



BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE: America and Its Allies

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1. Introduction: Understanding American Alliances, Past and Future

By Kori Schake

Shields of the Republic is a serious book about the value of America's alliances and how to both preserve and expand that value. Mira Rapp-Hooper succinctly sums up the purpose of America's post-World War II global expanse of allies as "a peacetime alliance system intended to neutralize threats before they reached the nation's shores, to protect partners, and to foster control over them."¹ But she judges that their current form is insufficient to the clarity of purpose that managing a rising China requires, and argues for reverting to deterrence as their sole function.

In this roundtable, David Edelstein issues three challenges to Rapp-Hooper's construct. First, he asks whether formal alliances are preferable to alternative means of protecting U.S. interests. Second, assuming the defensive nature of alliances with the United States is understood and accepted by adversaries minimizes the danger of security dilemmas. And, third, he questions whether "tinkering on the margins with alliances constructed during the Cold War to deal with the Soviet Union is insufficient to manage the threat" of a rising China. And, if not, what are the alternatives?

Danielle Lupton of Colgate University judges that Rapp-Hooper's book is "successful in its goal of debunking the notion that America no longer needs its formal allies" but that it would have benefited from defining critical concepts — "a more methodical accounting of how key independent variables in the analysis changed over time," for example — and explaining the underlying logic driving the counterfactual analyses on which it relies heavily.

Monica Duffy Toft reminds readers that the United States has always been a reluctant ally and questions the permanence of America's strategic shift after World War II. "[A]lliances are only as strong as the interests that gave rise to them in the first place," she writes, and

¹ Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 5.

the collapse of the Soviet Union may better account for NATO's fraying than does Rapp-Hooper's description of shifting from deterrence to defense. Toft also points out the divergence between American public attitudes in support of alliances and Rapp-Hooper's urgency to persuade Americans of the value of U.S. alliance systems. She concludes that "Rapp-Hooper's recommendation to craft a new alliance narrative is unwarranted. ... The communities most in need of convincing then, are not American citizens but the alliance and strategic theorists."

In his review, Thomas Wright questions the exclusion from Rapp-Hooper's book of "the role of ideology in America's competition with China and the strain that this will put on alliances." He raises several questions with challenging policy implications, including dealing with backsliding by allies. Like Edelstein, he questions the narrow aperture of only investigating formal alliances, since that excludes problematic regions of American foreign policy, such as the informal and bilateral commitments to countries in the Middle East. Overall, he "was left wanting her to dig deeper and go beyond her comfort zone about how the developments of the past decade might have challenged her worldview."

Melanie Marlow argues that, by focusing narrowly on countries with which the United States has formal treaty obligations, Rapp-Hooper prejudices policy prescriptions that would be detrimental in the broader confines of America's important relationships with countries like India and Israel: "The astute reader gets a good sense of how well-established treaty alliances seem to function but is still in the dark about the relative significance of more limited partnerships and the role of non-treaty, alliance-type cooperation." Marlow raises the important question of where regime type should fit in alliance policy: Does U.S. democracy promotion limit potential contributions to common interests, "or is there something about shared principles that makes the contest over more than just money and might, elevates human dignity, and makes costs less painful and objectives easier to achieve?" She also presses Rapp-Hooper's analysis for more prescriptions on allies whose policies are detrimental to U.S. interests, and on the consequences for alliances of the burgeoning power of the presidency.

In my review, I argue that Rapp-Hooper's criticisms of America's current alliances overstate the nature of new challenges and understate their record of adaptation. Like Wright, I

found her exclusion of ideology from her analysis a deficiency since it's necessary both for understanding the competitive advantages the United States gains from its ideology and for understanding its importance in persuading Americans to sustain that order. Her call for strategic clarity dramatically underestimates the political difficulty of getting agreement from the wide and diverse constellation of states and interests engaged in U.S. alliances. But the book rightly defenestrates two important arguments often made against U.S. alliances: that America risks entrapment by its allies, and that its alliances instigated Russian revanchism.

By the time of this posting, Rapp-Hooper will be trying to put these ideas into practice as a senior adviser in the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. The authors of these reviews wish her great success and look forward to the book she'll write after attempting it.

Mira Rapp-Hooper attempts something extremely difficult in *Shields of the Republic*, which is to write a serious academic book on a pressing policy issue and to make it accessible to a general audience. And she succeeds. A tour through her citations is a veritable syllabus for a master class on international relations. Yet, she writes discursively, breezily, as though having a conversation with someone who doesn't spend their time thinking about these important issues. She covers why alliances form, whether they're cost effective, what might have transpired if America hadn't participated in them, and what new challenges are taking shape. While I don't think she proves the case that America's alliances are faltering or that the revisions she advocates for are necessary, I stand in admiration of all this book achieves.

Putting the Liberal in Liberal International Order

The book explores alliance successes, a difficult argument to prove because deterrence is only genuinely in evidence when it fails and war results. Rapp-Hooper provides the accounting of "a peacetime alliance system intended to neutralize threats before they

reached the nation's shores, to protect partners, and to foster control over them.”² Despite a strong record, she is convinced the alliance structure that already contains all the right countries to produce success “does not meet the trials of our time.”³ Her explanation for this is that, with the end of the Cold War, alliances “ceased to be instruments of defense and deterrence, necessary to ensure American prosperity and security. Instead, they were agents for America’s global preponderance, used, for instance, to bolster liberal democracy in Eastern Europe.” And now, faced with challenges from Russia and China, those alliances are faltering and in urgent need of revision with a “demand that the alliance system recoup clear strategic purpose.”⁴ I think she is fundamentally mistaken — about the nature of the Cold War alliances, the novelty of current challenges, and the capacity of alliances to adapt to the changing circumstances.

I think she is mistaken because, like most political scientists, she does not engage the ideological element. Explaining either why the United States formed alliances or why America and its allies sustain them is impossible without that. The ideology of America’s alliances is inseparable from its defense. It’s what makes the country different from other great powers, historically and in the present. While all great powers attempt to shape the international order in their image, the image the United States purports is more than its power. The sphere of influence America seeks is values-based and therefore supports, rather than squelches, the aspirations of others. Asian countries can’t advance their sovereignty and accede to China’s vision for the international order, but they can while acceding to the American order. The United States has an asymmetric advantage in alliance formation and sustainability because of the type of order it created. As Ronald Reagan memorably put it, “there is a profound, moral difference between the use of force for liberation and the use of force for conquest.”⁵ The international order the United States and its allies built is an order of liberation — of countries choosing freely to associate for their mutual protection.

² Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 5.

³ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 6.

⁴ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 6.

⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Speech on the 40th Anniversary of D-Day,” June 6, 1984, The History Place, accessed Aug. 3, 2021, <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/reagan-d-day.htm>.

