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Stand by Me: Wartime Alliance Dynamics in History

March 2009

War is not a solitary activity. Beyond the obvious fact that it takes a defender to have a war, a large proportion of all wars in the Correlates of War Project involves alliances¹. The problem is that we know very little about wartime alliances, and the less we know about the process by which wars unfold, the less we know about their outcome. Even if we grant that relative power is a good predictor of war outcomes (and evidence suggests that it can only explain about 60% of all outcomes²), it tells us very little about the distribution of gains and losses among winners and losers except for the truism that losers lose and winners win. We also know very little about the distribution of costs and benefits among winners and among losers. Given that all major wars of the last 500 years featured alliances among great powers, it is hard to overstate the importance of covering this gap in our understanding of war.

This is of more than academic interest. Alliances are one of the favorite tools of states to achieve security and engage in predatory behavior.³ The centrality of NATO in U.S. security policy in Europe, East European states' eagerness to join NATO, the return of France to its military command, and Russian maneuvers to weaken NATO and derail its enlargement to include Ukraine and Georgia—going as far as launching a war in the process—demonstrate that alliance politics remain as relevant as ever, even at the heart of one of the most peaceful regions in the world, Europe. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are also evidence that alliances remain an important mechanism to distribute costs and benefits among states.

¹ In this paper, "alliance" and "coalition" are used interchangeably. The two main differences between these concepts are that an alliance is a formal agreement agreed upon in anticipation of a threat or benefit, whereas a coalition is an ad hoc group of states created to confront a present aggressor or reap the rewards of aggression.

² Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.21.

³ It is interesting to note that predatory states may not only use alliances to increase their own power to aggress, but may also exploit the weaknesses or false sense of security that an adversary's alliance can provide. German exploitation of French inability to help her Little Entente allies during the lead up to WWII is a prime example of this scenario.

This paper is a first cut at understanding wartime alliance dynamics. The main argument is that wartime allies employ a mix of strategies to distribute the costs and benefits of fighting, the composition of which is determined by military imperatives. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part surveys the literature and discusses the various strategies available to states when they fight as part of an alliance. The second part fleshes out a model that explains why states opt for various mixes of strategies and with whom. The third part is a short plausibility probe using the case of the “Grand Alliance” between the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union during World War II.

What we know about wartime alliance dynamics

We know a great deal about formal, peacetime alliances: how they form, how responsibilities are assigned, and why they are not always reliable.⁴ Surprisingly however, we

⁴ Key works using qualitative methods include Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, ed., *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace 7th Edition* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006); Jeremy Pressman, *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs: Learning, Alliances, and World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler’s Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979). The seminal formalization of alliance theory in terms of public goods is Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, “An Economic Theory of Alliances,” in Bruce M. Russett, ed., *Economic Theories of International Relations* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1968), pp.25-45; Paul Papayoanou, “Intra-Alliance Bargaining and U.S. Bosnia Policy,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* vol.41 no.1 (February 1997), pp.91-116; for a review of this literature, see Todd Sandler, “The Economic Theory of Alliances: A Survey,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* vol.37 no.3 (September 1993). Recent works using quantitative methods include Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs*; the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) Project at Rice University and its comprehensive database, <http://atop.rice.edu/home> (accessed May 15, 2008); on the ATOP Project see also Brett Ashley Leeds, Jeffrey M. Ritter, Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, and Andrew G. Long., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944,” *International Interactions* 28 (2002), pp.237-260. Scholars have also expanded the Correlates of War Formal Alliance Data Set back to 1648. See Douglas M. Gibler, “An Extension of the Correlates of War Formal Alliance Data Set, 1648-1814,” *International Interactions* vol.25 no.1

know much less about what happens to alliances once hostilities have begun.⁵ The current realist literature on alliances makes two contradictory claims about alliances in wartime: on the one hand, states will pass the buck to their allies whenever they can and, on the other hand, alliance capabilities are additive, that is, they increase in proportion to the aggregated capabilities of the members.⁶ They cannot both be right at the same time. First, if states engage in buck-passing, it effectively means that they are unwilling to make available to the alliance at least some of their capabilities. They let their allies do more with less: more of the common burden with less than the total potential power of the alliance. Second, if the total capabilities of an alliance are the sum of those of individual members, it means that each ally's contribution to the total war effort is proportional to their capabilities. In such a scenario, no one free rides. This paper aims to resolve that tension in the realist literature.

