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Buck-passing: A Theoretical Framework and Case Studies on the Munich Crisis and the Korean War

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摘要

推卸責任乃解釋國家外交政策的日益重要之概念，卻深受在理論及應用上不一致之困擾。本文旨在提出一個推卸責任的修正理論框架，奠基於對三個不同層次的區分──推卸責任作為意圖、作為行動，與作為結果。不同於其他策略，推卸責任的概念化應聚焦於其作為結果的層次，因其本質上是個涉及至少三方的策略，且其結果無法由單一國家獨力實現。修正理論框架亦挑戰傳統上認為雙極體系下不存在推卸責任的共識，認為在衝突為有限戰爭的前提下，區域強權得阻止超級強權的侵略。在慕尼黑危機的案例研究中，除了採行扈從的義大利外，其餘有關強權最終皆採行推卸責任策略，導致了慕尼黑協議的簽署。其最終結果乃是綏靖，無行為者提供制止侵略的公共財。在韓戰的案例中，當身處雙極世界並面臨美國的侵略時，儘管蘇聯拒絕介入，中國卻選擇承擔責任並軍事干預朝鮮半島。中蘇兩方政策的差異，起源於關聯行為者中限制戰爭規模的默契，以及韓戰結果對中蘇兩國的不同戰略價值。

關鍵詞：推卸責任、慕尼黑協議、韓戰、三方互動、現實主義

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Abstract

Buck-passing, an increasingly prominent concept to explain states' foreign policy, suffers from inconsistency in both theory and application. This thesis proposes a revised theoretical framework of buck-passing, which is established on the distinguishment of three images of buck-passing—intent, action, and outcome. The conceptualization of buck-passing, in contrast to other strategies, should center the image of outcome because buck-passing is a strategy that intrinsically involves three parties, and its outcome cannot be fulfilled unilaterally. The revised framework also challenges the traditional consensus that no buck-passing occurs under bipolarity, arguing that the regional great power is possible to stop a superpower's aggression in a limited war. In the case of the Munich Crisis, the involved great powers, except for bandwagoning Italy, adopted the buck-passing strategy at the end, leading to the signature of the Munich Agreement as the outcome of appeasement, where no collective good as checking aggression was provided. In the case of the Korean War, while facing the US aggression in a bipolar world, although the Soviet Union refused to engage in, China caught the buck and militarily intervened in the Korean Peninsula. The discrepancy between the Chinese and the Soviet policies was fostered by the tacit understanding of limiting the war scale among involved agents and the divergent strategic values of the Korean War's result between China and the Soviet Union.

Key Words: Buck-passing, Munich Agreement, Korean War, Three-party Interaction, Realism

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1. Introduction

The trend of empirical approaches in international relations is thriving. As Lake (2013: 571-572) pointed out, the focus of international relations as a discipline has shifted from the Great Debates, which drew heavily on the issues of paradigms, ontology, and epistemology, to mid-theory, which concerns more on specific issues or cases in a given historical period. In the field of security studies, the dialogue between theoretical concepts and historical cases has become a prominent approach. Concepts adopted from grand theories have been applied to states' choices on foreign policy to explain the cases or to test theories, which are prolific in various domains, including the development of signaling theory, the balance of power theory, and alliance theory. The case studies with applying concepts from grand theories have cultivated our understanding of specific historical periods and fed back to revise and sophisticate the theory.

Buck-passing is one of the concepts that provide great explanations of historical cases. With feedback from testing with cases, buck-passing becomes a more relevant concept in international relations theory. The concept was conceptualized from the prediction made by structural realism at first, and later scholars employed the idea as a generalized type of foreign policy. Buck-passing now becomes one of the main defensive

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strategies in offensive realism, a late school of the realist family. The concept has been applied to analyze more cases, such as the history of major wars in Europe, Japan's security policy, and the US foreign policy.

Although it has become prominent, buck-passing as a commonly-employed theoretical concept suffers from the lack of internal coherence and external differentiation. There is no well-acknowledged definition of buck-passing, and scholars conceptualize buck-passing with different definitions, scopes, and criteria without enough justification. The line between buck-passing and other defensive strategies such as appeasement or distancing is blurred as well. Such deficiencies lead to contradicted explanations of a single case, and the contradictions could be unproductive because we cannot assure that the disagreements are derived from the case as an anomaly or simply the divergent definitions of a single concept. This situation can be improved by a clearly defined and explicitly elaborated conceptualization of buck-passing.

This essay aims to propose a revised framework of buck-passing, which is potent to improve past theories' deficiency with refinement targeting more coherence and robustness and to provide an insightful perspective that deepens our understanding of historical cases. To achieve this aim, which could be translated as the primary research question to "how can the concept of buck-passing be refined?", the following sub-questions should be answered:

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1) What are the main findings of past buck-passing theories and the issues that have been overlooked?

2) Where does the revised buck-passing theory differ from past theories? Why do the differences matter?

3) How would the revised theory explain the historical cases? Do the historical cases support the revised theory?

Correspondingly, this thesis is composed of three parts. The first part is the literature review of buck-passing, summarizing the development of the conceptualization of buck-passing by reviewing major theorists' works and the application of buck-passing in case studies. After providing an overview of buck-passing literature, the deficiencies and issues worth further examination are marked. The second part presents the revised framework, comprising the conceptualization, theorization, and operationalization of buck-passing. The theory and its coherence are founded on the distinguishment of the three images—intent, action, and outcome—and furnishes an operable guide on how to apply the theory into concrete cases are developed.

The third part, the empirical test of the revised framework, adopts the case study method. As Bennett & Elman (2007:171) point out, case study excels at inquiring the complex and infrequent phenomena, which predominates the realm of international relations in terms of importance. Within the analysis of cases, the process tracing method

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is employed, which focuses on "processes, sequences, and on junctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case (Bennett & Jeffrey, 2015: 7)." On the investigation of history, besides secondary-source academic works, the original documents and papers of the involved under-analyzed states are referred as well

The value of the revised framework is demonstrated in two case studies. The first case is the Munich Crisis in 1938, a classic theme in buck-passing works. The case selection follows the logic of the typical case, which stresses the representativeness between the case and the theory under test (Seawright & Gerring, 2008: 299). The Munich Crisis, as the primordial source of buck-passing's conceptualization, has been reviewed by most influential buck-passing theoretical pieces. The test of the first case can show and contrast where the explanation derived from the revised framework differs from past accounts by circumventing a theoretical impasse with the light of the revised framework.

The selection of the second case, the Korean War, concerns the current theoretical consensus that no buck-passing takes place in bipolarity, on which the revised framework challenges and affords an alternative theory. The case study on the Korean War, as the deviant case of the currently prevalent opinion, aims to "inductively identify variables and hypotheses that have been left out of existing theories (Bennett, 2004: 30)." Involving two superpowers and one relatively minor power in bipolarity, the strategic interaction

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during the Korea War should be qualified enough for testing the existing argument.

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2. Literature Review

2.1. Key Development of the Concept of Buck-passing

Theories of buck-passing originated from the deficiency of traditional structural realism on foreign policy theories in the late 1980s. Balancing and bandwagoning, the two main strategies of structural realist foreign policy theories, have been cultivated by grand theorists. However, only the two main strategies are not enough to explain complex history. Even limited to the field of security studies, when facing the decision between war and peace, states' historical actions often did not fit the two main strategies, which become the ground of new theories on states' foreign policy.

In overview, the theory of buck-passing has grown around two axes. The first axis concerns alliance politics. Buck-passing, as its literal meaning, is about a state passing the buck to the others. In alliance politics, it is the coordination among the members of an alliance about which member should exert its own power costly to achieve the goal that is beneficial not only for itself but for all members. The second axis is the international system. Inspired by structural realism, the international system has been considered as an important independent variable to explain whether buck-passing is likely to occur. On the development of buck-passing theories, five important scholars have

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provided their insights that deepen our understanding of buck-passing. Ordered chronologically, they are Posen (1986), Christensen & Snyder (1990), Schweller (1994, 1998, 2006), and Mearsheimer (2003).

2.1.1. Barry Posen: Setting Frameworks and Critical Issues

Barry Posen is the first scholar who suggests the fundamental framework of buck-passing in the field of international relations. Posen (1986: 61-62) proposes buck-passing as a concept to describe how intense states balance against each other and the choice between the formation of a coalition and internal mobilization. Posen argues that in multipolarity, checking aggression is a collective good that threatened states covet riding free on it. In contrast, in bipolarity, there is no room for a great power to buck-pass because no other state is powerful enough to contain the other great power (Posen, 1986: 63-64).

In the analysis of historical cases, Posen argues that before the outbreak of World War II, both France and Britain were buck-passing. France believed that due to the inferior military power against Germany, the alliance formation but not internal balancing is the key to contain German expansion, and thus Britain is the target with the first priority to which France could pass the buck (Posen, 1986: 122-123). To prevent any would-be hegemon in the European continent, Britain also passed the buck of containing Germany

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to France. The evidence of Britain's buck-passing was the lack of commitment to sending land troops to the European continent before the spring of 1939 (Posen, 1986: 156-157). The geographic condition of being an island has contributed to the British policy of buck-passing (Posen, 1986: 177). The lesson of World War I, which altered the perception of war as high cost, led states to believe the advantage of the defense, facilitating the policies of buck-passing. Posen argues that before World War I, states had believed that the offensive eradication of opponent's power was the best way to defend itself, which had blended individual and collective goods. Yet, the perceived advantage of defense before World War II divided individual and collective good, which was the background of buck-passing (Posen, 1986: 232).

Posen's work provides a clear framework of critical issues about buck-passing. Posen points out the impetus of buck-passing is checking aggression as a collective good and the lure for other states to free ride on it. The work discusses how the power distribution of the international system influence buck-passing and takes geography and states' perception, the offense-defense balance, into account. These have all become essential issues through the development of the buck-passing theory. Yet Posen delineates the agenda of buck-passing without theorizing them in detail. The issues of buck-passing are rather mentioned than elaborated. Buck-passing is rather an ancillary concept but not the main theme in Posen's work. This is shown in the fact that although Posen has heavily

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employed buck-passing to describe the cases, he does not offer an explicit definition of buck-passing in his work.

2.1.2. Christensen & Snyder: Embedding Buck-passing in Structural Realism

If buck-passing appears first in Posen's work as a concept alone, Christensen & Snyder are the scholars who find the theoretical significance of buck-passing. Christensen & Snyder (1990: 140-141) raise the problem from Kenneth Waltz's description on the two scenarios of states' alliance behavior—to be chained for the need to maintain the power balance out of interdependence, or to pass the buck, letting other states to carry the burden for containing a rising hegemon.[1] Christensen & Snyder argue that in bipolarity, though domestic politics may disturb, buck-passing is not a relevant issue because the primacy of internal balancing reduces the value of allies. The structural incentive favors limited involvement rather than overreaction (Christensen & Snyder, 1990: 141-142). In contrast, in multipolarity, the balance of power depends on external balancing, and the alliance dilemma matters.

[1] Waltz did not use the exact term "buck-passing." In the description of the latter scenario, Waltz emphasizes more on the uncertainty of relationships in multipolarity, where the line between partners and opponents is blurred, than the dimension of collective good that Posen proposes. The connotation of "buck-passing" in Christensen & Snyder's article, which is defined as "counting on third parties to bear the costs of stopping a rising hegemon," leans more to Posen's version. *See*, Waltz, Kenneth N. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing. 67, 167-168; Christensen, Thomas J, and Jack Snyder. 1990. "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity." *International Organization* 44(2): 138.

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On what determines the alliance pattern in multipolarity, borrowing from the key variables in Jervis' security dilemma theory, Christensen & Snyder argue that the perceived offense-defense balance is the key. The perception about which side is favorable is determined by the historical lesson of the last major war and by who is in power—civil authority, which inclines to buck-passing, or military dominance, which favors more offensive policies. What should be noted is that the perception and the true situation of offense-defense balance are not the same: the perception would be misled by the experience from the nearest major war (Christensen & Snyder, 1990: 144-146). In both cases Christensen & Snyder employ (World War I and World War II), states failed to recognize the true offense-defense balance. Before World War I, Germany, France, and Russia all exaggerated the advantage of the offensive side except that Britain planned to pay the least in the European war while sitting in a geographically protected position (Christensen & Snyder, 1990: 150-156). In contrast, before World War II, the Soviet Union, France, and Britain all perceived the defensive advantage, believing that the German invasion to the other side (for France and Britain, the side of Poland) would stagnate and undermine the German offensive power for a few months, facilitating their buck-passing strategies. The Soviet Union also planned to avoid or at least delay the war against Germany. With its opponents' buck-passing strategies, Germany successfully expanded its territory by piecemeal aggression (Christensen & Snyder, 1990: 156-165).

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Comparing Posen's and Christensen & Snyder's works, we can see that the main arguments about the theory of buck-passing and explanation of historical cases do not deviate much: both works argue that the buck-passing strategy is critical in multipolarity yet irrelevant in bipolarity; both works emphasize the importance of offense-defense balance and distinguish the real offense-defense balance and states' perception of it. The value of Christensen & Snyder's article, except for the detailed elaboration of cases, shines on establishing buck-passing as a crucial concept in realist foreign policy theory. Christensen & Snyder finds a great position of buck-passing as a complement of traditional balance of power theory, embedding buck-passing in structural realism and security dilemma theory. If Posen sketches the frame of buck-passing and Christensen & Snyder flesh it out, the connection between buck-passing and other options of foreign policy is revealed by Randall Schweller.

2.1.3. Randall Schweller: Expanding Relevant Issues of Buck-passing

Unlike Posen's and Christensen & Snyder's works, buck-passing is not the main focus in Schweller's related works, yet combining buck-passing with broader issues, Schweller does invoke new understandings of buck-passing. He has written four buck-passing-related works—two journal articles and two books developed from the articles. In Schweller's 1994 work, he challenges the traditional realist's view that bandwagoning

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is the opposite option of balancing when facing external threats; instead, Schweller argues that bandwagoning not necessarily requires significant external threat as its precondition: unlike balancing as pursuing security, bandwagoning can be driven by craving for profit, joining the revisionist side, and sharing the gain from aggression. In such cases, bandwagoning is a form of "predatory buck-passing," trying to ride free on other offensive states (Schweller, 1994: 74). Schweller simplifies buck-passing into a sheer free-riding problem: when the collective good is assuring security by containing aggression, status-quo states could adopt the strategy of defensive buck-passing; when states gain profit by joining aggression, predatory buck-passing, namely bandwagoning, occur.[2] Schweller thus extends the concept of buck-passing out of defensive strategy.

Developed from the 1994 article, Schweller, in his 1998 work, attempts to apply his theory for explaining World War II, classifying buck-passing as one of the states' responses to threats. Before going into detail, what should be noted is that Schweller negates the claim that concepts of states' foreign strategies are mutually exclusive. Schweller defends his judgment by an interesting example (Schweller, 1998: 66) :

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[2] This links to Schweller's typology of four kinds of states in his balance of interests theory: lions, lambs, jackals, and wolves. Ordered sequentially, lions are the ones who hold vested interest under the status quo, willing to take a higher cost to preserve the current possession but spend little on gaining more; wolves are the revisionist states that want to extend their value far more than preserving their current owning. Lambs are averse to sacrificing much on both preserving and extending; in contrast, jackals are willing to pay on preserving current possession and even spend more on extending themselves. Schweller argues that the defensive buck-passing can be implemented by both lions and lambs when facing aggression. The predatory buck-passing would only be implemented by jackals with the attempts to free-ride on wolves' aggression. *See:* Schweller, Randall L. 1994. "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In." *International Security* 19(1): 100.

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Consider, for instance, the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact from the Soviets' perspective. It was bandwagoning because the Soviets joined the strongest and most threatening side to avoid a German attack and to gain essentially unearned spoils in Central Europe. It was buck-passing because the German attack was redirected westward, where, Stalin believed, the two sides would bleed each other white to the advantage of the Soviet Union. The pact was therefore a clear example of "free riding": by facilitating war among the Western capitalist states, the Soviet Union would gain the benefits of a greatly diminished German and world capitalist threat without incurring the costs of fighting. Finally, it was also balancing because, by delaying a German attack, the Soviets were both buying time to bolster their depleted military forces and gaining additional territory and resources to defend themselves against Germany if and when it returned east.

Although Schweller denies the exclusivity of strategies, he lists six strategies for states' responding to threats: balancing, bandwagoning, binding, distancing, buck-passing, and engagement. The feature of Schweller's theory on buck-passing is that buck-passing occurs only if the potential balancing coalition has the same or more strength than its opponent(s); when the aggressor is stronger than the whole defensive coalition, the collective good, namely potent balancing, does not exist, and thus threatened states should adopt the strategy of distancing, trying to be the one that survives last. The two strategies

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are distinguished by their prerequisite but not by states' actions, which could be the same (Schweller, 1998: 71-75). This leads to Schweller's distinct explanation of the World War II case: he categorizes British policy before World War II as distancing but not buck-passing because the sum of Britain's and France's power was still inferior to Germany's power. Britain adopted a double strategy of deterrence and appeasement (a type of engagement) to deal with the German threat without reckoning on a possible coalition (Schweller, 1998: 145-154).

The essence of Schweller's theory on foreign policies is more clearly examined in his 2004 article and 2006 book, which share the same topic.[3] Investigating why states fail to appropriately balance threats, Schweller classifies buck-passing, along with inaction, normal diplomacy, bandwagoning, appeasement, engagement, distancing, and hiding, into a subtype of nonbalancing or underbalancing (Schweller, 2006: 9-10). Through the neo-classical realist approach, Schweller argues that states' failure on appropriate balancing is caused by domestic political factors, which are social cohesion, elite cohesion, elite consensus, and regime/government vulnerability (Schweller, 2006: 46-56).

Schweller's innovation in the theory of buck-passing shines on several dimensions.

[3] The 2006 book is the expanded version of the 2004 article with more elaboration and extended case studies on the article's contentions. Thus I would cite the 2006 book below. *See*: Schweller, Randall L. 2004. "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing." *International Security* 29(2): 159-201; Schweller, Randall L. 2006. *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

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First, Schweller discovers that the element of buck-passing can be a part of offensive policies. Besides defensive buck-passing, when states try to ride free on gaining profit by changing the status quo, predatory buck-passing, namely bandwagoning for profit, occurs. Second, by emphasizing the precondition of effective containment of aggression as a collective good, Schweller distinguishes distancing and buck-passing, arguing that Britain's foreign policy toward France on the eve of World War II was not buck-passing but distancing, proposing a different explanation of past buck-passing literature. Third, Schweller precisely captures an implicit characteristic of buck-passing in past theories: buck-passing is a kind of underbalancing (or even nonbalancing). States that adopt buck-passing strategy do not spend enough effort on balancing their threats. In other words, if buck-passing is taken place on the defensive side, it means the aggression is not effectively balanced. By his neo-classical realist approach, Schweller shifts the focus from structural constraint to each state's concern and preference and thus broadens the relevant issue of buck-passing.

2.1.4. John J. Mearsheimer: Buck-passing as an Integral Part of Offensive Realism

If the past works ensure the status of buck-passing as a branch of realist foreign policy theory, John J. Mearsheimer, in his magnum opus of offensive realism first

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published in 2001, establishes buck-passing as an integral part of realism's new development. Mearsheimer names four possible strategies when states face aggression: balancing, buck-passing, appeasement, and bandwagoning. However, appeasement and bandwagoning are not desirable options because these two strategies contradict the logic of offensive realism, deteriorating the gap of relative power between threatened states and their opponents. Bandwagoning will benefit the opponent more than threatened states themselves, and appeasement is likely to enlarge but not reduce the aggressor's ambition to conquest (Mearsheimer, 2001: 163-164). Mearsheimer (2001: 139-140) thus nominates buck-passing and balancing as the two key strategies when facing threats. Mearsheimer pointed out that states have four ways for facilitating buck-passing: pursuing smooth diplomatic tie with the threat or trying not to infuriate it at least, keeping a distant tie with intended buck-catcher(s), arming themselves better by extra expense, and strengthening the intended buck-catcher (Mearsheimer, 2001: 157-158).

Between the two rational strategies of checking aggression, Mearsheimer argues that buck-passing is more alluring than balancing for two reasons. First, buck-passing is generally a less costly policy compared with balancing. Second, buck-passing can exhaust the power of not only the aggressor but also the buck-catcher, especially when the two struggle in a long war (Mearsheimer, 2001: 159-161). However, buck-passing can cause harmful effects in two ways. The main downside of buck-passing is the possible failure

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of buck-catcher to contain aggression. The other is that a strengthened buck-catcher might reversely become a new threat when buck-passer stands by while buck-catcher enhancing power (Mearsheimer, 2001: 161-162).

The structure of the international system chiefly determines states' choice between balancing and buck-passing. Mearsheimer argues that the buck-passing strategy does not exist in the bipolar system, "no buck-passing take place among the great powers in bipolarity because there is no third party to catch the buck" (Mearsheimer, 2001: 270). In bipolarity, when facing aggression, the great power has little choice but to balance against its rival by itself or to make a coalition with smaller states. In the multipolar system, when the potential hegemon holds more relative power, the higher the possibility that other states would adopt the balancing strategy and not pass the buck. States under a balanced multipolar system are more likely to adopt a buck-passing strategy, and states under an unbalanced multipolar system with a potential hegemon are more likely to take a balancing strategy, forming a balancing coalition (Mearsheimer, 2001: 269-271). Geography is a factor as well. If a threatened state has a common border with the aggressor, the vulnerability for a relatively easy invasion will push the threatened state more likely to balance, becoming a buck-catcher. Reversely, a state with a barrier to the aggressor has more space to pass the buck (Mearsheimer, 2001: 271-272).

Standing on the shoulder of giants, Mearsheimer proposes the most comprehensive

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version of buck-passing theory. Unlike the past theories of buck-passing are finely embedded in realism, Mearsheimer's offensive realism is taking root in the theory of buck-passing. Mearsheimer's buck-passing theory diverges from the past theories on four dimensions. First, buck-passing replaces bandwagoning as a major strategy for checking aggression. Bandwagoning and balancing had long been the main strategy in realist tradition (Waltz, 1979:125-127). Although scholars dispute which side is more prevalent in states' behavior, they do not reject the two strategies' status as main strategies (Walt, 1990: 28-29; Schweller, 1994: 74-75). Yet Mearsheimer challenges it. He argues that bandwagoning is not a chief strategy because it would enlarge the gap of relative power between bandwagoning states and the aggressor. Instead, buck-passing, which finely fits offensive realists' emphasis on relative power, becomes the chief strategy.

Second, Mearsheimer brings Waltz's original idea of buck-passing back in. When conceptualizing buck-passing, Posen, Christensen & Snyder, and Schweller all stress the side of the free-rider problem, regarding buck-passing as a way to exploit others' balancing behavior as collective good. Nevertheless, Waltz's initial insight mentions the other side of buck-passing, which is the calculation of relative power derived from the uncertainty of whether a state is an ally or enemy after a threat is balanced (Waltz, 1979, 167-168). Mearsheimer lists Waltz's insight as a primary advantage of buck-passing back, calling it the "offensive dimension" of buck-passing (Mearsheimer, 2001: 160). Third,

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buck-passing in Mearsheimer's offensive realism is much more prevalent and thus does not necessarily link to underbalancing. Buck-passing is an ordinary strategy for checking aggression. When a threat appears, except for an instant formation of a defensive coalition (which is quite rare), states pass the buck to each other. Buck-passing is indeed a low-balancing policy for the buck-passer, yet it is not necessarily lead to an insufficient balancing: the buck-catcher(s) can catch the whole buck and effectively balance against the aggressor.

Fourth, Mearsheimer's buck-passing theory is highly interconnected with his offensive realism, especially the theory of regional hegemon and offshore balancer. Mearsheimer argues that due to the stopping power of water, the global hegemon is an unachievable goal. Regional hegemon, which possesses unrivaled power in its own region, frequently plays the role of offshore balancer, preventing the emergence of other region's hegemon, for it could ensure no other state can intervene in its region's affairs. If the potential hegemon is balanced well by local powers, the distant regional hegemon can stay on the sidelines; if it is not, the distant regional hegemon will act (Mearsheimer, 2001: 40-42). The presence of a regional hegemon means that when any potential hegemon emerges, it will face obstruction from another great power responsively. The first choice of regional hegemon is passing the buck to local great powers for containing the potential hegemon, which allows buck-passing to be a normal response and a prevalent

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phenomenon.

Mearsheimer's contribution to buck-passing theory suggests a comprehensive theory of buck-passing that is indispensable for a grand theory and promotes buck-passing as a chief and prevalent strategy. By making the concept no longer an exceptional strategy only explaining specific cases, buck-passing has become a more relevant strategy for explaining a variety of cases, both in history and of contemporary issues.

2.2. Application of and Critics on Buck-passing

2.2.1. Historical Case Studies with Buck-passing

Posen, Christensen & Snyder, Schweller, and Mearsheimer, the five scholars have significantly contributed to the creation and refinement of the theory of buck-passing. Meanwhile, scholars also apply buck-passing's concept and theory to analyze historical cases. In the early years, buck-passing was confined to explaining cases from European history (Kaufman, 1992: 424-425; Edelstein, 2002:30). After Mearsheimer's work was published, buck-passing has applied to more diverse cases. As a great power in modern history, the US is the protagonist of buck-passing scenarios. The US behaviors that are depicted as buck-passing including its late engagement in World War I and World War II (Chan, 2004: 127-128), strengthening European states by European integration for the purpose of withdrawing from Europe in Eisenhower's term (Green, 2012: 23-31), and

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selling arms to Taiwan for checking China (Maitra, 2015).

The US is also involved in cases where other states pass the buck. Lind (2004: 110-116) argues that buck-passing best explained Japan's security policy during the Cold War. Japan let the US carry the most burden for containing the Soviet Union's threat in 1950-1970 and started to increase its military power in the 1980s because of the Soviet Union's growing military power in the Pacific and the absence of the US response. Mochizuki (2007: 742-743) discusses Japan's reaction to rising China, arguing that despite enhancing its conventional military capability and becoming a more active coalition member, Japan is passing the buck to the US, especially on the nuclear deterrence against China. Unlike Lind and Mochizuki, Sung (2018: 275-276) categorizes four groups of Asian states with different strategies toward China, puts Japan, which has territorial disputes with China and allies with the US, into the group of balancing, and lists Australia, South Korea, and New Zealand, states with no territorial disputes with China, as the group of buck-passing. Kassab (2015: 23, 68-69, 82) investigates weak states' strategies toward great powers (Armenia to Russia; St. Kitts and Nevis, Lebanon, and Cambodia to the US), arguing that the weak states suffer from under-development as the chief threat of survival and pass the buck of both traditional security and non-traditional security issues (terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking). Buck-passing better depicts weak states' behaviors than bandwagoning. Richey (2020: 5-11) analyzes the alliance politics in contemporary Indo-

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Asia-Pacific, arguing that the region's offense-defense balance is prone to the defensive side, and therefore the regional states would incline to pass the buck. Dogan-Akkas (2021: 3-10) conceptualizes the United Arab Emirates' strategy in Yemen as predatory buck-passing, arguing that the United Arab Emirates let Qatar and Saudi Arabia carry the buck of political cost while acquiring economic interests in Yemen. The United Arab Emirates relied on Saudi Arabia as the main power in the military coalition intervening in the Yemeni Civil War and blamed the failure of the intervention on Qatar while expanding its economic investment in Yemen.

2.2.2. Deficiencies of Current Buck-passing Literature

Throughout the development of the buck-passing theory, buck-passing performs well on explaining the main cases to which scholars apply and seems to be plausibly completed. However, the literature on buck-passing suffers from two dimensions.

First, the different works' analyses on the same historical case lead to different outcomes, and the inconsistency of explanation does not generate meaningful debate. The works of Posen, Christensen & Snyder, Schweller, and Mearsheimer all take the interaction between Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and Germany on the eve of World War II as analyzed historical cases, yet there is no consensus on explanation. Posen (1986: 122-125, 156-158) claims that Britain and France adopted buck-passing strategy toward

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each other, and Christensen & Snyder think that buck-passing was adopted by France, Britain, and the Soviet Union toward each other (Christensen & Snyder, 1990: 157-165). Schweller argues that since the combined power of France and Britain was inferior to Germany, it was distancing but not buck-passing taking place (Schweller, 1998: 71-74). Mearsheimer's explanation is quite complicated. Generally speaking, on the eve of World War II, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union were passing the buck to each other: "[t]he United Kingdom buck-passed to France, which tried to push Hitler eastward against the smaller states of Eastern Europe and possibly the Soviet Union, which in turn tried to pass the buck to the United Kingdom and France (Mearsheimer, 2001: 308)". Yet Britain's decision on the Munich Agreement is classified as appeasement as well.[4] Mearsheimer also argues that during World War II, the US passed the buck of struggling with the German army to the Soviet Union, delaying the Normandy landings to deplete both German and the Soviet military power (Mearsheimer, 2001: 160). The different findings on a specific case do not necessarily mean unproductiveness; instead, good progress would be made if a finding can complement the others' accounts through effective discourse. However, the different findings of the buck-passing pieces lack debate. The

[4] Specifically, Mearsheimer depicts Britain's decision on the Munich Agreement as "conceding power," and conceding power is the characteristic of the two strategies, bandwagoning and appeasement, which allows the aggressor to gain more power and become more dangerous. Since bandwagoning does not fit the case of the Munich Agreement, it should be appeasement. *See*: Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics.* New York: WW Norton & Company. 162-165.

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historical facts they recognized are almost the same.[5] The inconsistency is mainly derived from different definitions of buck-passing, making the polyphonic explanations an unfruitful definition problem, which can and should be improved.

Second, the usage of buck-passing is sometimes contradicted or at least confused within a single work. In Schweller's 1998 work, he argues that buck-passing needs the collective good as a precondition, namely the superiority of the combined power of threatened states (Schweller, 1998: 73-74). On the eve of World War II, the threatened states, namely Britain and France, did not have a superior combined power against Germany, so distancing but not balancing occurred. However, when Schweller discusses the US character in World War II, he claims that the US passed the buck as directly combating Germany in 1940-1941 to Britain and France for ensuring its security by preventing a European hegemon (Schweller, 1998: 192-193). The question is: should we count the US as one of the threatened states when doing power calculations? If so, the combined power of the threatened states would exceed Germany. If not, why the US security is threatened by the result of the European hegemonic war? Mearsheimer's work is also confusing in the case of the Munich Agreement. If Britain's grand strategy on the

[5] One important exception is that Schweller argues that the power gap between Germany and the side of Britain and France was closing after the Munich Agreement due to the two states' rearmament, but Mearsheimer conversely claims that the change of power balance after the appeasement was not in favor of Britain and France. See: Schweller, Randall L. 1998. *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest.* New York: Columbia University Press. 148-154; Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics.* New York: WW Norton & Company. 165.

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eve of World War II is regarded as buck-passing, why only the case of the Munich Agreement is classified as appeasement? It could also be the mutual buck-passing between France and Britain for the responsibility to defend Czechoslovakia. Or reversely, why not France and Britain's strategies toward Germany are appeasement?

2.2.3. Buck-passing's Operationalization: Lacking a General Expression

The two dimensions of current literature's deficiencies originate from a practical problem of current theories: the absence of buck-passing's operationalization. More specifically, the existing literature does provide the conceptual definition of buck-passing, which prescribes what the concept of buck-passing aims to explain. Posen (1986: 64), Christensen & Snyder (1990: 138), Schweller (1998: 73), and Mearsheimer (2001: 157-158) all argue that buck-passing in essence is letting others carry the cost of providing collective good need while paying little on it, which the concept of free-riding could capture.

However, the existing literature does not provide a general expression of buck-passing's operationalization on what situation could be deemed as buck-passing. In other words, while executing a case study, the criterion of what specific historical facts could lead to the recognition of buck-passing remains unclear. The past conceptual definitions of buck-passing do suggest some crucial elements of buck-passing, such as the collective

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need and free-riding among states, yet the standard of what kinds of historical fact could be deemed as collective need or free-riding does not be presented in the past works. Nevertheless, the interpretations of cases could still shed light on discovering the implicit operationalization in each piece.

As the pioneer of buck-passing theory, the actors on which Posen applies buck-passing theories, namely France and Britain on the eve of World War II, are confined to members of an alliance or at least the prospective allies. The concept of buck-passing is originated from the different patterns within alliances under bipolarity and multipolarity. The pattern of buck-passing, letting the ally carry the burden, would harm the attempt to make an alliance (Posen, 1986: 73-74). The historical facts as the evidence of buck-passing were France's attempt to drag Britain into the anti-German front (Posen, 1986: 123-124) and the lack of commitment from Britain (Posen, 1986: 155-156).

To explain the different alliance politics patterns, Christensen & Snyder employ a similar buck-passing definition as the pattern of alliance behavior with Posen. Nevertheless, while applying their theory, Christensen & Snyder do not bind themselves to the strict understanding of alliance that implies some sort of cooperation or collaboration; instead, they recognize the Soviet Union as a buck-passing state along with Britain and France on resisting German expansion (Christensen & Snyder, 1990, 157-165). The Soviet buck-passing-related historical facts listed by Christensen & Snyder

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were Stalin's two crucial beliefs: Britain and France were able to deny Germany's aggression for a considerable period, and Germany would attack the West first if the Soviet Union stayed unprovocative and formidable, which lead to the Soviet Union's attempt to entrap Germany to campaign with and be debilitated by France (Christensen & Snyder, 1990, 157-158). France refused to defend Czechoslovakia in 1938 but aided Poland in 1939 because Britain made no commitment to Czechoslovakia but provided a guarantee to Poland, which let France expect Britain to share a significant burden to contend with Germany. On the decision of Polish guarantee, Britain believed Poland was able to stop Germany for months, and Britain evaluated France's defensive power and Maginot line highly, aiming to bind France on fighting with Germany by the Polish guarantee.

Unlike Posen and Christensen & Snyder, Schweller does not place the concept of buck-passing as the pattern of alliance politics; instead, he names buck-passing as one of the six strategies that state's response to threat and one of the alternatives to forming an alliance (Schweller, 1998: 65-66). On buck-passing, Schweller proposes his balance of interest theory, which groups the states into the status-quo states and the revisionist states by their willingness to pay for defending the status quo (Schweller, 1998: 83-84). As a strategy reacting to threat, buck-passing occurs only within the status quo states. Under the balance of interest theory, the Soviet Union was the revisionist state, and for the

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strategic interaction of the defensive side, Schweller mainly discusses Britain and France as two status-quo states.[6] As noted before, Schweller does not recognize the interaction between Britain and France as buck-passing. Schweller argues that the combined power of Britain and France was inferior to sole Germany, so there was no collective good for defending German aggression. Instead, Britain and France adopted the distancing strategy, trying to be the last survivor, remaining isolated to avoid being involved in conflicts (Schweller, 1998: 71-74). The way Schweller lists historical facts to support the distancing interpretation is oblique. He points out the fault of the past buck-passing interpretation and argues that Chamberlain dismissed France's incompetence on defense and designed Britain's security policy on the basis without France. Britain did not expect to rely on allies on defense. Instead, Schweller argues that the alliance formation among status quo states could hardly be achieved when their combined power is inferior to the revisionist states, and Britain and France had not formed a valid alliance in the 1930s (Schweller, 1998: 151-154).

The innovation in the context of discussing buck-passing characterizes Mearsheimer's buck-passing theory. Mearsheimer places buck-passing not under the pattern of alliance politics but as one of the strategies for checking aggression. The

[6] As pointed out in the previous section, although Schweller mainly discusses the strategic interaction between Britain and France as two status quo states, he also recognizes the US for adopting a buck-passing strategy in 1940-1941.