Rapp-Hooper acknowledges this somewhat with respect to NATO's founding, describing it as "manifesting its intent to resist communism and encourage capitalist democracy."⁶ America's international order was always an ideological project, because it wouldn't accept sustained engagement with the existing international order. That's the story of the first half of the 20th century. Americans can only be persuaded to engage to create a different, better order — which is what the United States and its allies did in the second half of the 20th century. As Rapp-Hooper acknowledges, "it was already plain that this strategic shift was permanent" and "it would have to rehabilitate its adversaries."⁷ Yet, she doesn't credit what an enormous ideological difference is signified in the foundation of the post-war international order. For all the breadth of scholarship Rapp-Hooper's book engages, the one perspective she avoids is the seminal one: G. John Ikenberry's liberal internationalism.⁸ Democracy is central to the logic of peace in the American order.

Entrapment and Moderation

One of the book's best contributions is refuting the argument of allied entrapment. Rapp-Hooper finds no instances of allies entrapping the United States, an outcome she plausibly explains by the conditional nature of U.S. security commitments and by limiting their extension by U.S. selection of allies in the alliance formation process. That is, the United States has designed its alliances with terms that reduce exposure to the risks of entrapment. But she also takes up the second-order effect of entrapment, that the narrow focus on war overlooks the entrapment of the United States by allies expanding the terms of U.S. commitments.⁹ Although she doesn't stretch the point this far, this seems to be the best explanation for American exasperation with allied burden-sharing in NATO. The initial bargain in 1949 was that America would liberate any allied country that was occupied. That commitment then expanded to defending in place with the establishment of NATO's integrated military command, which expanded to defense at the inner-German border in the 1970s. This, in turn, expanded to attacking advancing Soviet forces east of Germany's

⁶ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 28.

⁷ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 25.

⁸ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁹ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 91–92.

border in the 1980s, which expanded to European countries taking greater peace dividends with the end of the Cold War. The United States has allowed responsibility for war outcomes in Europe to shift more and more onto American shoulders.

Still, Rapp-Hooper makes a strong case for alliances being of mutual value to both the United States and its allies. However, there is one omission in her tally of “logics” for forming an alliance: moderation of U.S. strategy. This would have fit nicely into her example of the Berlin crises.¹⁰ When President Dwight Eisenhower sent his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, to assure German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer that the United States would escalate to nuclear war to defend Berlin against Soviet encroachment, Adenauer exclaimed, “Good god, no! Not for Berlin!” Likewise, the Trump administration’s consideration of a “bloody nose” preemptive strike on North Korea’s nuclear weapons was untenable because it would have cost America its allies — not just South Korea, but also Japan. Nor would the cost accrue just in Asia. If the United States overrode allied objections to the use of force that would bring devastating consequences for the ally, countries far beyond Asia would reconsider remaining allied with the United States. America’s consensual alliances have prevented it from carrying out strategies that would impose on allies more than the allies themselves were willing to risk. That’s an important constraint on a great power and a genuine advantage to the United States, frustrating as it might often seem when arguing with U.S. allies.

An Ounce of Prevention

The weakest part of the book is Rapp-Hooper’s argument that, after the Cold War, the United States adopted a novel strategy of prevention, “ensuring that serious competition to American power never arose in the first place.”¹¹ It’s unclear how that squares with America trying to cajole Russia into being a European state and China into being a “responsible stakeholder.” She herself argues earlier in the book that the United States was slow to accept Russian and Chinese revanchism, adapting to confrontation only in 2017.

¹⁰ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 68.

¹¹ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 103.

Her example of prevention's folly is the NATO war in Kosovo, "a conflict that pit the alliance against entirely new adversaries and unmoored it from traditional notions of self-defense."¹² But her description of the argument for becoming involved in the Balkans parallels President Harry Truman's argument for involvement in Greece and Turkey: "conflict on Europe's periphery could endanger democratic consolidation."¹³ Rapp-Hooper opposes admitting the Baltic states to NATO, arguing that Russia could attack and "NATO would face the unhappy choice between escalation or backing down. The former is potentially catastrophic, as the United States and Russia are the world's leading nuclear powers. The latter would shatter the alliance."¹⁴ But Rapp-Hooper supports defending Berlin during the Cold War, which is a direct parallel to what she disavows doing for the Baltic states.

Rapp-Hooper does an excellent job showing that Russian revanchism predated NATO expansion, including Russian President Vladimir Putin publicly and privately seeking NATO membership in 2002.¹⁵ Parenthetically, her citation on that incident is an example of her outstanding scholarship, including reference by a U.S. policymaker involved in the discussion, a reputable academic account, and a knowledgeable Russian analyst.¹⁶ Yet, Rapp-Hooper still concludes that moving closer to Russian territory created NATO's current vulnerabilities, instead of acknowledging that step as a response undertaken to change Russian behavior.

New Kinds of War?

Rapp-Hooper argues that adversaries are developing sophisticated military approaches whose novelty lies in bypassing security guarantees by presenting challenges for which the use of military force would seem so disproportionate or distant from America's own security as to preclude Western public support and fracture U.S. alliances.

¹² Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 103.

¹³ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 105.

¹⁴ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 137–38.

¹⁵ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 126.

¹⁶ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 222, fn 76.

She rightly rejects “the breathless public discussion” of gray-zone war, reminding the reader that what George Kennan termed “political warfare” has been with us from the start.¹⁷ She rather unhelpfully introduces the term “competitive coercion” to describe the same phenomenon, but rightly assesses it carries lower risks of outright confrontation.¹⁸ It allows Russia to “accomplish grand aims using declining power resources”¹⁹ and China to continue reaping the benefits of the existing order while seeking to disrupt it. But she concludes that political warfare is an alliance blind spot, even though it has — even in her own accounting²⁰ — been intrinsic to Russia’s and China’s challenges all along, and America’s alliances have survived it.

What were the Berlin crises, other than Soviet attempts to “make [America’s alliances] less credible in military terms and nullify them through the use of non-military coercion”?²¹ The Eisenhower administration called these challenges “salami tactics” because they attempted small and legalistic changes to existing practice to cause allies to defect rather than uphold the existing order. Gray-zone warfare isn’t new, and America is pretty good at preserving alliance cohesion. It’s just a little out of practice.

America’s alliances are already adapting to redress vulnerability to new threats like gray-zone warfare. Take, for example, NATO’s Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence or NATO allies’ work on building societal resilience.²² The United States and its allies are experimenting their way toward using the tools of free societies — transparency, the rule of law, the attractiveness of the Western way of life — to protect those societies.²³ Rapp-Hooper doesn’t give either the societies or the alliances enough credit for finding ways to solve problems, which is surprising given that that’s what has made them successful across

¹⁷ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 147.

