

The Changing Nature of Military Alliances

The increasingly apparent similarities between the global context in the early days of the post–September 11 world and that of the early Cold War era appear to lend some prescience to President George W. Bush’s choice of Dwight D. Eisenhower, when asked to pick the portrait of one of his predecessors to hang in the White House.¹ History will mark both presidential administrations as the onset of new strategic eras in international relations, characterized by new predominant threats and global divisions. The two presidents pledged to intervene in the Middle East, defend Taiwan, reaffirm the religious background of the United States, and develop nuclear energy. And just as the creation of the system of U.S. military alliances was one of Eisenhower’s main legacies, so the reshuffling of world alliances may be one of the main geopolitical legacies of the Bush administration.

The threats of terrorism and proliferation have strengthened many old alliances and have fostered the creation of new alignments. At the same time, Washington’s policies have also put some long-standing U.S. alliances under strain. There are also deeper historical forces at work that are forcing permanent alliances increasingly to give way to ad hoc coalitions and multilateral alliances to give way to bilateral ones. Most importantly, the ever more complex nature of the strategic environment and the diversity of security arrangements devised by contemporary nations test the very notion of “alliance,” causing one to wonder if it even remains a useful strategic concept.

Why Ally?

Modern military alliances are the subject of a rich body of theoretical literature that contends that two main factors urge the formation of alliances.²

Bruno Tertrais is a senior research fellow at the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique and an associate researcher at the Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches Internationales.

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One is idealistic: nations commit themselves to fight alongside each other because of shared values and ideas. The other is realistic and rests on an analysis of costs and benefits: alliances can save costs and multiply benefits through the division of responsibilities, the sharing of common assets, or simply the protection provided by having a stronger country as an ally. Indeed, because the United States has long been one of the world's main military powers, its alliances have often taken the shape of a positive security guarantee and are thus unequal: one side (in this case the United States)

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protects the other. Such alliances nevertheless have been of great benefit to the United States because they have helped ensure that the allied party will not employ an independent defense policy and will be less tempted to become a nuclear power. Alliances have further ensured influence in the respective foreign policies of allied countries and have provided bases for power projection.

Military alliances that include a security guarantee in case of aggression can be formal (a written agreement) or informal. Formal alliances exist in two varieties: bilateral ones (such as those existing between the United States and its Asian allies and between France and some African countries) and multilateral ones (such as NATO or the alliance among Russia and some of the former Soviet states). Informal alliances do not take the shape of a treaty or accord but nevertheless imply a security guarantee—such as the relationship between the United States and Taiwan; the United States and Saudi Arabia; and, arguably, the United States and Israel. Finally, although often misunderstood as a recent phenomenon, time-limited constructs that seek to answer a particular threat or risk, such as ad hoc coalitions or coalitions of the willing, are as old as warfare itself.

A broader definition of military alliances would include those that do not imply a security guarantee. In today's parlance, they are often called strategic partnerships and include the recognition of common security interests as well as provisions for strong military cooperation to various degrees. Examples of such partnerships today include the United States and Russia, Turkey and Israel, Israel and India, and Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, as well as China and Asian states such as Pakistan or Burma.

The United States maintains formal defense commitments to nearly 50 states, including most Latin American countries (Rio Treaty, 1947); most European countries and Canada (Washington Treaty, 1949); and South Korea, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, Liberia, and a few smaller

states in the Pacific region. These alliances were forged in the second part of the last century to fight communism. Other countries that the United States would likely support in case of aggression include Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and New Zealand; these, along with traditional U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific region, have been designated “major non-NATO allies,” a category forged in the 1980s to facilitate arms transfers and military cooperation. The same could be said for some other countries with very close defense ties with the United States, such as Kuwait, Qatar, or Taiwan. More fuzzy and difficult cases include Pakistan, still linked with the United States by the 1954 Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement, and Saudi Arabia, with whom the United States has no formal alliance. Washington maintains friendly relationships with the current governments of these two countries, but it is by no means certain today that Washington would protect them if under attack. In the cases of Europe and South Korea, alliances have given birth to permanent multinational military command structures. Thus, although they come in multiple forms and shapes, the United States today maintains by far the most extensive and developed network of military alliances.

