1 Introduction: Grand strategy and alliances

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In 2003, one of the editors of this volume attended a conference in Sandhurst on the importance of history to the military profession.[1] Surprisingly, he discovered that some of the British officers with whom he talked acidly noted that a number of their American colleagues during the invasion of Iraq had questioned what foreign officers were doing in what to them was an almost wholly American operation. Moreover, they commented with some sharpness on the unwillingness of many American officers to share information, much less intelligence, with their allies. In one case, a British officer recounted the refusal of Americans to share intelligence that the British had originally provided because of its new US security classification, which prohibited sharing of that information to foreigners! This ludicrous situation did little to cement inter-alliance harmony.[2]

During the same period the other editor was taking command of the 1st Brigade of the 1st Armored Division in downtown Baghdad three months after the overthrow of Saddam's regime.[3] During subsequent operations in spring 2004 in Karbala, the 1st Brigade Combat Team worked closely with a brigade of Polish soldiers, a contribution to Operation Iraqi Freedom by one of America's most steadfast allies in Eastern Europe. The Poles lacked many of the technological capabilities of similar US units. Nevertheless, they possessed a wide spectrum of combat and intelligence skills, made accessible by the interoperability procedures honed by the NATO alliance, which he folded into his brigade's overall mission. Despite different rules of engagement that precluded its use in offensive

1 Out of that conference came a book edited by Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession* (Cambridge, 2005).

2 The US security classification SECNOFORN (secret no foreign) indicates that an item is not to be shared with foreign officers under any circumstances, including those officers assigned to coalition headquarters.

3 See Peter Mansoor, *Baghdad at Sunrise: A Brigade Commander's War in Iraq* (New Haven, CT, 2008).

combat, this allied Polish unit proved immensely useful in operations to eject the Jaish al-Mahdi, the Shi'ite militia beholden to the fiery cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, from Karbala. Unfortunately, this close working relationship between an American unit and one of its coalition partners was an anomaly in the early years of the war in Iraq. All too often American commanders marginalized non-US units rather than incorporating them in the conduct of operations. Part of this shortcoming was the result of lukewarm allied political (and therefore military) commitment to the war, which resulted in restrictive rules of engagement, but part of it was caused by hubris. Why take the time and expend mental energy to deal with allies when you are a representative of the world's sole remaining superpower?

Such attitudes reflected the final stage of the brief, blissful, but ultimately counterproductive unipolar moment enjoyed by the United States after the end of the Cold War. During this period many US military officers posited a revolution in military affairs based on a combination of superior intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems coupled with precision guided munitions that would render US military forces invulnerable to challenges by foreign militaries.[4] Not only were American military and intelligence capabilities going to eliminate fog and friction from the battlefield, but US forces would be able to accomplish their missions without significant help from allies.[5] Events in Iraq and Afghanistan soon ended such nonsense. Instead, the United States found itself conducting complex and difficult operations with less than ideal international support in counterinsurgency environments for which its military forces had insufficiently prepared in the decade before 2001.

This volume is predicated on the belief that in the future the United States will need alliance and coalition partners to achieve its strategic goals. It is also in part a response to the arrogance of some American leaders in the recent past that all too casually dismissed the importance of allies, other than as convenient political window dressing for American aims. It addresses the relationship between alliances and the conduct of grand strategy. By doing so it hopes to contribute to the larger understanding among policy makers, military officers, academia, and the

4 The decade immediately before the 2003 invasion of Iraq was, of course, the period of so-called rapid decisive operations, predicated on information dominance and associated command and control capabilities that would theoretically allow American military forces to see all enemy forces in their battle space and thus be in a position to destroy them.

5 For the claims of future war being dominated entirely by technological advances, see particularly Admiral William A. Owens with Ed Offley, *Lifting the Fog of War* (New York, 2001). For a rejoinder discussing the actual parameters within which revolutions in military affairs have occurred in the past, see MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300–2050* (Cambridge, 2000).

general public of the crucial importance that alliances and coalitions have played in the conduct of strategy in peace and in war over the centuries.[6] The contributors have focused their chapters on periods of history in which alliances or coalitions have played a major role in the articulation and conduct of grand strategy as well as military strategy in periods of peace as well as war. It not only deals with alliances and coalitions that have succeeded, but with those that have failed as well.

