

Chapter 8: "Conclusion: Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power" _The Origins of Alliances_ Stephen Walt

The purpose of Walt's concluding chapter is threefold:

- 1) summarize his findings on the explanatory power of several different hypotheses of alliance formation. He tests these hypotheses against cases of alliance formation (or absence) in the Middle East.
- 2) apply his findings to patterns of alliance formation beyond the Middle East, specifically the alliances built around the two poles of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.
- 3) make recommendations for U.S. grand strategy based on these lessons about alliance formation.

Hypothesis testing:

Balance of Threat Theory

States choose allies in order to balance against the most serious threat. Walt argues that balance of threat theory subsumes, and is a refinement of, balance of power theory; aggregate power is an important, but not the sole, component of threat. Threat is composed of aggregate power, proximity, offensive capability, and perceived intentions. The state that poses the greatest threat is not necessarily the most powerful state in the system. Balance of threat theory is superior to balance of power theory because we get greater explanatory power with no loss of parsimony. Balance of threat theory explains why a more powerful coalition would form in response to a threatening coalition (because the new coalition is balancing threat, not merely power) and why alliances form, not response to shifts in the global balance of power, but in response to regional threats. Balance of threat also explains alliance choices when potential allies are roughly equal in power.

Ideology

The importance of ideological differences declined as the level of threat increased. States stick with their own when there is a high level of security or when ideology and security reinforce one another. Ideology is

a more important factor in explaining alliances around superpowers because the two poles are roughly equal on other characteristics. Walt argues that many apparently ideological alliances are balancing alliances. Thus balance of threat theory also subsumes hypothesis about ideological solidarity. Additionally, because the superpowers have behaved as if ideology were important, they may be reinforcing tendencies for regional power to prefer one superpower over the other on ideological grounds.

Walt notes that this hypothesis is partly discredited by alliances that form between ideologically dissimilar states. Certain ideologies, e.g. communism and pan-Arabism, can tend to discourage alliances among ideologically similar states.

Foreign Aid and Penetration (establishment of contacts between national elites)

Walt finds that neither foreign aid nor penetration matters much in alliance formation. Both are predictable results of alliances, not causes of them. Most notably, client states have often retained considerable independence in their actions. Walt presents recent events in the Middle East as further evidence of his conclusions regarding how alliances form.

How the balance of threat explains alliance formation (the balance of power) in the bipolar, Cold War world:

Walt first argues that the balance of power in the international system is actually a sizable imbalance in favor of the U.S. and its allies. "A rough but reliable comparison (p. 274)" of the power of the two alliance

systems is made by comparing population, GNP, size of armed forces, and defense expenditures.

According to Walt, this imbalance of power is further support for the balance of threat hypothesis. If states were solely concerned with balancing power, we would expect many U.S. allies to jump ship to the U.S.S.R. Why didn't this happen? Because while the U.S. is more powerful, the U.S.S.R. is more threatening.

Why the Imbalance or why the U.S.S.R. is the Evil Empire:

1. Proximity: The U.S.S.R. is the largest and most powerful country in Eurasian and thus poses a significant threat to its many, many neighbors. The U.S. has only two neighbors and is separated from the rest of the world by oceans, but it will contribute to its allies defense against the U.S.S.R because of its own concerns about Soviet power.

2. Offensive Power: The Soviets compensate for their relative lack of allies through internal balancing efforts. Since it spends most heavily on offensive capabilities, it appears more threatening.

3. Aggressive Intentions: The Soviets believe that bandwagoning is the normal behavior of states so it relies heavily on threats and intimidation. Oh, yeah, and then there's that little thing about promoting world revolution. Walt notes that the perceptions of threat are reversed in the Third World where the U.S. has appeared more threatening and the Soviets more sympathetic.

4. Ideology: Marxist-Leninism threatens many of the world's most powerful countries. Additionally, Leninism is a devise ideology. Since there can only be one infallible vanguard of the party, the CPSU, any

attempt to follow a different set of interests from those defined by the CPSU is a direct challenge to the ideology.

5. Foreign Aid and Penetration: The U.S.S.R. has little to offer economically and attempts at penetration have been unsuccessful. Further, as Walt has shown earlier, these tactics are rarely effective.

a. Given these advantages and lessons about alliances, what should be the U.S. grand strategy?

1. Since states are likely to ally with the U.S., we should take a more relaxed view of international affairs.

2. Since only a massive shift in the balance of power would cause our allies to defect, we should not worry too much about military build-ups.

3. Since we should worry less about our allies defecting, we should stop taking actions to enhance our credibility that actually create opposition.

4. Don't overestimate the strength of the ties between the U.S. and our allies in the developing world. These states are concerned with regional threats, not the global balance of power.

5. Stop worrying about the threat posed by leftist governments in the third world. By opposing them, you just serve to help unite parties that would otherwise succumb to natural divisions caused by ideology.

6. Stop worrying that the recipients of Soviet arms are pawns of the Kremlin. Aid does not guarantee the patron control over the client.

7. The domestic situation of the U.S., namely the health of the U.S. economy, may be the most important factor in maintaining U.S. power.