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# THE SECURITY DILEMMA IN ALLIANCE POLITICS

By GLENN H. SNYDER\*

## THE SECURITY DILEMMA

A CENTRAL concept in international relations theory, but still one of the most under-studied empirically, is that of the “security dilemma.”<sup>1</sup> The term is generally used to denote the self-defeating aspect of the quest for security in an anarchic system. The theory says that even when no state has any desire to attack others, none can be sure that others’ intentions are peaceful, or will remain so; hence each must accumulate power for defense. Since no state can know that the power accumulation of others is defensively motivated only, each must assume that it might be intended for attack. Consequently, each party’s power increments are matched by the others, and all wind up with no more security than when the vicious cycle began, along with the costs incurred in having acquired and having to maintain their power.

States accumulate power in many ways; the most prominent methods are by armament, territorial aggrandizement, and alliance formation. The “supergame” of international security may thus be divided, for analytical purposes, into three subgames: the armaments game, the adversary game, and the alliance game. Typically, discussions of the security dilemma are illustrated by the armaments game: the arms race is seen as the epitome of competition for illusory security. Sometimes, at least implicitly, the security dilemma is seen operating in the adversary game (competition other than armaments), as in explanations that ascribe the cold war to the United States and the Soviet Union misperceiving each other’s “defensive” actions in Europe as “aggressive.” Little attention has so far been paid to the security dilemma dynamics of the alliance game. The present essay is intended to fill this gap, and to explore some

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<sup>1</sup> The best recent treatment is Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30 (January 1978), 167–214. The concept of the security dilemma was originated by John Herz, in his *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

interactions between the alliance game and the adversary game in multipolar and bipolar systems.

### ALLIANCE FORMATION IN A MULTIPOLAR SYSTEM: THE PRIMARY ALLIANCE DILEMMA

The security dilemma in the alliance game has two phases: primary and secondary. The primary phase occurs during the process of alliance formation, the secondary one after alliances have formed.

In a multipolar system (such as the one that existed before 1945), the primary alliance dilemma among the major states follows the logic of an N-person prisoner's dilemma. Each state has two options: seek allies or abstain from alliances. If all states are about equally strong and are interested only in security, all are fairly well off if all abstain, since each has moderate security against individual others, while alliances involve various costs, such as reduced freedom of action, commitments to defend the interests of others, and so forth. Alliances will form, however, for two reasons: (1) some states may not be satisfied with only moderate security, and they can increase it substantially by allying if others abstain; (2) some states, fearing that others will not abstain, will ally in order to avoid isolation or to preclude the partner from allying against them. Once an alliance forms, a counter-alliance necessarily follows, since there is no way of knowing that the first alliance is intended only for defensive purposes. The eventual result is the division of the system into two rival coalitions. This outcome is worse than all-around abstention because each state has incurred the risks and burdens of alliance with little improvement in its security.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1 portrays the primary alliance security dilemma. Although it is cast in two-person form, it is understood that for player A, the other player, B, means "all other players," and vice versa. The numbers in the cells are ordinal, ranked from 4 (best) to 1 (worst). The first number in each cell represents A's payoff, the second B's. The logical

<sup>2</sup> This is, of course, an idealized model based on certain assumptions from which the empirical world will deviate more or less, from time to time. The basic assumptions are that: (1) no state is aggressive, but none can know the intentions of others; (2) the states are roughly equal in military strength; and (3) military technology is such that there is no time to form a successful defense alliance after war begins. Uncertainty about the aims of others is inherent in structural anarchy. If a state clearly reveals itself as expansionist, however, the alliance that forms against it is not "self-defeating" as in the prisoners' dilemma (security dilemma) model. Or, if some states are weaker than others, their motives to ally will be different from the incentives of the prisoner's dilemma. The third assumption has been valid since about 1870. Before then (when the pace of warfare was slower), the compulsion to ally in peacetime was much weaker than suggested by the model. Despite these qualifications and possibly others, the model does capture some essential dynamics of multipolar alliance formation between 1870 and 1939.

FIGURE 1  
THE PRIMARY ALLIANCE SECURITY DILEMMA

		B	
		ABSTAIN	ALLY
A	ABSTAIN	All-around abstention 3, 3	B's coalition forms A isolated 1, 4
	ALLY	A's coalition forms B isolated 4, 1	Two rival coalitions 2, 2

outcome, two rival coalitions, is the second-worst for all players. The best, forming an alliance while others do not, and the second-best, all-around abstention, cannot be obtained, primarily because of uncertainty about the intentions of others and the overwhelming need to guard against the worst outcome, that of isolation.

This model predicts only that alliances will form. It does not predict who will align with whom, or how the benefits, risks, and costs of an alliance will be divided among its members. These matters theoretically are decided by a process of bargaining in which the states compete in offering each other attractive shares of the alliance's "payoff." Each state has two principal aims in the bargaining: to be in the most powerful coalition, and to maximize its share of the alliance's net benefits.<sup>3</sup> These are the "interests" of the state in the alliance game. If these were the only interests at stake, the alliance bargaining process would be completely indeterminate—that is, each state would be equally eligible as the ally or the adversary of every other state.

In the real world, however, the indeterminacy is reduced, though not eliminated, by other interests, which exist apart from the alliance game and which predispose states to align with certain others and against

<sup>3</sup> "Being in" the most powerful coalition does not necessarily mean that states join the most powerful coalition that is already in existence. Indeed, they will more likely join the weaker one which then becomes the most powerful as a consequence of their joining, because this gives them leverage to bargain for a maximum share of the alliance's payoff. Thus the logic of N-person game theory is consistent with Waltz's argument that states "balance" rather than "bandwagon." See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley, 1979), 125-26.

others. Here we must distinguish between "general" and "particular" interests. General interests stem from the anarchic structure of the system and the geographic position of the state. They include, for instance, a state's interest in defending a close neighbor, or in expansion to enhance its security, or even more generally, in preserving a balance of power in the system. Typical examples of general interests would be England's traditional interest in preserving the independence of the Low Countries and in maintaining a balance of power on the Continent. Such interests are "general" because they do not involve conflicts over specific issues with specific other states, but will be defended or acted upon against all comers. Since they are valued chiefly for their power and security content, I will occasionally refer to them as "strategic" interests. Such general strategic interests introduce only a modest amount of determinacy into the basic N-person model.

The indeterminacy is further reduced by the "particular" interests of states, which bring them into conflict or affinity with specific other states. These conflicts and commonalities may have some power content or they may stem from ideological, ethnic, economic, or prestige values. The Franco-English conflicts over Egypt in the 19th century and the Austro-German ethnic affinity are examples.

Particular conflicts or affinities of interest establish a tacit pattern of alignment, prior to or apart from any overt alliance negotiations. That is, states will expect to be supported in some degree by those with whom they share interests and to be opposed by those with whom they are in conflict. To illustrate: in the decade of the 1870s, Germany had a serious conflict with France over Alsace-Lorraine, but no significant conflicts with any of the other major powers. Russia had conflicts with Austria over the Balkans, and with England over the Straits question and colonial issues from the Middle East to China. England was on good terms with Germany, Austria, and Italy, but was in conflict with Russia and France over colonial issues. Italy had territorial conflicts with Austria in Europe and with France in Africa. The autocratic governments of Germany, Russia, and Austria stood on ideological common ground, but were ideologically antagonistic toward the three Western democracies. The alignments implied by these conflicts and affinities were: (1) on grounds of territorial interest: England and Austria versus Russia; England, Germany, and Italy versus France; and France and Russia versus England; (2) on ideological grounds: Germany, Austria, and Russia versus England, France, and Italy.

Such conflicts and alignments of interest and ideology establish a

background of relationships against which the overt alliance bargaining process takes place, and which affect that process considerably, predisposing the system toward certain alliances and against others. These relationships may foreclose some combinations if the conflict is severe enough; in other cases, the absence of conflict between some pairs may make them natural allies. More likely, however, these conflicts and affinities will narrow the range of indeterminacy rather than eliminate it. Natural partners may fail to ally because one of them overestimates the other's conflicts with third parties and tries to drive too hard a bargain, as Germany did in negotiations with England in 1899 and 1901. And natural opponents may be able to overcome their conflicts, as France and England did in 1904. Technically, conflicts and commonalities of particular interest enter into the bargaining process by reducing or increasing the total value, or "payoff," of certain alliances, thus reducing or increasing the likelihood that they will form. For example, a state with which one has a conflict will appear as a more likely opponent in war than other states; hence, an alliance *against* it will yield greater value than an alliance *with* it; the latter would require a prior settlement of the conflict, incurring costs in the form of compromised interests.

Thus, although an alliance between France and Germany was not logically out of the question between 1870 and 1914, it was extremely unlikely: it required a settlement of the Alsace-Lorraine issue, a compromise that would have cost one or both parties too much compared to the deals they could negotiate with others. France could get Russia as a partner at the minor cost of swallowing some ideological repugnance, and she could get England by giving up a position in Egypt that was valuable only for prestige reasons and could hardly be maintained for long.

The choice of allies is also influenced by the internal political configurations of states apart from the general ideological preferences just mentioned. For example, the Anglo-French Entente of 1904 probably would not have occurred, and certainly would not have developed so soon into a quasi-alliance against Germany, if the Radical rather than the Imperialist wing of the British Liberal party had been in charge of the foreign policy making posts in the Cabinet.

