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# Alliances in the "Gray Areas"

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THE PURPOSES OF THIS ARTICLE ARE TWOFOLD: first, to identify certain emerging, still evolving, trends in international relations; and second, to relate those trends to present realities. It will concentrate on the evidence pointing to loose coalitions opposed to the United States and Western democracy generally.

As policy makers appear trapped between the crisis of the moment on the one hand and administration priorities on the other, identifying problems over the horizon tends to lose its priority. Yet a plausible case can be made that a security threat is emerging that, over the next decade, could challenge United States military preeminence, as states and non-state groups seek to promote their own values and interests. Much of the world is hostile to Western culture and ways, and does not see a community of interest with the United States. Only tactical agreement is possible with such a nation, as these groups see it, in part because any meaningful relationship would reveal inadequacies in their own. Such appearances would be inimical to their interests. Additionally, a situation wherein one power is preeminent (as the U.S. is today) has traditionally created animosities that have led to the rise of countervailing power or the creation of coalitions among lesser powers.

The chief danger to the United States, and Western security in general, is not a renegade Somali warlord, or even an Iraq-like regional power, but a loose, unnamed alliance structure comprising governments and nongovernment entities whose mutual interests oppose Western ones on several fronts. Those interests in general are opposition to Western democratic values and to the United States as a power that appears unchecked. This "alliance" structure—for lack of a better term—would aim to force the U.S. government either to turn

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completely inward or to spend its energy on high-minded but peripheral foreign policy issues instead of concentrating its foreign policy attention and reduced military forces on genuine security threats.

How to test this "alliance" theory? One could make an argument that nearly simultaneous attacks by Iraq against one of its neighbors and by North Korea against the Republic of Korea would be an example of two nations collaborating to force the U.S. to fight a two-front war (the "two major regional contingencies" case that is the challenging centerpiece of current U.S. defense planning). Of course, it also could happen that each aggressor might be acting independently in pursuit of its own objectives and simply seizing an opportunity that presents itself. However, a loose "alliance" structure as posited here would require only minimal collaboration yet have a profound impact on the United States. The sole requisite for such collaboration could be opposition to U.S. foreign policy—alliances have been forged from less—or it could extend to other domains of anti-American motivation.

Thus, this type of a collaborative enterprise might be founded upon regional military asymmetry but then expand to cultural, ethnic, religious, or economic communities. Security concerns would come first, followed by what are commonly thought of as bases of relationships. As an example, Chinese power and the relative weakness of its neighbors (possibly excepting Japan) could lead to a pro-Chinese structure based on indifference to human rights, some variety of capitalist mercantilism, and an exclusionary trading bloc, each of which the United States finds anathema. Thereby, the region's political constellation could be transformed by both security concerns and cultural ties. Since the security component plays a role, perhaps even the leading role, the grouping could draw in other nations that may not necessarily share cultural ties but nevertheless recognize that military concerns dictate alignment with the new China-centered structure.

In the field of international relations, evidence is seldom as complete as one would like. Deduction and inference must inevitably be incorporated into analysis, and some degree of subjectivity is therefore present. Yet subjectivity alone does not invalidate a theory; it must be considered in light of whatever existing evidence can be marshaled.

Hence, we should not expect to find formal treaties codifying these "gray area" alliances of states and non-states, relationships that are by definition non-formal and often secretive. The term "alliance" is somewhat hyperbolic, but suggestive. The reader must judge whether the threat that is postulated seems significant; what should remain foremost is not whether formal agreements are identifiable (in fact, their obscurity may actually be a strength) but whether such relationships as can be demonstrated do jeopardize U.S. interests.

A further question is whether one can make sound judgments about strategy simply by estimating the *intentions* of those one considers potentially threatening. Intentions are easily misread. Any beliefs one may harbor about intentions can color intelligence analysis and blind one to realities. *Capabilities* should be central to analysis, simply because intentions can change virtually overnight, while developing capabilities takes time. If capabilities do not exist, then the argument that follows is inconsequential. But the evidence shows that at least a tenuous "gray area" relationship probably exists, that global dynamics help it to grow, and that its impending capabilities are threatening.

