

Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment." *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jan., 1991), pp. 233-256.

Although Third World countries dominate the globe, the most popular theory of foreign policy – the balance of power hypothesis – fails to consider their special needs. It relies too heavily on systemic and structural factors, to the detriment of more salient idiosyncratic considerations. Instead, David prefers "omnibalancing," whereby states consider not only external military threats presented by other nation-states, but also internal risks, such as coups, rejected by unitary-actor assumptions.

To provide historical underpinnings for his theory, David reviews the perils that have overcome Third World nations since World War II. Only a few dictators have succumbed to outside invasions, but many – over two hundred, by David's count – have fallen to coups d'état. ("The mortality of Third World states is low; the mortality of Third World leaders is high.") Further, civil wars far outnumber interstate wars in the Third World. David attributes these difficulties to the artificial nature of most Third World states and their boundaries: since they did not have the centuries their European counterparts had to congeal and evolve, the concept of statehood remains inchoate, leaving governments semi-illegitimate and at risk of violent régime change. Further, the authoritarian character of many such governments does not foster civil society or a sense of identification with the state. Having such weak internal cohesion, states cannot behave as unitary actors.

Because Great Powers and developed nations, having stable internal contexts, need not concern themselves with such matters, scholars have tended to overlook such considerations when they turn to the Third World. In David's view, however, a Third World nation attempts to choose as allies those nations that will be most committed to maintaining its government and the domestic status quo. Thus omnibalancing co-opts the realist logic of balance of power (nations attempt to work with secondary threats against primary threats), but expands its scope to incorporate a wider variety of threats. In other words, the Waltzian concept of anarchy not only describes the international system, but also the internal situation in Third World countries. Such considerations have the added advantage of explaining irrational actions on the part of Third World states: when the interests of the domestic leader run counter to those of the state, the former prevails.

Mengistu, as leader of Ethiopia, and Sadat, as leader of Egypt, provide two examples of omnibalancing behaviour. Mengistu's government inherited large levels of American financial assistance along with a firm mutual-defence commitment, but actively sought – and eventually received – a Soviet alliance. This occurred despite the USSR's longstanding commitment to Ethiopia's rival Somalia. While Mengistu's radical rhetorical might lead one to suspect an ideological basis for such an action, David dismisses any such claims, as Mengistu's actions repeatedly deviated from Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Appeasement ("bandwagoning") also fails to explain Mengistu's actions; he extended overtures only towards the USSR, never towards Somalia, the actual source of external threat. David accordingly asserts that Mengistu hoped to obtain sufficient Soviet support to counter the internal Eritrean insurrection. Sadat likewise turned his back on his Soviet sponsors immediately following his triumph in the 1973 October War¹. Ideology and bandwagoning are again dismissed as motivating factors; instead, Sadat needed an agreement ending the internal unrest stemming from the occupation of Sinai by Israel. Since the United States was the great power with the capacity to coerce Israel to withdraw, Sadat turned to the Americans to secure his position. It is unclear whether either of these leaders served the interests of their states in acting as they did, but they did preserve their holds on power.

¹ Also known as the Ramadan War and the Yom Kippur War. The characterisation of the war as a success for Sadat is David's.