Are Alliances Paths to Peace or Steps to War?

POSC 3610 – International Conflict

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CLEMSON
U N I V E R S I T Y

Goal for Today

Identify how alliances are paths to peace or steps to war.

Confrontation of the Day: The IND-BNG Border Fence (MIC#3055)

Alliances as Paths to Peace

Neorealists (e.g. Waltz, 1979) see alliances as natural response to anarchy.

- Intuition: promote peace through strength.
- States sufficiently mobilized for war achieve a balance of power.
- This makes states unwilling to actually fight the war, though.

Basically: alliances (defense pacts, in particular) raise costs of conflict relative to benefit of revising status quo.

- All else equal: alliances (defense pacts) deter.

Alliance as Steps to War

Others, like Vasquez (1993) see alliances as steps to war.

- Follow a realist culture of war.
- Realpolitik takes states to the brink.
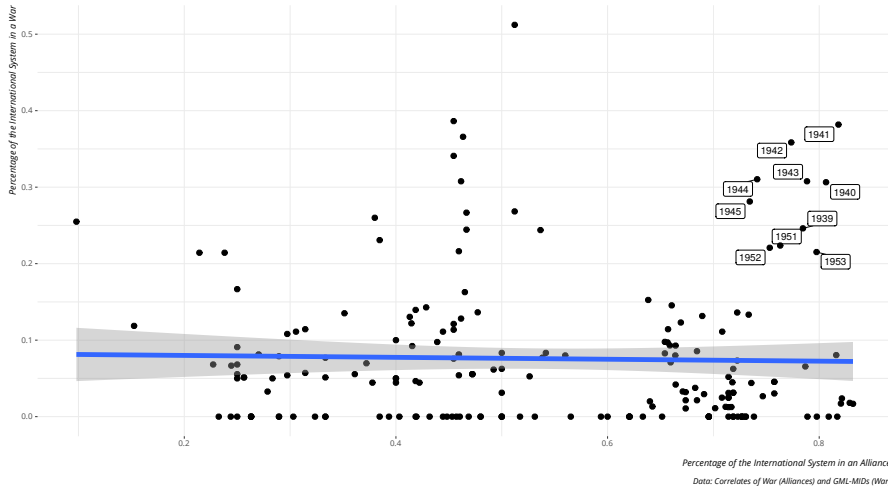- Heightened mistrust and conflict spirals ultimately lead to escalation to war.

The More Complicated Findings

The alliance-war relationship is not as simple.

- There's no clear system-level relationship.
- Alliances don't generally promote peace, even among allies.
- Some alliances *types* promote war among allies.
- Alliances-as-deterrence is still subject of a large debate.

There is No Clear System-Level Relationship Between Alliances and War

Any 'rise over run' line you draw over the data will be flat and any smoothing you do will overemphasize the WWII and Korean War years.

Percentage of the International System in an Alliance

Data: Correlates of War (Alliances) and GML-MIDs (War)

No Signal in the Noise

Some comments:

- Be mindful of the ecological issue.
- Very likely (almost certain) World War II is a high-leverage case here.
- Says nothing about the effects alliances have on those that sign them.

A Simple Test

We'll propose a simple model to explore the effect alliances have on dyads.

- DVs: confrontation onset (Y/N)
  - Later: escalation to dyadic war (Y/N)
- IV: alliance (Y/N) and alliance type.
  - Data come from CoW and ATOP
- Controls: contiguity, CINC, major power status, joint democracy, min. GDP per capita
- Sampling frame: politically relevant dyads.

Table 1: A Dangerous Dyad-ish Analysis of Inter-state Conflict Onset

	CoW Alliances	ATOP Alliances
Land Contiguity	1.095***	1.061***
	(0.060)	(0.060)
CINC Proportion	0.796***	0.785***
	(0.090)	(0.090)
Both Major Powers	0.975***	0.977***
	(0.085)	(0.085)
Major-Minor	0.044	0.060
	(0.065)	(0.065)
Alliance	0.002	0.147**
	(0.054)	(0.050)
Joint Democracy	-0.889***	-0.918***
	(0.088)	(0.088)
Min. GDP per Capita in Dyad	0.111***	0.102***
	(0.017)	(0.017)
Num.Obs.	107798	107798

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 2: A Dangerous Dyad-ish Analysis of Inter-state Conflict Onset

	CoW Alliances	ATOP Alliances
Defense	0.053	-0.229*
	(0.084)	(0.095)
Neutrality	0.330*	0.054
	(0.134)	(0.142)
Non-Aggression	0.266**	0.324***
	(0.092)	(0.065)
Entente/Consultation	-0.443***	-0.174+
	(0.100)	(0.091)
Offense		0.098
		(0.181)
Num.Obs.	107798	107798

Note:

Control variables omitted here for presentation.

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Alliances and Peace/War

Some findings:

- CoW and ATOP will differ about whether alliances are peaceful at all.
- Effects vary by alliance type.
    - ATOP and CoW differ about effect of defense/neutrality pacts.
    - Ententes/consultations are generally less likely to have confrontations.
    - Non-aggression pacts are prone to confrontation onset between allies.

The Example of the Indira–Mujib Treaty

The India-Bangladesh 1972 alliance illustrates this well.

- India helped East Pakistan (Bangladesh) secede from Pakistan in a two-week campaign.
- Both concerned about a future conflict, each pledged to "refrain from any aggression against the other party." (i.e. non-aggression)

However, the alliance born from heightened threat wasn't peaceful.

- India still had troops in the country.
- Eight confrontations followed over the 25-year treaty.

