Guides to International Studies

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Guide to the Scientific Study of International Processes

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The Quest for Security

Alliances and Arms

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Introduction

Dating at least since the time of Thucydides, security issues have been central to the study of international relations. Scholars and decision makers have puzzled over how states can simultaneously avoid being victimized by war and prepare for any war that does involve them. Particular attention has been paid to alliances and armaments as the policy instruments that should have the greatest effect on state war experiences. Princes have been advised to arm and ally to deter potential enemies and to defeat those that cannot be deterred; but, how much do we really know about decisions to pursue varying security strategies and the linkages between arms, alliances, and war? Our purpose in this chapter is to examine our understanding of these issues as it has developed over the past few decades of quantitative, scientific research.

We begin with a brief review of balance of power theories. Our aim is not to present a complete discussion of these theories, but rather to highlight the contributions they made to our understanding of the relationship between alliances, arms, and international conflict. We then show that the early quantitative literature, much of which was conducted at the systemic level of analysis, provided very little support for the hypotheses following from these theories. This lack of empirical support for realist hypotheses tested at the systemic level led to new theorizing that recognized variance in national goals and an enhanced role for domestic politics; the new theories in turn encouraged empirical tests at the nation state or dyadic level of analysis. With the broad guidance of existing theoretical perspectives, more specific formal models and empirical tests were designed to explain and evaluate particular questions about alliances and about arms acquisitions. Yet, while there have been significant advances in individual “islands of theory,” successfully integrated explanations of the pursuit and effects of security policies have remained rare. We conclude with a discussion of a few attempts to provide such integrated theoretical explanations.

Phase One: Theorizing Balance of Power and the Search for Security

“Balance of power” dominated thinking about international politics for several centuries; and, when scholars began to use large-N data sets to search for systematic relationships explaining international conflict, they drew, at least implicitly, from the ideas and concepts prominent in the realpolitik tradition. The term “balance of power” has many meanings (Haas 1953; Clausewitz 1862), but it is safe to equate it with a theory of international politics refined and developed for the post-World War II era by Wight (1946),
Morgenthau (1948), Gullik (1958), Wright (1958), Kaplan (1957), Kissinger (1957), and Waltz (1959, 1979) among others. The theory is based on the notion that world politics is primarily concerned with the struggle among states for power. Since the international system is anarchic, military force is the ultimate arbiter of disputes. Thus, every state is susceptible to being attacked at any time and each is ultimately responsible for its own security. The principle means available to states for providing security are producing their own armaments and aggregating their power with that of others through alliances. An oft-cited tenet of realpolitik was *Si vis pacem, para bellum* - if you seek peace, prepare for war.

There were certain differences among balance of power theorists. While many presumed that the purpose of maintaining the “balance of power” through arms and alliances was to maintain peace through deterrence, others held that its purpose was to assure the continued existence of the major actors in the international system. Gullik (1958) held this latter view, and even argued that war, along with arms and alliances, is one means by which the balance is maintained. Moreover, theorists drew distinctions among types of alliances and argued that permanent alliances are destabilizing and contribute to war, while flexible alliances are stabilizing and contribute to peace. Many argued, for example, that the rigid alliance structure preceding World War I led to the polarization of the international system and contributed to the outbreak and severity of that conflict (Wright 1958; Kaplan 1957). Finally, much of the field’s attention was focused on the question of the relationship between war and the “polity” of the international system, which basically referred to the number of power centers potentially contending for dominance. Both alliances and arms were viewed as affecting polarity. Yet, some argued that bipolar systems are more stable and some that multipolar systems are more stable (Deutsch and Singer 1964; Waltz 1964).

What was interesting about this early theorizing is that while scholars generally agreed on the nature of the international system (an anarchic self-help environment where force is the arbiter of disputes) and the factors that motivated state leaders (acquisition of power, which was essential for the ultimate goal of security), they had disagreements about what this should suggest about empirical relationships between arms, alliances, and war as observed in the system as a whole. Some believed that war was essential to the process of balancing and others believed that the process of balancing should produce peace. Flexible alliances were seen as a tool of balancing, and inflexible alliances as an impediment to balancing. Some believed that the concentration of power in two states or poles was more peaceful, while others believed that a diffusion of power among many poles was more peaceful. Thus, early quantitative analyses was aimed at determining how alliances, arms, and polarity more generally correlate with war in the system as a whole.