¹⁸ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 147.

¹⁹ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 149.

²⁰ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 71.

²¹ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 153.

²² See, The website for the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, accessed Aug. 3, 2021, <https://ccdcoe.org/>.

²³ David Carment and Dani Belo, “War’s Future: The Risks and Rewards of Grey-Zone Conflict and Hybrid Warfare,” Canadian Global Affairs Institute, October 2018, https://www.cgai.ca/wars_future_the_risks_and_rewards_of_grey_zone_conflict_and_hybrid_warfare.

these 70 years. I find unpersuasive her conclusion that these relationships, which have weathered such threats and changes, will find themselves suddenly incapable of persevering. NATO, in particular, has been genuinely brilliant at navigating such storms. Consider the Harmel report (nuclear deterrence plus commitment to disarmament), the 1979 dual track decision (to deploy intermediate-range nuclear weapons while simultaneously committing to negotiate their removal), the Partnership for Peace (delaying expansion of membership while building military and political convergence), and even pretending increases in spending were the result of Trump administration demands rather than due to Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea.²⁴ America's alliances sustain themselves because the fundamental bargains are sound: It's in both parties' interest to band together for their security, which increases the likelihood that they'll find ways to continue cooperating.

The Twilight Struggle

Rapp-Hooper acknowledges that both China and Russia are targeting U.S. alliances, which they view as preventing them from having spheres of influence.²⁵ But she blames the post-Cold War expansion of alliance aims — from deterrence and defense to war prevention measures — as legitimating Russian and Chinese aggression because Russia and China fear the West marching up to their borders. Expansion of NATO membership is occurring not because of the brilliant orchestration of grand strategy by the United States and its allies. Instead, it's happening because the values on which the American political system and that of the United States' closest allies rest are inspirations for people living under the yoke or threat of Russian or Chinese domination.

²⁴ For more on the Harmel Report, see "The Future Tasks of the Alliance," NATO, December 1967, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_26700.htm. For NATO's Partnership for Peace see "The Partnership for Peace Programme," NATO, accessed Aug. 3, 2021, <https://www.sto.nato.int/Pages/partnership-for-peace.aspx>. For NATO spending increase, see "NATO Moves Towards Spending Goal Sought by Trump, Spain Lags," *Reuters*, Nov. 29, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-summit-stoltenberg/nato-moves-towards-spending-goal-sought-by-trump-spain-lags-idUSKBN1Y31UD>.

²⁵ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 130.

America doesn't even have to be involved — Belarus is a perfect example — for people to rise up against the corruption and autocracy of Russia and China. The post-Cold War history of the international order is the United States attempting to persuade both China and Russia that they will be more secure by not being a threat to their neighbors, and both China and Russia being incapable or unwilling to adopt that perspective.

What is a surprise is how little effect these assiduous efforts by Russia and China to dent and curtail America's alliances have had. As Rapp-Hooper acknowledges, "China has not been able to cleave away U.S. allies" — it has only made "their choices more difficult."²⁶ Russia has been able, for now, to halt NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine, but only at the ruinous cost of ending a European vocation for itself. But it gives Russia too much credit to conclude, as Rapp-Hooper does, that "it furthers these goals by fracturing and containing the EU and NATO."²⁷ Both the European Union and NATO have held the line on sanctioning Russia and are increasingly invested in the success of Ukraine's democratic transition and its political independence from Russia.

In fact, the United States itself has done much more to damage the strength and vitality of its alliances than has either China or Russia. President Donald Trump's "America First" doctrine was a refutation of 70 years of U.S. commitment to allies as shields of the republic. In light of that, the hope of U.S. allies that America will keep its commitments and defend the international order it created is incredibly poignant. This says an awful lot about why America's alliances are more robust than Rapp-Hooper gives them credits for. It is the ideology undergirding U.S. policy that makes it so much more attractive to other countries and draws other countries to voluntarily ally with America, even if it means running the risk of being pulled into America's policies and wars.

Rapp-Hooper's exclusion of ideology in her calculations is the major flaw in her analysis. What countries stand for; the nature of their political systems; and, by extension, the purposes of their foreign policy really matter. So-called realists cannot understand modern Germany or the United States or the nature of America's alliances because they avert their eyes from the fact that history matters in the shaping of state behavior and ideology

²⁶ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 146.

²⁷ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 139.

matters in motivating state choices. NATO continues to exist, and to stretch its purposes to new challenges, because its members feel safer acting in each others' company. Countries in Asia flock to American protection because they believe the alternative is worse — they believe that the United States is a different kind of great power than China is.

The truths America holds to be self-evident do make for a different kind of alliance relationship. America believes people have rights and loans them in limited ways to governments for agreed purposes. It believes those governments have the right to choose their political boundaries. America believes geographic boundaries should only change by negotiation, not force. It believes countries built on these principles are inherently more peaceful — better neighbors and better contributors to a commonly defined good. It believes countries have the right to political associations — alliances — of their choosing. America believes in protecting countries that practice those principles, provided that the costs are not too high. And it believes that extending its protection to those countries makes it safer. Mira Rapp-Hooper's book demonstrates that post-1945 history has borne out those beliefs, even if her confidence falters in the face of new but familiar challenges.

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2. Alliances and the Interests They Serve

By David M. Edelstein

One can easily imagine copies of Mira Rapp-Hooper's *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances* being passed around the White House in recent months. "This explains why we need alliances," a deputy assistant secretary might proclaim emphatically as she hands off her copy to an eager aide. Indeed, Rapp-Hooper's book is a smart and effective brief in support of a prominent and renewed role for alliances in American grand strategy. The book is at once a historical review of the evolution of U.S. alliance relationships and a call for a reinvigoration of those relationships in the wake of an administration that has questioned their value.

For all of this, Rapp-Hooper ought to be praised. She has written a book with which advocates of grand strategies that are less reliant on such alliances will need to wrestle, including those who call for a more restrained American role in the world. In the spirit of that intellectual wrestling match, I make three arguments in this review, all of which suggest the need for a more probing examination of the interests that these alliances are meant to serve and whether a grand strategy dependent on alliances is the one most likely to further those interests.

First, any examination of America's alliances should be firmly grounded in an examination of the interests that motivate those alliances. As any student of international relations can recite, alliances are tools for protecting and advancing a state's interests. The key question is not whether alliances are valuable or not, but rather whether they are preferable to other potential tools for protecting U.S. interests. "America's alliance project," as Rapp-Hooper refers to it, ought only to persist if the costs and benefits of maintaining those alliances are preferable to the alternatives.²⁸ Complicating things even further is the need to consider not only how these alliances protect the immediate interests of the United States but also how these relationships might themselves influence the longer-term direction of U.S. interests

²⁸ Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 159.

and the threats to those interests. While Rapp-Hooper discusses the ambitions of both Russia and China, the specific interests that these two countries threaten and why formal alliances might serve America's interests better than plausible alternatives goes largely unaddressed. Rapp-Hooper opts to focus on formal alliances, such as NATO and the U.S.-Japanese alliance, in her analysis, even though some of America's most consequential security relationships are informal ones with countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia. Rather than limiting herself to formal alliances, Rapp-Hooper could have embraced a fuller analysis that considers the costs and benefits of both formal and informal relationships.