To summarize: in a multipolar system there is a general incentive to ally with *some* other state or states, following the logic of the N-person prisoner's dilemma, or security dilemma, that is generated by the structure of the system. Who aligns with whom results from a bargaining process that is theoretically indeterminate. The indeterminacy is reduced,

though not eliminated, by the prior interests, conflicts, and affinities between states and their internal political make-up.<sup>4</sup>

### AFTER ALIGNMENTS FORM:

#### THE SECONDARY ALLIANCE DILEMMA

Once alliances have begun to form, the alliance security dilemma takes on a different character. That is, having already “defected” in the primary dilemma by choosing to make alliances, states move into the second phase of the alliance dilemma, in which their choices are no longer whether to ally or not, but how firmly to commit themselves to the proto-partner and how much support to give that partner in specific conflict interactions with the adversary. The horns of this secondary dilemma may be described by the traditional labels “cooperate” (C) and “defect” (D), where cooperation means a strong general commitment and full support in specific adversary conflicts, and defection means a weak commitment and no support in conflicts with the adversary. The secondary alliance dilemma may or may not be a prisoner’s dilemma. (Henceforth in this discussion, the terms “alliance game” and “dilemma” will refer to the secondary game rather than the primary one.)

Each horn of the dilemma has both prospective good and prospective bad consequences; and the “goods” and “bads” for each alternative tend to be the obverse of those of the other. In the alliance security dilemma, the principal “bads” are “abandonment” and “entrapment,” and the principal “goods” are a reduction in the risks of being abandoned or entrapped by the ally.<sup>5</sup>

In a multipolar system, alliances are never absolutely firm, whatever the text of the written agreement; therefore, the fear of being abandoned by one’s ally is ever-present. Abandonment, in general, is “defection,” but it may take a variety of specific forms: the ally may realign with the opponent; he may merely de-align, abrogating the alliance contract; he may fail to make good on his explicit commitments; or he may fail to provide support in contingencies where support is expected. (In both of the latter two variants, the alliance remains intact, but the expectations of support which underlie it are weakened.) Suspicion that the ally is

<sup>4</sup> Despite the importance of internal politics, this reference will be the only one in this essay. For reasons of theoretical parsimony and space limitations, the analysis is based entirely on what in recently popular academic terminology is called the “rational actor model,” the actors being states.

<sup>5</sup> The concepts of abandonment and entrapment were first posited, I believe, by Michael Mandelbaum, in *The Nuclear Revolution: International Politics Before and After Hiroshima* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chap. 6.

considering realignment may generate an incentive to realign preemptively.

Entrapment means being dragged into a conflict over an ally's interests that one does not share, or shares only partially. The interests of allies are generally not identical; to the extent they are shared, they may be valued in different degree. Entrapment occurs when one values the preservation of the alliance more than the cost of fighting for the ally's interests. It is more likely to occur if the ally becomes intransigent in disputes with opponents because of his confidence in one's support. Thus, the greater one's dependence on the alliance and the stronger one's commitment to the ally, the higher the risk of entrapment. The risk also varies with the ally's inherent degree of recklessness or aggressiveness.

The risks of abandonment and entrapment tend to vary inversely: reducing one tends to increase the other. Thus a "C" strategy of strong commitment to an ally reduces the risk of abandonment by reducing *his* fear of abandonment; he is discouraged from defecting by his confidence in one's support. But this very support may encourage him to excessive boldness in disputes or crises with the adversary, thus exposing one to the risk of a war that one would not wish to fight. Conversely, a "D" strategy of weak or vague commitment, or a record of failing to support the ally in specific conflicts, tends to restrain the ally and to reduce the risk of entrapment; but it also increases the risk of abandonment by casting doubt on one's loyalty, hence devaluing the alliance for the ally. Thus, the resolution of the alliance security dilemma—the choice of strategy—requires chiefly a comparison and trade-off between the costs and risks of abandonment and entrapment.

There are certain other "goods" and "bads" that enter into the alliance security dilemma. A strategy of strong commitment and support will have the undesired effect of reducing one's bargaining leverage over the ally. If he knows he can count on being supported, he is less influenceable. Conversely, bargaining power over the ally is enhanced to the extent he doubts one's commitment because one can then make credible threats of nonsupport. Alliance bargaining considerations thus tend to favor a strategy of weak or ambiguous commitment—a "D" strategy in the alliance game. (Note that the opposite is the case in the adversary game where firm commitments to defend one's interests tend to strengthen bargaining power vis-à-vis the opponent.)

Another negative effect of strong commitment is that it tends to foreclose one's own options of realignment. Despite the general com-



pulsion to align in a multipolar system, states usually want to keep their commitments tentative or vague as long as possible—both to preserve opportunities for shifting partners in case the present one turns out to be unsatisfactory and to maximize bargaining leverage over the current partner by showing that they have alternatives. A strategy of weak commitment has the desirable effect of keeping alignment options open.

Finally, a strong commitment to the ally tends to solidify the adversary alliance by increasing the degree of threat to it. A weak or tentative commitment reduces this effect and may even weaken or divide the opposing alliance by preserving, for states in that alliance, the apparent option of realigning with oneself.

#### INTERACTION BETWEEN ALLIANCE AND ADVERSARY GAMES

Up to now, I have been discussing the alliance game or dilemma more or less independently of adversaries. But allies are dealing with their adversaries at the same time they are dealing with each other. The alliance and adversary games proceed simultaneously and complement each other in various ways. Strategies and tactics in the alliance game will have direct effects in that game, but also side-effects in the adversary game—and vice versa. Strategy choices in either game must therefore take account of both kinds of effects.

Table 1 presents a composite security dilemma that combines the two games. Each of the strategy pairs, I and II, shows an alliance strategy, together with its complementary strategy in the adversary game. (The cooperative “C” strategies and the defecting “D” strategies are shorthand for a wide range of empirical variations that cannot be explored here.) The two columns show the possible direct consequences of alliance and adversary strategies in their respective games.

The column labeled “alliance game” simply summarizes the previous discussion. The column labeled “adversary game” shows the possible “good” and “bad” effects of either conciliation or firmness toward an adversary when one is interested only in maintaining the general status quo. The security dilemma arises from the state’s uncertainty whether its adversary has far-reaching expansionist aims or, like itself, is interested essentially in the preservation, or limited modification, of the status quo. If the opponent is expansionist, a policy of firmness promises the desirable effects of deterring him and enhancing one’s own reputation for resolve. However, if he is basically oriented toward the status quo, a tough stance may provoke him, increase tension, and induce an “in-

TABLE I  
THE COMPOSITE SECURITY DILEMMA IN A MULTIPOLAR SYSTEM

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Possible Consequences</i>	
	<i>Alliance game</i>	<i>Adversary game</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">I</p> <p>ALLIANCE C: Support, strengthen commitment</p> <p>ADVERSARY D: Stand firm.</p>	“GOODS”	“GOODS”
	1. Reassure ally, reduce risk of abandonment	1. Deter, or prevail over, adversary
	2. Enhance reputation for loyalty	2. Enhance reputation for resolve
	“BADS”	“BADS”
<p style="text-align: center;">II</p> <p>ALLIANCE D: Withhold support, weaken commitment</p> <p>ADVERSARY C: Conciliate</p>	1. Increase risk of entrapment	1. Provoke adversary; increase tension; insecurity spiral
	2. Reduce bargaining power over ally	
	3. Foreclose realignment option	
	4. Solidify adversary's alliance	
• • • • •		
	“GOODS”	“GOODS”
	1. Restrain ally, reduce risk of entrapment	1. Resolve conflict; reduce tension
	2. Increase bargaining power over ally	
	3. Preserve realignment option	
	4. Divide adversary's alliance	
	“BADS”	“BADS”
	1. Increase risk of abandonment	1. Encourage adversary to stand firmer
	2. Reduce reputation for loyalty	2. Reduce reputation for resolve

security spiral”—that is, a vicious circle of “unnecessary” power competition because the adversary interprets one’s own firmness as aggressiveness toward him. Conversely, a conciliatory policy may have the desirable effect of resolving conflict and reducing tension with an essentially nonaggressive adversary; on the other hand, if the opponent

has expansionist goals, conciliation may encourage him to make further demands in the belief that one lacks resolve.<sup>6</sup>

Strategies in each game can have desirable or undesirable side effects in the other. In making choices, a state must therefore calculate the sum of direct effects and side effects. To save space, I will discuss here only the side effects on the alliance game of strategies in the adversary game, and omit the obverse side effects. An adversary "D" strategy of firmness, resistance, or coercion will tend to reassure an ally who doubts one's loyalty, and reduce the risk of the ally's defection or realignment. Opposed to this "good" are several "bads." Firmness toward the adversary increases the risk of entrapment by the ally, as the ally becomes intransigent through his confidence in one's support. Firmness in the adversary game reduces bargaining power over the ally in the alliance game because it reduces the credibility of a threat to withhold support. A tough stance toward the adversary also tends to close off the option of realignment with him. Toughness will also cause the adversary to move closer to his own allies, thus solidifying his alliance.