The Purification of U.S. Alliances

September 11, 2001, in many ways triggered what a French journalist aptly described as the purification of U.S. alliances.³ The attacks were a “trial by fire” for existing defense commitments. Although the tremendous outpouring of support for the United States from existing allies came as no surprise, the invocation of mutual security guarantees enshrined in bilateral or multilateral treaties to support the United States was largely unanticipated both at the time and by the original treaties themselves, which were designed to provide U.S. defense for its allies. European and Latin American allies, as well as Australia, South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines, activated existing security clauses to justify support for the United States. Pakistan also chose to support Washington despite domestic opposition. Alliances have thus passed the test of the September 11 attacks.

In addition, by requiring all nations to take a stand (“either with us or against us”), the United States essentially fostered the creation of a grand coalition that comprised, among others, all major world powers—a historically exceptional event.⁴ The United States also formed new alliances with dubious regimes such as Uzbekistan. Even so-called rogue states such as Sudan or Libya expressed willingness to cooperate. Only a few countries such as Iraq refrained from expressing support for the war on terrorism, even if only diplomatically. By one account, 136 countries offered varying forms of military assistance to the United States.⁵ According to the White House,

no less than 90 countries have participated in some form in the campaign against terrorism to this point, making the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism the largest and most powerful coalition ever. Twenty-seven countries provided military forces to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.⁶

International support for the more recent U.S.-led war on Iraq has been quite a different matter. Although a reported 49 countries were publicly committed to the coalition that invaded Iraq in 2003,⁷ only 16 of them provided military support, and only four of these (the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland) provided combat troops on the ground. Many key allies and partners such as France, Germany, and Russia chose instead actively to oppose the U.S. choice to go to war. By comparison, in Operation Desert Storm in 1991, between 50 and 100 countries (depending on how one defines “support”) were part of the political coalition, and 34 of them brought significant military contributions to the operation, including 17 providing combat ground forces.

Three trends are noteworthy. First, bilateral alliances forged in the fight against communism have found a new purpose; Thailand and the Philippines, for example, have become key U.S. partners in Asia, a main theater of terrorist operations. Second, ad hoc coalitions set up and led by the United States, not permanent alliances, have conducted the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq waged since then. Third, these coalitions have revolved around an Anglo-Saxon core. The two key U.S. military partners in the war against terrorism have been countries with strong ties to the United States, politically and culturally, which were U.S. allies long before the Cold War: the United Kingdom and Australia.⁸ These trends confirm the growing primacy of ad hoc and bilateral alliances over permanent and multilateral alliances. In fact, the post-September 11 era increasingly appears to be the culmination of a historical trend in this regard.

The Demise of Permanent Multilateral Alliances

The importance of ad hoc coalitions is not an entirely new phenomenon. After all, a coalition of the willing, under a nominal United Nations flag, intervened to repel North Korean aggression and defend South Korea from 1950 to 1953. What is new is that coalitions of the willing are becoming the rule rather than the exception in military matters as well as in other new dimensions of international security such as the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), aimed at controlling the trade of weapons of mass destruction-related equipments, including intercepting ships at sea. The Pentagon’s motto when preparing Operation Enduring Freedom remains the order of the day: “It’s the mission that makes the coalition.”

Conversely, permanent multinational alliances appear increasingly to belong to the past. In the 1950s, the United States created an impressive network of alliances against communism that have since fallen one by one into oblivion. The Agreement for Mutual Defense Assistance in Indochina, involving the United States, France, and three Southeast Asian nations, did not survive war in the region as well as disagreement between Paris and Washington. In June 1977, the eight-member Southeast Asia Treaty Organization ceased to exist. In disagreement with U.S. policy, France and Pakistan stopped cooperating with the organization, which then lost much of its *raison d'être* following the U.S. withdrawal from Indochina.