Among the very first studies conducted by the Correlates of War (COW) project were those seeking to determine whether alliances and arms lead to war or to peace at the systemic level of analysis. Singer and Small (1968) find that alliances are associated with peace in the nineteenth century and with war in the twentieth. Levy (1981) examines a longer period (1495-79) and finds that the correlation between alliances and war is negative in the nineteenth century and either positive or statistically insignificant in other centuries. Ostrom and Hoole (1970) find no statistically significant relationships between the proportion of states with alliance commitments and the proportion of states involved in war. With respect to military capabilities, Singer et al. (1972) find little relationship between the capability distribution in the international system and war over the entire period but that power parity was associated with peace in the nineteenth century while power preponderance was associated with war in the twentieth. Finally, the lack of a body of work examining the relationship between the polarity of the international system and conflict produced inconsistent and inconclusive results. Most of the statistical relationships were found to be weak and of those that appeared significant, the direction of the relationship could depend on the time period examined as well as on the precise operationalization of the concept of “polarity” (Singer and Small 1968; Singer et al. 1972; Bueno de Mesquita 1975; Kaplan et al. 1979; Wayman 1984; Levy 1985).

Far from settling the question, these early quantitative studies seemed to cause more confusion than clarity. There was no generally acceptable theoretical explanation for the frequent finding that relationships seemed to vary based on historical era. Weak and inconsistent results were variously interpreted as resulting from poorly designed tests, poorly specified theory, or the fact that variables long thought to be critical to the functioning of world politics simply do not matter. The bottom line from all this research is that no consistent relationships have emerged between systemic distributions of alliances or military capabilities and the probability of war. It appears that realpolitik/balance of power provides a very poor basis from which to derive hypotheses about world politics since the underlying concepts and ultimate predictions are both ambiguous. The overwhelming lack of empirical support for balance of power theory led the field to look elsewhere for explanations and hypotheses.

**Phase Two: Theorizing National Goals, Domestic Politics, and Policy**

Two broad research programs emerged that both challenged a basic assumption of the balance of power perspective - the idea that states primarily sought to protect their security and maintain the status quo. The first was initially developed by A.F.K. Organski in his 1958 book, *World Politics*. Organski rejects the notion that states all pursue the same goal (power or security) and that the goals of states are inherently defensive. Organski defines a “national goal” as “a future state of affairs considered desirable by that nation, promoted by the national government, and calling forth the efforts of the population in order to achieve it” (Organski 1958: 76). Goals are determined both by “the characteristics of the nation and its people” and by “the external situation in which the nation finds itself in relation to other nations” (Organski 1958: 78-9). Power is a means of achieving other goals important to a state, for instance, the pursuit of wealth, the pursuit of cultural interests, and control of the international order. Organski's assumption that states pursue national goals that are determined at least in part by domestic factors has significant implications for alliance politics. Organski predicts that alliances will be based not solely on power, but on common goals, and that alliances will be much less flexible than balance of power theorists envisioned. Both because of established, profitable economic patterns and because of similarities in national goals, certain sets of states are likely to establish long term alliances and “switching sides” will be difficult. Organski writes, "Years of propaganda will be required before a population will believe that a former enemy is a friend or vice versa. … Nor is a government likely to want to shift sides suddenly when its economy as well as its sentiments are intricately meshed with those of other nations" (Organski 1958: 215). These standing ties and stable relationships produce what Organski refers to as “international orders”:

A powerful nation tends to set up a system of relations with lesser states which can be called an "order" because the relations are stabilized. In time, everyone comes to know what kind of behavior to expect from the others, habits and patterns are established, and certain rules as to how these relations ought to be carried on grow to be accepted by all the parties. (Organski 1958: 315).