The current realist literature is also unable to explain the timing for institutional change during war. For instance, we don't yet have an explanation for why the Entente waited until March 1918 to establish a unified command for the western front, just as French forces were collapsing. In fact, the first productive, formal meeting between the two allies' prime ministers

(1999); Douglas M. Gibling, *International Military Alliances from 1648 to 2000* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, forthcoming 2008).

⁵ Exceptions include Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*; Patrick Michael Walsh, *Military Coalition Building: A Structural and Normative Assessment of Coalition Architecture* (Tufts: PhD dissertation, 1999); Nora Bensahel, *The Coalition Paradox: The Politics of Military Cooperation* (Stanford: PhD dissertation, 1999); Patricia A. Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Eric J. Labs, "Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims," *Security Studies* vol.6 no.4 (summer 1997), pp.1-49. We know more about how states win and lose wars, but by and large these studies tend to neglect the role of alliance. See Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Risa A. Brooks and Elizabeth A. Stanley, eds, *Creating Military Power: The Sources of Military Effectiveness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), but note chapter 8 for a rare exception; Biddle, *Military Power*.

⁶ See Bensahel, *The Coalition Paradox*, pp.5-25; James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science* v.35 no.4 (November 1991), pp.904-933.

only took place in November 1915, more than a year after the start of the war. More puzzling still (and to the great surprise of the French government at the time), the British proposed a French general to head the unified command. Why did the British agree to subordinate their forces to a collapsing ally? This runs contrary to what realism would predict: as the balance of power shifts within the alliance, increasingly powerful states should get an increasingly large say in how the alliance conducts the war.

A related problem is that concerns for relative gains within alliances in wartime do not seem to dovetail their internal distribution of power. One of the greatest sources of tension between France and Great Britain during World War I was the contribution of British forces to the war effort. French leaders thought that the British had been suspiciously slow in deploying their Expeditionary Force to France and that they were conserving their forces or employing them for operations peripheral to the main theater in northeastern France. French leaders' suspicions were not entirely groundless. It was not until it became clear that France was no longer able to hold the line that the British committed themselves definitively to prioritizing the western front, in 1916. Nonetheless Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, did not hesitate to travel to France in late August to ensure that the commander of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), Sir John French, would cooperate with his counterpart General Joseph Joffre, "even at extreme risk to his own army" in the words of British historian John Keegan.⁷ Meanwhile, because it was an "Associated Power" and not an "Allied Power," America refused to participate in the new joint command. How can we make sense of such seemingly contradictory behavior, where on the one hand the British engaged in buck-passing on the main front while

⁷ John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), p.110.

opening new ones, and later on willingly subordinated their forces to a French-led joint command?

Knowing how states fight as team members, when they act in solidarity or engage in backstabbing and what technical hurdles they have to surmount is important for three reasons. First, it should shed light on the little studied yet very important tradeoffs that states have to make when they fight with allies. These tradeoffs may be very revealing for national identity, self-perception and perception of the other, decision-making processes under duress, how states evaluate the balance of power and how states plan for the future.

Second, this study will help fill a surprising gap in the literature in International Relations. Most scholars—though by no means all—agree with Clausewitz that “war is an instrument or an act of policy.”⁸ It follows that, as Clausewitz remarked, “a certain grasp of military affairs is vital for those in charge of general policy.”⁹ Yet most works in security studies do not extend their investigation beyond the first moves in war.¹⁰ If policy (and politics!) extends into the act of waging war, we need a better understanding of what is going on once the shooting starts. We know little about how decision makers react to the changing conditions of war. This study of alliance politics in wartime will help fill that gap.

⁸ Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.92.

⁹ Quoted in *id.*

¹⁰ For example, see Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); John A. Vasquez, ed., *What Do We Know about War?* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 200); exceptions include fn 2; H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment: The Causes of War Termination and the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Jeffrey Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint During World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). Studies of civil-military relations go beyond the analysis of the causes of war, but their scope is limited by their narrow focus on bureaucratic and organizational factors. For an excellent overview of this literature, see Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), especially chapter 12 by Eliot A. Cohen.

