



AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

Alliance Politics in a Century of War, 1914-2014

JAMES W. PETERSON



B L O O M S B U R Y

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*To the memory of my father Walter Ludwig Peterson, who was born in 1914,
and,
To the memory of my mother Ellen Victoria Peterson, whose middle name is a
symbol of the Age before the “world (was) suffocated.”*

Contents

1914	ix
Acknowledgments	x
Introduction: 1914—An Abrupt End to a Century and a Quarter of Isolationism	1
Part One Alliance Networks and the Defeat of German and Japanese Power: Early Twentieth-Century Hot Wars, 1914–1945	
1 World War I, Temporary Alliance Networks, and American Leadership, 1914–1918	19
2 World War II, Permanent Alliances, and American Internationalism, 1931–1945	27
Part Two Role of Alliances in Containing the Power of the Soviet Union: Late Twentieth-Century Cold War, 1945–1991	
3 War of Nerves with the Soviet Union: A Broad but Shaky Containment Alliance, 1945–1991	43
4 Korean War: A Small Pacific-Based Containment Alliance and Stalemate, 1950–1953	61
5 War in Southeast Asia: Absence of Allies, Noncontainment, and Defeat, 1964–1973	73
Part Three Creation of Alliances to Restrict and Defeat Rogue State Power: Immediate Post–Cold War Period	
6 American-Led, United Nations–Based Alliance to Check Saddam and Iraq, 1990–1991	91

7	American-Led, NATO-Based Alliance to Check Milošević and Serbia, 1992–1999	103
Part Four Utility and Disutility of Alliances in Dealing with Challenges from Terrorist Power, 2001–2014		
8	America, NATO, and the War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014	123
9	America, Coalition of the Willing, and the War in Iraq, 2003–2011	141
10	Arab Spring, Discussions within Alliances, and the Potential for War, 2011–2014	163
Conclusion: 2014—Reflections on a Century of War and an Abrupt Transition to New Conflicts		
		173
	“ <i>Mazar</i> ”	184
	References	185
	Index	193

1914

In bloody pandemonium the world is suffocated, the world is suffocated,
a roar is made, the step of the army sounds darkly ...

You are quiet ... You are not permitted to speak ...

You are not permitted to breathe ... You are not permitted to live ...

Youthful blossom of Your Nation, youthful blossom of Your Nation
goes in the service of foreigners to die dishonorably,
goes to die dishonorably, goes to die dishonorably ...

How is it with you, Czech Land?

Rudolf Medek (1890–1940), a general in the Czech Legion
that defected from the Austro-Hungarian army and fought in
Russia with their army during World War I

Translated by James W. Peterson

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Introduction: 1914—An Abrupt End to a Century and a Quarter of Isolationism

Prior to 1914, the United States had followed a studied policy of isolationism since its founding in 1789. Famously, President George Washington had warned about the dangers of foreign involvement in his Farewell Address. This was ironic, for he had led the colonies to victory over England in a successful struggle to obtain independence. There was American global involvement sporadically in the course of the next 117 years, but there was no sustained involvement or substantial loss of life. Concerns about the Barbary states in 1804, the war with England in 1812, the struggle with Mexico in the 1840s, diplomacy with the English and French during the Civil War of the 1860s, the Spanish-American War, and building the Panama Canal were important but not really a violation of the isolationist posture. Such an approach to the global setting had the important side benefit of enabling a new nation to work through developmental problems at its own pace. Thus, the new nation and its leaders expanded the territorial base to the Pacific Ocean, dealt with the southern drive for independence through a bitter and tragic civil war, and established the basis for a strong industrial economy. In the early twentieth century, few anticipated that this luxury of time and internal preoccupation was about to end. However, it did end very abruptly, with the emergence early on of new categories of lethal weapons in the hand of armies engaged in warfare, with the rise of totalitarian dictatorships, with the later emergence of erratic rogue state leaders, and finally with the wide-ranging activities of hardcore terrorists who were intent on inflicting a severe blow to western culture and its sweeping global dominance.

