Are Alliances Paths to Peace or Steps to War?

POSC 3610 – International Conflict

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Goal for Today

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

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 generally promote peace *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 a War
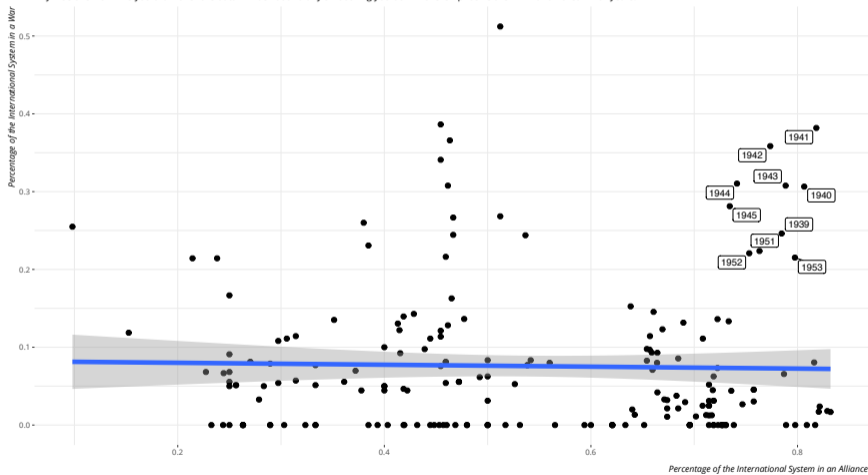
Percentage of the International System in an Alliance

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

The Signal and 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.

- DV: presence of a MID (Y/N)
  - Later: escalation to war (Y/N)
- IV: alliance (Y/N) and alliance type.
  - Data come from CoW and ATOP
- Controls: joint democracy, land contiguity, power preponderance.
- Sampling frame: politically relevant dyads.
- Temporal domain: 1816-2010 (CoW) or 1816-2003 (ATOP)

Table 1: Simple "Dangerous" Dyad-Year Onset Model

	COW Alliances	ATOP Alliances
	(1)	(2)
Alliance	-0.006^{***}	-0.005^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Contiguity	0.044^{***}	0.042^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Joint Democracy	-0.018^{***}	-0.017^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Power Preponderance	-0.016^{***}	-0.017^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Observations	112,914	101,240

Note:	$^{*}p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$
	MID Data come from GML MIDs (v. 2.03)

Table 2: Simple "Dangerous" Dyad-Year Onset Model

	COW Alliances	ATOP Alliances
	(1)	(2)
Offense		-0.001
		(0.004)
Defense	-0.004^{**}	-0.008^{***}
	(0.002)	(0.003)
Neutrality	0.022^{***}	0.012^{***}
	(0.005)	(0.004)
Non-aggression	0.014^{***}	0.001
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Entente/Consultation	-0.019^{***}	-0.004
	(0.002)	(0.003)
Contiguity	0.043^{***}	0.043^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Joint Democracy	-0.016^{***}	-0.016^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Power Preponderance	-0.016^{***}	-0.018^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Observations	112,914	101,240

Note: $^{*}p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$
MID Data come from GML MIDs (v. 2.03)

Alliances and Peace/War

Some findings:

- Generally, alliances are conducive to peace among allies themselves.
- However, that varies by type.
    - Defense pacts are most peaceful.
    - Ententes/consultations peaceful in CoW data, not in ATOP.
    - Non-aggression/neutrality pacts may be dispute-prone.

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 MIDs followed over the 25-year treaty.

Table 3: Simple "Dangerous" Dyad-Year Escalation Model

	COW Alliances	ATOP Alliances
	(1)	(2)
Alliance	-0.024	-0.033^{**}
	(0.015)	(0.016)
Contiguity	-0.080^{***}	-0.074^{***}
	(0.014)	(0.015)
Joint Democracy	-0.119^{***}	-0.120^{***}
	(0.026)	(0.029)
Power Preponderance	0.002	0.001
	(0.014)	(0.015)
Observations	2,927	2,723

Note: $^{*}p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$
MID Data come from GML MIDs (v. 2.03)

Table 4: Simple "Dangerous" Dyad-Year Escalation Model

	COW Alliances	ATOP Alliances
	(1)	(2)
Offense		0.191***
		(0.052)
Defense	−0.012	−0.033
	(0.021)	(0.031)
Neutrality	0.071*	0.118***
	(0.039)	(0.042)
Non-aggression	−0.063**	−0.103***
	(0.025)	(0.024)
Entente/Consultation	0.019	0.079***
	(0.027)	(0.030)
Contiguity	−0.074***	−0.062***
	(0.014)	(0.015)
Joint Democracy	−0.112***	−0.108***
	(0.026)	(0.029)
Power Preponderance	0.003	0.002
	(0.014)	(0.015)
Observations	2,927	2,723
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 MID Data come from GML MIDs (v. 2.03)	

Some Implications of the Escalation Model

The findings differ from the onset model.

