

Major Power Rivalry and Wedge Strategy of Concessions*

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Abstract

Military alliances are an important feature of major power competition. One way for a major power to increase its relative power is to drive a wedge in a rival's alliance. Why and when does a major power do so? I propose a theory of strategic calculus, which holds that a major power seeks to drive a wedge in the rival's alliance by offering economic aid to a rival's protégé when that country experiences a rapid deterioration in its relations with its patron. I test my theory on major power rivalry dyads and find empirical support for my argument on a set of directed dyad-year observations between 1960 and 2010. The findings contribute to our understanding of alliance politics and strategic considerations behind using economic carrots in major power rivalry.

*Thanks to...

Introduction

Alliance management is one of the most important features of major power competition. As such, scholars have widely studied how major powers manage their alliances ([Morrow, 1991](#); [Cha, 2010](#); [McManus and Nieman, 2019](#); [Blankenship, 2020](#)). In contrast to much of the past scholarship, I analyze the question of alliance management from a perspective rarely taken by scholars by posing the following question: under what conditions would a major power seek to drive a wedge in a rival alliance?¹ There are considerable risks in conducting wedge strategies as they could easily backfire: offering economic aid to a protégé of a rival major power might only serve to further strengthen the adversarial alliance as the protégé might use the economic aid to use for military purposes that undermines the interests of the major power giving the aid. What explains why and when major powers offer economic concessions to protégés of a rival alliance?

The question of wedge strategies has both theoretical and practical importance. "Divide and rule" is an adage as old as time. Several renowned strategists both in the East and the West had written long ago on the importance of dividing enemies. Already back in the sixth century B.C. Sun Tzu thus wrote: "when he is united, divide him... sometimes drive a wedge between a sovereign and his ministers; on other occasions separate his allies from him. Make them mutually suspicious so that they drift apart" ([Griffith, 1963](#)). Likewise, Machiavelli asserted "whenever there are many powers united against another power... one ought always

¹For the purpose of this paper, wedge strategy involves a major power seeking influence over a rival major power's protégé through the use of economic aid. For similar uses in the alliance literature, refer to [Crawford \(2008, 2021\)](#). Major powers refer to the five countries of the United Nations Security Council ([McManus, 2018](#); [McManus and Nieman, 2019](#)) and their protégés refer to the (defensive) allies of the major power patrons *per* [Leeds \(2003\)](#). The term rival alliance will be used throughout the paper to refer to the alliance between the rival major power and its protégé.

to put more hope in that one alone... [for] by using a little industry, he will be able to disunite the very many and to weaken the body that was mighty." (Machiavelli, 1998, 245). Such ideas are by no means outdated. In fact, they are very much alive within the minds of policymakers today. For example, a recent report from the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission states that China is attempting to “drive a wedge between U.S. allies and partners to undermine the development of a unified, U.S.-led security architecture in the Asia-Pacific" (Bergerson, 2016).

Given the self-evident importance of the topic in the alliance literature, it is puzzling that very few International Relations scholars have written theoretical works on the topic.² When a major power seeks to aggregate its power through an alliance, we can expect that a competing major power would seek opportunities to disrupt such alliances. Yet, most IR discussions in the alliance literature have centered only around the first of these two aspects with extensive discussions on balancing and bandwagoning (e.g., Walt, 1987; Schweller, 1994, 2004).³ However, without a proper understanding of wedge strategies, it is difficult to understand behaviors such as balancing or bandwagoning: bandwagoning is a type of *outcome* in alliance behavior while driving a wedge amongst potential or realized allies is the *process* that leads to such an outcome. We would only be able to gain a complete picture of the outcome only when we have a deeper understanding of the process that lies behind it.

In this paper, I propose a theory of *strategic calculus*: I argue that a major power seeks to drive a wedge by offering economic aid to a protégé of the rival major power when the protégé experiences a rapid deterioration of relations with its patron as to minimize the risk

²Timothy Crawford and Yasuhiro Izumikawa are the notable exceptions (Crawford, 2008, 2011, 2021; Izumikawa, 2002, 2013).

³Balancing refers to “ally[ing] in opposition to the principal source of danger" while bandwagoning refers to “ally[ing] with the state that poses the major threat." (Walt, 1985, 4)

of economic aid being used to strengthen the rival alliance. Using wedge strategies involves a degree of risk for the divider since the protégé of the rival alliance could use the economic inducement in conjunction with its patron to undermine the divider's goals. As such, it is more likely that a major power would exploit a window of opportunity by only offering economic inducements when it observes that the protégé is less likely to cooperate with its patron.

I test my theory on a set of directed dyad-year observations from 1960 to 2010 consisting of major power dividers as the sender states and the protégés of the rival patron as the target states. I find empirical support for my argument: a higher difference in ideal point distance between the target and its patron is positively associated with greater aid from the sender state. The finding is robust to a wide range of specifications controlling for observed confounders and time-invariant unobserved unit heterogeneity.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, this study helps to deepen our broader understanding of alliance politics. Scholars have spilled much ink on whether allies are reliable and how major power patrons seek to reassure their allies of their reliability as patrons (e.g., [Leeds, Long and Mitchell, 2000](#); [Leeds, 2003](#); [McManus, 2017](#); [McManus and Nieman, 2019](#); [Blankenship, 2020](#)). However, a divider may seek to disrupt such reassurances when the opportunity arises. Thus, understanding how major powers seek to divide rival alliances has significant implications for the broader literature on alliances – without a deeper understanding of this topic, it would be impossible to fully understand the question of alliance reliability.

With respect to the question of wedge strategies in alliance politics in particular, this paper helps to set a foundation for the effectiveness of wedge strategies. To be clear, there

have been significant works that examine the *effectiveness* of various wedge strategies (e.g., [Crawford, 2008, 2021](#); [Izumikawa, 2013](#)) because of their obvious implications for the question of alliance termination ([Leeds and Savun, 2007](#)). However, the more fundamental question in terms of theoretical and practical significance, I believe, is investigating the conditions under which wedge strategies are *attempted* in the first place. Theoretically, why major powers attempt wedge strategies in the first place is more puzzling, especially when we consider the obvious risks that accompany such strategies. In practice, we can only properly assess the effectiveness of wedge strategies only after we consider the conditions under which they are attempted.⁴

Second, this study makes important contributions to the broader International Relations literature on political influence by showing how major power politics is an integral part of major donors giving aid. Seeking influence in international politics is a common theme explored across multiple subfields within International Relations (e.g., [Flores-Macías and Kreps, 2013](#); [Malis and Smith, 2021](#)). In particular, International Political Economy scholars have examined whether and how major power donors such as the United States seeks influence by buying UN votes through economic aid (e.g., [Dreher, Nunnenkamp and Thiele, 2008](#); [Carter and Stone, 2015](#)). However, most of the theoretical framework proposed in these studies are approached from the perspective of International Political Economy. I show that strategic calculus between rival alliances is an important factor to be considered by scholars when analyzing aid transferred between rival alliances.

⁴This is akin to the logic of investigating the effectiveness of nuclear coercion. To investigate whether nuclear superiority is effective for coercion, scholars should not just examine observations where nuclear threats have been made but rather the entire universe of cases where nuclear threats are and are not made because of selection effects. For more on this point, refer to [Sechser and Fuhrmann \(2013\)](#); [Fuhrmann, Kroenig and Sechser \(2014\)](#).

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. I first elaborate on the concept of wedge strategies in major power diplomacy and why major powers may want to use them. I then explain the conditions under which major powers are likely to use economic aid to drive a wedge in a rival alliance. To formally test my theory, I conduct a panel analysis consisting of directed dyad-year observations controlling for a wide array of observed confounders. The final section concludes with the contributions of the study and suggestions for future research.

Concept of Wedge Strategies

Broadly, wedge strategies refer to the use of “diplomacy and statecraft to move or keep a potential adversary out of an opposing alliance” (Crawford, 2021, 1). Scholars have pointed out that there are two main tools of wedge strategies used by major powers, namely carrots and sticks (Crawford, 2008, 2021; Izumikawa, 2013). Carrots refer to positive inducements or rewards to change the behavior as the target state complies with the behavior intended by the state offering the carrot (Drezner, 1999; Nincic, 2010, 2011). For example, the United States rewarded Yugoslavia with economic inducements after Tito broke up with Stalin (Lees, 2010). In contrast, sticks often refer to military coercion. For example, Izumikawa (2002) argues that the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954 was a case of China using a coercive strategy to discourage the United States from supporting Taiwan. These two types of tools could be further divided along the type of resources used, namely military, economic and political (Izumikawa, 2002).