## Cold War Alliance Structures

The Warsaw Pact, which in truth was centered on strict control from Moscow, resembled in its architecture a pyramid. At the apex stood the Soviet Union; the base of the pyramid contained the other Pact signatories. A useful appendage was the collection of client states that acted as surrogate forces—sympathetic Third World regimes and some supposedly "non-aligned" states. Together these made up the Soviet bloc. Additionally, the surrogates group included terrorist and insurgent movements based in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and South and Central America; they generally occupied the front lines of the Soviet Union's expansionist aims. The cohesiveness of this interrelated structure has been described as the Soviet "collective security" system.[1]

The informal workings of this system show that it was more than just a military alliance organization. There was a clear division of labor among members in furthering Moscow's political offensive strategy, particularly in the Third World. Some states carried out specific duties, specializing in the smuggling of arms, supporting insurgents, training terrorists, trafficking in drugs, or aiding sympathetic Third World governments with intelligence gathering and the training of internal security forces. Some client states, like Cuba and Syria, were contracted to help not only in Latin America or the Middle East but in such distant areas as Africa. It may well be that these diplomatic, intelligence, and political purposes were at least as important to Soviet expansionism as the armored divisions of the Warsaw Pact.

That edifice crumbled, but the rats scurried away. Today in the former Warsaw Pact states drug smuggling and arms trafficking continue with relative impunity, only now carried out mostly by private gangs. As the drug culture in these Eastern and Central European states grows, their influence expands.[2] Their connections with the client states that survived the Soviet collapse make up part of the new anti-Western coalition confronting the U.S. today. They are particularly dangerous in that they facilitate the hemorrhaging of sophisticated or otherwise difficult-to-obtain weaponry for the former Soviet Union's radical

client states, and perhaps for terrorists as well. This very concern has moved the Federal Bureau of Investigation to open a Moscow branch office to help head off the possibility of Russian gangs stealing nuclear materials or a complete device and selling such things to terrorist groups or renegade states. According to Senator Sam Nunn, "Crime and particularly organized crime has become one of the most dangerous forces from the collapse of the Soviet system. . . . It may ultimately pose a threat to peace not only in that region but others."[3]

Ironically, the Nato alliance remained relatively static during the Cold War and has seen its only action as a formal alliance structure after that era had ended, in Bosnia. As might be expected from a system less centralized than the Warsaw Pact, greater heterogeneity has marked Nato; yet the dynamics of power entail that Nato does nothing without U.S. leadership. Other bilateral or regional relationships have been secondary to Nato, with the only possible exception being the U.S. relationship with Japan.

Throughout the Cold War, Nato was concerned with stemming the Soviet threat to Europe. Retaining its regional focus as depicted in the organization's charter, Nato was less concerned with global strategy. This changed somewhat in the 1980s, when the Reagan administration linked Third World developments to the Soviet Union and its allies—in effect, a switch from regionalism (i.e., Europe with emphasis on the Atlantic) to globalism, confronting Soviet strategy on a multi-regional scale. This globalist conception also is useful in recognizing the threat the loose alliance system presents today.

## Regional Crises and Rogue States

When the Soviet Union collapsed, its client states lost their patron and much-needed financial and political support. Some, like the Sandinista government of Nicaragua, were forced to accede to elections, which the Sandinistas lost. The FMLN guerrillas of El Salvador were forced to sue for peace as a result, and Cuban foreign policy became more muted than it had been at any time since 1959. Other regional transformations occurred as well: in Africa, the Angolan proxy war was brought to a temporary end, and foreign support for the war was halted; in Cambodia the story was largely the same.

Yet some regional supporters of this type of violence carried on, the most noteworthy being Iraq. States and groups once part of the Soviet alliance structure found themselves more isolated, and more independent. Seeking to relegitimize their invariably authoritarian ruling styles, these regimes and organizations sought to exploit regional instability and enhance their own prestige—as has Iran in the Persian Gulf and in the rest of the Muslim world—or, like Cuba, to forge coalitions opposed to the United States.