In May 1979, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), a Middle Eastern anti-Communist alliance created in 1955, was “inactivated” by the United Kingdom and Turkey, its last remaining members after Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan defected due to disagreements with U.S. policies or domestic political changes. (The United States was not formally a CENTO member.) In September 1986, the Australia–New Zealand–United States Treaty signed in 1951 became a *de facto* bilateral alliance as Washington decided to suspend its obligations toward Wellington after New Zealand refused to allow nuclear-armed or nuclear-propelled U.S. ships to call on its ports. In September 2002, Mexico withdrew from the Inter-American Treaty of 1947.⁹ Historically, permanent multilateral alliances have thus proven difficult to maintain because their members have chosen to opt out when disagreeing with U.S. policy and because diminished threats have made their cohesion harder to maintain, with these two factors reinforcing each other.

Even allies from NATO, the sole standing multilateral alliance that will be discussed in greater detail below, distanced themselves from Washington recently, most notably as the Iraq crisis developed. Belgium, France, and Germany openly opposed U.S. policy toward Iraq and in February 2003 refused to provide precautionary defense support (surveillance planes and antimissile batteries) to Turkey, arguing that the country had not been attacked and that Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which commits member states to assist one another in case of aggression, was inoperative. (The Defense Planning Committee, of which France is not a member, later reached a compromise with Brussels and Berlin to send NATO defensive equipment to Turkey.) Other key members of NATO, such as Canada, also refused to be part of the coalition, and the Turkish Parliament surprised Washington by refusing to allow the U.S. 4th Infantry Division to transit

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Turkey's territory on its way to Iraq, forcing U.S. planners to make last-minute adjustments. The Iraq war thus saw no less than two major European partners of the United States—Germany and Turkey—and the United States' own neighbors—Canada and Mexico—defect from the most important U.S. military engagement in a decade.

During the Cold War, the interests of the United States and its allies frequently diverged. Regional crises and local wars, in the Middle East and in Asia, frequently tested solidarity, but such crises rarely challenged the existence of the key U.S. alliances against the threat of communism. In the absence of an immediate military threat today, however, allies can afford to split, for they do not need the United States as much as they did in the past.

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Two traditional complaints by U.S. allies are thus much more likely to strain alliances now than in the past. First, U.S. allies accuse the United States of expecting too much from them, confusing solidarity with alignment—a dispute that escalated to almost unprecedented heights during the run-up to the 2003 war in Iraq.¹⁰ Although they are part of the war against terrorism, they generally do not see international terrorism as a threat to civilization and do not believe that combating terrorism requires systematic agreement with Washington's policies. Secondly, allies frequently complain that the United States seeks a division of labor with its allies and, specifically, that Washington wants to limit its military commitment in most common operations to air power and command, control, and communications (C3) support, encouraging regional allies to provide the bulk of forces on the ground.

A third, related complaint has emerged since the end of the Cold War. Allies now charge that the United States takes prime responsibility for waging war and then leaves its allies in local peacekeeping quagmires. In many circumstances, allies complain that Washington demands an excessive degree of leadership for the planning and conduct of operations while allies are relegated to second-class roles, collectively leading to the colloquial expression that “the United States does the cooking and we wash the dishes.” Although Robert Kagan has suggested that “Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus,” a more appropriate description, in keeping with the planetary metaphor, may be that U.S. alliances function like the Jovian system. The United States plays the role of Jupiter, the largest body in the solar system, around which revolve a large number of satellites (including, appropriately, “Europa”). The end of the Cold War has not altered the United

States' characteristically predominant position in each of its alliances, a position increasingly resented by its partners. Traditional friends of the United States in Europe and, in some cases, in Asia therefore see their alliance with Washington as a large imposition while being of lesser value for their security because they generally no longer perceive a deadly threat against them.

