

Snyder- World Politics, 1984

Snyder argues that though the security dilemma is one of the fundamental tenets of IR, it is very under-studied empirically (something the rest of the readings from this week seemed to demonstrate was fixed, over time). He attempts to analyze the security dilemma through the lens of alliance politics:

2 parts to the security dilemma in the alliance game, primary and secondary:

A. primary: in a multipolar system with many states that are roughly equivalent, alliances form for 2 reasons:

- i. states are not satisfied with only moderate security
- ii. states want to prevent their partner from allying against them

-counterbalancing alliances follow, leading to a split between two rival coalitions
-to make the model better, need to resolve the indeterminacy about who will join alliances, the two ways to do that are by describe “general” and “particular” interests:

-general: preferences resulting from geography and anarchy (england’s desire to keep the low countries independent)

-particular: specific facets of states that cause conflicts or lead to affinity (austro-german ethnic affinity)

B. secondary: once states have already defected and entered alliances, the question is how much to commit to the alliance and how strongly to defend partners in specific scenarios

- i. abandonment: ally defects or de-aligns
- ii. entrapment: being dragged into a conflict by an ally when your interests are only tangential/do not exist at all

-weak commitments tend to dominate alliance politics because they increase leverage over the alliance partner AND they are less likely to provoke the adversary alliance, even though they do risk abandonment

-alliance game and adversary game interact, sometimes in opposing ways; weak commitments to the alliance may make the adversary more likely to go to war if they are expansionist, but strong commitments may provoke them if they are status quo powers

-what determines the magnitude of these things:

1. dependence: level of dependence on the ally for security is key
2. strategic interest: interest in keeping the resources of your ally out of the hands of the adversary
3. explicitness: how specific is the agreement between allies
4. interests: how related are the interests that both sides have vis-à-vis the adversary

-possible spirals:

1. insecurity spiral: normal security dilemma spiral
2. integrative spiral: alliances move closer out of mutual fear of abandonment

-multipolar systems are less stable because the threat of realignment is much more credible than in a bipolar system, which means there is a higher fear of abandonment