Second, Rapp-Hooper's book is about the value of alliances to the United States, so the U.S.-centric nature of the book is understandable, if not fully excusable. For Rapp-Hooper, American alliances are simply defensive tools for protecting U.S. interests against efforts by others at "competitive coercion."²⁹ This presumably ought to be evident to others observing U.S. behavior, but the perspectives of both America's friends and foes are largely absent from the discussion. The continuing value of an alliance with the United States is taken to be self-evident for its allies, and the defensive nature of these alliances is presumably equally self-evident to its adversaries. The latter assumption is particularly problematic, for it underplays the danger of security dilemmas in which the actions that one state takes to secure itself simultaneously threaten others. American decision-makers must be cognizant of such potential dilemmas, balancing an interest in deterrence with an equally strong interest in not provoking an escalatory reaction from Russia or China.

Third and finally, how compelling one finds Rapp-Hooper's analysis may turn substantially on one's beliefs about how significant a transformation of the international system is currently underway. As Rapp-Hooper would have it, both China and Russia are most certainly ambitious and, at least in the case of China, increasingly capable great powers that pose a threat to the United States, its allies, and their interests. The rise of China, in particular, however, has the potential to mark not just the ordinary rise of a great power, but a true transformation of the international system. Should China become a peer competitor with the United States, it may be that tinkering on the margins with alliances constructed during the Cold War to deal with the Soviet Union is insufficient to manage the

²⁹ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 12.

threat. But such a potential threat is, in Rapp-Hooper's argument, nothing that cannot effectively be addressed with enhanced coordination and a bit of recalibration of the norms and expectations of these existing alliances.

And in the end, that is the puzzle one is left with after reading Rapp-Hooper's analysis: For all the change that we have witnessed in the international system since the end of the Cold War, it seems to her that the best grand strategy is essentially continuity. The same alliances that served the United States well during the Cold War are the same alliances needed to confront new threats in a new era in a new international system. But is this true? Can America's alliances in the North Atlantic and East Asia effectively manage threats from Russia and China that may take different forms than the military threats of the Cold War? What exactly are the interests of the United States in the face of these new threats, and how might alliances better protect those interests than alternative grand strategies to which Rapp-Hooper gives only limited attention? And if none of the changes in the international system witnessed so far have provoked Rapp-Hooper into rethinking her favored alliance strategy, what would, in fact, lead to such a reconsideration? As the United States contemplates the next phase of its engagement in the world, the options should include not only Rapp-Hooper's thoughtful prescription, but also its alternatives.

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3. What If? A Look Back at the Strategic Logic of U.S. Alliances

By Danielle L. Lupton

Shields of the Republic offers a new perspective on the construction and perseverance of the U.S. alliance system. The book is ambitious, covering extensive temporal ground and tracing America's partnerships from the country's founding to today. Mira Rapp-Hooper's argument centers on debunking the notion that America's alliances are "obsolete" and that it would simply be better for the country to go it alone. In sharp contrast, she endeavors to show how these alliances have been beneficial, not only for achieving American strategic objectives, but for maintaining broader international peace and stability. The book is indeed successful in its goal of debunking the notion that America no longer needs its formal allies.

To make this argument, Rapp-Hooper departs from more traditional analysis to instead employ the use of counterfactuals. The book develops its argument chronologically, with each chapter addressing a critical period in the development or preservation of the alliance system. Each chapter lays out the strategic logic behind U.S. alliances at the time and ends with a counterfactual discussion to hypothesize what might have occurred had key alliances not been in place. The chapters vary in their historical depth, with some taking a broad overview of the period in question while others home in on specific challenges, such as the 1961 Berlin Crisis.

One of the difficulties in tackling such an expansive subject matter is balancing the trade-offs between breadth and depth. The book's evidence is strongest -- and the argument most convincing -- when it engages in what one might call "mini" in-depth case studies. For example, in Chapter 4, Rapp-Hooper provides a compelling explanation of why the Clinton administration expanded NATO and then engages in a mini case study of the Kosovo intervention. Part of what makes these particular passages so compelling is Rapp-Hooper's use of primary source evidence as well as the judicious incorporation of quotes from key decision-makers explaining the logic underlying their actions.

The book also offers a departure from typical social science methods by engaging in counterfactual analysis. For this reason, it may not appeal as directly to political scientists

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<https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-america-and-its-allies/>

or historians looking for in-depth historical analysis or large-N empirical tests of the author's argument. Rapp-Hooper's approach works best when she shows that her counterfactuals mirror the logic of contemporary decision-makers. Yet, this is one area where more evidence is often needed to make the argument fully compelling. The book would have benefited from a more thorough explanation and justification of the underlying logic when conducting such analyses. This methodological choice, and the evidence that follows, would be more convincing had the book laid out clear benchmarks for its counterfactual analysis upfront. As James Fearon notes, successful counterfactual thought experiments require the researcher to be "explicit about the counterfactual scenarios needed to support their hypotheses."³⁰ Dedicating more discussion to this methodological choice would have supported the analysis later and strengthened the impact of the argument.

Rapp-Hooper also makes the deliberate choice not to "proffer a novel theory" but instead to focus on "evidence-based arguments" to support her central claim.³¹ This allows for an exploration of the evolution of the American alliance system and provides for an engaging discussion of the future of these alliances, especially in light of the Trump administration's America First approach, which undermined longstanding alliance relationships. In choosing to have history speak for itself, the book often weaves in key concepts as it unfolds. In doing so, however, critical concepts — such as what constitutes an "alliance victory" — remain largely undefined. A more deliberate, upfront explanation of these concepts and their importance would have provided the reader with a clearer framework with which to process the breadth of information offered throughout the book and would have served to make the argument and evidence more compelling.

Similarly, a more methodical accounting of how key independent variables in the analysis changed over time would have provided the reader with a greater understanding of the processes and mechanisms by which the alliance system developed and operated. Here, Rapp-Hooper maintains that U.S. alliance commitments were driven by perceptions of

³⁰ James D. Fearon, "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991): 194, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010470>.

