Assessment of the Current State of U.S. Alliances

Although alliances have always played an important role in international relations, people of different schools of thought, and at different points in time have characterized them in a plethora of different forms. An emerging debate among policymakers and academics alike in the field of international relations is the question of whether the U.S. led war on terrorism has affected the manner in which America forms alliances with nations, primarily in Asia. Throughout the years, scholars have defined alliances in various conceptual manners, and many recognized that the factors which determine the formative bases of alliances have shifted over time and in relation to the constraints of the current international system (Bueno de Mesquita, 489). Just as many theorists posited that the stability and balance of international security underwent fundamental change with the collapse of the Soviet Union, there are an increasing number of people questioning whether further changes have occurred since September 11th, 2001. This paper seeks to examine the nature of American alliances since the commencement of the U.S. led campaign against international terrorism. Is the United States changing its priorities and the values that have guided and driven U.S. foreign policy and alliance formations since the end of the Cold War? If so, what are the determinants of the formation of new alliances and strengthening of previous ones, and how are these changes manifesting themselves in American foreign relations?
Literature Review

A great deal of analysis has been written about the changes that have occurred in U.S. foreign policy since the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. As was mentioned above, the scope of this paper is limited only to the analysis of U.S. alliances since the attacks. There is no shortage of literature within the field of international relations on the theoretical concepts that govern the formation of alliances. Many of those theories have also been applied to historical examples throughout the 20th century. Due to the short passage of time since the attacks, only recently have applications of alliance theory begun to surface in connection with the international affairs of the previous three years, and more specifically the actions of the United States. In order to ascertain whether the system of alliances has changed in recent years, it is first necessary to review some of the fundamental concepts of alliance theory, as well as recent scholarly works that have provided their own analyses of the same question or general approach.

Many academic articles and books have been written on the subject of alliances between countries and the motivating factors that produce those alliances. In his *Principles of International Politics*, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita delineated the fundamental differences between the two primary types of military alliances: bilateral and multilateral (BDM, 488). He defined a bilateral alliance as a relationship solely between two states, and provided the Japanese-American alliance (signed after WWII) as one of the more notable models of this particular configuration. Bueno de Mesquita distinguished this type of a relationship from his example of a multilateral alliance; an agreement that involves more than two states (388). The most notorious manifestation of this type of
alliance is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO; consisting of 19 countries (as of 2002) and is constantly expanding. Bueno de Mesquita also outlined the framework of alliances that governed the international community during the 19th and 20th centuries, and how the primary forms that alliances took evolved chronologically from ententes, to nonaggression pacts, and finally to the Cold War era dominated mutual defense pacts (489). He finished off his historical account of the transitioning forms of alliances by hypothesizing that: “Perhaps the twenty-first century will see the invention of some other form of alliance” (489). The focus of this paper is to determine whether this remark by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita has in fact turned out to be incredibly prescient. While some of the forms of alliances described above still exist in our current political system, Bueno de Mesquita’s chapter on alliances ultimately fails to address the possibility that changes had already begun to occur. He does a superb job of illustrating different historical permutations of various alliances, but does not delve into the realm of modern day international relations. The information provided by Bueno de Mesquita also is inadequate because it fails to address in detail and explain specifically what drives different countries to form one type of alliance or another, and with whom.