Organski also argues that while alliances, arms production, military aggression, and territorial acquisition can serve as means to increase power, the primary source of
international power is domestic development; states increase their power by "mobilizing nationalistic sentiments, improving the efficiency of social organization, and most particularly, by industrializing" (Organski 1958: 397). Because states are at different stages of domestic development, they gain power at different rates. This inevitably makes the distribution of power in the international system fluid; strong states can expect to be "overtaken" as other states grow more quickly. When states that are disadvantaged with the current international order grow quickly and realign, they can challenge the dominant state for control of its international system, war can result.

While the power transition research program was one of the main challenges to the balance of power perspective, one of Organski's students, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, initiated an alternative research program that also challenged traditional approaches on some of the same grounds. Most notably, Bueno de Mesquita's expected utility research program also assumed that states pursue goals in the international system other than power, and that power is merely a means to those goals. In his 1981 book, *The War Trap*, Bueno de Mesquita assumes that states go to war in order to change the policies of the states they challenge. Decisions for war are based on expectations about the probability a state will win a war (relative power) and expectations about what is to be gained by winning (utility for changing the other state's policies). Again, this suggests that states are likely to form alliances and alignments based on similarity in policy preferences and not simply based on power.

In *The War Trap*, Bueno de Mesquita does not offer any theory of why states want different things and instead simply assumes that this is the case. His later work, however, specifically roots the development of policy preferences in domestic politics. *War and Reason*, co-authored with David Lake in 1992, analyzes two models of behavior, one in which a state chooses both goals and strategies, and one in which a state chooses strategies to pursue them; the former is referred to as a "realist" variant and the latter as a "dominant" variant. The model of war transition and expected utility research programs have provided frameworks within which investigation of more specific security behaviors have occurred. In the following two sections, we review the development of knowledge on the causes and effects in turn of alliances and arms acquisitions.

The Causes and Effects of Alliances

One of the first questions that scholars had to address in studying alliances is: What is an alliance? Scholars of security policy have found it useful to make a distinction between *alignments* and *alliances*. While any states that share interests and pursue common foreign policies are aligned, only a subset of these are allied. Alliances are distinguished by their formal nature: states enter into an alliance by signing a legally binding international agreement that requires specific actions under specific conditions (e.g., Snyder 1997: 6-8). Military alliances are formal international agreements that commit states to coordinate policy in responding to external threats and military crises.

Systematic data collection on alliances began in the 1960s as part of the Correlates of War (COW) Project. Singer and Small (1965) published a list of alliances formed between 1815 and 1939; the authors provided the names of signatories, the effective dates of the alliance, and classified each alliance as a defense pact, a neutrality/non-aggression pact, or an entente. These data were updated multiple times. Holsti et al. (1978) added alliances formed around wartime which were excluded from the original Singer and Small data set, and several scholars have extended the time period covered by the data collection. Most recently, Gibler and Sarkees (2004) published a comprehensive revision and update. The Correlates of War Formal Alliance data set made possible the great majority of the alliance research described below. More recently, the Alliance Treaty Network and Provisions (ATOP) project has provided new and detailed information about the content of alliance agreements, allowing researchers to address new questions about the design and reliability of international agreements (Leeds et al. 2002, Leeds and Mattes 2007).

As we saw above, traditional realist scholarship led to hypotheses about (1) why states form alliances — to increase their military capabilities and thus their security, (2) with whom states ally — generally the weaker side to balance power, and (3) whether alliances increase the likelihood of war — yes, if they are too inflexible but no, if they succeed in balancing power. Second phase theorizing led to new hypotheses: states form alliances not only to increase their security but to promote policies they like; states ally with other states with similar national goals; alliances may increase or decrease the likelihood of conflict depending on how they affect utility for war. Below we provide additional detail regarding the evolution of theoretical and empirical work on these three important questions.

Why do states form alliances? The most basic purpose behind alliances is capability aggregation. When two or more states work together, they become a more formidable potential fighting force. Alliances do not perfectly coordinate military policy, but pre-war coordination and planning does allow states to fight together more effectively and makes more apparent their intention to do so. While theorizing has focused most often on the improved ability to deter attack with the promise of aid from allies, capability aggregation can be useful for advancing a variety of goals in international politics. If all international bargaining takes place in the shadow of force, the ability to mobilize a larger fighting force translates to more bargaining power. When a state can call on allies for assistance, that state is more able to resist demands and compel concessions from adversaries, thus advancing their international goals. Alfeid (1984) and Lake and Newman (1991) conduct statistical analyses that show that most alliances that states choose to form increase their security and should improve their ability to deter attacks.

