

## POLITICAL AND MILITARY ALLIANCES

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***Abstract:** Considering international affairs and the role they play in ensuring national security, the paper here is a practical argument upon the role and mainly the importance exerted by the political military alliances. NATO stands as a chosen model, the most representative and vivid alliance; its role is being developed in the present day political context.*

***Keywords:** alliance; national interest; military security; national identity.*

**T**he theme of the security of states is associated with the theories of reason of state. This concept has emerged as a normative principle superior to other individual or group interests in society and has become a regulator principle of international behavior for any state. In a democracy, the structure of private interests may occur under the conditions of defining a public interest. David Clinton, in “*The National Interest: Normative Foundations*”, article published in „The Review of Politics”, vol. 48, no. 4, University of Notre Dame, 1986, emphasized that public interest becomes public good. Defining interest contributes to the fulfillment by the State of its obligations to protect and promote social good. Externally, this function of the state includes the ability to protect society from external threats and to engage in mutual cooperation with other countries.

In foreign affairs and security politics the discussion is mainly about **national interest**. National interest makes the state develop and maintain an optimum capacity to protect society and to promote its own public good. Security is also a public good, and it is the essential one. National interest relates to the regulator principle of the foreign and security policy, which considers the common good of society, the ultimate goal of diplomatic,

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economic and military actions. In this sense, foreign and security policy promotes the interests of each state (peace or war, the national good, economic, national prosperity etc.). We can distinguish: vital interests, major interests, primary interests, fundamental interests, ordinary interests etc. **National security becomes a state's ability to maintain and promote national identity and functional integrity.**

In recent decades, the state of security – insecurity (according to Barry Buzan) is determined based on the analysis of vulnerabilities and threats. Vulnerability is an external characteristic of security, while risk is an internal one. Vulnerability is associated with geographic location, size of territory, population, while risk is the active part ("an activated" vulnerability) and perceived as such. Vulnerability is determined strategically, risk is identified from a political point of view. The national security policy can be directed inward, in order to reduce vulnerabilities, and outward, in order to reduce risks and avoid threats. In essence, vulnerability is an indicator that determines the security needs of a state; risk is a manifested vulnerability and threat is a risk produced.

#### **Military Security**

Military threats shall be placed on the central position in national security. Military intervention endangers all the components of the state: the physical basis (territory) can be occupied (partially or totally) or affected as an ecosystem, the institutional structure can be dismembered, and the idea of the state may be seriously undermined. The exclusive use of violence of the state is recognized as the only legitimate form of employment of force in solving internal and external security matters. Threats, presented as foreign military prerogatives, emphasize the relevance of the use of force in international relations. When the threat is external in nature, military security concerns the state's military capacity to cope with aggression. Defining and building military capacity should be made according to vulnerabilities.

#### **Political Security. Undermining Authority**

Political security concerns the organizational establishment of social order. Threats are directed towards state sovereignty. It comes to threats nonmilitary in nature, because all the vulnerabilities, risks and threats are defined politically. Economic, environmental, human security etc. is added.

In the Cold War era, security was defined as a delicate balance of the military arsenals of the two sides. Even today the natural state of the

international system is not the state of security but instead that of insecurity. In the realist/neorealist view international relations are first and foremost about **power and security**. The focus is on states, the power they have and, given the implications of anarchy, insecurity. Obtaining security must be accepted, according to the realist school horizon, rather as the management of insecurity than that of elimination thereof. An optimum control over insecurity ensures a relative stability of the international system, stability specific to the balance of power.

With respect to political-military alliances, the determining factor in alliance formation is the distribution of power in the international system. States decide to bandwagon. Three types of behavior of states in the international system are noted: **balancing**, **bandwagoning** and **détente**. Bandwagoning is justified when: states may bandwagon with threatening states or coalitions hoping to be able to avoid an attack against them, (defensive bandwagoning); states may bandwagon with the dominant part in a war in order to participate in sharing the benefits of victory (offensive bandwagoning). Balancing appears in the case of minor powers, small states, their union in view of countering a strong, threatening state in order to discourage it, while détente represents the development of peaceful relations in order to reduce tensions. Analyses based on power balancing, interest balancing or threats balancing theories are used (see the contributions of K. Waltz, S. Walt, R. Schweller). The most important factor in making alliance decisions is represented by the compatibility of political objectives or interests and not the imbalance of power or the threat.

Alliances represent one of the most important means of acquiring security by a state, taking into account the anarchic characteristic of the international system. The military ones, in particular, are the result of formal agreements between two or more states, usually of treaties.

This is an important point in defining alliances because it is the one that explicitly states the conditions under which assistance is granted, which is the weight of military support granted by each allied, the territory covered by the alliance, the threat against which the alliance is constituted and other details of this type. These details make a fundamental difference between alliances and collective security organizations, difference that concentrates on two levels: on the one side, **collective security organizations**, despite their formal character, do not specify in their articles of association the

obligation of intervention of the other participants within it, if one of the parties is attacked; unlike them, **alliances entail the obligation of Allies intervention for the party attacked**, since by signing the Treaty establishing the alliance, states promise their specific mutual military assistance; moreover, alliances specify even the exact timeframe of allies intervention, the actual forces to be deployed, the areas to be protected etc.