While there are various tools that could be analyzed, I focus on economic aid. From a survey of the literature, this seems to be the predominant tool used in wedge strategies and is the focus of much of the scholarship (Izumikawa, 2013; Crawford, 2021). Economic aid

as a tool for seeking political influence has been widely discussed by political scientists and economics. In particular, International Political Economy scholars have widely noted that states use economic aid as a tool of economic statecraft to expand political influence (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Dreher, Nunnenkamp and Thiele, 2008; Bearce and Tirone, 2010). For example, Dreher, Nunnenkamp and Thiele (2008) argues that while major donor countries may all attempt to use economic aid to buy UN votes, only the United States successfully achieves this goal. Conflict scholars have also widely noted that the United States often uses economic aid as an important tool for seeking influence (De Mesquita and Smith, 2007; Carter and Stone, 2015). Thus, the implication from the literature is clear that major donor countries use economic aid as a tool in expanding their influence over other countries. While this paper is in agreement with these works that economic aid is an important tool of economic statecraft, the emphasis here is different in that it focuses on gaining influence over rival major power alliances.

While the concept of using economic aid as a tool of wedge strategies is obviously related to the broader literature of using aid to seek influence, there is a subtle difference in that wedge strategies conceptualize influence over the rival protégé as zero-sum. In other words, if we characterize a country (A) offering economic aid to another (B) as "A seeking influence over B," wedge strategy involves "A seeking influence over B at the expense of C," where C is a rival major power. In other words, a divider seeks influence over the rival's protégé at the expense of the latter's patron. Thus, I assume that a major power offering economic aid to a protégé of a rival alliance as being *at least partly motivated to drive a wedge* in the alliance. I argue that this assumption is plausible based on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Theoretically, the ultimate adversary of a major power is the rival patron as implied by the

preceding discussion. In this context, it does not seem plausible that a major power would want to seek influence over the rival's protégé in a purely non-zero sum manner when there are obvious security risks involved since the recipient of the aid can use the aid in a way that undermines the goals of the donor.

There is certainly an abundance of qualitative evidence which suggests that the United States used economic aid as a tool for driving a wedge in a rival alliance. Historical accounts show that the United States was keen to reward members of a rival alliance when they suffered a deterioration in relations with the patron. For example, the United States approached Tito with various economic inducements after the latter's split with the Soviet Union ([Lees, 2010](#)). Such dynamics were present in the Middle East as well. [Walt \(1987\)](#) argues that economic inducements were a key tool that both the United States and the Soviet Union utilized aid as a way of inducing Syria.

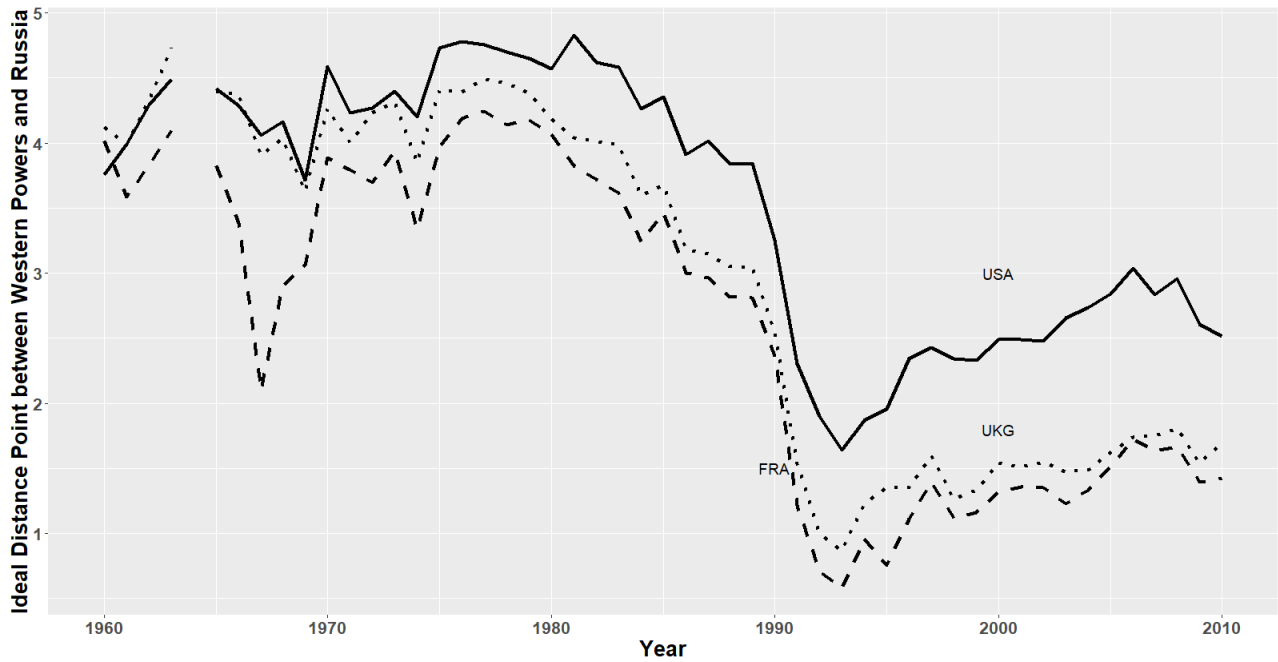
If this assumption is a plausible one, then we could conceptualize any instance of a major power offering economic aid to a protégé of a rival alliance as being at least partly motivated by intention to drive a wedge in the rival alliance. Given the preceding discussion, the most important criterion that I use to determine whether the offering of economic aid is a case of wedge strategy is whether the two major powers were in a security competition. For example, while South Africa was allied to the United Kingdom, it is more difficult to make the case that the United States would seek to drive a wedge between the United Kingdom and South Africa by offering South Africa economic aid. It may be more likely that the United States offered economic aid to South Africa for humanitarian reasons such as promoting human rights and democracy. I would argue that such non-humanitarian motivations are even stronger than past studies on economic aid because of the political risks involved in

giving aid to members of a rival alliance - in the worst scenario, the divider would merely only hurt itself as the target protégé could transfer the aid it has received to its patron. Thus, we have a strong theoretical reason to believe that giving aid to a protégé of a rival alliance is at least partly motivated by considerations of wedge strategy.

It is well-established in the defense economics literature that the primary threat to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has been Russia ([George and Sandler, 2018](#)). [Thompson \(2001\)](#) identifies the United States and Russia as major power rivals. This serves as a useful baseline for systematically identifying which dyads of major power experienced intense rivalry. For example, both the United Kingdom and France were key member of NATO, viewing Russia as a security threat during much of the Cold War and experienced rivalry with Russia. The fact that the United States was in an intense rivalry with Russia is well-documented in both popular accounts and academic works. A cursory look at [Figure 1](#) shows that there is a strong correlation in terms of ideal point distances between Russia, on the one hand, and the three western major powers on the other. This is not surprising given that the United States, the United Kingdom and France were all members of the same alliance.

As noted, there are other types of carrots that a major power may use as tools of wedge strategies. For example, a major power divider may transfer armaments to the protégé of its rival. The dynamics for these other types of carrots is likely to be different in how they work since they have different implications. For example, arms transfers obviously have bigger security implications for the divider and thereby involve greater security risks, especially if the recipient ultimately uses them to undermine the divider's goals. The theoretical

Figure 1: Ideal Point Distance between the Western Major Powers and Russia



discussion and the subsequent results below are thus limited to the use of economic aid as a carrot-based tool of wedge strategy.

Why Major Powers Use Wedge Strategies

Why would a major power ever seek to use wedge strategies in major power competition?

One might argue that there is absolutely no reason why a major power would ever use wedge strategies if minor powers can add so little fighting capability. However, such an argument overlooks the strategic advantage that minor powers could provide to major powers. Minor powers are often geographically located in strategically critical parts for major powers and serve as sites for military power projection. For example, [Morrow \(1991, 914\)](#) argues that the minor powers' concessions allow major power access to "military bases that provide strategic location for the projection of power."

International Relations scholars largely agree that alliances are an important component of major power competition. As [Crawford \(2021\)](#) argues, “major power competition often entails alliance competition.” Thus, one important way of maintaining a competitive edge over a rival major power is to increase the total capability of one’s own alliance by aggregating allies. This is known in the alliance literature as external balancing ([Waltz, 1979](#)). The aggregation of allies was an important element of major power competition throughout much of modern international politics as major powers continuously sought to gain allies ([Rich, 2003](#)).

Consequently, allies are an integral part in the major power competition in the modern era. While the overall aggregate materialistic capability the junior allies provide might be relatively small, the strategic advantages they provide by granting access to their territory to major powers could be substantive. For example, the Cuban Missile Crisis was initiated as the Soviet Union hoped to achieve a *fait accompli* by deploying nuclear missiles close to the United States. Similarly, the United States deployed nuclear weapons to its European allies, not only to reassure them but also gain an important strategic advantage in competing against the Soviet Union by deploying the missiles close to the border. Thus, gaining and losing allies is a crucial component in international politics.

