

Objective: to examine the structure and maintenance of U.S. alliances.

1 Key terms

- alliance
- hub-and-spokes structure
- patron vs. protege
- entrapment
- abandonment

2 Key readings

- Izumikawa, “Network connections and the emergence of the hub-and-spokes alliance system in East Asia” (2020)
- Meijer and Brooks, “Illusions of autonomy” (2021)

3 Key ideas

Question: What concerns do patrons have about their alliances with proteges?

Answer: (1) entrapment in a protege’s conflict (via chain-ganging or emboldenment); (2) allies becoming too independent; (3) free-riding.

Question: What is the dilemma patrons face in asymmetric alliances?

Answer: On the one hand, if the alliance commitment is strong, this risks emboldening the protege. On the other hand, if the patron is not committed enough, this provokes anxieties about abandonment on the part of the protege.

Question: How do patrons address protege concerns about abandonment?

Answer: Sending costly signals of reassurance (e.g., aid, arms transfers, foreign trips, etc.)

Question: What explains the persistence of alliances?

Answer: Realists argue that alliances last as long as there is an external threat binding them together. Neoliberal institutionalists suggest that institutions last because they are useful. Constructivists argue that shared identity binds together allies. The latter two camps provide an explanation for the persistence of NATO after the Cold War.

4 Additional review questions

- Who are the United States’ formal allies?
- Why are U.S. alliances in Asia structured in a hub-and-spokes model? Which explanation do you find most convincing?
- Why do Meijer and Brooks argue that Europe is unlikely to achieve strategic autonomy if the United States were to pull back its commitments to European allies?
- Why is U.S. military presence in Europe significant for debates about U.S. grand strategy?
- Why has the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan raised anxieties among US allies?