

Morgenthau seeks to answer a number of questions in this wide ranging essay: why have the US and Britain changed their views on permanent alliances? What functions do alliances serve? How are the Atlantic alliances, non Atlantic alliances, and the Communist pact alliances holding up during the Cold War? Finally, what can be done to improve the efficacy of those alliances?

Morgenthau argues that the United States and Britain, both nations which have long avoided permanent alliances, were "compelled to seek permanent alliances with each other and with other nations" because of the "new balance of power emerging from World War II" (p. 185). If so, how do alliances function?

Alliances are a "function of the balance of power operating within a multiple state system" (p. 185). Joining alliances is not a matter of "principle" but of expediency, i.e. whether the nation is strong enough to survive the international system unaided or whether the gains from forming an alliance outweigh the costs. Even in cases where countries have had common interests, such as Britain and America in maintaining a European balance of power, they have not necessarily created alliances to institutionalize those shared goals.

What does the alliance provide to nations who form it? It "adds precision," often limiting or laying out obligations between countries which share a community of interests. In those cases where their common interests are difficult to define, "a treaty of alliance is required to make them explicit and operative" (p. 188). Morgenthau postulates five distinguishing features of alliances:

- 1) intrinsic nature and relationship
- 2) distribution of benefits and power
- 3) coverage in relation to the total interests of the nations concerned
- 4) coverage in terms of time
- 5) effectiveness in terms of common policies and actions

Further, "we can distinguish alliances serving identical, complementary, and ideologist interests and policies" (p. 188). Typical alliances are "imbedded in a dynamic field of diverse interests and purposes" (p. 191). Finally, the legal agreements present in an alliance are often misleading; Morgenthau argues that we must look to concrete policies and actions to better assess the value of an alliance.

Using these differentiable concepts, Morgenthau investigates the "Atlantic Alliance," formed upon a firm foundation of identical interests, which has been sustained by "the atomic monopoly of the United States, the economic weakness of the nations of Western Europe, and the intransigence of Soviet policies." Thus nations of Western Europe essentially chose between "suicide" (i.e. acquiescing to a growing Soviet threat) or an alliance with the US (p. 193). Paradoxically, as Soviet power has grown, it has weakened the Atlantic Alliance, because, as pointed out by the Soviets themselves, neutrality is a more survivable position in the event of a nuclear war. Further, several defects in the alliance, including its organizational structure, policies of its leading members, and prestige of its leading statesmen have impaired its operation (p. 198).

Yet the alliances between American and nonwestern powers, such as South Korea, South Vietnam, and Japan, lay not solely upon identical interests as in NATO, but upon both identical interests and extreme discrepancy of power (p. 208). Morgenthau warns that these nonwestern alliances "may no longer regard their interests to be identical with those of the United States and conclude that safety lies not in closeness to, but rather in distance from, the United States (p. 205). History has not born this hypothesis out, however; the US-Japan, US-Korea, and other Cold War alliances have survived even the death of the Soviet Union. Although space precludes a deeper overview, Morgenthau similarly probes the alliances between the USSR and its various allies.

Morgenthau states that "the two bloc system is in the process of loosening but not breaking up" (p. 209). He accurately predicts rocky relations between the Soviet Union and China and points to tensions between German commitments to reunification and West Germany's dedication to the Atlantic Alliance. Morgenthau concludes by arguing that purely military situations require a "policy of alliances," while political ones which require "subtlety, discrimination, and imagination" might in fact be harmed by alliances. He warns leaders from abandoning "political creativeness" in favor of mechanical alliance signing as alliances cannot "stave off nor conceal failure, which attends upon wrong policies as punishment follows the crime" (p. 212).