For the purpose of this study we have defined alliances as inter–state groupings formally constituted by treaty, while coalitions represent more informal groupings, brought together by a common interest.[7] Nevertheless, one needs to be careful even with such simple definitions. In the end it does not matter whether one talks of alliances or coalitions. What matters is how well or how badly such groupings function in the real world. The Anglo-American alliance of 1941–1945 during World War II was much more than a formal relationship bound by a treaty that both nations had signed on the dotted line. On the other hand, one really wonders whether the connection between the Anglo-American powers and the Soviet Union was truly an alliance, considering the consistent mistrust that Stalin's Soviet Union exhibited toward its "allies" even during the war's darkest days with the Germans on the outskirts of Moscow. In the latter case, of course, all three nations had signed numerous agreements on the dotted line, many of which were quickly breached once hostilities ceased.

There are, of course, alliances and coalitions that consist of the willing, the more or less willing, and the not so willing.[8] In the end, the degree to which the aims of the various nations are congruent is the crucial determinant of success or failure. The glue holding alliance or coalition partners together often may be no more than the agreed upon aim of destroying a common opponent. Such was the case particularly in World War II with regard to Nazi Germany, a state which had proven itself to be an enemy to all. Yet, even then the Western allies had reason to worry about whether Josef Stalin might make peace with Adolf Hitler given

6 For other volumes dealing with the issue of strategy in history see Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (eds.), *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War* (Cambridge, 1992); Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich (eds.), *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (Cambridge, 2011); and Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich (eds.), *Successful Strategies: Triumphing in War and Peace from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, 2014).

7 Throughout this volume we will use the terms alliance and coalition within this defining framework. Unless explicitly stated, we use the terms alliance and coalition interchangeably when discussing issues that affect both types of politico-military groupings.

8 The Athenian alliance during the Peloponnesian War was to a considerable degree an alliance of the unwilling, although Thucydides may have exaggerated the unhappiness of some of the allies.

their inability until 1944 to open a second front to take some of the pressure off of the hard-pressed Red Army.[9]

In fact, such a peace was never in the cards, largely because of the ideological nature of the war on the Eastern Front. But at the time this certainty was clouded with doubt. What held the Grand Alliance together was the quite correct belief that there could be no peace until the Allies had utterly and completely crushed the Third Reich. In fact, the demand for unconditional surrender, articulated by President Franklin Roosevelt at Casablanca in January 1943, represented recognition of that reality. Similarly, Napoleon's intransigent refusal to recognize that the political nature of the war had changed with his defeat in Russia in 1812 and subsequent operations in Central Europe in 1813 led the major powers in the Sixth Coalition to recognize that they had no choice but to crush the *Grande Armée* and remove the emperor from power. As Clausewitz suggested: "Not until statesmen had at last perceived the nature of the forces that had emerged in France, and had grasped that new political conditions now obtained in Europe, could they foresee the broad effect all this would have on war, and only in that way could they appreciate the scale of the means that would have to be employed."[10] Napoleon steadfastly refused to recognize that war had changed, and so finally even the Austrians realized that there was no choice but to fight the war to finish, depose Napoleon, and place Louis XVI on the throne of France.

In the end, the glue that has kept alliances and coalitions together has been the political cohesion of common aims. Regarding war, Clausewitz suggests: "We maintain … that war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means."[11] What is true for the relationship between states at war is equally true for coalitions of states in peace and war. If politics and political aims drive the conduct of war by nations and their military forces, then politics lies at the heart of alliances and coalitions as well.[12] The creation of alliances sometimes

9 The Soviet Union had signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany in late August 1939, which suggested that such a possibility might occur again should Stalin waver.

10 Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ, 1976), p. 609.

11 Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 605.

12 Disastrously, the German military came to believe in the run up to World War I that what they termed "military necessity" should determine the conduct of the Reich's grand strategy as well as its military operations. The result was a disastrous series of political and strategic decisions, the most egregious of which were the Schlieffen Plan, which resulted in a massive invasion of Belgium guaranteeing that Great Britain would enter the war at its beginning, and the decision to resume unrestricted submarine warfare in early 1917, which guaranteed that the United States would enter the war. In this regard see particularly Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 2006).