Given the importance of allies, major powers not only have the incentive of maintaining a robust alliance network, but also to create divisions and frictions in rival alliances. Much of the asymmetric alliance literature has focused on how major power patrons reassure their allies. For example, [Blankenship \(2020\)](#) argues that the United States has reassured its protégés with its statements of support. Likewise, [McManus and Nieman \(2019\)](#) argues that a major power patron can reassure its allies through various signals of support using troop

deployment and leader visits. However, scholars have paid relatively little attention to the conditions under which an adversary would seek to drive a wedge in an alliance.⁵ This implies that International Relations scholars need to pay much more attention to this topic to understand alliance dynamics.

Indeed, past studies show that major powers are often motivated by such strategic considerations in their decision to implement wedge strategies as they could ultimately be an important factor in determining conflict outcomes. For example, the United Kingdom was interested in peeling away Spain from co-operating with Nazi Germany ([Crawford, 2008](#)). This has important practical relevance in today's political climate as well. Several scholars have warned of the potential conflict that could take place between the United States and China in the South China Sea. However, whether the Philippines would allow access the United States to these bases matter for major power conflict. A protégé that is dissatisfied with its patron may deny access to the military bases located inside its territory. Scholars should not confuse asymmetry of military power with the degree of protégé's autonomy. While these two concepts are certainly related and minor powers certainly lack the military capability compared to their major power patrons, their lack of capability does not necessarily translate to the protégés giving up of autonomy. For example, the Philippines notified the United States to vacate the naval base in Subic Bay in 1992 after the Filipino senate rejected the extension of the treaty ([Branigin, 1992](#)). From this perspective, a major power's goal of using wedge strategies may not necessarily be to further divide the relation between the rival patron and its protégé, but to delay the recovery of relations.

Thus, wedge strategies are likely to have limited aims. A major power divider conducting

⁵As mentioned above, Timothy Crawford and Yasuhiro Izumikawa are the notable exceptions.

wedge strategies is unlikely to believe that offering economic concessions to the protégé would turn against the patron and conduct a full-scale war. This is unlikely to happen because even if the rival protégé's preferences are realigned with those of the divider, the protégé would still have relatively little military capability. Indeed, the divider's aim is likely to be much more limited.

Windows of Opportunity and Carrots

When would a major power use wedge strategies against a rival alliance? At the core of my theory is the element of *strategic calculus*: I argue that a major power seeks to drive a wedge by offering economic inducements to a protégé of the rival alliance when the latter experiences a rapid deterioration of relations with its patron as to minimize the risk of economic aid being used to strengthen the rival alliance. While incentives and materialistic capabilities are necessary for states to be motivated to drive a wedge in a rival alliance, they are not by themselves sufficient. In other words, a major power does not conduct wedge strategies merely because it has the incentives and capabilities to do so. Using wedge strategies accompany inevitable risks. The first is the issue of commitment problem. When a divider provides economic aid to the target protégé, there is no guarantee that the target state would not use these economic aid in a way that undermines the foreign policy objective of the divider. International Relations scholars largely agree there are no formal institutions which guarantee that would enforces the bargaining. The issue of commitment problem is exacerbated by the fact that the target protégé, by definition, is a member of a rival alliance – there is always the risk of the target state betraying the trust of the divider after receiving the benefits.

Thus, offering economic aid to a protégé of the rival alliance comes with a significant risk of wasting resources and even potentially strengthening the adversary because there is no guarantee that the recipient of the aid would not pursue policies that would undermine the strategic interests of the divider. This risk could be especially high since the recipient is an ally of a rival major power. Thus, it is more likely that the divider would offer economic aid when there is a window of opportunity. In particular, I argue that a major power is likely to employ wedge strategies when there is a rapid deterioration in the relations between the adversary and its protégé. The rapid deterioration in the relations marks a window of opportunity a major power can exploit to create a bigger division between the adversary and its relations.

There are two reasons why a major power is likely to intervene when there is a rapid deterioration in the relations between the adversary and the latter's protégé. First, it is less risky for a major power to exploit an "opening" in the rival alliance than to attempt conducting such a strategy when the relation between the adversary and its protégé is relatively solid. A marked rapid deterioration in relations would be a signal to the divider that there can be an opportunity to offer carrots to further worsen the relation between the two. Second, the recipient of the aid and its patron are less likely to be able to cooperatively use such aid to pursue goals that undermine the divider's objectives. Given that the relation between the two countries has just recently deteriorated, it is less likely that the recipient of the aid would be used in a manner that undermines the foreign policy objectives of the divider.

There are some prominent cases from the Cold War era which illustrate this dynamic. [Walt \(1987\)](#) shows how the United states approached Egypt after the latter's rapid deteriora-

tion in relations with the Soviet Union, offering substantial economic aid to induce the latter away from the Soviet Union. As another example, the United States was keen to offer aid to Yugoslavia *after* the relationship between Tito and Stalin rapidly deteriorated (Lees, 2010). As Dean Acheson remarked, Tito was now “our son-of-a-bitch” (Clune, 2016). Consistent with the logic illustrated above, we see that policymakers had similar considerations when determining whether to provide aid to a protégé of a rival alliance. For example, a recently declassified piece of information shows that the United States political elites were concerned that aid provided by the United States under the initiative of Dulles to the eastern bloc would be a waste (Fulton, 2013).

The Soviet Union’s attempt to drive a wedge between Turkey and the United States is another important case highlighting the dynamic of wedge strategy through the use of carrots when the rival alliance experiences a deterioration in relations. It is well-documented that the Soviet Union offered Turkey aid during the Cold War (Bach, 2003). At first, it might be puzzling that the Soviet Union offered aid to Turkey in the 1960’s given that Turkey has been a member of NATO since 1952. What explains the motivation behind Moscow’s offering aid to Ankara? Girgin (2021) argues that the Soviet rapprochement towards Turkey was motivated out of driving a wedge between the United States and Turkey. The relation between Washington and Ankara already showed signs of being strained in the 1950s. A declassified CIA document from 1956 states that Turkish officials expressed “frustration” with U.S. economic policies towards Turkey.⁶

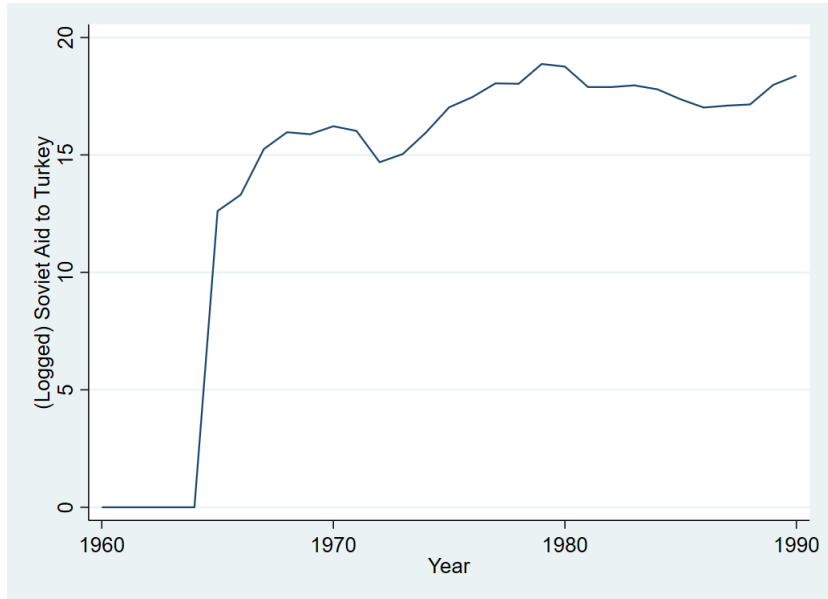
The critical issue that led to the deterioration in relation between the United States and Turkey arose in the 1960s over the issue of Cyprus. Ankara wanted to intervene in

⁶The relevant page is attached in the appendix.