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contrary alternative of buck-passing is balancing, which both are the two main strategies for states when facing aggression (Mearsheimer, 2001: 155). As the main strategy, the actor of buck-passing is not confined to the member of a formal alliance; in contrast, a state could adopt buck-passing whenever it needs to balance against another state as long as an intended buck-catcher exists. Mearsheimer's loose definition allows any state that could get benefit from other states' attempts to resist the aggressor to be counted as the actor of buck-passing. Therefore, France, Britain, the Soviet Union, and the US all adopted buck-passing on the eve of World War II while sharing the need for the collective good as checking German aggression. Britain decided not to make a continental commitment, spending its budget on building air forces but not the land army that could fight a continental war along with France (Mearsheimer, 2001: 309). France tried to pass the buck to its Eastern small allies, made good relations with Germany, and hesitated to build a firm alliance with the Soviet Union since it might make allying with Britain less likely (Mearsheimer, 2001: 310-311). While Britain and France were trying to pass the buck to the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union also tried to pass the buck back. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was clear evidence of the Soviet Union's buck-passing strategy from 1939 to 1941. Before the pact, Mearsheimer argues that the Soviet Union pursued both buck-passing and collective security policies before 1939. while launching rearmament to push Germany to invade the West first, the Soviet Union advocated the collective

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security system under several challenges, such as the French army's incapability of offensive operations, France and Britain's buck-passing policy, and no shared border with Germany (Mearsheimer, 2001: 314-315). The US remained on the sideline, embracing isolationism when the other three states were under the pressure of German expansion (Mearsheimer, 2001: 254). Even after engaging in the war, the US still delayed landing its troops in France for debilitating both Germany and the Soviet Union (Mearsheimer, 2001: 160). A summarized table of the discussed operationalizations from five scholars can be found in the Appendix.

Through examing different operationalizations, two common problems could be found. First, all works neglect to justify and explicitly elaborate the qualification of actors as states implementing buck-passing. The justification and elaboration on the qualification are crucial for recognizing buck-passing. It is the necessary process of selecting the actors, the basis of building theories under the simplified model. Without enough justification and elaboration, scholars could hardly defend why some actors are worth scrutinizing while some are neglected. Posen (1986) and Christensen & Snyder (1990) both place the concept of buck-passing under the context of alliance politics and set the qualification of buck-passing state as being the member of an alliance. One critical question arises: how to define an alliance? On the eve of World War II, Britain and France did not form a formal association for their cooperation. For the relationship between the

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West and the Soviet Union, whether there was firm cooperation or collaboration is under doubt. Lack of justification and elaboration on the qualification could obscure the merit of alliance politics analysis. While clearly defining being a status quo state as the qualification, Schweller (1998) nevertheless did not operationalize the qualification clear enough: should the US be counted as a status quo state? The answer is ambiguous.

The second common problem is the lack of general expression of buck-passing's operationalization. In other words, past works do not clearly point out what kind of actions could or could not be the evidence of a state adopting buck-passing. Scholars do perform outstandingly on associating the picked historical facts with the concept of buck-passing. However, they do not tell us the standard of what sort of historical facts should be picked in the first place, generating the problem that some historical facts have a competing explanation without further debate. For instance, the fact Posen (1986) points out that France attempted to drag Britain into the anti-German front could originate from the need to gather a strong ally to balance against Germany together. France's decision on refusing to defend Czechoslovakia but aiding Poland, mentioned by Christensen & Snyder (1990), could be out of the concern of avoiding fighting the unwinnable war. The Soviet Union's rearmament, marked by Mearsheimer (2001), could also be regarded as an attempt to balance against Germany. A general expression of buck-passing's operationalization should be stated to establish the theory's guidance of selecting

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historical facts and the corresponding rationales.

2.2.4. Issues on Refining Buck-passing Theory: Operational Definition, Scope, and External Differentiation

The above deficiencies of current buck-passing literature can be rescued by further investigation on the following three issues: operationalization of buck-passing, the scope of involved agents, and external differentiation with other strategies. First, all current literature lacks operationalization of buck-passing. Most literature does provide an explicit theoretical definition of buck-passing, which often mentions the element of free-riding. However, no current literature offers operationalization of buck-passing, telling us in what situation a case can be deemed as buck-passing or not. It may not be a primary concern when scholars are in the process of investigating a certain historical case, yet it does mean much when selecting which case is qualified for buck-passing theory to be applied, especially for the currently ongoing cases. An operational definition of buck-passing is also the first step to generate a meaningful debate of different explanations toward a specific case: only when a clear identification between what is and what is not buck-passing is achieved can the discussion about further related issues be established in a firm foundation.

Second, the main reason why explanations differ and the major insufficiency of

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buck-passing theory lies in the lack of investigation on the scope of involved agents in buck-passing theory. The term "scope" refers to the range of states that are influenced when discussing a case concerning buck-passing. Specifically, the scope of buck-passing is the boundary of the states that are relevant to the threat. Two problems arise. First, how to define "relevant"? The scholars lack elaboration on the problem, and the answers in the shared World War II case differ: Posen and Schweller count only Britain and France.[7] Christensen & Snyder's work includes Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. Mearsheimer lists not only European states as Britain, France, and the Soviet Union but also the offshore balancer as the US.

The inconsistency across the scholar's works reflects the different implicit criteria on how to define the involved agent. Posen and Schweller's criteria can be described as the involved agents need to possess mostly overlapped common interests and to stand on the same front. In other words, the collective good as the object of buck-passing is not only checking the rising power but also defending the satisfying power distribution at that time. Christensen & Snyder require only the involved agents to have a common enemy,

[7] Posen and Schweller have different reasons for counting only Britain and France. Although Posen does not explain explicitly, it seems that Posen does not think Britain, France, and the Soviet Union had joined the same alliance. To Schweller, according to his unique theory of balancing of interests, the Soviet Union is a revisionist state which has more interest in changing the international order than preserving the status quo; therefore, the Soviet Union is not a member of the defensive alliance that aims to preserve status quo, conversely adopting a predatory buck-passing strategy toward Germany. *See*: Schweller, Randall L. 1994. "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In." *International Security* 19(1): 100; Schweller, Randall L. 1998. *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest*. New York: Columbia University Press. 192-194.

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sharing the goal of balancing against the aggression. Mearsheimer's criterion is the loosest one. The term "threatened state" employed by Mearsheimer captures the spirit of his criterion.[8] When a potential hegemon emerges, all states within the system are threatened; Moreover, the distant regional hegemon is also threatened because another regional hegemon might intervene in the local affair of its own region if the potential hegemon prevails after a hegemonic war.

The second problem is the competency of a state to become an involved agent of a buck-passing case. It seems that except for relevance, there is no other requirement for counting as an involved agent, yet an implicit one exists: the threshold of power. The requirement is obscured because the actors, in most cases, are great powers in a multipolar world, lacking scenarios in bipolarity. In current buck-passing literature, most scholars argue that there is no buck-passing in bipolarity. The logic is consistent: in a bipolar world, the smaller state is not capable of confronting a superpower without the aid of another superpower (Posen, 1986: 63-64; Christensen & Snyder, 1990: 141-142; Mearsheimer, 2001: 270). The logic implies that a state qualified as an involved agent of a buck-passing case needs to be not only relevant but also strong enough to meet the threshold of power.

The logic of no buck-passing in bipolarity is questionable due to no clear distinction

[8] Schweller also employed the word "threatened state", but the phrases that can best fit Schweller's theory would be "status-quo state" and "revisionist state", which are applied more often.

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between "system" and "region."[9] From the previous review of buck-passing case studies, we can see that the US is involved in most cases including those in the Cold War. The reason is that the US as a superpower has interests all over the world. It shares a variety of common interests and the preservation of the status-quo as collective good with states in different regions. The superpowers in bipolarity do have interests worldwide and the will to fight for them, yet superpowers scarcely exercise their entire power in a distant region for two reasons. First, a superpower's interest in a distant region is limited. The internal balancing but not external balancing is the primary way for defending itself in bipolarity (Waltz, 1979: 169). Second, due to the stopping power of water, the superpower can hardly project its entire power across the ocean (Mearsheimer, 2001: 44, 114-119). Since the superpower would not exercise its full power in a distant region in bipolarity, setting the threshold of power only by the power comparison between small states and superpowers while neglecting the scale and the location of a conflict is problematic. The possibility of buck-passing in bipolarity deserves further studying.

The third issue for refining buck-passing theory is the external differentiation. The external differentiation problem of buck-passing from other strategies is well-recognized

[9] Toft has raised a similar problem that Mearsheimer blurs the region and the system. Yet, Toft marks the lack of distinction on level of analysis, but what I emphasize is the different costs on states' action in their own region and outside their region. See: Toft, Peter. 2005. "John J. Mearsheimer: An Offensive Realist between Geopolitics and Power." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 8(4): 393.

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in current literature. Scholars do not deny but rather admit frankly about the problem. In response to Vasquez's criticism on whether France, Britain, and the Soviet Union's behaviors was buck-passing, slow balancing, or appeasement (for Britain and France), Christensen & Snyder reject the either/or sight, claiming that they adopt different strategies simultaneously (Vasquez, 1997: 907; Christensen & Snyder, 1997: 921). Schweller also admits the concepts of strategies are not mutually exclusive, giving the above-cited sample for demonstrating that a single move can be deemed as three different strategies (Schweller, 1998: 65-66).

It is clear that the complete mutual exclusivity of different strategies is nearly unachievable. The state as a single rational actor with consistent strategy is a theoretical premise, not a genuine fact. When applying the pure concepts extracted from theory to the actual cases from history, the state's action would not perfectly fit the theoretical expectation. However, it does not mean the improvement of external differentiation is valueless. If a strategy overlaps with another strategy in most cases, classifying these two strategies and their individual characteristics would be meaningless. Although the problem of blurred boundaries between strategies can hardly be fully resolved, the improvement on external differentiation of different strategies is still significant progress. Clearer boundaries clarify the selection of a theoretical concept and the theoretical expectation of a single case, distinguishing the corresponding theoretical part of a case.

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The feedback from an anomaly would be more accurate to trace back which part of a theory should be revised. If we need the typology of strategies to understand the entangled states' behaviors on foreign affairs, the utility of the typology relies on the distinction of each strategy and how we classify them.

Two ways should help to set the boundary between buck-passing and other strategies. First, the subject and the object of an effect in buck-passing should be clarified. Unlike most strategies supposed to explain bilateral interaction, buck-passing requires at least three parties involved: a buck-passer, an intended buck-catcher, and an aggressor. Correspondingly, at least three ties exist: the relationship between the buck-passer and the intended buck-catcher, the intended buck-catcher and the aggressor, the aggressor and the buck-passer. Besides, there is another tie emphasized by literature: the relationship between the aggressor and the combination of the buck-passer and the intended buck-catcher. When talking about different patterns or effects of buck-passing, they belong to different ties. The free-riding problem belongs to the relationship between the buck-passer and the intended buck-catcher. Buck-passing as underbalancing depicts the pattern of the buck-passer and the intended buck-catcher as a whole and the aggressor. The clarification of the subject and the object of an effect helps integrate some minor findings concerning buck-passing. Crawford (2011: 180-181) argues that wedging is the main cause of buck-passing, which effect takes place in the two ties of the aggressor to buck-

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passer and to intended buck-catcher. Jones (2003: 117-118) classifies buck-passing as a unilateral strategy, emphasizing that the buck-passer's free-riding is unilateral to the intended buck-catcher. By clarifying the convoluted relationships within buck-passing, we can better depict what has happened by who to whom, and it is beneficial for the following topics.

The second way for improving the external differentiation of buck-passing is to distinguish the different images of buck-passing. In most works, scholars claim that they are studying buck-passing as a strategy, yet they do not explicitly distinguish the different images of buck-passing in their works. There are three images of buck-passing needed to be carefully classified: buck-passing as intent, buck-passing as action, and buck-passing as outcome.[10] Strategy, as a widely-adopted usage referring to state's own effort to achieve certain outcome, which could comprise intent and action, should not be confused with the outcome as the final result of a certain case.

By distinguishing the three images of buck-passing, we can clarify our languages concerning buck-passing. Buck-passing as a strategy, the characteristics of buck-passing, has been heavily examined by past scholars. Problems arise from the other two usages.

[10] The method of distinguishing different usages of an ambiguous concept is inspired by: Inis Claude's work on distinguishing different usages of the balance of power. The distinction of the three categories is inspired by Tang. The strategy here refers to a specific subtype of ideas, confined to scholars' thoughts on how states organize their foreign behaviors. *See*, Tang, Shiping. 2018. "Idea, Action, and Outcome: The Objects and Tasks of Social Sciences." *World Economics and Politics* (5): 33-59 (唐世平，2018，《觀念、行動和結果：社會科學的客體和任務》，〈世界經濟與政治〉(5)：33-59。).

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The referred behavior of buck-passing as an action is highly overlapped with other defensive strategies. The action depicted as buck-passing in most cases is low confrontational or simply passive actions, such as distancing itself from would-be allies or compromising on aggressor's demands, which are very similar or simply the same as other defensive strategies like appeasement. Buck-passing and other strategies possess different characteristics but have the same referred actions, which is the origin of low external differentiation of buck-passing.

The indistinguishability of buck-passing as an action from other strategies leads to an important question concerning buck-passing as an outcome: would buck-passing fail? The question matters because if every buck-passing succeeds, satisfying the aforementioned ideal sequential events, we can distinguish buck-passing from other strategies only by the outcome. Most current literature does not aware of this question, implying buck-passing as a unilateral strategy that can be executed on one's own.[11] Indeed, buck-passing's intention and action can be executed on a state's own. However, the outcome of buck-passing can not be achieved unilaterally. The identities of buck-passer and buck-catcher among threatened states are not fixed. In the case of aggression not yet entering the territory of the involved great powers, the great powers often are

[11] An exception is a short paragraph from Edelstein's work, arguing it is possible that no state catches the buck when one state is buck-passing. *See*: Edelstein, David M. 2018. "Cooperation, Uncertainty, and the Rise of China: It's About 'Time'." *The Washington Quarterly* 41(1): 160

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reluctant to check the aggression, passing the buck to others. If no one catches the buck at the end, the aggression remains unchecked, and the power is conceded to the aggressor. The outcome can be called the failure of buck-passing, and the failed buck-passing can be deemed as an appeasement of the outcome.

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3. A Revised Framework of Buck-passing

3.1. The Conceptualization of Buck-passing

3.1.1. The Indispensable Elements of Buck-passing

The study toward a framework of buck-passing should be started from the investigation toward "what is buck-passing." Buck-passing, as a theoretical concept, in essence, is an artificial product of human intelligence. While buck-passing as a concept is originated from human minds, it is employed to depict real-world events, which are independent existence out of humankind's recognition: buck-passing is widely used in the historical case study approach, and scholars claim that there are cases of buck-passing in history. In other words, buck-passing is also a social fact, a phenomenon that has happened in the real world. In order to define buck-passing, we should first look through what the indispensable elements of buck-passing are when it happens as a phenomenon, the core of buck-passing.

In the strictest sense, there are two indispensable elements of buck-passing. First, buck-passing requires the existence of collective good. The primordial idea of buck-passing is the free-riding problem, and the precondition of free-riding is the existence of collective good. The ordinary meaning of the collective good in the context of buck-

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passing refers to checking aggression, a defensive goal that divides the involved agents into at least two clusters: the offensive side and the defensive side.[12] Since the need for the collective good as checking aggression is shared by the defensive side, the number of the involved agents on the defensive side is at least two or more. Collective good as the indispensable element of buck-passing is an essential distinction in the typology of involved agents, and the possibility for states to ride free on other state's effort is guaranteed only if the collective good exists.

The second indispensable element of buck-passing is the presence of free-riding. Three characters are necessary for the presence of free-riding in the context of buck-passing: an aggressor, a buck-passer, and a buck-catcher. The buck-passer and the buck-catcher are on the defensive side, and the aggressor is on the offensive side. Each character could involve more than one party, and at least three parties should be involved.

Free-riding in the context of buck-passing only exists with the following process: the aggressor initiates aggression, the aggression is the common threat for the buck-passer and the buck-catcher, and the buck-passer passes the buck, riding free on buck-catcher's effort to check the aggression. Only when aggression is the common threat for the

[12] While in common usages, buck-passing refers to the defensive side, collective good could also be shared by the offensive side. Schweller (1994: 94) terms "predatory buck-passing" as the effort that one state attempts to ride free on the other's aggression. Since this article aims to deal with the theoretical framework of buck-passing, I would limit the concept of buck-passing to only defensively checking aggression, which is a more prevalent understanding in academia. For more on the extended connotation of buck-passing, see: Schweller, Randall L. 1994. "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In." *International Security* 19(1): 94.

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defensive side could checking aggression be qualified as collective good. Only when the buck-catcher provides the collective good as checking aggression is there room for buck-passer's free-riding effort. The three characters are necessary for the process of free-riding.

The two elements, the existence of collective good and the presence of free-riding, are indispensable for the concept of buck-passing and interconnected to each other. The existence of collective good is the precondition of the presence of free-riding, and the presence of free-riding is the core proposition that distinguishes buck-passing from balancing. Since buck-passing occurs only when the two indispensable elements exist, the circumstance that allows the two indispensable elements to exist could be termed as a possible buck-passing circumstance. A possible buck-passing circumstance encompasses at least one aggressor and two defensive states, and at least two defensive states share the need to check aggression as the collective good. Only when two defensive states face the same aggressor and share the need to counter the threat will there be room for the existence of collective good and the following free-riding on it.

3.1.2. Three Images of Buck-passing

Following the two indispensable elements, the conceptual definition of buck-passing could be concisely defined as "a state rides free on other state's effort for checking a common threat." The brief definition requires only the two elements: the existence of

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collective good as checking a common threat provided by one state and the presence of free-riding by the other state. The application of this definition is supposed to confine to the security dimension of international relations studies.

The distinction of this definition is the target of abstraction. Unlike other scholars' definitions, the definition is deliberately abstracted from buck-passing as outcome. Three images of buck-passing—intent, action, and outcome—could be distinguished from the intricate usages in the literature relating to the state as an actor.[13] The first image of buck-passing is buck-passing as intent, an actor's determination for generating buck-passing. Buck-passing as intent comprehends the calculation of whether adopting buck-passing is beneficial, the evaluation of the prospect of execution, and the most important one, the determination of adopting buck-passing. The typical scenario would be that a state intends to get other states to carry the burden of opposing the common enemy, making buck-passing as outcome happen. Buck-passing as intent is confined to the idea that works in human minds. The action that is driven by the intent refers to buck-passing as action.

Buck-passing as action, as the second image, refers to behaviors that aim to generate buck-passing as outcome. Buck-passing as action, unlike buck-passing as intent

[13] The classification of the three images of buck-passing is inspired by: Tang, Shiping. 2018. "Idea, Action, and Outcome: The Objects and Tasks of Social Sciences." *World Economics and Politics* (5): 33-59 (唐世平，2018，《觀念、行動和結果：社會科學的客體和任務》，〈世界經濟與政治〉(5)：33-59。).

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pertaining to human minds, requires a state to implement (or deliberately not implement) certain policies in the real world for the purpose of buck-passing. Here, the action is confined to unilateral action that the actor itself can carry out its implementation. The object of buck-passing as action by one defensive state could include not only the aggressor but also the other defensive states. While adopting buck-passing as action, the state is capable of implementing distinct policies to different actors at the same time due to the essence of buck-passing as a three-parties strategy. For example, a buck-passing state could implement pacifying policy to the aggressor and distancing policy to the intended buck-catcher for facilitating the outcome of buck-passing. The policies and their interaction will be elaborated in the following contents.

Buck-passing as an outcome, the third image, is the phenomenon that the result of the actors' interaction fulfilling the requirement of buck-passing, namely the two indispensable elements—the existence of collective good and the presence of free-riding. Unlike buck-passing as intent and buck-passing as action, which pertains to a single actor, buck-passing as outcome is the whole picture of an events' result. It includes each actor, the intent and actions each actor adopts, and the interaction between them.

In addition to the three images of buck-passing related to the state as an actor, there are two more common usages in buck-passing literature. Buck-passing as a theory is the product of scholar's effort, the academy's understanding of how buck-passing works,

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including its factors and effects. Buck-passing as a strategy refers to the state's own efforts to achieve buck-passing. Employing the classification of the three images, buck-passing as a strategy is the state's unilateral efforts as the intent and the action of buck-passing to realize buck-passing as outcome, which requires the interaction between multiple states' strategies following a certain path.[14] Buck-passing as a strategy is a general way to mention a single state's effort on intent or action without clear distinction.

The past definitions of buck-passing focus on buck-passing as intent and buck-passing as action. Schweller (1998: 73) defines buck-passing as "a threatened state attempts to ride free on the balancing efforts of others." Mearsheimer (2001:157-158) classifies buck-passing into strategies for checking aggressors, defining it as "a buck-passer attempts to get another state to bear the burden of deterring or possibly fighting an aggressor, while it remains on the sidelines." Christensen & Snyder (1990: 138) define buck-passing as "…they [states] may pass the buck, counting on third parties to bear the costs of stopping a rising hegemon." Schweller and Mearsheimer's definitions focus on the first and second images of buck-passing, namely buck-passing as intent and as action: they both mention a threatened state "attempts" to free ride on others. Thus, according to

[14] This definition of buck-passing as a strategy, confining the term to intent or action, matches the general definition of the strategy defined by Oxford English Dictionary: "[t]he art or practice of planning the future direction or outcome of something; the formulation or implementation of a plan, scheme, or course of action, esp. of a long-term or ambitious nature." *See*, Oxford English Dictionary Online. "Strategy, N." *Oxford University Press*, www.oed.com/view/Entry/191319. Latest Update 1 January 2022.

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their definition, the requirement of buck-passing is fulfilled by a single state's intent and the following action to execute the intent; the final outcome is not a necessary requirement for the realization of buck-passing. Christensen & Snyder's definition is closer to the second image, focusing on the action that a state implements.

3.1.3. Why Buck-passing as Outcome Matters?

The new definition this article proposes, unlike the past definitions, centers buck-passing as outcome. The reason why buck-passing as outcome is the core image of buck-passing is that buck-passing's indispensable elements require the interaction of the three characters following a certain path. Buck-passing as intent and buck-passing as action cannot guarantee the result fulfilling the requirement of buck-passing as outcome, since buck-passing as outcome cannot be achieved by a single actor unilaterally. In other words, the intent and action of buck-passing do not sufficiently lead to the existence of collective good and the presence of free-riding, which are the indispensable element of buck-passing.

Unlike other major strategies' expected outcome (i.e., balancing, bandwagoning), which realization needs unilateral action from a single actor, the critical feature of buck-passing is that buck-passing requires at least three parties involved, and its realization relies on a certain pattern of interaction among each party. For example, consider

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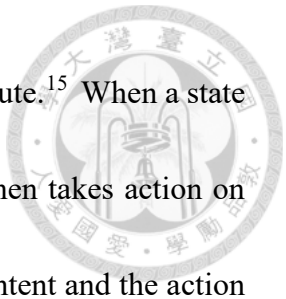

balancing. Balancing requires a state to restrain its opponent in a dispute.[15] When a state decides to adopt balancing, it first possesses intent to balance and then takes action on balancing, like deterring or combating with its opponent. While the intent and the action of balancing occur, balancing as an outcome would be generated automatically.[16] Balancing as an outcome is realized by a single actor's unilateral intent and action. The outcome of balancing needs no specific reaction from other actors. No matter how other actors respond, balancing still takes place. The decision-making of balancing could be affected by the interactions between different actors, but the realization of balancing as outcome needs only a single actor's unilateral intent and action.

The situation of buck-passing is different. A possible buck-passing circumstance, a circumstance that allows the occurrence of buck-passing, encompasses at least an

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[15] Here the usage of balancing concentrates on deterring and combating, representing the opponent-targeting aspect of balancing. The elaborated rationale behind the usage could be found in the section on the operationalization of buck-passing.

[16] Although the outcome of balancing is generated by the balancer unilaterally, it does not necessarily lead to the victory of the balancer. The image of outcome emphasizes what had happened as a phenomenon, but it does not guarantee a specific extent of an effect. When a state adopts the buck-passing strategy, the phenomenon of the existence of collective good and the presence of free-riding could be totally absent if other defensive states implement no action on balancing. In contrast, when a state adopts the balancing strategy, the delivery of the signal as deterring and the bloody conflicts as combating would occur in almost every circumstance, though the extent of the effect as restraining the opponent differs. It requires a very exceptional situation for the action of balancing not leading to the outcome of balancing. For instance, the deterring signal is intercepted on its way of delivery, or other forces eliminate the sent army before combating with the targeted opponent. The most similar case I could find is the Second Mongol Invasion of Japan in 1281, in which the casualties of the Mongolian side (60% to 90% of the totality number of the army as 140,000 depends on different sources, Turnbull, 2013: 56-57, 75) was caused primarily by the kamikaze (typhoon) but not the actual combat with the Japanese army. However, Japan was able to resist three waves of the attack (14th June on Iki, 23rd June on Nagato and Hakata Bay, and 12th August on Takashima) from the Mongolian army at the cost of lives. The battle as the outcome of balancing still occurred, yet the Mongolian was defeated primarily not by its opponent, and the restraining effect on Japan should have been small. For more on the Second Mongol Invasion of Japan in 1281, *see*: Turnbull, Stephen. 2013. *The Mongol Invasions of Japan 1274 and 1281*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. 55-79.

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aggressor and two defensive states as actors with the condition that the aggression is a common threat for at least two defensive states and thus checking aggression is a collective good on the side of the defensive states. The number of actors, for both aggressors and defensive states, could be more than above. For the concision of illustration, here the actors of the possible buck-passing circumstance are confined to the minimal scale, comprising one aggressor and two defensive states.

Under a possible buck-passing circumstance, three possible scenes depicting different paths of the strategic interaction among three parties are illustrated in figure 1.[17] The first scene is buck-passing as outcome, a typical situation that past buck-passing theories depict. One defensive state adopts the intent and action of buck-passing, while another defensive state carries the burden to balance against the aggressor. In buck-passing as outcome situation, the buck-catcher provides the collective good, and the buck-

[17] Here the actor's alternatives are confined to balancing and buck-passing. Bandwagoning is not included because here aims to illustrate how defensive states defend against the aggressor. Bandwagoning, the strategy Walt (1990: 17) depicts as "alignment with the source of danger," prescribes threatened states to ally with the aggressor, turning the threatened bandwagoning state into a part of the aggression. Bandwagoning strategy is a strategy for the weaker one, requiring the bandwagoning state to make asymmetrical concessions to its stronger ally (Walt, 1991: 55; Mearsheimer, 2001: 162-163). When a state adopts the bandwagoning strategy, it would temporarily get rid of the defensive position and join the aggressive side, where its agency within the alliance would be substantially absorbed by its stronger ally. Suppose bandwagoning is also counted in the figure. In that case, the bandwagoning state will join the aggressor. The relationship between the offensive and defensive sides would become the bilateral relations between the aggressor and the left defensive state. For further discussion on bandwagoning, *see*: Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: WW Norton & Company: 162-163; Walt, Stephen M. 1990. *The Origins of Alliance*. New York: Cornell University Press: 17, 19-21; Walt, Stephen M. 1991. "Alliance Formation in Southwest Asia: Balancing and Bandwagoning in Cold War Competition." In *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland*, eds. Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 52-56.

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passer rides free on it.[18] The second scene is the alliance formation. When both defensive states decide to balance against the aggressor, they are likely to ally with each other, forming a defensive alliance. Under this situation, the collective good as checking aggression is provided by both defensive states, and thus no free-riding occurs.

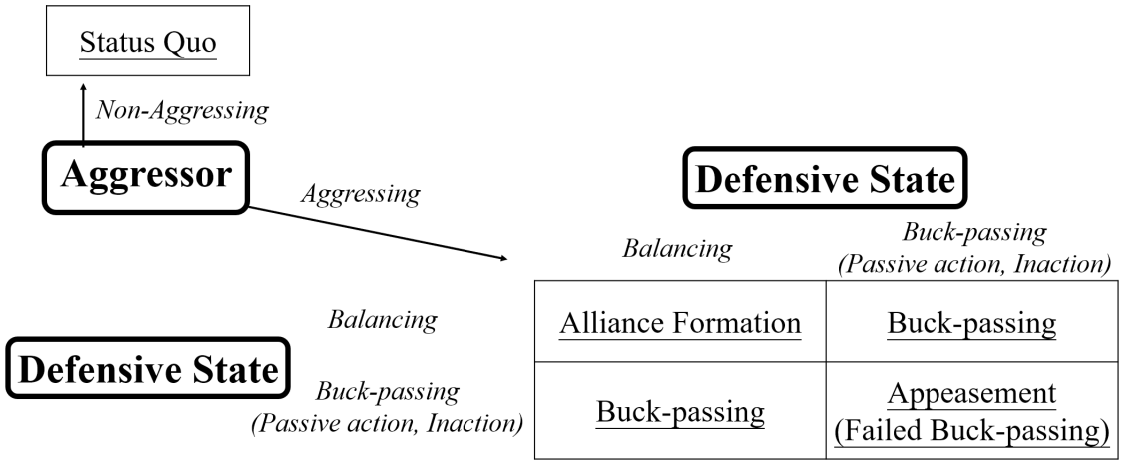

Figure 1. Three Scenes under a Possible Buck-passing Circumstance

(The words with frames are actors, the italicized words are actions that actors take, the words with underlines are outcomes)

Source: Author

The third scene, neglected by past buck-passing theories, is the scene of appeasement, the failed buck-passing. In the scene of appeasement, each defensive state adopts the intent and action of buck-passing, expecting another defensive state to balance against

[18] In the scene of buck-passing as outcome, the buck-catcher carries the burden to check aggression. Therefore, the outcome of balancing does exist in the bilateral relations between the buck-catcher and the aggressor. Still, the emphasis here is the strategic interaction among the three parties. Buck-passing as outcome is a pertinent description of the trilateral relationships between the aggressor and the two defensive states.

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the aggressor, but no one eventually carries the burden. The aggressor remains unchecked and gains additional power by its successful aggression. Although there is a need to check aggression as a collective good shared by both defensive states, the outcome is that the collective good does not exist since no state provides it. Therefore, there is no room for free-riding because no existing collective good could be ridden free on. In the appeasement scene, each defensive state unilaterally adopts the intent and action of buck-passing, but their attempts to pass the buck to another state fail. In other words, buck-passing as intent and buck-passing as action take place, but they do not lead to buck-passing as outcome.

Two points should be noted for classifying appeasement as outcome, a failed buck-passing. First, appeasement is not confined to the possible buck-passing circumstance and could happen in a two-parties circumstance. The occurrence of appeasement requires only an aggressor and a defensive state. In bilateral relations, the intent and action of appeasement could be implemented by a defensive state unilaterally and directly leads to appeasement as outcome.

Second, in a possible buck-passing circumstance, the action of appeasement is indistinguishable from the action of buck-passing. The strategy of appeasement is characterized by making concessions as action and modifying the opponent's aggressive behavior as intent (Treisman, 2004: 347; Mearsheimer, 2001: 163-164; Scheweller, 1998:

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74; Kennedy, 1976: 195; Powell, 1996: 750; Ripsman & Levy, 2008: 154). Making concessions as the action of appeasement is to satisfy the aggressor by negotiation or compromise without armed conflict. The concession is typically related to territorial change, yet the change is not confined to the defensive state itself: the concession could be recognizing the change of a third state's territory that is caused by aggression or surrendering its sphere of influence (Mearsheimer, 2001: 163-164; Scheweller, 1998: 74). The purpose of making concessions is the intent of modifying the opponent's behavior, trying to pacify the opponent and accommodate it with the new status quo after the concession. Making concessions toward the aggressor as the action of appeasement cannot be distinct from the action of buck-passing since buck-passing also allows a state to diverge the aggressor's attention from itself. More precisely, appeasement as action only prescribes the action in the bilateral relationship between one defensive state and the aggressor, yet buck-passing as action comprises both actions toward the aggressor and action toward another defensive state, such as maintaining a cool relationship or strengthening another defensive state (Mearsheimer, 2001: 158-159). Appeasement as action could be a part of buck-passing as action. Appeasement does differ from buck-passing on the image of intent—buck-passing does not aim to accommodate the aggressor—but while the actions of appeasement and of buck-passing are

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indistinguishable, the action naturally inclines to generate buck-passing as outcome.[19] In a possible buck-passing circumstance, where multiple defensive states exist, one defensive state's appeasement strategy would naturally pass the buck to other defensive states because the appeasing state does not take part in providing the collective good as checking aggression and thus rides free on other defensive states.[20] The only situation that one state's appeasement strategy would not ride free on other states is that there is no state catching the buck, providing collective good, the situation in which the aggression remains unchecked. Buck-passing outweighs appeasement in a possible buck-passing circumstance.

Through elaborating the three scenes in a possible buck-passing circumstance, the rationale behind centering the image of outcome in the definition of buck-passing becomes evident. The intent and the action of buck-passing cannot guarantee the occurrence of buck-passing as outcome. Buck-passing as intent or action could be adopted by a defensive state on its own, but buck-passing as outcome cannot be realized by one

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[19] While Mearsheimer (2001: 163-164) and Scheweller (1998: 74) explicitly argue that the intent of behavior modification characterizes appeasement, other scholars regard appeasement's purpose as delaying or avoiding military conflict (Treisman, 2004: 347; Kennedy, 1976: 195; Powell, 1996: 750, 757). Here the former account is adopted because the intent of behavior modification does point out a different way to stop the aggression that is distinct from buck-passing: buck-passing aims to check aggression by other's effort, and appeasement is trying to nullify the aggressor's will to threat. What should be noted is that if we define the intent of appeasement as delaying or avoiding military conflict without the aim of behavior modification, the intent of appeasement would also be indistinguishable from buck-passing as intent since buck-passing aims to avoid conflict on its bilateral relations with the aggressor.

[20] Although states adopting bandwagoning would not provide collective good as checking aggression, the situation is different. The appeaser is still a defensive state, but the bandwagoner becomes a part of the aggressor by joining the line of aggression.

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state alone, requiring the path that at least one but not all defensive state balances against the aggressor, providing the collective good that could be ridden free on. Even if the intent and action of buck-passing occur, without the existence of collective good, the outcome would finally be appeasement—the aggressor gains relative power by the unchecked aggression while defensive states' attempts of buck-passing fail. Since the intent and action of buck-passing cannot sufficiently lead to the outcome of buck-passing, the conceptual definition of buck-passing should be grounded on buck-passing as outcome itself. The new conceptual definition of buck-passing, "a state rides free on other state's effort for checking a common threat," indicates that while intent and action are still vital for analyzing the interaction of states' strategies, the outcome, namely whether the two indispensable elements—the existence of collective good and the presence of free-riding—exist, is the main criterion of whether buck-passing happens. If the two elements both exist, buck-passing takes place; if only the former exists, the alliance formation happens; if both are absent, appeasement occurs.

3.2. The Theorization of Buck-passing

This section aims to construct a revised theoretical framework of buck-passing. Past literature has established a firm foundation on the structure of buck-passing theory. The purpose here is to sketch the whole picture of buck-passing and to supplement it. For the

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integrity of the revised framework, this section will briefly introduce the parts that past theories had examined and emphasize elaborating new thoughts: the scope of involved agents, the strategic interactions among involved agents, and buck-passing in bipolarity.

3.2.1. Goals, Policies, and Factors

In the previous discussion, the two indispensable elements and the conceptual definition of buck-passing as the cornerstones of the revised theoretical framework are proposed: the existence of collective good and the presence of free-riding as the two indispensable elements, and defining buck-passing from the image of outcome as "a state rides free on other state's effort for checking a common threat." The following framework about the property of buck-passing would be built based on them.

