

IR Field Seminar Week 12

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Glenn H. Snyder. "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics." *World Politics* vol.36 no. 4 (1984).

Main Thesis: The security dilemma occurs in relation between allies as well as between adversaries. This "alliance security dilemma" is more severe in a multipolar than in a bipolar system. High mutual dependence coexists with plausible realignment options in the former system, while the risks of abandonment is low - although fears of entrapment exist - in a bipolar system.

Alliance Formation

Multipolar & Bipolar Systems

- there is a general incentive to ally with some other states following the logic of the N-person prisoners' dilemma that is generated by the structure of the system. This "general" interests refers to expansion to enhance its security and preservation of a balance of power.
- Who aligns with whom results from a bargaining process that is theoretically indeterminate. This indeterminacy is reduced by the prior interests, conflicts, and affinities between states and their internal political make-up. These "particular" factors include territorial interests, ideological affinities.

Alliance Maintenance

Multipolar System

- alliance are never absolutely firm because the fear of being abandoned by one's ally is ever-present. Suspicion that the ally is considering realignment may generate an incentive to realign preemptively.
- attempts to insure against abandonment by supporting the ally and avoiding accommodation with the opponent increase the risk of entrapment and reduce the options for realignment, hence the dilemma.

Bipolar System

- abandonment is highly unlikely because the superpowers are solidly committed by their strong interests to defend their allies and keep them within the alliance system, hence their de-alignment is irrational. De-alignment by the smaller states is illusory, since their protector will defend them no matter what political posture they assume.
- low risk of abandonment means entrapment is highly possible. Entrapment is a more serious concern for smaller states than for superpowers because they share only a portion of the latter's global interests, because the superpowers have a much greater capacity for taking initiatives, and because the allies' capacity to restrain the superpowers is much smaller than vice versa.
- Because of the weakness of the alliance security dilemma, the adversary dilemma dominates. This means that allies might have different policy preferences toward the adversary but this disagreement does not affect the stability of the alliance.

Other Important Factors (see table1 on page 469)

- the following factors affect strategies in alliance politics: relative dependence of the partners on the alliance, degree of strategic interest, the degree of explicitness in the alliance agreement, the degree to which the allies' interests that are in conflict with the adversary are shared, past record of behaviors.
- "integrative spiral": allies move progressively closer out of their mutual fear of abandonment. This integrative spiral in alliance politics is reinforced by the insecurity spiral in the adversary game (eg. The Anglo-France Entente of 1904 and the German-Austrian alliance).
- "restraining allies' dilemma": whether to support the ally or to collaborate with the noninvolved state on the opposite side in restraining both protagonists (England and Germany reached an informal agreement to restrain Russia and Austria, respectively, during the Balkan wars).
- The current dilemma for the US is finding the optimum blend of firmness and accomodation toward the Soviet, while Europeans face the dilemma of how to escape or minimize the risks of entrapment without

seriously risking some form of partial US abandonment. These dilemmas are reinforced by nuclear weapons because the potential consequences of entrapment and abandonment are calamity.