Permanent alliances do remain useful in several ways for U.S. partners. In addition to a security guarantee, allies gain access to U.S. technology and access to U.S. political-military circles. From London's point of view, for example, the possibility to influence Washington has long been a key rationale for the UK-U.S. "special relationship." Smaller countries also benefit greatly from their alliances with the United States, enabling them to modernize military installations on their territories and to have their officers serve in prestigious multinational command posts. Clearly, however, permanent military alliances with the United States will have a lesser role in Western defense policies than in the past.

Does the United States Still Need Permanent Alliances?

If commitments toward the United States are of lesser value for allied capitals, does the United States, for its part, still need permanent alliances? Permanent alliances appear to be of increasingly limited value for the United States, as the ratio of costs to benefits has changed to such an extent that conservative commentators have called for a radical reshuffling of U.S. commitments and bases abroad.¹¹

Alliances have become more costly for Washington, as permanent deployments have increasingly created friction with local populations, with each incident involving U.S. forces and the local populations prompting a public outcry, as in Japan and in South Korea in the 1990s. Given today's pace of U.S. technological advances, particularly in the field of communications, allied forces are not as easily interoperable. In many cases, U.S. forces do not use the NATO Standardization Agreements as much as they did in the past. Washington complains that European forces are still ill equipped for rapid power projection (only 50 non-U.S. NATO brigades are reported to be deployable), which makes the planning and conduct of common military operations more difficult and time-consuming.

Operations under the NATO banner bear a heavy political cost, relying on procedures that require constant negotiation to reach consensus. NATO was created to defend against a major threat; nations were expected to delegate command to the alliance's military authorities at the first signal of Soviet attack. Reaching consensus thus was not expected to be a problem. Despite the wishes of some in the U.S. Congress that the alliance's decisionmaking

procedures should be reformed, with consensus giving way to majority ruling, this perspective remains a minority view both in Washington and in Brussels. At the same time, the increasing threats of terrorism and ballistic missiles make allied territories vulnerable, risking exposure of the United States to blackmail.

Meanwhile, the benefits of alliances to the United States are decreasing. Washington is now capable of countering most potential military threats alone, in stark contrast with circumstances during the Cold War, when local

allies were to provide the bulk of defense capabilities in case of Soviet aggression until U.S. reinforcements could arrive. In addition, the use of allied territory is no longer guaranteed in times of crisis. Rather, host countries reserve the right to say no to the United States, as Ankara and Riyadh did prior to the war in Iraq. At the same time, Washington is able to rely increasingly on long-range power projection for contingencies not involving a large deployment of

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ground forces and will be able to do so even more in the future as new-generation hypersonic weapons are developed.¹² Moreover, alliances appear to be of limited political value if they do not help ensure that allies will refrain from actively opposing U.S. policy decisions, as some European countries did in early 2003 on issues regarding Iraq.

This change in the costs-and-benefits equation helps explain why Washington finds ad hoc coalitions under U.S. command increasingly attractive. Another reason is that the United States has grown increasingly weary of potential risks for U.S. forces operating under an umbrella organization. Following the disaster in Mogadishu, in early May 1994 then-President Bill Clinton signed Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 25, strictly limiting the possibility of foreign command of U.S. forces. Changes in the U.S. domestic scene and political culture, particularly since the congressional elections of November 1994 that brought to power a new generation of Republican politicians, have demonstrated growing U.S. defiance vis-à-vis multilateral institutions, especially when U.S. troops may be placed in harm's way. All of these factors likely help fuel the sentiment behind Bush's statement in September 2001 that, "[a]t some point, we may be the only ones left. That's okay with me. We are America."¹³

Permanent alliances will survive, but only as long as they demonstrably serve common strategic and political interests. Some alliances created to combat communism have proven useful for other purposes. For example, the

U.S.-Japanese alliance helps counter the North Korean threat, while the United States' alliances with Australia and the Philippines are useful in the fight against terrorism. More generally, as the Al Qaeda network extends across several dozen countries, international cooperation has become a vital U.S. interest. The need for rear bases during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan even compelled Washington to set up a new alliance to ensure cooperation with Uzbekistan. Additionally, despite technological gaps, alliances can still be helpful as "training grounds" for common operations and can ensure that armed forces share a minimum of technical interoperability and common military procedures. Also, permanent alliances can provide common assets to support peacekeeping operations, as NATO has done since 1993. Finally, alliances remain a powerful nonproliferation tool, particularly under the Bush administration, which has been less inhibited than its predecessor about nuclear matters, strongly reaffirming the extension of its nuclear umbrella over its allies. The positive security guarantees provided by Washington help decrease the chances that countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, or Turkey will be tempted to "go nuclear."