For establishing a thorough understanding of buck-passing, three questions need to be answered: why does a state adopt buck-passing? How does a state implement buck-passing? What facilitates a state's adoption of the buck-passing strategy? These three questions link to buck-passing's goals, policies, and factors. The goal indicates the effect a state would like to achieve by its strategy. The intent of buck-passing could be generated by the wish to achieve a goal. The policy refers to specific types of action. A state could implement various actions under a strategy, and policies are the representative types extracted from the actions. The factor suggests the underlying influence that drives a state

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to adopt a strategy, which is different from the indispensable element mentioned in the previous section. The inquiry to indispensable elements asks, "what are the most essential and necessary constituents that constitute the concept of a strategy?" The inquiry to the factor asks, "what contributes to a state's adoption of a strategy?'

3.2.1.1. Goals: Why Does a State Adopts Buck-passing?

There are three main goals when a state adopts buck-passing. The first goal is to reduce the cost of checking aggression by riding free on other states' efforts. The first goal is the primal characteristic of buck-passing, which distinguishes buck-passing from other strategies. The goal for reducing cost implies that the buck-catcher's effort is conducive to reducing buck-passer's cost, which requires the buck-catcher to possess enough strength that could substantially debilitate the aggressor after a war. If the buck-catcher is not strong enough, the buck-passing strategy will contribute only marginal effect on reducing the cost or even reversely strengthen the aggressor by allowing the aggressor to plunder vast resources from the weak buck-catcher at low expense.

The second goal of buck-passing is to check the aggression. In most past works and the revised framework here, buck-passing is defined as a defensive strategy that happens only when there is an aggressor. When adopting buck-passing, states do care about reducing the cost, but checking aggression is still a significant concern. Third, while

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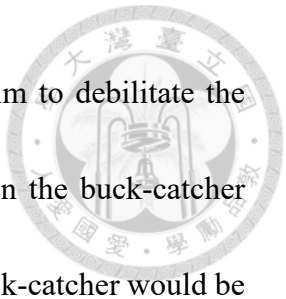

expecting to check aggression with low cost, buck-passing states aim to debilitate the contending states, namely the aggressor and the buck-catcher. When the buck-catcher balances against the aggressor, not only the aggressor but also the buck-catcher would be debilitated by each other. By letting the buck-catcher carry the burden of checking aggression, the buck-passing state, which stays on the sideline, can also reap relative power gain toward both aggressor and buck-catcher. Mearsheimer (2001: 160) calls the debilitating effect on the buck-catcher as the "offensive dimension" of buck-passing. It should be noted that the debilitating effect plays a significant role in achieving the goal of reducing the cost. The buck-passing state could deal with the survivor with less cost by letting the contending states bleed each other.

Among the three goals, reducing the cost is the primal goal that characterizes buck-passing as strategy. The buck-passing state still remains on the defensive side, yet it aims to reduce the expenditure on dealing with the aggressor. If a state is willing to combat the aggressor with high expenses, balancing but not buck-passing would be a more suitable alternative. Checking aggression and debilitating the contending states are the goals that the buck-passing state could pursue, yet sometimes the buck-passing state would not place them in the first place. In the buck-passing state's calculation, if the aggressor could be debilitated to the extent that the buck-passing state is able to handle it solely, the aggressor needs not to be defeated by the expected buck-catcher. If the expected buck-

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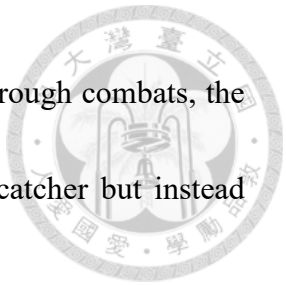

catcher does not possess enough power to debilitate the aggressor through combats, the buck-passing state should not aim to debilitate the expected buck-catcher but instead implement supporting policy to strengthen it.

The clarification of the three goals has two implications. First, a power threshold is necessary for selecting the involved agents in a buck-passing circumstance. The defensive state should be competent to rival the aggressor to a certain extent, yet it is not required to be as powerful as the aggressor. For the buck-passing state, the aggressor needs not to be eliminated but crippled. The point would be elaborated more on the following section about the actor. Second, there is a tension between checking aggression and debilitating the contending states. In an anarchic self-help world, the line between friend and enemy is blurred. A former ally would become a new threat if the balance of power shifts. On the one hand, the buck-passing state should dedicate to strengthening the buck-catcher for the goal of checking aggression; on the other hand, a formidable buck-catcher would undermine the effect of debilitating or even become a new threat after winning the conflict against the past aggressor (Mearsheimer, 2001: 161-162).

3.2.1.2. Policies: How Does a State Implement Buck-passing?

For achieving the three goals, there are several policies that the buck-passing state could execute. Mearsheimer (2001: 158-159) lists four policies that buck-passing state

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could take: (1) pursuing smooth diplomatic tie with the threat or trying not to infuriate it at least, (2) keeping a cool tie with the intended buck-catcher, (3) raising military expenditure to better arming itself, and (4) supporting the power growth of intended buck-catcher. Concisely, the four policies could be respectively termed as: (1) pacifying, (2) distancing, (3) mobilizing domestic resources, and (4) supporting. Same as the goals, the policies have internal tension as well. The first policy is relatively straightforward: trying to pacify the aggressor in the bilateral relations for converting the aggressor's attention to other states, which pursues reducing the cost of direct conflict with the aggressor. The second and the fourth policies are alternative. The purpose of the second policy, distancing itself from the intended buck-catcher, is to avoid being involved by the expected conflict between the aggressor and the intended buck-catcher, and the fourth policy aims to better check the aggression by strengthening the power of buck-catcher.

The third policy, raising military expenditure to better arming itself, is not recognized as a distinctive policy of buck-passing by the revised framework. It does not mean buck-passing states would not conduct such internal mobilization. On the contrary, for the most threatened states, no matter they adopt balancing, buck-passing, or even bandwagoning, building a stronger force would be a rational choice.

The primal characteristic of buck-passing is to reduce the cost while trying to check the aggression. Increasing expenditure to strengthen the army is a cost indeed, yet

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facilitating a mutual depletion by conflicts between the aggressor and the buck-catcher while preserving own power is a gain on relative power calculation. A strong army is also a great resource to deal with the prevailing one from the conflict between the aggressor and the buck-catcher. Enhancing own military power is a legitimate move for buck-passing states, yet it applies to bandwagoning or balancing state as well.[21] Buck-passing states do conduct mobilizing domestic resources, yet internal mobilizing as a policy is too prevalent in defensive strategies that could hardly be recognized as a characteristic of buck-passing. Implementing internal mobilizing or not is not a valid indicator for adjudicating whether a state adopts buck-passing.

The selection of the three policies depends on how a buck-passing state ranks the goals. While pursuing the primal goal of reducing the cost, a buck-passing state must strike a balance between checking aggression and debilitating contending states. For a buck-passing state, a perfect scenario would be equalizing the power balance between the aggressor and the buck-catcher, letting them exhaust each other in the conflict. However, it is highly challenging, if not impossible, to precisely evaluate the power gap of the contending states and forecast the result of the fight by the evaluation. Therefore, the

[21] A bandwagoning state still needs to mobilize domestic resources on defense for two reasons. First, a formidable army could help the bandwagoning state earn the aggression's spoil better and gain more control within its alliance with the stronger aggressor. Second, internal mobilization could alleviate the deteriorated relative power gap between itself and its stronger ally.

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buck-passing state typically would prioritize to debilitate the aggressor than the buck-catcher because the aggressor had demonstrated its offensive intention while the buck-catcher had not.

Reducing the cost should be the first priority of a buck-passing state. If a state places checking aggression above reducing the cost, balancing but not buck-passing should be the appropriate strategy this state adopts. A buck-passing state generally should conduct the policy of pacifying in the bilateral relations with the aggressor, avoiding the costly direct conflict. The exception is that the buck-passing state could assure that the aggressor cannot harm itself before other defensive states are defeated, which could occur when the buck-passing state is an offshore balancer or geographically distant from the aggressor.

The strategic interaction among the three parties determines the decision between distancing and supporting. Distancing and supporting are the policies applied to the intended buck-catcher. The relationship between distancing and supporting could be regarded as a continuous spectrum. The extension of the supporting side is forming a defensive alliance with the intended buck-catcher; the distancing side, bandwagoning with the aggressor. Typically, there are incentives for the buck-passing state to implement supporting policy since the priority of debilitating the aggressor is higher than debilitating the intended buck-catcher. However, three reasons could drive a buck-passing state to adopt distancing. First, if the distribution is highly favored to the intended buck-catcher,

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a buck-passing state could adopt distancing, with the expectation that the intended buck-catcher is able to check the aggression solely. Second, distancing is also a policy that could improve the buck-passing state's relations with the aggressor. Third, if the buck-passing state aims to facilitate the conflict between the aggressor and the intended buck-catcher, distancing could contribute to it. The elaboration on the interaction among the three parties will be elaborated in the following section.

3.2.1.3. Factors: What Facilitates a State's Adopting of Buck-passing Strategy?

Before investigating what facilitates buck-passing, the answer to the reverse question—what prevents buck-passing—is relatively clear: a direct, imminent, and dreadful threat. The directness refers to the aggression as an uninterrupted territorial invasion, facilitated by the common border without obstacles like high mountains or desert. Imminence indicates the transient time interval from the moment under analysis to the date conflict occurring or expected to occur. Dreadfulness suggests the relative power gap between (1) the aggressor and the defensive state, and (2) the aggressor and the combined power of the allied defensive states if a defensive alliance is formed. For instance, if an aggressor currently invades a small state and a defensive state allies with the small state but shares no border with the aggressor, the threat is imminent but not

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direct for this defensive state. If an aggressor shares a long common border with a defensive state and is now mobilizing resources to combat with another defensive state on the battlefront in the reverse direction, the aggressor is a direct but not imminent threat.

Buck-passing is a strategy that places the goal of reducing the cost but not checking aggression in the first place. If the aggressor poses a direct, imminent, and dreadful threat to a defensive state, the necessity of checking aggression should dominate the strategic selection, and thus the state should seek to maximize its power rapidly under pressure by adopting the strategy of balancing and trying to ally with other defensive states. In contrast, the situation that allows a defensive state to adopt buck-passing is that the danger of the aggression is indirect, tardy, or mild. Three factors have been considered to facilitate a state's decision on adopting buck-passing strategy in literature: geography, international system, and the perception of offense-defense balance.

Geography is the least controversial factor among the three. There is a consensus that if a defensive state is separated from the aggressor by the geography, the defensive state is likely to adopt a buck-passing strategy (Posen, 1986: 176-177; Christensen & Snyder, 1990: 144-145; Schweller, 1998: 71-72; Mearsheimer, 2001: 271-272). A state adjacent to or even shares the border with the aggressor bears a direct threat of invasion, making buck-passing less feasible. In contrast, a distant state has more space to let other states carry the burden of checking aggression. Among distant states, the offshore

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balancer should be noted. The offshore balancer is the state that tries to prevent the rise of a regional hegemon in a specific region behind the water. Britain and the United States are regarded as the offshore balancers, preventing the rise of a European hegemon. The offshore balancer often adopts the buck-passing strategy, expecting others to encounter the potential hegemon while avoiding being dragged into costly direct war.

The international system, the distribution of power among the states, is another crucial factor in a state's decision to adopt buck-passing. In literature, scholars argue that buck-passing only occurs in multipolarity; there is no buck-passing in bipolarity (Posen, 1986: 63-64; Christensen & Snyder, 1990: 141-142; Mearsheimer, 2001: 270). The rationale behind the argument is that in a bipolar system, the superpowers are unrivaled except for competing with each other, so other states are not capable of catching the buck, balancing against aggression launched by a superpower. However, the revised framework contends that buck-passing in bipolarity, both as a strategy or as an outcome, is still possible. The point will be elaborated on in the following content.

Particularly, Mearsheimer argues that the multipolarity could be classified into balanced multipolarity and unbalanced multipolarity by whether a potential hegemon exists: buck-passing is more prevalent in the former since states in unbalanced multipolarity are more likely to collaborate under a more imminent and dreadful threat for being dominated by the potential hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2001: 270-271). Schweller

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(2006: 8-9) disagrees with Mearsheimer's structural explanation, arguing that under Mearsheimer's account, the eve of World War II must have been a balanced multipolarity due to the occurrence of buck-passing, but it was an unbalanced multipolarity, a tripolar system with Germany, the United States, and the Soviet Union as the poles, the observation that has been examined in his past study (Schweller, 1998: 26-31).

Schweller's criticism sounds not strongly valid because Schweller's assessment of power distribution of the late interwar period does not meet Mearsheimer's criterion of an unbalanced multipolarity. According to Mearsheimer, the distinguishment between balanced multipolarity and unbalanced multipolarity is by whether a potential hegemon exists, and the definition of a potential hegemon is "…more than just the most powerful state in the system…A potential hegemon need not have the wherewithal to fight all of its rivals at once. but it must have excellent prospects of defeating each opponent alone, and good prospects of defeating some of them in tandem (Mearsheimer, 2001: 44-45)." It is clear that under Schweller's assessment of power distribution, Germany was only one of the three poles, so it was not qualified as a potential hegemon in Mearsheimer's theory. Mearsheimer explains that Germany before 1939 was not a potential hegemon; only after 1939 had Germany become a potential hegemon as the rearmament achieved (Mearsheimer, 2001: 316-317, 348). Therefore, Europe was a balanced multipolar system before 1939, which facilitated the occurrence of buck-passing.

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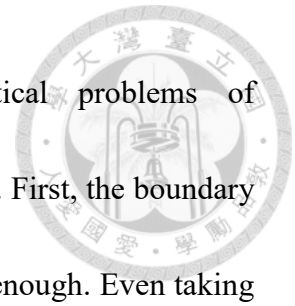

However, Schweller's criticism still reveals two practical problems of Mearsheimer's balanced and unbalanced multipolarity classification. First, the boundary between the balanced and the unbalanced multipolarity is not clear enough. Even taking Mearsheimer's definition, how much relative power could be acknowledged as "excellent prospects of defeating each opponent alone" and "good prospects of defeating some of them in tandem" remains vague (Mearsheimer, 2001: 44-45). Second, assessing power distribution is hard to reach a consensus in the first place. For example, when counting the power distribution in 1939, Schweller assesses that the Soviet Union and Germany were roughly equal with little advantage in favor of Germany (23.98% to 20.55% share of major power capabilities), while in Mearsheimer's evaluation, Germany was the dominant power that no one can solely compete in 1939 as unbalanced multipolarity (Schweller, 1998: 26-31; Mearsheimer, 2001: 316-318, 393-394). Although these two problems undermine the reliability of the classification, the concept that unbalanced multipolarity prevents buck-passing is still valuable for examining the mechanism of buck-passing. The rationale that unbalanced multipolarity prevents buck-passing is the defensive states' compelling aversion to being dominated by the potential hegemon. It emphasizes the importance of the intensity of threat on the occurrence of buck-passing.

The third factor is states' perception of offense-defense balance. Proposed by Christensen & Snyder (1990: 144-146), the logic behind the third factor is intricate. If the

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military technology advancement is prone to the defensive side, states would become less vulnerable when facing aggression and therefore tend to adopt buck-passing strategy, and vice versa. However, political leaders' perception of the objective offense-defense balance is not accurate (which was wrong in both World War I and World War II) and is determined by the lesson of past experience, especially the last major war. Thus, what drives political leaders' decision on buck-passing or chain-ganging is not the objective offense-defense balance but the political leader's perception of it.

From offense-defense theory, Christensen & Snyder's adoption of subjective offense-defense balance—the perception on whether technology is prone to the offensive or the defensive side—explains well the different decisions between the First and the Second World War; however, the concept of subjective offense-defense balance is under doubt. Tang (2010: 240-244) criticizes the subjective offense-defense balance for two reasons. First, there is not enough evidence to claim that political leaders often evaluate the objective offense-defense balance or make the decision of war based on their perception of it. Christensen & Snyder (1990: 157) also admits that in Hitler's decision on waging war, his opponent's adoption of buck-passing strategy is more crucial than his perception of offense-defense balance. Second, the causal link between the subjective offense-defense balance and the aggressive intent could be reversed, which means a leader's aggressive intent could be an independent variable to explain one's perception

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of offense-balance balance as a dependent variable. Tang (2010: 242) points out that Hitler possessed the expansionist goal priorly and thus developed the doctrine of blitzkrieg, believing in the dominance of offense. The subjective offense-defense balance should be the effect but not the cause.

On the issue of buck-passing, the subjective offense-defense balance faces the same problem. The perceptions of offense-defense balance and the intent of buck-passing are both ideas held by the same actor. The validity of the argument that the perception of offense-defense balance facilitates statesman's adoption of buck-passing strategy should be based on the evidence suggesting that the intent of buck-passing results from the perception of offense-defense balance. However, it is difficult to demonstrate the causal relationship. States' adoption of buck-passing is facilitated when states feel secure from the aggression, yet the feeling could result from geography, the distribution of power, or the evaluation of the aggressor's will. There is not enough evidence suggesting that the perception of offense-defense balance plays a vital role in statesman's decision to adopt buck-passing strategy.

In sum, the logic behind how the three factors—geography, international system, and the perception of offense-defense balance—facilitate states' adoption of buck-passing strategy is all relevant to whether the threat is direct, imminent, or dreadful. For geography, a shared border facilitates buck-passing. For the international system, the traditional view

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is that only multipolarity allows the occurrence of buck-passing, and the more the power distribution in favor of the aggressor, the less likely the occurrence of buck-passing. For the perception of offense-defense balance, although the defensive advantage could lessen the threat from aggression, there is not enough evidence to suggest that the perception plays a vital role in statesman's decision-making.

3.2.2 Actor: Involved Agents, Three Characters, and Buck-passing in Bipolarity

After reviewing goals, policies, and factors, a fundamental constituent of buck-passing should be examined—actor. The issue of actors could be organized by two questions: how to select the qualified actor in a given event? What are the characters of which states play roles in a buck-passing circumstance? As elaborated in chapter two, these two questions have been overlooked by past scholars, and thus there are different explanations toward a single event with a different number of actors, undermining the comparability of research. This section aims to propose a theoretical framework concerning actors in a buck-passing circumstance.

The primal step of discussing actors in a buck-passing circumstance is to distinguish the qualified actors. Two kinds of states should be distinguished: the related state and the involved agent. The related state is the state whose interest is influenced by aggression.

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There is no threshold of power for the related state: the only requirement is that aggression affects the state's interest. The related state is the general term, the superset of all concerning states.

In contrast, the involved agent is, conceptually defined, the related state that is capable of altering the situation of a buck-passing circumstance. The involved agent has more agency in deliberately selecting their strategy, and the decision it makes could substantially influence the strategy selection of other involved agents. Putting it more plainly, the involved agent is the game-changer of a buck-passing circumstance. It is the protagonist of the dispute, and its strategy is weighty for the generation of the final outcome.

To be qualified as an involved agent, reaching the threshold of power is necessary. To reach the power threshold criterion, a state should be a great power in the region that aggression occurs or a regional hegemon from another region. The great power here contains two subtypes. The first is the traditional definition of great power: "a state must have sufficient military assets to put up a serious fight in an all-out conventional war against the most powerful state in the world (Mearsheimer, 2001: 5)." The traditional definition does not consider the factor of geography; states are ranked only by their power in comparison with states all over the world, which could be called the global great power.

The second subtype, the regional great power, is a specific type under the condition

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of bipolarity. In bipolarity, there are only two superpowers in the world, and thus they expand their sphere of influence, hold interests, and compete with each other worldwide. Among the globe, the primary region, where the two superpowers locate, possesses the top priority. For superpowers, the primary region is significant for the purpose of safeguarding itself and limiting the opponent's direct expansion, and thus the primary region earns superpowers' major attention and resource mobilization. For other secondary regions, the superpowers have limited interest: they can fight a limited war for defending their interest, but they are unwilling to launch an all-out conventional war. When fighting in the secondary regions, the superpower would not exert their full power for two reasons. First, out of the fear of the escalation, the superpower would intend to limit the scale of war, preventing the regional conflict from escalating to an all-out war that another superpower should take part in.[22][23] Second, the superpower may not wish to invest all resources to fight in a region that has only limited interest. Third, due to the stopping power of the water, superpowers could hardly project their power effectively across the

[22] For more about the mechanism behind escalation, *see*: Fearon, James D. 1994a. "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes." *American Political Science Review* 88(3): 577-592.

[23] The theory here does not contradict the famous domino belief in bipolarity. The domino belief, defined by Jervis, is "the expectation that a defeat or retreat on one issue or in one area of the world is likely to produce… further demands on the state by its adversaries and defections from its allies (Jervis, 1991:22)." The domino effect theory explains the copious interventions in distant regions from the two superpowers during the Cold War age. Nevertheless, the domino effect is about whether the superpower should get involved in distant affairs and its rationale. The theory here is about the level of intervening, arguing that the superpower would not be willing to fight an all-out war due to the less importance of the secondary region. For more about the domino belief, *see*: Jervis, Robert. 1991. "Domino Beliefs and Strategic Behavior." In *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland*, eds. Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 20-50.

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ocean (Mearsheimer, 2001: 44, 114-119). Therefore, if a state in the secondary region under bipolarity is capable of resisting limited aggression in its own region from a superpower across the ocean with support from the other superpower, it could be qualified as a regional great power, the second subtype of great power. The regional great power is capable of providing the collective good as checking the aggression in its own region, so they are qualified to become an involved agent in a buck-passing circumstance.

The classification of the related state and the involved agent is to limit the range of discussion and thus preserve the trait of buck-passing as a theoretical concept. In the real world, a possible buck-passing circumstance could happen when the aggression does not directly point to the defensive involved agents but a small state that is more kin to the defensive involved agents. In this situation, the targeted small state is a related state in the buck-passing circumstance, but it is not qualified as an involved agent due to its limited strength. While facing a threat from a great power, the strategy a small state adopts, no matter it is balancing or bandwagoning, would present with a strong color of buck-passing since a small state could hardly safeguard itself on its own.[24] If a small state forms an alliance with other defensive states, it still let its ally carry a substantive share of the collective good of checking aggression.[25] The small state's buck-passing is so pervasive,

[24] Even if a small state bandwagons to the aggressor, it still needs to pass the buck to the aggressor for safeguarding itself from the aggressor's opponents, namely the other defensive states.

[25] The argument here is confined to the condition that the source of the small state's threat is a great

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obscuring the trait of buck-passing as a theoretical concept.[26] In addition, the small states, constrained by their power, can hardly make a contribution to altering the situation in a buck-passing circumstance. Focusing on the involved agent could simplify the model and thus make the theory more concise.

After classifying the related state and the involved agent, we could limit the discussion to only the involved agents, which mainly determine the outcome of a buck-passing circumstance. Among the involved agents, three kinds of character should be distinguished: aggressor, local great power, and distant regional hegemon. The aggressor is the one seeking to upset the current international order by coercive means. The aggressor intends to alter the unfavorable status quo by military actions. Typically, the aggressor could be a rising great power or a potential hegemon in a region since they have a stronger incentive to alter the status-quo by military actions.[27]

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power or more. In a bilateral relation between one great power and one small power, while possessing not enough power to resist the threat solely, the burden of checking aggression would be mainly on the allied great power's side. From the perspective of the allied great power, itself is the buck-catcher that shares the chief burden of checking collective threat. If the allied great power decides to get rid of the burden in the bilateral relationship with the small power, the strategy could hardly be called as buck-passing since the allied great power is unlikely to expect that the small state is able to provide the collective good of checking aggression on which the allied great power could free-ride. The situation is more close to abandonment proposed by Glenn Snyder: "[a]bandonment, in general, is 'defection,' the ally may realign with the opponent; he may merely de-align, abrogating the alliance contract; he may fail to make good on his explicit commitments; or he may fail to provide support in contingencies where support is expected (Snyder, 1983: 466)." The reason for adopting abandonment could be the capacity problem, the calculation of cost-benefit, or the fear of being entrapped by the small state's conflict. The allied great power could also re-estimate the circumstance and try to engage with the former opponent, which breaks the necessary requirement of buck-passing that the small state and the allied great power share the need of collective good as checking aggression.

[26] It does not mean that the revised framework of buck-passing cannot explain the behavior of small states; instead, the point here is we can observe what distinguishes buck-passing from other strategies by great power's adoption more clearly and thus better delineate what buck-passing should be like.

[27] An extended question would be whether a rising great power or a potential hegemon could avoid

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The local great power, namely the defensive state, is the main body of checking aggression on the front line. Located in the same region, the local great power faces the risk of being conquered by the aggressor—a direct threat to its survival— and thus shares the collective good as checking aggression. What should be noted is that when a rising great power or a potential hegemon occurs, the existence itself, regardless of its intent or action, poses a threat to the local great power. The tilted balance of power naturally causes pressure on the local great power at the system level. The rising great power or the potential hegemon could try to alleviate the tension by costly signaling, yet the uncertainty about other states' intentions as the nature of international anarchy could undermine the effort (Mearsheimer, 2001: 31).[28] When a rising great power or a potential hegemon takes coercive measures to upset the status quo, the local great power is the innate opponent of the aggressor. The aggressor may try to neutralize a specific local great power, reinforcing the current neutralized or hedged position of buck-passing state when the aggressor faces multiple local great power adversaries, yet the attempt would be more likely to postpone but not prevent a local great power from finally joining the alliance due to the enlarged relative power gap and the corresponding structural pressure after

becoming an aggressor, a discussion that would go beyond the purpose of this thesis. The revised framework would focus on the aggressor's character but not the origin of an aggressor.

[28] For more about how states send costly signals, *see*: Quek, Kai. 2021. "Four Costly Signaling Mechanisms." *American Political Science Review* 115(2): 537-549.

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aggressor's short-term victory.

Besides the local great power, the distant regional hegemon could play a decisive role in checking aggression. The distant regional hegemon is distinct from the local great powers for the fatality of the aggression. Great powers, located in the same region as the aggressor, face the risk of territorial invasion, which constitutes a direct and imminent threat toward its survival. In contrast, a regional hegemon has acquired an unrivaled power in its own region. The reason for checking aggression in a distant region is out of the fear that another regional hegemon, the potential hegemon after a successful hegemonic war, could freely intervene in the affairs in its own region (Mearsheimer, 2001: 41-42). The regional hegemon does balance against the aggressor for security concern, yet the security concern is not as urgent as the local great power for being conquered. Therefore, the distant regional hegemon could enjoy the space of letting the local great power resist the aggression on the front line while remaining in a contingent position for whether to take part in the struggle.

The importance of the distant regional hegemon shines in a multipolar world. In multipolarity, due to the contingent position of the regional hegemon, both the aggressor and the local great power cannot ensure whether the distant regional hegemon would get entangled in their conflict, so their action would primarily follow the logic implied by the power distribution of their region. However, if the distant regional hegemon is eventually

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determined to intervene in the hegemonic war in another region, the distant regional hegemon could invest a huge proportion of its resource due to the lack of local threat, which could mean a considerable amount of aid or even sending its troops. In bipolarity, the superpower could play the same role as the regional hegemon. Due to the global competition between superpowers in bipolarity, states are pressured to choose a camp and share the collective good as preserving the current regional order with one of the superpowers. Even if there is only one regional great power in that region, buck-passing is still possible between the regional great power and the kin superpower.

3.2.3 Outcomes: Three-party Interaction

In the previous section, the strategy of buck-passing, namely intent and action among the three images, has been elaborated. This section aims to depict how the interactions of different strategies from the three parties under a possible buck-passing circumstance lead to three typical outcomes, including alliance formation, archetypical buck-passing, and appeasement as failed buck-passing. The purpose of this section is not to exhaustively cover all possibilities under a possible buck-passing circumstance, which can hardly achieve; instead, the purpose is to elaborate the outcomes that are typical in a buck-passing circumstance and unravel the paths of strategic interaction toward the outcomes. As an essay dedicated to buck-passing, the discussion in this section will mainly focus on

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the interaction among the defensive side. The offensive side will be mentioned as the necessary background but not be elaborated in detail both in the theoretical part here and in the case study, which is beyond the scope of this essay.

A possible buck-passing circumstance, as above defined, is a circumstance that allows the occurrence of buck-passing as outcome. For concisely discussing, the buck-passing circumstance scale here is confined to its minimal scale, which comprises three parties as one aggressor and two defensive states that share the collective good as checking aggression. The three-party interaction is the strategic interaction among the three parties. Each state would adopt its strategy and interact with corresponding policies, aiming to manipulate the situation's development to its desired three-party outcome in a specific event.[29] Among the interaction, four ties need to be specified: the relationship between the buck-passer and the intended buck-catcher, the intended buck-catcher and the aggressor, the aggressor and the buck-passer, and the relationship between the aggressor and the combination of the buck-passer and the intended buck-catcher. However, since the three parties hold different interests, the desired outcomes of the three parties are mutually exclusive and thus can hardly be achieved concurrently. The fact that not every strategy could realize its desired three-party outcome has extra meaning for the

[29] Outcome in this section refers to the one with all three parties' participation. The outcome that is confined to the bilateral relationship would be specified explicitly.

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theory of buck-passing. In contrast to other strategies like balancing or bandwagoning that could be realized in a bilateral relationship with only two parties involved, the realization of buck-passing, by definition, requires at least three-party involvement. This leads to a unique essence of buck-passing as strategy: buck-passing could fail with generating no outcome. The adoption of buck-passing as strategy and the realization of buck-passing as outcome do not necessarily coexist. This is why the revised theoretical framework suggests that the conceptual definition of buck-passing should center the third image, buck-passing as outcome.

The first typical outcome in a buck-passing circumstance, the alliance formation, is a relatively plain pattern, presented in figure 2. The outcome of alliance formation requires both defensive states to adopt the balancing strategy, forming a defensive alliance for checking aggression. The defensive states individually balance against the aggressor in their bilateral ties with the aggressor, and they also ally with each other and collaboratively balance against the aggressor. The provision of collective good as checking aggression is shared by both defensive states, resulting in the absence of free-riding. Facing the defensive alliance, the aggressor could decide to continue its offense by initiating a war against the two defensive states or conceding, preventing further conflict with the two defensive states. The alliance formation is more likely to happen when the aggressor is about to acquire enough power to achieve a prompt and low-cost

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victory against a single defensive state. If the aggressor is not seriously debilitated by a war with a single defensive state, another defensive state would have to compete with a dreadful aggressor with no aid. Therefore, defensive states are motivated to seize the last chance of effective balancing by forming a defensive alliance.

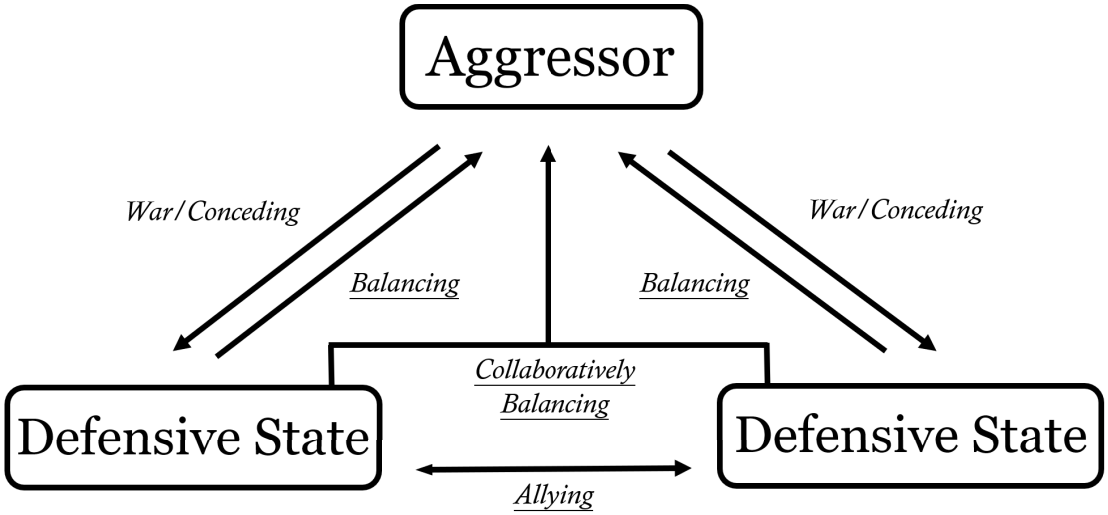

Figure 2. Strategic Interaction of Alliance formation as Outcome

The words with frames are actors, the italicized words are actions that actors take, and the underlined words are the necessary components for alliance formation as outcome

Source: Author

Buck-passing as outcome, namely the archetypical buck-passing, is the second typical outcome under a buck-passing circumstance, presented in figure 3. In archetypical buck-passing, the defensive states are classified into a buck-passer and a buck-catcher. Buck-passing as outcome requires three necessary conditions: (1) the buck-passer passes the buck of checking aggression to the buck-catcher, (2) the buck-catcher balances against

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the aggressor, and (3) the buck-passer and the buck-catcher as a combination's balancing action should be implemented primarily by buck-catcher. The first condition is relatively straightforward: buck-passing as outcome needs the buck-passer to pass the buck. While adopting the buck-passing strategy, two policies are available for buck-passer dealing with buck-catcher: distancing itself from the buck-catcher or supporting it. Distancing is conducive to maintaining a good relationship with the aggressor while taking the risk of a low-cost victory of the aggressor. Supporting would enhance the prospect of the buck-catcher's performance in the conflict, yet it could lead to the aggressor's retaliation and the possibility that the prevailing buck-catcher would become a new threat. The decision between the two policies is determined by buck-passer's evaluation of the relative power gap between the aggressor and the buck-catcher. The buck-passer generally would try to pacify the aggressor, letting it focus on the buck-catcher and avoiding being dragged into the conflict.

The second and the third conditions are about the indispensable elements of buck-passing. To realize buck-passing as outcome, the existence of collective good and the presence of free-riding must occur. To fulfill these two requirements, the buck-catcher should provide the majority of the collective good as checking aggression, which allows the buck-passer to ride free on its effort. The requirements do not exclude the space of buck-passer's supporting, which intends to strengthen the buck-catcher for better prospect

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of debilitating the aggressor, and even limited balancing. The point is that the buck-passer and the buck-catcher as a combination's balancing action should be implemented primarily by the buck-catcher. A detailed discussion of the criterion will be presented in the next section about operationalization.

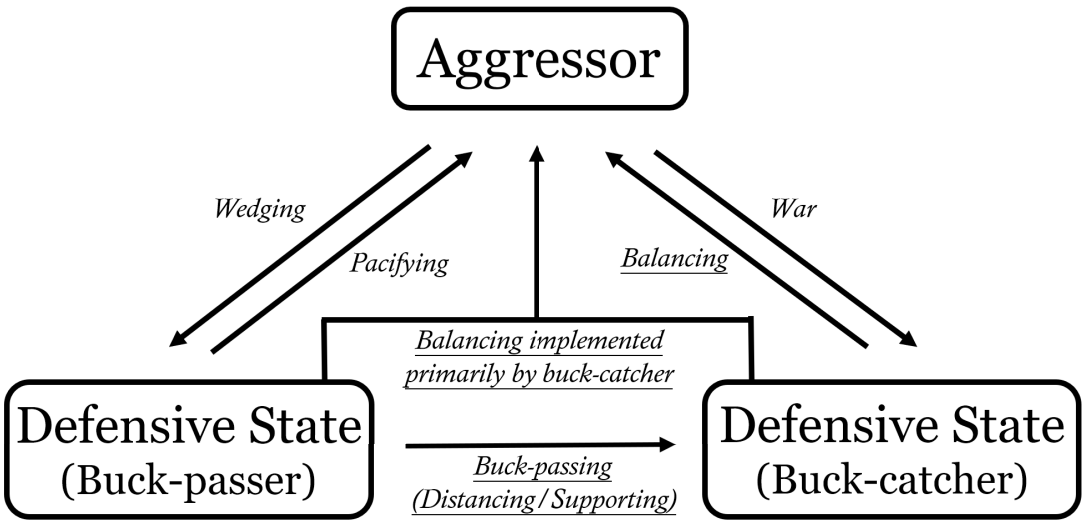

Figure 3. Strategic Interaction of Buck-passing as Outcome

The words with frames are actors, the italicized words are actions that actors take, and the underlined words are the necessary components for alliance formation as outcome

Source: Author

Besides the defensive states, the aggressor can adopt the wedging strategy to prevent an opposing coalition. Wedging strategy aims to generate alignment change, including realigning the opponent to the friendly side, dealigning an opponent to a neutral position, or reinforcing the current non-align state's neutrality (Crawford, 2021: 16-17).

