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Mightier Yet?: Explaining British Military Underconfidence in Reference to Anglo-American Alliance Formation

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Great Britain during the Second World War is commonly remembered, both by laymen and academics, as having been barely able to defend itself against overwhelming German strength after the fall of France in May 1940 until the entry of the United States into the war decisively swayed the balance of forces. This image is however mistaken as the British war effort was both modern and vigorous while the make-up of the German armed forces and its supporting economy were largely backward. I employ realist balance of power and balance of threat theory to argue that Great Britain attempted to expedite Anglo-American alliance formation processes by intentionally inculcating a sense of military underconfidence. By overstating its own military and economic weaknesses and exaggerating Germany's military power British policymakers communicated a far more dire image to American policymakers than was warranted by the actual war situation. Empirical evidence from 25 May 1940 and 11 March 1941 relating to the British war situation regarding shipping, finance and materiel suggests that there were notable differences in public communications to the United States and the private assessments entertained in the British War council. It thus seems relevant to further research the role of inculcated military underconfidence in alliance formation processes within a multi-stage research strategy.

Are you a PhD student or early-career researcher?

Yes

What discipline or branch of humanities or social sciences do you identify yourself with?

Economics & Political Science

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