A number of the shortcomings in Bueno de Mesquita’s work that were enumerated above are addressed in Karen Mingst’s theoretical undertaking; Essentials of International Relations. As was previously alluded to, in order to answer the question being set forth in this paper, it is first necessary to understand the different mitigating factors that contribute to the formation of alliances, rivalries, and quasi-alliances between countries. Karen Mingst asserted that: “A state augments its security by…forming alliances with other states based on similar interests (Mingst, 67-8). The similar interests
referred to by Mingst include the following primary considerations: shared values (political freedoms etc.), similarity in type of government, economic considerations, and concerns related to the preservation of a country’s national security. If one accepts the logic of Mingst’s assertion, then logically the converse characterization of inter-state relationships must also apply: countries which do not subscribe to the same general values (i.e. human and women’s rights), have different forms of governance, and perceive security issues from a different perspective are almost never allied with each other, and are often outright enemies. In a separate, yet relevant corollary to Mingst’s enumerated reasons for the formation of alliances based on shared values, she emphasizes that the entire structure of the international political system is subject to change at the hands of a number of possible exogenous events (Mingst, 93). She said of our current international system: “…while the military threats from other states may have diminished and economic threats are more diffuse from the forces of globalization, nontraditional threats to security have escalated. Drug trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism undermine both state security and individual security” (127). Essentially, Mingst concludes that Realists and Liberals alike both recognize the importance and firm rooting of alliances in shared values, yet certain factors that serve as catalysts for greater instability can cause changes to the basic theoretical framework of alliances. She elucidates a clearer picture of the theoretical factors behind the formation of alliances between countries, but she barely hints at the fact that many historical and especially current relationships between states cannot be understood within the framework that she espouses. Mingst focuses solely on the classical theoretical foundations of alliances, but does not apply those concepts to any real-world examples.
In his book, *Balance of Power: History and Theory*, Michael Sheehan provides the remaining theoretical background on alliances necessary to assess the question being asked in this paper. Sheehan’s book is a lengthy treatise on the evolution of one of the fundamental elements of Realist theory: balance of power. He delineates more than ten variations of the definition of balance of power, but the main premises of this concept are as follows: the international system is anarchic, with each state seeking to maximize its power potential by constantly making decisions based on increasing its own relative power while undermining the power of its competitors (Sheehan, 5). Because every state is assumed to follow this model, a balance of power is maintained, and if any change occurs to the status quo, every state will attempt to ensure that they gain from it.

Promoting a beneficial balance of power can be summed up as the notion of a country producing a political environment that is most beneficial to its own strategic interests while other actors ensure that no one power assumes too much control in a given region. While not everybody subscribes to all aspects of this theory, the overall general concept has been assumed to be the framework under which most world leaders make foreign policy decisions (Sheehan, IX). Because of the popularity of this concept, it is crucial to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors and variable involved in today’s international system.

Sheehan also emphasizes a number of important assertions about alliances within the theoretical framework of Realism and specifically balance of power politics. The first essential element related to alliances is Sheehan’s statement that alliances may be formed on the basis of ideological preference in times of strategic stability, but in times of danger, alliances are formed based on availability, willingness, and strategic value with
ideological compatibility becoming relatively dispensable (57). This statement appears
upon first glance to directly contradict the earlier theoretical concepts emphasized by
Karen Mingst, but it actually provides a more all-encompassing definition of the
motivations behind the formation of alliances. Sheehan also makes another claim
pertinent to understanding the current state of U.S. alliances. He said that:

“In a balance of power system alliances should be flexible and temporary. States should be
prepared to desert old allies and seek new ones whenever such a realignment would serve to benefit the
balance of power…Because of this need to avoid permanent commitments, ad hoc alliances best suit a
balance of power system” (Sheehan, 56).

This assertion by Sheehan is important to understand as part of the larger body of
theoretical literature that has been written about alliances (some of which has been
addressed throughout this section), as well as a represented of the variation that exists
among competing theories, which will later be applied to real-world scenarios.
Sheehan’s theories alone are insufficient and too narrowly focused to exclusively obtain
an accurate assessment of the current state of U.S. alliances. Nothing in the realm of
international relations is ever simple and clear cut, the majority of the time it is necessary
to blend numerous competing viewpoints together in order to craft a better understanding
of a given political debate. All the previous theoretical works that have been discussed
will contribute individually in assessing the question of this paper in following sections.