The third typical outcome is appeasement, namely failed buck-passing, presented in

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figure 4. The reason for calling appeasement as failed buck-passing is the absence of the two indispensable elements of buck-passing: the existence of collective good and the presence of buck-passing. In appeasement as outcome, The defensive states both adopt the buck-passing strategy or at least implement the policies that could be interpreted as buck-passing, yet neither defensive state provides collective good as checking aggression, and therefore neither state can free-ride on other's effort.[30] It is different from the failure of checking aggression as buck-passer's goal. In the archetypical buck-passing, the buck-catcher is possible to lose to the aggressor, failing to check the aggression, but it is still a valid buck-passing both on buck-passer's strategy and on the outcome: the collective good is provided, and the free-riding present. What actually failed is the buck-catcher's goal of checking aggression through its balancing strategy.

In contrast, the failure of both defensive states' buck-passing strategy leads to appeasement as outcome, the failed buck-passing. In appeasement, the defensive states are required to pass the buck to each other mutually. No state is willing to balance against the aggressor on its own, and they fail to coordinate with each other to form a defensive alliance. The two defensive states as a combination do not take enough action to balance

[30] As discussed in the previous section, buck-passing and appeasement can hardly be distinguished by the image of action, and not in every case are there valid sources that could unravel the actual intent of a state. In the case that the state's intent is unclear and the action could be interpreted as both appeasement and buck-passing, the revised framework would count the state's strategy as buck-passing.

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against the aggressor. The defensive states try to pacify the aggressor to prevent its expansion or further aggression, and the aggressor successfully expands without facing counterbalance from its opponent.[31] For generating appeasement, the aggressor generally would implement the deterrence policy, aiming to deter its opponent from balancing. The aggressor could also try to persuade the defensive states that it would not continue its expansion after the current event to reduce the perception of threat from the defensive states. If the word is faithful, the attempt is close to assuring, which the aggressor tries to convince its opponent that the conflict is unnecessary unless the defensive state balance against the aggressor (Schelling, 2008: 74). If not, lying could describe the attempt to disguise the intent of further aggression (Mearsheimer, 2011: 27-28, 52). The criterion between reassuring and lying, whether the aggressor's word is faithful, is about the aggressor's intent.

[31] The appeasement as outcome is more likely to occur when the aggressor's target is not the defensive great powers themselves but the small state on the same front. When it comes to the aggression on great powers' own territory, it is unlikely that the attacked great power would only wish to pacify the aggressor in lieu of taking effective balancing actions.

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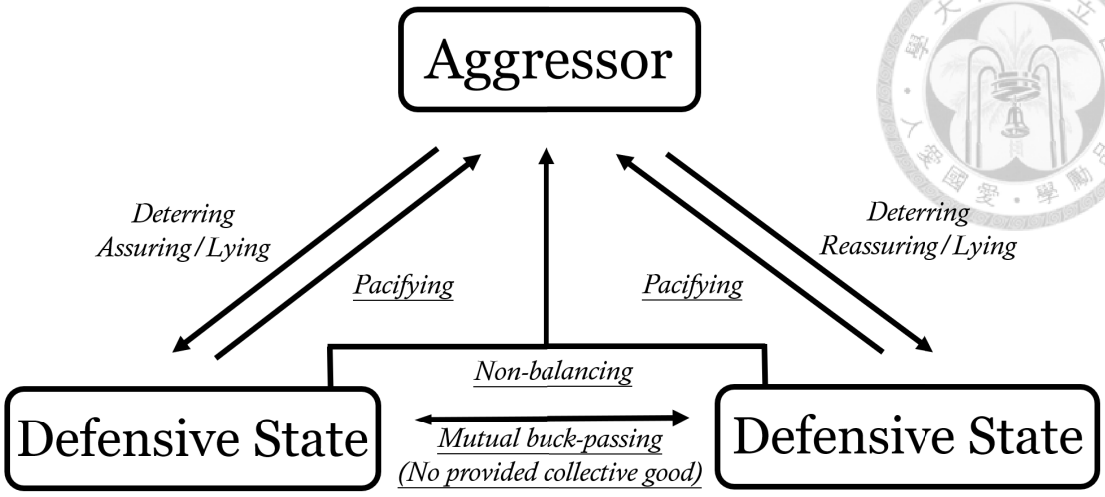

Figure 4. Strategic Interaction of Appeasement (Failed Buck-passing)

The words with frames are actors, the italicized words are actions that actors take, and the underlined words are the necessary components for appeasement

Source: Author

Although the general pattern of the three typical outcomes under a buck-passing circumstance has been elaborated, the path toward each outcome is contingent on the strategic interaction of the three parties. For instance, when the aggression happens in a related small state, after one defensive state claims that it will not intervene, the other defensive state's decision will determine the final outcome. If the defensive state decides to balance against the aggressor, the outcome is archetypical buck-passing; if not, appeasement. Before the defensive state makes the final decision, the aggressor could also try to persuade (assuring / lying) the defensive state that the aggression would be the last move of its expansion, aiming to direct the outcome to appeasement. This section discusses the fixed outcomes at the end of an event under a buck-passing circumstance,

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yet throughout the whole time span of an event, the dynamic strategic interaction is the origin of the outcome. The necessary elements are the instruments to identify the three typical outcomes from the diverse path of strategic interaction at a fixed moment. It does not mean the strategic interaction in a buck-passing circumstance only has three fixed paths.

3.3. The Operationalization of Buck-passing

The last section of this chapter discusses the operationalization of the revised framework. In the previous sections, the conceptualization of the theory about buck-passing has been established. This section aims to operationalize the previous findings, providing a guideline on distinguishing buck-passing from historical facts. In other words, the guideline offers a manual for conducting case studies concerning buck-passing. The guideline consists of five steps that are the necessary procedures for identifying buck-passing. The five steps are: (1) specifying the scope of time and space of an event, (2) clarifying the situation, (3) identifying involved agents' strategies, (4) examining the path of strategic interaction, and (5) estimating the final outcome. The five steps need not be presented sequentially in a case study concerning buck-passing, yet the case study should cover the processes and the results of the five steps.

The first step is specifying the space and time span of the case. The space is the

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region where the case's main event happens. Specifying the space helps determine which states are the related states of the event and estimate the distribution of power among them, which is an important factor in facilitating buck-passing. The time span is a fundamental yet often neglected constituent in identifying buck-passing. The specification of the time span determines the outcome of the case. As previously discussed, the outcome is contingent on the strategic interaction, and the strategic interaction is a continuous process happening among the involved agents. The strategic interaction does not intrinsically have a definite end: we could hardly assert an event is completely end since its impact could last long. An arbitrary cut of the time span with a solid rationale is necessary for delimiting the boundary of the case. Only after determining the time span could the case's final outcome be assured. Suppose a path of strategic interaction with three stages: two defensive states form a defensive alliance with a small state as the target of aggressor's expansion, aggressor adopts wedging strategy and successfully realign one state from the defensive alliance, and the left defensive state gives up to fulfill the commitment in the alliance and let aggressor invades the small state. If the time span of the case is cut in the first stage of the path, the outcome is alliance formation; the second stage, archetypical buck-passing; the third stage, appeasement. The final outcome of a case could only be assured when the end of the time span is specified.

The specification of time span also affects whether a state is qualified as an aggressor.

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Though lacking explicit definition, aggressor, in the realm of international relations, generally refers to the revisionist state that has implemented firm actions by forces on changing status quo. The difference between a revisionist state and its counterpart, a status-quo state, is whether a state desires to change or preserve the status quo (Wolfers, 1962: 125), which does not necessarily associate with the state's intent as benign or malicious. Just as Tang (2010: 24-25) points out, statues quo is merely the distribution of power and states' positions among it at a giving moment, and a state trying to preserve its loot from past expansions can be hardly distinguished from a state currently on its way to expansion. The qualification of an aggressor depends on the status quo, the distribution of power at a given moment, and the specification of the time span determines that moment. Therefore, in the revised framework, the status quo is the power distribution at the beginning of the case's time span, and the aggressor is the state that implements firm action by force with the desire to upset the status quo.

The second step is clarifying the situation, which includes the selection of involved agents and the investigation of actors' objectives and relationships. After specifying the time and space, we could determine which states are qualified to become an involved agent, including the great powers in the specified region and the distant regional hegemon, and assign the characters of the aggressor, the local great power, and the distant regional hegemon to the involved agents. After selecting the actors, it is also necessary to

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investigate involved agents' objectives, power distribution, and the relationships among them. Clarifying the situation unveils the stage scenery of a case.

The third step, identifying involved agents' strategies, is a critical process worthy of detailed elaborating. Understanding the involved agents' strategies is the necessary foundation of investigating the strategic interaction and the outcome as a product. The strategy, as defined previously, consists of a state's intent and action, which aims to realize the strategy's expected outcome. To identify involved agents' strategies, operational criteria on what kinds of intent and action could be deemed as a specific strategy is necessary. I would provide criteria for the main strategies in the revised framework.

While identifying strategies, the state's action predominates over its intent in terms of importance. Not every intent could generate certain action, yet action is bound to represent certain intent. An action exerts real influence on its target, and it is costly and more difficult to conceal. The intent is difficult to discern, and it is generally cost-free and does not pose a real influence in the outer world without generating an action. The historical materials about intent should be an auxiliary to interpret the action. The intent only plays an important role when strategies are indistinguishable by actions only. For instance, the strategies of buck-passing and appeasement, like previously examined, are nearly indistinguishable by actions only. Still, they are different on the intent image: appeasement expects to modify the aggressor's behavior and accommodate it while buck-

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passing does not.

Buck-passing, inspired by Mearsheimer (2001: 139-140), is nominated as the two main strategies with balancing for checking aggression. For better contrasting and characterizing buck-passing, the concept of balancing is modified in the revised framework. The revised framework emphasized balancing as a cost-enduring strategy, which contrasts buck-passing as a cost-averse strategy. Past theories suggest four policies of balancing: allying, mobilizing additional resources on defense, deterring, and combating with the opponents (Waltz, 1979: 168; Mearsheimer: 2001, 156-157, Parent & Rosato: 2015, 56-57; Walt, 1990: 15-17). All four policies are costly. Allying is costly by creating the risk of losing credibility when the balancing state decides not to honor its pledge (Fearon, 1995: 396; Fearon, 1997: 70; Quek, 2021: 537-538). Mobilizing additional resources requires economic expenditure. Deterring holds the same cost as allying when the balancing state backs down from the deterred target's challenge. Combating with the opponents incurs casualties. Balancing is implemented intrinsically with expenses.

The revised framework emphasizes the opponent-targeting aspect of buck-passing, namely the confrontational policies as deterring and combating. The conceptualization of balancing is strongly influenced by structural realism. Waltz (1979: 125-128) directly defines the purpose of balancing as the restoration of the balance of power. Mearsheimer

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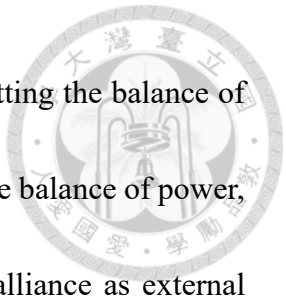

also set the goal of balancing as “preventing an aggressor from upsetting the balance of power (Mearsheimer, 2001: 156).” Following the logic of restoring the balance of power, Waltz (1979:128) suggests two policies for balancing: forming an alliance as external balancing and mobilizing domestic resources as internal balancing. It should be noted that both allying and mobilizing domestic resources, though influenced by the opponent, are not directly involving the opponent in essence, since both policies could be achieved without directly interacting with the opponent. The two policies could be called competitive balancing, aiming to compete with the opponent on the balance of power. However, balancing now possess the second goal of restraining the opponent through the development of balancing theories. Two confrontational policies are nominated to fulfill this goal: deterrence and combating. Walt (1991: 52) defines balancing as “alignment against the threatening power, to deter it from attacking or to defeat it if it does.” Parent & Rosato (2015: 56) also regards deterring and combating as the way to restrain the opponent, defining balancing as “a state’s efforts to amass military might so as to deter another’s aggression or prevail in a conflict should deterrence fail.” Mearsheimer (2001: 156) also points out that “the initial goal [of balancing] is to deter the aggressor, but if that fails, the balancing state will fight the ensuing war.” These definitions demonstrate that deterring and combating are the two confrontational balancing policies, targeting to restrain the opponent directly.

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The revised framework highlights the confrontational policies of balancing for two reasons. First, deterring and combating are the unique characteristics of balancing among other strategies. As previously discussed, mobilizing domestic resources could contribute to the goals of other strategies like buck-passing and bandwagoning as well. Allying is also the requirement of bandwagoning, though the target of allying is different. In contrast, deterring and combating as the confrontational policies characterize balancing as directly restraining against the opponent, which better distinguishes balancing from other strategies. Second, deterring and combating are the terminal policies of balancing that bring actual changes to the outcome. Allying and mobilizing domestic resources, in essence, exerts their influence by deterring and combating. Allying, as a commitment to another state(s), does not necessarily lead to further actions since the commitment can be infringed. The influence of allying is exerted on other agents by amplificating the effect of deterring and combating. The alliance formation could make the deterrence more likely to succeed by sending a costly signal on its determination to combat (Fearon, 1995: 396; Fearon, 1997: 70; Quek, 2021: 537-538) and enhance the cost for the opponent to initiate a conflict (Fearon, 1994b: 246). Allying could also enhance the performance of combating by building cooperation between the allied defensive state. Mobilizing domestic resources is an internal policy in essence. The influence of mobilizing domestic resources is exerted by building a stronger army, which is a great plus on better deterring and

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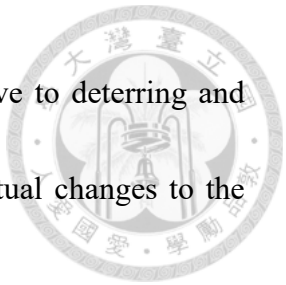

combating. Allying and mobilizing domestic resources are conducive to deterring and combating, which are the terminal policies that ultimately bring actual changes to the outcome.

Although it is a cost-averse strategy, buck-passing allows a state to implement some degrees of balancing action, such as supporting the buck-catcher. The primary goal of buck-passing is to reduce the cost, requiring not to eliminate the cost to zero (which can hardly achieve), so sharing the burden of balancing aggressor to some extent is acceptable for a buck-passing state. The question is the border between balancing and buck-passing: what kinds of actions could be deemed as balancing/buck-passing?

The revised framework suggests that the border is contingent on the threat that the aggressor poses. The graver a threat is, the costlier a counterbalancing needs to be, and the higher threshold for qualifying as balancing. When the threat stays on the stage of deterrence, a commitment could satisfy the criteria of balancing.[32] When the deterrence contains an explicit menace of exerting military power, the commitment should correspondingly promise the mobilization of forces. The mobilized forces that the commitment promises should comprise the land power. Since an aggressor aims to

[32] Deterrence here equals blackmail in Mearsheimer's theory (Mearsheimer, 2001: 152-153). In Mearsheimer's theory, the difference between deterrence and blackmail seems only limited to that deterrence refers to the defensive side and blackmail refers to the offensive side. It looks like that the distinction possesses no inherent value. As Ifft points out, one's deterrence is regarded as blackmail by its opponent (Ifft, 2007: 249).

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conquer and control territory in most cases, which suits not the navies and air forces, land power is the leading role in an aggressor's expansion (Mearsheimer, 2001:87). Therefore, the corresponding balancing needs the mobilization of land power, which could be an actual expense on balancing. The commitment to only mobilize the navies or air forces does not share a sufficient burden of checking aggression. The commitment to mobilize land forces, which promises possible bloody attrition in ground warfare with the aggressor, is qualified as balancing in a three-party interaction under a buck-passing circumstance. When the threat escalates to war, the criterion of balancing correspondingly raises to sending the troops, especially land powers, to check the aggression.[33]

The action of buck-passing is negatively defined from balancing: the action that does not meet the criteria of balancing could be regarded as buck-passing under two conditions. First, a buck-passing state is required to share the need for the collective good as checking aggression with the other defensive state. If a state faces the aggressor alone, logically there is no chance for the occurrence of buck-passing. Second, a buck-passing state should still stay on the defensive side. When facing a threat, a state is possible to adopt the strategy of bandwagoning, allying with the source of threat (Walt, 1990: 17). While allying with the aggressor, the bandwagoning state temporarily gets rid of the defensive

[33] The commitment to use nuclear weapons is the strongest form of military commitment, and it satisfies the criteria of balancing in all deterrence situations. Even in a war, nuclear commitment is still qualified as balancing when the war is limited.

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position, joining the camp of the aggressive side.[34] It distinguishes buck-passing from bandwagoning since the buck-passing state still stays on the defensive side. If the two conditions are satisfied, a defensive state's actions that are not qualified as balancing could be regarded as buck-passing. The buck-passing action includes but is not confined to underbalancing (weak commitment against deterrence and low mobilization of military force against war), the policies of buck-passing (pacifying, distancing, and supporting), and inaction.

Another important concept that needs to be examined is alliance. The issue of alliance formation as outcome, or allying as action, is relevant in the revised framework with two related concepts: bandwagoning as allying with the source of threat (Walt, 1990: 17) and alliance formation (allying as action) as one of the three typical outcomes in a buck-passing circumstance. A clarification on the idea of alliance helps to identify these concepts clearer.

In the revised framework, the concept of alliance is distinguished from alignment. To be clear, alliance is the subset of alignment (Snyder, 1990: 104-105; Wilkins, 2012: 56-58, Krause & Singer, 2001: 16). Although many works regard alliance and alignment as synonyms, the classification between them contributes to a greater precision on related

[34] However, just as Mearsheimer (2001: 162-164) points out, bandwagoning would enlarge the relative power gap between the bandwagoner and the stronger aggressor. Temporarily getting rid of a defensive position does not guarantee a durable exemption from its ally's threat.

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concepts. Alignment, as the superset of the alliance, is more loosened, referring to "any general commitment to cooperation or collaboration (Krause & Singer, 2001: 16)." In contrast, alliance focuses on the military dimension with a more formal form as "formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership (Snyder, 1997: 4)."

The revised framework, a study under security studies, concentrates on the military dimension of the state's interaction. Therefore, in the revised framework, bandwagoning requires the defensive state to ally with the aggressor.[35] The alliance formation as outcome and ally as action, just as literally, refers to the alliance and forming an alliance. For attempted alignment change, the realignment requires that the target withdraws from its previous alliance and ally with the divider; the dealignment does not necessarily require alliance change: no withdrawal from the alliance is needed when dealigning a state from fixed to the hedged position; the reinforcement, preserving the target's existing position, needs no alliance change. Besides, the non-aggression pact is not qualified as an alliance for two reasons. First, an alliance, according to its definition, requires states to exert or not exert their military forces against other states outside the alliance membership.

[35] The original text about Walt's definition of bandwagoning is "bandwagoning refers to alignment with the source of danger (Walt, 1990: 17)." However, as Bergsmann (2001: 33) suggests, Walt regards alliance and alignment as synonyms and deploy them interchangeably. For instance, while Walt uses alignment to depict bandwagoning, he also employs ally to explain the logic of bandwagoning: "the more powerful the state and the more dearly this power is demonstrated, the more likely others are to ally with it (Walt, 1990: 20)." The revised framework defines bandwagoning as "allying" with the source of threat, which emphasizes the military property of bandwagoning.

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In contrast, the non-aggression pact only stipulates the prohibition of using forces against the signatories inside the pact. Second, an alliance prescribes the state to implement particular behavior under a specified circumstance, namely *casus foederis,* while the commitment of non-aggression requires no *casus foederis* and covers the whole duration of the pact (Bergsmann, 2001, 35). The non-aggression pact is a form of alignment, yet it is not qualified as an alliance in the revised framework.

The fourth step is examining the path of strategic interaction. After ascertaining the involved agents' strategies, an in-depth inspection of the results of the strategies and the path of interaction toward the outcome throughout the time span of the case is necessary. A state's strategy generally cannot guarantee the fulfillment of the expected goal by that state alone. The strategies of other states and the interaction among them determine one strategy's final result. Tracing the results of strategies and their reasons throughout the time span is necessary for estimating and explaining the case's final outcome.

The fifth and final step is estimating the final outcome. The final outcome is the slice of the strategic interaction at the end of the selected time span of the case. In a buck-passing circumstance, the final outcome is likely to fit in one of the three typical buck-passing outcomes. By identifying the strategies of the involved agents and the interaction among them, a more accurate estimation of the final outcome should be possible with the list of necessary components of the three typical outcomes. The final outcome is the last

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judgment of involved agents' strategies in the case study. It determines the final results of the involved agents' strategies. For buck-passing, the final outcome arbitrates whether a buck-passing strategy succeeds or not.

To conclude, this chapter builds a revised framework of buck-passing. It examines the conceptualization, the theorization, and the operationalization of buck-passing. The section of the conceptualization of buck-passing lists the two indispensable elements, centers outcome among the three images, and examines the rationale behind them. The theory section covers buck-passing's goals, policies, factors, actors, and outcomes, building a framework on essential aspects of buck-passing. The operationalization provides a guideline on conducting case studies concerning buck-passing, arguing the criteria of crucial concepts in the revised framework. With the completion of the revised framework, it is time to get into the case study part: the Munich crisis and the Korean War.

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4. Case Studies: the Munich Crisis and the Korean War

4.1. The Munich Crisis: A Failed Buck-passing

The first case study investigates a classic topic on buck-passing works: the Munich Crisis. The goal of the case study is to elaborate on the respective strategies that the involved agents on the eve of World War II adopted and how the interaction among strategies led to the final result of the Munich Crisis. The main event this section aims to explain is the 1938 Sudetenland Crisis, precisely speaking from the May Crisis to the signature of the Munich Agreement at the end of September. The specified time span of the case is from the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936, Germany's significant step to alter the status quo at the moment, to the conclusion of the Munich Agreement, which paved the way to the German annexation of whole Czechoslovakia in March 1939. To complement the context of the case, the analysis would also discuss the situation after the Treaty of Rapallo, especially the diplomacy concerning treaties and alliance formation. The space of the case study would focus on Europe since the aggression occurred in Europe.

4.1.1. The Scope of Involved Parties: Germany, Britain, France, and the Soviet

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Union

To begin with, selecting the involved agents would be the cornerstone of a case study: only when we know which states matter can we capture how the international order evolves. Most historians and political scientists have little disagreement on the great power system in the 1930s, though with different ways to estimate the balance of power. Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the US, and the Soviet Union were the seven great powers on the eve of World War II. Among the seven states, Italy was the "least of the great powers (Ratti, 2012: 89-90)", which some scholars doubt its great power status.

On the different ways to measure the power distribution, Schweller (1998: 16-19) employs the index from the Correlate of War project, arguing that Germany, the US, and the Soviet Union were the three poles out of seven major powers. He contends that only when possessing more than half the military capability of the most powerful state could a state qualify as a pole. Singer & Melvin (1966: 245-253) measures the international system by indexing population and diplomatic representation. Singer & Melvin assess the diplomatic representation by the different classes of diplomatic missions from the ambassador to the chargé d'affaire. By the diplomatic approach, the Soviet Union and Japan were not on the top seven, and the rank of Italy was even higher than Germany (Singer & Melvin, 1966: 263-264, 274-275). On the side of the traditional approach, Levy (1983: 46-49) lists Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the US, and the Soviet Union

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as great powers in the entire period of the inter-war period from the detailed analysis on the historical records of the results of wars. Moul (1985: 482) also reaches the same conclusion as Levy. In contrast, emphasizing the naval power and the will to project it over the state's own region, Rasler (1994: 16-17) nominates the seven states except for Italy as the global powers in the 1930s. By examining scholars' evaluations on the 1930s' great power system and their approaches, we could find that the list of great powers does not deviate much yet the methods are diverse.

To assess the distribution of power on the eve of World War II, this article would employ the three indexes that Beckley (2018) proposes to measure different dimensions of power distribution. Beckley (2018: 11-14) argues that there are two approaches to assessing states' power: the power-as-resources approach and the power-as-outcome approach. The power-as-outcomes approach is issue-specific in essence, which could hardly calculate the preferences and the resolve of all states involved in wars, and assessing power by past events has limited value to evaluate the current power distribution. Among the power-as-resources approach, Beckley (2018: 14-17) argues that the past studies focus on the gross indicators, such as GDP and the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) from the Correlates of War project, and the gross indicators exaggerate the importance of population size by overlooking the production costs, the welfare costs, and the security costs arising derived from the population. Instead, Beckley (2018: 17-19)

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proposes the net indicator, namely GDP*GDP per capita, to deduct the costs from the gain of a large population. Beckley (2018: 21-22, 37-39) selects four case studies that the gross and the net indicators deviate much and a quantitative test on the past interstate military conflicts for predicting their outcomes, finding that the net indicator performs better than the gross indicator in both tests.

The goals of the power distribution assessment here are (1) to determine the scope of involved agents, listing the great powers from the selected region, and (2) to know the relative strength among each state. The main event this section investigates is the Munich Crisis, a significant step of the German expansion in the European continent. Therefore, based on the seven great powers past studies list, six states—Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the US, and the Soviet Union—would be counted as the involved agents in the Munich Crisis. As a great power in the 1930s also, Japan is not counted because it was not located in Europe. In the period of the Munich Crisis, Japan had its own Sino-Japanese War to fight, and it was not powerful enough to play the leading character in European affairs as an offshore balancer.[36] The US is involved since it was an offshore balancer that had the capability to intervene the European affairs, and more importantly, it was the

[36] To clarify, the point here is that Japan did not fully engage in the Munich Crisis. It does not mean that Japan's foreign policy had no influence on European affairs. For instance, the signature of the Anti-Comintern Pact encircled the Soviet Union, and Japan's growing naval power endangered the leading status of the British navy.

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most powerful state at that time.

To measure the relative strength of the six involved agents, three indicators are employed in this article: CNIC, GDP, and GDP*GDP per capita. As the product of the Correlates of War project, CNIC is calculated by each state's total population, urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, military personnel, and military expenditure of all state members.[37] CINC is regarded as the indicator reflecting a state's gross military power, which could be a great reference on how much military power a state could exert at the current moment. As a gross indicator on the economic dimension, GDP represents a state's rough potential when converting its economic resources to military power. GDP*GDP per capita, the gross indicator proposed by Beckley (2018: 17-19), measures the expected performance when a state fully commits to an enduring total war. In an enduring total war, both the army and society are contested. The result of war is not only determined by the competence of military personnel but also the logistics, the efficiency of production, the morale of civilians, and the state's capability to extract resources. In other words, the importance of a society's resilience is weighted more in an enduring total war. The costs on production, welfare, and security entailed from the huge population could be better deducted by the net indicator, which

[37] National Material Capabilities (v6.0), from Singer, J David, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey. 1972. "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965." *Peace, war, and numbers* 19(48): 427.

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diminishes the advantage huge population size brings.

The power distribution measured by the three indicators of the six involved agents in 1938 is presented in Table 1. The table covers CNIC, GDP, GDP*GDP per capita with raw values and each state's share. The US was ranked in the first place in all three indicators, demonstrating it as the mightiest power in 1938. For the gross military dimension, namely the CNIC index, Germany (23.93%), the Soviet Union (25.50%), and the US (26.49%) were the three strongest powers among the system. For the gross economic dimension as GDP, Germany (15.73%) and the Soviet Union (18.62%) were still the strongest states in Europe, yet the gap between them and other great powers reduced substantially, especially Britain (13.68%). Regarding the net indicator, GDP*GDP per capita, Britain (17.50%) beat Germany (16.04%) and other states, ranked first among European states. In contrast to the former indexes, the Soviet Union (8.17%) was constrained by its low GDP per capita, performing poorly in the net indicator. In brief, the US was the most powerful state in the 1938 international system. Among European states, the Soviet Union shone at the gross indicators on both military and economic dimensions with its gigantic population. Britain, by its high GDP per capita, got first place in the net indicator. Germany was a formidable state with both large population and economic development, ranked second in all three dimensions.

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Table 1. Power Distribution Among Involved Agents in the Case of the Munich Crisis, 1938

Indicator\State	France	Germany	Italy	Britain	USSR	USA
CINC	0.045568597	0.15422215	0.031848751	0.077787034	0.16435921	0.1707712
CINC (%)	*7.07%*	*23.93%*	*4.94%*	*12.07%*	*25.50%*	*26.49%*
GDP	187,402	342,351	143,981	297,619	405,220	799,357
GDP (%)	*8.61%*	*15.73%*	*6.62%*	*13.68%*	*18.62%*	*36.74%*
NET	836,978,001	1,709,562,811	477,455,800	1,865,014,104	871,114,009	4,897,231,597
NET (%)	*7.85%*	*16.04%*	*4.48%*	*17.50%*	*8.17%*	*45.95%*

Source: Data of CINC is derived from: National Material Capabilities (v6.0), from Singer, J David, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey. 1972. "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965." *Peace, war, and numbers* 19(48): 427. Data of GDP and GDP per capita refers to Maddison, Angus. "Statistics on World Population, GDP and Per Capita GDP, 1-2008 Ad." http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/Historical_Statistics/vertical-file_02-2010.xls. Latest Update 1 January 2022.

Compared to other great powers, France and Italy were less potent than their fellows. France was ranked fourth out of five European great powers in all three indexes when Italy was ranked at the last place. While France reached half of the third European states in all indicators, Italy was not able to meet the same criterion. Italy was the "least of great powers (Ratti, 2012: 89-90)" that could barely meet the threshold of great power.

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4.1.2. Great Powers' Situation and Strategies

To reveal how buck-passing works in states' strategic interaction, this section would focus on how the other great powers responded to the German expansion. The analysis would begin with the case of Italy and the US, which exercised diplomacy with relatively clear goals in the inter-war period. The foreign policies of the three European defensive great powers—France, Britain, and the Soviet Union—were intricate and deeply interconnected with others' decisions. To unfold the strategic interaction among three states, the analysis would first look into France, which the treaty with Czechoslovakia was the crucial background of the 1938 crisis. Britain, exerting a significant influence on France's decision, would be the next case. Only after understanding the other great powers' policies, the decision of the Soviet Union, which has been under dispute long, could finally be revealed. Given that the development of a single historical event could be mentioned repeatedly in the investigations of respective states' policies, this section would try to reduce redundancy by providing a detailed depiction when the state under analysis was crucial for that event and curtailing the narration for development that had been already illustrated.

4.1.2.1. Italy: the Bandwagoner

Multiple conditions fostered Italy's inclination toward bandwagoning with Germany.

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The Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini and the German Chancellor and the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler shared similar ideologies. Italy and Germany were dissatisfied with the order under the Versailles system. Regarding the power distribution, Italy was barely qualified as the weakest great power, which mitigated the offensive realist's assertion that great powers hardly bandwagon since bandwagoning would deteriorate the power disparity—Italy was already much more vulnerable than Germany (Mearsheimer, 2001: 162-163). The bandwagoning strategy in Italy's diplomacy became visible after 1936. When the Spanish Civil War burst out in 1936, Italy and Germany both attacked the elected Popular Front government and coordinated to support the Nationalist side to combat the Republican side, which was backed by the Soviet Union (Whealey, 2004: 9-14). In November 1937, Italy entered the Anti-Comintern pact, which Germany and Japan previously signed.[38] In December the same year, Italy withdrew from the League of Nations just like Germany did in 1933 (Tollardo, 2016: 215).

The issue that once blocked the alliance between Italy and Germany was the Anschluss problem, namely Germany's ambition to annex Austria. In 1935, Italy signed

[38] The English summarization of the Mussolini-Laval accords could be found at: *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1935*. 1953. Vol. I. Washington: United States Government Printing Office. p. 170-171. For the official text of the accord in French, see: *Protocol between France and Italy Regarding the Maintenance of the Status Quo in Central Europe and Particularly in Austria,* Rome, Jan. 7, 1935, *British and Foreign State Paper*s, vol. 139, p. 947-948, available from https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015049924551&view=1up&seq=965; *Protocol Concluded by Italy, Germany, and Japan at Rome, Rome,* Nov. 6, 1937, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Japan: 1931-1941*, vol. II, No. 762.94/204, p. 159-160, available from https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/ASLU3O4NOAR5C58W.

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the Mussolini-Laval accords and joined the Stresa fronts with Britain and France to safeguard the independence of Austria as Italy's client state from Germany (Mallett, 2004: 680-681).[39] However, the Stresa front collapsed just after a few months by the signature of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement that Britain compromised to let Germany strengthen its navy and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia.[40] After shifting its target to conquering North Africa, Italy prioritized the relationship with Germany over the Austria issue. Mussolini admitted that Austria was Germany's satellite state in a conversation with the German Ambassador in Rome Ulrich von Hassell in 1936. During the 1937 visit to Germany, Mussolini claimed that he had grown "tired of being the sentinel of Austrian independence" to the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop (Mallett, 2004: 691-692).

During the 1938 German aggression toward Czechoslovakia, Italy steadily stood on Germany's side, including supporting Germany's plan to use force against Czechoslovakia. In the May Crisis, Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, intended to concert with Berlin and offered to publish a note in *Informazione Diplomatica* (Italian governmental communique). In April, Mussolini supported the

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[39] *Joint Anglo-Franco-Italian Resolution on European Affairs with Final Declaration and Anglo-Italian Declaration*, Apr. 14, 1935, *British and Foreign State Paper*s, vol. 139, p. 756-758, available from https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015049924551&view=1up&seq=774.

[40] *Exchange of Notes between the United Kingdom and Germany Regarding the Limitation of Naval Armaments,* London, June 18, 1935, *British and Foreign State Paper*s, vol. 139, p. 182-185, available from https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015049924551&view=1up&seq=200&skin=2021.

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eight-point demands of the Karlsbad programme, which was proposed by the Sudeten German Party (Sudetendeutsche Partei, SdP) Leader Konrad Henlein, requesting the territorial autonomy in the Sudetenland area and later becoming the core terms in the negotiation between Czechoslovakia and the SdP (Strang, 2007: 165-166; Caquet, 2019: 50-51). On 17th September, Mussolini predicted that the dispute between Germany and Czechoslovakia would end with a military solution, and Italy should get involved if Britain intervened (Mayor, 1953: 157). After Hitler issued the ultimatum that demanded Czechoslovakia to retreat from Sudetenland before 28th, Mussolini reaffirmed Italy's situation that it would stand with Germany once Britain engaged in the war with Hitler's envoy Philipp, Landgrave of Hesse, who conveyed that Germany's invasion to Czechoslovakia would be associated with the natural aim of total destruction at 25th (Mayor, 1953: 161). Mussolini also launched the initial mobilization of the army at 27th (Mayor, 1953: 162). On 28th, asked by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain for helping persuade Hitler to extend the ultimatum, Mussolini sent a message to Berlin that under the premise that Italy would firmly stand with Germany, Italy consented to Britain's proposal of granting a delay for 24 hours, and the final decision was reserved to Hitler with Italy's support.[41] Throughout the whole event of the Munich Crisis, Italy made a

[41] *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Ser. D, Vol. II,* p. 993-994.

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great effort in concerting its action with and showing Italy's support to Germany. The spirit of Italy's bandwagoning strategy in the Munich Crisis was precisely captured by Ciano's words: "we are not interested in the fate of Prague and we are absolutely solid behind Germany (Mayor, 1953: 121)."