Third, understanding wartime alliances should lead to a better understanding of peace as an outcome of war. Rivalry between allies on the winning side may or may not influence the duration of the war and the shape of the peace. Concerns for relative gains may lead states to advocate strategies that will improve their postwar position, which in turn will affect the position of their allies. From a purely military perspective (if there is such a thing), these are distortions, distractions from the objective of defeating the enemy. However senior officers are no mere automatons who, once set down the path to war, mindlessly pursue battlefield victories to the detriment of everything else. They are participants in the political contest that their state is engaged in. At the senior levels of national leadership, the line separating military and political objectives tends to blur. How both groups of leaders, civilian and military, interact and understand each other should have a crucial influence on what the postwar world will look like.

Incentives and disincentives to cooperate with allies

Great powers under anarchy engage in an unending quest for security, the result of which is perpetual tensions and war. When war becomes inevitable, which strategy is best: fight alone and keep all the spoils of war to oneself, but risk defeat; or fight with allies but share the spoils? States can choose from four “pure” strategies: going solo, stay on the sidelines, bandwagoning with the threat and bandwagoning for profit.

Internal balancing: fighting solo

When facing a threat to their security, great powers can engage in internal balancing to confront the threat on their own. This is not a very attractive strategy however. First, internal balancing is very costly. The state has to shoulder the entire burden of opposing the adversary. This may include not only the cost of deploying armed forces of enough size, but also significant Research and Development (R&D) costs without partners to share the risks associated with developing new technologies or additional markets to improve economies of scale. The politics of arms sales in wartime may also prevent the state from acquiring the best equipment or from receiving spare parts in a timely fashion.

A second problem with internal balancing is that the state runs the risk of appearing threatening to its neighbors. A demonstrated willingness to use force unilaterally may lead them to fear that the state is no longer restrained by norms of behavior. Increased military spending and new military acquisitions can also be threatening because of uncertainty about resumption of normal military spending after the war, but also because of increased military stocks. There hardly is a worst time than wartime to spark a spiral of mistrust with one's neighbors fuelled by the security dilemma. To summarize, internal balancing/fighting solo is a risky and inefficient way to wage war.

Buck passing: waiting on the sidelines

According to some scholars, one of the best strategies is for the state to buck-pass: to let another state confront the threat and incur the cost of war.¹¹ Yet this is also a risky strategy, as the intended buck-catcher may fail to catch the buck, or fight the adversary in ways that are not in the buck-passer's interests. Moreover, a strategy of pure buck-passing implies the forfeiting of any gain that could be achieved through active participation, like the acquisition of new territory, better borders, national unification, access to new resources, and so forth. Buck-passing also implies that the state will miss out on any side payment from their allies. It can also weaken its own long-term security as future partners will regard them as untrustworthy.

A state may engage in free riding with the intention of waiting it out and emerge the strongest, or of backstabbing their ally when they have become sufficiently weak. Such a strategy requires either that other states be so focused on the present that they fail to recognize what is going on, or that they are unable to derail the strategy. Most likely, this strategy will invoke suspicion and push the warring parties to moderate the fighting to preserve their postwar position.

Bandwagoning: nothing succeeds like success

States bandwagon for two main reasons: out of fear, and out of greed. It usually involves a weaker actor allying with a stronger one. According to some scholars, bandwagoning

¹¹ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp.157-62; Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp.63-64.

is the dominant behavior in the international system.¹² Bandwagoning is an opportunistic strategy that requires the target of the bandwagoning to be successful. The bandwagoning state joins the target because doing so will lead to benefits or the avoidance of costs. If the target loses the ability to instill fear, or if it weakens so much that it can no longer help the bandwagoning state attain its objectives, the alliance dissolves. A state that is prone to bandwagoning is also an unreliable partner in war, as it may switch sides whenever the wind turns. The consequence is that the autonomy of bandwagoning states can become a problem for the target. Bandwagoning states therefore run the risk of losing their autonomy to their powerful ally, as the latter tries to ensure the reliability of their weaker allies.

Mixed strategy: fight when it counts

The best strategy is therefore a mix of buck-passing and active participation. In practice, this means entering into some form of agreement with like-minded states to share the burden of fighting the adversary. In other words, buck-passing and balancing go hand in hand.¹³ There are important advantages to this mixed strategy. If state A opts to enter into a burden-sharing agreement, it will spread the cost and allow for a degree of control over the war objectives and the war strategy. It also opens up the possibility of using the war to enhance A's postwar

¹² Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹³ Mearsheimer argues that balancing and buck-passing "obviously represent contrasting ways of dealing with an aggressor." Mearsheimer, *ibid.*, p.159. The point of an alliance (that is, to opt for external balancing) is to share the burden of opposing an adversary. This is hard to distinguish from buck-passing however, as sharing the burden is logically equivalent to passing part of one's burden off to someone else.

position. The question, therefore, is under what conditions will states emphasize one component of this mixed strategy over the other?