NATO is a classic example of an alliance. It specifies clearly the foundation of military cooperation between the parties (the defense against common threat), the weight of each participant in the alliance, the territory to be defended, the circumstances under which the obligation of intervention is triggered (article 5) etc.

The specialized literature differentiates between an actual alliance and security / collective defense organizations<sup>1</sup>. The difference is that the treaty of alliance implies a common enemy, clearly identified (in many cases clearly specifying against whom the agreement applies, the conditions that require intervention, mandatory participation, time required, the amount of force that must be mobilized by each ally, the allied territory to be defended) whereas collective security refers to potential adversaries unspecified and involves group solidarity against all military threats from some third party.

Another defining feature for the alliance is its purpose, which is a **fundamentally military one or to maximize security**. This is what clearly distinguishes military alliances from any other forms of associations between states based on economic, cultural, religious or other types of criteria. In this sense, NATO is fundamentally different from organizations of a profound economic nature such as the EU or NAFTA. In terms of membership, alliances are formed only between states, excluding transnational political and economic entities, international organizations, NGOs, revolutionary groups, guerrillas or others. Especially this element of the definition eliminates the possibility of alliance between national governments and sub-national or transnational groups or entities that may activate at some point in the international system.

**Alliances have as main purpose the concentration of military forces of the Allies against a common enemy from outside the alliance.**

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliance*, Iași, The European Institute, 2008, p. 23, apud Andrei Miroiu, Radu-Sebastian Ungureanu, *Handbook of International Relations*, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2006, pp. 210-211.

It reduces the likelihood of a conflict between the allies, which is one of the benefits rather than the goals of the alliance. From this perspective, the alliance is a tool at the hands of states, as rational actors in the international system, to increase their capacities or to block the opponent's intention to increase its capacities. Against this element one may object that, alliances are not always necessarily directed against a state, they can also be directed against phenomena in international relations.

This is the case of the Holy Alliance of the eighteenth century, which was more an alliance with an ideological perspective on how stability in Europe should have been preserved, aiming to prevent the raising of any revolutionary state with continental hegemony claims. Just like it was the Anglo-French Entente formed in 1904, which was the most durable alliance in history being based on a set of shared values. The coalition triggered by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington is one against an international phenomenon – terrorism – that threatens the security of the entire international system, not just that of a particular state.

Another element of the definition of alliance is reciprocity, without being a required element, because not all alliances are based on it, but most have it in as central element being considered a means of increasing the benefits of the alliance. This principle of reciprocity gives greater consistency and coherence to an alliance, relying on a fundamental conditioning of the benefits of the alliance concerned. Along with the formal character of the alliance, reciprocity gives a legal and moral obligation to respect the commitment made through the alliance. A sixth element of an alliance is its political character, expressed at least on a secondary level. Typically, in an alliance there is some expectation among allies beyond the actual scope of the agreement: they expect that alliance partners support them politically in their diplomatic efforts even in the absence of a specific requirement stipulated by the Treaty in this respect.

As a final element of the definition we refer to **the interests that the alliance is built, maintained and consolidated on**. Interests make an alliance be viable or useless, to be to a greater or lesser extent beneficial, they can even cause or prevent the establishment of an alliance. Alliances tend to be formed between states with common interests. However, when faced with an identification of the allied interests or when the interests of the allied parties are diverging to great extent, the alliance becomes useless. In

an alliance there are always common interests that were there before the alliance, common interests of the Allies resulting from the alliance itself, interests that are built over time, as the alliance is maintained and strengthened. Generally speaking, allies interests are only partially, but significantly shared. Alliances are concluded under international treaties.

*Balancing.* Historical evidence reveals four elements related to the formation of alliances. The first one: external threats are the most common cause of international alliances. Second, balancing is more common than bandwagoning. Third, states not only balance power, they also balance threats. Although superpowers choose their alliance partners, primarily to balance each other, regional powers are generally indifferent to the balance of power. Instead, states form alliances, often in response to threats coming from other regional actors. Offensive capacities and intentions increase the likelihood that others join forces in opposition, although the precise impact of these factors is difficult to measure.

Alliances formed to balance the threat can take many different forms. In a typical form, states try to resist threats, adding to its strength that of the other State. Thus, superpowers have sought allies to oppose mutual threat (by purchasing military bases or other useful military supplies) or to stop the rival from expanding its influence. On the other hand, regional states have sought external help, most commonly from a superpower, but sometimes also from some local actors when they were engaged in an intense rivalry or in an active military conflict<sup>2</sup>.

The history of the alliances supports the assertion according to which these states act primarily to balance against each other. All the commitments of the powers considered, except for two of them were formed primarily to counter the opposing power.<sup>3</sup> The remaining cases fall in total agreement with the general aim of weakening the regional position of the other powers.