Half a year after the Munich Crisis, Italy formed a military alliance with Germany under the famous Pact of Steel in May 1939.[42] Throughout the Italian diplomacy before the outbreak of World War II, Italy did not deviate from the path of bandwagoning Germany. This does not imply that Italy embraced the coalition with Germany at all costs. Rather, besides the aforementioned Anschluss problem, Italy postponed Germany's proposal to form a military alliance in May 1938 because Italy expected Britain to make more concessions to distract it from Germany (Crawford, 2021: 95). Italy of course tried to earn the most interests by vacillating between the cooperation with the West and Germany, but on the critical decision, Italy acted in concordance with Germany and finally formed a military alliance with the more formidable ally, which fitted the strategy of bandwagoning. On the road of bandwagoning, Italy may have adjusted the pace, but it had not deviated from the path.

[42] *Treaty of Alliance between Germany and Italy, Berlin,* May 22, 1939, *British and Foreign State Papers,* vol. 143, p. 499-501, available from https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015049923801&view=1up&seq=535.

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4.1.2.2. The US: Buck-passing with Isolationism

Isolationism is a label commonly used for depicting the US foreign policy in the inter-war period. No matter it is called isolationism, unilateralism, or neutrality, the attitude that avoids getting embroiled in international disputes is a characteristic of US diplomacy (Jonas, 1966: 1-3; Braumoeller, 2010: 352-354; Blower, 2014: 363-364). One of the most famous events of isolationism was the US Senate's rejection to join the league of Nations in 1920, which left a formidable great power out of a supposedly inclusive international organization (Herring, 2008: 432-433). However, whether isolationism dominated US diplomacy in the 1920s is still debated. Braumoeller (2010: 355-359) argues that the US had plenty of diplomatic achievements in the 1920s, including the Washington Naval Conference, Anglo-American intervention on France and Belgium's occupation of Ruhr, pressuring related states by stopping loan to promote Dawes Plan and the Treaty of Locarno, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Nevertheless, the 1930s was the time that scholars felt the gale of isolationism rose, especially after 1935 (Kennedy, 2001: 393; Herring, 2008: 502).

1935 was at the peak of isolationism. A survey conducted in 1935-1938 exemplified the US public opinion on international affairs (Gallup & Robinson, 1938: 388). Asked about the possibility of war, 73% of voters agreed that there would be another World War; however, asked about the US possible engagement in the war, 62% of voters believed that

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the US could stay out of the war, and 95% of voters rejected the idea that the US should engage into the war. The trend of isolationism in public opinion also influenced the legislation of the US. In January 1935, the Senate rejected Roosevelt's proposal to join the World Court (Kennedy, 2001: 232-234, 393). In August the same year, Senate passed the first Neutrality Act, which principally prohibited importing and exporting munitions from the belligerent states and banned the US citizen from traveling to the belligerent area.[43]

The US also reacted passively to the threat of Nazi Germany in the 1930s. The US's initial image of the Nazi party on its road to rising was "essential opportunism," which was "without a definite goal, without a program and only the one desire of emerging somehow or other from the muddle of the times."[44] After Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany, the US was unresponsive to the remilitarization of Rhineland and the Anschluss issue (Braumoeller, 2010: 361). On Germany's reoccupation of Rhineland, the US had limited reason to engage. When reporting the issue to Roosevelt, the US Secretary of State Cordell Hull claimed that the US was not the signatory of Locarno Pacts and the bilateral peace treaty the US and Germany signed—the US Senate had rejected the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and signed a bilateral treaty instead in 1921—did not include the

[43] *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy 1931-1941*, p. 266-271.
[44] *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1930, Vol. III*, p. 83-85.

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part that regulated the demilitarization of Rhineland.[45] The US did closely monitor the development in Europe but did not participate in it.

A similar situation occurred in the Anschluss problem, where the US also found limited reason to intervene. While pointing out the disquieting essence of German troops crossing the frontier to Austria, the Counselor of the US Embassy in Germany admitted that "there is no valid moral objection to the union from an internal German or Austrian standpoint."[46] The US did contribute to aiding Jews persecuted by the Nazi government: the issue gained media exposure in the US and aroused protests. The US government opened the visa application for Jews (Kennedy, 2001: 410-418). The US stayed internationalism in the humanitarian issue, yet isolationism prevailed while going to the political and diplomatic issues. Roosevelt's comment on the German Jews issue captured the dilemma: "[t]he German authorities are treating the Jews shamefully and the Jews in this country are greatly excited. But this is also not a governmental affair. We can do nothing except for American citizens who happen to be made victims (Dodd & Dodd, 1945: 19)."

In the 1938 conflicts between Germany and Czechoslovakia, the US still avoided

[45] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1936, Vol. I,* p. 218. The bilateral peace treaty between Germany and the US could be found at: *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1921, Vol. II*, p. 29-32.

[46] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938, Vol. I,* p. 466-472.

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directly getting involved in the European conflict. Shortly after Anschluss, in the May Crisis, the event in which the Czechoslovak President Edward Beneš ordered the partial mobilization on the border with Germany, the US refused to engage timely. The May Crisis started on the evening of 20th May, the time when Beneš ordered partial mobilization after meeting with the head of the army. In the meeting, Czechoslovakia Defense Minister informed Beneš that a report indicating the German army's concentration along the Czechoslovakia border had been confirmed (Lukes, 1996: 144). The intelligence that generated Beneš's decision of mobilization, which resulted in turmoil in the already sensitive Czechoslovakia-German relations, was proved wrong rapidly by more sources from different agencies and states. On the evening of 21st May, it was certain that Germany did not conduct an unusual gathering; the crisis was over (Weinberg, 1957: 222). When reacting to the false German aggression, France and Britain showed resolve to balance during the crisis. On 21st May, France and Britain warned Czechoslovakia for no further mobilization without consulting France and Britain to eliminate further escalation.[47] At the same time, France determined to engage in a conflict to honor the Franco-Czechoslovak Treaty of Mutual Assistance if Germany really launched aggression.[48] French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet warned that once

[47] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p. 336.
[48] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p. 336-337; *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938. Vol. I,* p. 512-515.

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Germany crossed the Czech border "will automatically start war."[49] Britain stood with France's side. In a letter to Berlin, British Foreign Minister Viscount Halifax implicitly expressed its will to engage: "France has obligations to Czechoslovakia and will be compelled to intervene...In such circumstances His Majesty's Government could not guarantee that they would not be forced by circumstances to become involved also."[50] The two states' reactions were sent no later than 21st May, representing that they signaled the on-time deterrence for the threat they had perceived.

The US reaction toward the May Crisis was hesitant in contrast to France and Britain. On 21st May, while the US Ambassador in Berlin Hugh Wilson reported Czechoslovakia's partial mobilization, he asked for permission to show the US concern to the related states.[51] Although Wilson's suggestion was mild, only planning to mention that the US was concerned about the dangerous situation and emphasized the US only interest was the preservation of peace, the US Secretary of State Cordell Hull declined his advice, claiming that "for the present at least a simultaneous approach to Berlin and Praha would not be advisable" on 22nd May.[52] Hull was committed to this claim. While Bonnet asked the US ambassador in France whether the US could pressure the Czechoslovak

[49] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p. 340.
[50] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p. 331-332.
[51] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938, Vol. I,* p. 506-507.
[52] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938, Vol. I,* p. 515.

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government for more concession toward Germany, Hull had no reply.[53] On 28th May, only after the crisis was over, Hull finally made a statement about the situation in Central Europe without specifying which states were concerned or what had actually happened.[54] The US was satisfied with the non-entanglement policy, remaining hands-off from both the offensive and the defensive sides of European affairs (Baker, 1971: 54).

In September, when the tension between Czechoslovakia and Germany reached its climax, the US finally got involved in the event, yet the action the US took was far away from taking any real responsibility. The US reaction to the Munich Crisis could be divided into two stages: before Hitler's Godesberg ultimatum on 23rd and to the conclusion of the Munich Agreement on 30th (Farnham, 1992: 208). Before the Godesberg ultimatum, the US was reluctant to be embroiled in the conflict. When predicting the European situation on 18th, Roosevelt asserted that Chamberlain was seeking peace for any prices, and Czechoslovakia would be abandoned to face German aggression on its own (Ickes, 1954: 468). After the unfruitful meeting in Berchtesgaden between Chamberlain and Hitler, Roosevelt updated his prediction about a higher probability of a European major war (Farnham, 1992: 210). Roosevelt met with the British ambassador in US Ronald Lindsay, suggesting the upcoming war should utilize blockade and be conducted in a

[53] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938, Vol. I,* p. 519-520.
[54] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938, Vol. I,* p. 520-521.

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defensive manner. Lindsay depicted Roosevelt during the meeting as:[55]

> *Today he would not dare to express approval of the recommendations put to the Czechoslovak Government. He would be afraid to express disapproval of German aggression lest it might encourage Czechoslovakia to vain resistance. He thus felt unable to do anything and thought at his press conference tomorrow (he has postponed the last two) he would confine himself to refusing to make any comment at all.*

In spite of close observation and concern, the US did not implement any practical policy toward the conflict.

In the second stage, the US non-entanglement policy was shaken, but the effort the US made was still associated with a strong isolationist color. Hitler issued the ultimatum requiring Czechoslovakia to withdraw its whole authorities from the Sudetenland, to hand over the whole region without any damage, to discharge all Sudeten German from Czechoslovak military and police, and to release all German political prisoners in the Godesberg Referendum on 23rd evening.[56] The request, described by the US ambassador in France William Christian Bullitt at 25th, was "totally unacceptable...I could not see how any Government could conceivably accept such a proposal."[57] Czechoslovakia informed

[55] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. VII,* p. 627-629.
[56] *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Ser. D, Vol. II,* p. 908-910.
[57] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938, Vol. I,* p. 648-649.

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Britain of rejecting Hitler's Godesberg ultimatum on 25th.[58] In the meeting with the British envoy Horace Wilson, Hitler issued the ultimatum that whether Czechoslovakia must accept the Godesberg term before 2 p.m. on 28th or Germany will clear the disputed territory by force.[59]

Roosevelt initially was still indifferent to the European crisis. At a cabinet meeting on 23rd afternoon, Roosevelt was depicted as "there is no doubt of the President's desire to avoid any embroilment in European quarrels (Ickes, 1954: 472-473)." However, the news from Godesberg changed Roosevelt's mind (Farnham, 1992: 214-215). Roosevelt took a step forward to the Munich Crisis, sending a message on 26th to Hitler with copies to the leaders of Czechoslovakia, France, and Britain. In the message intending to urge for peace, the US still restrained itself from being dragged into the crisis, emphasizing that "the United States has no political entanglements" and "whatever may be the differences in the controversies at issue and however difficult of pacific settlement they may be, I am persuaded that there is no problem so difficult or so pressing for solution that it cannot be justly solved by the resort to reason rather than by the resort to force."[60] The US showed its concern but provided no commitment. The US message placed Czechoslovakia and Germany on the same status, which ignored the two states'

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[58] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 518-519.
[59] *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Ser. D, Vol.II,* p. 554-557.
[60] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938, Vol. I,* p. 657-658.

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inequitable responsibility for precipitating the crisis (Caquet, 2019: 171).

The first US message did not solve the crisis. Hitler replied to Roosevelt on 27th. The letter mentioned the historical complex between Czechoslovakia and Germany emotionally and concluded with a tough assertion: "[t]he possibilities of arriving at a just settlement by agreement are therefore exhausted with the proposals of the German memorandum. It now rests, not with the German Government, but with the Czechoslovak Government alone, to decide if they want peace or war."[61] Although the first message was futile, on 27th, Roosevelt joined the request to Mussolini that asked him to collectively persuade Hitler for extending the negotiation with Britain and France.[62] On the same day, Roosevelt sent the second message to Hitler, which the words slightly stronger than the previous one. While pointing out the dispute between Czechoslovakia and Germany should be solved peacefully, the US asserted that using force that could generate a major war "is as unnecessary as it is unjustifiable."[63] However, the US still refused to intervene in the turmoil with the clear expression: "the Government of the United States has no political involvements in Europe, and will assume no obligations in the conduct of the present negotiations."[64]

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[61] *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Ser. D, Vol.II,* p. 960-962.

[62] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938, Vol. I,* p. 677. About Italy's reply, see the previous section about Italy.

[63] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938, Vol. I,* p. 684-685.

[64] Ibid.

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Looking through US diplomacy on European affairs, the buck-passing strategy with strong isolationist color was prominent. The US was the most powerful state in the international system in 1938. If counted by the net indicator, the US had a roughly half share of the whole system. In contrast to its strength, the US primary diplomatic goal is to avoid getting embroiled in European disputes, which appeared in almost all critical international conflicts in the 1930s. The goal, substantially influenced by domestic isolationism, fits well to the distancing policy of buck-passing strategy. By distancing from other involved agents, taking no clear stand and averting from collaborating with other states, the US effectively took its hands off the European struggles and left the problems to other defensive powers to solve. The US implemented a pacifying policy toward Germany in the meantime. The US prevented itself from provoking Germany. In the Jews issue after Anschluss, the US restrained itself from raising the problem to the official agenda. The words that Roosevelt sent to Hitler during the Munich Crisis were deliberately mild and restrained as well.

Several factors facilitated the US buck-passing strategy. As a distant regional hegemon, the US enjoys the luxury of being geographically separated from the aggressor by the ocean. The multipolar system in the 1930s could still be deemed as balanced until 1938. Regarding the US perception of defense-offense balance, Roosevelt believed it was defensive-advantageous in 1938. When discussing the tactics in a possible European war

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on 17th September 1938, Roosevelt claimed that it would be difficult for Britain, France, Germany, and the Soviet Union to conduct effective offensive strike (Ickes, 1954: 468):

> *"He [Roosevelt] doesn't think that France could penetrate the German frontier. It would cost France a million men to do this. Neither could Germany overcome the Maginot Line of defense which the French have been assiduous in building since the Treaty of Versailles. Russia cannot strike effectively at Germany across Romania. Neither could England be effective so far as an army is concerned."*

Roosevelt also emphasized the importance for Europe to conduct a defensive war.[65] These factors all contributed to the US adoption of the buck-passing strategy.

A brief conclusion to the US role in the Munich Crisis and the broader 1930s was the buck-passer with isolationist color. Even when the non-entanglement policy was easing on the second stage of the Munich Crisis, the US still provided no guarantee or commitment to European affairs, claiming it had no political involvement in Europe. While trying to maintain the peace without political involvement, the US retreated from being the payer of the cost of peace. However, unless the aggressor deliberately stops, the price must be paid. The real question is who the payer is. Apparently, the US was not.

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[65] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. VII,* p. 627-629; Ickes, Harold L. 1954. *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The inside Struggle 1936–1939.* Vol. II. New York: Simon and Schuster. p. 474.

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4.1.2.3. France: From Commitment to Buck-passing

Before investigating the concrete foreign policy of France, it is worthwhile to have a quick look at France's geography and relative power. Among other defensive great powers, France was the only state that shared the border with Germany. Regarding the relative power compared to Germany, France was slightly inferior to Germany in the first three years of the 1930s, with a share gap of less than two percent in both CNIC and net indicators. However, after 1934, the relative power gap expanded. In 1938, Germany was three times more than France on the CNIC index and two times more on the net indicator. Along with the fragile geographical location and deteriorated power gap, the historical struggle between France and Germany intensified the tension as well. The relationship between France and Germany from the Franco-Prussian War to the outbreak of World War II is prevalently depicted as "heredity enmity (Marcowitz, 2008: 19-20; Krotz, 2014: 338-340)." The mutual perception of hostility and the restraint to Germany imposed by the post-World War I international settlement impeded the rapprochement between the two states. France was naturally the one that was the most sensitive to the rising German threat among the great powers.

French foreign policy posited Germany as its primary foe throughout the whole inter-war period. After the end of World War I, while restraining Germany by the strict terms in the Treaty of Versailles, France backed up the formation of the Little Entente, the

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defensive alliance among Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia nowadays). As the reinforcement of the alliance, France respectively signed the bilateral treaties to the three states in the Little Entente. In its bilateral relations with Czechoslovakia, France signed the Treaty of Alliance and Friendship in 1924, which the article I regulated a soft demand for the two states to concert their action regarding the security issue.[66]

Shortly after one year, France's commitment to Czechoslovakia was reinforced by the conclusion of the Mutual Guarantee Treaty as a part of the Locarno Pacts in 1925.[67] Among the Locarno negotiation, Germany signed the Treaty of Mutual Guarantee, which ensured the territorial status quo of its frontier between France and between Belgium would not be violated with the guarantee by all five contracting parties.[68] Germany also signed the Arbitration Treaty with Czechoslovakia, regulating that the two states should submit the problem they cannot solve peacefully to the arbitral tribunal or to the Permanent Court of International Justice.[69] On the basis of the two treaties, France and

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[66] *Treaty of Alliance and Friendship between France and Czechoslovakia, Locarno,* Jan. 25, 1924, *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 23, No. 1298, p. 361, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%2023/v23.pdf

[67] *Treaty of Mutual Guarantee between France and Czechoslovakia,* Locarno, Oct. 16, 1925, *League of Nations Treaty Series,* vol. 54, No. 1298, p. 359-363, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%2054/v54.pdf

[68] Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain, and Italy were the five contracting parties of the treaty. For the full text of the treaty, *see: Treaty of Mutual Guarantee between Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain and Italy*, Locarno, Oct. 16, 1925., *League of Nations Treaty Series,* vol. 54, No. 1292, p. 291-301, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%2054/v54.pdf

[69] *Arbitration Treaty between Germany and Czechoslovakia,* Oct. 16, 1925., *League of Nations Treaty Series,* vol. 54, No. 1296, p. 343-351, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%2054/v54.pdf

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Czechoslovakia concluded the Mutual Guarantee Treaty, in which the first article prescribed that if Germany violated the treaty signed with one state, the other state should "undertake to lend each other immediate aid and assistance." [70] By providing reaffirmation on its status quo territorial boundary, Germany pronounced its sovereignty over Rhineland and hoped to alter the Allied occupation on Rhineland (Wright, 1995: 121-122). For France, the Locarno pacts confirmed its gain from the victory of World War I. The treaty between Czechoslovakia was also a part of restraining German expansion. Nevertheless, France's mutual guarantee commitment to Czechoslovakia prescribed the legal duty to defend Czechoslovakia under German aggression, which put France under trial after several years.

When Hitler gained power and became the German Chancellor in 1933, France's reaction was surprisingly mild. France was struggling with the economic turndown facilitated by the Great Depression and the domestic political trend of disarmament at the juncture, although the French intelligence services had indicated that the Nazis advocated rearmament and expansion (Jackson, 1998: 796). France's potential ally, Britain, regarded not Germany but France as the cause of instability and sympathized with Germany (Jackson, 1998: 821). France's unresponsiveness did not affect Germany's rearmament

[70] *Treaty of Alliance and Friendship between France and Czechoslovakia, Locarno,* Jan. 25, 1924, *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 23, No. 1298, p. 361, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%2023/v23.pdf

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policy under the Nazi regime. After three years, the remilitarization of Rhineland challenged the status quo that France craved to preserve.

The 1936 remilitarization of Rhineland was a significant step on Germany's road to expansion, which symbolized the end of the Locarno order and a grave frustration of France's attempt to preserve the status quo settled by World War I. The first reaction of France's cabinet to alleged Germany's plan to remilitarize Rhineland was tough. The French Prime Minister Albert Sarraut testified to the French Senate that France would not accept remilitarization "under any circumstances" on 6th March (Schuker, 1986: 315). However, the French military section leaders did not back the cabinet's assertion. Resulted from the disarmament in the previous years, the French military budget declined 17 percent from 1930 to 1934, and the progress of the construction of Maginot lines was behind schedule (Schuker, 1986: 318-319). The French general Maurice Gamelin confessed that there was no feasible unilateral offensive plan to rescue Saar from German occupation, and Germany was dominant on the military dimension compared to France solely (Ripsman & Levy, 2007: 49). While France sought British aid, Britain was reluctant to get involved in the conflict. Britain regarded that the fall of the Versailles order was inevitable and expressed that Britain would take action only when the contracting parties of the Locarno Pacts jointly decided upon the issue (Parker, 1956: 359). Standing alone without British support, France was not able to stop Germany from

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reclaiming Rhineland.

It is worth mentioning that France and the Soviet Union reached a rapprochement in the 1930s.[71] Preventing the Soviet Union from stepping back to the road of collaborating with Germany, which the Treaty of Rapallo represented, France tried to reconcile with the Soviet Union, the attempt that suited the collective security policy the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov promoted. France signed a Non-aggression Pact with the Soviet Union in 1932, and the Treaty of Mutual Assistance between France and the Soviet Union was concluded in 1935.[72] From the text of the Mutual Assistance Treaty, France and the Soviet Union reached a defensive alliance, which regulated if one state were under unprovoked aggression, "the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and reciprocally France shall immediately come to each other's aid and assistance."[73] The signature of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance was also the excuse for Germany to remilitarize Rhineland, accusing "it is an undisputed fact that the Franco-Soviet pact is exclusively directed against Germany" and the signature of the treaty "has

[71] The Franco-Soviet relations in the 1930s will be discussed in the following section about the Soviet Union as well from the Soviet's perspective.

[72] *Pact of Non-Aggression between France and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,* Paris, Nov. 29, 1932, *League of Nations Treaty Series,* vol. 157, No. 3615, p. 411-419, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%20157/v157.pdf; *Treaty of Mutual Assistance between France and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,* Paris, May 2, 1935, *League of Nations Treaty Series,* vol. 167, No. 3881, p. 395-406, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%20167/v167.pdf

[73] *Treaty of Mutual Assistance between France and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,* Paris, May 2, 1935, *League of Nations Treaty Series,* vol. 167, No. 3881, p. 395-406, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%20167/v167.pdf

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destroyed the political system of the Rhine Pact, not only in theory but also in fact."[74] Although France and the Soviet Union reached rapprochement, it did not indicate that the two states had established an intimate collaboration. It was more France's strategy to keep the Soviet Union away from Germany than a true partnership (Haslam, 1984: 203-231). Britain was still the prominent potential ally France craved to earn its friendship. The amicable relationship between France and the Soviet Union was also put through the ordeal of the Spanish Civil War burst out in July 1936. Under the pressure of the British's demand on following the non-intervention principle, the French Popular Front government set an embargo on the exportation of arms to Spain and proposed the non-intervention argument, the policy that reversed the previous policy of sending arms to the Republican side, which the Soviet Union supported (Gallagher, 1971: 56-57; Stone, 1979: 129-133). The Spanish Civil War also aroused the fear of the spread of Communism in France (Carley, 2015: 12-14; Haslam, 1984: 231).

France's guideline in its foreign policy on the 1938 crisis between Germany and Czechoslovakia was clear: tying Britain on the same boat of defending Czechoslovakia. Back in February 1937, the French Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos had explained France's reactions toward two scenarios of German expansion to the US ambassador in France

[74] *German Memorandum Respecting the Termination of the Treaty of Locarno and the Re-Occupation of the Demilitarised Zone in the Rhineland*, London, Mar. 7, 1936, *British and Foreign State Paper*, vol. 140, p. 518-521, available from https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015049924569

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Bullitt: in case of Germany invading Czechoslovakia, France was committed to fighting due to the past promise; in case of the Anschluss issue, "France had no obligations to protect Austria."[75] France was also seeking the British promise to intervene in the Czechoslovak issue. Delbos had told the British ambassador in France George Clerk that France would fight if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia around February 1937, and Clerk replied that "then we'll all be dragged in."[76] Delbos urged Britain for the promise to intervene again in a meeting with the new British ambassador in France Eric Phipps on 30th April, and Phipps replied that Britain would not make this kind of commitment in advance and would act contingently to the situation if Germany really invaded Czechoslovakia. The interaction between France and Britain in 1937 captured France's difficulty in the Czechoslovak affair: on the one hand, France admitted that it had committed to safeguarding Czechoslovakia; on the other hand, the military action against Germany was only desirable under the collaboration with Britain.

France kept its words in the first trial of the May Crisis. Germany annexed Austria in March 1938 with feeble reactions from France and Britain, although the Treaty of Versailles had prohibited such annexation. When Czechoslovakia accused that Germany concentrated army in the German border and thus launched partial mobilization

[75] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1937, Vol. I,* p. 46-54.
[76] Ibid.

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accomplished on 21st May, France responded timely and firmly, warning Germany that France would honor its treaty obligation, coming to aid Czechoslovakia, and Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia territory would automatically start the war.[77] In fact, Phipps described that the French Foreign Minister Bonnet's after hearing the alleged German mobilization in the Czechoslovakia border was "only too anxious to follow any lead we may give at Prague with a view to averting war."[78]

France's attempts to keep its words not only worked on the side of Germany but also on Czechoslovakia, and the French pressure on Czechoslovakia became harsher and harsher throughout 1938. Collaborated with Britain, France asked Czechoslovakia to make the concession that could satisfy the SdP and Germany to avoid the war that could drag it in. In the May Crisis, when deterred Germany, France and Britain jointly demanded Czechoslovakia for no further mobilization unless consulting with them.[79] On 20th July, when Britain informed Beneš that Britain had launched the Runciman Mission, scheduling to send Walter Runciman as the British envoy to mediate the Sudetenland issue, the Czechoslovak President was shocked, claiming that it was beyond his constitutional competence and he would need to consult with France.[80] However, on the

[77] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p. 336-337, 340.
[78] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p. 336-337.
[79] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third. Vol. I,* p. 336.
[80] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third. Vol. I,* p. 600-601.

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same day, Phipps met with Bonnet and the French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier, and they both agreed with the Brtish proposal for mediation.[81]

The mediation by Runciman was destined to be an unfruitful effort. The SdP leader Konrad Henlein had been ordered by Hitler in his Berlin Visit on 28th March to ask for unacceptable demands to the Czechoslovak government. “We must always demand so much that we cannot be satisfied,” Henlein summarized with Hitler’s confirmation.[82] Under Runciman’s mediation, Beneš conceded to consent on forming an autonomous territory in the Sudetenland in his 24th August proposal, which he had been rejected throughout the previous negotiation; however, the SdP still refused to accept, claiming that the German people were divided into three cantons by the proposal (Lukes, 1996: 185-186). On the same day, the French Ambassador in Berlin told the Czechoslovak Ambassador in Berlin that it was critical for Czechoslovak to agree on whatever Runciman suggested, or France was not able to militarily defend Czechoslovakia from German destruction no matter the ultimate result of war (Lukes, 1996: 189-190). Runciman, as a supposed impartial mediator, ironically warned Beneš on 3rd September that “if it came to choice between acceptance of Karlsbad programme or war he [Beneš] should be under no illusion as to what British choice would be.”[83]

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[81] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third. Vol. I,* p. 601-603.
[82] *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Ser. D, Vol.II,* p. 197-199.
[83] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 221.

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Under the pressure of Runciman, on 5th September, Beneš finally accepted all the requirements that the SdP proposed in the Karlsbad programme; however, the SdP leaders found the excuse of the conflicts in Moravská Ostrava and withdrew from the negotiation on 7th.[84] The situation deteriorated dramatically. On 12th, Hitler requested Suteden German's self-determination and implied to use force if Czechoslovakia refused; the Sudeten German paramilitary organization Freiwilliger Schutzdienst (latter succeeded by Sudetendeutsches Freikorps) started to raise commotions under the command of the SdP; and the Czechoslovak government imposed martial law to resume the order (Caquet, 2019: 89-94).

France could not have formed a clear consensus on how to respond to the new German threat initially. The Czechoslovak Ambassador in France on 13th reported that the French cabinet was divided on whether France should surrender a plebiscite under German pressure, and the French Prime Minister Daladier and Foreign Minister Bonnet were on each side of the vote; France officially could have only reasserted that France would aid Czechoslovakia if it were under attacked (Caquet, 2019: 101-102). The repeatedly-stated French commitment to Czechoslovakia was shattered at 16th when the French Ambassador in Czechoslovakia warned Beneš that Bonnet "was preparing a

[84] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 675-679.

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backdoor to treason (Lukes, 1996: 175).” On the Anglo-French conversation at London on 18th, in contrast to Chamberlain betting all hopes on his scheduled negotiation with Hitler, Daladier rejected the idea of self-determination, arguing that plebiscite was “a weapon with which the German Government could keep Central Europe in a constant state of alarm and suspense” and Hitler would employ the same logic to other states after Czechoslovak concession.[85] Daladier also clearly asserted that France was bound to support Czechoslovakia under unprovoked aggression by the obligation derived from the Mutual Guarantee Treaty. “[N]o Frenchman could avoid doing his duty,” Daladier commented.[86] However, Daladier did not oppose Britain’s approach to pressure Czechoslovakia for concessions that would have possibly satisfied Germany. Daladier agreed on demanding Czechoslovakia for the cession of territories in Sudetenland to Germany. At the same time, both Daladier and Bonnet asked Britain to guarantee the neutrality of Czechoslovakia after its sacrifice.[87]

On 19th September, the joint message derived from the Anglo-French conversation was sent to Prague, clearly stating that the European peace “cannot effectively be assured unless these areas are now transferred to the Reich.”[88] As payback, the joint message

[85] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 373-400.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 404-406.

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promised that Britain would guarantee the new Czechoslovakia boundaries against unprovoked aggression.[89] When Beneš heard the message, he was agitated and felt that the new promised guarantee was unattractable since the old one by France had been proved valueless.[90] In order to hear the reply before Chamberlain met Hitler at Bad Godesberg, both France and Britain pressured Czechoslovakia to comply with their demands and urged Czechoslovakia to reply immediately, even not allowing it to consult with parliament.[91] In the discussion inside the French cabinet, the French cabinet unanimously agreed on the content of the joint message and even suggested the menace to retreat from the Mutual Guarantee Treaty if Czechoslovakia denied the proposal.[92]

On the evening of 20th September, Czechoslovakia officially declined the Anglo-French proposal, examining the reasons including Czechoslovakia had not participated in the discussion and the Czechoslovak parliament needed to be consulted, and appealed to apply the problem to arbitration through the Arbitration Treaty signed with Germany.[93] The Czechoslovak refusal, nevertheless, lasted even shorter than one day. After receiving the Czechoslovak refusal, on 2 a.m. 21st, the British and French Ambassadors in Czechoslovakia visited Beneš, expressing the ultimatum that issued by their respective

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[89] Ibid.
[90] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 416-417.
[91] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 406, 419, 426-427.
[92] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 420.
[93] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 431-434.

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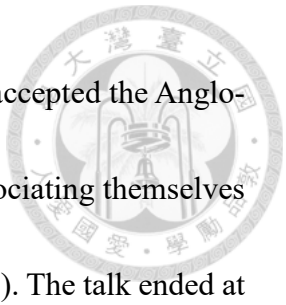

government that if Czechoslovakia did not withdraw the refusal and accepted the Anglo-French proposal, the two states would abandon Czechoslovakia, dissociating themselves from the previous treaty and the current crisis (Caquet, 2019: 108-109). The talk ended at 3:45 a.m. with Beneš's promise that Czechoslovakia's final answer would be given at mid-day.[94] Before 5 p.m., the British and French Ambassadors in Czechoslovakia were handed the note from the Czechoslovak government, which recorded that Czechoslovakia accepted the Anglo-French proposal under the two states' attitudes about if Czechoslovak refused the proposal and were attacked by Germany as a result, "with feelings of grief."[95]

The Britain-French proposal did not move Hitler. During Hitler's meeting with Chamberlin on 23rd, he issued the Godesberg Memorandum, which the French Ambassador in Czechoslovakia depicted as "enormity" and the "assassination of Czechoslovakia (Caquet, 2019: 154)". The ultimatum also aroused France's enmity to Germany.[96] French Council of Ministers unanimously declined the request of plebiscite in the Godesberg terms.[97] Czechoslovakia officially turned down the Godesberg ultimatum on 25th. On the same day, during the Anglo-French conversation held in London, Daladier appealed to demand Hitler to return to the Anglo-French proposal.

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[94] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 438.
[95] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 444-445, 447.
[96] *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Ser. D, Vol.II,* p. 938-939.
[97] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 520-535.

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Asked by Chamberlain about the response if Hitler refused, Daladier replied, "in that case each of us would have to do his duty."[98] Replying to Chamberlain's question about whether France would declare war on Germany if Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, Daladier clearly asserted that "in the event of unprovoked aggression against Czechoslovakia, France would fulfill her obligations."[99] In the end, in the letter Chamberlain sent to Hitler as the result of the Anglo-French conversation, Britain did not endorse the Godesberg terms, only mentioning that Czechoslovakia had already accepted the cession of the Sudetenland and a peaceful negotiation could be reached by the representatives from Germany and Czechoslovakia.

However, when facing Hitler's aggressive diplomacy, threatening whether Czechoslovakia accepted the Godesberg term by 28th or war, both Britain and France backed down. Under the joint requests by Italy, Germany, France, Britain, and the US, Hitler agreed to extend the negotiation and held the Munich Conference with the representatives from the four powers without Czechoslovakia: Germany, Italy, Britain, and France. During the Munich conference on 29th, under the pressure of an imminent major war, France and Britain conceded on almost all demands in the Godesberg Memorandum, including releasing Sudeten German from police and military forces and

[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

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freeing all Sudeten German political prisoners.[100] Furthermore, the territorial cession that the Munich Agreement prescribed even encompassed more lands that Hitler had demanded in the Godesberg Memorandum, including numerous cities with a preponderant proportion of Czech inhabitants (Lukes, 1996: 252). France was neither keeping the promise entailed by the Mutual Guarantee Treaty to safeguard Czechoslovakia under unprovoked aggression nor sticking to the Anglo-French proposal the had already demanded Czechoslovakia's significant concessions as the bottom line in the negotiation.

The history of France's behavior from the Locarno pacts to the Munich Agreement revealed that France had been insisting on the balancing strategy toward Germany for more than a decade but finally capitulated and adopted the buck-passing strategy in September 1938. The consolidation of Central Europe against possible German aggression was the original goal of the French support to the Little Entente. The bilateral relationship with Czechoslovakia was fortified further by the Mutual Guarantee Treaty under the Locarno order, aiming to stop Germany's expansion on its eastern frontier. Nevertheless, the alliance with Czechoslovakia targeting Germany also entailed France's duty to safeguard its smaller ally, which became the central issue in its diplomacy after

[100] *Agreement Signed at Munich between Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy,* Munich, September 29, 1938, *Documents on German Foreign Policy,* 1918-1945, Ser. D, vol. 2, No. 675, p. 1014-1016, available from https://books.google.com.tw/books?id=jwNJAQAAIAAJ

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Hitler seized power.

France's option of taking a balancing strategy against Germany heavily relied on Britain's attitude after the Nazis ruled Germany. The enlarged power gap between France and Germany in the 1930s determined that a solely French balancing against Germany was both undesirable and infeasible; France could risk entangling itself to a major war in defending Czechoslovakia only when acquiring the promise of British intervention. At the same time, France needed to pressure Czechoslovakia to make concessions to minimize the possibility of war. These constituted a three-fold pattern on French foreign policy on Czechoslovakia issue in the latter half of the 1930s: (1) France needed to reaffirm its promise to Czechoslovakia for restraining Germany and its own international reputation, (2) France yearned for British help due to the power gap with Germany, and (3) France was compelled to pressure Czechoslovakia to make concession toward Germany for both minimizing the probability that required France to fight for Czechoslovakia and coordinating with British policies. The pattern repeatedly appeared in French diplomacy concerning the Czechoslovak issue until September 1938, the month that France capitulated from insisting on the balancing strategy and adopted a buck-passing strategy to pacify Germany at all costs.