Cyprus when internal violence broke out between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots in 1963. However, Washington opposed any such kind of intervention. After learning the Western bloc's opposition to Turkish intervention, the Soviet ambassador to Turkey Rijov approached Ankara and offered assistance (Гасымлы, 2008, 78-79). The deterioration in relation between Washington and Ankara was apparent in the exchange of letters between President Johnson and Prime Minister İnönü. President Johnson used a strong language to oppose Turkey's intervention in his letter, stating "I hope you will understand that your NATO allies have not had a chance to consider whether they have an obligation to protect Turkey against the Soviet Union if Turkey takes a step which results in Soviet intervention without the full consent and understanding of its NATO Allies." İsmet İnönü, the Turkish prime minister at the time, responded by stating that Johnson's "message, both in wording and content, has been disappointing." Interestingly, the United States' own intelligence service assessed that "Johnson's letter has done more to set back United States Turkish relations than any other single act" (CIA, 1964). Consistent with this account, we observe a large spike in Soviet aid to Turkey in 1965 in Figure 2. Figure 3 also shows that there was a rapid deterioration in relation between the United States and Turkey around this time where positive (negative) values indicate deterioration (improvement) in relation between the two countries from one year to the next.⁷

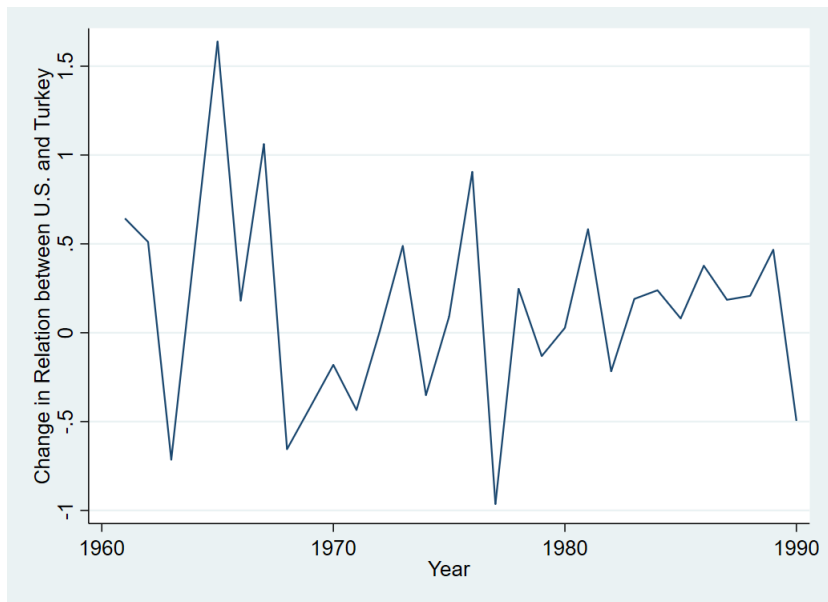
⁷Figure 3 shows the values of Δ Standardized Ideal Point Distance_t over time. Formally, for the United States and Turkey with ideal points x_i and x_j respectively, I first calculated Standardized Ideal Point Distance_t $\equiv \{|x_i - x_j|_t - \text{mean}(|x_i - x_j|)\} / \text{sd}(|x_i - x_j|)$ and then took the difference between the measures at time t and $t - 1$ to calculate Δ Standardized Ideal Point Distance_t

Figure 2: Soviet Aid to Turkey



Source: [Bach \(2003\)](#)

Figure 3: Deterioration in Relation between U.S. and Turkey



Source: [Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten \(2017\)](#)

The above case highlights two aspects that are worth elaborating. First, the protégé state of the rival alliance obviously has agency in influencing the sequence of events. For example, the perceived deterioration in relation between the United States and Turkey due to the issue over Cyprus was a major impetus in inducing the Soviet Union to offer aid to Turkey. In particular, the case highlights how both the target protégé as well as its major power patron have agency – İnönü ultimately let his discontent with U.S. policies be known to the wider international community. Likewise, the Johnson administration expressed its dissatisfaction with Ankara’s handling of the Cyprus issue ([Times, 1964](#)).

Second, the cause of the dispute that gave rise to the opportunity for the divider to exploit may have deep roots which the divider may not be able to manipulate in advance. Thus, in the dispute between the United States and Turkey over the Cyprus issue, Soviet actions were more reactionary rather than anticipatory. In other words, it seems less likely that the Soviet Union somehow intended to bribe Turkey to exacerbate the Cyprus issue by giving Ankara economic aid. Indeed, the above graph of Soviet aid seems to confirm the notion that the divider’s attempt to drive a wedge occurred as a *response* to the deterioration in relation between the United States and Turkey, which in turn, were functions of the political calculations of both Ankara and Washington.

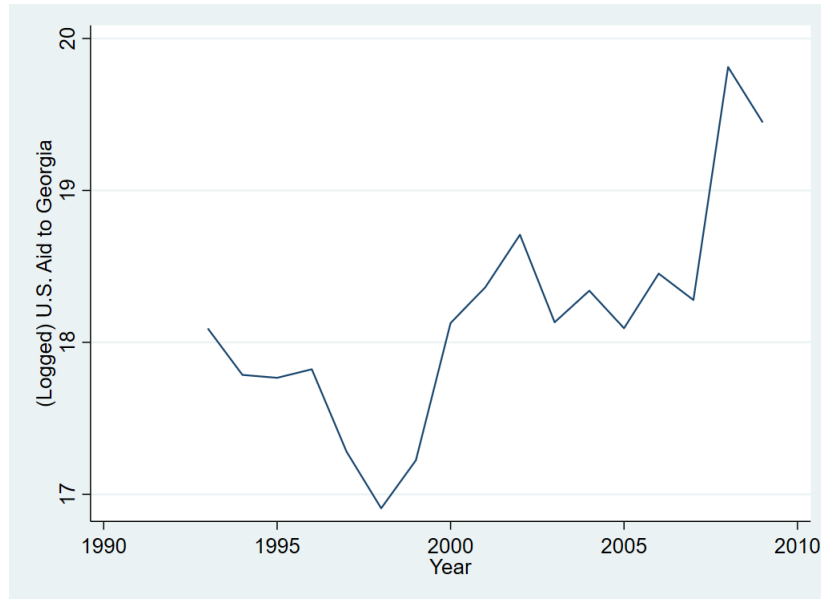
Why would an internal friction between the rival patron and its protégé present a window of opportunity for rapprochement for the divider to use carrot-based wedge strategies? Intuitively, a divider might want to signal that it has no hostile intentions when the target protégé is suffering a deterioration in its relations with its patron. Conversely, the impression that the divider has “offensive intentions” by using a stick-based strategy might drive the target back into the arms of its patron as it seeks to form a balancing coalition against a

threatening power ([Walt, 1987](#)).

The case of Georgia highlights that wedge strategies are not mere relics of the Cold War era. While scholars have often focused on how the United States has sought to support Georgia's democracy movement since the Rose Revolution, Georgia was initially both a member of two defensive alliances led by Russia, namely the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). While Georgia did not renew CSTO and ceased to be a member of the alliance in 1999, it remained to be a member of CIS until 2009. After the Soviet Union dissolved, Georgia was initially led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia from 1991 to 1992. However, he was eventually ousted by the Military Council and Eduard Shevardnadze from 1992. Georgia went through a civil war as the faction supporting Gamsakhurdia opposed fought against Shevardnadze's government. Russia helped Shevardnadze to sustain his power by intervening in the civil war on behalf of Shevardnadze. It seems quite plausible that the Russian government assessed Shevardnadze to have more pro-Russian inclinations compared to Gamsakhurdia. In terms of foreign policy, Shevardnadze seems to have hedged his bets. While Georgia initially aligned itself with Russia by acceding to CSTO and CIS, Shevardnadze also made overtures to the west deepening cooperation with the EU and NATO.

Shevardnadze's rule was marked by corruption ([Akhmeteli, 2014](#)). Shevardnadze was ultimately forced to resign in 2003 in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution. Mikheil Saakashvili, an elite who was educated in the United States and even took classes at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, came to power. The Rose Revolution signified an important turn of events. After Saakashvili came to power, the United States sharply increased its funding for democracy promotion as shown in [Figure 4](#).

Figure 4: US Aid to Georgia



Past scholarly works suggest that the United States led other pre-existing NATO members to effectively induce Georgia to join NATO ([Benson and Smith, 2023](#)). For example, President Bush said that he supported Georgia's bid to join NATO in the Bucharest summit ([Guardian, 2008](#)). I argue that inducing Georgia to join NATO constituted an action to drive a wedge between Russia and Georgia especially when we consider the fact that Georgia was still a member of the defensive alliance led by Russia. The implicit assumption here is that simultaneously being a member of both defensive alliances led by Russia and the United States is incompatible and politically infeasible, at least in the long run.

Given the extant discussion, I propose the following hypothesis:

H1: *The deterioration in relation between the rival major power patron and its protégé is positively associated with the quantity of economic aid offered by the divider.*

Research Design

Scope Conditions

I test my argument on triads involving major power rivalries from 1960 to 2010. As I have argued above with support of key historical cases, there are important incentives for major power dyads in rivalry to conduct wedge strategies. Some readers might wonder why I do not examine all directed dyad-year observations from 1816 to 2010.⁸ There are three reasons why I limit the scope conditions of the argument. First, there is the issue of data availability. The use of economic aid was not a major feature of international politics before the Second World War and consequently, the data for economic aid is available up to only 1960. While economic concessions were an important feature of wedge strategies during the Second World War ([Crawford, 2008, 2021](#)), such data are relatively sparse.