There are added benefits. Alliances of democratic countries can help legitimate a military operation—to the point that many neoconservatives see NATO as a potential alternative, in this regard, to the UN. Alliances also provide a way for the United States to have some degree of political influence on other international policy issues, as well as a means of ensuring privileged access to national arms markets. Finally, dismantling an alliance could have adverse consequences by creating a power vacuum that others might fill, making Washington unlikely to abandon them. Despite the administration's unilateral tendencies, Bush, who began his presidency with a remarkable "God bless NATO" could still credibly say in May 2002 that he "believe[s] in alliances."¹⁴

NATO: Last Major Alliance Standing

Among U.S. alliances, the transatlantic system is complex and unique. Forged by two world wars, NATO is the quintessential military alliance, to the point that experts and officials on both sides of the Atlantic frequently refer to it as simply "the alliance." It is also the single remaining multilateral alliance of the network created by U.S. diplomacy in the 1950s. Is its fate the same as the others?

Unlike the other now-defunct multilateral alliances, NATO gained new life after the disappearance of the Communist threat by intervening in the Balkan wars, starting with the monitoring of an embargo in the Adriatic Sea in the summer of 1992 and culminating in 1999's Operation Allied Force to

enforce a settlement to the Kosovo problem. NATO's moment of triumph was also the beginning of its troubles, however, as this operation left a bitter taste in Washington. Critics stigmatized the "war by committee" that obliged the United States, by far the largest contributor to the war, to consult and reach consensus with 18 other capitals at each important stage of the war-waging effort. Several countries even repeatedly insisted on micromanaging the selection of targets.¹⁵

Largely as a result, despite invoking Article 5 of the Washington Treaty on September 12, 2001 (an action the United States had not requested), NATO was not involved in major military operations of Enduring Freedom. Allied Force also left the same taste in some European capitals, however, because during the war the United States operated partly under the U.S. flag (through its European Command, EUCOM), outside NATO structures and procedures, and thus completely out of the control of the 18 other nations.¹⁶ It is also clear that European security is of decreasing importance for Washington because the conti-

Alliances remain a powerful nonproliferation tool.

nent is now mostly peaceful whereas nearly all current and projected security challenges are likely to be in the Middle East and Asia.

The Atlantic Alliance itself is also undergoing profound internal changes. It has discarded the geographical command structure inherited from the Cold War, geared toward fighting wars at its periphery, in favor of a multi-purpose functional command structure. NATO's second enlargement eastward will bring most of Europe into its fold. Most U.S. forces stationed in Germany will redeploy further east and south, into countries such as Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria.¹⁷ Cooperation with non-NATO members is extending and deepening. NATO and Russia have established a NATO-Russia Council, which will help foster cooperation between former adversaries. NATO has set up a rapid reaction force to enable it to be more responsive to emerging crises. In sum, unlike other multinational alliances, NATO was able to evolve after the threat against which it was created disappeared, therefore allowing it to maintain its position as the dominant security arrangement on the continent.

Militarily, the main function of the Atlantic Alliance progressively transformed in the 1990s from waging war to enforcing peace. Europe no longer faces a major military threat. The experience of Kosovo, in which NATO procedures were seen as a liability by Washington, and the precedent of Afghanistan, in which the United States declined to use NATO as an umbrella organization despite European offers, will make resorting to NATO to con-

duct major military operations an exception rather than the rule. In contrast, NATO has proven exceptionally useful in organizing and conducting peace support operations. The International Security Assistance Force's assumption of command in Afghanistan has extended this role far beyond the alliance's borders. The United States and its coalition partners may also yet call on NATO to play a role in the stabilization of Iraq.