Table 3: A Dangerous Dyad-ish Analysis of Inter-state Conflict Escalation

	CoW Alliances	ATOP Alliances
Land Contiguity	0.028	0.111
	(0.120)	(0.121)
CINC Proportion	-0.127	-0.115
	(0.174)	(0.174)
Both Major Powers	0.860***	0.933***
	(0.147)	(0.149)
Major-Minor	0.504***	0.527***
	(0.112)	(0.113)
Alliance	-0.306**	-0.590***
	(0.105)	(0.100)
Joint Democracy	-4.237	-4.242
	(72.583)	(70.699)
Min. GDP per Capita in Dyad	-0.081**	-0.064*
	(0.025)	(0.027)
Num.Obs.	2304	2304

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 4: A Dangerous Dyad-ish Analysis of Inter-state Conflict Escalation

	CoW Alliances	ATOP Alliances
Defense	-0.330*	-0.280
	(0.165)	(0.205)
Neutrality	0.280	0.397+
	(0.208)	(0.241)
Non-Aggression	-0.455*	-0.877***
	(0.187)	(0.146)
Entente/Consultation	0.172	0.221
	(0.198)	(0.169)
Offense		0.315
		(0.289)
Num.Obs.	2304	2304

Note:

Control variables omitted here for presentation.

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Some Implications of the Escalation Model

The findings differ from the onset model.

- No real effect of offensive alliances and escalation.
  - High-leverage cases: German unification and Triple Alliance.
- Defense pacts decrease escalation in CoW (but not ATOP).
- Neutrality agreements seem likely to have a positive effect on escalation in ATOP.
- Non-aggression pacts *decrease* likelihood of escalation to war.

Deterrence or Steps–to–War?

You read a fun scholarly dialogue between Johnson/Leeds and Kenwick/Vasquez.

- Johnson/Leeds: defensive pacts deter.
- Kenwick/Vasquez: defensive pacts are steps-to-war.

How did they achieve such different results?

Johnson/Leeds Method

Johnson/Leeds' (2011) analysis:

- *Unit of analysis:* directed dyad-year
- *DV*: MID onset/escalation
- *(Main) IVs*: potential target/challenger had defense pact
- *Controls*: challenger has offense/neutrality pact, capability ratio, distance, alliance similarity portfolio, joint democracy
- *Main data sources:* ATOP (for alliances)

TABLE 1. Probit Analysis of Dispute Initiation 1816–2000

Deterrence effect: potential target has a relevant defensive alliance	−0.062 (0.015)***
Initiation effect: potential challenger is a member of a defensive alliance	−0.068 (0.016)***
Potential challenger has a relevant offensive alliance	0.276 (0.029)***
Potential challenger has a relevant neutrality pact	0.315 (0.025)***
Challenger's likelihood of winning	0.161 (0.022)***
Distance	−0.384 (0.006)***
Similarity in alliance portfolios	−0.455 (0.041)***
Joint democracy	−0.155 (0.027)***
Constant	0.827 (0.068)***
Observations	1,077,992

(*Notes.* Standard errors in parentheses; ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .1$; peace years, (peace years)^2, (peace years)^3 included in estimation).

Kenwick/Vasquez Method

Kenwick/Vasquez (with Powers in 2015) propose an alternate test:

- *Unit of analysis:* directed dyad-decade (where alliance is introduced into directed dyad).
  - "Decade" includes five years before the alliance and four years afterward.
- *DV*: MID initiation/war onset
- *(Main) IVs*: ATOP defensive pact, conditional deterrent pact (Benson, 2012)
- *Controls*: mostly same as Johnson and Leeds (2011)
- *Main data sources:* ATOP (for alliances)

Method note: the authors do a "matching analysis" in which observations are identical except for the "treatment" of the alliance.
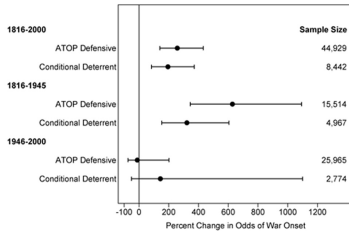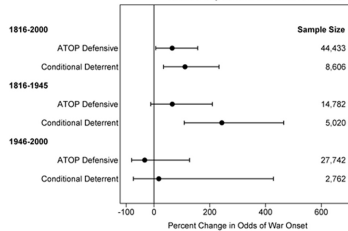
(A) MID Initiation
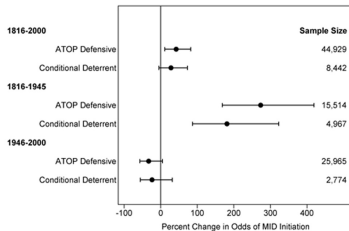
(B) MID Initiation, Only Alliances with Exclusively Defensive Terms Included
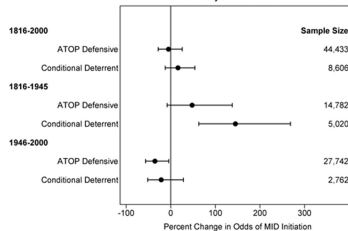
(C) War Onset

(D) War Onset, Only Alliances with Exclusively Defensive Terms Included

What Explains the Difference?

The differences between the two are largely issues of research design.

- Case selection
- Dyad-years vs. dyad-decades
- Short-term vs. long-term/general effects
- Differences between pre/post-WWII

Conclusion

Alliances have an ambiguous relationship with peace and war.

- Alliances don't generally promote peace among allies.
- Not all alliance types have this kind of effect, though.
- Not all alliance types even have consistent effects from onset to escalation.

"Are alliances actually steps-to-war?" is a question that needs to be more specific.

- Short-term: Yes? Maybe? Why else are they forming?
- Long-term/generally: Maybe not, even though the evidence here is mixed/contingent, and period-specific.

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