The pattern could be found in most Czechoslovakia-related events in 1938. France, failing to stop Germany from remilitarizing the Rhineland and Anschluss, reacted firmly

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and timely in the May Crisis coordinating with Britain, although it was partially due to Germany did not prepare to conflict at that moment. France consented to the Runciman mission and the following British pressure on Czechoslovakia. Responding to Hitler's implication of using force, France was divided internally but still reaffirmed its promise to Czechoslovakia externally at 13th. During the Anglo-French conversation on 18th, despite claiming that it was bound to defend Czechoslovakia, France acquiesced to the British suggestion of asking Czechoslovakia to cede its territory. After Czechoslovakia declined the Britain-French proposal on 20th, France collaborated with Britain to pressure Czechoslovakia to withdraw the refusal by claiming that France would abandon Czechoslovakia and dissociate itself from the crisis. At the moment that France menaced Czechoslovakia with retreating from its treaty obligation, the French strategy could hardly be called balancing. Facing the German deterrence of using force, France did not respond with deterring back, reaffirming its legal duty toward Czechoslovakia, but pressuring its ally to cede territory, the essential element of sovereignty, with the menace to retreat from a binding treaty. This symbolized the intrinsic change of French strategy from balancing to pacifying Germany at its ally's high cost.

The later development in September was more tragic. Although Czechoslovakia agreed on the Anglo-French proposal, Hitler still requested more in his Godesberg Memorandum. In spite of France claiming the necessity for resorting force on the Anglo-

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French conversation at 25th, under Hitler's ultimatum, France eventually signed on the Munich Agreement, which gave Germany more than it previously required. Once France had betrayed its ally, there was a limited reason not to betray again at the cost of others' sacrifice. France had insisted on the balancing strategy on the Czechoslovak issue, but it eventually adopted the buck-passing strategy to pacify Germany in the end. Beneš's mourning after hearing the accords of the Munich Agreement depicted the transition of French policy and how it damaged Czechoslovakia: "Unbelievable, unbelievable.... Horror. Such French treason. They betrayed us completely (Lukes, 1996: 253)."

4.1.2.4. Britain: Partnership, Pacifying, and Buck-passing

Despite concerting its action with France in most events concerning the Czechoslovak issue, Britain held different interests and thus followed a distinct guideline on its foreign policy. Unlike France situated adjacent to Germany, Britain was divided from the European continent by the English Channel. Britain did not face the pressure of German expansion on the front line. There were two vital interests in Britain's European diplomacy in the inter-war period. The first was to prevent a European hegemon. As an offshore balancer, the most dreadful challenge Britain could have faced was to be threatened by a European hegemon that reigned the whole continent. Therefore, Britain had to intervene the European affairs to preserve the balance of power, preventing any

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potential hegemon from dominating the European continent. The second was to avoid getting involved in a costly conflict. The British diplomacy in the inter-war period was not confined to Europe. The Japanese Naval expansion imposed risk on the British commercial route in East Asia (Moul, 1985: 749-750). Britain needed to allocate its limited resources to different regions and tasks. Getting involved in a costly conflict would have damaged the capability that Britain relied on ruling its vast lands of imperial.

The two interests, however, had an internal tension when it came to how to deal with its potential ally. Britain's most crucial possible ally was France during the inter-war period, especially after Germany emerged as a formidable foe with its rearmament program starting in 1936 (Layne, 2008: 405-406; Mathews, 1941: 351-352). Although Britain and France's cooperation was not formalized in a legally bound treaty of alliance, Britain and France concerted their policies in most critical issues related to German expansion.[101] Britain needed France to combat Germany at the front line, and France also craved British support on checking the opponent that could hardly handle by itself alone. On the goal of preventing a European hegemon, Britain heavily hinged on its relationship with France, which was destined to be the primal German foe due to geography and past

[101] The institutionalization of the cooperation between Britain and France was fulfilled only after the summer of 1938 as the Supreme War Council. For more details about the Anglo-French Supreme War Council, *see:* Philpott, William J. 2002. "The Benefit of Experience? The Supreme War Council and the Higher Management of Coalition War, 1939–40." In *Anglo-French Defence Relations between the Wars*, eds. Martin S. Alexander and William James Philpott. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 209-226.

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historical implications. Nevertheless, with the goal of avoiding getting involved in a costly conflict, Britain feared that it would have been dragged into the conflict by its commitment toward France. This tension constituted the fundamental pattern of British diplomacy in the 1930s: while ensuring its diplomatic presence on restraining German expansion, Britain refused to give France a clear continental commitment. This tension intensified when France tried to honor its commitment toward its Eastern ally Czechoslovakia. For Britain, the partnership with France was too important that can hardly be replaced or discarded. Britain had few choices but to support France if France was under German's attack. However, when it came to France's commitment toward its ally, the situation was more convoluted. On the one hand, a pure non-involvement policy would have deteriorated its partnership with France, undermined the French capability to restrain Germany, and allowed Germany to expand effortlessly. On the other hand, a full guarantee on French commitment could have overly bolstered France's confrontation with Germany and made the conflict more likely to happen. The tension between the two vital interests dominated British diplomacy in the late 1930s.

In the 1920s, unlike the Soviet Union and France, Britain was not keen on making alliances. One of the most prominent presence of British diplomacy in European affairs was the signature of the Locarno pact of 1925. Britain guaranteed on the status quo

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territorial borderline among Germany, France, and Belgium.[102] Britain aimed to reconcile France and Germany by the Locarno pact on the basis that without guarantee, France could have felt insecure and therefore provoked Germany into a conflict that might have dragged Britain down, like France's attempt in the occupation of Ruhr (Jacobson, 2004: 33). While providing a guarantee on French territory, Britain was reluctant to engage in the Eastern European disputes. Britain's presence in the Locarno pact was regarded as the substitution of the draft of a mutual assistance treaty between France and Britain and the Geneva Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes, highlighting that Britain would have only guaranteed France's frontier with no further extension (Macgee, 1995: 6-13). Jacobson (2004: 15) depicted British policy in the conclusion of the Locarno pact as "formal non-alignment, limited commitment, conciliation and negotiated rapprochement."

Britain did not regard Germany as a formidable threat to European peace and mobilized limited resources for containing Germany in the initial years after Hitler became the German Chancellor. Although jointly forming the Stresa Front with France and Italy for restraining Germany on the Anschluss issue in April 1935, Britain concluded

[102] Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain, and Italy were the contracting parties of the treaty. For the full text of the treaty, *see: Treaty of Mutual Guarantee between Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain and Italy*, Locarno, Oct. 16, 1925., *League of Nations Treaty Series,* vol. 54, No. 1292, p. 291-301, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%2054/v54.pdf

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the Anglo-German Naval Agreement after just two months.[103] According to the agreement, Britain acknowledged Germany to expand its naval strength to 35% of the British naval. For Britain, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement could have alleviated the security challenge at that time—poor economy, declining fleet size, the rise of Germany and Japan's relative power, and the US isolationism (Salerno, 1994: 51). However, France regarded the agreement as a revision to the Versailles order and a violation of the Stresa front, feeling that it "sacrificed on the altar of British egoism (Salerno, 1994: 54-55)". In the following year, Germany remilitarized the Rhineland. While being fully aware that the German remilitarization of the Rhineland could undermine the French commitment to its Eastern ally, Britain did not support France's plan of using forces, regarding the fall of the Versailles order was inevitable and promising to intervene only when all Locarno pact signing parties jointly consented (Parker, 1956: 356-359; Schuker, 1986: 313-314). When the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936, Britain implemented the non-involvement policy. Fearing to be dragged into the conflict by France, Britain pressured France to withdraw its support to the Republican side, which confronted the Nationalist side backed by Germany and Italy (Stone, 1979: 129-133).

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[103] *Joint Anglo-Franco-Italian Resolution on European Affairs, Stresa*, Apr.14, 1935, *British and Foreign State Paper*s, vol. 139, p. 756-758, available from https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015049924551&view=1up&seq=774&skin=2021; *Exchange of Notes between the United Kingdom and Germany Regarding the Limitation of Naval Armaments,* London, June 18, 1935, *British and Foreign State Paper*s, vol. 139, p. 182-185, available from https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015049924551&view=1up&seq=200&skin=2021

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A new stage of British security policy was unveiled when Neville Chamberlain became the British Prime Minister. Chamberlain ordered a defense review in 1937, and the British cabinet approved the review report in February 1938. The review report suggested that Britain should have invested resources in strengthening the Royal Air Force in the first place and the Royal Naval in the second place; the section of the land army was sacrificed (McKercher, 2017: 276). Chamberlain's decision on allocating resources has been characterized as balancing with priority or "targeted balancing" in recent years, which targeted Germany, especially Luftwaffe, as the gravest challenge of Britain's security (Lobell, 2012: 760-766; Layne, 2008: 399-401). Britain's oriented rearmament policy sacrificed the land army, which constituted the background of British diplomacy on the Czechoslovak issue. The land power gap fostered British pacifying policy toward Germany—avoided the conflicts by pursuing "better relations with the dictators (Layne, 2008: 409-415; McKercher, 2017: 276)."

The trial of Britain's new security policy was initiated in May 1938. When Germany annexed Austria in March, no strong action but only verbal condemnation came from Britain. Although The Treaty of Versailles prohibited Anschluss, neither Britain nor France possessed vital interests in or was committed to defending Austria. Britain was inconceivable to protect Austria by force, and using force to alter the reunification of Germany and Austria under the flag of national self-determination was unwise in politics

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(McKercher, 2017: 286). However, the situation was different in the May Crisis. France explicitly committed to defending Czechoslovakia under unprovoked aggression, and Czechoslovakia was an essential ally in French encirclement toward Germany. Although Britain did not provide any prior commitment to Czechoslovakia, when Czechoslovakia came into crisis, Britain still needed to evaluate the partnership with France, including France's capability to contain Germany and France's perception of Britain's commitment, and the risk of being dragged into the war toward formidable Germany by France's commitment.

On its timely reaction toward the alleged German troop concentration on the Czechoslovak border on 21st May, Britain externally provided an implicit guarantee expressing to Germany that France was resolved to intervene if Germany invaded Czechoslovakia due to its commitment, and in that situation, Britain "could not guarantee that they would not be forced by circumstances to become involved also."[104] Britain's reaction conformed to its foreign policy. When asked about the alleged military concentration, the very first reaction from the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop on 20th May was "the rumors as nonsense" because "Germany had no ulterior designs."[105] The response from Ribbentrop at least indicated that Germany did not wish

[104] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p. 336-337.
[105] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p.323.

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to bring the issue of invasion publicly, no matter whether it was concealment. In this situation, deterring Germany from its possible further aggression was the option that could have satisfied the British need of both intensifying the partnership with France and avoiding entanglement. On the basis that Germany possessed no genuine intention to invade at that time, Britain had chosen a balancing strategy with implicit guarantee toward Germany. It should be noted that after deterring Germany by its implicit guarantee, Britain also warned France that the implicit guarantee sending to Germany did not bind Britains to engage in war toward Germany, trying to sober France and maintain British diplomacy's flexibility: "[i]f, however, the French Government were to assume that His Majesty's Government would at once take joint military action with them to preserve Czechoslovakia against German aggression, it is only fair to warn them that our statements do not warrant any such assumption."[106]

The risk of being involved in conflict by the Czechoslovak issue emerged in the May Crisis, and Britain determined to eliminate the risk on the price of Czechoslovakia's concession. On 20th July, Britain proposed the Runciman Mission for mediating the Sudetenland problem to Beneš without prior consultation.[107] Although complaining about the British proposal had "put him in an impossible position," Beneš backed down

[106] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p.346-347.
[107] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p.600-601, 612-613.

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and welcomed the visit of Walter Runciman.[108] During the stay of Runciman, Britain compelled Czechoslovakia to accept all requirements in the Karlsbad programme by implying to abandon Czechoslovakia if a war occurred.[109] However, the British effort was futile due to the consensus that the SdP leader had reached with Hitler. The withdrawal of the SdP from the negotiation on 7th September signaled the failure of British mediation.

Although the development of the Sudetenland issue in September was so rapid and dramatic, the two British principles on its Czechoslovakia policy were consistent and clear: pacifying Germany on Czechoslovakia's cost to avoid conflict and providing no guarantee to France on the Sudetenland issue. Unlike France struggling with its commitment, Britain held no commitment to Czechoslovakia, and Czechoslovakia was not an indispensable part of British deployment against Germany. In the negotiation with Germany, Britain's main concern was not to minimize the cost of reaching a deal, which Czechoslovakia must have suffered, but to keep Germany in the negotiation, preventing Germany from leaving the table and resorting to force that could invoke French intervention and dragged Britain down. The situation in September was different from the May Crisis. When facing Germany's real threat to using force, the interests of preventing

[108] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. I,* p.604-607, 620.
[109] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 221.

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German expansion and avoiding being involved in the conflict were in great tension that could hardly be achieved simultaneously. Britain made a choice at the expense of Czechoslovakia.

Throughout September 1938, Britain repeatedly backed down for pacifying Germany. After the SdP withdrawal from negotiation and Hitler's Nuremberg speech asking the Sudeten German's self-determination on 12th, Britain pressured Czechoslovakia to agree on the Anglo-French proposal that required Czechoslovakia to cede the Sudetenland to Germany by issuing an ultimatum along with France on 21st. Hitler declined the Anglo-French proposal and suggested the Godesberg Memorandum instead, which invoked French opposition. In the Anglo-French conversation on 25th, in contrast to Daladier proposing to ask Hitler to return to the Anglo-French proposal, Chamberlain still sought for continuing negotiation, claiming that "[w]e had to get down to the stern realities of the situation."[110] During the negotiations in Godesberg by Chamberlain on 22nd and in Berlin by the British envoy Horace Wilson, Britain clearly expressed to Hitler that Germany could acquire what it desired by peaceful means.[111] Under Hitler's audacious diplomacy of setting the due date of the negotiation in advance to 28th and then extending the term by a conference held by Germany, France lost its

[110] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 520-535.
[111] *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Ser. Third, Vol. II,* p. 463-473, 554-557

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resolve to stick to the Anglo-French proposal. Britain finally signed the Munich Agreement, promising more concession than Hitler demanded in the Godesberg terms. The only compensation that Britain gave to Czechoslovakia was the guarantee of the new boundaries against unprovoked aggression, which was proved futile in the March 1939 German occupation of the remained Czechoslovakia lands: "the British government was determined to run no risks and make no sacrifices for those they had urged to sacrifice themselves (Weinberg, 1994: 524)."

On assessing the theoretical meaning of British diplomacy concerning the Czechoslovak issue, although one could hardly not draw attention to British compulsion on Czechoslovakia for greater and greater concession toward Germany, it should be noted that the stake Britain truly held was its partnership with France and the entailed risk of engaging in a conflict with Germany. Britain did adopt a buck-passing strategy, aiming to minimize the cost—including being embroiled in conflicts and undermining the partnership with France—in the most time of the late 1930s period, trying to pacify Germany with the Czechoslovak concessions. However, it could be an overstatement that Britain was consistently pursuing to modify Germany's aggressive behavior by accommodating it with the new status quo after concession, which the appeasement strategy suggests on the image of intent. Britain had already placed Germany in the top priority to be checked by its rearmament program during the Chamberlain administration.

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Britain valued its partnership with France so much because of the continuing German threat as a potential hegemon. If Britain completely believed that Czechoslovakia's concession could satisfy Hitler, the careful and enduring negotiation with France on the Czechoslovak issue would have been unnecessary since the value of the British partnership with France would decrease due to the declining German threat after the disputes settled. The British reaction as an implicit guarantee in the May Crisis could hardly be explained by the appeasement strategy as well. The above argument does not suggest that Britain expected no change in Germany's behavior after the Munich Agreement. Instead, the argument here points out that Britain's primary concern in the Sudetenland issue was its partnership with France and the entailed risk. Modifying Germany's behavior had been an additional expectation but not the utmost purpose of British diplomacy. Besides a brief interlude of the May Crisis, buck-passing predominated the British strategy in the late 1930s Czechoslovak issue.

4.1.2.5. The Soviet Union: Buck-passing with Conditional Commitment

Among the great powers in the inter-war period, the Soviet Union was placed in a unique situation and thus adopted a distinct foreign policy. The Soviet Union faced a predicament in its diplomacy. On the one hand, the Soviet Union's security was deeply interconnected with the development of European affairs. Despite poor performance on

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the net indicator, the Soviet Union possessed the highest share on the CNIC index among the European great powers. The formidable military power made other great powers can hardly neglect the presence of the Soviet Union in their strategic planning. History also proved that a strong power in Central Europe could be devastated to the Soviet security. Unlike the US enjoying the geographical separation, the Soviet Union had no choice but to get entangled in European affairs, on which its security hinged.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union found no camps with which it could truly ally. As the only Communist state in Europe, the Soviet Union perceived itself as surrounded by the "hostile capitalist encirclement (Tucker, 1977: 563)." The ideological barrier and past historical entanglement impeded the Soviet attempts to collaborate with other great powers deeply. The Soviet Union was powerful enough that no great power was willing to see the Soviet Union join with its enemy, yet the Soviet Union was too suspicious to build a true partnership with due to its ideology and past records—for Germany, the Soviet Union had long been its most fearful Eastern threat and the major enemy in the Eastern Front of World War I; for Britain and France, the Soviet Union (at that time Russia) reneged on its commitment toward Allied powers with its withdrawal from World War I. The isolation and the need to intervene the European affairs led to the Soviet Union's distinct diplomacy in the inter-war period: the great adjustability on changing camps to align with.

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The rapprochement with Germany was the theme of the Soviet foreign policy in the 1920s. Both dissatisfied with the order of the Versailles, the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Rapallo with Germany in 1922.[112] Under the treaty, the two states waived their claims of previous war compensation, creating the foundation of future collaboration. The Soviet-German relations were further reinforced by the German-Soviet Neutrality and Non-aggression Pact concluded in 1926.[113] The Neutrality and Non-aggression pact reaffirmed the Rapallo spirit and prescribed that one state should remain neutral when the other contracting party faces an unprovoked aggression, including the prohibition of joining the coalition for economic or financial sanctions against the other contracting party. The Soviet diplomacy of achieving rapprochement, represented by the signature of two treaties, aimed "to exploit the differences between the capitalist Powers to forestall the development of any united front against the USSR (Haslam, 1984:24)", which was "the perfect example of applying the tactic of exploiting inter-imperialist contradictions to Soviet advantage (Haslam, 1984: 3)."

However, the rise of Nazis challenged Soviet policy. In January 1933, Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany. The new German Chancellor had long expressed its

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[112] *German-Russian Agreement,* Rapallo, Apr. 16, 1922, *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 19, No. 498, p. 247-252, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%2019/v19.pdf

[113] *Treaty between Germany and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics*, Berlin, Apr. 24, 1926, *League of Nations Treaty Series,* vol. 53, No. 1268, p. 387-396, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%2053/v53.pdf

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antagonism toward communism. In Mein Kampf, Hitler bound Jews and Marxism, accusing them of demolishing "the very foundations of human existence and culture (Hitler, 2018: 94, 97-98)." The German-Soviet relations in 1933 had already been shadowed by the hearsay that the German Chancellor proposed a military alliance toward the Soviet Union with France at the 1932 Lausanne Conference (Stein, 1962: 57). Hitler's accession to power intensified the Soviet Union's doubt. Despite the mutual suspicion, Germany and the Soviet Union did not settle their foreign policy direction in the first few months. The extension of the German-Soviet Neutrality and Non-aggression Pact was ratified on 5th May (Stein, 1962: 63). Nevertheless, with the Soviet attempt to go closer with France, the nonconformity between the Soviet Union and Germany came true. In the summer of 1933, the Soviet Union proposed a discussion with France "on general issues and on all agreements envisaged with other Powers (Haslam, 1984: 21-22)." In the early Autumn, a Berlin press claimed that based on official sources, the Soviet Union commanded the German Communist Party's armed uprising (Haslam, 1984, 24). On 15th September, three Reichswehr military bases located in the Soviet Union, carrying the secret Soviet-German military collaboration from 1930, were discontinued (Stein, 1962: 54). On 22nd September, Germany arrested two Soviet journalists, who entered into Leipzig for reporting the Reichstag fire trial without admission. On the next day, the Soviet Union threatened to retaliate by imposing the same treatment on German

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journalists in the Soviet Union.[114] The two states were deviating from the reconciliatory path Rapallo Treaty represented.

The dispart with Germany naturally pushed the Soviet Union to the other side of European great powers. The Soviet-French relations entered a new positive stage. As the German Ambassador in the Soviet Union Herbert von Dirksen had wisely pointed out in March 1933, "[t]he development of Soviet-French relations will be correlated with that of German-Soviet relations; the greater the cooling toward Germany, the greater the disposition to cordiality toward France."[115] The Soviet Union and France had already concluded a Non-aggression Pact in November 1932, shortly before Hitler seized power.[116] Based on the previous Non-aggression Pact, the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Mutual Assistance with France in May 1935, symbolizing that the two states were legally carrying the duty to aid each other under unprovoked aggression. As a product of the rapprochement between the Soviet Union and France, the Soviet Union also signed the Treaty of Mutual Assistance with Czechoslovakia, which embroiled the Soviet Union in the 1938 Czechoslovakia Crisis.

Unlike the Soviet-French one, the Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty of Mutual Assistance

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[114] *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Ser. D, Vol.I,* p. 845.
[115] *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Ser. D, Vol.I,* p. 140-146.
[116] *Pact of Non-Aggression between France and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, Paris, Nov. 29, 1932, *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 157, No. 3615, p. 411-419, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%20157/v157.pdf

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provided only a conditional guarantee. The text of the two Mutual Assistance Treaties was almost the same in the main body. Nevertheless, in the protocol of the Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty, a crucial stipulation lay in Article Two: "...the two Governments recognise that the undertakings to render mutual assistance will operate between them only in so far as the conditions laid down in the present Treaty may be fulfilled and in so far as assistance may be rendered by France to the Party victim of the aggression."[117] The special stipulation made the execution of the duty under a bilateral treaty depend on the action of a third party. At first sight, the stipulation seems to be decisive evidence that the Soviet Union was encouraging France to fight with Germany with a false promise. However, the stipulation was actually proposed by the side of Czechoslovakia (Lukes, 1996: 47-49; Haslam, 1984: 51). The Czechoslovak diplomat Arnošt Heidrich suggested the stipulation for avoiding getting entangled in a conflict with no relation to Czechoslovak interests, such as a Soviet-Japanese war. The stipulation fitted in the Soviet interest as well—the geography determined that in the situation both the Soviet Union and France honored their commitments, Germany would be more likely to select France as the next target after Czechoslovakia, with which shared the border (Lukes, 1996: 47-49). The implementation of the Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty entirely hinged on French

[117] *Treaty of Mutual Assistance between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, Prague, May 16, 1935, *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 159, No. 3677, p. 347-361, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%20159/v159.pdf

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behavior. Beneš's comment cut to the core: "it was Paris that had a treaty with the Kremlin, not Prague. (Lukes, 1996: 48)"

In 1936, the Soviet-French rapprochement was challenged by two significant events. Claiming as a response to the Soviet-French Mutual Assistance Treaty that was "exclusively directed against Germany," Germany remilitarized the Rhineland on 7th March 1936.[118] When the French Foreign Minister asked to support economic and financial sanctions toward Germany, the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov agreed and requested quick ratification of the Soviet-French Mutual Assistance Treaty. As a result, the French Senate passed the ratification on 12th. Although the Soviet Union endorsed the sanctions, Britain rejected the proposal, and France yielded to Britain (Haslam, 1984: 98-99). The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War cast a shadow on Soviet-French relations as well. The Soviet Union intervened in the Spanish Civil War, supporting the Republican side with which shared a similar ideology due to the domestic opinion and pressure from the international Communist movement (Kaufman, 1988: 442-443; Haslam, 1984: 110-111). France originally planned to send arms to the Republican side on July 22nd, yet pressured by Britain during the negotiation with Britain Foreign Minister Anthony Eden on 23rd and the Admiral François Darlan mission to Britain on 5th

[118] *German Memorandum Respecting the Termination of the Treaty of Locarno and the Re-Occupation of the Demilitarised Zone in the Rhineland*, London, Mar. 7, 1936, *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. 140, p. 518-521, available from https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015049924569

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August, France reversed its previous policy and initiated the agreement of non-intervention instead (Gallagher, 1971: 56-57; Stone, 1979: 129-133). Between the partnerships with Britain and with the Soviet Union, France stood with Britain in both events. The decision was natural due to the closer relationship originating from historical collaborations and the dominant collective interest in preserving the status quo. However, it also reflected that the Soviet Union did not reach a true partnership with France, even though the Soviet Union had legally allied with France by the Soviet-French Mutual Assistance Treaty, to which Britain had not formally committed. For France, the partnership with Britain was the necessary foundation of its security, and "a Franco-Soviet military agreement risks putting in jeopardy the warmth and candour of Franco-English relations (Haslam, 1984: 141)."

Soviet domestic politics also undermined its diplomacy of collective security. The 1937 Great Purge had seriously damaged the Soviet Union's reputation abroad and had raised doubt of its military capability from Western countries (Hochman, 1984: 171). The Soviet Great Purge and the alleged foreign intervention also evoked the Soviet domestic hostility toward foreigners and isolationism. In the 1937 summer and fall, the Consulates of Italy, Germany, Japan, and Poland were requested to be closed by the Soviet Government. In January 1938, the Consulates of Britain, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, and Czechoslovakia—the only Czechoslovak

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Consulate in Kiev constructed only one and a half years ago—faced the same fate. The Soviet government even declined to compensate Czechoslovakia's spending on constructing the Consulate building.[119] The development of Soviet politics caused Beneš's suspicion of the Soviet Union's power and will toward its commitment. When the Czechoslovak Ambassador in the Soviet Union Zdeněk Fierlinger visited Vladimir Potemkin, the Soviet Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs ensured that the Soviet Union was well prepared "to render assistance to Czechoslovakia in line with the pact of mutual assistance (Hochman, 1984: 146)." Despite the Soviet assurance, Beneš commented that he no longer counted on the Soviet aids when facing pressure from Germany to the US Ambassador in Czechoslovakia in February (Lukes, 1996: 113). In April, Beneš repeated his doubt with the words that he "did not regard Soviet Army any longer as an effective force for Western actions (Hochman, 1984: 136-137)."

The Soviet performance in the May Crisis proved Beneš's judgment. During the first trial of the 1938 Sudetenland disputes, in contrast to French direct deterrence and British implicit guarantee toward Germany, the Soviet Union provided no help. Shortly before the Czech partial mobilization, on 11th May in Geneva during the talk with Czechoslovak diplomat Arnošt Heidrich, Litvinov claimed that the war was inevitable and reassured the

[119] *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Ser. D, Vol.I,* p. 903-909.

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Soviet commitment to Czechoslovakia: "[t]his time it will be the Soviets who will stand by until near the end when they will be able to step in and bring about a just and permanent peace (Lukes, 1996: 154)." However, on the brink of a conflict, Fierlinger attempted to visit Litvinov, but he was unable to get in touch with the Commissar or any other Soviet leader in 20th May. After three days, Potemkin noticed Fierlinger that Litvinov was unavailable due to bronchitis. Only on 25th, when the situation was basically settled, Litvinov received Fierlinger but refused to give any concrete commitment on the issue of the Soviet Assitance to Czechoslovakia (Lukes, 1996: 154-155; Hochman, 1984: 152).[120] The Soviet inaction during the May Crisis was perceived as reluctance to honor the commitment to Czechoslovakia by other powers, especially Germany. The German Ambassador in the Soviet Union Schulenburg commented that the Soviet Union during the May Crisis had "painstakingly and systematically avoided hitherto any precise announcement on the fulfillment of its treaty obligations" in his report delivered to the German Foreign Ministry.[121] In June, a Strategic Study of the Wehrmacht's Supreme Headquarters named France and Britain as the opponents when war broke out by the Czechoslovak issue, accompanied by the conspicuous ignorance of the Soviet Union's

[120] Haslam further extrapolates that the Soviet Union was a strong suspect of giving the Czechoslovak intelligence bureau disinformation in order to trigger the Czechoslovak-German war that could have dragged the West in. For Haslam's account, see: Haslam, Jonathan 1984. *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-39.* London and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 148-157.

[121] *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Ser. D, Vol.II,* p. 423-426.

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commitment.

The Soviet Union's character in the September 1938 Munich Crisis was long under dispute. Scholars debated both the fact and corresponding estimations on the Soviet performance. Instead of proposing a detailed new account, which exceeds beyond both the purpose of this section and the author's competence, the analysis below would divide the inquiry into three sub-issues about facts. First, what was the Soviet commitment toward Czechoslovakia in the 1938 crisis? Did the Soviet commitment to Czechoslovakia change in the period of 1938? Second, what had the Soviet Union planned concerning the method of fulfilling its commitment? Was it executable? Third, what actions did the Soviet Union actually implement related to its commitment? The three questions could constitute a fundamental understanding concerning how to evaluate the Soviet performance in the 1938 Crisis.

About the first issue, the Soviet Union had neither backed down on commitment nor threatened to abandon Czechoslovakia, though in an evasive way. In contrast to Britain's warning by Runciman or France's ultimatum on forcing Czechoslovakia to accept the Anglo-French proposal, the Soviet Union did not pull back or threaten to withdraw from its commitment. Litvinov repeatedly reaffirmed that the Soviet Union would honor its commitment throughout 1938. However, despite sticking to its words, the Soviet Union guaranteed nothing more than its past words, illustrated by two meetings between Beneš

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and the Soviet Ambassador in Czechoslovakia Sergei S. Aleksandrovsky. On 19th September, receiving the Anglo-French proposal, Beneš asked Aleksandrovsky to send two questions to Moscow immediately. The first question was whether the Soviet Union would honor its commitment to Czechoslovakia on the condition that France honored its commitment. The second question, recorded by Beneš, "[w]hat will the attitude of the Soviet Union be if France refuses to fulfill her obligations? (Lukes, 1996: 223)" Beneš received the answer on 20th. The Soviet Union replied positively to both questions; nevertheless, the second question was recorded differently as to whether the Soviet Union would come to assistance based on the Articles 16 and 17 of the League of Nations' Covenant, which transformed the issue from the independent Soviet aid to conditional assistance relied on a notoriously tardy procedure (Lukes, 1996: 223-225, Hochman, 1984: 161-162). [122] On 25th, after rejecting the Godesberg demands, Beneš received Aleksandrovsky and asked him practical questions concerning the amount of airborne Soviet troops planned to deploy in Czechoslovak and their types of equipment. Aleksandrovsky recalled that "I confess to having a heavy feeling because I could tell

[122] Lukes (1996: 223-224) asserted that Aleksandrovsky distorted the question and rejected the possibility that Beneš gave the wrong phrases. Lukes argued that shortly after the meeting with the Soviet Ambassador, Beneš met with the Czech Communist Party leader and raised the same question, and the Czech Communist Party leader replied that the Soviet Union always fulfilled its commitment, and Beneš should have asked Moscow if he required more than the Soviet legal duties. The account from the Czech Communist Party leader proved Beneš employed exact and precise words since according to Aleksandrovsky's version of the second question, Beneš did not ask any more than the past Soviet legal duties.

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Beneš nothing, especially regarding his 'practical questions.' (Lukes, 1996: 240)" The Soviet Union did not exempt itself from past commitments, yet it refused to provide any pragmatic guarantee related to its past words.

The second issue, about what had the Soviet Union planned or done concerning the method of fulfilling its commitment, arose from a fundamental fact: Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union were not adjacent. If the Soviet Union was bound to come to Czechoslovakia's aid, it needed to find a way to overcome the geographical separation. The discussion focused on two ways. The first way was sending the Soviet air forces to Czechoslovakia. The suggestion could have dated back to the 1937 Soviet-Franco meeting and was reaffirmed in April 1938 a meeting Stalin participated in (Ragsdale, 2004: 33-34, 127). Another way was to transport the Soviet land power passing through other states. Both ways require the cooperation of a third state. Among the states both adjacent to the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, namely Poland and Romania, Romania was the only feasible option. Poland had a territorial dispute with Czechoslovakia, claiming that it would obtain Teschen from Czechoslovakia if Germany seized Sudetenland. Romania had promised to France for allowing the Soviet airplanes and material to pass through its territory "both in the air and on land" in mid-June (Carley, 2010: 373-374, Ragsdale, 2004: 148)). About the critical issue of the Red army passing through Romanian land, Romania officially pursued a policy of postponing, not to give a

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concrete answer until the critical juncture came. Privately, Romania had given a secret commitment to France. Dated back to 15th October 1937, the Romanian King Carol II had promised the French General Gamelin that in the case of war, he "would allow the Russians to cross the northern part of his territory in order to reach Czechoslovakia" with demanding the promise should have been a secret (Ragsdale, 2004: 80-83)." Another question arises: what did the Soviet Union perceive about Romania's stand on the issue of land passage? Hochman (1984: 74-75, 194-201) records a Romanian official note, suggesting that the issue of passage was discussed between the Romanian Foreign Minister and Litvinov between 9th to 13th September in Geneva and was officially approved by the Romanian government on 24th.[123] A brief summary of the second issue could be that the Soviet Union planned to transfer its army by land and by air passing through Romania, and the plan was executable due to the consent from Romania.

About the third issue, what actions the Soviet Union actually implemented related to its commitment, Ragsdale (2004: 123-126, 140-148) provides a detailed analysis. The conclusion Ragsdale reached was that the Soviet land power did not pass through Romania, and the issue of materials transportation remains open. Ragsdale employs

[123] It should be noted that Ragsdale (2004: 149-151) seriously discredits the authenticity of the Romanian Official Note from the wording and the content of the document, the inexistence in other sources such as the note's author Romanian Foreign Minister Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen's memoir, and the untrustworthiness of the provenance of the document.

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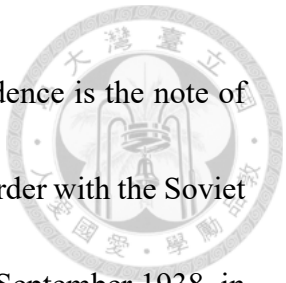

several sources to justify his argument. A piece of critical direct evidence is the note of the Romanian border guard in the region of Tighina, the Romanian border with the Soviet Union. The note recorded no Soviet army passage but trivial stuff in September 1938, in contrast to the note of border guard in the Romanian border with Czechoslovakia and Hungary recorded detailed observation on troops and personnel acting near the border. Another source is the observation from Polish Consular. The observation from Polish Consular in Kishinev recorded the material dispatch and troop mobilization (the latter was marked as "doubtful intelligence") in late September. The Polish Consular in Kiev noted that no military transport in the railway from the border to Kiev on 30th September. Two pieces of indirect evidence also deny the likelihood of the Soviet mobilization through Romania: the Romanian military supply trains' preplanned schedule remained normal without interruption or drastic changes, and the Romanian General Staff suggested in October, "there were no relations or communications between the Romanian and Soviet armies at all."

How to theoretically evaluate the Soviet diplomacy related to the Czechoslovak issue in the inter-war period? The Soviet Union initially tried to reconcile with Germany in the 1920s. Nevertheless, the tension between the Soviet Union and Germany grew and intensified by Hitler's seizure of power. Correlated with the deteriorated relations with Germany, the Soviet Union embraced the rapprochement with France, joining the

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balancing coalition against Germany in Central Europe. The signature of the Mutual Assistance Treaty with Czechoslovakia, which hinged on France's behavior, dragged the Soviet Union down to the 1938 crisis. While seeking cooperation with the West, the French policy decision in the remilitarization of Rhineland and the Spanish Civil War proved the Soviet failure of building a true partnership with France. The 1937 Great Purge also harmed the Soviet military capability and its reputation in the West.

A fair theoretical evaluation of the Soviet diplomat in the Czechoslovak Crisis should be buck-passing. There is no ample evidence proving that the Soviet Union pursued to provoke a war between Germany and the West. The special stipulation of the Soviet-Czechoslovak Mutual Assistance Treaty was actually proposed by the side of Czechoslovakia. Litvinov's instruction to Aleksandrovsky in June 1938 indicates that the Soviet Union did not oppose against British way of preserving peace at the expense of Czechoslovakia:

> *With such a raging pressure being put upon Czechoslovakia by England and France, you should of course reinforce the spirit of the Czechs and their resistance to that pressure. You should not forget, however, that we are not at all interested in the forcible solution of the problem of the Sudeten Germans and we should offer no objections at all to such measures, which, while preserving Czechoslovakia's full political independence, would be able to diffuse the tension and prevent the danger of a military confrontation...You should not object to Anglo-French suggestions*

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concerning some extension of the rights of the Sudeten Germans, the sending of observers and so on (Steiner, 1999: 758).