In addition, Article 5 of the Washington Treaty has not lost all relevance. A major terrorist act in Europe would probably be met with a collective response by the alliance. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles is another real threat to European countries. NATO is adapting to address this danger (including in the field of missile defense). Potential military challenges to Europe's borders also have not completely disappeared.

Overall, there are therefore good reasons to believe that the Atlantic Alliance will survive despite internal strains. NATO still serves important functions for its members.¹⁸ It has proven successful at adapting and undertaking new missions of peace support. Threats to Europe have not disappeared, and although a resurgent Russian threat does not appear all that credible at the moment, the alliance still serves an important function by reassuring new members. NATO also remains a vehicle of U.S. influence on the European continent, particularly on the eastern part today.

There is also inertia.¹⁹ Contrary to other multilateral alliances of the Cold War, NATO created a large civilian and military bureaucracy, and history teaches us that large institutions do not die easily. One overall explanation for this resilience is simply the fact that, despite disagreements and misunderstandings, Americans and Europeans have much more in common from a political, economic, and cultural point of view than, say, the United States and its Asian allies. Such is the reason why NATO now is and will probably remain the only U.S.-led multilateral alliance standing.

Europe: Alliance in the Making

Even NATO will have to adapt to the emergence of another new development: the progressive rise of a more integrated Europe. Although the European Union was strongly divided during the Iraq crisis of 2002–2003, with most U.S. allies choosing to bandwagon with the United States (i.e., join the U.S.-led alliance) while others sought to balance Washington (i.e., actively oppose U.S. policies) because they feared disastrous international consequences of military intervention, Europe is nevertheless gradually developing its own strategic identity. The European Security and Defense Policy is now a reality: members of the EU vote together in international forums on numerous international security issues; since 2002, the EU has begun con-

ducting autonomous military operations in the Balkans and in Africa; and despite numerous shortcomings in power projection, Europe now has many of the tools needed to be an independent, full-fledged strategic actor, even if on a lesser scale than the United States.

A Europe-wide security guarantee already exists. In 1947, France and the United Kingdom allied themselves against the possible resurgence of German nationalism in the Pact of Dunkirk. The following year, this arrangement was enlarged to include

three other European nations (Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) and became the Brussels Treaty, which includes a commitment to use military force if one of the treaty's parties is attacked. The Brussels Treaty was modified in 1954 to include Germany and Italy and remains in force today. Article 5 of the Brussels Treaty provided the basis for the Washington Treaty's own Article 5, which is less demanding because it does not automatically commit NATO members to military assistance.

Dismantling an alliance could have adverse consequences by creating a power vacuum.

Emboldened by their common perception of the Iraq war and the evolution of U.S. policy, several countries in the EU, including France and Germany, are tempted to deepen their defense cooperation independently of the United States and NATO. Although the degree to which the EU's defense policy should be independent from NATO and the United States is still a point of contention among Europeans and a touchy subject in transatlantic circles, consensus holds that, in the case of a regional crisis, the EU should not be impotent if Washington chose not to intervene.

More recently, the EU made the historical decision to include a security clause in its draft constitution that amounts to a mutual security guarantee with the possibility of military assistance. The formulation agreed on by EU governments in December 2003 states:

If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States. Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under NATO, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence.²⁰

The EU thus increasingly appears to be a real security alliance, and it may in fact be among the most solid ones imaginable, given its roots in strong

economic, legal, and political integration. Thus, in the midst of the decline of other Western, permanent multinational alliances, the EU's emerging common defense policy appears one of the most original and interesting developments in the long history of military alliances. If NATO were to decline further in importance for Europeans, the continent would not be left without a security guarantee. In fact, in spite of the wishes of all alliance members, the existence of such an EU security clause could even be a logical consistency contributing toward NATO's decreased importance in the future.

