



*Marco Cesa. Allies Yet Rivals: International Politics in 18th Century Europe. Translated by Patrick John Barr. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.*

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Alliances have, and likely always will have, a common feature of international diplomacy for a number of reasons. First, the primary objective of any government is defence and states will attempt to heighten security through international agreements. Second, military and economic power is unevenly distributed among states and weaker

powers will unavoidably gravitate toward stronger powers in search of increased protection and commercial benefits. Third, an alliance can occasionally be the most effective means of tying the hands of a rival. Despite the variety of objectives that encourage the formation of alliances and the numerous forms that international agreements can assume, Marco Cesa argues that international relations theory has consistently recognized the existence of only one type of alliance: those agreements between states that are designed to confront an aggressive and dangerous “common enemy.” Above all, this viewpoint has one-dimensionally characterized alliances as unions of separate forces, policy-coordination organizations, or as takers of joint action against some third party. The “internal” dimensions of alliances, or the complex negotiations between allies, have consequently been overshadowed by the “external” dimensions, or the measures implemented by the allies to confront the threatening power. Nevertheless, states are almost always involved in ambiguous and clandestine diplomatic manoeuvres against not only enemies, but allies as well. Through an examination of this “darker side” of alliances, Cesa attempts to highlight the shortcomings of traditional international relations theory and, at the same time, offer an alternative framework for the examination of inter-ally relations.

The proposed framework is well situated in the existing international relations literature and both the advantages and disadvantages of traditional theoretical conceptions of alliances are expertly analyzed. “Realist” scholars of international relations, Cesa writes, have traditionally focused primarily on those alliances in which states aggregate military power and seamlessly cooperate to achieve previously agreed-upon objectives. Unsurprisingly, these examinations have tended to deemphasize both the complexity of negotiations that occur between allies and the potentially divisive national interests that emerge throughout conflicts. “Neorealist” scholars have similarly failed to adequately describe the internal dimension of alliances. The systematic-structural approach adopted in these studies has effectively accounted for alliances that result from power imbalances between states, but, like the realists, this framework is capable of examining only the external functions of an alliance. However, certain aspects of traditional international relations theory can still assist in explaining inter-ally relations. Cesa admits that the realist conception of power among states and the understanding of both competition and conflict in the international system can be productively applied to an examination of the internal dimension. The neorealist

principle of anarchy and the absence of an organizing authority, on the other hand, can help to reveal motivations behind international agreements and the subsequent scepticism among allies. Still, only components of these theories are considered useful and Cesa contends that any framework for examining alliances should focus first and foremost on the main purpose of an international agreement: the “conformity” of another state.

Since states can use numerous methods to circumscribe the actions of other powers and render the diplomatic manoeuvres of allies more predictable, Cesa proposes four criteria for distinguishing between types of alliances: the nature of the cause of the alliance; the context in which the cause emerges; the simultaneous existence of other national objectives; and the relative military and economic power of the allies. These criteria are then combined with two traditional international relations alliance “dilemmas.” First, the “alliance power dilemma” acknowledges the concurrent fears that an ally will become too powerful and, as a result, exercise more independence and even establish control over the alliance and that an ally will become too weak and therefore be incapable of contributing to the achievement of the common objectives. Second, the “alliance security dilemma” recognizes the twin dangers of “abandonment” and “entrapment.” On the one hand, if too much distance is placed between the allies, then the risk that one ally might abandon the other at the next opportunity is heightened. On the other hand, if an ally establishes an overly intimate relationship with the other ally, then the former power risks becoming entrapped in unwanted diplomatic crises or even military conflicts. Using these theoretical constructs and the four criteria, Cesa considers the primary variables for the examination of alliances to be the configuration of interests of the allies and the distribution of military and economic power among the states. Alliances can therefore be “symmetrical,” with both states possessing similar power, or “asymmetrical,” with one state possessing a disproportionate amount of power. At the same time, alliances can either be “heterogeneous,” with each state possessing dissimilar goals, or “homogeneous,” with both states assigning a secondary role to national objectives in favour of the common cause. These two dimensions represent the dynamics of “dependence” and “exchange” in an alliance.

The resulting four alliance types – 1) the symmetrical-homogeneous or “aggregation” alliance; 2) the asymmetrical-homogeneous or “guarantee” alliance; 3) the asymmetrical-heterogeneous or “hegemonic” alliance; and 4) the symmetrical-heterogeneous or “deadlocked” alliance – are tested with four case studies from the eighteenth century. This period was selected because of the existence of a number of powerful states, the inability of a single power to establish a hegemonic position, and the absence of ideological conflict. These three factors enable common causes and national objectives to be separately analyzed. Moreover, the several coalition conflicts during the eighteenth century provided countless opportunities for states to take advantage of diplomatic “open spaces” and pursue alternative policies. The four case studies therefore correspond to the four alliance types: the agreement between Great Britain and the United Provinces between 1702 and 1756 represents a typical guarantee alliance; the Anglo-French alliance in the first half of the eighteenth century represents a hegemonic alliance; the agreement between Great Britain and Prussia during the Seven Years War represents an aggregation alliance; and the Austro-French alliance during the second half of the eighteenth century represents a deadlocked alliance. Above all, Cesa argues that the functioning of an alliance depends most of all on the cooperation between states, the relative power positions of the allies, the methods used by each state to achieve the “conformity” of another state, and the importance and role of the common enemy.

Although Cesa effectively highlights the complexity of inter-ally relations and the conduct of coalition conflicts, the proposed framework possesses numerous shortcomings. The absence of ideological motivation in the eighteenth century, considered to provide an advantage for the examination of the internal dimension of alliances, has not been enjoyed by scholars of most other historical periods. The so-called Holy Alliance between Austria, Prussia and Russia following the Napoleonic Wars and the Warsaw Treaty of 1955 are only two prominent instances of more recent, ideologically-motivated alliances. Similarly, hegemonic states have frequently emerged in the international system and the United States in the post-Communist world is a contemporary example of one power establishing a dominating economic and military position. Cesa admits that the proposed framework is intended as an initial examination of the internal dimension and that other criteria and possibly even other alliance types might be required. More complex international relations phenomena most certainly

need to be considered if the proposed framework is to be extended to other geographical regions or historical periods.

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