³¹ Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 7.

threat, a logical argument that is supported throughout the book. Yet, as Figure 7.1 shows, there were multiple primary threats identified by decision-makers during key periods of analysis. A more systematic explanation — especially in early chapters — of how policymakers determine and prioritize these threats would have deepened the theoretical and analytical contribution of the book. It would also have allowed for a clearer thread between chapters and a more in-depth analysis of how the findings speak to broader debates in the alliance politics literature.

Rapp-Hooper's book largely focuses on how formal alliances support the goals of the United States — a logical choice given the work's central aim. However, this focus also brings up important questions about how American actions at critical junctures impacted the alliance system. For example, the relatively brief discussion of the George W. Bush administration's foreign policy homes in on NATO contributions to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. What is missing from this discussion is an analysis of how the handling of the invasion of Iraq negatively impacted the U.S. alliance system, especially in terms of American legitimacy. As others note, such decisions had long-lasting ramifications on the alliance system.³² In this regard, the book is best read alongside recent works focusing on the politics of alliance construction and maintenance, such as Marina Henke's *Constructing Allied Cooperation* or Paul Poast's *Arguing About Alliances*.³³

What Rapp-Hooper's book provides that more traditional scholarly works often omit is a direct focus on the policy implications of her argument and findings. In the final chapters, *Shields of the Republic* makes the critically important observation that America's alliances have been harmed not only by strategic competitors, such as China and Russia, but also by domestic politics. Its analysis of how to repurpose and rebrand formal alliances is timely

³² See David Andrews, ed., *The Atlantic Alliance Under Stress: US-European Relations after Iraq* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Robert Kagan, "America's Crisis of Legitimacy," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 2 (2004): 65–87, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/usa/2004-03-01/americas-crisis-legitimacy>; and Jamie Tarabay, "Global Opportunity Costs: How the Iraq War Undermined U.S. Influence," *The Atlantic*, March 18, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/03/global-opportunity-costs-how-the-iraq-war-undermined-us-influence/274116/>.

³³ Marina Henke, *Constructing Allied Cooperation: Diplomacy, Payments, and Power in Multilateral Military Coalitions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Paul Poast, *Arguing About Alliances: The Art of Agreement in Military-Pact Negotiations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

and important, especially as the Biden administration seeks to reaffirm America's alliance commitments.

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4. Misconstruing Who Gets It Wrong on Alliances: Citizens Versus Strategists

By Monica Duffy Toft

Mira Rapp-Hooper's *Shields of the Republic* is a short but in-depth assessment of America's relationship with alliances. Rapp-Hooper makes the case that the United States has only recently come to accept the value of alliances and that this was a good thing. Since the country's founding with the Franco-American alliance of 1778, alliances with other states have helped to secure American borders and its interests. Moreover, the forming of alliances during the Cold War and after represented something rather distinct for the United States as a global superpower. The Soviet Union, for example, could not reliably call upon allies during the Cold War and China cannot do so today. Alliances in the American arsenal are a vital weapon that should be safeguarded. However, Rapp-Hooper is nervous. She believes that the world is increasingly dangerous, that America's alliances are fraying, and that we need new narratives to help to strengthen them.

BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE: America and Its Allies

<https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-america-and-its-allies/>

In reading Rapp-Hooper's animated journey through American history one is struck by two things — one historical, one empirical. On the historical side, it is clear that from the time of the country's founding the United States has always been reluctant to join alliances: from concerns about alliances as “entanglements” — as characterized by Presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson in the late 18th and early 19th centuries — to President Woodrow Wilson's choice of terminology in describing America as an “associated power” rather than an “ally” during World War I. America was founded on the idea that it was a separate, unique, and shining example of a respite from internecine “old world” squabbles. Its geographic isolation made it an ideal counterweight to European conflicts, and its burgeoning economic productivity positioned it to have great influence without political interventions and intrigues. So, the acme of U.S. foreign policy was to maintain that freedom of ideas and space.

It was only after the failure of the League of Nations (*sans* America) to halt World War II, and the postwar menace of Stalin's Soviet Union to Europe, that the United States came to embrace the notion that alliances had become not only desirable, but indispensable for securing U.S. political and economic interests. This raises the intriguing question as to whether this embrace signified just another tactical alliance in the face of a significant threat rather than a deeper grand strategy for the United States. For Rapp-Hooper, it clearly was not a tactic. Rather, technology circumvented the country's geographical distance, while shared ideas about democracy and the defense of those ideas required a military alliance such that, by 1941, she claims that “it was already plain that this strategic shift was permanent.”³⁴

But was it, or more appropriately, was it necessarily so? This hardly seems to be the case even according to Rapp-Hooper's account, which observes that it took another four years of war, Soviet occupation of Europe, and the development of nuclear weapons to wake the United States to the realization that American interests are best secured through alliances. Furthermore, because the NATO alliance was formed in response to the Soviet threat, so

³⁴ Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 25.

long as that threat remained so too would the alliance. True, as alliances go, six decades is a long time. But is it long enough to consider it permanent?

Rapp-Hooper could have made the case that it is, not by pointing to the fact that NATO was initially intended to be binding for 20 years, or to the fact that it served its purpose for the six decades of the Cold War, but to the three decades that followed the end of the Cold War. The Soviet Union is defunct. NATO lives on. But is this, too, really the case? The name is the same, but is the NATO of 2021 the same organization, institution, and alliance that it was in 1990?

On the “Yes, similar enough” side, NATO remains committed to collective defense, collective security, and cooperative crisis management. But on the “No, it’s new wine in an old bottle” side, as an organization, NATO has changed dramatically, growing from 12 member states in 1949 to 30 in 2020. And as this growth has occurred, NATO’s missions have expanded (indeed, with increasing frequency far beyond Europe) while the U.S. commitment to the alliance has declined. Yes, it took time for this to happen, but it is happening. As any structural realist would have predicted, with the threat of the Soviet Union gone, the alliance would continue to fray. The U.S. commitment would have weakened even further had the Russian Federation not invaded Ukraine in 2014. In short, the U.S.-led alliance system is at a crucial crossroads.

NATO’s metamorphosis should in no way be taken as support for the position that alliances need no longer be part of the U.S. strategic toolkit. Hardly. But it is necessary to point out that alliances are only as strong as the interests that gave rise to them in the first place: in NATO’s case, a serious and credible military threat. Once those threats decline, institutional inertia notwithstanding, alliances effectively end.

What is perhaps most striking, and reprises themes from the early work of Robert Keohane³⁵ and the contemporary work of G. John Ikenberry,³⁶ is the divergence between

³⁵ Robert O. Keohane. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

³⁶ G. John Ikenberry. *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

how alliance theorists and national security strategists think of alliances — no more threat, no more alliance — and how most American citizens think of them: as communities of friends who share a history of sacrifice, suffering, fear, and in NATO’s case, ultimate success. Most Americans seem to recognize the enduring nature of these alliances, even in a changing world.