<sup>6</sup> The adversary dilemma presented here is a secondary security dilemma, analogous to the secondary alliance dilemma. In both cases, the primary security dilemma, which is a prisoner's dilemma, has already been resolved by mutual defection. That is, alliances have formed and adversaries have adopted a general posture of power/security rivalry in the "DD" cell of the primary game, which we might also call the international "supergame." Once adversaries are in this cell they may be able to reduce their conflict; on the other hand, they may sink deeper into conflict and competition. That is, having protected themselves against the worst, they are now able to consider whether they might not improve their situation by conciliating the opponent—although they must also guard against exploitation of such cooperation. Whether conciliation or continued (or greater) firmness is the better policy for any state will depend on its adversary's preferences—which the state does not know, although presumably it knows its own. The adversary dilemma in Table 1 simply assumes the extremes—the opponent is either status-quo-oriented or expansionist—even though he may have mixed motives or be expansionist in different degree in different situations. Formally speaking, adversaries play a series of sub-games within the general context of supergame "DD." Some of these may be prisoner's dilemmas, but some may be other games that are either more or less conflictual than the prisoner's dilemma. The dilemma for the state, then, arises from its uncertainty as to what game is being played, which in turn stems from its uncertainty about the adversary's preferences. Choosing the best strategy thus requires an estimate of the opponent's preference rankings for possible outcomes. Space forbids a discussion of the various possible sub-games: in Table 1, they are implicitly "Stag Hunt" (when the opponent prefers the status quo) and a variant of "Chicken" (when the opponent is expansionist but prefers peace over expansion by war). For a comprehensive treatment, see Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), chap. 2.

The secondary adversary dilemma is similar to the dichotomy between the axioms of deterrence theory and those of the "spiral model" as described by Robert Jervis in *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), chap. 3. Jervis makes the point that the choice between deterrence and spiral-model axioms—between firmness and accommodation—depends essentially on one's estimate of the adversary's ultimate aims. Jervis does not apply the term "security dilemma" to this broad choice, but uses it in its traditional sense as an explanation of why the search for security among status-quo states may be self-defeating—i.e., as the structural basis of the spiral model.

A "C" strategy of conciliating the adversary will have the desirable side effect of restraining the ally, thus reducing the risk of entrapment. The ally, observing one's improving relations with the opponent, will have less confidence that one will stand four-square behind him in a crisis; consequently, he will be more cautious in his own dealings with the opponent. He may even interpret the improved relations with the adversary as a sign that one is considering realignment; he may then become more amenable in order to discourage one's defection. Conciliating the opponent also keeps open one's option of realignment with him, which is desirable for its own sake as well as for the enhancement of one's bargaining leverage over the present partner. Accommodating an adversary may also weaken *his* alliance, as his partners begin to doubt his loyalty and seek alternative partners.

The most undesirable side effect of conciliating the adversary is that it entails the risk of abandonment by the ally. His fear that one is contemplating realignment may induce him, not to try to discourage this by becoming more accommodative, as suggested above, but to realign preemptively or at least move closer to the opponent. This risk is an important constraint on conciliation between adversaries, possibly offsetting the benefits from greater cooperation in the adversary game.<sup>7</sup>

#### THE DETERMINANTS OF CHOICE

What determines choices in the alliance security dilemma? Thus far, we have suggested only a superficial answer to this question: choice involves estimates of, and trade-offs among, the various benefits, costs, and risks listed in Table 1. But what determines the magnitude of these values and consequently the severity of the dilemma?

Probably the most important determinant is the relative *dependence* of the partners on the alliance—how much they need each other's aid—and their perceptions of each other's dependence. Thus, the more dependent a state is, and/or the less dependent the ally appears to be, the

<sup>7</sup> There are some interesting analogies between the dynamics of the two games. A strategy of conciliation in the adversary game may produce a "falling domino" effect: the opponent interprets one's overture as weakness and pushes harder on both present and future issues. The alliance analogue is the entrapment effect. As an opponent may be emboldened if he is appeased, the ally may become more intransigent and aggressive if he is supported. The alliance analogue to deterrence of the opponent is restraint of the ally. Deterrence involves a threat of force against an adversary; restraint may be accomplished by threatening *not* to use force in support of the ally. In the alliance game, strengthening one's commitment to the ally tends to foreclose one's alternative alliance options; in the adversary game, firming up one's commitment against the opponent may foreclose compromise settlement options. Bargaining power over the ally is enhanced by a weak, ambiguous commitment; leverage over the adversary is strengthened by a firm, explicit one.

more likely it is that the costs and risks of abandonment will outweigh the costs and risks of entrapment. Dependence is compounded of (1) a state's need for assistance in war as a function of the extent to which its military capability falls short of its potential adversary's capability; (2) its partner's capacity to supply the assistance (the greater the partner's strength, the more one is dependent on him, up to the point where the combined strength provides sufficient security); (3) the state's degree of conflict and tension with the adversary (the greater the conflict and tension, the more likely one will have to call on the partner for help);<sup>8</sup> and (4) the state's realignment alternatives (the more numerous the alternatives, and the more satisfactory they are, the less the dependence on the present partner). These factors will of course change over time; some may change in opposite directions. For example, by 1914 the increased military strength of France and Russia (especially the latter) had reduced their dependence on England, but this was partially offset by their increased conflict with Germany and Austria. Also, the factors are not entirely independent. Thus, increased conflict with the adversary will reduce realignment alternatives by tending to close off the option of realigning with him.

Another determinant is the degree of *strategic interest* that the parties have in defending each other. Strategic interest is an interest in keeping the ally's power resources out of the opponent's hands. Analytically, this is different from dependence as just defined, since it refers not to the need for aid in case one is attacked, but to the need to block an increase in the adversary's power. In practice, the two are closely linked since the ally's independent existence is a prerequisite to receiving his aid. Strategic interest might be termed "indirect dependence," and need for the ally's assistance might be labeled "direct dependence." Most alliances in a multipolar world involve both kinds of dependence, but they should be kept separate because allies may be dependent in different degree on each dimension. The most important causes of such asymmetries are geographical factors and disparity of power between allies. The English Channel, for instance, minimized Britain's direct dependence on her continental allies, but she was indirectly dependent on them because domination of the Continent by a single power would have neutralized the protection of the Channel. In the pre-1914 decade, France was directly dependent on British aid, but had little operational strategic

<sup>8</sup> "Conflict" and "tension" are analytically separable. Conflict is incompatibility of interest; tension may be defined crudely as the felt likelihood that the conflict will produce war in the immediate future. A high degree of conflict may be accompanied by low tension; the opposite is also possible, though less likely. The two are linked here because of their similar effect on alliance dependence.

interest in defending England because England could defend herself against direct attack by Germany. The effects of power disparity may be seen in the German-Austrian alliance of 1879. Because of her relative weakness, Austria was much more dependent in a direct sense on German assistance against Russia than vice versa, but Germany was indirectly dependent because of her strategic interest in preventing Austria from being absorbed by Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Asymmetries in indirect dependence chiefly affect the partners' relative fears of abandonment. Thus, when one state has a stronger strategic interest in its partner than vice versa, the first will worry more about abandonment than the second, although this differential may be offset if the second state is more dependent in the direct sense. Differences in strategic interest help to explain why the most powerful state in an alliance often has little leverage over its partners: when the stronger state's strategic interest is well known, it cannot credibly threaten defection or realignment.

A third determinant is the degree of *explicitness* in the alliance agreement. A vague or ambiguous agreement tends to maximize fears of abandonment; an explicit one minimizes such worries, but it does not eliminate them. Conversely, entrapment may be a less worrisome possibility with a vague agreement since the partners can assert that they are not committed. The flip side of this, however, is that while states explicitly allied may be entrapped over the partner's interests that are covered in the agreement, they may find it quite easy to dissociate themselves from the ally in contingencies not mentioned because they can be fairly confident of each other's loyalty in the ultimate contingency. But when the agreement is ambiguous, they may find it necessary to stand by the ally in all situations to prove their loyalty. Thus, France and Russia, bound by a quite specific agreement limited to the contingencies of German or Austrian military attack, were each able to withhold support in several crises in the pre-1914 decade where only the partner's interests were at stake, with little damage to the alliance. England, however, tied only loosely to France and Russia, felt compelled

<sup>9</sup> Austria also had a strategic interest in Germany's not being absorbed by Russia, but this interest was abstract—i.e., non-operational—since Germany was quite capable of holding her own against Russia, provided Russia had not previously conquered Austria. Thus, the situation was analogous to the Franco-British relationship. The general point is that the stronger ally will be less directly dependent than its partner but more indirectly dependent. Asymmetry of this kind is especially pronounced in a bipolar world because of the wide disparity of power between the superpowers and their allies. Thus the European members of NATO are highly dependent on the U.S. in the direct sense, but the U.S. is not similarly dependent on them; on the other hand, the U.S. is indirectly dependent on its allies because of its strategic interest in containing Soviet power.

to support them in nearly all confrontations lest they doubt her fidelity.<sup>10</sup>

At bottom, however, the explicitness factor is only a modifier of the effects of the more basic dependence and interest factors. Vagueness allows these factors full play; explicitness tends to inhibit their effects. Thus, asymmetrical dependence by itself will cause the more dependent ally to fear abandonment, but this anxiety will be reduced by a formal, explicit contract. Conversely, such a contract will make it harder for the less dependent ally to escape entrapment, at least on issues specified in the agreement.