*Bandwagoning is a behavior that may underlie the formation of alliances.* Although the states almost always choose their allies to balance the threat, this behavior is not a universal one. In certain situations, the

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<sup>2</sup> The most obvious examples are the protector-protected relationships that enabled Arabs and Israelis to support their rivalry, the help offered to belligerent parties in the civil war in Yemen and the Arab coalition that fought the October War of 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *Op.cit.*, p. 211.

generally low tendency of states to join forces with the dominant power may increase to some extent.

States bandwagon when there is no prospect of useful allies, because they will face the threat by themselves if they choose to resist. The lack of efficient allies is evident in most cases of bandwagoning.

From here emerges the fact that states prefer balancing bandwagoning, even when faced with significant threats. The rare cases of bandwagoning are the result of a series of circumstances and because bandwagoning is especially the response of weak states, it's unlikely to significantly alter the global balance of power.

Besides economic and military capacities, threats of subversive actions or other forms of political pressure can be as strong a determinant for a coalition. Although the distribution of capabilities is extremely important for superpowers, it plays a very small role in alliance choices by regional actors. Despite the fact that geographical proximity is very important, the evidence does not show a linear relationship between distance and threat level. The lack of linearity is due to the fact that many rivalries in the Middle East were coordinated through political channels (propaganda and subversion), where military power (and thus geography) played a minor role.

The states' tendency to prefer balancing is explained by the fact that balancing against a strong state may be the most prudent response if assumptions related to intentions are inaccurate. Joining a defensive alliance to oppose a potential threat can be a protection if the state in question is actually an aggressive one. Such an alliance will be unnecessary if the state in question turns out to be a peaceful one. Instead bandwagoning can fail catastrophically if one chooses to ally with a strong state, and later discovers that its intentions are actually hostile. Therefore, balancing will be considered a more secure option when intentions can not be definitely determined.

*The Implications of National (State) Security on Global Security.* The durability of global security, one of the pressing imperatives of the present, has a solid support in the security of states. Beginning with major powers that are concerned with strengthening strategic stability and ending with small states, apparently even more eager to preserve national security, they are all vitally interested in strengthening a climate of peace and global confidence. In their extensive efforts to develop cooperation on the non-

proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their launching devices, to tighten up regulations in the field of the fight against international terrorism and other cross-border threats, states have a strong and ongoing commitment.

Through an active, dynamic national security policy, state security manages a complex involvement in international security. In recent years, defense policies of the national territory, states' preventive diplomacy policies, are combined with offensive policies to promote their own interests that support global stability in different regions of the world.

In Europe, for example, the EU achieved the European Security and Defense Policy, the objectives of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, maintain stability in the Balkans and the Caucasian-Caspian area of the Black Sea, fight against terrorism, and NATO member states participate in the collective defense effort and in the construction of the EU military dimension, as well as in fulfilling the commitments of partnership and cooperation with the other countries of the world, to build trust and cooperation at regional and continental levels.

States are directly involved in restructuring the global security system, economic cooperation and adapting rules and principles of international law to developments caused by the globalization process, in the work of the UN, OSCE, EU, WTO. At OSCE level states contribute to improving political, economic and environmental security, promote multi-ethnicity, manage crisis areas, actively address security issues through cooperation, remove tensions and conflicts, maintain regional and international real stability, make efforts for the democratization of other geopolitical spaces, promote effective cooperation at multilateral level.

From the analysis of state, national security implications on global security an interrogation like this can not be missing: What is its role in strengthening the global security system, the development at a national level of a consistent, lean and versatile tool as well as achieving and optimizing interoperability with its allies and partners? Undoubtedly an organizational structure able to generate immediate, decisive results, at operational and strategic level, especially externally, in theaters of action outside of the ordinary areas of responsibility, is a tool with an important role in strengthening global security. Or, in this respect, national transformation efforts, aligned with those of NATO, for example, make the military of a Member State an institution of great leanness, mobility and flexibility,



capable of leading operations across the entire spectrum of conflict, rapidly deployable and capable of engaging in network operations, technologically superior, fully supported logistically by means of an integrated logistics system.

With such versatile military capabilities suitable for deployment and capabilities support in the theater, but also for the degree of use of that availability, the military can perform complex missions for maintaining the territorial security and stability of the State concerned, but also for strengthening Alliance capabilities to support global interests, in terms of the diversity and maximum severity of current century threats.

National security implications on the global one can however cover other areas of activity as well. If enhancing and developing the cultural, scientific and human potential is an essential component and source of national security, then they have a significant impact on global security. It is eloquent how states, faced with the hasty offensive of cultural globalization, retain, along with territorial integrity, cultural unity through programs aimed at the local and regional assertion of distinct cultural identities.

The increasing decay of rights in the post-Cold War period, of the concept of national security in the face of collective security did not eliminate, as unfounded, the valences of the former in the context of fast growth and diversification of cross-border risks and threats. The fight against insecurity, corruption, tax fraud and smuggling, organized crime and terrorism forced a vigorous and timely government offensive together with the civil society, NGOs, public institutions, on the directions mentioned by the national security strategy, having a strong impact in terms of strengthening the State concerned as a pillar of security in subregional, regional and, implicitly, global security.



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