Allies fight together because they have at least some overlapping objectives.¹⁴ It may be going too far to say that “anything that an alliance allows during wartime can also be accomplished without a prewar alliance,”¹⁵ especially because a peacetime alliance often serves as a costly signal to allies and adversaries alike. Peacetime alliances are not mere epiphenomena, but contribute to fostering peace when the conditions are right, and also to precipitating war. Yet the point remains that allies join forces in war because they believe that it is in their interests. The reason they fight with allies is that they need to pool their resources with other states in order to defeat an adversary.

The decision to fight together is intimately linked to the question of the objectives. A common objective brings the allies together, but how the objective is interpreted and implemented can vary greatly across allies. States will likely have other, sometimes competing, objectives as well. To compound the problem, these objectives are never static: opportunities for gain and risks of loss often arise as the situation on the battlefield develops and the diplomatic context evolves. Allies may also disagree over methods and the nature of the endgame.

¹⁴ When a state wages war, it has two goals. The most immediate and pressing goal is to get the adversary to stop fighting. The second goal is to emerge from the war in as good a position as possible. It is tempting to believe that getting the adversary to stop fighting on your terms will lead to an enhanced postwar position, while getting the adversary to stop fighting *on their own terms* (that is, getting them to stop fighting you by agreeing to their terms for a ceasefire, by surrendering, etc.) will lead to an unfavorable postwar position; but this is not always the case. An exhausted victor may see its postwar position considerably weakened. Switching to the winning side in the course of the war can also lead to an improvement in the state’s postwar position. Defeat can also result in reduced overextension. For the moment however, I will assume that winning war is a necessary condition for having a good postwar position.

¹⁵ James D. Morrow, “Alliances: Why Write Them Down?” *Annual Review of Political Science* v.3, p.64.

More importantly for this study, allies compete with each other even as they fight the common enemy. Concerns for relative gains among allies at war are a fundamental, yet understudied, aspect of wartime alliances. Each ally wants the other to bear a disproportionate share of the fighting (buck-passing) in some theaters while having a free hand in some others. As American strategists from the Office of the Chief of Staff noted during WWII, “Never absent from the British minds are their post-war interests, commercial and military. We should likewise safeguard our own eventual interests.”¹⁶ If partners in a “special relationship” like the US and Britain sometimes acted as defensive positionalists toward each other, one can imagine that the situation may be even worse among distant allies, forced by events to pool their resources against a common adversary.¹⁷

In addition, alliances may fall victim of their own success: without a common interest (defeating the adversary), allies may become rivals—as the Soviet Union and the U.S. at the end of World War II did.¹⁸ Consequently, each ally wages war with an eye on their relative position at war’s end. Military victories for the alliance as a whole often translate into asymmetric strategic gains for the allies: the benefits of victory are not evenly distributed among allies. States may also have to reveal military, technological or diplomatic secrets to win in the

¹⁶ Col. J. McNarney and Adm. R.K. Turner, “Joint Instructions for Army & Navy Representatives,” *Office of the Chief of Staff*, Washington, 21 January 1941, Record Group (US Archives) 165, Exec.8, quoted in Steve Weiss, *Allies in Conflict: Anglo-American Strategic Negotiations, 1938-44* (New York: St.Martin’s Press, 1996), p.7.

¹⁷ For the concept of defensive positionalism, see Joseph M. Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism,” *International Organization* vol.42 no.3 (Summer 1988), pp.485-507.

¹⁸ For a similar argument applied to NATO, see John J. Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War,” *International Security* (Summer 1990), pp.5-56; for a somewhat ad hoc explanation for why NATO has survived to the disappearance of the threat that gave it rise, see Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism After the Cold War,” *International Security* (Summer 2000), pp.5-41.

present, secrets that could turn out to be very useful to their former allies in the future. The nature of the endgame is therefore an ongoing concern for allies.

From structural incentives to behavior

The structural incentives described in the previous section are not enough on their own to determine behavior.¹⁹ The military situation on the ground guides states in deciding when they should be passing the buck, when they should be supporting their ally, and when they should act on their own.