expands the goals of the belligerents, making shared negotiating space with the enemy harder to create. Roosevelt's policy of unconditional surrender was meant to keep the allies fighting towards a common goal rather than risk the alliance disintegrating over political disagreements concerning the contours of the postwar world. World War II is an anomaly in certain respects, for total victory over one's opponent is a rarity in military history. Enduring peace usually requires alliance partners to settle for less than optimal individual outcomes at the negotiating table. In this regard, alliances can also act as a brake on broader ambitions of great powers, as was the case with the United Nations command during the Korean War, in which the majority of the alliance members sought a return to the *status quo ante bellum* and threatened to withdraw their forces from the conflict if the United States and South Korea sought more ambitious aims.[13]

Moreover, in thinking through the complexities of the politics that influence alliance members, one should understand that alliance powers are influenced by differing historical experiences, geographies, political systems, and economic circumstances.[14] The nightmarish casualties of World War I pushed British strategy in the period from 1941 through to the end of World War II in quite different directions than those of their American allies, who not only possessed far greater economic and manpower resources, but who had not experienced the great killing grounds of World War I's first three years. On the other hand, from the British perspective on their island base the defeat in northern France and the Low Countries in spring 1940 represented only the opening battle in the war with Nazi Germany, while to the French it represented the end of both the war and the alliance.[15]

Equally important in the *Weltanschauungen* (world views) of those responsible for guiding states and military forces is the deep influence of geography. In the example above, the French – as did the Germans – regarded the shore of the English Channel as representing a geographical dead end where military operations ceased. But for the British the Channel and the ocean to which it leads represented a great highway,

13 Thomas A. Keaney, "The United States and its Allies: A Historical Perspective," in Barry Rubin and Thomas A. Keaney (eds.), *US Allies in a Changing World* (London, 2001), p. 14.

14 For a discussion of the influence such factors exercise on the making of strategy, see Williamson Murray and Mark Grimsley, "Introduction: On Strategy," in Murray, Knox, and Bernstein (eds.), *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War*.

15 The French General Maxime Weygand is reputed to have commented after the armistice with Germany that Britain would have its neck wrung like a chicken. Churchill, in addressing the Canadian parliament at the end of December 1941commented, "some neck, some chicken."

over which they would be able to conduct future military operations against the Germans and Italians. It is not surprising then that the British were intellectually prepared to make the enormous and imaginative effort that led to the evacuation at Dunkirk, which saved the heart of the British Army and tens of thousands of French troops as well.[16] On the other hand, their French allies dithered and only late in the game joined in the great escape.[17] In the historical memory of the British there existed the example of the successful withdrawal from Corunna in Spain in January 1809 and the escape from Walcheren Island later that year.[18] On the other hand, the French had no such happy memories of the sea as a highway. Rather the sea was only a reminder of some of their worst defeats – Quiberon Bay and Trafalgar spring to mind – while their greatest strategic naval success, the Battle of the Virginia Capes, had at best helped others, namely the American colonists.

In the larger sense the wild card in the politics of alliance partners lies in the fact that each state will inevitably possess different aims. The more closely those aims align, the more effective in the long run will be alliance cooperation against its enemies. But inevitably those aims to one extent or another will diverge, and the farther they diverge, the more difficult it will prove to harmonize alliance military operations. Even if the war aims of the allies are relatively congruent, each alliance member will view the conduct of operations from quite differing perspectives. This was certainly true of the Americans and the British throughout World War II.

Moreover, one of the major factors that keeps a coalition working effectively has to do with the degree that each member feels threatened by an external opponent. Thus, what Churchill termed the "Grand Alliance" worked best in 1942, when German military forces were enjoying their greatest battlefield successes. By fall 1944 that alliance was fraying considerably due to the fact that the Germans and their Japanese allies were clearly on the brink of complete defeat (the Italians having already succumbed a year earlier). Similarly, in 1814 what kept the Sixth Coalition against Napoleon from collapsing was the fact that when Napoleon and the French rallied in early February of that year, the coalition members

16 The possibility exists that the British were preparing to make a similar withdrawal in the face of the massive German Michael Offensive in spring 1918.

17 And one might also note that the British had had a long experience of making major withdrawals of their ground forces from the continent. Dunkirk was occasioned not only by British geography, but by British historical experience as well.

