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# **WARRING FRIENDS**

Alliance Restraint in  
International Politics

**Jeremy Pressman**

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*In memory of  
Goldie Pressman,  
my grandmother*



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## Warring Friends



# 1

## Alliance Restraint

**I**n the months leading up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, several close U.S. allies frenetically worked to stop the war. In different ways, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey all took actions or issued statements that sought to restrain the United States by blocking American military intervention to topple Saddam Hussein. They failed to stop the world's lone superpower.

Nearly fifty years earlier, the situation was reversed as the United States worked to restrain its British and French allies. In 1956, after Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, Britain and France considered military action against Egypt to retake control of the canal. The United States opposed Anglo-French military intervention. But the opposition of the American superpower was to no avail, and British and French military forces, along with Israeli troops, invaded Egypt.

Lest one think that allies always fail to restrain each other, the history of international politics also demonstrates the opposite tendency. In the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the United States led a coalition to expel Iraq from Kuwait. The United States feared that Israeli military retaliation against Iraqi attacks would fracture the U.S. war-fighting coalition. Even before the start of the American military operation, U.S. officials worked to rein in their Israeli ally. Using both inducements and the threat of punitive policies, the United States successfully restrained Israel.

In a much earlier example, the United States had to abandon military intervention because of British opposition. In 1954, with French forces

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under siege at Dien Bien Phu in Indochina, France pleaded with the United States for direct military support. The United States was willing to do so only along with Britain, but Britain opposed intervention and adamantly refused to join its American ally. The United States declined the French request, and the French forces at Dien Bien Phu fell.

More generally, as the case studies in this book demonstrate, efforts by one ally to restrain its partner are common in international affairs, but these attempts at alliance restraint have not received sustained scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> This book asks two central questions. First, does alliance restraint cause the formation of some alliances? Second, what explains the success or failure of alliance restraint attempts? Both questions address alliance restraint, but they deal with distinct categories of the alliance literature. The first question concerns the origins of alliances whereas the second one is about alliance management, or how decisions are taken inside an existing alliance. The case studies in chapter 2 address the first question. Chapter 3, on Anglo-American relations, and chapter 4, on American-Israeli relations, explore the second.

The second question, on the success or failure of alliance restraint, is particularly puzzling because neither of the dominant answers about alliance decision making fits the empirical evidence. Some scholars have argued that powerful allies get their way, just as powerful states more generally dominate international affairs. As Thucydides wrote long ago, “The strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”<sup>2</sup> Within alliances, the most powerful ally gets the outcome it wants.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars have emphasized ways that weak allies prevail over their stronger partners through shared normative commitments or institutional constraints. The stronger ally is often at the mercy of its partners—or at the very least the allies have equal standing despite the power disparity.<sup>4</sup> Yet neither of these explanations can explain the variation we see in the success *and* failure of alliance restraint attempts. Neither stronger nor weaker allies always get their way in restraint debates.

This book proposes a different way of explaining alliance restraint success that accepts and rejects part of each existing answer. The more powerful ally must *mobilize* its power resources and not, as it often does, rely solely on rhetoric and persuasion to restrain its allies. The 800-pound gorilla has to throw its weight around; merely being heavy is not enough to force allies in line. At the same time, the institutional factors matter as tools or pathways for the mobilization and use of power rather than as limits on the policies of the powerful allies.

This answer—that alliance management in terms of the success or failure of alliance restraint turns on power mobilization—leads to two obvious questions. First, when will a powerful ally mobilize its resources either to restrain an ally or to ignore a restraint attempt by one of its weaker partners? Case studies of Anglo-American and American-Israeli relations show that the powerful ally mobilizes its resources when it is not deceived and thus has sufficient information about its weaker ally's policy; its leadership is unified on the alliance restraint question; and the mobilization furthers its highest national security objectives. When the more powerful ally is the restrainer, there is one additional factor: power mobilization may also be necessary to create an alternative to the military policy it sought to block.

The focus here on power mobilization in the domestic realm is consistent with the work of several neoclassical realists whose recent writings address the relationship between national and international elements, resource mobilization, and the factors influencing strategic policy choice. Structure alone does not determine the strategic choices of states. Instead, domestic variables act as intervening variables. To Randall Schweller, for instance, some states fail to balance against threats because of domestic political factors; they fail to mobilize their resources. When states have a weak extractive capacity, meaning they lack the political power and governmental tools to draw on the material resources of their country, they end up with policies that vary with those predicted by structural realism. In his study of underbalancing, Schweller focuses on elite and social consensus and fragmentation. When elites and societies are divided, resource mobilization is limited, and that, in turn, constrains state policy.<sup>5</sup> In sum, his work shares three characteristics with this study of alliance restraint: domestic factors shape the selection and pursuit of strategic policies; domestic resource mobilization or the lack thereof is a central determinant; and leadership (elite) unity is an important variable.