A fourth determinant, affecting both the risk of abandonment and the risk of entrapment, is the degree to which the allies' *interests* that are in conflict with the adversary are shared. If these interests are similar and valued with about equal intensity, both risks will be minimized for both parties, since presumably (*ceteris paribus*) they will be about equally ready to fight over them. On the other hand, if their interests are quite different, each partner will worry about being trapped into "pulling the other's chestnuts out of the fire," but each will also fear that the other may stand aside if his own interests are threatened. For instance, in the Franco-Russian alliance before World War I, France had little intrinsic interest in Russia's conflicts with Austria in the Balkans, while Russia had little interest in France's conflicts with Germany. When France strengthened her commitment to Russia in 1912, she encouraged Russian aggressiveness, thus increasing her own danger of being entrapped. But this was more than offset by the reduced danger of Russia's abandonment of the alliance in a Franco-German war. The French by this time were convinced that a war was virtually inevitable: it was desirable that it begin with a Russian-Austrian fracas in the Balkans, thereby ensuring Russian participation.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the incentives and disincentives for current strategy options will be affected by one's own and others' *behavior* in the recent past. The determinants just described are situational rather than behavioral. Although they are fairly good indicators of some items in the calculus, such as the *costs* of abandonment or entrapment, they yield only general and uncertain judgments about their *likelihood* and about such other items as one's own or the ally's loyalty reputation. Expectations about

<sup>10</sup> The best treatment of this series of crises, beginning with Morocco (1905) is still that of Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), Vol. I.

<sup>11</sup> The term "abandonment" is used here in the sense of reneging on one's specific alliance obligation, not as realignment or de-alignment.

On Franco-Russian relations between 1912 and 1914 and the strengthening of the French commitment, see G. P. Gooch, *Before the War: Studies in Diplomacy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1938), chap. 2.



allies' future behavior and their probable expectations of one's own behavior cannot be very precisely arrived at from guesses about the others' "dependence," "interest," and so on. Behavioral evidence supplements the situational elements to yield more specific and confident expectations. Thus, Britain and France were generally concerned about Russian defection throughout the pre-1914 decade because of their knowledge of Russia's rather low dependence on the Triple Entente—mostly because her option of realigning with Germany was open until late in the period. They became more specifically and intensely concerned when Russia negotiated a settlement of certain disputes with Germany in 1910. Of course, the ally's recent behavior may be in response to one's own prior behavior. The point is that the continuing sequence of strategic choices by all actors yields a stream of behavioral evidence which interacts with estimates of the general situational factors when the parties assess the probable consequences of current strategy options.

These factors—direct and indirect dependence, explicitness of commitment, disparity of interests in conflict with the opponent, and the behavioral record—are the principal determinants of the values and likelihoods that the parties impute to the various possible consequences of strategy options as listed in Table 1. These values and likelihoods, in turn, are the proximate determinants of strategy choice itself.

Thus, if a state feels highly dependent on its ally, directly or indirectly, if it perceives the ally as less dependent, if the alliance commitment is vague, and if the ally's recent behavior suggests doubtful loyalty, the state will fear abandonment more than entrapment. It will therefore tend to reassure the ally of its commitment, support him in specific confrontations with the opponent, and avoid conciliating the opponent. The reverse conditions will tend to induce opposite strategies.

These propositions may be illustrated, though imperfectly, by certain differences between British and French behavior toward each other and toward Germany from approximately 1905 to 1909. Britain was not dependent on French aid in case of a direct German attack—the navy could handle that. She was indirectly dependent on the Entente, however, because of her strategic interest in a continental balance of power and her derivative interest in preventing a German conquest of France or a German-French alliance, either of which would make the British Isles vulnerable. France was perceived as less dependent because she already had an alliance with Russia in addition to an apparent option of realignment or rapprochement with Germany while England had no alliance alternatives. The vague language of the Entente Cordiale of 1904 placed little constraint on French realignment. The British did



worry somewhat about entrapment in a Franco-German war over specific French interests, but this concern was less important than their anxieties about French defection.

The result of these considerations was a policy of reassurance toward France and firmness toward Germany. This reduced the risk of abandonment at the cost of some increased risk of entrapment—in case the French became too intransigent toward Germany in their confidence of British support. However, the latter cost was small: Britain had little leverage for restraining France in any case because of French knowledge of British strategic interests. The firm stance toward Germany would deter Germany if she were aggressively inclined, but it risked provoking an insecurity spiral if she were not. Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Minister, entertained both possibilities, but chose firmness as a prudent worst-case strategy in the adversary game; it was also consistent with his alliance game strategy of reassuring France.

Although France valued the Entente, she was less dependent on it than England—not because she would not need help in a war against Germany, but because she did not believe England could provide much help in a land war. France correctly perceived the strong British strategic interest in defending France and in preventing a Franco-German realignment. She was also reassured by unqualified British support in the Morocco crisis of 1905. Therefore, France had little reason to doubt British loyalty and felt little need to reassure the British of her own loyalty in order to avoid abandonment. Instead, she exploited British anxieties about French loyalty in order to get a firmer British commitment—principally in the form of joint military staff talks and an implicit British pledge to send an expeditionary force to the Continent in case of war. France had some fear of entrapment in a war resulting from the Anglo-German naval race; partly for this reason, she adopted a policy of moderate conciliation of Germany. Other incentives for conciliation came from the Franco-German adversary game. Powerful groups in France wanted a rapprochement with Germany at this time, both to compensate for French and Russian military weakness and to secure commercial and colonial benefits by deals with Germany in the Near East and Africa. These incentives produced an agreement with Germany over Morocco in 1909, which, of course, further increased British concerns about a possible French realignment.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On Anglo-French-German relations during this period, see K. A. Hamilton, "Great Britain and France, 1905-1911," and D. W. Sweet, "Great Britain and Germany, 1905-1911," in F. H. Hinsley, ed., *British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1977), chaps. 5 and 11.

Thus, actual and perceived asymmetries of direct and indirect dependence, differences in particular interests vis-à-vis the opponent, the vagueness and fragility of the Entente, and the behavioral record combined to produce different strategies by France and Britain in both the alliance and adversary games.

#### ON SPIRALS

In the adversary security dilemma, “D” strategies of firmness, played between adversaries who believe each other to be potentially aggressive but who really are not, produce an “insecurity spiral”—i.e., a spiral of power/security competition that feeds on each party’s fears that the other’s defensive moves are aggressively motivated.<sup>13</sup> An analogous spiral in the alliance security dilemma is an “integrative spiral,” in which allies move progressively closer out of their mutual fear of abandonment. The integrative spiral interlocks with the insecurity spiral in the adversary game—i.e., the two spirals are mutually reinforcing. Thus, allies play reciprocal “C” strategies out of fear that the partner may defect if they do not show support; they further attempt to reduce the partner’s anxieties by standing firm against the opponent; the opponent then feels threatened and encircled, and his hostile response increases the allies’ incentive to close ranks; when they do, the adversary becomes more fearful and hostile, and, feeling more dependent on his own allies, moves closer to them; in reaction, the first alliance further solidifies, and so on.

The Anglo-French Entente of 1904 and the German reaction to it set in motion an alliance integrative spiral and an interlocking adversary insecurity spiral that continued until the outbreak of war in 1914. The Entente had not initially been intended as a quasi-alliance against Germany, but only as a colonial settlement and as a hedge against involvement in the impending war between the parties’ respective allies—Japan and Russia. But Germany did see it as a threat and challenged it in the Morocco crisis of 1905 in an attempt to break it up by exposing British infidelity. However, Britain stood firmly behind France; the result of the Germans’ coercion was a self-confirmation of their own hypothesis: the Entente was transformed into a quasi-alliance against the newly revealed German threat.

The tightening of the Entente set in motion an insecurity spiral in

<sup>13</sup> What I call the insecurity spiral is sometimes referred to as the security dilemma. I believe this is a mislabeling, however, since the spiral is an *outcome* of both adversaries’ choosing one of the options in the security dilemma, not the *problem* of choice itself. The defining feature of any dilemma is the difficulty of choosing between two options, each of which will have more or less unsatisfactory consequences.

the adversary game, chiefly between Germany and England. The latter, feeling more dependent on France as evidence of German hostility mounted (especially via the Anglo-German naval competition) carefully avoided, or limited, any accommodative moves toward Germany that might raise doubts in French minds about British loyalty and thus possibly trigger a French realignment with Germany.<sup>14</sup> She also increased her commitment to France by initiating military staff conversations. For Germany, the hypothesis of Entente hostility now seemed to be even more strongly confirmed by the British reserve and the spectacle of the partners moving closer together. Germany stepped up her ship-building and drew closer to Austria. Thus, the increased solidarity in one alliance, interacting with an insecurity spiral in the adversary game, increased the cohesion of the other alliance.

These spirals continued with the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907 and the Bosnian crisis of 1908-1909. The Anglo-Russian agreement, like the earlier Anglo-French one, was on its face a settlement of various colonial conflicts, but for Britain it was also (unlike the French Entente) consciously intended to strengthen the balance of power against Germany. Germany perceived it as another step in her encirclement, and felt increasingly dependent on Austria. During the Bosnian crisis, fearing Austrian defection, she supported her ally completely and, by issuing an ultimatum, she forced Russia to back down. She also expanded the scope of her alliance commitment to Austria. Whereas the alliance formally called for mutual support against Russia only in a defensive war, Germany now assured Austria of full support even in an offensive war. Britain also supported Russia during the crisis, although not to the point of offering military assistance. The result of the crisis was thus to consolidate both alliance systems, to extend the scope of the German-Austrian one, and to increase the level of tension between the two.<sup>15</sup>

The integrative process continued on the Entente side with British support of France during the second Morocco crisis (1911),<sup>16</sup> and a firming and extension of commitments between France and England, and between France and Russia, in 1912. The French-British connection was tightened by an agreement on a naval division of labor in which the French fleet was to guard the Mediterranean and the British fleet was to guard the Atlantic coasts of both countries. In return for this

<sup>14</sup> George Monger, *The End of Isolation* (London: Nelson, 1963), chap. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Bernadotte Schmitt, *The Annexation of Bosnia* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1937).