Second, most countries in the international state system do not have extended alliances. For example, although Iran and Iraq were in a severe rivalry since Khomeini came into power in 1979, these two countries had no effective allies to speak of. Since the question of addressing the conditions under which a country would seek to drive a wedge in a rival alliance entails the notion of alliances, including these dyads as potential cases make no sense.

Third, not all states have the willingness or the capabilities to conduct wedge strategies with respect to all other states in the system. Determining which triads are relevant is ultimately a matter of empirical question and a difficult one. Here, I let historical patterns

⁸1816 is the starting year of the Correlates of War project.

be a guideline. Past works shows that offering economic concession or economic aids is one of the most common tools of wedge strategies ([Izumikawa, 2013](#); [Crawford, 2021](#)). Clearly, not all states in the international state system have the ability or the incentive to offer economic aid for pursuing foreign policy goals. For example, it is unlikely that Senegal, as a member of the Economic Community of West African States,⁹ has the capability to drive a wedge between Japan and the United States by offering economic aid to Japan. More importantly, it is hard to imagine the conditions under which Senegal would have the political incentive to attempt to drive a wedge between Japan and the United States. Thus, such cases are essentially politically irrelevant triads for the purpose of this paper and are excluded.

It is also important to note that not all major power dyads are in security competition. On the contrary, some major powers have a relatively harmonious relationship. For example, the United Kingdom has had a "special relationship" with the United States since the end of the Second World War ([Dumbrell, 2006](#)). Likewise, [Gibilisco and Montero \(2022\)](#) shows that the United States and France have been in a relatively cooperative relationship. The relationship between Russia and the United States, on the other hand, has been marked by intense rivalry ([Thompson, 2001](#)). Much of the defense economics literature assume that Russia is the key rival that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has in mind. The criterion necessarily involves a judgment call. For example, NATO is in principle open to accepting Russia as a member ([Simons, 2010](#)). However, most International Relations scholars would agree that this has been highly unlikely. Which states are deemed to be threatening and thus (implicitly) designated as adversaries are an important question, but

⁹This organization is classified as a formal defensive alliance according to [Leeds et al. \(2002\)](#) (ATOP #3895).

beyond the scope of this paper.

I consider the major powers of the post-WWII period to be the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. There are a couple of good theoretical reasons to justify limiting major powers to these five countries. First, this paper addresses how patrons of major power asymmetric alliances seek to create frictions and divisions in other competing asymmetric alliances. Not all alliances could be conceptualized as asymmetric. Second, the definition used here is broadly consistent with how International Relations scholars conceptualize a "major power." For example, many studies in the conflict literature studying extended deterrence and alliance focus on these five major powers. ([Huth and Russett, 1984](#); [Huth, Bennett and Gelpi, 1992](#); [Fordham, 2010](#)). Most recently, [Gibilisco and Montero \(2022\)](#) uses this definition to study major power intervention in the post-WWII period. Similar to [Gibilisco and Montero \(2022\)](#), I exclude Germany and Japan from my analysis although these two countries are sometimes considered as major powers from 1991. While Germany and Japan are also sometimes considered as major powers, they do not have any protégés of their own and thus may not be considered as patrons of any asymmetric alliance.

I consider protégés to be the allies of the five major powers according to the definition of *defensive* alliances per [Leeds et al. \(2002\)](#). The five major powers have a number of protégés to varying degrees. The United States obviously had the largest number of protégés in the post-WWII period. The alliance network maintained by the United States was vast. While the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance members and U.S. allies in East Asia are the most prominent alliance members, Washington also maintains formal defense pacts with countries in South America. For this paper, I consider the United Kingdom and France to be both protégés of the United States and major powers in their own right. For countries

such as Belgium that are allied to both the United Kingdom or France and the United States, I consider the United States to be the patron. Past studies essentially adopt this framework as they consider the United States to be the security provider to the NATO alliance members. For example, [Fuhrmann \(2020\)](#) considers the conditions under which NATO members (including the United Kingdom and France) would be more willing to free-ride on the defense spending of the United States. There are also some minor power countries that were allied to the United Kingdom or France, but not allied to the United States. For example, France had allies in Africa such as Central African Republic and Senegal ([Leeds et al., 2002](#)). The United Kingdom also had allies of its own not allied to the United States such as Nigeria and South Africa. For such countries, I consider France or the United Kingdom to have been the major power patrons as appropriate.

Data and Statistical Model

I conduct a panel analysis with directed dyad-year as the unit of analysis. The dependent variable is (logged) foreign aid from the sender state to the target protégé state. The *sender* state refers a major power patron divider. The *target* states consist of protégés of a rival alliance.¹⁰ I define a rival alliance to be an alliance that had intense rivalry at any point during the post-WWII period according to [Thompson \(2001\)](#) as well as their respective allies. For example, I consider the United State's offering of economic aid to a Soviet protégé as a case of wedge strategy. Based on the literature, I identify twelve directed pairs of major power rivalry, namely United States-Russia, United Kingdom-Russia, France-Russia, United States-China, United Kingdom-China, France-China, and their reverse counterparts. While

¹⁰To be clear, there are no directed dyad-year observations where the major power patron is paired with its *own* protégé.

it is relatively clear that the three western major powers faced security threats and were in intense rivalry with Russia, the case is less clear with China. I thereby conduct analyses without China as the sender state as a robustness check – the findings are consistent. On the other hand, the relation between the United States and other two western major powers were of complementary rather than competitive relationship. For example, [Gibilisco and Montero \(2022\)](#) shows that major power interventions by the United States and France were complementary rather than competitive.

Based on the preceding theoretical discussion, the dependent variable is (logged) economic aid. The data on economic aid for the United States, the United Kingdom and France is drawn from the World Bank. The data on Soviet aid is drawn from ([Bach, 2003](#)). The data on Chinese aid is drawn from ([Dreher et al., 2022](#)). The data from the World Bank date back to 1960. The data on Chinese aid only date back to 2000 and there seems to be no systematic data dating back before this time period. However, I believe that this issue does not pose a big problem as China was mainly a recipient, rather than a donor of economic aid before the twenty-first century.

The ideal point distance measures the extent to which two countries share similar preferences. The further the distance between any two countries, the less similar are the preferences. This measure is particularly useful as it denotes “single dimension that reflects state positions toward the US-led liberal order” ([Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten, 2017](#)). I draw my data on the ideal point distance from [Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten \(2017\)](#) which calculates the ideal point distance between two countries by applying dynamic ideal point estimation to the United Nations voting data.

The main independent variable of interest is the *deterioration in relation* between the

adversarial patron and its protégé. As highlighted by the explanation of the Turkish case, it is the *deterioration* in relations over time, rather than than the fixed state of relations at any given point in time, that is the main theoretical variable of interest. From the perspective of the divider, how the relation between the target protégé and its patron changes is likely to represent a signal with more information because some protégés with weak linkages are likely to have relatively disharmonious relations with their patron to begin with. This is consistent with the theoretical implications from recent works (Beardsley, 2024). For example, in discussing the trilateral dynamics between the United States, Russia and Ukraine, Beardsley (2024) argues that “change in congruence is also important to take into account, not just the levels of congruence.”

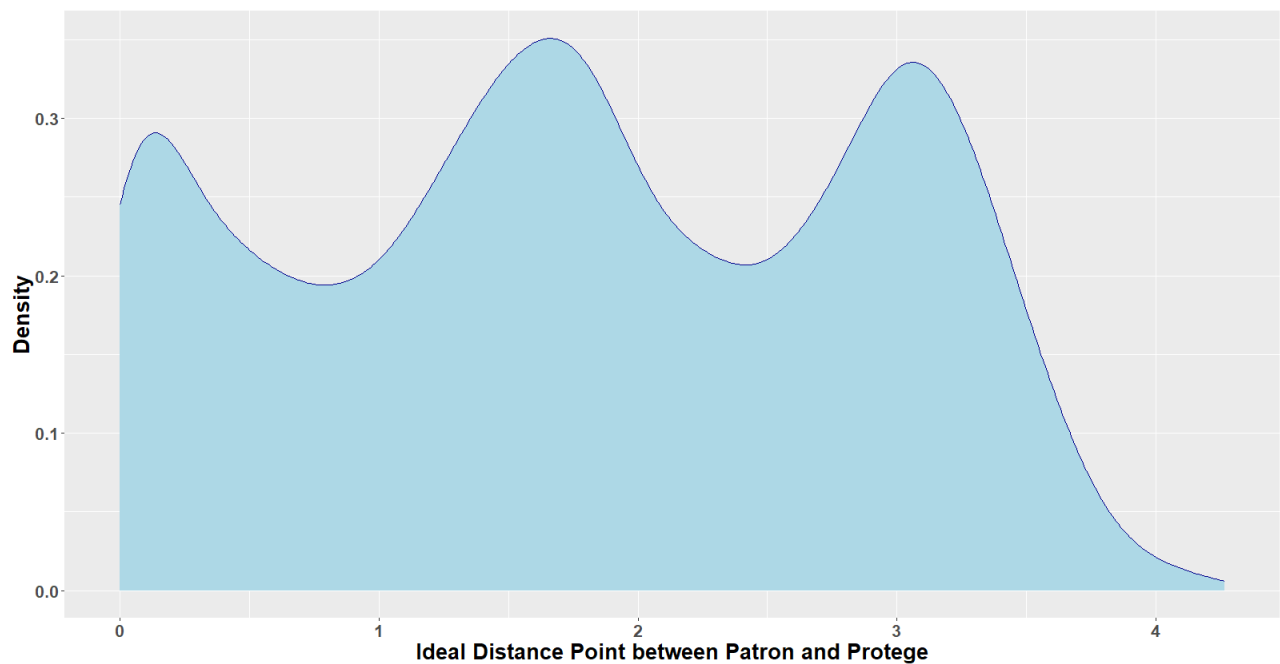
One way to take into account of both the change and the level of the ideal point distance is to use a standardized measure of ideal point distance and observe the change in this standardized measure from one year to the next. Thus, I first the standardize the ideal point distance between a patron and its protégé and then take the differences between the standardized measures at time t and $t - 1$ to calculate the (standardized) change in relation over time.¹¹ Intuitively, a greater positive difference in the ideal point distances between the two years for a given pair of patron-protégé would signify a greater deterioration in relations. I lag this measure by one year to alleviate concerns of reverse causality.