Now that some of the leading theories on alliances have been summarized, a brief
summary of recent essays and some independently commissioned case studies that have
analyzed American alliances since September 11th, 2001 will be given. In her book,
Growing U.S. Security Interests in Central Asia, Elizabeth Wishnick describes the
geographical and geopolitical significance of many Central Asian countries to the War on
Terror. She asserts that before 9/11, the Central Asian countries had only a marginal
significance to the security interests of the United States, and she summarizes the policies pursued by America in relation to the region during the presidency of Bill Clinton (3). Wishnick then emphasizes the changing nature of U.S. security interests in Central Asia since the inception of the American campaign against international terrorism. She claims that the Bush Administration willfully ignored the continuing deplorable human rights abuses being committed and the tacitly accepted the corrupt and authoritarian Central Asian governments, because “…anti-terrorism became the defining principle of U.S. foreign policy…” (6). Wishnick finishes her assessment of U.S. alliances with the Central Asian republics post-9/11 by enumerating the numerous negative costs associated with the corresponding change in U.S. foreign policy. These costs included: increased anti-American resentment due to public opinion that the U.S. was supporting the repressive regimes that governed them, thereby producing fertile recruiting grounds for terrorists, as well as the destabilizing effects on the status quo balance of power in the form of favoring a potential regional hegemon in the form of Uzbekistan (28).

Wishnick’s study is helpful in terms of describing how U.S. alliances in one specific region in Asia have been affected by the policies pursued in relation to the war on terrorism, but it is limited in its applicability to other regions and the different changes and problems associated with studying a wider geographical range of countries.

In addition to numerous other regional or country specific studies similar to Wishnick’s, there is another collection of academic works relevant to the question being addressed in this paper. As was alluded to earlier, only recently have scholarly works begun to materialize that specifically address the overall manifestations of U.S. alliances post-9/11. In the Spring 2004 issue of Washington Quarterly, Kurt Campbell assesses
the status and role of alliances as a function of current U.S. foreign policy. In his essay entitled, “The End of Alliances? Not So Fast,” Campbell proclaims as truth that American alliances have undergone a dramatic transformation as a result of the war on terrorism (Campbell, 151). He outlines four of the primary schools of thought that have emerged to explain this new phenomenon (152), but discredits each one of them because he believes each is based on the assumption that, “a clear, uniform trend has emerged that will determine the fundamental fate and future of alliances in U.S. strategic planning” (152). He asserts that that assumption is a fallacy, and that our alliance system is still in flux (153). Campbell then provides his own personal and fairly unique perspective on the changing nature of American alliances in Asia. He draws a parallel between the demands placed on U.S. alliances by both the Cold War and the war on terrorism, and insists that “the United States has in fact given more value to those alliances that can reliably support U.S. interests in the war on terrorism and participate decisively in coalitions of the willing” (158). It is from this group of countries that Campbell believes U.S. alliances have undergone dramatic change, and he then delineates a distinct three-tiered system of categorizing the multitude of different alliances, and changes in bilateral relations between the U.S. and those countries. This new typology of U.S. alliances includes: a new nuclear family, new friends, and flings. The countries that belong to the new nuclear family, have all developed from shared values, governing practices, and political freedoms. The “new friends,” according to Campbell, consists of a group of countries that he says had pre-existing relations with the United States, but have become closer allies as a result of the strategic conditions of the war on terrorism. Finally, the “flings,” encompass a diverse range of countries with which the U.S. has historically had
drastically different strategic outlooks from in the past, but who have chosen to cooperate with Washington in certain areas of the war on terrorism. This hierarchy of countries referred to by Campbell will be referenced throughout the paper, and is a convenient, yet extremely imprecise method of framing U.S. bilateral relationships. Campbell’s essay touches upon some of the wide-ranging themes that are associated with the character of the current alliances of the United States. While it has a clear overarching framework, it is sorely lacking in specific examples and explanations for why certain countries have been categorized in which manner, and also lacks empirical methods of any sort to lend credibility to an otherwise interesting and certainly unique theory. The intention of this paper is to combine the successful approaches and methodology used in each of the previously mentioned bodies of literature, in order to test the validity of the hypotheses that will be set forth in an upcoming section by using a case-oriented approach.