<sup>16</sup> Ima C. Barlow, *The Agadir Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940).

arrangement, France successfully demanded an exchange of notes that strengthened the British diplomatic commitment.<sup>17</sup>

The bolstering of the French-Russian alliance occurred mainly because of France's increasing anxiety about possible Russian defection. Russian dependence on France was declining because of Russia's steadily increasing military strength. Moreover, she had demonstrated some independence by failing to support France during the 1911 Morocco crisis and by settling some minor conflicts with Germany in the Near East. France became worried that Russia might be induced to remain neutral in a Franco-German war. She dealt with the problem by extending the scope of her commitment to Russia, implicitly promising aid not just in case of a German (or German-Austrian) attack on Russia (as per the terms of the treaty) but also in case Russia was forced to attack Austria because of an Austrian military initiative in the Balkans. This was analogous to the extension of the German commitment to Austria after the Bosnian crisis.<sup>18</sup>

The integrative/insecurity spiral was partially—but only temporarily—interrupted during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), when England and Germany managed to fashion a *détente* based on collaborative restraint of their allies.

#### THE RESTRAINING ALLIES' DILEMMA: THE BALKAN WARS INTERLUDE

When members of opposite alliances become involved in a crisis confrontation, their allies may find themselves in a special form of the composite security dilemma in which the alliance and adversary components are closely linked. The dilemma is not just whether to support or restrain the ally, but whether to support the ally or to *collaborate* with the noninvolved state on the opposite side in restraining both protagonists. As in the classic prisoner's dilemma, the opposite restraining states have a good deal to gain by cooperating—in keeping the peace and avoiding entrapment—but they are also motivated *against* cooperation by the desire to avoid alienating their allies. The best outcome

<sup>17</sup> Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), provides an excellent account of these French-British negotiations; see chaps. 11 and 12.

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting that France tightened her alliance with Russia by increasing her own commitment, but strengthened her British connection by extracting a firmer commitment from England. The explanation for the difference is that the "balance of dependence" between France and Russia favored Russia, whereas between France and England, it favored France. In other words, France enjoyed more bargaining power over England than over Russia.

may be obtained by secretly supporting one's own ally while the adversary restrains his; but if both parties pursue this strategy (perhaps out of suspicion that the other is doublecrossing) the result is the typical "DD" outcome of the prisoner's dilemma—in this case, mutual entrapment.

The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 engaged Britain and Germany in this sort of dilemma. Their allies, Russia and Austria respectively, supported opposite sides among the Balkan states who first stripped Turkey of most of her European territory and then fought another war among themselves over the division of the spoils. England and Germany reached an informal agreement: England was to restrain Russia from intervening, Germany to restrain Austria. The collaboration worked initially. Acting through a conference of all the great powers, the two peacemakers did restrain their allies and enforced compromise settlements. Formally, England and Germany both played "C" in the adversary game and "D" in the alliance game, risking the loss of their allies in order to avoid entrapment in a conflict over issues in which neither had much intrinsic interest. Apparently, the integrative/insecurity spiral of the preceding years had been stopped.

This cooperative achievement, however, was due to a special combination of factors and, ironically, its success generated forces that made its repetition unlikely. For Germany, the payoff for collaboration with England was illusorily magnified by the vain hope that it would lead to an Anglo-German neutrality pact, which Germany had been seeking for years. This hope outweighed the risk of alienating Austria, a risk that was low because the government in Vienna was itself divided about risking a confrontation with Russia. As for England, she was now more willing than before to take a chance on Russian defection because her dependence on the Russian and French ententes had declined. England's dependence had always been indirect, based on her strategic interest in a continental equilibrium. In 1912-1913, such an equilibrium was at least being approached, by virtue of a substantial increase in Russian military strength and the growing solidarity of the Russian-French alliance. A British commitment was therefore less necessary to deter the central powers, and Russia and France were less likely to realign if they began to doubt British loyalty. In the adversary game, the British balance of incentives had shifted somewhat from deterrence to conciliation, and in the alliance game her balance of worries had shifted from fears of abandonment to fears of entrapment. The British payoff in collaborating with Germany was further increased by Sir Edward Grey's desire to dampen the insecurity spiral by easing German fears of encirclement,

and by the desire to gain more leverage over Russia in the persistent squabbles with her over Persia. Finally, Britain's cost in restraining Russia was minimized by the fact that the Russian government was as divided and vacillating about risking war as the Austrian government was.<sup>19</sup>

THE STRADDLE STRATEGY:

SIR EDWARD GREY IN JULY 1914

The Anglo-German cooperation of the Balkan Wars did not carry over into the crisis of July 1914, chiefly because Germany's balance of incentives had changed sharply by then. The growth of Russian military power, the initiation of Anglo-Russian naval conversations, and the increasing tension between the continental alliances had increased Germany's sense of dependence on Austria. This, combined with Austria's reproaches for her weak support during the Balkan Wars, increased German fears of Austrian defection: Austria must not be restrained again. Germany's feeling that war was inevitable led to the thought that it had better be now than later, when Russia would be even stronger. Her incentive to cooperate with England had declined with the evaporation of the dream of a neutrality pact, although German leaders continued to believe that England might well stand aside in a war in which Russia could be made to appear the aggressor. By July of 1914, Germany was no longer in a security "dilemma," strictly speaking, since she had resolved it on the side of definite support of her ally and firmness toward her opponents. The same was true of France and Russia: Russia, like Austria, was determined not to back down again, and France repeatedly avowed her unflinching loyalty.

In England, however, Sir Edward Grey's dilemma was as severe as ever: his incentives for either option in both the alliance and adversary games were about evenly balanced. In the alliance game, this was largely the result of the apparent equilibrium of power on the continent, which lessened Britain's need to stand by her allies. If they could hold their own against the central powers, they were less likely to defect out of fear of British defection. In the adversary game, Grey hoped to keep alive the *détente* with Germany that had been nourished by the amicable settlement of certain colonial disputes in the spring and summer of 1914. Thus Grey's worries about the intransigence of Britain's allies were at

<sup>19</sup> The classic study of the Balkan Wars is E. C. Helmreich, *The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938). For a more recent interpretation emphasizing Anglo-German relations, see R. J. Crampton, *The Hollow Detente* (London: George Prior Publishers, 1979).

least as strong as his fears of their desertion, and he was as eager to avoid provoking Germany as to deter her. The two horns of the dilemma appeared about equally attractive (or unattractive). Grey therefore adopted a straddle—a mixed “C-D” strategy in both the alliance and the adversary games. He gave vague reassurances to France and Russia, rejecting their pleas for an unambiguous declaration of armed support. He issued a few mild warnings to Austria and Germany, but concentrated on reviving the joint Anglo-German mediation of the Balkan Wars. The latter effort failed because Grey did not appreciate the extent to which German payoffs had changed since 1912–1913. Germany agreed to collaborate in joint restraint of Austria and Russia, but defected by goading Austria on. In the overall straddle, it was Grey’s hope that Russia would be restrained without being alienated while Germany would be deterred without being provoked. This strategy failed because France–Russia and Austria–Germany, all thinking wishfully, drew opposite conclusions from it. France and Russia counted on British support while Germany and Austria expected British neutrality until the very last moment. Thus, in striving for the best of all worlds, Grey got the worst. If, early in the crisis, he had declared his firm support of Russia and France and warned Germany unequivocally, *or* if he had clearly declared to France and Russia that Britain would not fight, the war might have been averted.<sup>20</sup> This is not to argue that Grey’s ambiguity was a central cause of the outbreak of World War I. But England was the only major power that still had both polar options available; in failing to exercise either one, she gave up a chance to prevent the war.<sup>21</sup>

We should not conclude from this single case, however, that a straddle strategy in the composite security dilemma cannot work, that one must firmly grasp one horn or the other. Special circumstances in 1914 made it virtually inevitable that the continental powers would interpret British intentions wishfully. These circumstances were, first, that the continental powers were firmly locked into a collision course: Austria and Russia via their deep conflict of interest in the Balkans, Germany and France because of their high dependence upon and firm commitments to their

<sup>20</sup> Historians are divided as to whether Grey could have averted the war by taking a clear stance one way or the other. Albertini’s opinion (fn. 10, Vol. II, 514), is that he could have. For a contrary view, see A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 525. For a discussion of Grey’s dilemma, see Michael J. Eckstein, “Great Britain and the Triple Entente on the Eve of the Sarajevo Crisis,” in Hinsley (fn. 12), chap. 18.

<sup>21</sup> It is true that Grey felt constrained by domestic and constitutional considerations from issuing an unequivocal commitment. The fact that eventually he did issue a clear warning to Germany that England could not remain neutral—although it came too late to affect German decision making—indicates that these constraints were not absolute.



allies. The integrative/insecurity spiral within and between the continental alliances had become so tightly wound by the summer of 1914 that, in order to have any chance of reversing it, Grey would have had to choose one of his extreme options. Second, British power was not considered so decisive for the outcome of a war that the other states were unwilling to gamble with the uncertainty of its being used. Third, both sides on the Continent had grounds for optimistic expectations about England, generated by recent interactions with her.