It was indeed nearly a full century of war, even for a relatively young nation that had attempted to keep to itself for the first half of its history. Even though America avoided involvement in World War I for a full three years, the issue of its engagement was on the table from the beginning. The allied forces represented the nations from which American culture and its political system

had sprung. The link to the British was by now one of partnership rather than hostility. To the extent that the Central Powers largely represented pre-modern imperial systems, the involvement of the United States was destined if not a foregone conclusion. It is also true that the end of World War I technically gave way to fifteen years of peace in Asia before Japan moved into Manchuria and to two decades of peace in Europe before the signing of the Munich Pact and Hitler's subsequent move into the Sudeten regions of Czechoslovakia. However, the bridges to World War II began to appear piece by piece almost immediately. Western weakness was apparent in the decision by the United States to stay out of the League of Nations due to the breakdown of the Senate ratification process. Simultaneously, there was a preoccupation of many western nations with future avoidance of war rather than preparation to deter or contain nations that were bent on aggression and related challenges to any existing balance of power. In a sense the interlude between the two world wars was an actual warm-up for the next one and even a kind of invitation to the next generation of dictators.

What made alliance politics central to U.S. considerations and decisions during a century of war? First, in each of the four periods under review, American foreign policy leaders did not operate exclusively alone. What is interesting is the diversity that existed in the strength, depth, and extent of alliance support.

During the first period of global warfare, the United States essentially joined existing alliances that were struggling, and so the result was that American power eventually tipped the balance and catapulted the new arrival on the world politics into a position of unchallenged leadership by 1945. In both hot wars the allies were located both to the east and west of the central powers that basically constituted the enemy in both conflicts. Difficult battles took place on West European soil in the first war, and the loss of life for the Allies was very heavy due to the trench warfare at very close quarters. In the second war, the allies were basically under Nazi control and not able to guide their own military destiny, as they had in the first war. Only the United Kingdom remained free from occupation by the Germans, and so the link was really to one western ally during most of the conflict. The D-Day invasion of June 1944 changed that picture, but still there were not really existing allied armies

that could join the force that had entered France. In truth, America was doing battle on behalf of and in support of allies instead of arm in arm with them.

There was also an eastern front in both wars, and the nature of it differed considerably from one war to the next. During World War I, Russia hammered the Central Powers from the east, but they pulled back from the conflict after the new Bolshevik Regime in 1917 signed the Peace of Brest-Litovsk with Germany. Domestic politics, indeed a revolution, weakened the overall allied effort to establish a pincer movement that would force the collapse of the Central Powers in the middle. The Soviet withdrawal occurred near in time to the American involvement, and so that event partly compensated for the lost ally in the east. During the second global conflagration, the Soviet Union actually signed a peace agreement, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, with Germany in 1939, before the giant in the east had even entered the war. The German invasion of the Soviet Union two years later ended the Soviet respite and engaged them in a major way. They suffered more casualties than any other country that fought the war and played a key role in turning back the Nazi tide in places such as the Crimean Peninsula. However, their contributions were compromised by efforts to prepare the liberated areas such as Poland for the communist takeover in the late 1940s. However, they did march in from the east as the others did from the west and helped liberate key centers of fascist power in such places as eastern Czechoslovakia and the worst of the concentration camps in Auschwitz. Of course, the eastern front also included the battle against Japan and the liberation of the areas that it had conquered. In that struggle Stalin bided his time and only declared war the day after the use of atomic weaponry on Hiroshima and a few days before the end of the war. Thus, the Soviet Union was an ally of American power with mixed results along the entire extent of its eastern front.

