

Introduction

Having been advised to suspend the shelling not to risk firing on friendly forces as well, Alphonsus replied, with a severe face, “Go on shooting all around and fear nothing, my gunners; you can’t go wrong, for they are all enemies.”

—PAOLO GIOVIO, *La Vita di Alfonso da Este*

It is generally accepted that the members of an alliance do not necessarily have to be friends, and that cooperation between allies may well conceal a certain degree of competition. Nevertheless, the majority of international relations scholars tend to perceive allies simply as states working closely together in order to achieve a shared objective; as such, they virtually take it for granted that allies act as one body. Alliances are commonly seen as a union of separate forces, a policy-coordination organization, the taker of joint action against some third party. Even if some observers and scholars point out that such cooperative enterprise and the ensuing relations are often of a rather fragile, contradictory nature, both everyday language and specialized analyses invariably place the stress on the cooperative features of alliances and on their “external” functions, that is, on those aspects of the alliance designed to deal with what is usually described as the “common enemy.”

However, even the briefest examination of diplomatic history will reveal a number of other aspects of alliances. First of all, the events associated with each phase of all alliances invariably show that the common cause is not the only dimension of allies’ relations; nor does it clearly circumscribe their functional space. In fact, allies are generally involved in more ambiguous

and complex maneuvers, by means of which one ally tries to condition and control the other, and even when the common cause is clearly evident, each member pursues the cause while at the same time closely observing the behavior of the other, and trying to limit its freedom of movement to some degree. Second, there is a striking variety of types of alliance, as can be seen not only in the degree to which the various members condition the behavior of the others but also in the tone of their relations, which may vary from tense to cordial, and from a position of reciprocal support to one of substantial diffidence toward, and reluctance to adopt, the other's aims. The most common generalizations—which also happen to be the oldest and most deeply rooted ones—are incapable of encompassing this and other differences. As in a Hegelian night when all cows are perceived as being gray, scholars of alliance politics tend to see one alliance as similar to all others, which to be quite honest is extremely debatable. To conclude then, an alliance can be said to possess an internal dimension that, as well as casting a rather sinister shadow over relations between the partners, is equally as important as the external dimension, if not more so. Furthermore, the notion of alliance conceals such a great variety of phenomena and behavior that it becomes difficult to encapsulate them within a single framework. The present study is going to examine both the “darker side” of alliances and the various forms such alliances may take. The work is subdivided into two main parts, one theoretical, the other historical.

The realist school, with its insistence on the balance of power, has contributed most to developing and spreading the view that alliances are essentially instruments by which states aggregate their power against a common enemy, thus assigning a secondary role to relations between allies (to such an extent as to lose sight of these relations altogether) and to how allies interact with third parties. Traditional theory is naturally not without foundation, but it allows light to be shed on only a small number of alliances, that is, those that are almost exclusively a reflection of an imbalance of power, or on one aspect of most alliances, that is, their “external” orientation against an enemy. Moving from here, we first of all provide an outline of contemporary theoretical debate on alliances (balancing versus bandwagoning, external versus domestic causes), illustrate its limitations, and propose an alternative conception of alliances, at the core of which is the study of inter-allied relations, with all their ambivalence.

This preliminary work serves, in turn, as the basis for a review of the broader theoretical perspective from which alliances are generally analyzed. Claiming that alliances are a manifestation of the principle of the balance of

power amounts to inferring that states' ideal objective is the pursuit of security, and adopting, implicitly or otherwise, a systemic-structural approach similar to that of the neorealist school of thought. However, such a position may be accepted as only an initial approximation, given that many alliances cannot be conceived in such terms. Moreover, neorealism was designed to give account of international macro phenomena, and thus it comes as no surprise that such an approach is incapable of grasping the multifaceted nature of alliances. Given our present concern with the regular, recurrent features of international politics, we have decided to remain within a systemic context and focus not so much only on the international structure but rather on how each state is positioned in relation to both allies and enemies. The interpretation of alliances offered within such a framework places considerable importance on the role played by inter-ally exchange and power relations. The implications of such an approach are quite simple: by focusing on how each ally tries to control the behavior of its partner, the emphasis is not so much on pursuit of security in the face of some external threat as on pursuit of the "conformity" of others, in particular the conformity of the same ally. In fact, it will not be possible to focus on the pursuit of other objectives, such as security, until the ally has been bound—in other words, until the ally's freedom of movement has been circumscribed, and its behavior rendered more readily foreseeable, by the alliance itself. The resulting picture is completely in keeping with the realist tradition—with the struggle for power continuing within the alliance itself—although it is one that the realist school overall has itself failed to produce.

We therefore focus on both analytical levels—the internal and the external—at which each and every alliance may be studied. Together with the famous "alliance security dilemma" clearly expounded by Glenn H. Snyder, and based on the twin fears of "abandonment" and "entrapment," the present study focuses on the "alliance power dilemma," which once again has been formulated on the basis of two opposing fears: that one's ally may become too strong, and thus be capable of escaping one's control, or even of exercising control; and that it may be too weak, and as such incapable of making any significant contribution to the alliance. Furthermore, an examination is made of the more common forms of behavior that allies adopt toward their enemies, together with the potential interaction between different levels. Thus the impact on inter-ally relations of a policy of firmness (or of flexibility) toward the enemy (or enemies) is discussed, as are the repercussions on the alliance of a conciliatory (or aggressive) stance adopted

by the enemy (or enemies). The fears associated with the two previously mentioned dilemmas, together with the policies adopted to deal with these fears, take various forms depending on the case at hand; similarly, the stance adopted in relation to the enemy may have a variety of consequences. The problem is thus one of distinguishing between forms of alliance. In other words, despite the presence of a common cause, the nature of this cause, the context in which it emerges, the existence of other national causes, and the relations of power between allies all affect the performance and workings of the alliance to a certain degree. These and other differences can be accounted for only if we distinguish between types of alliance, which is yet another matter that previous studies have failed to deal with satisfactorily. This operation is even more important, given the vague, inconclusive nature of the majority of generalizations currently available.