How ironic then that Rapp-Hooper’s book directs a lot of its normative power at American citizens, whom she seems to feel need to be convinced of the value of U.S. alliance systems. For example, she claims that “It is no small wonder that many citizens, lacking a clear explanation of the system’s Cold War record and its current potential, have come to see alliances as evidence of hegemonic overextension — outdated luxuries of a hyper-powerful America at its apex, which the country can no longer afford.”³⁷ This statement is at best puzzling (why would a “hyper-powerful America” need to bother with the transactional costs of maintaining its alliances?) and at worst simply untrue. A majority of Americans understand that U.S. alliance systems remain an important asset in today’s world and that it is precisely its alliances that set the United States apart from Russia and China, neither of which can boast a significant alliance. According to a 2019 Chicago Council survey,³⁸ for example, 69 percent of Americans supported an active role in foreign and global affairs for the United States, with 74 percent believing that alliances make the United States safer. Rapp-Hooper’s recommendation to craft a new alliance narrative is unwarranted and effectively collapses into an Ikenberry-like call for a return, more broadly, to U.S. support of, and active participation in, multilateral institutions of all sorts. Americans get it.

The communities most in need of convincing then, are not American citizens but the alliance and strategic theorists, who continue to seem to think that international politics either does, or should, reduce to material interests — an approach long ago debunked in the opaque writings of, for example, political scientist Alexander Wendt.³⁹

³⁷ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 16.

³⁸ See “2019 Chicago Council Survey,” The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Sept. 16, 2019, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/public-opinion-survey/2019-chicago-council-survey>.

³⁹ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391–425, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858>.

Finally, although like most readers, I appreciate Rapp-Hooper's call to strengthen America's commitment to its alliances — and thereby strengthen their efficacy — *Shields of the Republic* stays a bit too narrow in its conception of where and how those alliances should be operating. For example, there is little consideration of technological shifts, intelligence, and cyber security in the contemporary era, nor in the attention span of populations who are consumed with domestic politics, economic fragility, and, at this particular moment, a global pandemic. Yes, alliances such as the newly configured NATO remain important, but they need to function in an international and global system very different from the past. A system that will look even more different in the future.

In sum, the better question is not actually whether alliances should remain a vital part of America's national interest toolkit — there is no question that they should — but whether they should be allowed to disintegrate, or at least re-brand, when the constellation of interests that scaffolded their original construction has shifted beyond the point of sustainability. And that question, in turn reduces to the question of the relative importance, in all multilateral institutions, of material and non-material factors, such as friendship, nostalgia, and the politics of memory in national identity. That's a critical question with which Rapp-Hooper's plug for U.S. re-engagement with America's post-Cold War alliances does not engage.

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5. The Shield of Orthodoxy

By Thomas Wright

The title of Mira Rapp-Hooper's book initially gave me pause, given the echoes of Walter Lippmann's 1943 *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic*. Lippmann's wartime books — that and *War Aims* the following year — are a bit of a bugbear of mine.⁴⁰ They still receive plaudits because of his neat phrase “strategic solvency,” which cautioned Americans against allowing the country's commitments to exceed its resources. America should always be ready to deliver if the geopolitical checks it writes are cashed. That sounds sensible enough, but there was more. Lippmann wanted an alliance with the Soviet Union to prevent a recurrence of German aggression and warned against any effort to contain it. He dismissed a European federation as a fantasy. The Soviets, he wrote, should have a free hand to do as they wish in Eastern Europe. Even in the middle of World War II, this was unsound advice. I was therefore relieved when I reached page 15, at which point Rapp-Hooper makes clear her attachment is to the title and the solvency concept, not his general prescription, with which she disagrees. This deft and nuanced handling of Lippmann is characteristic of the book as a whole.

Rapp-Hooper has written a thorough yet succinct analysis of America's treaty alliances since World War II. It is very readable and brimming with insight. However, ultimately, I was left wanting her to dig deeper and go beyond her comfort zone about how the developments of the past decade might have challenged her worldview. It is something of an article of faith among liberal internationalists that alliances are important but underappreciated, that they need to be updated to deal with modern challenges, and that we need to do a better job of explaining their utility to the public. *Shields of the Republic* makes a strong case along these lines. But as I think about America's challenges with alliances, I find myself drawn to questions that are either absent or make only a fleeting appearance. This applies not just to the book but also to the general discourse on alliances.

⁴⁰ Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (New York: Little Brown, 1943); and Lippmann, *U.S. War Aims* (London: Hamilton, 1944).

The first issue is the role of ideology in America's competition with China and the strain that this will put on alliances. The U.S.-Chinese competition is moving beyond the purely regional to become global and all-encompassing, representing a clash of governing systems — democracy versus authoritarianism. This raises several questions and dilemmas for U.S. policymakers. What impact will a protracted ideological struggle have on the alliance system, particularly as the United States oscillates between different political administrations? Should U.S. leaders turn to ideology to mobilize support for alliances? Does competition with China offer a new way of justifying the NATO alliance to Americans? Even if one wants to keep ideology at a remove, these are shaping up to be complicated political questions.

The second issue is how to deal with problematic allies, particularly those that are abandoning democracy for authoritarianism. The most difficult case may be Turkey, which is hardly mentioned in the book. After the coup attempt in 2016, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, “Despite our political and military pacts with the Western alliance, the fact is that once again the biggest threats we face are from them.”⁴¹ In the years that followed, he has clashed with a number of NATO allies, including Greece, France, and the United States. Erdogan has used military power in Syria, Iraq, and Libya, and he sided with Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. He has reached out to Russia and persisted with the S-400 anti-missile system despite massive U.S. pressure not to.

The United States also faces problems on democratic backsliding from Turkey, Hungary, and several other states. This not only complicates those bilateral relationships but also raises real questions about what side those allies are on in a competition with authoritarianism. Rapp-Hooper agrees that this is a problem but writes, “Rather than eject undemocratic members, which may be inadvisable over the longer term and more difficult to achieve, NATO should institute regular procedures to monitor democratic deficits within the alliance.”⁴² This is what they call a sidestep. Turkey and Hungary couldn't care less about a monitoring system. That's not to say that expulsion is a viable or wise approach —

⁴¹ “Erdogan'dan S-400 açıklaması!” *Sözcü*, July 17, 2019, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2019/gundem/son-dakika-erdogandan-s-400-aciklamasi-5229776/>.

⁴² Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 187.

it is not in my opinion, at least not at this stage. But greater consideration ought to be given to a range of measures to deter further backsliding, including sanctions, a downgrading of the relationship, and anti-corruption measures.