While states value additional military capabilities on their side in international bargaining, alliances come at a cost: to get something of value one must give something of value. In some cases, this is a symmetric promise. In return for an ally's promise of assistance in maintaining sovereignty and territorial integrity and advancing one's own international goals, a state must promise to defend its ally and advance the ally's goals as well. If the policy goals and threats faced are identical in character and salience, this may not be costly, but rarely are state goals and threats perfectly matched. Thus, in return for help in deterring challenges and advancing some goals, states usually must accept an increased risk of conflict involvement (in the event the ally becomes involved in war) and some adjustment in policy positions to coordinate goals with the ally.

In other cases, alliances represent a trade-off in different issue areas. Many alliances are asymmetric with larger powers alloying with smaller states. While there are a few exceptions involving strategic locations or crucial resources, rarely do these small states provide much military support to their stronger partners. Thus, minor powers may provide major powers with some other advantages in return for their protection; asymmetric alliances involve issue linkage. A variety of concessions have been observed,
including compliance with foreign policy initiatives, use of territory and resources, trade preferences, or other forms of tacit alignment. Morrow (1991) terms these asymmetric bargains “the security-autonomy trade-off” (see also Palmer and Morgan 2006). Schroeder (1976) goes further, arguing that major powers often use alliances as “tools of management,” or means to control the policies of other states, even in their relations with one another.

Alliances inherently involve risks, however, because they require states to entrust their security, at least in part, to others. Given that fulfilling an alliance in the event of war is costly, states might reasonably worry that their partners might abandon them in their time of need. Quantitative analysis by Kreke and Siverson and King (1970) finds that allies only joined their partners in war about 25 percent of the time. This research raised serious questions about whether alliances are a credible policy tool.

Yet, scholars who model the choice to form and fulfill an alliance theoretically (e.g., Morrow 1994; Smith 1995; 1998; Fearon 1997) deduce that most states that have incentives to form alliances also have incentives to fulfill them. Bluffing (that is, forming an alliance one will not fulfill if it is invoked) is in equilibrium only under a limited set of conditions. Using Fearon’s (1997) terms, formal alliances require states to “sink costs” and/or “tie their hands.” Because the negotiation and policy coordination involved in forming and maintaining an alliance are costly, insecure states have less incentive to commit to alliances. Because breaking past commitments is costly to international and domestic reputations, states that have signed alliances have increased incentives to fulfill them. And because the pre-war coordination encouraged by alliances improves the chances of winning conflicts, states that have formed alliances have increased incentive to fight together in war.

This posed a puzzle given the existing empirical evidence. Smith (1995) suggests, however, that the sample of alliances for which one can observe reliability is not a random sample. This is because conflict is more likely to occur (and thus the alliance is more likely to be invoked) when belligerents expect alliances to be unreliable. The most reliable alliances are less likely to be invoked. Even among those alliances that are challenged, however, alliances appear to be more reliable than was once thought. Earlier studies had assumed that any two states that were allied were expected to join one another in war whenever war occurred (e.g., Siverson and King 1979, Sabrosky 1980). Yet most alliance treaties specify particular conditions that invoke an alliance and specific actions to be taken should the casus foederis arise. Alliances are contracts that are often written with quite specific language that limits their applicability. Leeds et al. (2000) match the terms of agreements to the circumstances of conflicts. These authors show that when wars occur that require action by allies, allies fulfill their commitments approximately 75 percent of the time. Leeds (2000a) further shows that violation is most likely when conditions have changed since the time of alliance formation; when the conditions known to signatories at the time of formation are in effect, the great majority of alliances are fulfilled. None of these theories suggest that the reliability of alliances is not of concern; rather, they suggest that observed alliances tend to be fulfilled because leaders take into account the probability of fulfillment at the formation stage.