A second question might also be raised: if alliance restraint is about power mobilization, how is that different from restraint attempts among *non-allies*? States try to stop military policies they do not like all the time. But there are important differences. When non-allied states try to stop a military policy, it is called deterrence or compellence. They may threaten or use force to do so. With alliance restraint, however, the restrainer never threatens to use force against its own ally to stop the disputed military policy. An ally may try to coerce its partner, but it will almost never threaten direct military action. In alliance restraint, allies neither resolve disputes harmoniously nor attack each other to get their way.

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Furthermore, the alliance itself creates institutional links that facilitate the use of power to shape the restraint attempt. Alliances facilitate the exchange of information, allow for closer monitoring, and create channels for issue linkage and side payments.<sup>6</sup> Rather than constrain the powerful ally, as one might assume based on previous claims, these institutional aspects of the alliance provide mechanisms for the powerful ally to flex its muscles if it so chooses. Alliances serve as institutional “arenas for acting out power relations.” In other words, if a powerful ally mobilizes its resources for alliance restraint, the fact that it takes place within an alliance gives that ally additional or enhanced policy tools.<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, the act of joining the alliance itself may send signals that are absent in the regular ebb and flow of international affairs. The act of forming an alliance sends a costly signal to both the new ally and the adversary. Other scholars have focused on the impact on the adversary.<sup>8</sup> Yet the fact that the restrainer in the alliance was willing to absorb some costs and risks associated with the alliance indicates to its new partner, the restrainee, just how much the former values the policy of alliance restraint.

Figuring out how alliance restraint works has profound implications for policymakers. Is a rival alliance being formed for protection because both states view a third state as a potential menace or is the alliance an effort by one state to rein in a second and reduce the risk of a conflict with the third state? The same holds for prospective partners: is a potential ally seeking to deter a third party, increase control of its soon-to-be ally's defense policy, or both? Much as the spiral and deterrence models offer states two contradictory lenses through which to view diplomatic and military action, alliances can be seen in a protective, outward-directed manner or a controlling, inward-directed manner.<sup>9</sup> Similar confusion may occur as states seek to differentiate between “offensive” and “defensive” alliances.<sup>10</sup> The policy response that follows could be different depending how one views and interprets an alliance.

Alliance restraint is one of a range of possible policy answers to a dilemma a state faces, namely, how to prevent war among two other states. How, for instance, can the United States stop Indo-Pakistani or Greco-Turkish conflict? Timothy Crawford describes an alternate answer to this question. Whereas alliance restraint involves aligning with one state to prevent a battle between that ally and a third party, Crawford's pivotal deterrence involves deterring both sides from attacking the other while avoiding “firm alignment with either side.” In alliance restraint, the restrainer uses a mixed policy approach of alliance (with the restrainee)



and deterrence (with the third state). In pivotal deterrence, the same state seeks to deter states two *and* three: “the pivot tries to obscure its ultimate allegiances in order to restrain both sides.” Yet in considering three types of pivotal deterrence, Crawford describes one approach—the “straddle strategy”—that looks very similar to alliance restraint, a fact that Crawford acknowledges in linking the strategy to Glenn Snyder’s *Alliance Politics*. Crawford, citing the work of Georg Simmel and Theodore Caplow, further notes that triads tend to become “segregated,” or in Caplow’s words, “two-against-one,” exactly the kind of triangle described in this book.<sup>11</sup>

Deepening our understanding of how alliance restraint works also offers guidance to strong and weak states about how to maximize their influence within alliances. This has important implications for the contemporary policies of both the United States and its many allies. The United States has many bilateral military ties, such as those with Australia, Israel, Japan, and South Korea. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has 26 members, and the Organization of American States has 34 members.<sup>12</sup> How the members of these pacts try to affect U.S. policy and how the agreements might be used by the United States to affect its allies is a crucial question. At a time when some analysts recommend ending NATO because it does little for American national security but others advocate deepening U.S. involvement because such self-binding restrains America’s destabilizing, unilateral impulses, a focused study of alliance restraint could provide crucial insights.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of definitions, alliances have often been described as either formal or informal. They have also been contrasted with alignments, which are less committed relationships between two states. Since restraint may play a role in all these categories, the definition in this book breaks down alliances into five components.<sup>14</sup> An alliance is a relationship between two or more states based on shared interest, an exchange of benefits, security cooperation, specific written agreements, and/or an expectation of continuing ties. Every alliance need not have all five components, and the five are not mutually exclusive; they can and do overlap. Though this definition does not a priori include an exact minimum combination that determines the threshold beyond which a given international relationship is an alliance, shared interest alone is not sufficient for an alliance, though it probably is for an alignment. At the same time, specific written agreements are not necessary.<sup>15</sup> Two states could be allies without formally signing an agreement. The definition includes security cooperation in order to stress that the focus is military alliances.