From Bandwagoning to Balancing?

Although the United States is decreasing its reliance on alliances, other countries may now be tempted to rely more on such alliances than they did in the past. This situation has resulted directly from U.S. power and policy. Although bandwagoning has been the dominant behavior of the majority of states in dealing with the United States and its defense policy since September 11, 2001, there may come a time for balancing to move from being an exception to being a dominant trend.

The scale and scope of U.S. military deployments and actions since September 2001, combined with renewed national pride in major countries such as China, India, and Russia—a growing trend since the early 1990s—may have unwanted side effects for Washington. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, two unstable countries whose futures are increasingly in question, have decided to increase their defense cooperation recently. Riyadh is also seeking a new relationship with Russia.

For its part, Moscow is making clear that it does not want to bow to U.S. pressure and is showing a growing assertiveness in foreign policy, especially in its own neighborhood. It is seeking to reinforce the alliance it formed in 1992 with several former Soviet states (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) that form the Organization of the Collective Security Treaty. Meanwhile, the United States continues to encourage a concurrent regional grouping, GUUAM (named after the initials of member states Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova). Although the increased presence of U.S. troops on the territory of the former Soviet Union serves Russian interests by helping to stabilize the region, Moscow firmly intends to defend its influence in the area. The opening of a new Russian base in Kyrgyzstan (the first new Russian base abroad since the end of the Cold War) just kilometers away from an existing U.S. base may herald new geostrategic competition between rivals, with allies summoned to take sides.

At the same time, friends of the United States are also deepening their cooperation with each other. Two of the most noteworthy of these developments are the growing partnership between Israel and Turkey and the new partnership between Israel and India. New alignments are thus taking place in the context of a perceived growing threat of Islamic fundamentalism, but also in reaction to U.S. policies and the developments of the war on terrorism. Out of these alignments may grow some new, non-U.S.-led formal military alliances.

The Concept of Alliance as Source of Strategic Misunderstanding

Still, the most important lessons to be drawn from the above analysis concern the changing nature of Western alliances. Washington will rely increasingly on coalitions of the willing rather than on permanent alliances and, among those, on bilateral rather than multilateral ones. NATO will remain the exception, but its role will be less important than in the past and even less so as the EU emerges as a real military alliance. Formal U.S. military alliances remain helpful to fight against terrorism or proliferation, but they have also been badly shaken by the war in Iraq.

The combination of the September 11 attacks and the war in Iraq have made the concept of “alliance” fuzzier as well as a potential source of misunderstanding.²¹ For instance, what does defining Saudi Arabia as an ally of the United States mean when some suspect that elements of the Saudi government may have supported the September 11 attacks? Are not the bilateral strategic partnerships between some Western-oriented states stronger and more solid than some more formal military alliances? How can the United Kingdom and Uzbekistan belong to the same category? The former has been the strongest U.S. military ally for more than a century and a democracy that shares core values with the United States, while the latter is a recent, tactical partner of Washington, a dictatorship whose strategic location makes it a partner needed for the war on terrorism. Still, both are protected by a formal U.S. security guarantee. The term “ally” has become so broadly applied in some circles that, as a 2002 study noted, “[w]hile any country that has offered support since September 11 to the global war on terrorism has been called an ally, only 23 countries are formally obligated by treaty to defend the United States from an armed attack.”²²

In fact, the very term “alliance” may be a growing source of strategic misunderstanding. What does it really mean to be an ally in today’s dynamic world without a single definitive threat? One of the reasons for the intensity of the transatlantic debate over Iraq in 2002–2003 was the differing interpretations among NATO countries of the word “ally” itself. The United

States expected its allies to at least avoid opposing, if not support, U.S. actions against Iraq. Countries such as Belgium, France, and Germany, however, held a more restricted interpretation of the alliance relationship. That these countries shared values and interests with the United States, including a mutual defense commitment, did not mean in their view that they were obligated to support an enterprise that they viewed as entirely distinct from the war on terrorism and as carrying grave risks for the international system. In fact, they felt it was a moral duty to oppose U.S. policies even though, for instance, the U.S.-French relationship is the oldest functioning military alliance in the world.