Thus, states that are likely to be more reliable partners should be selected more often as allies. Consistent with this claim, Gibler (2006) finds that states that have honored an alliance commitment in the past are more likely to form new alliances in the future. Theorizing about why states form alliances has led to expectations about whom allies with whom. Specifically, these theories suggest that in deciding whether to form alliances and with whom, states should consider: (1) their own power and the threats they face; (2) their potential ally’s power and the threats the ally faces; (3) the extent to which they share policy goals with their potential ally; and (4) the credibility of the alliance. Large-N studies have had trouble capturing some of these factors and finding support for them empirically.

For instance, those who argue that alliances are primarily about capability aggregation would expect to see that stronger states have more allies. Yet, evidence on whether dyads including major powers are more likely to be allied depends on the data set used and the time period analyzed (e.g., Morrow 1991; Lai and Reiter 2000; Leeds et al. 2002; Gibler and Sarkeses 2004; Kimball 2006; Gibler and Wolford 2006). The formal models proposed by Morrow (1994) and Smith (1995; 1998), however, suggest that the crucial issue concerning power is whether an ally is able to change the outcome of a war between an ally and a challenger. Thus, a more accurate test of the role of power in these theories would consider the marginal impact of a potential ally’s power on an expected conflict outcome. In other words, does the addition of an ally have the ability to change the balance of power between the prospective challenger and target? Alliances should be more likely when the answer to this question is affirmative.

Threat plays a role in every theory of alliance formation; since alliances at their heart are responses to external threats, some degree of threat should be a necessary condition for alliance formation, and as threat increases, alliances should become more valuable. Yet, large-N empirical support for this relationship is also inconsistent, perhaps in part because scholars have not yet operationalized the existence of threat in a convincing way. Reiter (1994) does not find a statistically significant relationship between his measure of “direct threat” faced by a minor power and the likelihood that the state allies with a major power. Lai and Reiter (2000) do not find a consistent relationship between the number of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) a dyad have been involved in with outside states over the past ten years and their probability of being allied, although Gibler and Sarkeses (2004) and Leeds et al. (2002) replicate the analysis using newer alliance data and find a positive relationship. Since alliances deter MIDs, however, it is unclear that observed MIDs are a good measure of the threat faced by states when they are allied (Leeds 2003a).

The perception of shared goals is one of the main factors enhancing the credibility of an alliance (e.g., Morrow 2000). Shared goals also make policy coordination among allies easier and less costly. Thus, we expect shared goals to be a key explanatory factor in who allies with whom, and existing empirical data supports this contention. Lai and Reiter (2000) find that states are more likely to be allied with another if (1) they have not been involved in a MID opposite another during the last ten years, (2) they have participated in a MID against the same third state in the past ten years, (3) they share a religious and/or linguistic, (4) they share similar political institutions. Kimball (2006) finds that states that share rivals are more likely to ally, and Powell (2010) finds that states with similar domestic legal systems are more likely to ally. While similar political institutions in general are related to allied status, results on whether democracies are especially likely to ally with one another are inconsistent (e.g., Siverson and Emmons 1991; Simon and Gartzke 1996; Lai and Reiter 2000; Leeds et al. 2002; Gibler and Sarkeses 2004; Kimball 2006; Gibler and Wolford 2006).

When it comes to the effects of alliances, the primary question has always been: Do alliances lead to peace or to war? As reviewed above, empirical tests conducted at the systemic level of analysis uncovered no consistent relationships. Nation-state level tests conducted by Siverson and Ring (1979) and Wayman (1996) find that states with alliances are more war prone than states without alliances, but since these analyses include no control variables, it is hard to tell whether the positive relationship between alliances and war is spurious. After all, scholars who have consistently argued that states seek alliances when they feel threatened and have some expectation of future conflict. The relevant question, therefore, is how do alliances affect the probability of war given the fact that states form alliances under conditions that may be particularly
have a far better and more nuanced understanding of the effects of these actions than did balance of power theorists in the 1950s. On the other hand, while research has produced strong “islands” of theory with supporting empirical evidence, alliances and arms acquisitions have tended to be studied in isolation from one another. We believe an important direction for the future is the development of theories of security policy that effectively consider the substitutability and complementarity of varying components. This point was made well by Morrow (1995), who encourages researchers to consider the interdependence of decisions to build arms and to ally. Two recent attempts at such integrated theorizing hold promise.