Alliance restraint is an actual or anticipated diplomatic effort by one ally to influence a second ally not to proceed with a proposed military policy or not to continue an existing military policy. The focus is military policies, not the entire range of an ally's policies. Military policies include military intervention, war, arms sales, nuclear proliferation, and the formation of alliances. This focus is also restricted to restraint attempts within an alliance, a subset of efforts to shape policy among all states, be they allies, neutrals, or adversaries. Alliance restraint is an attempt; it may be a success or a failure. It is a failure when the restrainee goes ahead with the policy despite allied objections. It is a success when the restrainee modifies, drops, or accepts a substitute for the military policy contested by the restrainer.<sup>16</sup>

## The Alliance Literature and Beyond

In studying alliance restraint and its impact on both the origins and management of alliances, this book draws on three scholarly streams within the study of alliances and, in some cases, international relations more broadly. First, a handful of scholars have written directly about alliance restraint. But they have not framed the same research questions and have addressed varied slices of the alliance restraint issue. This book is the first to compare restraint with another explanation for the formation of alliances. It is also the first to compare explanations for the success or failure of attempts at alliance restraint.

Second, many scholars have studied the origins of alliances, but these studies tend to be associated with Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat model. This perspective has kept the spotlight off motivations such as alliance restraint, which are about influencing or controlling one's ally more than using the alliance to counter an external threat. Since Walt's book, which primarily addresses the question of whether to ally, much of the work of the last decade on alliance formation and regime type has emphasized a slightly different question—with whom to ally.<sup>17</sup>

Third, when is alliance restraint successful in existing alliances? Scholarly works on how decisions are made by strong and weak allies (alliance management) or strong and weak states more generally provide possible answers. Many of the existing answers, whether originally intended for alliance frameworks or not, have trouble explaining the variation we see in alliance restraint success and failure.

*Alliance Restraint*

Paul Schroeder put the issue of alliance restraint on the map in 1975, but he takes a very broad view of restraint in his review of “pacta de contrahendo.”<sup>18</sup> He notes that alliances can be both “weapons of security and instruments of management.” His description of World War I and World War II suggests that the former function will be most important just before and during times of war.<sup>19</sup> Schroeder describes a lot of restraint, and he demonstrates how prevalent it is in international affairs. His biggest contribution is in proving that the desire to control one’s ally is a frequent occurrence. But he includes a much wider range of contested policies, not just military ones, ranging from the management of the international system to the status of particular rulers.<sup>20</sup> Schroeder does not systematically address questions about when and why alliance restraint works, and consequently, his many cases are not organized to answer that particular research question. He concludes by noting briefly that there “is no magic formula for using alliances as tools of management for the purpose of promoting international peace and stability.”<sup>21</sup>

In contrast with Schroeder, Snyder is concerned with the causality of alliance restraint. His book, *Alliance Politics*, addresses both alliance formation and management. In general, Snyder develops the linkage between one’s adversaries and allies. For Snyder, policies toward both are part of the same game, the composite security dilemma. Alliance restraint may hinder deterrence of one’s adversary and vice versa. Restraint may prevent entrapment, being drawn into war, but facilitate abandonment, the defection of one’s ally.<sup>22</sup>

Snyder lists three ways in which the formation of an alliance might lead to restraint: reassuring an ally so it feels more secure, creating dependence so it does not want to jeopardize the alliance, and developing norms that “facilitate controlling the ally.” These in turn suggest methods for restraining: threatening defection, withholding diplomatic support in a crisis, insisting on consultation, and offering inducements. Snyder develops a rational approach, a “calculus of restraint,” that emphasizes the entrapment/abandonment dichotomy and the balance of interests between the restrainer and the restrainee.<sup>23</sup> According to Snyder, the success of alliance restraint turns on credibility, interests, dependence, and commitment to the alliance. This framework is a useful starting point for thinking about alliance restraint but is at a general enough level of abstraction that it would need further specification to help guide a researcher working inside actual cases. Snyder does not frame and test