Some readers may question whether there would be enough variation in the independent

¹¹Formally, for a patron i and target j with ideal points x_i and x_j respectively, the standardized measure of ideal distance point at time t is calculated as Standardized Ideal Point Distance $_t \equiv \{|x_i - x_j|_t - \text{mean}(|x_i - x_j|)\} / \text{sd}(|x_i - x_j|)$ where $|x_i - x_j|_t$ represents the ideal point distance at time t and $\text{textmean}(|x_i - x_j|)$ and $\text{textsd}(|x_i - x_j|)$ represent the mean and the standard deviation of the ideal point distance for the sample period. Thus, Δ Standardized Ideal Point Distance $_t$ measures how the relationship between the patron and its protégé changes between time t and $t - 1$. Positive (negative) values of Δ Standardized Ideal Point Distance $_t$ would indicate that the relation between patron i and its protégé j has deteriorated (improved) over time.

variable. They might be concerned that protégés in asymmetric alliance would not be able to disagree too strongly with their patron and subsequently that there would not be sufficient variation in the independent variable. Contrary to such expectations, Figure 5 shows that there are substantial variations within major power-protégé relations in terms of the raw ideal point distances. This is perhaps not surprising given that protégés have a certain degree of autonomy and can disagree strongly with their major power patron.

Figure 5: Distribution of Ideal Point Distance between Patron and Protégé



I control for various observed confounders that could be correlated with both the deterioration of relations between the patron and the protégé as well as the aid from the divider. The deterioration in relation between the rival major power patron and its protégé and the divider's giving of aid do not take place in a vacuum: the rival major power patron and its

protégé obviously have agency. I thus control for various observed confounders that pose a challenge for inference in this regard. It is likely that the protégé of the rival patron may seek to play off its patron against the divider to receive more aid. Moreover, as noted by [Izumikawa \(2018\)](#), a rival major power patron might use *binding strategies*, and potentially offer more aid to its own protégé to keep it loyal. I thus control for various economic variables that pertain to such incentives. I first control for the (logged) gross domestic product of the divider and the target protégé states as well as the (logged) total trade between the two countries. These variables could be plausibly correlated with both the tendency of the sender state to offer aid as well as the relation between the target state and its patron. The data on these variables are drawn from [IHME \(2022\)](#) and [Barbieri, Keshk and Pollins \(2009\)](#). For similar reasons, I also control for the aid given by the patron since this could be correlated with the degree of deterioration between the patron and its protégé as well as affecting how much aid the divider gives to the target protégé in response.

Next, I control for the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) scores of the divider and the target protégé states. While the gross domestic products of the divider and the target protégé take account of the *economic* variables that could confound the relationship, some might argue that these are insufficient since this study is focusing on observations pertaining to security alliances. For example, it is possible that a divider with an overwhelming military strength might not be inclined to attempt wedge strategies because it does not feel the need to do so. At the same time, a target protégé of the rival alliance might be less willing to let its relation with the patron deteriorate in the presence of such a divider as past scholars have argued that aggregate military capability is an important component of threat perception (e.g., [Walt, 1987](#)). Similarly, a target protégé that is militarily strong

might be more willing to let its relations with the patron deteriorate as it could afford to pursue more autonomous policies. At the same time, a divider might be more willing to induce such protégés to break away from the patron by offering aid as this would represent a greater loss for the rival patron from the perspective of the divider.

As the case of the Russian invasion of Georgia demonstrates, the regime type of the target state could be relevant since western democracies such as the United States or the United Kingdom might be more inclined to give aid to countries with more liberal regimes. At the same time, target protégé countries which were once illiberal may suffer a deterioration in relation with their autocratic patron as they become more democratic. I thus control for the regime type of both the sender and the target countries. I draw the data on the democracy score from [Pemstein, Meserve and Melton \(2010\)](#). Higher values denote that a country is more democratic.

Next, I control for the (logged) arms transfers from the divider to the target protégé. Recent research suggests that military aid could be highly correlated with economic aid from the sender state ([Boutton, 2021](#)). At the same time, the target protégé might become more emboldened after receiving military assistance from the divider and be willing to condone the deterioration in relation with its patron. The data on arms transfers are drawn from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute ([SIPRI, 2023](#)).

Additionally, I control for variables pertaining to the actions from the rival patron to its own protégé that could confound the relationship between the deterioration in relation between the two countries and aid from the divider. First, I control for whether the rival patron initiated a militarized conflict against the target protégé state. Although militarized interstate disputes between allies are not common, they may nonetheless occur as shown

by the fishing disputes between the United States and Canada (Malis, 2021). Such disputes could potentially deteriorate the relation between the patron and its protégé while also being correlated with the willingness of the divider to offer aid. For similar reasons, I also control for sanctions imposed by the major power patron. Sometimes, a major power patron may impose sanctions on its own allies (Drezner, 2021). The data on these two variables are drawn from the Correlates of War MID dataset and Morgan, Bapat and Kobayashi (2014), respectively. In all regression specifications, I lag the potential confounders by two periods to alleviate concerns of reverse causality and include the lagged dependent variable of economic aid from the divider to the target protégé as there is likely to be a bureaucratic inertia in the amount of economic aid allocated from one year to the next.¹²

There are six models in the main analysis. In the first three models, I use unit fixed effects to control for time-invariant unit heterogeneity. Scholars have warned against the blind use of two-way fixed effects, showing that the interpretation is often not clear (Kropko and Kubinec, 2020; Imai and Kim, 2021). Thus, my subsequent interpretation relies on models using only unit fixed effects. However, I do show that the results are robust to two-way fixed effects in sign and statistical significance in the results below. I cluster the standard errors by directed dyads to account for intra-dyad correlation of errors per the standard practice in the conflict literature (e.g., Sechser and Fuhrmann, 2017). I also show the robustness of my finding by using random effects for the last three models.¹³

¹²I also replicate the main findings here with the differenced dependent variables without the lagged dependent variable in the appendix.

¹³I have also conducted a series of panel unit root tests to ensure that there are no unit roots which increase the risk of spurious inferences.