The Soviet Union did try to pursue the outcome of alliance formation. The Soviet Union clearly adopted a balancing strategy the most time before the end of September 1938 by forming a collective security system with treaties. However, it should be clearly noted that the Soviet balancing strategy was limited to conditional balancing or half-committed balancing. Every promise and deterrence it made for balancing Germany hinged on the French action—captured by Beneš's comment: "it was Paris that had a treaty with the Kremlin, not Prague. (Lukes, 1996: 48)" By unwilling to intervene without France's intervention first, the half-committed balancing indicated the Soviet interest in restricting German expansion on the one hand and revealed a strong tendency of the Soviet policy to reduce the cost on the other hand.

However, the Soviet Union eventually abandoned the balancing strategy and adopted the buck-passing strategy at the end of the Munich Crisis. It is fair to say that the Soviet Union had no legal duty to come to assistance for Czechoslovakia—the Soviet commitment hinged on France, and France had backed down. Nevertheless, it is also true that the Soviet Union did not take firm balancing action against Germany. Despite no breaching commitment, the Soviet Union stayed on the sidelines in a German expansion, just as Britain and the US. The Soviet Union was also not resolved to aid Czechoslovakia

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immediately as its legal duties required in the possible German aggression. Hitler extended the due date of his ultimatum and invited the four powers to the conference not until 28th, and the Soviet Union was not the participant in the Munich Conference. These indicated that if the Soviet Union wished to come to immediate aid in case of the German aggression resulting from failed negotiation between Germany and the West, it was necessary to prepare itself in a ready position on 30th or prior since it could not have acquired timely information. However, the evidence shows that no Red Army mobilization was carried out at the end of September, although the Soviet Union did have a promise toward Czechoslovakia and did have an executable plan for sending land power passing through Romania with approval. Combined with the Soviet inaction in the May Crisis, it should be fair to draw a brief conclusion of the Soviet performance on its commitment toward Czechoslovakia: the Soviet Union did not back down on its promise while providing no related guarantee to its commitment and taking no firm actions on fulfilling its words.

4.1.3. Outcome: Appeasement as Failed Buck-passing

After hearing the conclusion of the Munich Agreement on 30th morning, Beneš called Aleksandrovsky, asking the Soviet ambassador to ask Moscow without delay that given the fact Britain and France had decided to abandon Czechoslovakia, whether

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Czechoslovakia should go to war or capitulate. Aleksandrovsky did not cable the question to Moscow immediately, the request he depicted as an "agonized cry" afterward (Lukes, 1996: 252). The Soviet answer was no longer needed after the Czechoslovak decision was made in the noon. In the address at 12:30, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister expressed that Czechoslovakia had to accept "the most ruthless and unfair terms ever forced on anybody in history" under the condition that it had been "deserted by all its allies and friends" (Lukes, 1996: 254). The outcome of appeasement in the 1938 Czechoslovak Crisis was achieved in the end.

The strategic interaction among great powers could answer how the outcome came into reality. Among the six great powers in the inter-war period, Germany was the aggressor that challenged the status quo. Despite standing with the West in the Stresa front, Italy, as "least of the great powers," adopted the bandwagoning strategy, pursuing a close relationship with Germany in the late 1930s. In the other four states that shared the collective good of checking German aggression, the US was the one that stuck to the buck-passing strategy in the whole period of the inter-war period before the conclusion of the Munich Agreement. Influenced by its domestic opinion of isolationism, the US adopted a buck-passing strategy with a distancing policy, aiming to avoid embroilment in the European Crisis.

The other three great powers—France, Britain, and the Soviet Union—had once or

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more balanced against Germany but all backed down at the end of September 1938. France, seriously sensitive to the rise of Germany, formed a balancing coalition toward Germany and committed itself to defend Czechoslovakia against unprovoked aggression. Nevertheless, France relied on British intervention to overcome the power gap between France and Germany in the late 1930s. Under the British demand to eliminate the risk of war from the Czechoslovak side, which did not contradict France's interest, France jointly pressured Czechoslovakia to accept the Anglo-French proposal, which indicated France's retreat from the balancing strategy. Under the pressure of Germany and without Britain's commitment, France totally abandoned Czechoslovakia in the Munich Conference. Britain, struggling between preventing a European hegemon and avoiding getting involved in the conflict, was dragged into the Czechoslovak Crisis by its partnership with France, which played the key characters in the two distinct interests. Despite once balancing against Germany, providing the implicit guarantee in the May Crisis, Britain adopted the buck-passing strategy, trying to pacify Germany at the expense of Czechoslovakia throughout September. The Soviet Union, after Hitler seized power, reconciled with France and joined the balancing coalition with Mutual Guarantee Treaties with France and with Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union provided a conditional balancing commitment to Czechoslovakia hinged on France's action. Despite no legal obligation due to France's inaction, the Soviet Union adopted a buck-passing strategy, implementing

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no actions on balancing Germany at the end of September.

The adoption of buck-passing strategies by five defensive great powers led to the outcome of appeasement, the failed buck-passing. While Italy and the US continuously adopted the strategies of bandwagoning and buck-passing, France and the Soviet Union once approached the outcome of alliance formation against German expansion by the conclusion of the French-Czechoslovak Mutual Guarantee Treaty and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Mutual Assistance Treaty, although the Soviet commitment was conditional, hinging on France's behavior. While not bound by legal duty, Britain was dragged into the tension of the May Crisis and provided an implicit guarantee on combating Germany at the moment. However, pressured by Germany and the pacifying policy Britain implemented, Britain and France urged Czechoslovakia to accept the Anglo-French proposal by issuing ultimatums on 21st September. The endorsement on requesting an ally for territorial cession represented France's adoption of buck-passing strategy. Although its legal duty was determined by France's action, the Soviet Union took neither firm action nor genuine preparation for the possible German aggression. In the end, no state carried the burden to check German aggression, and no collective good was provided to be ridden free on. The aggressor, namely Germany, remained unchecked and successfully acquired the Sudetenland in the Autumn of 1938. In March next year, despite the guarantee of new border lines by the four powers signing the Munich

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Agreement, Germany annexed the remaining part of Czechoslovakia. Without single military combat with other great powers, Germany acquired the vast land of Czechoslovakia, with a total of 14.6 million population (15.5% of the German total) and an 11.6% share of total German GDP.[124]

The case study on the Munich Crisis provides a new perspective for circumventing a past theoretical impasse. In current literature, scholars contend about what strategy a state took during the Munich Crisis, especially British strategy. The scholars' opinions about British policy are varied from balancing (Lobell, 2012: 749-751; Ripsman & Levy, 2008: 150-151), buck-passing (Posen, 1986: 158; Christensen & Snyder, 1990: 157-165; Mearsheimer, 2001: 308-316), to appeasement (Lukes, 1996: 189-200; Caquet, 2019: 158-162; Kennedy, 2001: 418-422; Ragsdale, 2004: 39). Applying the revised framework of buck-passing to analyze the case of World War II, the conclusion of this section argues that Britain did take balancing action once during the May Crisis, adopted buck-passing strategy the most of the time, and created appeasement as the outcome of the Munich Crisis along with other great power's policy. The dissensus of past debate originates from two points. First, the past studies ignore that the standard of a defensive state's strategy

[124] The share of GDP is counted by the 1937 value since no available Czechoslovak GDP statistical data under German occupation. GDP data refers to Maddison, Angus. "Statistics on World Population, GDP and Per Capita GDP, 1-2008 Ad." http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/Historical_Statistics/vertical-file_02-2010.xls. Latest Update January 1 2022. Data of population is derived from: National Material Capabilities (v6.0), from Singer, J David, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey. 1972. "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965." *Peace, war, and numbers* 19(48): 427.

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is contingent correspondingly to the aggressor's action, as examined in the previous section about the operationalization of buck-passing. While Germany was only verbally condemning Czechoslovakia's treatment of Sudetenland Germans and not taking firm actions, the standard of balancing strategy could be a simple deterrence, as Britain did in the May Crisis. When Germany resorted to invading Czechoslovakia and mobilizing the Wehrmacht, only verbal support and domestic rearmament could hardly be counted as balancing, as Britain and France had done in September 1938.

Second, the view that Britain had launched the rearmament programs during the 1930s and therefore the British strategy in the period should be recognized as balancing neglected the difference between competitive and confrontational balancing policies and the importance of selecting time span. Britain did implement the rearmament to preserve the balance of power by competitive internal balancing, but the strengthened British power did not transform into firm actions on resisting the German expansion, conducting not enough confrontational balancing policies as deterring or combating. In the selected time span from 1936 to 1938, Britain did not take enough action to stop the German aggression, and Germany remained unchecked as the outcome. The 1930s rearmament contributed to British firm balancing action against the aggressor only after the outbreak of World War II or even after the end of the Phoney War by amplifying the confrontational balancing policies as deterring and combating. However, it was not the rearmament

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program but the final confrontational balancing policy decisively establishing the British foreign policy as balancing—supposed Britain still took no action after Germany invaded Poland and stopped further aggression with satisfaction, the British strategy in the 1930s and early 1940s would hardly be called balancing even with the rearmament program. In other words, the rearmament program Britain adopted in the 1930s did affect continuously and contributed to the British confrontational balancing policy in World War II, but it was not enough to set the British strategy in the 1930s as balancing by the rearmament program alone.

Third, the past studies overlooked the importance of distinguishing the intent, action, and outcome. While the intent and action (combined as strategy) could be taken unilaterally by one state, the outcome, especially buck-passing as outcome, could not be achieved by a single state's policy. No evidence showed that any great power fully embraced appeasement as strategy, truly believing that the German ambition could be satisfied by the Czechoslovak concession alone; modifying the German behavior was rather an additional expectation but not the utmost goal. The appeasement did exist as the outcome—German expansion remained unchecked—which was formed by the great powers' adoption of buck-passing strategy at the end of September 1938. The buck-passing did exist—not as the outcome but as the strategy. When all states adopted the buck-passing strategy with no state balancing against the aggressor, providing the

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collective good, the outcome of buck-passing could not be formed since no collective good could be ridden free on.

In sum, the past disagreement on explaining states' strategies in the Munich Crisis can be derived from the fixed standard of strategy and the confusion of different images. Like the story of the blind man and the elephant, the different parts of the Munich Crisis history as the elephant have been outstandingly depicted by past scholars, and the revised framework hopes to be the torch that illuminates the contour of the case, deepening our understanding about the whole picture of the Munich Crisis history.

4.2. The Korean War: Buck-passing in Bipolarity

The second case study investigates the Korean War. The analysis aims to reveal how states interact in a possible buck-passing circumstance under the bipolar system. The main focus of the analysis is the Chinese decision to send troops into the Korean War. The specified time span of the case is from the end of the Chinese Civil War to the Chinese troops crossing the Yalu River on 19th October 1950. Therefore, the status quo in the analysis would be the divided governance by the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) on the Korean Peninsula separated by the 38th parallel. East Asia would be selected as the space for the

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case study.

4.2.1. The Scope of Involved Parties: the Soviet Union, the US, and China

The bipolar system was established in the post-war period. World War II caused colossal devastation on the European population and economy, exhausting the engaging traditional European great power's capability. As the traditional European great powers fell, the US and the Soviet Union took center stage. Most scholars agree that the US and the Soviet Union were the only two great powers (or superpowers) in the post-war period (Kennedy, 1988: 357-360; Rasler, 1994: 4; Waltz, 1964: 882; Mearsheimer, 2001: 404).[125] The two states that possessed unrivaled power dominated the landscape of international affairs in the following decades.

The power distribution in 1950 demonstrated bipolarity. Table 2 presents the relative power distribution among the related states of the Korean War by the measurement elaborated in the previous section. It is clear that the US and the Soviet Union were the two superpowers among the related states. As Kennedy (1998: 357) pointed out, "only the United States and the USSR counted, so it seemed; and of the two, the American

[125] When counting also Britain, France, China, and Germany as great powers, Levy (1983:26-28; 47) labeled the US and the Soviet Union as two superpowers in the post-war period. No matter terming as great power or superpower, most scholars reach the consensus that the two states were the most powerful states in the period. In this essay, the two terms (superpower, great power) would be employed interchangeably in the case study of the Korean War. While discussing the regional great power (in contrast to the common usage of (global) great power, see the section about actor in chapter three), superpower would be mostly used to avoid misunderstanding.

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'superpower' was vastly superior." The Soviet Union could compete with the US on the CINC index, representing the military power, with a noticeable gap of 31.96% to 50.34%. When it comes to the net indicator (GDP*GDP per capita), which emphasizes the economic performance and deducts the costs from the gain of a large population, the US outperformed the Soviet Union significantly by a gap of 89.80% to 9.35%.

Besides the two great power, China held a level of power.[126] Blessed by its huge population, China possesses a 16.39% share on the CNIC index but performed poorly on the net indicator by 0.71%. The other two states, the ROK and the DPRK, were much weaker than other related powers, both possessing less than 1% share in all three indicators.

Apparently, the ROK and the DPRK were not powerful enough to meet the power threshold and be recognized as the involved agent. How about China? China could be counted as the involved agent of the case of the Korean War for three reasons. First, the global power distribution was bipolar in 1950. China could be regarded as the regional great power, able to provide the collective good as checking aggression, even from the superpowers, in the scale of a limited war. Second, superpowers did not plan to exert their full power in the Korean War. East Asia was not the primary region that the two

[126] In this essay, China refers to the People's Republic of China governed by the Chinese Communist Party. The Republic of China in Taiwan would be called as Taiwan or the Kuomintang government.

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superpowers located. The survival of the ROK or the DPRK was not a vital interest for superpowers that were worth mobilizing all resources. Neither the US nor the Soviet Union wished the Korean War to be escalated to an all-out war. Including China, the three states adopted multiple measures to limit the scale of the war (Halperin, 1963-: 13-20). Third, China was capable of resisting a superpower's limited aggression in its own region. Despite possessing a share of slightly less than one-third of the US power, China was strong enough to resist the limited power projection from the US. A rough estimation could be calculated by the level of the US engagement in the Korean War. According to Kane (2006), the US deployed 326,863 military personnel in the ROK in 1951 due to the Korean War. The number of the deployment shared 12.83% of the total US military personnel size. Despite being outperformed by the gross power, China was not in an impossible situation to stop limited aggression from a distant superpower.

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Table 2. Power Distribution Among Involved Agents in the Case of the Korean War, 1950

Indicator\ State	China	North Korea	South Korea	US	USSR
CINC	0.09263017	0.002670179	0.004736309	0.28444302	0.18059845
CINC (%)	16.39%	0.47%	0.84%	50.34%	31.96%
GDP	244,985	8,087	17,800	1,455,916	510,243
GDP (%)	10.95%	0.36%	0.80%	65.08%	22.81%
NET	109,758,602	6,905,142	15,199,246	13,920,519,331	1,449,834,079
NET (%)	0.71%	0.04%	0.10%	89.80%	9.35%

Source: Data of CINC is derived from: National Material Capabilities (v6.0), from Singer, J David, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey. 1972. "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965." *Peace, war, and numbers* 19(48): 427. Data of GDP and GDP per capita refers to Maddison, Angus. "Statistics on World Population, GDP and Per Capita GDP, 1-2008 Ad." http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/Historical_Statistics/vertical-file_02-2010.xls. Latest Update 1 January 2022.

4.2.2. Great Powers' Situation and Strategies

4.2.2.1. The Soviet Union: An Irresponsible Agitator

The Soviet Union's diplomacy on the engagement of the Korean war could be divided into three stages. In the first stage, the Soviet Union reversed its attitude from indifference to endorsement on the DPRK's proposal of unifying the Korean Peninsula

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by force. In the second stage, the Soviet Union urged China not to send troops into the war. In the third stage, when the US intervened and dominated the battlefield, the Soviet Union started to ask for Chinese intervention yet provided a limited commitment for military assistance. The logic behind the Soviet's policy change from agitating the war to adopting a buck-passing strategy laid on the Soviet Union's perception of the interest and concerns behind the Korean War.

The DPRK first proposed the military unification of the ROK to the Soviet Union after the division of Korea in 1945 on 12th August 1949. The DPRK leader Kim Il-sung suggested the issue to the Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK Terenty Shtykov, and Shtykov replied that Stalin had affirmed that the military operation would only be possible if ROK initialed aggression toward the DPRK (Shen, 2013: 201-202). On 3rd September, Kim sent an envoy to ask the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in the DPRK Grigory Tunkin for the permission of military operation against the ROK again. The DPRK's proposal was declined again. Nevertheless, Shtykov sent a lengthy telegram with detailed analysis of the power comparison between the DPRK and the ROK on 15th September, depicting that DPRK thought it was impossible "to unify the country by peaceful means" and rejected "the idea of allowing Korea to be divided in the long term." Shtykov argued that although the US might intervene in the conflict and the power of the DPRK army was not abundant enough to ensure the victory in war, it was "possible and desirable" for the DPRK "to

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develop guerilla movement in the Southern Korean" and for the Soviet Union "to provide aid and guidance."[127] The Soviet Politburo declined Shtykov's suggestion, asserting that the DPRK was unprepared for launching aggression both on the military and on the political dimension.[128] Shtykov expressed the decision of the Soviet Politburo to Kim and the DPRK foreign minister on 4th October and received a reluctant consent.[129]

The Soviet Union's attitude reversal from rejection to endorsement was initiated after January 1950. On 17th January, Kim told Shtykov about his willingness to visit Moscow for asking Stalin's permission to attack the ROK.[130] Receiving the message from Shtykov's telegram, Stalin replied on 30th January that "[i]f Kim Il-sung is willing to have a conversation with me, I am ready for receiving and holding a talk with him. Please express my thought to Kim and tell him that I am ready to assist him."[131] After three days, Stalin requested Shtykov to tell Kim that the issue of attacking the ROK should have been confidential without informing any other leaders of the DPRK and the Chinese comrades (Shen, 2013: 209). In April, Stalin met with Kim, discussing the plan

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[127] *The Korean War: Declassified Documents from Archives in Russia I,* p. 242-254 (《俄國檔案館的解密文件（上冊）》，頁 242-254。).

[128] *The Korean War: Declassified Documents from Archives in Russia I,* p. 255-260 (《俄國檔案館的解密文件（上冊）》，頁 255-260。).

[129] *The Korean War: Declassified Documents from Archives in Russia I,* p. 262 (《俄國檔案館的解密文件（上冊）》，頁 262。).

[130] *The Korean War: Declassified Documents from Archives in Russia I,* p. 305-306 (《俄國檔案館的解密文件（上冊）》，頁 305-306。).

[131] *The Korean War: Declassified Documents from Archives in Russia I,* p. 309 (《俄國檔案館的解密文件（上冊）》，頁 309。).

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of military unification with the following notices: the DPRK should not expect direct Soviet intervention; if things went wrong, the DPRK should consult with Beijing but not the Soviet Union for assistance; no Soviet advisers would join the DPRK army in the initial attack (Stueck, 1995: 36). During the April meeting, Stalin agreed to support the DPRK's plan of military unification (Weathersby, 1993: 441).

Why did the Soviet Union alter its attitude toward the DPRK's plan? While historians are still debating about the reason behind Stalin's decision, several crucial accounts should be mentioned. First, Stalin started to believe that the US would not intervene in the conflicts on the Korean Peninsula. The US Secretary of States Dean Acheson's speech on National Press Club on 12th January claimed that the US defense perimeter did not include the ROK.[132] Kim's belief that the US would not intervene in the Korean Civil War since the US did not intervene in the Chinese Civil War may have influenced Stalin's thoughts. The Soviet Union deciphered the US telegram that the US General Douglas MacArthur suggested Washington not to intervene in possible military conflicts between the DPRK and the ROK (Shen, 2013: 217; Goncharov et al., 1993: 141-142; Weathersby, 1993: 433).

Second, Stalin aimed to reclaim the accession to Port Arthur (Lushunko nowadays)

[132] *The Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XXII,* p. 111-118

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that the Soviet Union had compromised in the negotiation with China. Due to the fear of the Chinese realignment from the Soviet Union to the US, the Soviet Union conceded its right on the Chinese Changchun Railway, Dairen, and Port Arthur in the negotiation of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance at the end of January 1950.[133] Among the compromise, Port Arthur possessed great strategic importance to the Soviet Union, which represented the Soviet Union's only ice-free port to the Pacific Ocean (Vladivostok was not an ice-free port) (Shen, 2013: 147-158). If a war broke out in the Korean Peninsula, the Soviet Union could assure an ice-free port to the Pacific Ocean no matter the result: if the DPRK won the war, the Soviet Union could control other ports in Southern Korea; if the DPRK lost, exposed to unfriendly foreign powers, China would need to ask the Soviet army to stay at Port Arthur for safeguarding the region (Shen, 2013: 247-252). Third, motivated by the great concession made on the new treaty with China and the likely rapprochement between China and the US, the Soviet Union planned to induce a conflict near China that could deteriorate the Sino-US relations and reinforce China's isolation (Goncharov et al., 1993: 98-99, Stueck, 1995: 34; Kim,

[133] *Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance (with Exchange of Notes Concerning the Abrogation of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance and of the Agreements on the Chinese Changchun Railway, Dairen and Port Arthur, Signed on 14 August 1945, and Concerning the Recognition of the Independence of the Mongolian People's Republic),* Moscow, Feb. 14, 1950, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 226, No. 3103, p. 3-19, available from https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20226/v226.pdf. For more details about the Soviet perception toward a likely Chinese reconciliation with the West, *see*: Goncharov, Sergei N., John Wilson Lewis, and Litai Xue. 1993. *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War.* California: Stanford University Press. p. 98-99.

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2011: 101-109).

In the second stage of the Soviet diplomacy behind the Korean War, after the outbreak of the Korean War and before the battle of Inchon, the Soviet Union urged China not to send troops. The DPRK army dominated the battlefield in the initial days after the outbreak of the Korean War on 25th June. On 28th June, just three days after the war broke out, the DPRK's army occupied Seoul, the ROK's capital (Haruki, 2018: 80). The US timely reacted in the United Nations. On 25th, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 82, determining the DPRK's military operation constituted "a breach of peace" and calling the member states "to refrain from giving assistance to the North Korean authorities."[134] On 27th, the Resolution 83 was passed, legalizing and recommending the member states' intervention in the conflict.[135] On 7th July, the Security Council urged the member states to provide military forces for intervention and entitled the unified command of the joint force to the US on Resolution 84.[136] All mentioned resolutions were passed with the Soviet Union's absence.

What was the Soviet motivation for not vetoing the resolution but deciding to be absent instead? The Soviet Union officially explained in the 27th August telegram to the

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[134] Security Council Resolution 82 (1950), *Calling upon the North Korean Authorities to withdraw their armed forces to the 38th parallel,* S/Res/82(1950) (25 June 1950), Available from https://Digitallibrary.Un.Org/Record/112025

[135] Security Council Resolution 83 (1950), *On assistance to the Republic of Korea*, S/Res/83(1950) (27 June 1950), Available from https://Digitallibrary.Un.Org/Record/112026

[136] Security Council Resolution 84 (1950), *On the Korean question and a unified command under the United States,* S/Res/84(1950) (7 July 1950), Available from https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/112027.

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Czechoslovak President Klement Gottwald that there were four reasons behind the Soviet absence: to demonstrate the solidarity between the Soviet Union and China, to emphasize the absurdness of the Kuomintang government as the US's puppet occupying the Chinese representative in the Security Council, to recognize the illegality of the resolution generated with the absence of two powers, and to induce the US abusing the majority in the council for more foolish things.[137] The Soviet Union did boycott the Security Council from January 13th for protesting Kuomintang's representativeness. Nevertheless, a more important reason could be the Soviet's aversion to escalate the situation. If the Soviet Union had executed its veto power, it would have been evidence of the Soviet manipulation of the DPRK's aggression, and the conflict may have escalated from a regional conflict to a clash between two superpowers (Haruki, 2018: 85; Stueck, 1995: 59).

The US engagement soon reversed the situation in the Korean Peninsula. On 26th June, the US air forces started to conduct strategic bombing on Kaesong, Seoul, and Pyongyang (Shen, 2013: 256). On 3rd July, the first US ground army division arrived in Korea (Haruki, 2018: 88). The US army resisted the DPRK's invasion in July and August.[138] The US's victory at the Battle of Inchon on 15th September altered the

[137] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 42-43 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 42-43。).

[138] The official name of the army that combated with the DPRK army should be the United Nations

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situation substantially in the US's favor. On 27th, the US reoccupied Seoul. The DPRK's army started to retreat from the South of the 38th parallel, and the DPRK's survival was at risk (Haruki, 2018: 112-116; Stueck, 1995: 85-87).

In response to the US's intervention, the DPRK asked the Soviet Union about the Chinese intervention. Dated back to 2nd July, China had proposed to deploy three Group Armies on the Sino-DPRK border and had asked for the Soviet air cover for the deployment (Shen, 2013: 260). On 7th, Shtykov reported to Stalin that the DPRK Foreign Minister suggested the air forces aid from the Soviet Union and the entry of Chinese troops into the Korean Peninsula (Shen, 2013: 257). On 13th, Kim met Shtykov, telling him that China had prepared to help the DPRK at its best and asking him that since the US had intervened in the war, "the democratic countries such as Czechoslovakia and China should be able to send their troops to aid the DPRK."[139] On 19th, Kim mentioned China had offered to send troops into Korea for four divisions with the size of 320,000 during the talk with Shtykov and asked for Stalin's opinion. Shtykov replied that he had no idea about Stalin's opinion on this issue.[140] On 19th August, Kim asked for aid from

army. Since the major constituent of the United Nations forces was the US army and the US was entitled to the unified command, the force would be called the US army to simplify the analysis and to emphasize the superpower's presence in the Korean War. In addition, most Soviet telegrams called the troops battling with the DPRK "the US army" instead of the United Nations army.

[139] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 434-435 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 434-435。).

[140] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 435-437 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 435-437。).

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the Soviet air force again.[141] On 26th, Kim sent an envoy to Shtykov, mentioning the issue of Chinese intervention again.[142] The Soviet Union finally responded to the DPRK requests on 28th, promising to provide air force aid without noticing a single word to the issue of Chinese intervention.[143] Kim caught the hint. In a convention among the DPRK Politburo on 21st September, Kim stated that since the Soviet Union had aided what the DPRK had asked, there would be no reason to ask for Chinese help and suggested asking Stalin first before making a resolution on demanding Chinese aid.[144]

Why did the Soviet Union keep silent on the issue of Chinese intervention? The tacit rejection of Chinese intervention originated from several reasons. First and foremost, the Soviet Union planned to entrap the US on the Korean battlefield. Recalling that both the US and the Soviet Union were not located in East Asia, the occupation of the Korean Peninsula did not possess an intrinsically critical strategic value on geopolitics for the two superpowers. Stalin's telegram to Gottwald on 27th August elaborated how the Soviet Union evaluated the ongoing stalemate in the Korean battlefield:[145]

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[141] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 32-33 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 32-33。).

[142] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 44-45 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 44-45。).

[143] *The Korean War: Declassified Documents from Archives in Russia II,* p. 515 (《俄國檔案館的解密文件（中冊）》，頁 515。).

[144] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 60-61 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 60-61。).

[145] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 42-43 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 42-43。).

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After we withdrew from Security Council, the US has embroiled in military intervention toward Korea, ruining its reputation on both military and moral dimensions. No honest person would doubt that the US plays the characters of perpetrator and aggressor in the Korean affair, and the US military is not as formidable as its propaganda. In addition, the US's attention obviously has been drawn from Europe to the Far East. From the global balance of power perspective, aren't these all favorable to us? Certainly yes.

If the US government continues to be bound in the Far East and pulls China into the struggle for the liberation of North Korea and its own independence, what will the outcome be?

First, just like other countries, the US cannot cope with China, which possesses a great number of armed forces. The US will be entrapped in the struggle. Second, after the US gets entangled, it will be incapable of embarking on World War III in the near future. Therefore, World War III would be procrastinated for an undetermined period, which earns time for the consolidation of European socialism. Not to mention that the struggle between the US and China will foster revolutions in Asia and the entire Far East. From the global balance of power perspective, aren't these all favorable to us? Certainly yes.

It was clear that for the Soviet Union, the strategic value of the Korean War was not confined to the local victory of the battlefield but the exhaustion of the US's power and the corresponding global balance of power. The conflict in Korea would have also diverted the US's attention from Europe, which was the primary region of the competition

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between the two superpowers, creating a better ground for communist expansion in Europe. Thus, the goal of the Korean War was transformed from a rapid victory to the US's entrapment in the Far East, which created a better condition for the Soviet Union's scheme in Europe (Kim & Park, 2016: 78-79; Chang & Halliday, 2005: 359).

Second, the Soviet Union may have been aware that the Chinese intervention would escalate the Korean War. As its absence in the Security Council indicated, the Soviet Union was unwilling to see that the Korean War escalated to a World War, which could drag the Soviet Union in. The Chinese intervention might raise the West's concern of full aggression from the Communist camp (Kim & Park, 2016: 78-79).

Third, an overwhelming victory by the Chinese intervention in the Korean war could have been not favorable for the Soviet Union. If the DPRK achieved an easy triumph with Chinese intervention, it would significantly improve the Chinese status inside the Communist camp. The Soviet Union might have held an optimistic view on the Korean War by two telegrams arguing that the situation favored the DPRK in July and August (Shen, 2013: 264-265). If the Soviet Union believed that the DPRK could ensure an easy win with Chinese aid, it was reasonable to prevent China from adopting piling on strategy, which "bandwagon with the victor to claim an unearned share of the spoils," just as the Soviet Union had exemplified with the declaration of war on Japan in the very end of the World War II (Schweller, 1994: 95-96).

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After the battle of Inchon reversing the Korean battlefield situation, in the third stage, the Soviet Union urged China to send troops crossing the border. The DPRK's defeat in Inchon alerted China. On 18th September, the Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai told the Soviet Ambassador in China Nikolai Vasilievich Roshchin that China should mobilize its army from the South to the North East to disturb the opponent.[146] The Soviet Union replied to China on 20th without mentioning the issue of military mobilization.[147] After three days, China called the issue more explicitly that "if the US threatens to eliminate the DPRK, China is obliged to help the DPRK comrades."[148] The deteriorated situation also compelled the DPRK to ask for any help it might receive. On 30th September, Kim formally asked Stalin for direct military assistance from the Soviet Union and proposed that if some reason made the Soviet aid impossible, "please help us by establishing a voluntary international army in China and other People's Democratic states for providing military assistance on our endeavor."[149] The situation now requested the Soviet Union to respond to the issue of Chinese intervention directly.

The negotiation around the Chinese intervention in the first half of October was

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[146] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 51-52 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 51-52。).

[147] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 53-56 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 53-56。).

[148] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 61-62 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 61-62。).

[149] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 69-71 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 69-71).

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convoluted. On 1st October, the Soviet Union first time asked China for intervention, sending troops—even just five or six divisions—to march toward the 38th parallel.[150] China refused the proposal on 2nd, arguing that few divisions could not assure victory against the US due to poor quality equipment, and the intervention would lead to a total clash between China and the US, the conflict which could drag the Soviet Union in due to the Sino-Soviet alliance. China advised that the DPRK should adopt guerilla tactics and suggested a Sino-Soviet meeting on the issue of the Korean War.[151] On 5th, the Soviet Union agreed on the suggestion of meeting and asked for Chinese intervention again, arguing that China could send more troops and if World War III was unavoidable, it would be better to fight at the moment than after the revival of Japan and the ROK controlling the whole of Korea.[152] On 6th, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party Mao Zedong met Roshchin, expressing that he agreed on Stalin's analysis of war and would send Zhou and the Chinese General Lin Biao to visit Stalin on 8th.[153]

On 8th, Mao noticed the Soviet Union that he had decided to send troops into Korea and had noticed Kim. Zhou arrived at the Soviet Union on the same day.[154] However, on

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[150] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 72-73 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 72-73。).

[151] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 77-78 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 77-78。).

[152] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 80-81 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 80-81。).

[153] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 84-85 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 84-85。).

[154] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 88

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11th, the telegram of the conclusion of the Sino-Soviet meeting sent to Mao, which Stalin and Zhou jointly agreed on "despite the favorable international situation, in avoidance of embroiled into a difficult situation, the Chinese troops should not cross the border with Korea due to the lack of preparation," suggesting to abandon the DPRK.[155] Mao ordered the Chinese troops to stop the previous plan on 12th.[156] One day after, the situation reversed again. On 13th, Mao expressed to Roshchin that the Chinese Communist Party leaders believed that they should come to assist the DPRK and asked for the Soviet air cover as early as possible and no later than two months.[157] On 18th, China held a convention that made the final decision on the intervention in the Korean War (Shen, 2013: 316). On the same day, Mao ordered four group armies and three artillery divisions to cross the border in the night of 19th.

What had the Soviet Union done to generate the convoluted decision-making of Chinese intervention? The October negotiation could be divided into four periods: the Chinese first refusal (2nd-7th), the Chinese first acceptance (8th-11th), the Chinese second

(《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 88。).

[155] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 90-91 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 90-91。). The signature of the joint advice was signed by Zhou and "Filippov." Filippov was a pseudonym of Stalin in the Soviet ciphered telegrams (Shen, 2013: 215; Mikoyan, 2010: 118). Haruki (2018: 247-248) suggested that Stalin's adoption of pseudonyms was a way to hide his opinion inside the Soviet: "[c]opies of Mao's and Kim's messages to Stalin were circulated to other Politburo members; Stalin's answers under various pseudonyms—Filippov, Fyn Si, and Semenov—apparently were not."

[156] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 92-93 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 92-93。).

[157] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 96-97 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 96-97。).

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refusal (12th), and the Chinese final acceptance (13th-18th). As the section analyzing the strategy of the Soviet Union, here would focus on the Soviet Union's commitment to China, which majorly concerned the Chinese first acceptance to the Chinese second refusal. The remaining parts would be explained in the next section.

The turning point from the Chinese first acceptance on 8th October and the second refusal on 12th lied in the meeting between Stalin and Zhou, which was held at Stalin's Black Sea villa (Shen, 2013: 162). The core disagreement between the Soviet Union and China in the Black Sea meeting was the Soviet commitment to mobilizing air forces. The issue of the Soviet air commitment could be traced back to July. On 2nd July, China had proposed to deploy three Group Armies in the Shenyang district, which was on the Sino-DPRK border, and had asked for air cover from the Soviet air forces (Shen, 2013: 260). On 5th, the Soviet Union agreed on the Chinese proposal, suggested that nine divisions should be deployed on the Sino-Korean border, and promised to "try our best to provide air cover for these troops."[158] The Soviet Union confirmed again through its telegram on 13th that if China decided to deploy its army, the Soviet Union prepared "to send the fighter aviation division with 124 jet aircraft for providing these troops air cover."[159]

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[158] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 429 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 429。).

[159] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 433-434 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 433-434。).

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China consented and welcomed the Soviet offer on 22nd.[160] It should be noted that the Soviet Union and China did reach a consensus about the Soviet's air cover on the Chinese deployment near the border, but it was not explicit whether the Soviet Union commitment could extend to the situation when the Chinese army crossed the border, moving into the Korean Peninsula. The Soviet Union did promise to provide air cover to the deployment of the Chinese troops but no explicit commitment on the possible corresponding mobilization crossing the Sino-Korean border afterward.