The military situation on the ground

The bargaining power of the allies varies with their respective military situation. An ally in a favorable military situation is in a better position to plan for the long-term and pursue interests and war aims not immediately related to the defeat of the adversary on the battlefield. For instance, the US could more easily plan for the postwar era during WWII because its territorial integrity was never seriously threatened. On the other hand, Britain's survival was at stakes; thus Britain had to let the US intervene in some of its traditional key spheres of influence, for example in the Middle East and the Caribbean.

¹⁹ It has long been recognized that structure does not determine behavior but merely presents incentives to actors, who are then free to follow or ignore them. See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p.92; Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). For an overview of the general arguments about structural incentives and disincentives for cooperation, see David A. Baldwin, *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

My working hypothesis is that when allied states fight together, *the military situation of the respective allies influences the level of cooperation between them*. The standard definition of cooperation is a “goal-directed behavior that entails mutual policy adjustments so that all sides end up better off than they would otherwise be.”²⁰ In wartime, cooperation happens at many levels, from the tactical to the grand strategic,²¹ and involves both civilians and military personnel. This is too vast for a single study however, so the most fruitful strategy is to focus on senior military and civilian leaders. Therefore by “level of cooperation” I mean the extent to which senior civilian and military leaders of allied states arrive at an agreement over war aims and force employment.²² Each ally would like to define war aims unilaterally and tailor them perfectly to their own national interests; and they would gladly employ only allied forces instead of their own. Most likely however, they will have to compromise; firstly because it would be irrational for their allies to acquiesce to such skewed distribution of costs and benefits, and secondly because the adversary is too powerful to be defeated alone (if it were, what would be the benefits of being in an alliance?²³).

The independent variable (IV) is the extent to which state A’s military situation is favorable or not, from imminent cessation of the fighting due to the state A’s unwillingness/inability to go on, to imminent cessation of the fighting due to adversary state C’s

²⁰ Helen Milner, “International Theories of Cooperation among Nations: Strengths and Weaknesses,” *World Politics* v.44 no.3 (April 1992), p.468.

²¹ Even the tactical level can have significant political consequences. See Joseph F. Bouchard, *Command in Crisis: Four Case Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); for a general discussion of the various levels of war, see Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1987). For a discussion of the challenges of studying strategy, see Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” *International Security* v.25 no.2 (Autumn 2000), pp.5-50.

²² I refine the dependent variable below to include the type of cooperation.

²³ I need to work on this point. My focus on great powers excludes dyads where a great power is allied with one or more smaller power(s) whose defeat would not change the overall military situation of the alliance.

unwillingness/inability to go on.²⁴ This does not refer to the objective military situation, but to A's situation *as it is perceived* by its allies. Obviously, A has an incentive to lie about its military situation in order to extract more help from its allies; but this is counterbalanced by the knowledge that if caught, it will be harder to convince its allies of a genuine need later. The most likely scenario is not outright lies, but omissions.

I divide the IV into: very unfavorable, unfavorable, favorable, and very favorable. A perceived very unfavorable military situation is one where ally B perceives that A runs the real risk of being defeated. B's senior leaders should discuss the probability of A's defeat in their internal meetings. A perceived unfavorable military situation is one where ally B perceives that A is unable to win; or that A is on the defensive. Defeat is not yet a distinct possibility, but A is losing forces, ground, or both. B's senior leaders should discuss A's military situation without displaying any excessive defeatism. They should see ways by which A could turn things around. A perceived favorable situation is one where ally B perceives that A has begun to gain ground, or that the attrition ratio with the adversary favors A. B's senior leaders should discuss the positive situation, but without any excessive optimism, as defeat is still a possibility. A perceived very favorable situation is when ally B perceives that there is a high probability that A will reach its stated war aims in the near future. B's senior leaders should discuss the coming victory of A, and what comes next.

²⁴ Goemans rightly points out that the fighting does not necessarily stop because one of the fighters is unwilling/unable to continue fighting. I am defining the variable this way because I want to avoid talking about "winning" and "losing," as only about 25% of all wars since 1800 have had a clear-cut outcome. See Goemans, *War & Punishment*.

In table 1 on next page, we can see how the military situation influences the level of cooperation. Let us examine these theoretical possibilities into greater detail. I will first look at the extremes (both allies in a very favorable or very unfavorable military situation), and then tackle the more difficult situations (1,2, 1,3), (2,1... 2,3) and (3,1... 3,3).