The end of the Soviet collective security system meant the end of an alliance structure dominated from a central source; conversely, it has allowed the various states opposed to the West to fish in well stocked waters. The dissolution of former communist states like the Soviet Union into Russia, the Central Asian republics, and the Baltic republics, and also of Yugoslavia (the scene of a terrible aggressive war by one new state on others) has strengthened this trend toward anti-Western free-lancing. The dynamic, therefore, is towards growing anarchy and greater opportunities to associate with like-minded opponents of the U.S.-led West.

Three main ideas are important to what follows. First, with the shift in U.S. thinking from a "global" to a "regional" conception of foreign policy, one may easily fail to recognize an interrelatedness among these threats.[4] The terms "regional" and "global" pertain to power projection capabilities. The USSR had a global power projection capability, due in large part to its expansive collective security system. No successor exists that can project power in the same way; but alternative methods do exist, namely, terrorism, arms deals, counterfeiting, insurgency, and narcotics. These all flourish in the "gray areas" outside of state control (sometimes at the instigation of other states), and all are measures that over time can erode the economic power and political freedoms of the U.S. as well as its ability to project power abroad. Thus regionalism as a focus could obscure an emerging global structure that is loosely bound together around hostility to the West and the United States.

Second, any countervailing Western alliance structure is unravelling at the peripheries, chiefly among states that acknowledged their opposition to communism during the Cold War but that now fear a preponderance of U.S. power unchecked by a rival superpower. Brazil and some nations of Southeast Asia are two examples. Others might include Pakistan, South Africa under the African National Congress, and perhaps either Greece or Turkey.

Third, in some geographic areas the idea of the state as such is crumbling, while in other regions it remains strong. Particularly where it is disintegrating there is fertile ground for non-state actors like mafias, drug cartels, insurgent movements, and terrorist cells. These groups thrive among the newer, weaker, smaller, less stable states in Europe and Central Asia. This disintegrative process is ongoing even in areas previously thought secure, such as in Europe, where, as one observer recently put it, "the same mentality [as that which followed the disruption of the state system after World War I] is present again today. As in the 1930s, it reinforces trends among the smaller states to look for other partners and bilateral ties."[5]

## Two Regional Powers of Note

Archaeologists have discovered that during the Second Punic War (218–202 B.C.) trade between Carthage and Rome continued largely uninterrupted. The strategic dilemma this incongruity produced for the Carthaginians has been described: "They had, indeed, remained unchallenged for so long that they had come to regard the command of the sea as theirs by prescriptive right; yet the same anti-militarist and commercialist attitudes of mind that tended to make them dilatory in their reaction to military threats also led them to spend no more on their navy—upon whose efficiency their whole commercial empire outside of Africa ultimately rested—than was absolutely necessary."[6] Let us consider two states that wish to play Rome to an American Carthage.

*China.* The People's Republic of China, or PRC, sees in the United States an implacable foe that must be defeated. Yet China's leaders hope that the West will continue to trade with China and make investments in that country, for they are in China's long-term interest and blind the West to China's threatening military posture as well as its ability to cause great mischief among its neighbors.[7]

Chinese doctrine supports this view. During the 1980s the People's Liberation Army concluded that, contrary to Mao's dictum of people's war, future wars would be of the "local and limited" variety and that China consequently had to modernize and streamline its armed forces. Future wars would be intense but of limited duration. The U.S. success in the Gulf war has only reinforced this assessment.[8]

To its more than three million military personnel, eight thousand battle tanks, and nuclear weapons (constituting mainly a regional threat), China has added force-projection capabilities that threaten the interests of maritime nations.[9] Emphasis on developing a "blue water" naval capability that extends power beyond littoral defense indicates a desire to play a role in areas not adjacent to Chinese territory. New marine units, enhanced amphibious warfare capability, tanker aircraft, new Russian MiG-29 fighters, and the desire to obtain an aircraft carrier battle group are indications of this trend.

