

**Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances***

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987

In this chapter, Walt proposes five general explanations for international alliances, which he will test in the body of his book.

When confronted by a significant external threat, states may either balance or bandwagon. **Balancing** is defined as allying with others against the prevailing threat. **Bandwagoning** refers to alignment with the source of danger. If balancing prevails over bandwagoning, then states are more secure, because aggressors will face combined opposition. If bandwagoning is the dominant tendency, then security is scarce, because successful aggressors will attract additional allies, enhancing their power while reducing that of their opponents.

While it is commonly believed that the choice between the two strategies is a matter of power and capabilities (balancing is alignment with the weaker side, bandwagoning with the stronger), Walt's point is that **states tend to ally with or against the foreign power that poses the greatest threat**. Thus, (the perception of) threat matters more than capabilities.

Walt's general hypothesis on balancing and bandwagoning are that:

- Balancing is more common than bandwagoning
- The stronger the state, the greater its tendency to balance. Weak states will balance against other weak states but may bandwagon when threatened by great powers
- The greater the probability of allied support, the greater the tendency to balance. When adequate allied support is certain, however, the tendency for free-riding or buck-passing increases.
- The more unalterably aggressive a state is perceived to be, the greater the tendency for others to balance against it.
- In wartime, the closer one side is to victory, the greater the tendency for others to bandwagon with it. There can be two motives behind the bandwagoning strategy: appeasement, and avoidance of an attack through diversion.

As regards the impact of ideology on alliances, he makes the following hypothesis:

- The more similar the domestic ideology of states, the more likely they are to ally
- The more centralized and hierarchical the movement prescribed by the ideology, the more conflictive and fragile any resulting alliance will be. Therefore, Leninist movements will find stable alliances more difficult to sustain than will either monarchies or democracies.
- The more secure a state perceives itself to be, the greater the impact of ideology on alliance choices. The greater the advantage of the defense in warfare, the greater the impact of ideology on alliance choices. The consequence of these two points is that the conditions under which ideology is a significant cause of alignment are the conditions under which large, ideologically based alliances are the least dangerous.
- States lacking domestic legitimacy will be more likely to seek ideological alliances to increase internal and external support.
- Statesmen will exaggerate the impact of ideology on the choice of alliance partners.

As regards foreign aid, Walt argues that it plays a relatively minor role in alliance formation:

- The more aid provided by one state to another, the greater the likelihood that the two will form an alliance. The more aid, the greater the control by the donor over the recipient.
- Foreign aid is a special form of balancing behavior. Therefore, the greater the external threat facing the recipient, the greater the effect of aid on alignment.
- The greater the donor's monopoly on the commodity provided, the greater its leverage over the recipient.
- The greater the asymmetry of dependence favoring the donor, the greater its leverage over the recipient.
- The greater the asymmetry of motivation favoring the donor, the greater its leverage over the recipient. But since the recipient's security is often more precarious, asymmetry of motivation will usually favor the recipient.
- The weaker the domestic political decision-making apparatus of the donor, the less leverage it can exert on the recipient.

As regards the impact of transnational penetration (manipulation of one state's domestic political system by another) on alliances:

- The greater one state's access to the political system of another, the greater the tendency for the two to ally.
- Penetration is more effective against open societies.
- Penetration is more effective when the objectives are limited. The more intrusive the act of penetration, the greater the probability that it will have a negative effect on alignment.
- Penetration is more effective when other causes contribute to the alliance.