Figure 1.

The military situation of allies and cooperation in wartime

		State A				
		Military Situation				
State B Military Situation		<i>Very favorable</i>	<i>Favorable</i>	<i>Unfavorable</i>	<i>Very unfavorable</i>	
		<i>Very unfavorable</i>	VHC	VHC	VHC	VHC
		<i>Unfavorable</i>	HC	HC	VHC	VHC
		<i>Favorable</i>	LC	LC	HC	VHC
		<i>Very favorable</i>	VLC	LC	HC	VHC

VHC : Very High Cooperation
 HC: High Cooperation
 LC: Low Cooperation
 VLC: Very Low Cooperation

In box (1,1), the allies are both in a very favorable military situation: not only is their survival assured, but they should soon be in a position to force the adversary to stop fighting on their terms, at which point they will have “won”. It is when the allies reach this stage of the war that we can expect cooperation to really break down. The allies can afford to allocate more resources to position themselves favorably for the postwar period. Because of concerns for relative gains, states will worry about their allies’ future intentions; this translates into the fear that if they do not pay sufficient attention to how the endgame unfolds, their allies will take advantage of their willingness to cooperate. However the problem is not limited to future intentions; present intentions become more and more problematic as the military situation of the allies improves. The impending achievement of the common goal, the defeat of the adversary, makes it harder for states to predict their allies’ behavior because that was the shared basis of their relationship. As the adversary weakens, it becomes harder to discern other states’ present intentions. This uncertainty about present and future intentions, against a backdrop of concerns for relative gains, should lead to a marked decrease in the level of cooperation among allies. We should observe the following: a) very little coordination of movement among military units beyond avoiding friendly fire, b) irrelevance or disintegration of the unified command and control structure, c) the end of transfer of resources beyond humanitarian gestures, and d) little willingness to accommodate allies if it affects the state’s postwar prospects.

As noted in footnote 19 above, the defeat of a great power is a huge loss for any alliance. Such loss has the potential to lead to a shift in the battlefield balance of power in favor of the adversary which could only be overcome at great cost, if at all. It is in the self-interest of

the allies to prevent such shift from occurring. This situation corresponds to boxes (4,1... 4,4) and (1,4... 4,4). The structural hypothesis predicts that whenever an allied great power is in a very unfavorable military situation, other great powers will do whatever they can to avert disaster and save their ally. Their time-horizon will shorten, away from thinking about their postwar position, towards the immediate objective of saving their ally from defeat. Therefore, we should observe the following: a) very high coordination of movements among military units, b) tight integration of the command and control of units of various allies, c) high transfer of resources, military, financial, raw material, etc, to the endangered ally, and d) sacrifice of potential long-term gains and traditional claims/strategic posture.

The value of box (3,3) is Very High Cooperation (VHC) despite the fact that both allies are only in an unfavorable military situation. Neither ally is in imminent danger of being defeated, yet I believe that we should expect them to have a very high degree of cooperation. This is because since neither is on a safe footing, they can't be sure that if they ignore the ally now and its situation deteriorates, they will be able to help them and stave off a disastrous slip to a very unfavorable situation later. Therefore we should observe the same behavior as that predicted in boxes (4,1... 4,4) and (1,4... 4,4).

When only one of the allies is in a favorable/very favorable situation while the other is in an unfavorable situation, which corresponds to boxes (1,3, 2,3) and (3,1, 3,2), the first one is in a good position to extract concessions from its ally. Let us look at (1,3, 2,3). State A risks little by exploiting B's difficult situation to extract concessions in exchange for its help. Its own situation is good, and the situation of its ally is not so difficult that its survival is at stakes—yet.

State A cannot threaten to abandon B (this would not be credible since it would endanger its own prospects for victory), but it can more safely allocate its resources to position itself for the aftermath of the war than if B were in grave danger. However, pulling A in the direction of more cooperation is the adversary, who is still able to put B in a difficult position. State A therefore remains committed to the overall goal of defeating the adversary. We should observe the following: a) very high coordination of movements among military units, b) tight integration of the command and control of units of various allies at the tactical and theater level but LESS coordination at the grand strategic level, c) high transfer of resources, military, financial, raw material, etc, to the endangered ally, and d) few, if any, sacrifice of potential long-term gains and traditional claims/strategic posture.