One often discussed possible target is the Spratly Islands chain, a barren group with undetermined oil reserves. Perhaps more important to the United States is the location of the chain—in the South China Sea, roughly equidistant between Manila and Singapore and astride the sea lanes connecting many of America's allies and trading partners. Significant forces stationed there would enable China to pressure these nations and might mark a shift to a sea-interdiction strategy, significant in light of the American withdrawal from the Philippines.

China is also a weapons proliferator, selling missiles of up to intermediate range, particularly in the Middle East. According to the Office of Technology Assessment,

this places China in clear violation of the Missile Technology Control Regime, despite recent pledges to abide by it.[10]

Additionally, two U.S. television networks have produced major investigations of the sale of Chinese assault rifles in the United States and of the uses of wholesale companies for intelligence purposes. Supposedly local concerns such as regional security, internal stability, and technology acquisition govern most Chinese intelligence operations, yet the reach of these operations is global. To that end they have supported subversion not only in Asia but in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. Concludes one observer: "Chinese intelligence operations come to seem significant in proportion to a country's prospects for economic competition or military confrontation with the PRC. Also, China's intelligence support for its nuclear and missile proliferation activities alters regional balances of power and is therefore of concern to nations with a stake in world order."[11]

Over the centuries China's empire rested upon the psychological pressure it was able to impose on its neighbors. Military intimidation, espionage, and subversion form strong themes in the Chinese military classics, and they are a crucial element in reasserting modern imperial ambitions.

*Iran.* Leaders of the Islamic Republic believe and teach that the United States is "the great Satan." While China is a sought-after market because it is generally thought of as having tremendous export potential for Western companies, Iran has extraordinary leverage against Western powers because two-thirds of the world's known oil reserves are located in the Gulf area. Thus Iran's slight stature as a national entity is in part offset because of its chief export to the West, with oil sales growing even though Iran is labeled a pariah state.

Secondly, Iran is involved in a complex competition for influence that both demarcates and shatters cultural distinctions. As an avowedly revolutionary Islamic state, it is the marquee nation in a cultural clash between Islam and the West. At the same, time the Shi'ism predominant in Iran clashes with the Sunni majority in all other Islamic nations, specifically in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In both respects Iran is pitted against the United States.

The Islamic leadership of Iran believes it cannot coexist with Judeo-Christian values. Adding a martial component to their brand of fundamentalist Islam, the mullahs describe their role in expansionist and violent terms. Since 1979 their actions have backed up their hyperbole. Even during the Iran-Iraq War, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), comprising a quarter of a million men, conducted military and paramilitary operations abroad. Another method of power projection has been terrorism, with the IRGC controlling factions in Iran, Lebanon, and Libya and forming security ties with North Korea and Sandinista-led Nicaragua.[12]

One tenet of ancient Persian nationalism that remains a thread of modern Iranian foreign policy is domination of the Gulf region. Revolutionary Iran's strategy has been one of removing alien sources of power so that it can dominate the region and expand its influence beyond the Gulf. Its cause gained considerable momentum when the Soviet Union collapsed, opening the Central Asian states to Iranian contacts, and when the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf war shattered the idea of pan-Arab nationalism founded upon victory in battle.[13] The Palestine Liberation Organization's acquiescence to an Israeli state is portrayed by militant Muslims as another example of secular nationalist failure: Hamas and Hezbolah opposition to the PLO-Israeli peace process is directed by radical fundamentalists in Iran.

Equally important in this regard is the weakening of secular Arab states. Regime security and stability have become the most pressing problems confronting Middle Eastern Arab states.[14] Iran has worked to undermine the viability of secularism in the region through a campaign of terrorism, assassination, and subversion, including proselytizing through sympathetic clerics. Arab states across North Africa, near the Gulf, and on the Saudi peninsula have been targets; Egypt and Algeria have been left tottering. Subversion is supported by Iranian president Hashemi Rafsanjani, who in November 1992 reportedly urged a terrorist campaign in the United States to reinforce American isolationism and, thereby, the alienation of secular Arabs.[15]