During the second period under review, the Cold War, America welcomed allies in a global contest of wits that centered initially on a bipolar balance of power that included Moscow at one end and Washington at the other. Alliance loyalties were much stronger in the psychological battle with the Soviet Union than they were in the two regional hot wars on the continent of Asia. Western allies quickly formed NATO in 1949, and the Eisenhower administration established a number of regional pacts such as SEATO in

key, challenged areas of the globe. Soviet rhetoric and bombast was nearly apocalyptic at times, but so was the talk that emanated from the United States at various points in both Republican and Democratic administrations in the 1950s and 1960s. However, by the 1960s cracks appeared in what had been a generally unified western alliance under western leadership. France under DeGaulle attempted in the 1960s to locate a middle way between Moscow and Washington. Chancellor Brandt in West Germany a bit later made trips into Eastern Europe in an effort to heal the scars inflicted by previous historical tragedy, and all of this put pressure on America to respond. In the developing world, expected American allies such as democratic India helped forge a Non-Aligned Movement that changed the image of a united anti-communist or pro-democratic camp. However, these fissures in America's alliances did not seriously compromise allied efforts to build a wall that would contain Soviet power from future aggression. When the fear of nuclear expansion of Soviet power into the Western Hemisphere came to a head in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the alliance pulled together, as it would at various points when Soviet provocations occurred over the city of West Berlin.

America's involvement in the Korean and Southeast Asian conflicts taught a very different story about western solidarity. There was far less consensus on the applicability of a containment policy than they had been about its utility in Asia. From the American point of view, the attack of North Korean forces across the 38th parallel of latitude into South Korea represented the same kind of danger as would have a parallel Soviet thrust into a West European country. Equally important, China joined the Soviet Union in East Asia in a kind of common front against dangers emanating from the capitalist world. After the victory in 1949 by Mao and the communists in the Chinese Civil War, the two communist superpowers were very close for a full decade. In fact, in international communist conferences the Chinese often described Moscow as the sun in the communist universe with all the fellow communist regimes circulating as planets around it. All of that would change in the early 1960s, but at the time of the Korean War it made a powerful impression on the Truman administration. However, there was no alliance comparable to NATO in East Asia, and so the United States had to rely on a handful of Pacific-based allies. America had confronted Soviet personnel in the original push of forces, after

the Inchon Landings, back into North Korean territory. By the end of 1950, Mao unleashed 200,000 forces into the northern part of the peninsula, with the result that they drove the allies back across the 38th parallel. As a result, the United States and a handful of associated Asian nations achieved the outcome of protecting the national sovereignty of a new South Korean ally, but in the process they felt the sting of a powerful East Asian communist nexus of three nations.

A decade later in the mid-1960s the Johnson administration perceived a similar collusion among the North Vietnamese, Chinese, and Soviets in Southeast Asia. The surface parallels to Korea were striking, for in this case protection of South Vietnam against incursions from the North across the 17th parallel of latitude look much like Korea in 1950. Thus, the Tonkin Gulf attack became the trip wire event that prompted American involvement, much as the North Korean attack had in an earlier decade. South Korean military forces joined up with the Americans, perhaps in a payback for the help in their earlier effort against an Asian communist foe. A few other regional allies provided token forces, but the main western allies did not see it as their battle as they had not in Korea at an earlier time. Part of this reluctance was due to European preoccupation with its own economic and political recovery from the devastation of World War II. As the war dragged on for nearly a decade, and as atrocities such as the My Lai massacre received publicity, Europe's attitude often became one of sharp criticism of American purpose as well as the process by which it carried out the war. Both Asian and European allies breathed a sigh of relief, along with the American public, when the armistice was finally signed in January 1973. Of course the final outcome was quite different than that in Korea, for within two years North Vietnam took over the south and integrated the country into one whole. In the end, the parallel to Korea was not very accurate, for both China and the Soviet Union provided mainly supplies to the North Vietnamese. Further, China and Vietnam actually fought a brief war with each other after the American departure.