When both allies are in a favorable situation, or if one is in a very favorable situation while the other is in a favorable situation, which corresponds to boxes (1,2, 2,2) and (2,1, 2,2), cooperation will be low. Since none fear that the other will be eliminated, each will worry about how the other is positioning itself.

Plausibility probe

World War II is perhaps one of the most studied conflicts, yet International Relations scholars have little to say beyond its causes and consequences. This plausibility probe is an attempt at addressing this gap. For instance, current realist theories cannot explain why the United States insisted upon a landing in France as early as 1942, despite expected massive losses and the likelihood that the operation would fail. Some scholars argue that until mid-1944

the United States was quite satisfied with leaving the fighting to the Soviet Union, in effect, passing the buck to Stalin.²⁵ As will be shown below, the evidence shows that this interpretation is wrong. This is also a solid case for testing the argument because there was considerable variation in the independent variable. Not only did Great Britain and the Soviet Union go from near defeat to total victory (with numerous ups and downs along the way), but the United States entered the war because of a devastating attack that seriously curtailed its ability to operate in the Pacific and was driven almost entirely out of the theater by the Japanese.

Great Britain's Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, liked to call the tripartite alliance between his country, the United States and the Soviet Union the "Grand Alliance," a reference to his ancestor's alliance against France in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-13), the first Duke of Marlborough. In less than four years, this modern Grand Alliance managed to roll back most of the territorial gains of the Axis Powers, and to compel them to surrender unconditionally.²⁶ Because this section is a plausibility probe, it will consist of an overview of the "Destroyers-for-Bases" quid pro quo between the United States and Great Britain in the summer of 1940; and a brief exploration of the reasons why the United States hesitated between a Japan- and a Germany-first strategy.

²⁵ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p.160. Mearsheimer concedes that the United States was an "inadvertent buck-passer" but fails to explain this puzzle for his theory.

²⁶ Japan was allowed to keep its Emperor in a strictly apolitical role. For Japan's terms of surrender, see http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/jimenu.asp (accessed March 16). Germany did not get anything. For the terms of surrender for Germany, see http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/gsmenu.asp (accessed March 16).

The Destroyers-for-Bases agreement

Most historians agree that the United States entered World War II on 7 December 1941. This is a convenient date, and I am not disputing it. However, by then America had already taken a number of important, gradual steps toward full-scale belligerency: Cash and Carry, Lend-Lease, the convoy escorts in the Atlantic, sanctions against Japan. One of these steps was the Destroyers-for-Bases agreement.

By the Spring of 1940, the United States could clearly see that Great Britain was in grave danger. French defenses were fast collapsing, and the British Expeditionary Force was suddenly finding itself surrounded. Indeed, already in on 15 May 1940 Churchill had sent a letter to President Roosevelt pleading for material support, especially the loan of forty to fifty destroyers of World War I vintage. Roosevelt was reticent, in good part because he was afraid that it was too late for the British Isles, and he wanted assurances that in case of a disaster, the Royal Navy would be moved to Canada rather than being allowed to fall into the hands of the Germans.²⁷ Two events led the Americans to conclude that Great Britain would stay in the fight. First, British ruthlessness in dealing with the French fleet at the Battle of Mers-el-Kébir of 3 July, where the Royal Navy sank much of the French fleet to prevent it from falling into German hands, killing over a thousand French sailors, demonstrated that their will to fight was intact and that they well understood how important it was to prevent Germany from enlarging their

²⁷ Robin Renwick, *Fighting with Allies: America and Britain in Peace and War* (Hampshire: MacMillan Press, 1996), pp.29-33.

fleet at the expense of the allies.²⁸ Second, intelligence in mid-August suggested that Great Britain had a better than 50-50 chance of defeating a German invasion.²⁹

With British survival assured, or at the very least their will to survive, the Roosevelt administration began to show itself more open to the idea. It also recognized that they were in a very good situation to drive a hard bargain on Great Britain. They asked that in exchange for the destroyers, Great Britain give the United States "...the right to construct naval and air bases in eight British transatlantic territories from Newfoundland and Bermuda in the northwest and West Atlantic off Canada and the United States to British Guiana near Brazil's bulge and astride the Straits of Dakar," with a 99 years lease.³⁰ Needless to say, Churchill and his Cabinet were "horrified" and "extremely reluctant" to make the deal.³¹ Yet, they agreed to it because, in the words of Churchill, "we must ask, therefore, as a matter of life or death, to be reinforced with these destroyers."³²

Helping Russia: The Grand Alliance is born

Up until late 1942, the United States hesitated between a Japan- and Germany-first policy. That they chose Germany over Japan was far from preordained. In fact, as late as 1936 some military planners were still arguing that the two main threats to U.S. interests were

²⁸ Renwick, *Fighting with Allies*, p.32.