Empirical Findings

Table 1: Main Results

	Fixed Effects			Random Effects		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Deterioration in Relation with Patron _{t-1}	0.209** (0.0649)	0.222** (0.0731)	0.238** (0.0756)	0.151* (0.0636)	0.195** (0.0685)	0.214** (0.0732)
(Logged) Aid _{t-1}	0.493** (0.0717)	0.463** (0.0704)	0.454** (0.0730)	0.771** (0.0359)	0.701** (0.0467)	0.715** (0.0459)
(Logged) Patron's Aid _{t-2}		0.0222* (0.00937)	0.0190* (0.00963)		-0.00956 (0.00692)	-0.0115 (0.00747)
Patron's Sanctions _{t-2}		0.300 (0.227)	0.291 (0.224)		0.0791 (0.183)	0.0983 (0.181)
Patron-initiated MID _{t-2}		-0.320 (0.504)	-0.372 (0.506)		0.455 (0.512)	0.522 (0.514)
Divider Democracy _{t-2}		0.164 (0.258)	-0.199 (0.248)		0.857** (0.201)	0.628** (0.207)
Target Democracy _{t-2}		0.203* (0.0946)	0.156 (0.104)		-0.238** (0.0684)	-0.262** (0.0774)
Divider CINC _{t-2}		8.034** (2.004)	9.697** (2.493)		5.126* (2.159)	2.203 (2.663)
Target CINC _{t-2}		-150.1* (76.02)	-133.7+ (79.40)		-4.970 (7.801)	-6.887 (7.404)
(Logged) Divider-Target Trade _{t-2}		-0.00484 (0.00717)	-0.00623 (0.00668)		-0.000250 (0.00633)	0.000646 (0.00587)
(Logged) Divider GDP _{t-2}		-0.0237 (0.0823)	-0.238* (0.121)		0.192** (0.0533)	0.316** (0.0893)
(Logged) Target GDP _{t-2}		0.250* (0.123)	0.0119 (0.294)		-0.0506 (0.0362)	-0.0283 (0.0333)
(Logged) Divider to Target Arms Transfers _{t-2}		0.0160 (0.0148)	0.0161 (0.0150)		0.00242 (0.0108)	0.00139 (0.0104)
Constant	0.782** (0.105)	-4.841** (1.538)	6.967 (7.425)	0.532** (0.0715)	-3.731** (1.123)	-7.586** (2.417)
<i>N</i>	6181	5881	5881	6181	5881	5881
Directed Dyad Fixed/Random Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects			✓			✓

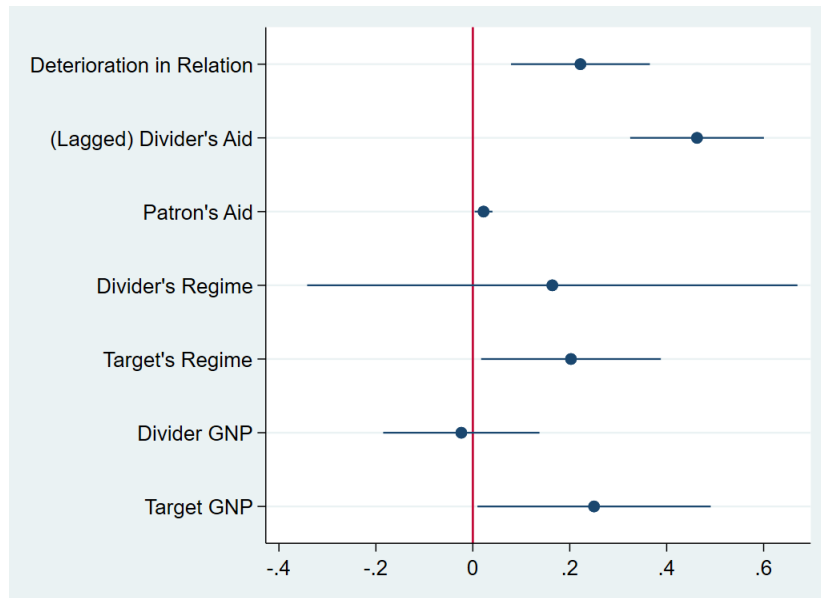
Clustered standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 1 presents the main results. The variable *Deterioration in Relation with Patron*_{t-1}

is positive and statistically significant indicating that a more rapid deterioration is positively associated with the sender state offering more (logged) economic aid to the target state. The results are statistically significant at the conventional level for all the models. We also observe that the lagged dependent variable is statistically significant and positive, as expected. Other control variables are also in the expected direction. For example, the patron's imposition of economic sanctions on the target state is positively associated with the sender state's amount of offering economic aid. A marginal effects plot with key control variables based on Model 2 of the main results are presented below in Figure 6. Since the dependent variable is logged economic aid from the divider, the interpretation of the regression results based on Model 2 is as follows: one unit of increase in the standardized difference in ideal points is associated with a 22.2 percent increase in the economic aid from the divider, *ceteris paribus*.

Figure 6: Effects of Deterioration in Patron-Protégé Relation on Divider's Economic Aid



Placebo Test

Some readers might wonder whether the above posited relationship would hold for *non-aligned* countries in the international system as the target countries. The theory I propose here does not make any specific predictions with respect to countries that are *not* aligned to the major powers. Consider, for example, a triadic setting involving the United States, Russia and Kenya. Both the United States and Russia might seek influence over Kenya by offering economic aid. However, there is a good reason to doubt that the logic of *strategic calculus* that I laid out above would be as strong a factor in whether Washington provides aid to Kenya since Kenya was not aligned with Russia. From the perspective of the United States, there is no strong reason to believe that Kenya would appropriate the U.S. economic aid to strengthen its military cooperation with the Soviet Union. Thus, we have no *a priori* theoretical expectation that the deterioration in relation between Russia and Kenya, for example, should be a strong predictor for explaining the amount of aid given by the United States. Table 2 highlights the strong null effect between the deterioration of relations and the endowment of economic aid from the sender state.¹⁴ The results suggest that the deterioration in relation is not significant in predicting the giving of economic aid and the mechanism of *strategic calculus* may not be important when major powers give aid to other countries that are not protégés of a rival alliance.

By an analogous logic, if we use the full sample of countries by including both targets that are aligned with a rival major power and those which are not, we should observe a

¹⁴I have used the term “relation between target and divider’s rival” instead of “relation with patron” in Tables 2 and 3 since it would be incorrect to characterize the relation between Kenya and the Soviet Union, for example, as a patron-protégé relation for the purpose of this paper.

Table 2: Placebo Test: Non-aligned Targets

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Deterioration in Relation between Target and Divider's Rival $_{t-1}$	0.0131 (0.0345)	0.0132 (0.0351)	0.0135 (0.0353)
(Logged) Aid $_{t-1}$	0.698** (0.0119)	0.677** (0.0119)	0.668** (0.0121)
Constant	2.224** (0.0849)	-6.196** (0.855)	15.92** (3.466)
N	28583	28200	28200
Directed Dyad Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects			✓
Controls		✓	✓

Clustered standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

statistically significant difference in whether the deterioration in relations between the target and the divider's rival depending on whether the target country is classified as a wedge target according to the definition laid out in the preceding discussion. We see in Table 3 that the interaction term Wedge Target \times Deterioration in Relation between Target and Divider's Rival $_{t-1}$ is statically significant and positive, suggesting that the divider responds different depending on whether the target is aligned to the divider's rival and "rewards" the target more in the case when it is an ally of the rival and suffers a deterioration in relation with the rival.

Table 3: Placebo Test: Non-aligned and Aligned Targets

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Deterioration in Relation between Target and Divider's Rival _{t-1}	0.00925 (0.0346)	0.0116 (0.0352)	0.0106 (0.0353)
Wedge Target × Deterioration in Relation between Target and Divider's Rival _{t-1}	0.142* (0.0718)	0.185* (0.0789)	0.212** (0.0806)
Wedge Target	-0.655** (0.160)	-0.572** (0.145)	-0.452** (0.148)
(Logged) Aid _{t-1}	0.693** (0.0118)	0.673** (0.0119)	0.666** (0.0119)
Constant	2.055** (0.0809)	-4.777** (0.711)	17.73** (3.063)
<i>N</i>	34894	34344	34344
Directed Dyad Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects			✓
Controls		✓	✓

Clustered standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Reverse Causality?

While I have adopted the appropriate lag structures to alleviate concerns of reverse causality, such concerns remain an important issue in conflict studies. For example, scholars can never be sure about the causal direction between peace and mutual trade dependence (Keshk, Pollins and Reuveny, 2004; Kim and Rousseau, 2005; Hegre, Oneal and Russett, 2010). This study obviously suffers from similar limitations since this is not a randomized controlled trial. However, I argue that seeking to use economic aid to drive a wedge between a rival patron and its protégé is an uncommon behavior in general based on the alliance literature because there are obvious risks in providing positive inducements (Baldwin, 1971; Walt, 1987). As an extreme example, it is difficult to imagine that Russia would be able to drive apart the relation between the United States and its NATO allies by offering the latter economic aid. As the case studies in the theory section show, the divider is more likely to be responding to

the events that occur largely outside its power rather than instigating the crisis that unfolds.

The placebo test also highlights why reverse causality seems to make little sense in light of our understanding from the alliance literature. If reverse causality is indeed the predominant mechanism driving the results, the placebo test results in Table 3 seem to suggest that a divider's aid to the target state is more effective for the deterioration of the relationship between the target state and the divider's rival when the target state is a formal ally of the rival. Given the literature arguing that security alliances often consist of states with similar preferences (Smith, 1995; Benson and Smith, 2023), it seems unlikely that such shared preferences could be reshaped much more effectively compared to non-aligned target states through aid from the divider.