With different background conditions, a straddle might be successful. Success means instilling cautious (and, hence, opposite) expectations in the ally and the adversary, rather than wishful (and opposite) ones, and doing so without unduly antagonizing either party. One wants the ally to think one probably will not fight, and the opponent to think one probably will. The ambiguity of a straddle is most likely to be interpreted cautiously in circumstances more or less opposite to those of 1914: the conflict of interest between ally and adversary is relatively mild, they are not firmly committed against each other, and one's own military power is expected to determine the outcome of a war. Then the other parties' costs of being restrained or deterred, or of accepting a compromise settlement, would be low compared to the expected cost of a war (and defeat) resulting from a mistaken prediction of one's own intentions. A mixed past record containing instances of both non-support of the ally and strong resistance to the opponent would also be helpful. Such conditions were approximated in relations between Russia, Austria, and Germany in the 1870s and 1880s, when Bismarck played the straddle option successfully on several occasions.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE ALLIANCE SECURITY DILEMMA IN A BIPOLAR SYSTEM

The alliance security dilemma is sharply truncated in today's bipolar system because one of the central "bads"—that of abandonment—is

<sup>22</sup> These remarks can no more than suggest the complexity of the straddle problem. One aspect of this complexity is that one is trying to optimize among four objectives: restrain the ally, but avoid alienating him; deter the opponent but avoid provoking him. Just what mixture of communications is likely to optimize will be difficult to estimate, even if one could assume that they will be interpreted as desired by both other parties. Another aspect is the necessary ambiguity of one's messages, which makes it unlikely that they *will* be interpreted exactly as desired. The possible porosity of diplomatic communication channels limits the extent to which signals sent to the ally and adversary can be inconsistent with each other—e.g., signals to the ally that lean toward restraint and messages to the opponent that emphasize firmness. The "pure" and consistent strategies of restraining the ally while conciliating the adversary, or supporting the ally while warning the opponent, are less likely to be misread, and either one may well keep the peace, but they risk alienating the ally or increasing the opponent's hostility. By minimizing these latter risks, a mixed strategy promises a better outcome than either of the pure ones, but also risks a worse outcome, especially when the background conditions approach those in 1914.



highly unlikely. At least that is so for the European central arena of the system, to which the following discussion will be limited.<sup>23</sup> The superpowers are solidly committed by their own interests to defend their allies, hence their de-alignment is irrational. Realignment with each other is logically impossible, simply because there is no other state powerful enough to provide a motive. The European allies theoretically could shift sides if left to their own devices. However, the superpowers have powerful incentives to prevent their realignment—by force if necessary—as the Soviets have demonstrated. The West European states have no motive to realign, since the Soviet Union is the principal threat to their security and the United States is their natural protector.<sup>24</sup> Finally, simple de-alignment by the smaller states is ultimately illusory, since their protector will defend them no matter what political posture they assume.

Entrapment is possible, however. Conceivably, both the superpowers and their allies could be pulled unwillingly into a conflict in Europe by one partner's initiative—for instance, involvement of the West German army in an East German revolution. The smaller allies must worry in addition about extraregional entrapment (the spillover into Europe of a superpower conflict originating in other areas), and about nuclear entrapment (a superpower initiating nuclear warfare in Europe in the hope that it might be confined there). In general, entrapment is a more serious concern for the lesser allies than for the superpowers because they share only a portion of the latter's global interests, because the superpowers have a much greater capacity for taking initiatives (notably nuclear initiatives), and because the allies' capacity to restrain the superpowers is much smaller than vice versa.

Since the alliance dilemma is mostly a function of *tension* between the risk of abandonment and the risk of entrapment—reducing one tends to increase the other—the dilemma is weak in a bipolar alliance, because only one of these risks is significantly present. That risk, entrapment, can be dealt with simply by dissociation from the ally's policy, or by various means of restraining the ally, without concern that the ally may defect in consequence. The superpower may exert economic pressure or simply withhold support from the ally's adventures (as the

<sup>23</sup> I believe the present system should still be classified as bipolar, even though there has been some movement toward multipolarity. Although some of my theoretical statements in this section apply to bipolarity in Europe in general, they are much more relevant to NATO than to the Warsaw Pact, as my examples clearly indicate. Bipolar alliances outside Europe have somewhat different dynamics, which cannot be explored here.

<sup>24</sup> Some might argue that the West European countries are allied with the United States out of cultural and ideological affinities (and disaffinities with the Soviet Union), not because of structural compulsion. However, even if these affinities did not exist, alignment with the U.S. would be dictated by their security interests.

United States did during the Suez crisis of 1956). The weaker allies may also fail to support, or even hinder, the superpower's actions (as the Europeans did during the Yom Kippur War and on the recent gas pipeline issue); they may also be able to exercise some restraining leverage by appealing to consensus norms or by exploiting the superpower's need for collective legitimization. In so doing, they do not risk losing the superpower's protection. Neither the superpower nor its protégés need feel any compulsion to support each other (and thereby accept *increased* risks of entrapment) solely to insure against the alliance's collapse. When support is provided against the adversary, it is chiefly because the allies share each other's interests and perceptions in the adversary game, not because they fear the partner might otherwise leave the fold. Finally, neither the greater nor the smaller allies are inhibited from conciliating the adversary by the worry—typical of multipolar alliances—that such conciliation might precipitate the ally's realignment.

Because of the weakness of the alliance security dilemma, the adversary dilemma dominates. That dilemma can be dealt with by each partner according to its own preferences, with little concern for alliance “side effects.” The superpowers and their allies may disagree about policy toward the adversary, and, as in NATO at present, they may even pursue contradictory policies. But they need have little fear that their own association is thereby endangered. Indeed, it is largely because the alliance itself is fundamentally stable that such policy divergences may develop and persist. The alliance is stable because it is essentially a product of the structure of the system and of the common security interests generated thereby. So long as that structure and those interests persist, the allies are free to disagree.

By contrast, in a multipolar system where the alliance and adversary dilemmas are roughly co-equal, allies are much more constrained in their play of the adversary game by the possible consequences to the alliance. In particular, they are inhibited from conciliating the adversary for fear the ally will take it as a prelude to realignment, and will realign preemptively. Since multipolar alignments are not determined by the structure of the system, but are formed by choice among several options, they are unstable and vulnerable to policy disagreement. Worries about alliance disintegration thus tend to induce similarity of policy toward the opponent. In a multipolar alliance there is a close link between the degree of policy solidarity and the stability of the alliance; in a bipolar alliance that link is tenuous at best.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> For a similar argument, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley, 1979), esp. 169–70. This essay has been considerably influenced by Waltz's impressive work.

Although the alliance security dilemma is weak in a bipolar system, it is not entirely absent. There are partial surrogates for abandonment—various degrees of movement away from the ally or toward the opponent that give rise to truncated forms of the dilemma. Different types can be discerned at the political and military levels.

At the political level, the most extreme conceivable approaches to abandonment are “condominium” for the superpowers and “finlandization” or “neutralization” for the lesser states. Condominium means a high degree of collaboration by the superpowers to maintain order in the system, and subordination of their competitive interests and the interests of their allies to this goal. Logically, condominium is more akin to multipolar “concert” than to realignment, and is not inconsistent with a continued intention to defend allies against actual attack. However, the allies might still have reason to worry about not being supported over less-than-ultimate issues, and about losing whatever political influence they currently enjoy as a consequence of superpower rivalry.

Finlandization or neutralization are also just barely conceivable. In an ultimate sense, both are illusions. Although it is possible that some European NATO members might drift in these directions out of fear of being abandoned by the United States or, conversely, of being entrapped in a conflict between the superpowers, such stances would amount only to “pseudo-abandonment” so long as the U.S. retained its intention to defend them. NATO, like any bipolar alliance, is essentially a guarantee of the lesser states by the superpower; as long as the guarantee holds, the alliance holds—whatever postures the smaller states may strike. This does not mean, however, that the degree of West European accommodation with the Soviets is unimportant. If West Germany, say, were to come under significant Soviet influence, important costs for the U.S. and the Western alliance would be entailed, even if the alliance *per se* remained intact.

Within these extremes—that is, within the realm of the possible—are various degrees of “détente” with the adversary, each involving some degree of cooperative benefits and some dependence on the adversary for continuance of the benefits, and hence, some influence by the adversary. Specific moves toward détente, by either the superpowers or their protégés, may generate fears that further moves that would weaken alliance obligations are impending. Typically, the fears exceed what is likely to happen, much as fears of realignment in the multipolar world are quite disproportionate to the real possibilities—states are notoriously paranoid—but, of course, it is the subjective fears rather than the objective possibilities that influence their behavior. Thus, in the truncated

alliance game of bipolarity, simply the reduction of tension between adversaries, or its possibility, is functionally equivalent to potential defection or realignment as a source of abandonment anxiety.

An obvious military surrogate for abandonment would be a partial U.S. troop withdrawal from Europe. (A complete withdrawal is hardly conceivable.) Although this would not seriously impair the U.S. commitment to Europe, it would certainly stimulate ever-lurking European worries about a U.S. retreat to the American "fortress."