Iran's assets to carry out this campaign include close ties to the Abu Nidal organization, Hamas in Israel, Islamic Jihad based in Lebanon, and a core of sympathetic states including Cuba and Syria. The U.S. State Department lists Iran as the world's "most active state sponsor of terrorism."[16] Iran benefits from drug trafficking in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon and is a conduit for opium from Afghanistan. At a time when many states that engage in drug trafficking are—through various political fictions—kept off a special U.S. government list of such states (e.g., Peru and Bolivia are officially said to be cooperating with U.S. anti-drug efforts, when there is considerable evidence to the contrary), Iran remains on it. Additionally, Iran controls a counterfeiting operation in Lebanon aimed at undermining U.S. currency. It expertly reproduces U.S. hundred-dollar bills that can also be used to purchase whatever a terrorist network needs. Finally, Iran has a nascent nuclear program, imports missiles from China and North Korea, and gets technical assistance from Soviet-trained Cuban scientists. The CIA reportedly believes that Iran funds the North Korean nuclear program and may be repaid with technical assistance and enriched uranium.[17]

Tehran is trapped between a desire to expand its influence and its own weakness. It appears that Iran has only a limited capability to increase oil production, while oil prices have bottomed out, providing less return on exports than anticipated. In order to further its expansionist aims, therefore, Iran must

manipulate the supply of others. Threatened subversion and military pressure are methods of doing that. With burgeoning domestic dissatisfaction and low oil prices, the danger of the Iranian leadership acting rashly is one that cannot be ignored. Even if the theme of revolutionary Islam is toned down or blended into Persian nationalism, the chance of a desperate act is growing.

Another approach, in theory, would be for Iran to moderate its policies in order to attract new customers like the United States. Yet Iran has had some success in this area without moderating its policies. In 1992, despite Iran's record, for the first time since 1979 U.S. companies began purchasing oil at Iran's Kharg Island terminal—with Washington's consent, so long as the oil is intended for resale outside the U.S. These companies now buy more Iranian oil than the second-largest purchaser, Japan. The lesson to be drawn, it would appear, is that one can attack Western interests at the same time that one does business with Westerners. Leaders in Tehran could find themselves strengthened without having to appear at all conciliatory.

## Informal Alliances

We have seen an ability to cooperate, at least in a limited sense, across different cultures with respect to missile sales, technological cooperation, nuclear programs, and so forth. A further question is whether that cooperation can reach across differing cultures to a more substantial degree.

Culture is often thought of as something that divides, and, in terms of language, ethnicity, custom, religion, values, and morality (the scaffolding of any defined culture), this is an accurate assessment. But another tenet holds that a perception of common enemies tends to bridge those divides rather than make them appear threatening. Confucian and Muslim states, for example, have cultural differences, but some of them have deeper differences with the West. Samuel Huntington has identified what he calls the "Confucian-Islamic Connection," a perceived community of interest generated when well armed Western states, who are advocates of non-proliferation, attempt to limit the military power of Asian and Muslim states.[18]

Crumbling Cold War alliances are accelerating the drift away from long-accustomed relations. Several examples illustrate how an increasingly erratic state system has disturbed formerly stable relationships. With the loss of its patrons, Cuba faces dire economic prospects; Fidel Castro has sought to exploit anxieties of other nations that the United States is a power to be feared. Brazil, for example—traditionally a strong U.S. ally—has begun a reassessment in the wake of concern about the direction of U.S. policies concerning nuclear weapons proliferation, environmental issues pertaining to the Amazon basin, and Brazil's weapons dealings with renegades like Saddam Hussein. A more positive Brazilian

assessment of Cuba would be a profound turnabout in that nation's foreign policy, for it was only a few years ago that a plan to smuggle Cuban weapons into the hands of would-be domestic revolutionaries was thwarted by Brazilian authorities.[19]

But perhaps the most troubling example comes from Southeast Asia, where traditional bilateral and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) multi-lateral ties are imperiled. Two dynamics are at work: fear of growing Chinese power, and the apparent U.S. retreat from the region (symbolized by the withdrawal from bases in the Philippines). Some evidence for this can be seen in South Korea's adhering to China's position that dialogue instead of economic sanctions is the best way to harness North Korea's nuclear ambitions.[20] The image of the U.S. withdrawing without replacing the Philippine installations while also reducing its military power generally has spurred rapid weapons-buying in the area and a new emphasis on interregional multilateralism—neither of which, however, has the potential for significantly opposing Chinese ambi-tions.[21]