18 For British strategy in this period see Richard Hart Sinnreich, "Victory by Trial and Error: Britain's Struggle against Napoleon," in Murray and Sinnreich (eds.), *Successful Strategies*.

remembered how extraordinarily dangerous the emperor had proven to be in the past.[19] Even more to the point was the fact that in March 1815, with the peace conference in Vienna about to collapse and the victorious allies on the brink of war with one another, Napoleon's return from Elba reunited the powers due to the military threat the emperor represented. The result was a renewed alliance and military effort that led to victory at Waterloo and finally ended the Napoleonic wars by shipping their author off to St. Helena.

Yet, one should also note that while desperate circumstances may well keep alliances together, they may also cause an alliance to splinter as its members attempt to salvage something from the wreckage of defeat. In late May and early June 1940, as Hitler's panzer divisions sliced across northern France and then after taking Dunkirk turned south, the Anglo-French alliance rapidly disintegrated in spite of Churchill's desperate efforts to persuade the French to stay the course.[20] Its sorry end came with Marshal Philippe Pétain's government signing an armistice on 22 June at Compiégne and dropping out of the war. Eleven days later the Royal Navy attacked the French fleet at Mers-el-Kébir and sank one battleship and damaged five other vessels with the loss of 1,300 French sailors, underlining just how differently the political leaders of the two former allies viewed the strategic balance.

We might also note that alliances tend to weaken as well when the moment of victory approaches. This is particularly true when coalitions have thrown together powers whose ideological world views and aims are fundamentally different. The most obvious case in this regard was the unsurprising collapse of the Grand Alliance as the victory in Europe approached. With Nazi Germany's rapid spiral downward to defeat in early 1945, there was little to keep the Anglo-American powers and the Soviet Union together and a great deal to separate them.[21] A less obvious case, but equally important, came with the Anglo-French alliance after World War I; peace quickly resulted in the dissolving of what had been a close wartime connection, but one that, absent the pressure of the Imperial German Army, splintered over the division of the spoils. That divorce was to be a major contributing factor in Hitler's ability to overthrow

19 For Napoleon's military prowess see particularly David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (New York, 1973).

20 Churchill even suggested a union of the two nations.

21 A whole generation of American diplomatic historians in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s created a cottage industry that argued that the United States was fundamentally at fault for the outbreak of the Cold War in the late 1940s. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the increasing availability of Soviet documents has served to underline how completely flawed such arguments were.

the Versailles settlement. Only in spring 1939, after the Germans had trashed the Munich Agreement by occupying Czechoslovakia, did the British and French begin to patch the alliance back together again in a desperate attempt to defend Europe against the threat represented by the Third Reich. Regrettably for Europe's fate, by then it was too late to make up for what Churchill quite correctly termed the "locust years."[22]

Finally, above all alliances and coalitions are matters of the present and the immediate future. They rarely live much past the crisis or crises that have occasioned their creation. In the fifth century BC, the Athenians and their allies celebrated their alliance by swearing oaths and then dropping lumps of iron, symbolizing those oaths, to sink to the bottom of the sea as an indication that the alliance would last forever.[23] Of course, it did not – the Spartans and the Peloponnesian League had something to say about its length. Defeat of the Athenian fleet at Aegospotomi in 404 BC ended the Athenian alliance, while at the same time terminating the Peloponnesian War. Even as tight an alliance as the Anglo-American alliance in World War II dissolved in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, only to resurrect with the creation in the late 1940s of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, an alliance that the perceived threat of Soviet power did so much to create. Thus, one must remember that alliances and coalitions for the most part are largely the result of the exigencies of the present and their existence is largely a matter of external factors.

When those external factors disappear, for the most part so do alliances and certainly coalitions.[24] The crucial question, then, is how do political and military leaders keep an alliance together when it matters most. As the collapse of the Anglo-French entente in the aftermath of World War I underlines, such a collapse can have a disastrous impact on the course of events in the international arena.[25] Yet the difficulties that the Anglo-French relationship encountered in the aftermath of World War I partially reflected the problems that the two powers had

22 For the sorry story of Anglo-French relations in the late 1930s see Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938–1939: The Path to Ruin* (Princeton, NJ, 1984).

23 Aristotle, *The Constitution of Athens*, ch. 23 (www.amazon.com/Aristotle-Politics-Constitution-Cambridge-Political/dp/0521484006/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438976222&sr=1-1&keywords=the+constitution+of+athens).