The alliance dilemma for the U.S. at the political level is a by-product of the adversary dilemma—of the choice between conciliating or confronting the adversary. Unlike the multipolar version, it does not involve a trade-off between risks of abandonment and risks of entrapment, but rather a balancing between two kinds of incentives for partial "abandonment" by the smaller states. As Henry Kissinger has noted, the West Europeans tend to oscillate between fears of collusion and fears of collision between the United States and the Soviet Union, and their response to *both* fears is to conciliate the Soviets.<sup>26</sup> Their motives for this response to superpower collusion presumably are (1) to hedge against a possible weakening of the American will to protect their interests; (2) to preserve some bargaining power vis-à-vis the United States; or (3) simply to share in the benefits of better relations with the Soviet Union. When they fear collision (entrapment), their incentives to conciliate the Soviet Union may be (1) to restrain U.S. intransigence; (2) to insulate their own good relations with the Soviets from the superpower confrontation; and perhaps (3) to offset U.S. belligerence, thus moderating the overall alliance stance and reducing the risk of provoking the Soviets.

Thus, for the United States, the alliance dilemma presents the problem of finding the optimum blend of firmness and accommodation toward the Soviets—that which generates the least incentive for the allies to "neutralize" or "finlandize." Since the U.S. will have its independent preferences in the adversary game, which might point to a different optimum stance in that game, the overall problem is one of optimizing between two optimums.

Henry Kissinger stated the problem clearly when he warned President Nixon in 1973:

We had to remain sober in our dealings with the Soviet Union. If we became too impetuous the European nations would grow fearful of a U.S. Soviet deal. This would cause them to multiply their own initiatives . . . to protect themselves, by making their own arrangements with the U.S.S.R. But paradoxically, the same would happen if the U.S. remained in the

<sup>26</sup> Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 382.

trenches of the Cold War. In that case European leaders would be tempted to appear before their publics as “mediators” between bellicose superpowers. The U.S. had to conduct a careful policy towards the Soviet Union: sufficiently strong to maintain the interest in the common defense; sufficiently flexible to prevent our allies from racing to Moscow.<sup>27</sup>

This strategy is appropriate when a superpower is most concerned about the effects of its own strategy upon that of the allies. When the concern is that the ally is “defecting” on its own initiative, however, a better strategy might be to preempt. For example, Nixon and Kissinger worried in the early seventies that the West German *Ostpolitik* might go too far; this stimulated them to move ahead with their own negotiations lest Germany be left alone in the Soviet embrace. Kissinger reports that he dreaded the moment “when no German chancellor can afford the hostility of the Soviet Union . . .”:

This uneasiness about the drift of Brandt’s policies was shared by his principal partners in the Western alliance. . . . To forestall [independent German maneuvering between East and West], or perhaps outflank it, each of Brandt’s colleagues—including Nixon—sought to pre-empt Germany by conducting an active detente policy of its own. In this sense, *Ostpolitik* had effects far beyond those intended. It contributed to a race to Moscow and over time heightened mutual suspicion among the allies.<sup>28</sup>

When the U.S.-Soviet détente negotiations were well underway, the bogey of “condominium” was raised in Europe—notably after the agreement on Prevention of Nuclear War in 1973, which seemed to imply joint Soviet-U.S. management of crises and disputes between other states. At that point, the European states felt impelled to deepen their own détente in order to hedge against the possibility that Washington’s commitment to its allies was weakening. Willy Brandt noted that one of his motives for *Ostpolitik* was his belief that only a part of U.S. forces would still be in Europe at the end of the seventies.<sup>29</sup>

However, the most important motives for détente on both sides of the Atlantic were autonomous ones stemming from the adversary game, and the reduced cohesion of NATO was more the result of the reduced Soviet threat than of mutual fears of defection among the allies. Nor did fears of the partners’ defection seriously *inhibit* the détente policies of either the U.S. or Europe—despite Kissinger’s warning.

There is no bipolar parallel to the integrative spiral that occurred in

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

<sup>28</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 145-46.

<sup>29</sup> Willy Brandt, *Begegnungen und Einsichten. Die Jahre 1960-1975* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1976), 348, cited in Karl Kaiser and Hans-Peter Schwarz, *America and Western Europe: Problems and Prospects* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1977), 229.

the pre-1914 alliances. Such a spiral may occur in a multipolar system because alliance commitments are always somewhat in doubt; hence—especially during periods of rising tension—there are tendencies to strengthen and expand commitments in order to guard against abandonment, tendencies that at the same time generate and are reinforced by an insecurity spiral between adversaries. In a bipolar alliance such as NATO, the basic alliance commitment is not in doubt since it is structurally ordained; there is little scope or incentive to strengthen it by acts of policy, and there is hence no integrative spiral. An insecurity spiral may develop independently in the adversary game, and NATO's policy cohesion may increase in response to common perceptions of a rising external threat, but these processes are not additionally driven by fears of desertion by allies.<sup>30</sup>

#### THE CURRENT NATO CRISIS AND THE SECURITY DILEMMA

The present conflict between the United States and its European allies is chiefly a disagreement about how to deal with the adversary security dilemma. Each side of the alliance prefers a different strategy toward the Soviet Union, and each either advocates or independently pursues its own preferred strategy. The United States prefers a "D" strategy of toughness and confrontation; the Europeans generally a moderate "C" strategy of conciliation. Their strategies in the alliance game are consistent with, though more or less incidental to, their favored strategies in the adversary game. The United States perceives itself as increasing its support for its allies by building up its capability for deterrence and defense, in Europe as well as in peripheral areas where it perceives European interests to be at least as great as its own. The Europeans are divided, but mostly skeptical about U.S. nuclear policies. They resist U.S. pressures to increase their own conventional forces; they also resist U.S. tendencies to make *détente* a hostage to Soviet behavior in the third world, and they obstruct Washington's attempts to apply economic sanctions against the Soviets.

Some of the reasons for this divergence are extraneous to the present

<sup>30</sup> Conversely, it ought to be easier for the bipolar superpowers than for multipolar adversaries to dampen or avoid insecurity spirals by conciliating each other, since their conciliation is so much less constrained by alliance concerns. In the pre-1914 decade, Sir Edward Grey empathized with Germany's insecurities and fears of encirclement; he realized that the steady tightening of the Entente was provoking her, but he could do little about it because he feared abandonment by Russia and France if he tried. The U.S. and the Soviet Union do not have a similar problem. This is not to say that it is easy to escape from or weaken insecurity spirals in a bipolar system—it is merely easier because the attempt involves significant risks in the adversary game only.

theme—notably, the rise in Europe's economic strength (which has generated a new spirit of assertiveness against the U.S. in the security as well as the economic fields), and a declining faith in America's leadership capacities. A rough assessment of the weights that the parties attach to the "goods" and "bads" of the composite security dilemma and of why these weights have changed, may provide a further explanation. The reasons fall into four somewhat overlapping categories: (1) divergent images of the motives and intentions of the adversary; (2) different valuations of détente; (3) European perceptions of a declining credibility of the U.S. deterrent in light of the Soviet Union's achievement of nuclear parity; and (4) a shift of Soviet aggressive adventures to the third world, which has precipitated a conflict between the global interests of the United States and the more limited perspectives of the European allies. These changes have affected both the alliance dilemma and the adversary dilemma, but mostly the latter.

The perceptions and value loadings on the adversary dilemma have changed sharply for Europe since the early seventies.<sup>31</sup> Most importantly, of course, the political and economic gains from détente have substantially increased the incentive to conciliate the Soviets. The European states see no "resolve reputation" costs in conciliation because they perceive Soviet intentions as essentially defensive, possibly because the Soviets have not been aggressive in Europe for more than two decades. This image may be partly a wishful one, supported by the benefits from détente.

The "goods" and "bads" of a tough strategy toward the Soviet Union have also changed with a net increase for the "bads." For the Europeans, the deterrent value of firmness has declined because of their pacific image of the Soviets, while the danger of provoking an insecurity spiral through excessive firmness has increased. Europe is disposed to invoke the "1914 analogy": the greatest danger arises not from the powerful adversary, but from the dynamics of conflict itself, which might produce a "war that nobody wanted."<sup>32</sup> Finally, too tough a stance might undermine prospects for arms control, the centerpiece of détente.

American perceptions and values in the adversary dilemma have changed in the opposite direction. Viewing Soviet behavior and détente

<sup>31</sup> The terms "European" and "American" are intended to refer to the apparently dominant views among European and American elites. Obviously, there is a wide spectrum of opinion on both sides of the Atlantic.

<sup>32</sup> The 1914 analogy is poorly taken, since that spiral fed on factors peculiar to a multipolar system—notably high and equal interdependence among allies. Also, recent historiography has suggested that World War I was a war that "somebody" (Germany) did want. See, for example, Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967).



from a global perspective, the United States began to devalue détente in the late seventies after Soviet advances in the third world, and virtually wrote it off after the invasion of Afghanistan. The Reagan Administration perceives the Soviet Union as an inherently aggressive state that will seize every opportunity to expand by force, and will interpret any conciliation as weakness. Accordingly, deterrence and firmness are valued more highly, while the risk of stimulating Soviet insecurity and a spiral of rising tension has been downgraded, if not ignored. On the economic side, a strategy of economic deprivation, designed to weaken the Soviet Union's military potential and economy, has been substituted for the former strategy of inducing Soviet accommodation by weaving the U.S.S.R. into a web of economic interdependence.

In the alliance game, the Europeans worry principally about entrapment. They fear that excessive U.S. bellicosity might set off a severe insecurity spiral with the Soviet Union, which could explode into crisis or violence. A more specific concern is that of extraregional entrapment—being caught up in a superpower conflict caused by an American over-reaction to Soviet advances in the third world. Talk by U.S. military planners of “horizontal escalation” has no doubt fueled this anxiety. However, the fear probably is not so much one of being pulled into an actual war begun in some peripheral area as it is that tensions generated in such areas might become general and destroy détente in Europe. Another cost would be a tightening of the Soviet hold on the East European countries, ending the dream of at least a partial integration of all of Europe. (European concern about “nuclear entrapment” is a special case which will be discussed below.)