The third issue is the role of the Middle East. Rapp-Hooper conveniently skirts this early on by explaining that she is only looking at treaty alliances, which excludes all of America's relationships in the region. This makes for a more coherent and parsimonious book, but it leaves out an enormous piece of the puzzle — one that could and should have been addressed at the end. In practical terms, America's alliances in the Middle East draw more on U.S. commitments and fighting power than NATO does. Saudi Arabia has become much more repressive and aggressive under Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. Egypt has resisted any reform, has also become more repressive, and has sown the seeds of future internal instability. How should the United States think about these relationships?

Even if one agrees that the alliances with Arab states do not belong in the book, the greater Middle East and Afghanistan still do, given their relevance to NATO. Remember, after all, that when French President Emmanuel Macron called NATO “brain dead,” it was the situation with Turkey in Syria that he had in mind.⁴³ The United States may want to pivot to Asia, but France and much of Europe is still greatly concerned by instability in the Middle East and its effects on terrorism and refugee flows in particular.

Now that the Trump administration has ended and the Biden administration is underway, I find myself wondering if there are any counterintuitive lessons we can learn from the last 10 years. For instance, if Russia did not invade the Baltics when the United States had a president who had serious reservations about NATO, does that mean deterrence is more stable than we expected? Why did Japan and Australia have mixed feelings about the Obama administration's track record of alliance management, and is there anything that can be learned from that?

⁴³ “Emmanuel Macron Warns Europe: NATO Is Becoming Brain Dead,” *The Economist*, Nov. 7, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead>.

I would enthusiastically recommend that anyone flirting with an America First view of alliances be given this book and be proverbially locked in a room until they read it and come to terms with its findings. However, I am not as convinced that it will provide the answers people who already support alliances are looking for as they think about some of the most intractable problems of alliance management. This is a shortcoming of the foreign policy community as a whole and one that must be addressed sooner than later.

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6. Whither Goeth America's Alliances?

By Melanie Marlowe

Mira Rapp-Hooper's *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances* is a persuasive and spirited defense of the American alliance system. The 2016 election sets the stage for the book. On the campaign trail, in speeches and in tweets, candidate Donald Trump accused long-time U.S. allies of taking advantage of America's generosity in order to avoid paying for and fighting their own wars. Much of the country — citizens and government officials alike — seemed to accept some form of this critique. There was, indeed, some strength to it. Three generations after the construction of America's post-war treaty alliances, and one generation after the end of the Cold War, these alliances have fallen victim to their own success. America's alliances have managed to keep the peace so well, Rapp-Hooper argues, that they are largely invisible, their utility unfelt and unappreciated. Trump has left the Oval Office, but the underlying set of problems remains.

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In today's strategic context, the United States needs a strong alliance system, indeed "perhaps more than ever."⁴⁴

Making the Case for Alliances

The book begins with an examination of America's history with alliances, highlighting the country's dependence on the French for success in the Revolutionary War and the warnings of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson about entangling alliances. The United States joined World War I as an "associated power" and thus avoided, in the strictest sense, violating the early presidents' admonitions. World War II forced a rethinking about the purpose of alliances. America's "happy distance" would no longer protect it from a determined enemy. Aircraft carriers and bombers meant an adversary could keep the homeland at risk.⁴⁵ By the end of the war, it was clear that an immense and enduring global power shift had occurred, with the United States positioned to be one of two dominant powers. The purpose of joining an alliance to fight a war was transformed to that of maintaining the balance of power and keeping the peace. Whereas alliances in the 18th and 19th centuries were rather transitory, those in the 20th century had an expectation of durability, if not permanence.

The United States created early Cold War alliances with strategic clarity based on the immediate geopolitical and military threat from the Soviet Union, well aware that America would be shouldering most of the responsibility to defend against and deter aggression by alliance adversaries. With that responsibility came the power to shape alliance institutions and control allies' foreign policy. By the 1990s, having largely fulfilled their principal missions, effectively and at relatively low cost, America's alliances seemed to grow stale, adrift from their original mission of collective defense conceived in a Cold War context.

Rapp-Hooper does not make the mistake of wanting to preserve alliances because of nostalgia for Cold War accomplishments or because they are ends in themselves. America faces daunting economic and military challenges from China, and Russia's renewed

⁴⁴ Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 192.

⁴⁵ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 23.

aggression in Europe and cyber activities cannot be ignored. “[P]reservation is not enough,” she writes. “U.S. alliances must be reformed with an eye toward parrying competitive coercion.”⁴⁶ The United States will continue to bear much of the financial and military obligations of these relationships, but middle powers are not helpless and may be particularly effective in the gray-zone conflicts of our time. Americans today must be sold on the idea that alliances remain essential to America’s post-Cold War national security. This book aims to provide the intellectual and practical justification for such an effort.

The ambitious objectives of the book necessarily forced choices in its analytical approach. The scope is self-consciously limited to allies with which the United States has a formal defense pact, with particular focus on treaty alliances with NATO, Japan, and South Korea. Important security relationships with countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia are therefore avoided. This makes for a more straightforward argument and more energetic read, and those looking for detailed analyses of other kinds of partnerships will not be at a loss for material elsewhere. But the omission becomes consequential by the last chapter, which offers prescriptions about how to structure America’s alliances to confront challenges today. India, on track to soon be the most populous nation in the world and already the world’s most populous democracy, gets just one brief mention. India is a nuclear power whose proximity to China, global trade relationships, and fast-growing GDP make it both a force to reckon with and a potential partner to cultivate. Rapidly-developing Vietnam, with a coastline of more than 1,864 miles (3,000 kilometers) and a frequent target of Chinese maritime aggression, also gets fleeting consideration. The astute reader gets a good sense of how well-established treaty alliances seem to function but is still in the dark about the relative significance of more limited partnerships and the role of non-treaty, alliance-type cooperation.

Another analytical choice the author makes is to use counterfactuals to support her conclusions. The reader is asked, for instance, to imagine what would have happened had an alliance not existed during a particular crisis. While this approach captures the interest of the reader, imagining what would have happened in the absence of an alliance is not as persuasive alone as it might have been if paired with more in-depth historical evidence.

⁴⁶ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 175.

The Nuts and Bolts of Future Alliances

The book succeeds brilliantly in providing a salutary and timely reminder of the importance of enhancing U.S. alliance relationships, but three important questions deserve further discussion.