²⁹ J. Garry Clifford, "Destroyers-for-Bases-Agreement," in John Whiteclay Chambers II, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Military History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.213.

³⁰ Fitzroy André Baptiste, *War, Cooperation, and Conflict: The European Possessions in the Caribbean, 1939-1945* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p.51.

³¹ Robin Renwick, *Fighting with Allies*, p.33

³² *Ibid.*, p.31.

Japan... and Great Britain.³³ By 1940, Germany and Japan had become the focus of American staff work. American planners developed a series of contingency plans, codenamed Rainbow, which took into account the possibility that the United States would become a “major participant” in the conflict.³⁴ Following secret military discussions with the British and the Canadians in Washington from January to March 1941, the United States opted for a coordinated strategy of holding the line against Japan while taking on Germany. The strategy was confirmed at the first Washington Conference, codenamed ARCADIA, which was held from 22 December 1941 to 14 January 1942. Planners immediately started working on a buildup of forces in Great Britain, in preparation for an eventual reconquest of Europe.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was fighting for its survival against Germany. American senior leaders began to fear that the Soviet Union would collapse. On 11 March 1941, Roosevelt told Treasury secretary Henry Morgenthau “Nothing would be worse than to have the Russians collapse.”³⁵ American senior leaders fully understood that if the Soviet Union were knocked out of the war, victory over Germany would be very difficult, if not impossible. There were two ways to help the Russians: sending them military supplies through Lend-Lease, and

³³ Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p.9. Not surprisingly, U.S. official historians have tended to minimize or ignore this aspect of Anglo-American relations. See Grace Person Hayes, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II: The War Against Japan* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982 [1953]), pp.4-7; Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *U.S. Army in World War II: Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1999), pp.2-4; Ray S. Cline, *U.S. Army in World War II: Washington Command Post: The operations Division* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1951), pp.35-6, dismisses the RED contingency plans against the British Empire as representing “highly improbable developments in international affairs” which “in no way reflected any real anticipation of hostilities (...).” However, many U.S. officers, especially those who studied at the war colleges, shared the belief that Great Britain was “one of America’s most persistent and deadly rivals in a world shaped by commercial economic and racial antagonisms which might very well lead at almost any moment to war between the two powers.” Quoted in Stoler, *ibid.*, p.8.

³⁴ Cline, *Washington Command Post*, p.6.

³⁵ Quoted in Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, p.72.

opening a new front. Lend-Lease convoys were promptly organized, but what about a new front?

American planners began to draw up plans for two ways of helping the Soviet Union through the opening of a second front. The first, and perhaps most surprising, was to reject the Germany-first strategy and go all-out against Japan. This would prevent Japan from opening a second front in the rear of the Soviet Union, which would have probably been fatal.³⁶ However, this would only provide indirect relief to the Soviet Union, which would be insufficient. The United States therefore started to push the idea of a landing in northwestern France. The operation would be codenamed SLEDGEHAMMER. The landing was going to happen in 1942, and it would essentially be a suicide mission.³⁷ The payoff was keeping the Soviet Union in the war. There was no question of passing the buck to Stalin, of letting the two totalitarian giants exhaust themselves and then invade in northern Europe just in time to have an easy win over Germany.

In the end, neither SLEDGEHAMMER nor its 1943 successor, ROUNDUP, were necessary. The Russian winter, coupled with British opposition to these operations and their insistence for a new front in North Africa (codenamed GYMNAST) to protect their lines of supply to India, shifted U.S. priorities away from northwestern Europe, to North Africa.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.73, 79-83.

³⁷ General Dwight Eisenhower estimated that the “odds of a successful landing were only one in two and of maintaining a beachhead one in five (...). *Ibid.*, p.88.

Concluding remarks

The field of Security Studies is analogous to a medical doctor who is interested in disease prevention and eradication, but not in caring for sick patients. This project is an attempt at focusing on the patient. It represents a first cut at giving a theoretical organization to the events of World War II. The plausibility probes suggest that there is a correspondence between the argument and the empirical record.