The alliance dilemma for the European allies is how to escape or minimize these risks of entrapment without seriously risking some form of partial U.S. abandonment. The latter might consist of troop withdrawals, American downgrading of the priority of European defense in favor of other areas such as the Persian Gulf, or a further drift to unilateralism. Although the European alliance dilemma is somewhat sharper than the U.S. dilemma discussed earlier, it is still not severe because any such partial abandonment by the United States would fall well short of total withdrawal of the latter's commitment or its nuclear deterrent.

### THE NUCLEAR DIMENSION

I have chosen to treat the issue of nuclear strategy separately because it poses the risks of abandonment and entrapment (and consequently the alliance dilemma itself) in different forms. Simply put, nuclear aban-



donment means the loss of U.S. will to use its strategic weapons in defense of Western Europe; more precisely, that the credibility of U.S. deterrence drops below the level required to deter the Soviets. Europe has had reason to worry about this since the Soviet Union achieved a second-strike capability in the late fifties or early sixties: the recent advent of full parity apparently operates as a kind of perceptual threshold that has greatly heightened European anxiety. Of course, European concerns about such "decoupling" are not so much fears of actual U.S. nuclear abandonment as they are worries that U.S. strategic nuclear forces are no longer effective in deterring the Soviets. American proposals for a policy of no first use do raise fears of deliberate nuclear abandonment.

Thus, to Europe nuclear abandonment means either a withdrawal of the U.S. nuclear deterrent or an evaporation of its credibility. Nuclear entrapment means the actual use of nuclear weapons in case deterrence fails, especially in a way that makes Europe the principal battleground. Thus, the tension between nuclear abandonment and entrapment is virtually equivalent to the familiar tension between deterrence and defense, the latter defined as war-fighting, or a capability and doctrine for fighting a nuclear war "rationally." Europeans have always favored pure deterrence over war-fighting postures. Some, if not most, probably (if secretly) would prefer a strategy of pure nuclear bluff: deterrence by a threat of massive retaliation, but no retaliation at all if the threat is ineffective. Nuclear war-fighting and limited nuclear war strategies favored by the United States are resisted for at least three reasons: (1) they imply a greater likelihood, and greater degree, of devastation in Europe than a strategy of assured destruction, which seems to hold out at least some possibility of a nuclear war being conducted intercontinentally, "over Europe's head"; (2) they might encourage the U.S. to initiate nuclear war too casually in the event of conventional attack or to take excessive risks in a crisis; and (3) they are provocative to the Soviet Union, both politically and militarily.

The nuclear issue presents the alliance dilemma to the Europeans in its severest form, and it is the issue about which Europe is most ambivalent or divided. By itself, the dilemma is whether to support American efforts to strengthen extended deterrence, including intermediate nuclear forces (INF), at the risk of greater destruction in Europe if deterrence fails, or to resist these efforts, thereby sacrificing some deterrence in the hope of limiting damage to Europe. As on the political side of the dilemma, there is a trade-off between the risks of abandonment and entrapment. The nuclear dilemma links up to the broader security dilemma through the risk of alienating the United States if its

preferences are opposed, and of damaging the Europe-Soviet détente if they are accepted. A further link is provided by the option of conciliating the Soviets: if deterrence is weakened by parity, perhaps the U.S.S.R.'s incentives to attack can be weakened by increasing its stake in economic intercourse with Western Europe—even if this means increasing Europe's vulnerability to Soviet influence.

European governments have tentatively resolved the nuclear dilemma by a contingent acceptance of INF, intended both to recouple the U.S. strategic deterrent to Europe and to balance off the Soviet SS-20. Damage to the European détente will be minimized, they hope, with only American fingers on the triggers. They tacitly, if reluctantly, accept the U.S. war-fighting doctrine. The package is rounded out by political assurances to the Soviets—or “reinsurance,” as former chancellor Schmidt called it—presumably against either lower deterrence credibility if INF is not deployed or against Soviet ire if it is. Deployment was made contingent on a prior effort at arms control; these talks, at this writing, have broken down and deployment is underway, but whether it will be completed as planned is uncertain.

This is not the place to rehearse all the arguments, paradoxes, and political currents generated by the INF issue. It is of interest for our present theme in that it presents Europe's nuclear alliance dilemma in quintessential form: it is seen simultaneously (or by different groups) as insurance against American nuclear abandonment and as a source of European nuclear entrapment.<sup>33</sup> Probably INF would shore up deterrence marginally. In contemplating a conventional attack, the Soviets probably would perceive a greater likelihood of U.S. retaliation against their homeland with nuclear weapons based in Europe than with intercontinental ones, since the U.S. could at least hope the Soviets would limit their counter-retaliation to Europe. (Indeed, Moscow would have a strong incentive to so limit it—to act as if the physical location of the weapons rather than the nationality of the trigger finger dictated the direction of their response—in the hope of avoiding setting off the whole U.S. strategic arsenal.) Alternatively, the Soviet Union might feel that an attack on Europe would have to start with a preemptive assault on INF, and would shrink from that for fear that so provocative an act would trigger full-scale U.S. retaliation. But both of these deterrent arguments lead straight to the point made by the European Left that INF means greater damage to Europe in case deterrence fails, and the first argument supports the view that it makes the United States more

<sup>33</sup> A similar point is made by Robert J. Art in “Fixing Atlantic Bridges,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 46 (Spring 1982), 77.

willing to *initiate* nuclear war. The Left in the European political spectrum tends to focus on the danger of nuclear entrapment that INF poses, whereas the Right emphasizes its reduction of the risk of nuclear abandonment. No doubt the moderates feel the dilemma most intensely.

### CONCLUSION

The security dilemma occurs in relations between allies as well as between adversaries. In a multipolar system, the alliance and adversary dilemmas are of roughly equal importance and are closely intertwined. Choices in each dilemma are constrained not only by predicted or feared effects internal to itself, but also by side effects in the other dilemma. In particular, strategy choices in the adversary game—conciliation or firmness—are constrained by fears of abandonment or entrapment by allies.

The alliance dilemma is more severe in a multipolar than in a bipolar system because high mutual dependence coexists with plausible realignment options. An ally's defection is a calamity, yet distinctly possible. Conciliating the adversary, or weakening one's support of the ally to guard against entrapment, are both constrained by fears of abandonment. But attempts to insure against abandonment by supporting the ally and avoiding accommodation with the opponent increase the risk of entrapment; hence the dilemma. On the whole, however, abandonment worries outweigh entrapment fears. The mutual fear of abandonment tends to promote convergence of policy—typically convergence on mutual support and firmness toward the adversary.

The alliance security dilemma is less severe in a bipolar system because—although fears of entrapment exist—the risks of abandonment are low. The adversary dilemma dominates; strategy choices in that dilemma are not much constrained by side effects in the alliance game. The allies may adopt independent, indeed contradictory, policies toward the opponent with little fear that the partner will defect in consequence. Thus, the tendency is toward divergence rather than convergence of policy. Although minor policy differences may be resolved by consensus norms, major differences tend to persist because there is little structural pressure toward their resolution. And their persistence does not seriously threaten the existence of the alliance.<sup>34</sup>

It follows that those who see NATO's current crisis as heralding its collapse tend to confuse cause and effect. Although the disagreements

<sup>34</sup> These remarks are, in effect, an elaboration of Kenneth Waltz's axiom that flexibility of alignment in multipolarity produces rigidity of strategy, while rigidity of alignment in bipolarity promotes flexibility of strategy. Waltz (fn. 25).

have arisen from a variety of proximate causes, they persist largely because the alliance *cannot* break up. Since NATO is a product of the bipolar structure of the system, it cannot collapse or change basically until that structure changes. This structural guarantee against disintegration encourages unilateralism and inhibits compromise. Policy conflicts may not be resolved because the cost of not resolving them does not include a risk to the alliance itself. In contrast, the structural instability of multipolar alliances—the fact that they *could* collapse—tended to promote conflict resolution and policy consistency among their members.

The only way in which intra-NATO conflict might conceivably bring about the alliance's demise is through a radical revision of the U.S. conception of its interests such that it is no longer subject to structural compulsion. It is conceivable that the U.S., disillusioned with European obstinacy, might relapse into hemispheric isolation. This would mean recognizing, as Robert Tucker and others have argued,<sup>35</sup> that America's physical security in the nuclear age is not dependent on keeping Western Europe out of Soviet hands; it would also indicate a substantial devaluation of the cultural, economic, and other nonsecurity values that have motivated the U.S. commitment. It is also conceivable that Western Europe might unite and take full responsibility for its own defense and nuclear deterrence. This would amount to a change in the structure of the international system, rendering the alliance irrelevant or unnecessary. The likelihood of either of these events in the foreseeable future is extremely low. The alliance will survive, while its internal conflicts will continue to produce much argument but little resolution until the Soviet Union once again appears threatening to Europe or nonthreatening to U.S. interests elsewhere, or until political changes in either the United States or Europe (or in both) generate more harmonious policy preferences toward the adversary.

<sup>35</sup> Robert W. Tucker and Linda Wrigley, eds., *The Atlantic Alliance and Its Critics* (New York: Praeger, 1983), chap. 6.