The laxity with which officials and experts use the word “ally” can thus be confusing and even damaging. In fact, “ally” covers so many different meanings that the time may have come to discard it altogether. At a minimum, the modern obligations of long-standing allies, no longer united simply to oppose or support communism at all costs, must be fundamentally reconsidered and clarified to avoid future strategic misunderstandings.

Notes

1. David Frum, *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George W. Bush* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 53.
2. Robert Osgood, *Alliances and American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987); Stephen M. Walt, “Why Alliances Endure or Collapse,” *Survival* 39, no. 1 (spring 1997): 156–179.
3. Jacques Amalric, “Purifier les Alliances,” *Libération*, September 17, 2001, p. 4.
4. Charles Krauthammer, “The Real New World Order: The American and the Islamic Challenge,” *Weekly Standard*, November 12, 2001, www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/000/456zfygd.asp (accessed January 14, 2004).
5. Paolo Pasicolan and Balbina Y. Hwang, “The Vital Role of Alliances in the Global War on Terrorism,” *Backgrounder* no. 1607, October 24, 2002, p. 1, www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/bg1607.cfm (accessed January 14, 2004).
6. Statistics found at www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/defense/enduringfreedom.html (accessed December 19, 2003). CENTCOM gives slightly lower numbers (70 countries in the coalition, with 21 providing forces). See www.centcom.mil/Operations/Coalition/joint.html (accessed December 19, 2003).
7. Statistics found at www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/news/20030327-10.html (accessed December 19, 2003). Fifty-two countries had representatives at CENTCOM when the operation began in March 2003.
8. See Philip Bowring, “What Is It About Anglophones? Britain, Australia and the U.S.,” *International Herald Tribune*, March 27, 2003.
9. “Mexico Resigns From Americas Defense Treaty, Calling It Cold War Relic,” Associated Press, September 6, 2002.
10. See Bruno Tertrais, “France and the United States: Drawing the Distinction Between Solidarity and Alignment,” *In the National Interest* 2, no. 7 (February 19,

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11. Victor Davis Hanson, "So Long to All That: Why the Old World of Bases, Alliances, and NATO Is Now Coming to an End," *National Review Online*, January 31, 2003, www.nationalreview.com/hanson/hanson013103.asp (accessed February 8, 2003).
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 13. Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), p. 81.
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 15. See Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), p. 105. The authors dispute the claim made at the time by U.S. officials and lawmakers.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
 17. "U.S. Reshuffling Its Troops in Europe; NATO Briefed on Plans for New Bases in Post-Cold War Era," *International Herald Tribune*, December 9, 2003.
 18. For a discussion of NATO's post-Cold War utility, see David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed: The Alliance's New Roles in International Security* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Peace Press, 1998), pp. 47-90.
 19. See Walt, "Why Alliances Endure or Collapse," p. 166.
 20. "Intergovernmental Conference (12-13 December 2003) Addendum 1 to the Presidency Proposal," December 9, 2003, p. 33, www.euitaly2003.it/NR/rdonlyres/B6D8B2AC-707C-4FC8-AA34-12FD3C396EC8/0/1209Cig60Add1_en.pdf (accessed January 14, 2004) (emphasis in original).
 21. For two different perspectives on this point, see Nikolas K. Gvosdev, "Diplomatic Gobblygook: Alliances and the National Interest," *In the National Interest* 2, no. 27 (July 9, 2003), www.inthenationalinterest.com/Articles/Vol2Issue27/Vol2Issue27Realist.html (accessed July 11, 2003); Victor Davis Hanson, "The Awakening: We Need a Clean Slate in the Postbellum World," *National Review Online*, August 14, 2003, www.nationalreview.com/hanson/hanson081403.asp (accessed August 20, 2003).
 22. Pasicolan and Hwang, "Vital Role of Alliances," p. 3.