Any local power vacuum seems destined to draw in China, to the detriment of the United States and its Asian allies. Almost certainly this Chinese influence will transform the region more than will U.S. trade ties. While it is true that the Asian "tigers" have experienced phenomenal growth through exports to the U.S., it should also be kept in mind that China is becoming a "tiger" in its own right and shows little sign of moving toward a more pro-American position except in the area of trade. Economic growth and military modernization appear to be progressing, but toward opposite goals. It should be remembered that in 1974 the PRC invaded the Paracel Islands, garrisoned by South Vietnamese troops allied with the United States, notwithstanding its wish to expand ties to Washington. If further military modernization is imperiled by economic shortcomings in the future, it should come as little surprise if a similar thrust toward the Spratlys occurs or if solidified ties to Myanmar (Burma) provide China a base for acting against Indonesia in an effort to claim oil deposits off the northwestern coast of Sumatra, astride the Malaccan Strait.

## Implications of Informal Alliances

These emerging structures differ from Cold War alliance structures in several important ways. Until the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the coalition opposed to the United States was for the most part both public and legal, in the sense of a signed agreement with obligations for all members. While the reality differed from the facade, the formal structure did help focus the United States and its allies on a common enemy. It took the West some time to realize that the reasons the formal counterpoise, NATO, existed—to protect Europe and to oppose

Warsaw Pact nuclear strategy—had little bearing on the actual Soviet offensive in the Third World. Nevertheless, the image of the Warsaw Pact as a formal alliance made it relatively easy for the legalistic, rationalist, positivist West to perceive and label it a threat.

The post–Cold War alliance structure is more likely to include "gray area" alliances of states and non-state actors. The most important aspect of these associations is their secretive nature, in contrast to the overt Warsaw Pact. Theoretically at least, being secretive allows an advantage: it may be that this non-legal form enhances the possibility of surprise by lulling its adversaries into believing that if no threat is proclaimed, none exists.

Another observation is in order: foreign-source support for insurgencies did not end with the Soviet Union's collapse. A strong argument for the reappearance of national-interest motives amid the collapse of political structure is Russia's support for Serb expansionism in the Balkans and Russian troops in the former Soviet possessions known today as the "near abroad." The products of an old czarist policy, these areas appear unaffected by talk of a new world order and look more like prey for nineteenth-century-style imperialism. The same can be said for other regional expansionists like Iran, which still supports insurgents throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The fact that such aggressors rely on non-state actors is hardly new. In whatever guise, the agents of "gray area" expansion have long been instruments of aggressive states.

The first principle of "gray area" expansion, at the heart of this low-level style of aggression, is a psychological battle to disrupt Western democracies. The "Eastern" way of warfare described by Sun Tzu's *Art of War* and other ancient military classics employs two principles that are difficult for Americans to understand, precisely because they are aimed at dividing the population from its leadership. The "Eastern way" strikes at the two non-military parts of Clausewitz's strategic triad, the people and the government. The first Eastern way's principle exploits *time*. For the United States, and democracies generally, geared to elections every few years (and with policy no doubt affected by off-year elections as well), it is difficult for the people to comprehend a style of warfare that thinks in terms of generations, perhaps even longer. In the hands of enemies, then, stealthy aggression becomes a weapon.

The passage of time is also critical to the second principle, psychological warfare. As these conflicts grow around the globe, and as the West becomes exhausted in conflicts that remain unresolved after a short period of time, popular impatience with the political leadership sets in or is generated by rivals seeking to build electoral pressures. In the Eastern approach, the center of gravity for disrupting democracies lies in exploiting their political electoral cycles, the key linkage between population and politician.

Militarily, the difficulty lies in identifying the precise nature of the threat. For Sun Tzu, attacking the army of the adversary was only the third-best approach, after attacking first his strategy and then disrupting his alliances—for "those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle."[22] On the other hand, military power is a substantial component of the intimidation factor vital to destroying the psychological will of the enemy.