Moreover, if reverse causality is the driving mechanism and wedge strategy is so effective for the deterioration of relations between the target protégé and its patron, it seems that we should observe more instances of states seeking to implement wedge strategies given their effectiveness in inducing the deterioration of relations. However, this seems to contradict the observed empirical pattern as major power dividers seem to wait for windows of opportunity to open before attempting such a strategy. In a slightly different context, Kinne and Bunte (2020) also note that Washington failed to provide a single bilateral loan to Kyrgyz government because of the latter's deep ties with Russia.

Lastly, I conduct regression analyses where I investigate the possibility of reverse causality by regressing Δ Standardized Ideal Point Distance_{*t*} between patron and protégé on lagged (logged) foreign aid from the divider to the target protégé state. Table 4 presents the results. In contrast to the main results above, the coefficient estimate is *negative* and statistically significant, strongly suggesting that the aid from the divider does *not* lead to the deterioration

in relation between the target protégé and its patron in general.¹⁵ The reverse in the sign of the coefficient estimate is in contrast to studies examining other phenomena with plausible reverse causality such as the relationship between trade and conflict where the sign of the coefficient estimate stays the same (Kim and Rousseau, 2005; Glick and Taylor, 2010). Given the discussion and the analyses, I argue that it makes theoretical sense to believe that the deterioration in relation between the target and its patron precede the use of carrot-based wedge strategies.

Table 4: Effect of Divider’s Aid on Change in Standardized Ideal Point Distance between Patron and Protégé

	Fixed Effects			Random Effects		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
(Logged) Aid _{t-1}	-0.0103* (0.00439)	-0.0104* (0.00442)	-0.00977* (0.00384)	-0.00881** (0.00194)	-0.00782** (0.00278)	-0.00552** (0.00201)
Constant	0.0527** (0.00597)	0.127 (0.254)	-3.489** (1.272)	0.0337** (0.0110)	0.881** (0.205)	0.481 (0.436)
<i>N</i>	6181	5881	5881	6181	5881	5881
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Directed Dyad Fixed/Random Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effects			✓			✓

Clustered standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Robustness Tests and Sensitivity Analyses

I conduct further robustness tests to probe the sensitivity of my results in the appendix.

First, scholars might argue that the *quantity* of economic aid matters relatively little in the context of wedge strategies since it is the symbolic act of transferring economic aid to a protégé of a competing alliance that has political significance. As such, scholars might be interested in whether the *act* of giving aid itself, rather than the amount, is positively

¹⁵Indeed, the results here suggest that the use of wedge strategies can be often counter-effective. Under what conditions wedge strategies can be effective is a question I investigate in another study.

associated with the rapid deterioration of patron-protégé relations. Such an approach would also alleviate concerns about measurement issues regarding the quantification of aid across different dividers. I conduct analyses where I code the variable of giving aid as 1 if a divider offer aids to a target protégé state in a certain year and 0 otherwise, essentially treating it as a binary dependent variable. I conduct analyses using logistic regression with year fixed effects as well as with correlated random effects. Next, given the potential problems of using logistic regression with unit fixed effects, I conduct additional analyses with the linear probability model with unit fixed effects as well as two-way fixed effects. The results are shown to be robust to such specifications.

Second, readers might be concerned that the results shown above might be driven by the behavior of a particular divider. This is especially a big concern since I am only examining five major powers. Moreover, the United States, the United Kingdom and France exhibited similar foreign policy preferences throughout the sample period examined. As such, I conduct further sensitivity analyses to probe the robustness of my results by sequentially dropping each of the five major powers with the same regression specifications to analyze whether any single particular divider is driving the results. The results remain robust to such specifications.

Third, scholars might have concerns about the Nickell bias induced by using lagged dependent variable with fixed effects (Nickell, 1981). The panel data structure is unbalanced with some directed dyads having a short T . I replicate my analyses using first differences in the dependent variable and omitting the lagged dependent variable and show that the results are robust and consistent with the main findings here.

Fourth, while the scope conditions of my theory pertain to treaty alliances, some scholars

might be interested in whether the results would hold when alliances are interpreted more broadly to include both formal and non-formal allies. I replicate the analyses here with additional observations of protégé states in the Middle East based on the alignment criterion per [Walt \(1987\)](#). The results are robust to the inclusion of such observations.

Fifth, scholars might be concerned about unobserved confounders since this is an observational study. As such, I have conducted sensitivity analyses to examine the extent to which my independent variable of interest is robust to unobserved confounders as recommended by [Cinelli and Hazlett \(2020\)](#). The basic logic of this method is to assess the sensitivity of unobserved confounders with a pair of partial R^2 values with a given observed benchmark covariate. Using the divider's GDP as the benchmark covariate, I show that the results are robust and consistent with the theoretical expectations given here.

Lastly, some readers might argue that countries such as France, the United Kingdom and China have been only regional players at most for the sample period examined and that including these countries as independent major power dividers could bias the results and argue that only the United States and Russia as major power dividers should be considered. At the same time, simply omitting observations with France, the United Kingdom and China as dividers obviously results in models with less data.

However, modeling the relationship between the United States and its major power protégés – France and the United Kingdom – is difficult for two reasons. First, the relationship between the United States on the one hand, and the United Kingdom and France, on the other, may be deemed to be hierarchical. For example, scholars often describe the United Kingdom and France as depending on the United States for their security (e.g., [Fuhrmann, 2020](#)). Second, there could be either motivations of strategic complementarity or

substitution amongst the western major powers when they give aid to the rival's protégés. For example, it is plausible that either the United Kingdom or France may either join or refrain from giving aid to a rival's protégé when they observe the United States giving aid. Thus, scholars would need to model both the hierarchical *and* the spatial nature of such dynamics to fully account for both of these possibilities.¹⁶

While I cannot fully account for such dynamics in this study, I replicate the main fixed effects models – for both all five major powers and just the United States and Russia – while accounting for interdependence in errors amongst dyads by using dyadic robust clustered standard errors ([Aronow, Samii and Assenova, 2015](#); [Carlson, Incerti and Aronow, 2024](#)). The results are broadly consistent with the expectations here, although not as robust and the models seem to suffer from degeneracy problems due to data limitations.

Conclusion

There are two main contributions of this study. First, I have sought to provide an answer to the question of the conditions under which major power are likely to attempt wedge strategies. While wedge strategy is an important component to understand in alliance politics, scholars have paid relatively scant attention to the topic. However, a complete understanding of alliance politics such as the question of abandonment would only be better understood when we consider the role of the divider.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to examine wedge strategies in major power diplomacy using quantitative methods. I have argued and provided support-

¹⁶The term spatial here does not refer to geographic space but rather the *relation* (and the potential resulting strategic interdependence) between actors. For the use of spatial regression for dyadic studies, refer to [Neumayer and Plümper \(2010\)](#).

ing evidence in this paper that the implementation of a wedge strategy is likely to occur when the protégé in the rival alliance experiences a discord in its relations with its patron. Operationalizing economic aid as a carrot of wedge strategy, the statistical analysis shows that a rapid deterioration in relations between the rival protégé and its patron is positively associated with the divider offering more economic aid to the protégé.

I have also provided an important theoretical basis upon which the *effectiveness* of wedge strategies should be analyzed. Past research has tended to focus on the effectiveness of various wedge strategies (Izumikawa, 2013; Crawford, 2021). However, discussing the effectiveness of wedge strategies should be preceded by the question of the conditions under which they are likely to be attempted. This is for both theoretical and inferential reasons. The question of when major powers are likely to use wedge strategies is more fundamental than the effectiveness. In terms of inference, we would better be able to study its effectiveness only after answering the question of the conditions under which it is likely to be attempted since we have to consider selection effects. By providing an answer to the question of the conditions under which wedge strategies are likely to be attempted, I have provided a framework through which we would be better able to address the question of the effectiveness of wedge strategies.

Second, this study also contributes to our understanding of the conditions under which major powers may give economic aid to particular recipients and thereby makes an important contribution to the International Political Economy literature. While scholars have certainly noted that donors give economic aid for non-humanitarian reasons and out of various strategic motivations (e.g., Bearce and Tirone, 2010; Carter and Stone, 2015), how economic aid interrelates with major power competition has been overlooked. I show that patron-protégé

relations were an important factor for the endowment of aids for certain countries.

There are important limitations to the current study. In particular, I have noted that the hierarchical nature and the strategic interdependence amongst western major power dividers belonging to the same "camp" has not been sufficiently accounted for in this study. This is not only a statistical problem, but an important theoretical one which scholars may want to further pursue both methodologically and substantively in the future.

There are other important questions on wedge strategies that need to be answered for future research. The obvious question to investigate is the effectiveness of wedge strategies. There are various contexts through which such a question may be answered. For example, political analysts have noted that China is attempting to gain influence in various parts of the world at the expense of the United States. Under what conditions are such attempts likely to be effective? Answering such questions requires deep theoretical analysis and presents significant challenges. However, this remains a topic that is imperative to study, given its theoretical and practical significance.

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