The two criteria we have chosen for characterization of the types of alliance closely reflect the conceptualization of alliances proposed herein: the relation of forces between allies, and their respective systemic positions. What emerges from employment of these two criteria is identification of two general classifications of alliance. The first includes symmetrical and asymmetrical alliances, depending on whether the power relationship between the allies is a balanced one (symmetrical) or is stacked in favor of one of them (asymmetrical). The second classification leads to a subdivision of alliances into homogeneous and heterogeneous varieties, depending on whether the members conform to convergent constraints or grasp compatible opportunities in the former case, or obey divergent constraints or exploit contradictory opportunities in the latter case. The systemic position of allies enables us to understand the degree to which they are prepared to cooperate, and thus the kind of negotiations they are likely to hold—accommodative in the case of homogeneous alliances, or coercive in the case of heterogeneous coalitions. The power relations between allies throw light on the dynamics of exchange, in the case of symmetrical alliances, or on the dynamics of dominion and dependence, in an asymmetrical nature. The two “dilemmas of alliances” take on their own forms in each class. However, the most important factor is the compositional effect produced when the categories intersect to give the various types of alliance described in this book.

This largely deductive operation defines four basic alliance types. First there is the symmetrical, homogeneous type, which we call the *aggregation* alliance, whose members cooperate in a mutually beneficial way subject to commonly agreed conditions. The second type, asymmetrical and homogeneous, which

we call the *guarantee* alliance, is also characterized by a substantial degree of cooperation among members, which benefits all of them; however, the terms of this cooperation are basically established by one of the allies, the stronger of the two. The third type, asymmetrical and heterogeneous, is called the *hegemonic* alliance; here the two members adopt different stances, but the imbalance in the power relations between the two is such that it enables the less dependent of the two to drag the other along with it, imposing certain conditions on this weaker party that are at least partly detrimental to it. Finally, the fourth type is the symmetrical, heterogeneous model, which we call the *dead-locked* alliance; this type differs from the others in that its members possess equal bargaining power, but each member has adopted a position that cannot be easily reconciled with that of the other member; the net result is a situation of paralysis. Each type of alliance thus possesses certain general characteristics; within each type, more specific hypotheses are developed regarding the policies adopted by the allies and the results of their interaction. It is at this point that the various forms adopted by the two dilemmas of alliances are further specified and given an initial explanation.

The theoretical propositions formulated for each type of alliance are next illustrated using four case studies taken from the diplomatic history of 18th century Europe, for two reasons. First, given that this period in history has been largely ignored by the specialists until now, we would like to broaden the scope offered by current international studies, to take in what is generally considered one of the most interesting periods in the history of European diplomacy. The four cases in question are presented here in chronological order, starting from the War of Spanish Succession and ending on the eve of the French Revolution, thus offering the reader an overview of almost the entire century. Second, 18th century international politics and diplomacy were played out within a context that is ideal for our purposes. The absence of any ideological conflict makes it fairly easy to isolate the impact of interest and power that we wish to stress here; the existence of a number of great powers gives the international system a certain fluidity and enables us to immediately identify the reactions of states to the smallest change in their situational context. Finally, the absence of any hegemonic actor clears the field of further “noise” capable of conditioning the logic of alliances to the point where it overshadows some of the dynamics we are most interested in here.

During the first half of the 18th century, Britain and the United Provinces clearly represented a case of a guarantee alliance; the two nations joined forces to combat the French, subject to the terms and conditions established by

government in London. At the same time, the United Provinces, protected by their major ally and induced in other ways to follow its leadership, over the years progressively attempted to reduce their engagement, dedicating themselves prevalently to trade; Britain, for its part, systematically influenced its minor ally's foreign policy (and sometimes even internal policy). The Dutch were thus absorbed into the various diplomatic mechanisms designed by Britain; yet more often than not they benefited from British leadership.

During the decade after the Peace of Utrecht, Britain laid the foundations for its future "preponderance" thanks in part to a hegemonic alliance with France. By taking advantage of the momentary decline in power and prestige of the latter, Britain managed to closely ally France to itself and use that nation as a means of strengthening its own foreign influence, from the Baltic to the Mediterranean. The pursuit of a common cause—in this case, preservation of peace—cost France dearly, since as Britain's ally it found itself forced to surrender certain important interests.

The Anglo-Prussian alliance during the Seven Years' War enables us to study the mechanisms that characterize the aggregation alliance, which is the one closest to the traditional idea of an alliance often to be found in international studies. In this specific case, we have two powers that closely cooperated in a mutually beneficial manner, in circumstances that reduced any potential sources of conflict between the two to a bare minimum. Their mutual dependence and shared enemies led Britain and Prussia to reach agreements both countries were happy with, without either party being in a position to manipulate the other.

Finally, a fine example of the deadlocked alliance is that of Austro-French relations during the latter half of the century. Far from affording one another mutual support, Austria and France remained united almost against their will, following the end of the Seven Years' War. Each needed the other, but given their diverse positions in the international chessboard neither wished to lend support to the other's policies. Austria thus found itself hindered by France's veto on numerous occasions, while France chose to renounce certain substantial benefits in order not to favor Austria's designs.

The last chapter then offers an assessment of our analysis by reviewing some of the initial hypotheses, by identifying more precisely the conditions under which the causal connections mentioned are more or less likely to hold, and by proposing a series of ideas regarding the transformation and decline of alliances that are in keeping with the overall theoretical framework.