In naval terms, the idea of combating an opponent by defeating his strategy instead of directly taking on his military forces derives as much from Western naval strategists as it does from Sun Tzu. For Sir Julian Corbett and Raoul Castex, sea control, commerce raiding, and controlling the enemy's strategy were more important than defeating the enemy's battle fleet. Thus, interdiction denying access through the Strait of Hormuz already appears to be the chosen Iranian naval strategy, chiefly by means of land-based missiles and submarines.[23] The *guerre de course* has long been utilized by inferior naval powers to disrupt the strategy of the stronger power. The vulnerability to interdiction of massive amounts of shipping among Western trading partners and their allies in East Asia makes a *guerre de course* strategy attractive today as well.

In peacetime the threat is less blatant but still harmful. Ensuring the security of sea lines of communication requires not just the psychological comfort provided by naval presence but also diplomatic and economic measures designed to assure militarily weaker states that they have friends. Unfortunately, the trend is toward further U.S. naval isolation from some important areas for naval activity. If this trend holds, gradual gravitation of Southeast Asian states toward a Chinese-dominated sphere of influence is likely. In the Persian Gulf, an Iranian program of intimidation against littoral states, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, continues. Critical states, those with mineral deposits or that lie alongside important sea lanes, are being subverted by measures other than traditional war. Many of the littoral states being contested today are also crucial trading partners for the West, and regime changes, particularly in economically important Saudi Arabia or strategically placed Taiwan, could have a profound impact on Western security.

Submarines, even antiquated varieties, have become an attractive method of threatening commercial shipping, and possibly also of interdicting logistical shipping intended to support distant armies. Antisubmarine warfare is difficult today for even the most advanced naval powers. Even a handful of submarines in littoral areas adjacent to regional conflicts are enough to make intervention hazardous. As one observer notes, "No greater threat exists to successful [naval] operations in the littorals than that posed by a professionally operated diesel submarine."[24] While some states are more proficient with these vessels than others, and they may or may not pose a direct threat to the most modern navies, there is little doubt they can be a destabilizing factor. For example, China cannot

view with equanimity Indian purchases of Russian submarines.[25] Furthermore, as Clausewitz reminds us, war is a highly subjective affair. As long as they are willing to pay a substantial price, even mediocre powers that can score single victories against stronger yet psychologically weakened powers can in the end attain some semblance of victory—as the Tet offensive, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and the 1983 Marine Corps disaster in Lebanon have shown.

The anatomy of alliance structures has changed in yet undetermined ways in the years after the Cold War. What is obvious, though, is that as Soviet-style communism receded as a menace, the cohesion underlying the old structures broke down. Defections from Cold War alliance structures and relationships with insurgents, criminal elements, weapons profiteers, and terrorists—all agents of "gray area" expansionism—are real, but they remain distressingly unnoticed by the West. Steps toward peace between old enemies, most notably in the Middle East, have masked the intensification of other tensions at a time when the United States appears disengaged. The result is that new opportunities for regional powers to project their influence have emerged.

Another obvious difference is the potential for violence these regional powers possess, facilitated in part by the breakdown of old alliances. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction among even mid-level powers is a cause for great concern. At the same time, these nations' conventional military potential draws upon familiar and proven methods. On land, insurgency and low–intensity conflict tend to keep the level of violence down but with disproportionate chances for victory. At sea, particularly where littoral states can be recruited as bases, pressure on the maritime arteries threatens to constrict the West's lifeblood, trade, while in the event of war there is potential to deny critical passage to U.S. ships.

Hence, although the means for expanding such alliances may not be outright military aggression, there can be little doubt that power even of the old-fashioned variety plays a significant role in the post–Cold War environment. When states take measures to multiply their power, whether through formal alliances or something different, the result is a summons that must not be taken lightly.

## Notes

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25. See Wortzel, esp. pp. 161–2.

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When speculation has done its worst, two and two still make four.

Samuel Johnson, *Idler* 36