First, Vasquez (1987; 1995; Senese and Vasquez 2008) has developed and provided empirical tests of a theory of state’s “security dilemma.” Second, the steps to war. At the heart of this theory is the notion that politics at any level occurs over the issues that divide political actors. World politics is not a struggle for “power” nor is it a product of states’ efforts to provide security for themselves. Rather, it involves the efforts of states to get what they want in matters over which they have preferences that differ from others. Vasquez and Senese argue that some issues, notably territorial issues, are more serious than others; but, the choices made by statesmen regarding how to deal with these issues constitute a key feature to understanding international relations. Arms and alliances are among the tools available to statesmen. Vasquez and Senese argue that if states follow realpolitik prescriptions and respond to international disputes as if they believe that force is the ultimate arbiter, that is, by arming and forming alliances, then war is likely to occur. Thus, all issues, even serious ones, do not necessarily lead to war—indeed, it depends on how states try to deal with those issues. Moreover, realpolitik policies are not, by themselves, necessarily associated with war. They are only likely to lead to war when they are being used by states to deal with conflicts over serious issues.

Vasquez (1987) has made a compelling case that this perspective well-accounts for previous findings regarding arms, arms races, and alliances. He and Senese have also conducted a large number of empirical tests evaluating hypotheses derived from the theory (Senese and Vasquez 2008, see also Galbreath and Thomsen 2005). In general, the results from these tests indicate that disputes between states are more likely to escalate to war when the dispute is territorial in nature, when the states have a history of disputatious behavior, when the states have alliances when the states are engaged in an arms race. Consistent with the theory, the empirical results are more nuanced than this simple statement might suggest. In particular, there are a number of interesting and important interactions among the variables. Alliances and armaments do not appear to be strongly associated with dispute escalation except when the issue in dispute is territorial; and, this effect is amplified if the dispute occurs in the context of an ongoing rivalry. Moreover, although there are some differences across historical eras, it appears that alliances interact with the nature of the dispute in a multiplicative fashion while arms races do so in an additive fashion (Senese and Vasquez 2008). The bottom line is that alliances and armaments appear to be related to international conflict, but in a much subtler and complicated fashion than early international relations theorists suspected.

The second recent theoretical perspective is presented in the work of Morgan and Palmer (Morgan and Palmer 2000; 2005; Palmer and Morgan 2006). This theory is intended to be a general theory of foreign policy and is based on the assumption that states pursue two composite goods through their foreign policies. These are labeled “change,” referring to those activities intended to alter the status quo, and “maintenance,” referring to those activities intended to preserve the status quo. It is assumed that all states, at all times, seek to produce both goods and that the key foreign policy decision involves how to allocate finite resources to produce the optimal amount of these goods possible. Observed foreign policy activities, such as arms and alliances, are the inputs that convert resources into change and maintenance. Some of the hypotheses
derived from this theory are intuitive. One example is that states with more resources engage in more of all types of foreign policies. Thus, we expect wealthier states to acquire more arms and more alliances than poorer states. Not surprisingly, these hypotheses receive a great deal of empirical support.

These results have broader and more interesting implications, however. The most important pertain to our understanding of foreign policy substitutability. Scholars have long believed that if policies are substitutable (e.g., increasing arms or increasing allies are simply different means by which states provide security), then we should observe an inverse relationship in their usage. Repeated empirical tests have found this to be wrong (Most and Siverson 1987; Diefi 1994) states tend to increase (decrease) their arms at the same time they increase (decrease) their alliances. The two-good theory explains this result quite simply. Since states that gain (lose) capabilities tend to do more (less) of all types of policies, and since changing capabilities is the chief factor leading to changes in policies, we should expect the usage of all policies, substitutable or not, to vary directly in general.

Moreover, the theory also leads to a number of non-intuitive results having to do with foreign policy substitutability and how policies interrelate. The theory tells us that the effect of acquiring arms and alliances on other policies is actually quite complicated, and it depends on which good the acquisition was intended to produce and on the factors that brought that about. Most pertinent for this discussion are conclusions based on the assumptions that: (1) in asymmetric alliances, the stronger party is gaining change from the alliance and the weaker party is gaining maintenance; (2) arms expenditures are maintenance producing; and, (3) conflict initiation is change producing. The theory says that when we observe an alliance formation, it must be the case that something changed to make that alliance a more efficient use of resources than had been the case previously. Thus, observed alliances always have an effect similar to an increase in capabilities; in general, they lead to an increase in all other types of policies. We do expect a state joining an alliance to divert some resources to other policies producing the same good to policies that would produce the other good, however.

