

Alliances and Bargaining

POSC 1020 – Introduction to International Relations

Steven V. Miller

Department of Political Science



Puzzle(s) for Today

Why do states fight other countries' wars?



Figure 1: A Chinese soldier displays knocked-out U.S. tank of 1st Cavalry Division

Alliances

Alliances are commitments by states to cooperate on security policy.

- They form when states have compatible interests in military cooperation.
- Importantly, alliances can alter the bargaining dynamics in a bilateral dispute.

Types of Alliances

- Bilateral or multilateral (e.g. NATO)
- Asymmetrical—a powerful state commits to defending a weaker state (for example, the United States and South Korea)
- Offensive (e.g. Molotov-Ribbentrop)
- Defensive (e.g. France-Russia, pre-WWI)

The Cost of Alliances

Alliances are costly.

- Commitment of blood and treasure to defend another.
- Must be upheld to be credible, even if defeat is likely.
- Alliances limit freedom, as consultation with allies is necessary before taking action or making decisions.
- An emboldened ally may entrap protector in conflict.

Why Form Alliances?

- Weak state may gain protection from powerful rivals.
- Strong state may signal its resolve to defend weak state.
- Combining resources may economize, allowing greater defense.
- Can temper conflicts (e.g. Greece and Turkey in NATO).
- Can formalize a sphere of influence (e.g. the Warsaw Pact).

Additional Motives

Balancing results in roughly equal blocs.

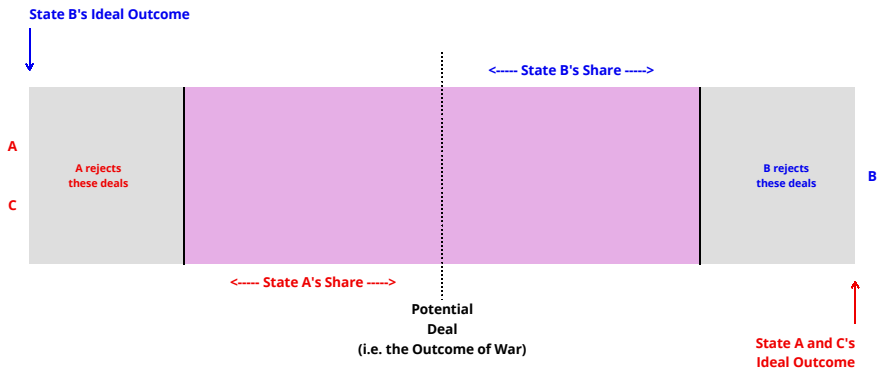
- Small states seek to avoid domination by alliance leader.
- Alliance with strong state threatens state freedom.

Other explanations of alliance formation

- Bandwagoning: when states join aggressive/threatening side (for example, Italy in World War II)
- Affinity: shared culture, ideology, or religion.

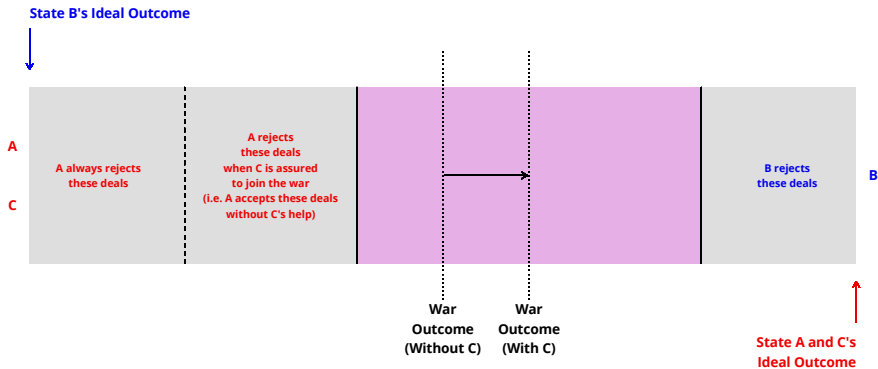
The Alignment of Interests Among A-C and B

C Supports A, but C's participation in a potential war is an open question. Both A and B are perfectly matched (i.e. $p(\text{victory}) = .5$) and a hypothetical bargaining space still exists.



What C's Participation Does to the Bargaining Range

C's participation decreases A's cost of war and decreases the bargaining range.



How Alliances Establish Credibility

Alliance obligations are honored about 70% of the time. Reasons include:

- Hands-tying
- Abrogation costs
- Influencing decision-making calculus of opposing side in multiple ways



Figure 2: Marriage of John I, King of Portugal and Philippa of Lancaster

When Alliances Fail

- The tail wags the dog, raising costs of war for C.
- Abrogation costs are cheap.

The Emergence of Germany

Germany emerged as a major power after 1870, collecting both friends and enemies.

- 1879: Dual Alliance with Austria-Hungary.
 - A curious alliance, given Seven Weeks' War (1866)
- 1882: Expansion to include Italy, Austria's blood enemy.
 - Italy's rationale: placate nearby states to focus on empire.

The Counter-Coalition Against Germany

This prompted quite a counter-coalition, especially among former rivals.

- 1894: Franco-Russian Alliance
- 1904: Entente Cordiale (UK-France)
- 1907: Anglo-Russian Convention

Leading to World War I

The alliance pattern contributed to the outbreak of World War I:

- Small conflicts escalated.
- Alliances created incentives for preventive war.
- Major powers became dependent on allies.
- The larger number of states increased chances of miscalculation.

The Interwar Period

The interwar period posed similar problems.

- Major buck-passing, definitely among UK, France, and Russia/USSR.
- Hitler successfully defied French commitments to Czechoslovakia and Romania, among others.

The Interwar Period

We can understand why the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact happened in this perspective.

- No country was more consistent in raising alarms about Hitler than the USSR.
- However, UK and France had folded on the Ruhr, Sudetenland, and other issues.
- Thus, the Soviets bailed to placate Germany and leave UK and France to dry.

WWII happened as a result of weak alliance commitments.

The Cold War

Clear bifurcation of Europe into West and East.

- West: NATO countries
- East: Warsaw Pact

The Cold War

A long, if very problematic, “peace” followed.

- U.S. tied its hands to Europe with troops in W. Germany/elsewhere.
- Both sunk costs into reorganizing entire economic systems in the sphere.

Conclusion

Alliances are institutions that can prevent or facilitate war.

- Peaceful: influence bargaining by B , settle issues among signatories.
- Dangerous: tail-wags-the-dog, cheap commitments with small abrogation costs.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Alliances and Conflict

 Alliances and Bargaining

 Analyzing European Alliance System (1879-1990)

Conclusion