First, in an updated approach to diplomacy and the alliance system, how can America best attract partners for strategic competition with China and Russia? Some argue that the United States should ally with other democracies (even if they are imperfect) and stand united against authoritarianism.⁴⁷ At the Munich Security Conference in 2021, President Joe Biden showed the world that the time of tweet-bludgeoning allies and cozying up to authoritarians was over, declaring that “if we work together with our democratic partners, with strength and confidence, I know that we’ll meet every challenge and outpace every challenger.”⁴⁸

This is a fine aspiration, but what does this statement mean in concrete terms? How and to what extent will treaty allies like Turkey, Hungary, or the Philippines, which are experiencing serious resurgences of illiberalism, join a values-based effort? With the transnational challenges America faces, one may ask if it is wise to humiliate or antagonize capable potential partners. Might limiting the country’s partnerships to those who share American values undermine its efforts in the long run? Or is there something about shared principles that makes the contest over more than just money and might, elevates human dignity, and makes costs less painful and objectives easier to achieve?

Others contend that an interest-based alliance system might more effectively attract much-needed partners who would be out of place or might not risk joining an arrangement based on ideology or values. Are transitory forms of cooperation, possibly based on security and

⁴⁷ Hal Brands and Charles Edel, “A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity,” *Washington Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2021), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2021.1893003>.

⁴⁸ Joseph R. Biden, “Remarks by President Biden at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference,” The White House, Feb. 2, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/19/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-2021-virtual-munich-security-conference/>.

prosperity, so bad, after all? Instead of viewing alliances as an ever-accreting pile of commitments, perhaps there is something to learn from the more cautious and more transactional alliances of centuries past. This kind of system could present problems as well. Bundles of bilateral or multilateral agreements would require more attention. It is possible the nature of interest-based alliances would be more flexible and temporary. Thus, members might feel less commitment when their alliance duties and interests were in conflict. Is there a middle road between the two sides?

Second, how might the United States more effectively do the difficult workaday tasks of alliance management as it cedes more responsibility to capable allies? Partners today are chasing economic success, making their own foreign policies, and making decisions about technology that will have consequences beyond their borders. A reformation of alliances will require dealing with allies as they are positioned today, not as they were, nor as one retrospectively wishes them to have been. It is one thing to dislike how Trump treated recalcitrant allies who pursued policies contrary to the interests of, say, other members of NATO and to those of the United States. It is another thing to define what the United States is willing to do when treaty allies side against it on what it considers to be critical national security matters.

Among U.S. NATO allies, for instance, Hungary is home to a Huawei supply center and has allowed the Chinese telecommunications company to build out its 5G network.⁴⁹ It has also taken out billions of dollars in loans from Chinese banks to fund a railway and a Chinese university campus in Budapest whose charter requires Chinese Communist Party involvement in teaching and administration.⁵⁰ Germany, which has been scolded by more than one American president for insufficient contributions to NATO, had an extended

⁴⁹ Pablo Gorondi, "Hungary Says Huawei to Help Build Its 5G Network," *Associated Press*, Nov. 5, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/688e48fac84a4eeca73fdb5e17732c5f>; and "Factbox: Huawei's Involvement in Telecoms Networks around the World," *Reuters*, Sept. 30, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-huawei-world-factbox-idUSKBN26L2PK>.

⁵⁰ Rintaro Hosokawa, "Hungary's Plans for Chinese University Campus Spark Intense Backlash," *Asia Nikkei*, June 19, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Hungary-s-plans-for-Chinese-university-campus-spark-intense-backlash>; and Tim Gosling, *Al Jazeera*, May 28, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/28/why-plans-for-a-chinese-university-in-hungary-fuel-concerns>.

flirtation with Huawei.⁵¹ Angela Merkel was a strong proponent of closing a European Union investment deal with China just before the Biden administration entered the White House, undercutting what the Biden team hoped would be a united effort.⁵² She pressed forward on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline despite American objections and threats of secondary sanctions.⁵³ Turkey's purchase and 2019 deployment of a Russian S-400 air defense system eventually led to sanctions by the Trump administration as it headed for the exits.⁵⁴

Some of these activities are of more concern to the United States than are others, but each has been rightfully viewed by American leaders somewhere between a headache and a national security threat. A watchful eye may sense that U.S. influence should be exerted in hopes of retrieving a wandering friend. What might this mean in practical terms? Is there a threshold of "unacceptable" behavior the United States will not tolerate, or should it keep a rogue ally in the partnership at all costs? What if private or public reprimands are not sufficient to change behavior? Sanctions may motivate some course correction, but reliance on sanctions to force friends to comply with agreements is not a workable long-term strategy. Is America offering the right incentives to attract and keep allies?

Finally, are American political institutions capable of reforming, sustaining, and leading the alliances it needs? Yes, but hard choices have to be made. Domestic politics may constrain Biden's ability or willingness to engage with allies in the most effective ways. For instance, he has promised not to sign trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership that don't have robust labor and environmental protections and infrastructure investments. This may be good politics with his base and even with increasingly anti-free trade Republicans. But it's bad economics, and eventually it

⁵¹ Laurens Cerulus, "Germany Falls in Line with EU on Huawei," *Politico.eu*, April 12, 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-europe-huawei-5g-data-privacy-cybersecurity/>.

⁵² Jack Ewing, et al., "China-EU Talks Hit Another Snag as Biden Camp Objects," *New York Times*, Dec. 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/23/business/china-european-union-united-states.html>.

⁵³ Robin Emmott, "U.S.'s Blinken Warned Germany's Maas about Nord Stream 2 Sanctions," *Reuters*, March 24, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-blinken-nato-nordstream/u-s-s-blinken-warned-germanys-maas-about-nord-stream-2-sanctions-idUSKBN2BG216>.

⁵⁴ Lara Jakes, "U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Turkey Over 2017 Purchase of Russian Missile Defenses," *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/14/us/politics/trump-turkey-missile-defense-sanctions.html>.

will undercut America's economic might, which reinforces the country's military standing. It also damages credibility with allies whom the United States expects to make hard political choices for its sake and who expect America to make political sacrifices, too. And it will drive those allies closer to China as they search for markets for their goods.

As the last few years made clear, America's executive-centric foreign policy process and open hostility between political parties allow the president, for good or ill, to have extraordinary influence on ally relationships. It also means that the president shoulders much of the political responsibility for foreign policy. Does Congress have the will to reassert itself in this area, even though it would entail risks? Will presidents learn to rely less on unilateral executive tools and more on negotiation in order to produce more durable, reliable alliances? Are there changes to the political process that might be conducive to a better foreign policy for the United States?

Shields of the Republic shows us that the hurdles are high in fashioning an alliance system that will serve America well in the new geopolitical era. In a period characterized by a multiplicity of threats, constrained budgets, and pressing domestic issues, the United States is going to have to pick its battles, shore up friends, and give up some of the control it has exercised around the globe. Rapp-Hooper correctly states that "The geopolitical outlook, then, is one in which the US is uniquely powerful but no longer enjoys global primacy." But she is admirably optimistic that the United States can work to see a successful new system in place: "[W]hen American and allied capabilities are combined, they are formidable."⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic*, 172.