So, we expect all states joining alliance to increase both their arms expenditures and the frequency with which they initiate disputes; but, for weak states joining an asymmetrical alliance this effect should be much pronounced for dispute initiation and for strong states this effect should be more pronounced for arms expenditures. The empirical evidence provides fairly strong support for these hypotheses (Palmer and Morgan 2006). Furthermore, if we compare states in alliances to those not in alliances, we expect allied weaker states to spend less on arms than do non-allied weaker states of similar capabilities and we expect stronger allied states to spend more on arms than do non-allied strong states of similar capabilities. Again, the empirical evidence bears this out (Palmer and Morgan 2006). Interestingly, these results speak to debates regarding burden sharing in alliances as well as to debates regarding the effects of alliances and foreign policy substitutability. In particular, these results suggest that the observation that weaker allies (notably in NATO) spend a lower percentage of their national wealth on arms than do the strong does not imply that the weak are "free-riding" on the strong. Rather, all states' arms expenditures are exactly what we should expect if the alliance is providing the intended benefits to everyone.

Conclusion

We conclude, therefore, with optimism. Over the past 50 years, the scientific study of international processes has produced an improved theoretical understanding of the conditions under which states seek arms and alliances and the effects that arms acquisitions and alliances have on international outcomes. Data collection and data analysis techniques have allowed scholars to subject increasingly nuanced hypotheses to empirical scrutiny. At the same time, we recognize the need for further scientific research. Integrated theories that explain and predict security policy portfolios as a whole are in their infancy, and the endogeneity of power (through arms acquisitions and alliance formation) has not been well incorporated into many popular theories of war (e.g., bargaining models as presented by Fearon 1995; Powell 1999; Wagner 2007). We fully expect these linkages to be a priority in future work.

References


Programmatic Research on the Democratic Peace*

Steve Chan

Introduction

Are democracies more peaceful? And, if so, why and how? These questions have engaged the attention of international relations scholars more than any other topic in recent years. That democracies have not fought one another in the contemporary era represents in Jack Levy's (1999: 270) view, "as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations." Similarly, Bruce Russett (1996: 125) pointed to this phenomenon as "one of the strongest nontrivial normative generalizations that can be made about international relations." Nils Peter Gleditsch (1995: 829) also remarked "the importance of democracy lies in its being a near-perfect sufficient condition for peace." These observations suggest a general agreement about democracies' peaceful disposition — at least toward one another. The strength of this relationship between democracy and peace, however, continues to be debated. Some analysts have questioned whether this relationship may be supplanted by shared capitalism or US hegemony, or attenuated by border settlements and interdependent observations (Farber and Gowa 1993; 1997a; Gartzke 2007; Gibler 2007; Ward et al. 2007). Moreover, the causal mechanisms that lead democracies and, for that matter, autocracies, to be more peaceful in their foreign policy present some of the most exciting challenges and opportunities for a progressive research agenda.

This chapter reviews this research agenda over the past quarter century. It is, however, impossible to discuss fully all the pertinent studies consisting of dozens of books and hundreds of articles. Some of the omitted works can be found in previous reviews on this subject (e.g., Rummel 1985; Morgan 1993; Chan 1997; Maoz 1998; Ray 1998; Morrow 2002).

Early Works

Immanuel Kant's (1957) Perpetual Peace, published in 1795, has often been acknowledged as the intellectual precursor to contemporary scholarship on democratic peace. In this treatise, he argued that a republican form of government would promote peace. Unlike monarchs who would undertake war for frivolous reasons, Kant reasoned that it would only be natural for citizens to be more prudent because they would bear the costs of war. In addition to republicanism, he suggested that cosmopolitanism and an expanding federation of like-minded republics should enhance peace. Contemporary research has referred to the Kantian triangle whereby democracy, international trade