The third period of review entails the very new kinds of challenges to the United States and its allies after the end of the Cold War in 1989–1991 but prior to the terrorist attacks of 2001. Once again, the alliance patterns were entirely different from the previous period as well as the time of epic global warfare.

While the initial reaction within America was to take a deep breath, assume that the “end of history” had arrived, and to demobilize, lurking dangers soon made their presence felt. If the battle against communism was no longer a central concern, during the next decade protection of oil resources and issues of genocide did become central preoccupations.

Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait occurred in the year after the fall of communism in Central Europe and a little less than a year before the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the economic issues that it raised were classic post-Cold War ones. How would the West preserve its economic lifeline in coming decades of energy uncertainty? What kinds of new authoritarian leaders would feel more freedom extend their influence with the disappearance of the strictures of the Cold War? Were small states now much more vulnerable to aggressive neighbors with the elimination of a sort of balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States?

In the case of the Persian Gulf War of 1990–1991, a strong, UN-supported alliance provided an answer to those three questions. There would be support for the use of military power if oil resources were threatened, if “Rogue Leaders” extended their scope too far, and if vulnerable states in strategic locations were severely jeopardized. The degree of allied support of a global nature was very high for the U.S.-led initiative to take “all means necessary” to dislodge the Iraqi army from Kuwait. The United Nations voted in favor of thirteen resolutions that were directed against Saddam’s occupying force. What split the allies as well as the American Congress was the issue of what tactics constituted the proper “means” to bring about the desired result. A variety of nations put economic sanctions into place very quickly, but they did not produce a quick solution. There was a sharp division of opinion over the question of how long to wait for sanctions to work before military force was considered. In early 1991, force replaced sanctions, and the Iraqi army yielded in a relatively short time. The liberation of Kuwait became an illustration of what Americans had learned about defining a winnable conflict in a far more effective way than they had in Vietnam. Thereby, they regained the trust of both the American public and old allies.

In terms of the three critical questions raised above, the challenge from Serbia and Slobodan Milošević evoked the second and third. The implosion

of Yugoslavia in 1991 whetted the appetite of Serb leader Milošević, and throughout the decade he encroached upon several of smaller new nations that used to share the Yugoslav Federation with the Serbs. The basic rationale of the Serbian incursions was protection of Serb minorities in new countries in which they no longer enjoyed majority status, as they had in the old Yugoslavia. In that sense, their plight was similar to that of the new Russian minorities that now lived in post-Soviet nations such as Latvia or Ukraine. Thus, the Serbs from the truncated Yugoslavia engaged in a brief war in Slovenia with that objective in mind. The war in Croatia was more lengthy and bloody. In the end Croatian forces managed to push out the Serbian invaders, but the aftertaste was a bitter one.

It was the war in Bosnia that took the most lives and brought differences within the western alliance to the fore. In this case, Milošević teamed up with Bosnian Serb leaders such as President Radovan Karadžić in an effort not to only protect the Serb minority but also to extend its control over territory with the new state. In 1992–1995 they successfully, through military conquest, spread the Serbian dominance to 70% of the territory of the country. Members of the western alliance held back for a variety of unique reasons. Germany had traditionally had special linkages to the Croatians, while France held historical connections with the Serbs. Initially, President Bush was reluctant to do much due to a kind of longing for the old and larger Yugoslavia that had preserved a kind of neutrality during the Cold War. Soon after President Clinton took office, American intervention under UN sponsorship into Somalia had backfired in such a way that there was a subsequent wariness within the Clinton administration to another similar involvement. Finally, the butchery at Srebrenica in mid-1995 awakened the West to the futility of relying only on UN peacekeeping forces. The western alliance operated through a limited NATO bombing campaign that brought all parties to the peace table in Dayton, Ohio, in relatively short order.