**Causal Model**

It is the contention of this paper that there has indeed been a noticeable change in the formative factors that determine the nature of a number of alliances and bilateral relationships between the United States and various Asian countries. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze all U.S. alliances with every Asian country, therefore I will focus on two groups of countries from which I intend to derive the testable hypotheses: countries that previously had no alliance and had completely different value systems from the U.S. pre-9/11, and countries that had some sort of relatively insignificant bilateral relationship with the U.S. before the war on terrorism (an explanation of why these two groups were chosen will follow in the data and method section). As was previously
mentioned, various earlier studies have established that countries form alliances based upon shared values, similarity in governance, economic reasons, and because of national security reasons (i.e. Japan/U.S. bilateral alliance in order to deter Chinese aggression etc.). These traditional determinants of the forging of alliances, however, do not adequately explain why the United States has established bilateral relationships with countries such as Pakistan and Uzbekistan. America has entered into tenuous and even firm alliances with these and other questionable countries because of a shift in priorities in U.S. foreign policy. Achieving success in the war on terror demands that America enlist the help of certain countries, not on the basis of shared ideology or values, but rather on their potential capacity and willingness to provide assistance to the U.S. in prosecuting this global campaign. This necessity is supported by a previously quoted section from Michael Sheehan’s, Balance of Power, in which he clearly asserted the fact that in times of perceived threat or danger, ideological considerations decrease significantly, and allies are chosen based upon viability and capability only (Sheehan, 57).

There are a number of different methods, characteristics, and capacities that certain countries have that can produce the necessary assistance required by the United States. These abilities included any or all of the following: a well developed and respected intelligence capability (information or networks), bordering a country of ongoing military significance (possibility of allowing stationing of U.S. armed forces), existence of Al-Qaeda presence or other significant terrorist organizations within borders, ability to assist in seizure or freezing of financial assets of terrorists and/or curtail funneling of funds to terrorist organizations, and any other method of being able to either eliminate infrastructure of terror
or sources of terrorism (these combined capabilities will hereafter be referred to as “assistance potential.”)

There are also a number of different areas by which one could measure an increase in the level of bilateral relations between the U.S. and other countries. One of the primary measurements that can be used would be the level of financial aid received by the country allied with America. Other considerations could include (but not necessarily be limited to): removal of economic sanctions, transfer of military technology, debt relief, formal defense guarantee, or sponsorship for membership in a desired NGO (WTO etc.). This variable will be referred to as “Change in R.”

**Testable Hypothesis**

Examining the two primary variables in this study can test the hypothesis that emerged from the causal model: assistance potential and change in R. The hypothesis that is being asserted in this paper is that there will be a positive correlation between the two variables. In more precise terms, it is expected that: if a specific country has a positive value of x; meaning that it has the potential to provide material support of some variety to the campaign against international terrorism, then it will most likely have a positive value of y; meaning that the U.S. will consequently have attempted to strengthen bilateral relations with that country and/or forge an alliance between the two by providing some sort of tangible benefits. Additionally, the causal model would also hypothesize that if x=0 or is a negative value (no ability to support in any way; actively working against the U.S.-led coalition in the War on Terror), then y=0 or be a negative value, representing either no fundamental change in any alliance or the previous status of their
relationship, or a worsening of bilateral relations. However, I expect that the latter example will not have as strong a correlation between x and y as the former will.

In order to ensure the accuracy of the results from the case studies, it is necessary to control for the factors outlined earlier that usually account for the development of alliances (economic reasons, national security issues, similarity in governance, similar values and freedoms). The cases should ideally be composed of countries that do not fall into these categories, so that any observed change in R could be correctly attributed to the presence of the independent variable, assistance potential, and not some other factor.