- States with offensive alliances are more likely to have their MIDs escalate to war.
    - High-leverage cases: German unification and Triple Alliance.
- Defense pacts have no effect on escalation.
- Neutrality agreements seem likely to have a positive effect on escalation.
- Non-aggression pacts decrease likelihood of escalation to war.
- Ententes are positive in ATOP data, not in CoW data.

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).
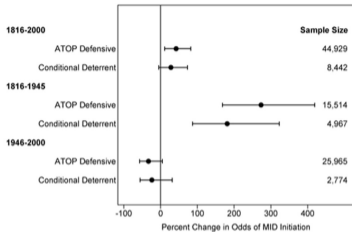
Kenwick/Vasquez Method

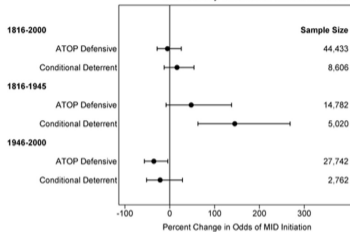Kenwick/Vasquez (with Powers in 2015) propose an alternate test:

- *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.
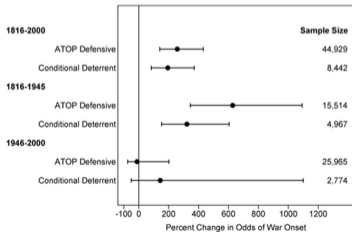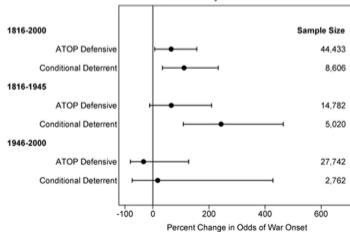
(A) MID Initiation

1816-2000	Sample Size
ATOP Defensive	44,929
Conditional Deterrent	8,442
1816-1945	
ATOP Defensive	15,514
Conditional Deterrent	4,967
1946-2000	
ATOP Defensive	25,965
Conditional Deterrent	2,774

Percent Change in Odds of MID Initiation

(B) MID Initiation, Only Alliances with
Exclusively Defensive Terms Included

1816-2000	Sample Size
ATOP Defensive	44,433
Conditional Deterrent	8,606
1816-1945	
ATOP Defensive	14,782
Conditional Deterrent	5,020
1946-2000	
ATOP Defensive	27,742
Conditional Deterrent	2,762

Percent Change in Odds of MID Initiation

(C) War Onset

1816-2000	Sample Size
ATOP Defensive	44,929
Conditional Deterrent	8,442
1816-1945	
ATOP Defensive	15,514
Conditional Deterrent	4,967
1946-2000	
ATOP Defensive	25,965
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Percent Change in Odds of War Onset

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

1816-2000	Sample Size
ATOP Defensive	44,433
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1816-1945	
ATOP Defensive	14,782
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1946-2000	
ATOP Defensive	27,742
Conditional Deterrent	2,762

Percent Change in Odds of War Onset

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

Morrow's (2017) Re-Analysis

Table 1. Frequency of Prior Disputes and Initiation of Dispute Afterward (Percentage) Conditioned on Formation of Alliance in the Unmatched Kenwick et al. (2015) Data

Number of Disputes Prior	No Alliance Formed (Control)		Alliance Formed (Treatment)	
	No Dispute Afterward	Dispute Afterward	No Dispute Afterward	Dispute Afterward
0	38,097	278	6,851	76
	(99.3)	(.7)	(98.9)	(1.1)
1	199	72	41	6
	(73.4)	(26.6)	(87.2)	(12.8)
2	37	18	8	3
	(67.3)	(32.7)	(72.7)	(27.3)
3	9	13	3	1
	(40.9)	(59.1)	(75.)	(25)
4 or more	1	8	0	0
	(11.1)	(88.9)		

Note. The numbers in parentheses are percentages.

Conclusion

Alliances have an ambiguous relationship with peace and war.

- Alliances generally promote peace among allies.
- Not all alliance types do, 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.

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