The Soviet Union rejected to provide air cover simultaneously to the Chinese intervention in the Black Sea meeting. On the October 6th telegram, Roshchin recorded that during his meeting with Mao, Mao "drew a great attention on issues concerning air forces," pointing out that China had not organized its own air forces, which was necessary to cover the land army sending to Korea, to coordinate with the operation in the battlefront, and to protect important industrial cities in China, with the conclusion that emphasized China's urgency of acquiring technology and equipment from the Soviet Unions.[161] During the Black Sea meeting, China urged the Soviet Union to send air forces for providing simultaneous air support on the Chinese army mobilizing into the Korean

[160] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 437-438 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 437-438。).

[161] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 84-85 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 84-85。).

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Peninsula. The Soviet Union rejected the request (Shen, 2013: 304-305). The conclusion of the meeting, signed by Stalin and Zhou on 11th, clearly stated that the aircraft unit for implementing air cover could only be provided after at least two months.[162] After deciding to withdraw the intervention plan on 12th, Mao changed his mind on 13th. In the talk with Roshchin, Mao expressed his resolve to intervene, demanded the arrival of the Soviet air forces "no later than two months in any case," and asked Zhou to renegotiate with Stalin.[163] Replying to Zhou's telegram about Chinese demands sent on 14th, Stalin refused to give the commitment to mobilizing the Soviet air force into the Korean Peninsula. Stalin stated that the Soviet air force would only deploy and defend within the Chinese territory and would not enter Korea even after two or two and a half months (Shen, 2013: 314-315).

The direct reason behind the Soviet Union's reluctance toward sending air forces into Korea was still unclear. The Soviet Union's hesitance on sending air forces might have originated from the US's deterrence. The US twice attacked the Soviet air forces. On 4th September, the US attacked a Soviet aircraft on the Yellow Sea.[164] On 7th October,

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[162] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 90-91 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 90-91。).

[163] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 92-93, 97-98 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 92-93, 97-98。).

[164] *The Korean War: Declassified Documents from Archives in Russia II,* p. 522-523 (《俄國檔案館的解密文件（中冊）》，頁 522-523。).

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two US F-80 strafed the Soviet airdrome with machine guns.[165] In both incidents, the US refused to accept the Soviet diplomatic note, claiming that due to the United Nations Security Council resolutions, the note should be delivered to the United Nations but not the US. The Soviet Union made no effective reaction apart from diplomatic notes (Shen, 2013: 307-309). The Soviet Union's inaction about the US's offensive behavior was consistent with the reluctance toward sending air forces into Korea, which could serve the purposes of preventing an escalation of war and avoiding getting embroiled in the conflict. Nevertheless, the reason behind Stalin's complete withdrawal from the previous offer of providing air forces remained unknown.

Last but not least, the Soviet Union's phrasing on the telegram concerning Chinese refusal of intervention revealed a strong tone of blaming the abandonment toward DPRK on China. On the 11th telegram about the joint advise signed by Stalin and Zhou, the text explicitly stated that "[t]he Chinese troops that planned to send were not prepared with poor equipment, lacking artillery and tanks," and attribute the conclusion of abandon the DPRK as "[b]ased on above reasons and considering the unfavorable factors that Chinese intervention could bring to Chinese internal affairs reported by comrade Zhou Enlai." The telegram also pointed out the suggestion of non-intervention was due to "the lack of

[165] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1950, Vol. IV,* p. 1260-1261.

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preparation" of the Chinese troops "despite the favorable situation." The last line of the telegram was "waiting for your decision," trying to let Mao be the one making the final call.[166] The telegram from Stalin to the DPRK for expressing the advice concluded by the Black Sea meeting intentionally pointed out that "I also want to inform you that Comrade Mao Zedong agreed with and endorsed on the suggestion formed from this meeting," emphasizing Mao's role in abandoning the DPRK.[167]

From the 1949 planning of the war to the October negotiation, the Soviet Union consistently performed its reluctance toward engaging in the Korean War, refusing to provide the collective good on which its partners could be ridden free. The Soviet Union agitated the war, giving the green light to the DPRK's plan of military unification. However, the Soviet Union rejected the Chinese proposal to intervene in the early stage of the war, when the situation had been favorable to the DPRK. After the US's victory in the Inchon battle, when facing the possible devastation of the DPRK by the US aggression crossing the 38th parallel, the Soviet Union finally asked China for intervention. However, the Soviet Union refused to commit to the simultaneous air cover for Chinese troops mobilizing into the Korean Peninsula and only promised to send air forces two months

[166] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 90-91 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 90-91。).

[167] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 93-94 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 93-94。).

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after Chinese intervention on 11th October. After three days, the Soviet Union even withdrew from the previous two-month delay air cover proposal, arguing that the Soviet air force would not enter Korea even after two months.

The Soviet Union clearly adopted a buck-passing strategy after the US predominated the Korean battlefield. As the agitator of the warfare on the Korean Peninsula and as the two superpowers under bipolarity, facing the aggression from another superpower, the Soviet Union did not mobilize its troops to aid the DPRK but passed the buck to China, urging China to intervene without promising the assistance of air cover in Korea. Even in the joint advice derived from the Black Sea meeting, the Soviet phrases blamed China for abandoning the DPRK. Aiming to reduce the cost of checking the US aggression by riding free on China's efforts, the Soviet Union demonstrated a perfect example of implementing a buck-passing strategy.

What were the factors fostering the Soviet Union's adoption of buck-passing strategy? The Soviet interests and concerns behind the Korean War played a crucial role. Through the above analysis, securing the accession of an ice-free port to the Pacific Ocean and exhausting the US by the bloody conflicts in Korea could be found as the Soviet Union's main interests behind the Korean War. The main interest as securing an ice-free port and minor interest as deteriorating the Sino-US relations had been achieved by the action of launching the Korean War itself without relying on the result of the DPRK's

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victory. The concern on the escalation prevented the Soviet Union from engaging in the war, which could lead to a direct confrontation between the two superpowers. Therefore, the buck-passing strategy served well for the Soviet Union's interest of exhausting the US without embroiling itself into the war and with the addition of preserving its own power. The main drawback of the buck-passing strategy—the outcome of appeasement could be generated by other defensive states refusing to catch the buck—was not fatal in this case. Geographically, the Soviet Union's main population concentrated on the west side of its vast territory. The US's occupation of the whole of Korea would have been a loss but not an intolerable cost that could pose a direct security threat to the Soviet Union.

As an irresponsible agitator, the Soviet Union adopted the buck-passing strategy when the US challenged the status quo as the 38th parallel. China's decision determined the outcome of the Korean War case.

4.2.2.2. China: An Unwilling Balancer

Like the Soviet Union, the Chinese diplomacy in the Korean War could also be divided into three stages. Before the outbreak of the war, China was unwilling to support the DPRK's plan of military unification. After the war broke out, China proactively suggested intervening in the conflict, but the Soviet Union rejected the proposal. In October, when the Soviet Union reversed previous policy and asked for Chinese

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intervention, China had a convoluted decision-making process and finally determined to send the troops across the Yalu River, the Sino-Korean border. This section aims to answer why China decided to catch the buck, intervening in the Korean War in the end.

Before the Soviet Union endorsed the DPRK's military unification plan, China's agenda was to end the Chinese Civil War by conquering Taiwan completely. Mao had sent a telegram to Stalin on 21st October expressing China's disapproval of the DPRK's plan to unify Korea by force with Stalin's agreement.[168] On 27th October, China was defeated by the Kuomintang government in the battle of Guningtou, which stopped the Chinese offense and transformed the situation between China and Kuomintang into a stalemate (Yang, 2016: 118-120). China's strategic priority thus shifted to the preparation of the next military operation against the Kuomintang regime.

Not until May 1950 was China informed about the Soviet endorsement of the DPRK's military unification plan. On 3rd May, Stalin told Mao that the DPRK leaders would visit Mao to report the conclusion of the Sovie-DPRK meeting in April.[169] On 13th, Mao received Kim and the DPRK Foreign Minister. During the meeting, the DPRK leaders informed Mao that the Soviet Union had given the green light to their military

[168] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 139, 153 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 139, 153。).

[169] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 388 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 388。).

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unification plan. For the sake of prudence, Mao asked Stalin for confirmation on the same day.[170] Stalin soon replied to Mao on 14th, confirming the Soviet Union's endorsement of the DPRK's plan and noticing that the issue of Korean military unification "should be collectively determined by Chinese comrades and the Korean comrades."[171] Mao replied immediately on the same day that he agreed with the estimations by the DPRK.[172]

It should be noted that although it seemed that China deliberately agreed on the DPRK's proposal, China actually could hardly reject the proposal with the Soviet Union's endorsement. Through the negotiation of the Sino-Soviet alliance in December 1949 and January 1950, China had secured three hundred million US dollars Soviet loans over the next few years (Goncharov et al., 1993: 95). The Soviet Union also permitted China to use half of the loan to purchase Soviet equipment to strengthen the Chinese navy, which was crucial for the military operation targeting Taiwan (Goncharov et al., 1993: 99-100). The continuing war in China also devastated the Chinese economy and infrastructure: 50% of the electric industry and 90% of the steel industry were destroyed, and the fiscal deficit in 1949 was about 46.4% of the total annual spending (Shen, 2000: 50-51). The prospect of the Chinese economy relied on its cooperation with the Soviet Union. If China

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[170] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 411 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 411).

[171] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 412 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 412。).

[172] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 412-413 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 412-413。).

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performed inharmoniously to the Soviet plan, China could hardly bear the risk of losing the Soviet economic commitment (Goncharov et al., 1993: 146). This was also a critical factor in the Chinese decision of intervention afterward.

Shortly after China agreed on the DPRK's plan, the Korean War broke out on 25th July, which soon triggered the US's retaliation that posed grave obstacles to China's previous agenda. Before the outbreak of the Korean War, the US had abandoned the Kuomintang government. In August 1949, the Truman government published the China White Paper, which was later depicted as "letting the dust settle," reinforcing the US policy of disengagement and non-intervention (Hao & Zhai, 1990: 96-97).[173] The US President Harry S. Truman's speech on 1st January 1950 clearly stated that the US would not interfere in Taiwan affairs and would not pursue courses that could embroil the US into the Chinese Civil War.[174] The exclusion of Taiwan from the US defense perimeter in Acheson's speech on the National Press Club on 12th reaffirmed the policy.[175]

As a critical premise for the Chinese military unification plan, the US's disengagement policy was altered by the outbreak of the Korean War. After two days, on 27th June, Truman declared a reversal of the previous policy, the neutralization of Taiwan

[173] The phrase "let the dust settle" originated from the Acheson's acquiescence in the debate with the US Senate Ralph Owen Brewster: "'You are going to let the dust settle?' Brewster goaded. 'If you wish to put it that way,' Acheson wearily retorted. (Time, 1951)"

[174] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman,* p. 11-17.

[175] *The Department of State Bulletin. Vol. XXII,* p. 111-118

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Strait:[176]

"The attack upon Korea makes it plain beyond all doubt that communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war...Accordingly I have ordered the 7th Fleet to prevent any attack on Formosa...The determination of the future status of Formosa must await the restoration of security in the Pacific, a peace settlement with Japan, or consideration by the United Nations."

The neutralization of the Taiwan strait had a serious influence on the Chinese decision to intervene in the Korean War in October. First, China perceived the US policy reversal as its determination to intervene in the Chinese Civil War. On 28th, Zhou stated that "I, on behalf of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, declared that Truman's declaration on 27th and the action of the US navy, was the military aggression to the Chinese territory and a total breach to the Charter of the United Nations."[177] Mao accused Truman of tearing up "all international agreements concerning non-intervention of the Chinese domestic politics" in the Central Committee of the Chinese People's Government.[178] The negative perception of the US policy reversal triggered Chinese retaliation not only on words but also on actions. Invited by the United

[176] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman,* p. 492.
[177] *Selected Pieces Concerning Zhou Enlai Diplomacy,* p. 18-19 (《周恩來外交文選》，頁 18-19。).
[178] *Selected Pieces of Mao Zedong since the Foundation of New China. Volume I,* p. 423 (《建國以來毛澤東文稿》，第一冊，頁 423。).

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Nations Security Council, China filed a complaint about the US armed invasion of Taiwan in November 1950, which was the only record that the representatives from China and from Kuomintang simultaneously presented and debated in the United Nations (Hsiao, 2016: 166-174). The Chinese interpretation of the Truman talk exaggerated the US's enmity toward China, which the US planned only to neutralize the Taiwan strait as a temporary measure (Chang, 2011: 84-88, 101-103). The Chinese misperception of the US policy was more difficult to handle by the lack of high-level regular diplomatic channel between China and the US—at the moment, the "China" US recognized was the Kuomintang government. The intensified Chinese-US rivalry also boosted the Chinese reliance on its partnership with the Soviet Union. Second, the obstacle on China's previous plan of military unification on Taiwan allowed China to mobilize more troops from the Southern East territory to the district nearby the Sino-Korean border. The US policy provided the ground for the early Chinese proposal of intervening in the Korean War in July and August.

Pushed by the US policy, China proactively proposed an early intervention in the second stage. On 2nd July, when suggesting the deployment of three Group Armies on the Sino-DPRK border, China mentioned that if the US army crossed the 38th parallel, the Chinese troops would combat with the US army on the title of "volunteer army" and with wearing the DPRK army's uniform for disguising (Shen, 2013: 260). The Chinese

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proposal was no joke. In the meeting with Shtykov on 13th, Kim reported that while mentioning the willingness to offer help, the Chinese charge d'affaire asked for the map of Korea with different scales and the sample of the DPRK army's uniform.[179] On 19th, during the talk with Shtykov, Kim mentioned China had offered to send troops into Korea for four divisions with the size of 320,000.

Despite receiving no reply from the Soviet Union, China was still preparing for the possible request of intervention in August. On 5th August, Mao called the President of the Northeast District People's Government Gao Gang to finish all preparation for military operation within August and waited for engaging in combat in September. Gao stated in a military convention on 11th-13th that the mobilization was required to employ the title of the volunteer army and to disguise as the DPRK army on uniforms, flags, codes, and names. On 18th August, Mao commanded Gao that all military preparation should be finished before the end of September (Shen, 2013: 265). With the deteriorated situation after the battle of Inchon, on 18th September, China called upon the issue of intervention to the Soviet Union again. However, due to the worsening situation on the Korean battlefield, while still suggesting the mobilization of Chinese troops to the Sino-Korean border on 18th, China mentioned the possibility to resort the case of the Korean War to

[179] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 434-435 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 434-435。).

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the United Nations for a peaceful solution and asked for the Soviet Union's opinion.[180] The Chinese strategic aim of the mobilization, in addition to preparing for directly intervening, conformed to the bluffing strategy for earning better conditions on the possible negotiation (Kim, 2016: 252).

In the third stage, China and the Soviet Union launched a convoluted negotiation in October, which could be divided into four periods: the Chinese first refusal (2^{nd}-7^{th}), the Chinese first acceptance (8^{th}-11^{th}), the Chinese second refusal (12^{th}), and the Chinese final acceptance (13^{th}-18^{th}). The detailed narration of the interaction between China and the Soviet Union and the reason behind the Soviet Union's changing commitment has been examined in the previous section. This section would focus on the decision-making and the reasons behind the Chinese repeated reversal of its policy toward intervening in the Korean War. For explaining the Chinese reversal of its external policy toward intervention, the domestic discussion is necessary to elaborate, the topic on which Shen Zihua's magnum opus provided an in-depth analysis (Shen, 2013: 284-316).

Asked by the Soviet Union for intervening in the Korean War on 1^{st} October, Mao immediately held a conference on the same day, which did not reach a consensus among majorities. Mao thus held an enlarged conference on the next day, and the majority agreed

[180] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 51-52 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 51-52。).

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that the issue of intervention should be handled with more discretion. Mao decided to organize a conference on 4th with more members and invite the Chinese General Peng Dehuai, who subsequently became the People's Volunteer Army commander. The participants of the conference on 4th were still divergent on the intervention issue. On 5th morning, Mao met with Peng and expressed to Peng that he preferred Peng to be the commander of the intervening forces. On the same afternoon, Peng declared that he supported intervention in the Korean War in the conference, and thus the decision was made (Shen, 2013: 284-288). The development of domestic discussion explained the Chinese first refusal: a clear opinion among Chinese leadership on intervention was not formed until 5th.

After China noticed the Soviet Union on its decision to intervene on 8th, the Soviet Union's refusal of providing air cover in the joint advice on 11th led to the Chinese second refusal on 12th. What reversed the Chinese policy once again? The insistence from Mao did. After receiving the telegram of joint advice, Mao ordered the intervening troops to halt the previous plan of mobilizing into the Korean Peninsula while staying prepared and summoned Peng and Gao to Beijing for the conference. On 13th afternoon, Mao insisted on intervention even without the Soviet air cover and persuaded other participants on the conference (Shen, 2013: 312-313). The decision was expressed to Roshchin on the same day, and Mao emphasized himself as the key person in the decision-making during the

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meeting.[181] Even the later Soviet complete withdrawal from sending air forces into the Korean Peninsula did not alter Mao's resolve. On 18th, Mao held the conference, making the final call on intervention. In the same evening, Mao ordered the troops to enter the Korean Peninsula on the following evening (Shen, 2013: 316-317).

Throughout its diplomacy in 1949-1950, despite not planning the war initiatively, China performed volition on participating in the Korean affairs. Although the decision-making process was tortuous, China was resolved to intervene at the end even after the Soviet Union refused to provide air cover. Though with short backing down in October, China steadily committed to the engagement into the Korean War and actually adopted the balancing strategy, carrying the buck after the Soviet Union explicitly passed the buck to it. In contrast to the Soviet Union's policy at the same period, what was the motivation behind Chinese diplomacy? Two major concerns mattered.

The first and foremost rationale was the strategic value of the Korean War result for China. The possible results of the Korean War—from the expulsion of the US in the Korean Peninsula if the DPRK won to the US occupation of the whole Korean peninsula if the DPRK was defeated—weighed heavily for Chinese diplomacy toward Korean affairs. Unlike the Soviet Union, which emphasized not on the result of the war but on

[181] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume III, 1950.8─1951.8,* p. 96-97 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第三卷 1950.8─1951.8》，頁 96-97。).

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embroiling the US in the Korean battlefield and gained interests by the outbreak of war itself, which side occupied the Korean Peninsula possesses great value to China. If the US was repelled from the Korean Peninsula, China could acquire the buffer of the sea to the capitalist states. If the US wanted to invade the Chinese sphere of influence again, the US would need to overcome the difficulty of implementing amphibious assault. On the contrary, the US occupation of the whole Korean Peninsula if the DPRK was totally defeated would pose a grave threat to Chinese security. The Northeast part of China, which was the industrial center, would be under the pressure of continuing air assault. China would also lose the buffer toward the US-supported regime and face the threat of direct invasion from its Northeast frontier, which was not far away from the Chinese capital Beijing.

The high strategic value of repelling the US out of the Korean Peninsula was also demonstrated in the cease-fire negotiation in January 1951. On 11th January, due to the Chinese preponderance on the Korean battlefield, the United Nations General Assembly passed the principles of calling cease-fire in Korea with supplementary that the General Assembly would hold a conference to discuss Taiwan's status and China's representation in the United Nations (Shen & Xia, 2011: 196). Although the offer was so attractive that it could much improve the predicament on the Taiwan issue and the isolation in the international regimes, China rejected the United Nations' proposal. The reason behind the

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rejection was the Chinese pursuit to repel all foreign forces in the whole of Korea (Shen & Xia, 2011: 198). The decision of turning down the United Nation's offer originated from the over-optimism about the war development, yet it also reflected that China attached great importance to the expulsion of the US from the Korean Peninsula.

The second concern was to secure the economic and military aids promised in the Sino-Soviet alliance. As discussed above, the Chinese economy was devastated in 1950 due to World War II and the Chinese Civil War. The infrastructure and industrial facilities were destroyed, and the number of technicians was in a remarkable lack due to the Kuomintang experts retreating to Taiwan and the repatriation of the Japanese technicians from the former Manchukuo district. China relied on the Soviet Union on military as well (Shen, 2000: 77-79). The weapon of the Chinese troops was mainly purchased from the Soviet Union. The partnership with the Soviet Union was critical for China's prospect of building a strong air force and navy and acquiring nuclear weapons. During the negotiation about the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance, Mao had admitted that the lack of air forces and navy blocked the Chinese way to unify Taiwan militarily and asked for the Soviet Union's help.[182] China spent forty million US dollars (out of sixty million the promised three hundred million Soviet loan in the fiscal

[182] *Selected Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations, Volume II, 1949.3-1950.7,* p. 175-178 (《俄羅斯解密檔案選編：中蘇關係 第二卷 1949.3─1950.7》，頁 175-178。).

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year) to purchase military weapons including aircraft and artillery in 1950 (Shen, 2000: 55). The Chinese reliance on the Soviet Union was intensified by the US policy of neutralizing the Taiwan Strait. After the US policy, on its road to eliminating the Kuomintang government, China had to choose whether to build a more formidable army to deter the US engagement or to pacify the US for its benevolence to withdraw the policy. It was rational to choose the former path since Mao was a realist and China was a Communist state. The decision of intervening in the Korean War, which was costly not only on troops causalities and military expenditure but also on restraining itself from the rapprochement with the US, proved China's loyalty and the resolve to honor the friendship with the Soviet Union. Otherwise, China was likely to lose the trust of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet commitment China acquired could have gone in vain. China betted on the requital the Soviet Union might reward. From hindsight, China won the bet. The Soviet Union provided massive military weapons to China, including the urgently needed aircraft—the Soviet Union gave China 372 MiG-15 aircraft for free in 1951—which substantially accelerated the modernization of the Chinese army (Shen, 2013: 341-345). The economic aids promised in the Sino-Soviet alliance were carried out and broadened. The intervention of the Korean War constituted the foundation of the Sino-Soviet partnership in the coming years.

The two major concerns explained Chinese diplomacy in the different stages. In the

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first stage, China was undertaking the military unification toward Taiwan and thus refused the DPRK's proposal. When the Soviet Union endorsed the DPRK's plan, China soon agreed to consolidate the Sino-Soviet alliance. In the second stage, when the DPRK predominated the battlefield, China was willing to provide aids that could assure the DPRK's victory, which meant the expulsion of foreign forces. However, without the consent of the Soviet Union, China could implement no external actions but internally prepare for the possible calling. In the third stage, the deteriorated war situation after the battle of Inchon generated Chinese hesitation to intervene in the Korean War in October—if the intervention could not assure the victory or at least push the US forces back from the Sino-Korean frontier, the intervention would impose a serious cost on the already devasted Chinese economy with limited gain. The Soviet Union's rejection of sending air forces intensified the anxiety. The Chinese final decision was the mixed product of the two concerns: China could not bear the US occupation of the whole Korean Peninsula, and China needed to honor the partnership. Despite the risk of defeat and no requital from the Soviet Union, China intervened in the Korean War.

4.2.3. Outcome: Buck-passing in Bipolarity

The Korean War exemplified a case with archetypical buck-passing as outcome under bipolarity. Although the Communist camp was the side initiating the war, the US

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crossed the 38th parallel after the victory in the battle of Inchon, targeting the annihilation of the DPRK, which the Soviet Union and China perceived as aggression that challenged the status quo. The Soviet Union adopted the buck-passing strategy, refused to send forces into the Korean Peninsula, and asked China to make a decision between intervention and abandonment toward the Korean affairs. China finally decided to adopt the balancing strategy by directly intervening in the Korean War, carrying the buck that the Soviet Union passed. While China provided the collective good as checking aggression, the Soviet Union remained on the sideline and rode free on the Chinese effort. The pattern of buck-passing was conspicuous in the Korean War, which contradicts the past buck-passing theories about no buck-passing under bipolarity. Both superpowers under bipolarity were involved in the case of the Korean War. One aimed to change the previous status quo, and another one passed the buck. In the end, a regional great power caught the buck, balancing against the aggressive superpower. The interaction between the US, the Soviet Union, and China in 1950 challenged the past theories about the relationship between buck-passing and bipolarity, which the revised framework has offered an explanation.

Two factors contributed to the outcome of the Korean War as archetypical buck-passing. First, there was a tacit understanding among the three states that the war should be limited. For the US and the Soviet Union, the escalation of the war by one superpower

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would impose the pressure for another superpower to retaliate due to the logic of the Cold War, which could ultimately lead to the disaster as World War III. For China, it was only feasible to fight a war with a superpower on a limited scale. If the war escalated, the power discrepancy between China and the superpower would obscure the prospect of the war. The three states implemented actions to avoid escalation. China sent their troops with the title of "People's Volunteer Army," circumventing a formal declaration of war. The Soviet Union noticed the DPRK during the April meeting prior to the outbreak of war that no Soviet direct intervention and advisers would be provided in the initial stage of the war (Stueck, 1995: 36). The Soviet Union refused to assist China by sending air forces to the Korean Peninsula in the October negotiation as well. The Soviet Union consistently adopted the guideline of non-direct involvement. When the Korean War broke out, the US refused the Kuomintang government's proposals to send an army of 33,000 joining the United Nations force and to launch a preemptive attack toward Chinese airports and military rally points (Chang, 2011: 88-94). Dated back to 25th August 1950, when discussing the possible Chinese intervention in the Korea War, the US deliberately emphasized the importance of limiting the war scale in the decision of US National Security Council: "[t]he United States should not permit itself to become engaged in a

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general war with Communist China."[183] The tacit understanding of limitation was the premise of the Chinese intervention in the Korean War.

Second, the divergent strategic values on the result of the Korean War for the Soviet Union and China fostered the outcome as archetypical buck-passing. For the Soviet Union, launching the war itself and embroiling the US in the conflict fulfilled the Soviet main interests in the Korean War. The result of the war did not possess a decisive value. The US occupation of the whole of Korea was tolerable for the Soviet Union, which major population dwelled in the west side of its vast territory. The expulsion of the US from the Korean Peninsula could be an expansion of the Communist side but provide no crucial strategic value since Japan was still under US control, blocking the Soviet path to dominating the northwest Pacific Ocean. In contrast, China attached great importance to the result of the war. The US occupation of the whole of Korea would be intolerable due to the shared border and the possible air assault. The expulsion of the US possessed great value for ensuring sea as the buffer and imposing difficulty of amphibious operation on the subsequent aggression. For the Soviet Union, the payoff of the Korean War, no matter win or lose, was not decisive, which was the foundation of the Soviet adoption of the buck-passing strategy. For China, victory or defeat as the result of the war was totally

[183] *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1950, Vol. I,* p. 375-391.

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different: the victory could enhance the Chinese security significantly, and the defeat was intolerable so long as the US was China's enemy. The different levels of pressure derived from the divergent strategic values created the ground of one state adopting the buck-passing strategy when the other state adopted the balancing strategy in the meantime, which is the necessary requirements of the outcome as archetypical buck-passing.

"We think we should intervene. We must intervene. The interest in intervention is significant. The damage of non-intervention is grave." Mao explained to Zhou about the decision of intervention.[184] To adopt Mao's assertion in the context of analyzing the Korean War case's outcome as archetypical buck-passing, we could put: China should have intervened. China must have intervened. China needed to intervene due to the Soviet Union's buck-passing. China was capable of intervening because of the limited scale of the Korean War. Chinese interest in the intervention was significant, while the Soviet one was moderate. Chinese damage of non-intervention was grave, while the Soviet one was bearable. All these conditions contributed to the result of the Korea War case: archetypical buck-passing as outcome in bipolarity.

[184] *Selected Pieces of Mao Zedong, Vol. VI,* p. 103-104 (《毛澤東文集》，第六卷，頁 103-104。).

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5. Conclusion

Buck-passing, as a theoretical concept derived from Western history, has drawn growing attention and become one of the mainstream interpretations when explaining a state's diplomatic strategies in the realist school. The vitality of buck-passing as a concept is demonstrated in the proliferating literature both on the theorization embedded in grand theory and on the adoption to explain more cases from divergent regions and histories. However, buck-passing's expanding influence on both theory and case studies has been undermined by the lack of a fundamental review focusing on the concept itself: the usages of buck-passing are conflicting in different works, and the conceptualization of buck-passing is confused within a single piece. A consistent and applicable theoretical framework is in need.

This essay is an attempt to achieve this goal. The first chapter provides an overview of the essay. The second chapter presents a thorough literature review with the development of the concept of buck-passing, a comparison among important works concerning buck-passing theories, and the deficiency of current literature. The third chapter proposed a revised framework of buck-passing. The framework comprises the conceptualization, theorization, and operationalization of buck-passing, which constitutes an integral understanding of the concept of buck-passing. The fourth chapter contains two

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case studies. The first case is the classic case of buck-passing theoretical study: the Munich Crisis. The analysis of the interaction between great powers in the late inter-war period suggests that the great powers backed down and adopted the buck-passing strategy at the end of September, which led to the outcome as appeasement at the end of September 1938. The Korean war is the topic of the second case study. The investigation demonstrates that under bipolarity, when the US as a superpower aimed to alter the status quo by eliminating the DPRK, the Soviet Union as another superpower adopted the buck-passing strategy, refusing to commit troops mobilization into the Korean Peninsula. China finally decided to catch the buck, intervening in the Korean war by directly combating the US army.

Three core findings in this essay contribute to the realm of buck-passing studies. First, the revised framework provides a coherent theory of buck-passing. There are three principal innovations of the revised framework. The first innovation, which constitutes the foundation of the revised framework, is to distinguish intent, action, and outcome as the three images. Past studies confuse the three images and thus encounter problems about low external differentiation between buck-passing and appeasement and the arbitrary selection of historical facts that holds the theoretical assessment of a state's strategy. Under the classification of three images, the revised framework emphasizes the importance of outcome, since buck-passing as outcome could not be achieved by a single

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state's unilateral policy: there must be an aggressor, a buck-passer which adopts buck-passing strategy, and a buck-catcher which balances against the aggressor. This challenges the past studies' over-simplified explanation that a state's strategy will directly lead to the same kind of outcome. Based on the above theoretical hypotheses, the revised framework provides the conceptional definition and operationalization of buck-passing. The three typical outcomes in a possible buck-passing circumstance—alliance formation, archetypical buck-passing, and appeasement—are examined. Second, the revised framework offers a stricter process on selecting the actors in a case study, which propounds a solution toward the related deficiency on lack of justification within a work and the inconsistency across different works. The classification of involved agents with the new subtype of great power—regional great power—generates a new theory about buck-passing in bipolarity. Contradicted to the past theory that no buck-passing occurs under bipolarity due to the unrivaled strength of superpowers, the new theory suggests that the regional great power could be capable of carrying the buck and balancing against a superpower under the conditions that the conflict is limited and takes place in the regional great power's own region. The revised framework provides a more precise and more coherent conceptualization of buck-passing with several theoretical novelties.

The second finding is the reassessment of the classical case Munich Crisis in buck-passing theory. This essay provides a detailed analysis of actions the great powers

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implemented during the late inter-war period and the theoretical implication of them. It also shows the concrete process of how great powers' strategies generate the final outcome of the Munich Crisis. Illuminated by the revised framework, the analysis concludes that although some great powers once or more balanced against Germany, all great powers except for Italy as a bandwagoner backed down and adopted the buck-passing strategy at the end of September 1938, thus leading to the outcome as appeasement. The explanation circumvents the theoretical impasse about different interpretations on strategies of great powers, especially Britain, by the clear distinguishment between strategy and outcome: all defensive great powers adopted buck-passing as strategy, which led to the appeasement as outcome.

The third finding is to demonstrate that buck-passing does occur in bipolarity. The analysis of the Korean War unveils the historical process from the DPRK's first proposal of military unification to the Chinese intervention. Looking through the interaction between the Soviet Union and China in 1949-1950, an obvious pattern emerges: facing the aggression from the US as a superpower, the Soviet Union as another superpower adopted the buck-passing strategy, urging China to intervene while refusing to send forces into the Korean Peninsula; with hesitation, China finally decided to send troops across the Sino-Korean border and engage into the war, balancing against the US and catching the buck from the Soviet Union. The factors of tacit understanding among the three states

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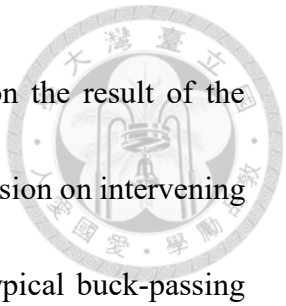

that the war should be limited and the divergent strategic values on the result of the Korean War for the Soviet Union and China fostered the Chinese decision on intervening in the Korean War. The outcome of the Korean war case as archetypical buck-passing demonstrates that buck-passing can occur in bipolarity, challenging the past consensus about no buck-passing in bipolarity.

Besides the contributions, some limitations of this essay should be acknowledged. Due to the selection of cases, this essay does not take the impact of nuclear weapon development into account, which may affect the validity of some arguments in the revised framework when applying to modern cases. As research on a defensive strategy, this essay draws close attention to the interaction among the defensive states with less discussion on the decision-making of the aggressor. A study on the concerns of the aggressor and how the aggressor perceives the strategies from defensive states and reacts upon them can complement this essay.

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Appendix

Summary of Four Buck-passing Works' Buck-Passing Operationalizations

	Posen (1986)	Christensen & Snyder (1990)	Schweller (1998)	Mearsheimer (2001)
Definition	"Checking an expanding hegemon is a collective good. [...] Each state may view the world in this fashion, attempting to pay as little, and get others to pay as much, as can be managed. (p.64)"	"counting on third parties to bear the costs of stopping a rising hegemon (p.138)"	"a threatened state attempts to ride free on the balancing efforts of others (p.73)"	"A buck-passer attempts to get another state to bear the burden of deterring or possibly fighting an aggressor, while it remains on the sidelines (p.157-158)."
Theoretical Context	Patterns under alliance politics	Patterns under alliance politics	State responses to threats	Strategies for checking aggression
Opposite Concept	Overreaction under bipolarity	Chain-ganging when states perceive an offensive advantage	Distancing when the combined power of status quo states is inferior to the revisionist states	Balancing (as two main strategies for checking aggression)
Qualification of Being Actors	Members of an alliance or at least the prospective allies	Member of an alliance with loose definition (require not collaboration or cooperation)	Status quo states that are willing to pay for defending the status quo	Any state that could get benefit from other states' attempts to resist the aggressor
Actors	Britain, France	Britain, France, the Soviet Union	Britain, France (and the US?)	Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the US

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Actor's Strategy (Outcomes)	Buck-passing	Buck-passing	Distancing	Buck-passing
Historical Facts	*Britain*: Lacked of commitment *France*: Attempted to drag Britain into the anti-German front	*The Soviet Union:* ◦ Stalin believed that Britain and France were able to deny Germany's aggression for a considerable period and the German would attack the West first if the Soviet Union stayed unprovocative and robust ◦ Attempted to entrap Germany in combat with France *France:* ◦ Refused to defend Czechoslovakia but aided Poland since Britain made no commitment to the former but guarantee the latter *Britain:* ◦ Evaluated France's defensive power and Maginot line highly ◦ Aimed to bind France on fighting with Germany by the Polish guarantee	The combined power of Britain and France was inferior to sole Germany Britain designed its security policy on the basis without France Britain and France had not formed a valid alliance in the 1930s	*Britain:* ◦ made no continental commitment ◦ spent budget on building air forces but not land army *France:* ◦ Tried to pass the buck to its Eastern allies ◦ Keep good relations with Germany ◦ Hesitated to build a firm alliance with the Soviet Union *The Soviet Union:* ◦ Before 1939: launching rearmament to push Germany to invade the West first ◦ 1939-1941: The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact *The US:* ◦ Embraced isolationism in the 1930s ◦ Delayed landing troops for debilitating Germany and the Soviet Union

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Source: Posen, Barry. 1986. *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*. New York: Cornell University Press; Christensen, Thomas J, and Jack Snyder. 1990. "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity." *International Organization* 44(2): 137-168; Schweller, Randall L. 1998. *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest*. New York: Columbia University Press; Mearsheimer, John J. 2001. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: WW Norton & Company.

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