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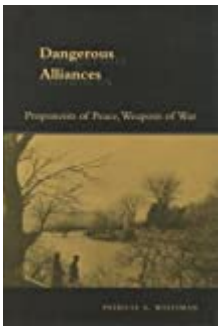

Patricia A. Weitsman. *Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. xii + 244 pp. $49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-4866-7.

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"Hold Your Friends Close, But Your Enemies Closer"

In this work, Patricia Weitsman attempts to create a unifying theory on alliance formation by synthesizing a variety of ideas garnered from different schools of thought in international relations. Marrying concepts from both the realist and institutionalist traditions, she seeks to move the discussion about alliances away from the emphasis on external threats and the "capability aggregation assumption" (i.e., states form alliances to enhance their diplomatic and military power) (p. 17). Instead, Weitsman focuses on the internal dynamics of alliances and the way in which these organizations often originate as a means of managing conflict among contracting states. Different threat levels, she asserts, produce a spectrum of responses, ranging from hedging (a minimal commitment to potential allies or enemies to keep one's options open), to tethering (a more substantive relationship with an open adversary to prevent the outbreak of hostilities), to balancing (seeking an alliance with another state to counter the threat posed by a third party), and finally, to bandwagoning (one state subordinates itself in an alliance to the state that threatens its very survival). Ironically enough, as she stresses, tethering alliances, which seek to keep the peace among constituent parties, may lead to increased instability due to the "alliance paradox." Those left outside such alliances may feel threatened enough to form or tighten alliances of their own, leading to competition between alliances that enhances the chances of war.

This unusual work draws on both history and international relations, but clearly lies within the latter discipline. Contemporary concerns clearly inform it, as Weitsman's discussion of NATO in both the introduction and conclusion indicates. Like most works in political science, it also concentrates on developing universal theories. At the same time, Weitsman develops and elaborates upon her theories by drawing examples from European diplomacy between 1871 and 1918. For the case studies that constitute the meat of the book, she focuses on the major alliances of this period: the two Dreikaiserbunds, the Dual Alliance, the Triple Alliance, the Franco-Russian Alliance, and the Triple Entente.

The practice of tethering is the most important theme of this book. Weitsman notes that several of the alliances she studies originated from a desire to contain enemies by "keeping an eye on them." For instance, she asserts

that if the Dreikaiserbunds represented attempts by Germany to hedge between Austria-Hungary and Russia, both the Austro-Hungarians and the Russians saw these alliances as a means of tethering each other. The addition of Italy to the Triple Alliance, the Entente Cordiale, and the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, she argues, also represent examples of tethering. Weitsman finds the genesis of such alliances interesting because they have important implications for the character of these diplomatic arrangements. Indeed, she concludes that where the internal threat within an alliance is high and the external threat low (as is often the case with tethering), both commitment and cohesion are low. Conversely, where the internal threat is low and the external threat high, both commitment and cohesion rise correspondingly.

Since it describes what they have already grasped intuitively, diplomatic historians will probably not find anything original in this argument, but Weitsman employs a useful framework and vocabulary to describe a wide set of diplomatic circumstances. Her emphasis on tethering also provides an important reminder that not all alliances arise in response to external threats. The overall theory makes sense on its face, but when it comes to relating theory to events, a variety of difficulties emerge.

It is not entirely clear that some of her examples constitute cases of tethering. Germany took the initiative in forming both the Dreikaiserbund and the Triple Alliance as a means of keeping the peace among quarrelsome allies; these antagonistic allies themselves showed little interest in reaching an agreement on their own. Moreover, Weitsman never clarifies how tethering works or if it even works at all. Many of the examples she presents culminated in failure, with the exception of those alliances confronted by a serious external threat, such as the Entente Cordiale.

The example of the Entente Cordiale also raises questions concerning Weitsman's definition of an alliance. Weitsman initially describes alliances as "bilateral or multilateral agreements to provide some element of security to the signatories,"a broad definition that does not distinguish between very different types of relationships and makes arrangements such as the Dual Alliance the equivalent of the Entente Cordiale (or the Triple Entente) (p. 27). The treaty that underpinned the Dual Alliance outlined specific obligations and described specific enemies while, to quote Serge Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister, the Triple Entente's "real existence is not better authenticated than the existence of the sea serpent" (p. 118). In the endnotes, Weitsman elaborates on her definition, describing an alliance "as any formal or informal agreement between two or more states intended to further (militarily) the national security of the participating states. It is a continuing security association among member states with an element of forward planning and understanding to aid member states militarily or though benevolent neutrality" (p. 188). Since the Entente Cordiale originated merely as a settlement of long-running colonial disputes, it does not seem to fit this description particularly well. The Entente quickly became something quite different, but Weitsman focuses so intently on the theory of tethering that she shows little interest in the very rapid transformation of the Entente as a response to an external threat (or the transformation of alliances in general). Indeed, she briefly notes this transformation as part of the alliance paradox, but she never thoroughly documents or investigates this point.

The emphasis on the alliance paradox and the diplomatic system as a cause of World War I points to another difficulty with this work. The period before 1914 witnessed the last years of Cabinet diplomacy, and thus most historical studies rightly stress the role of individuals and their choices. Although Weitsman appears to see Bismarck as a master of his environment, she views most other diplomats and foreign ministers as prisoners of the diplomatic system, ordained to act as they did by the rational and almost immutable laws of international relations. This bloodless history leaves little room for individual choice or responsibility, and Weitsman almost seems to intimate that the alliance paradox, not human decisions (often mistaken), played a preponderating role in contributing to war (pp. 100-101). For a theory that depends a great deal on the assessment of threats, both internal and external, Weitsman never deals with the subjective nature of such assessments–which depended largely on the perceptions of a few individuals.

The shortcomings of this approach become most evident in the treatment of a German foreign policy that grew increasingly erratic, inept, and misguided after Bismarck's departure from the helm. Decisions made by a small number of German diplomats and soldiers (such as allowing the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia to lapse in 1890, rebuffing British proposals of an alliance between 1898 and 1901, building a large fleet, and brazenly challenging the Entente Cordiale in 1905) fundamentally shaped the diplomatic system. Domestic considerations influenced many of these decisions, but poor assessments of external threats (as well as an associated inability to measure the relative strength of Germany, its allies, and

its enemies) also played an important role. Weitsman's intimation that the alliance paradox led to German insecurity does not attribute enough responsibility to German leaders who repeatedly misread the European diplomatic scene. This misreading, which contributed to the aggressive and unskillful pursuit of German ambitions, succeeded in turning the Triple Entente from a tethering alliance to one united by a powerful, overbearing, and apparently capricious external threat.

It seems difficult to assert that this short period of time, ever popular with both historians and political scientists for the study of alliance building, really provides the material from which one can issue universal statements. This difficulty becomes apparent when Weitsman uses her case studies to generalize about NATO–an organization that emerged at a time when ideology and popular opinion played a much greater role in diplomacy. Weitsman briefly mentions these forces in the examination of her case studies, but since these factors did not play a major role in diplomacy before 1914, they do not receive much notice. Perhaps a study covering a wider variety of periods and circumstances would provide a better means of testing Weitsman's provocative and intriguing set of ideas that may yet form a unifying theory on alliances.

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