24 The exception being NATO which has, of course, continued to exist after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The coalition that the United States assembled in 1990 to liberate Kuwait after Saddam's military had invaded and occupied that country terminated almost immediately after the accomplishment of its military mission.

25 In this case the failure of the two nations to cooperate in confronting the rise of Nazi Germany until 1939 was to have disastrous results for both nations. See Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power*.

in dealing with the security problem that a still united Germany represented. For the French the solution was a truncated Reich, which was absolutely unacceptable to the British. In the end the French settled for considerably less, the peace supposedly cemented by a British guarantee to uphold the Versailles Treaty. Unfortunately for all concerned, the British guarantee proved completely worthless for much of the thirties and only came into play again when it was much too late.

The ingredients for successful alliances

One might then ask what makes an effective alliance beyond simply the politico-military threat that its members seek to address. Perhaps the most important requirement for participating in a successful alliance has to do with extending Sun Tzu's admonition that one should know oneself and one's enemies to include a deep understanding of one's allies, their aims, their strategic culture, their military capabilities, and their geography and history.[26] What this understanding demands is astute political and military leadership with a considerable degree of sophistication and the ability to work with the leaders of other nations and their military organizations, which inevitably possess quite different views of the world. Such leadership must be willing to compromise its goals and approach at times in order to accommodate the quite different views and goals of its more important allies. As one of the leading historians of British strategy in the eighteenth century has noted about the failure of British grand strategy during the 1770s in the war against the American colonials, "At times it seemed as if British statesmen would have to relearn the idea that they might have to do for others something that they might not want to do, in order to persuade somebody else to do something for Britain that they did not want to do."[27]

Here we are back to the most fundamental requirement for success in human affairs, but one of the rarest attributes, namely the need for competent, imaginative leadership. Some of the attributes of such leadership can be acquired through study – a knowledge of history, for example.

26 One might note that military historians have done little work on the subject of military cultures, including service cultures. Yet it is increasingly clear that military effectiveness depends to a great extent on military organizational culture. Such cultures are built up over decades if not centuries, and they rest on historical experience, the peculiarities of geography, the nature of government, the influence of tradition, and the inherent contradiction between the need for discipline and the requirement for innovation, adaptation, and initiative on the battlefield.

27 Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire* (New York, 2007), p. 518.

But in the end who leads is more often than not a matter of chance. Two examples from the interwar period underline this point. In 1931 had Winston Churchill stepped off the curb in New York City during a lecture tour a second earlier, he might well have died rather than have received a glancing blow from the motor vehicle barreling toward him.[28] Similarly, Franklin Roosevelt, exposed to the polio virus, only suffered the loss of the use of his legs; had the disease been slightly more critical, he might have died or lost the use of most of the rest of his body. Can anyone doubt but that the history of the remainder of the twentieth century would have been affected in a disastrous fashion by the death or incapacitation of one or both of these leaders? The most important ingredient in success or failure of alliances has to do with the abilities of the political and military leaders responsible for developing strategy, but in considering this reality, one is dealing to a considerable extent with the accidents of life.

In this regard, ideological regimes have proven particularly incapable of understanding and working with allies. Nazi Germany is a good example of this weakness. Given Hitler's ideology and megalomania, there never was and never could be successful strategic cooperation among the Axis powers, which, combined with the failure of their leaders to understand the nature of their opponents, proved to be a disastrous mix in the long run in spite of considerable operational successes up through 1941. Similarly, the failure of Soviet leaders to understand their Chinese allies resulted in the collapse of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The result was nearly a disastrous war between those two nuclear powers.[29] Similarly, the failure of the Western powers to understand the nature of Stalin's tyranny led to flawed decisions in their attempts to shape the war's outcome through an overestimation of the Soviet Union's willingness to cooperate with them in the postwar period.

Another point that needs emphasis is the need for transparency among alliance or coalition members. In this regard, the clearest example of the importance of this factor in building a level of trust between states during the initial stages of alliance creation came in the first meeting between British scientists and intelligence officers and their American counterparts in September 1940 at the height of the Battle of Britain. At that time Churchill had sent over the "Tizard Mission" under one of Britain's leading scientists, Sir Henry Tizard, to make contact with the Americans and pass along to their future allies some of the most important British technological advances. But, of course, that effort aimed at much more

28 Used to the British system where vehicular traffic moves on the left side of the road, Churchill looked the wrong way.
29 See Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, 1994), pp. 721–22.