The last piece of the puzzle in analyzing alliance dynamics with regard to rogue state leaders was the struggle over Kosovo, a largely Albanian republic of the shrunken Yugoslavia itself. Alliance activity was much quicker in this situation, probably because of guilt over the earlier slow response in Bosnia and the resulting very high casualty count. NATO military force was used to push

the Serb military out of Kosovo and back into what was still at that time the Serbian Republic. There was an interesting debate within the alliance about the potential need to inject ground forces, if air power proved insufficient to beat back the Serbian offensive. Unlike the Serbian invasion of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia, this one was against a republic in its own country. Engagement of ground troops could raise international legal questions about a violation of the national sovereignty of Yugoslavia. In the end, there was no need to explore that question further, and the residual issues included dealing with accusations that the Kosovars had committed atrocities against the Serbs as they retreated back into their own republic.

The western alliance continued to play an engaged role in all of the settings following the defeat of the Rogue Leaders. For example, NATO created no-fly zones over the northern area of Iraq in which the Kurdish minority lived. They did the same in southern Iraq in order to protect the Shiite majority against attacks from Saddam and his associated Sunni groups. Following the Dayton Accord in 1995, NATO worked with the EU and the UN to help preserve a delicate balance among Muslims, Serbs, and Croats. In December 2004, an EU force replaced NATO as the official peacekeepers in the fragile nation. Finally, NATO continued to play a protective role in Kosovo, a function that may have been even more important after the declaration of independence in Kosovo in February 2008. Of course, the declaration inflamed the Serbs and led to a division between countries that were willing to grant diplomatic recognition to the new nation and those that were not.

During the fourth period covered in this study, the threat of terrorism moved to center stage and became the focal point of American policy as well as that of the western allies. Convergence and divergence of views certainly characterized the relationship between the United States and its allies. Connections were very tight in the days immediately following the 9/11 attacks, remained supportive through the invasion of Afghanistan, nearly broke up over the decision to bring down Saddam's regime in Iraq, and dovetailed again in making the delicate decisions about responding to the turmoil of the Arab Spring.

All western allies and many in other continents moved quickly to support America and its citizens emotionally after the attacks in New York City and

Washington, D.C. As the United States worked to put together a plan to dislodge the Taliban that had protected Al Qaeda from power in Afghanistan, there was nearly unanimous support for the American position and moves. All in traditional alliances could relate to a country that had taken a direct attack on its homeland with the loss of about 3,000 lives. As America sought to establish military bases in surrounding countries, even President Putin in Russia understood the need to set up operations in two former Soviet Republics, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. In fact, the mission over more than a decade was shared between the United States and NATO, with the military alliance taking full control in the last few years. Many Partners for Peace (PfP) of the alliance offered troops and humanitarian missions as well. Fatigue and pressure for withdrawal was shared by all alliance partners after a decade of war, but it is hard to locate an American initiative that had more allied support since World War II.

In contrast, the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 probably ranks with Vietnam as the one with the least support among allies. There was no chance of obtaining UN support in the way that America did in the Persian Gulf War of 1990–1991. At the same time, the support that NATO gave to both the Kosovo air campaign and to the invasion of Afghanistan was also lacking. As a result, President Bush and a few supportive leaders in the Azores just prior to the invasion leaned heavily on support from British prime minister Tony Blair, found more support from new NATO members and PfP supporters from the “new Europe,” and stitched together a “Coalition of the Willing” in support of the operation. Of course, doubts principally centered on the American assumption that Iraq had something to do with the 9/11 attack, an unlikely possibility given the secular nature of Saddam’s regime and the religious fanaticism of Al Qaeda. On the surface, the suspicion that nuclear weapons might be close to development in Iraq might have galvanized the allies. However, the proof of Iraq’s progress on nuclear technology was always slim, in spite of his stonewalling tactics to UN inspectors. No doubt, all agreed that his record was abysmal, that his human rights abuses were grave, and that both Iraq and the region would be better off without him. However, there were other despots scattered throughout the world, and America was not considering a similar effort to depose them from power. As with the war in