**Data and Method**

A compilation of data must be assembled and evaluated in order to determine the validity of the hypothesis being asserted in this paper. A case-oriented approach is being employed to determine the results of this study, because an empirical analysis of the hypothesis set forth in this paper would necessitate the development of a means of mathematically measuring the independent and dependent variables, and would most likely produce imprecise results. The independent variable, or a country’s assistance potential, would have to be measured at least on a scale of 0-5; with zero representing no capability to provide assistance, and a five representing a country that possessed every single capacity that could conceivably help the U.S. fight the war on terrorism. Furthermore, the dependent variable, or the change in a country’s bilateral relationship with the U.S., would also have to be measured on a scale. This measurement would be even more imprecise as no unanimous agreement could ever be reached on classifying
the degree to which a country’s alliance with the U.S. changed. The only accurate method that could get a more accurate picture of reality, would be to define a variable such as level of foreign aid as being the representative measurement of change in bilateral relations. However, even that variable would not be completely reliable because it does not account for all the other tangible and intangible ways in which a country can benefit from having a better alliance with the United States.

When using the comparable cases strategy in any empirical examination, it is extremely crucial to exercise careful judgment when selecting the cases to be used. One of the most frequent errors committed by scholars who use case studies is known as selection bias. In its most obvious form, the author will deliberately or subconsciously select only countries that will support his or her theory, while in its subtler occurrence it is committed when the choice of countries rely on values of the dependent variable (Landman, 47). Studies such as this, composed of only a small number of cases being examined, also frequently have their results tainted due to what is commonly referred to as omitted variable bias. These errors, along with a number of others that occur less frequently, were identified in advance and kept in mind when selecting the countries that were used in this standard MDSD (most different similar design) study.

The first primary case study that will be used to test the hypothesis of this paper will be of Pakistan. First it is necessary to demonstrate that none of the control variables mentioned above are present in the example of Pakistan. Before the commencement of the war on terrorism, the United States and Pakistan had what some would characterize as an adversarial relationship. The U.S. cut off all foreign aid to Pakistan in 1990, following the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan. The relationship only worsened throughout the
1990’s as the U.S. increasingly began to develop a quasi-alliance with neighboring enemy: India. In 1998, the U.S. enacted economic sanctions on Pakistan for its participation in nuclear testing and provocative relationship with India. Mohan Malik characterized the impression of Pakistan before 9/11 as a country that was on a “gradual descent into the ranks of failed states” (Malik, 19). In addition to having no economic relationship with the United States, Pakistan also had no national security significance in terms of U.S. interests after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and until after 9/11. Finally, America and Pakistan had completely different values and strategic views from each other. Clearly Pakistan qualifies as being exempt from all the potential reasons that would produce a desire for the United States to form an alliance with. However, U.S./Pakistani relations dramatically changed after the beginning of the war on terrorism. Pakistan qualified as having the highest possible level of assistance potential to the United States in the campaign against international terrorism. A large domestic terrorist presence existed in Pakistan, including a number of fugitive Al-Qaeda leaders. Pakistan also had a well respected intelligence service that had a dearth of extremely useful intelligence on Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. Additionally, because so many terrorists attempted to flee to safety in Pakistan, the U.S. required Pakistani military cooperation to seize the terrorist fugitives, as they could not cross the border into Pakistani territory to seize them.

Now that it has been established that Pakistan is excluded from the control variables, and had a very high presence of the independent variable, assistance potential, the remaining element to examine is whether this situation would produce the results predicted by my hypothesis (a corresponding change in R). Following its expressed
intent to provide assistance to the U.S., Pakistan received sizeable amount of tangible benefits in return for their cooperation, and the Bush Administration referred to them as an “indispensable ally” (Dennis Kux, “Pakistan after the Elections”). Soon after the U.S. allied itself with Pakistan, America pledged to provide $1.5 billion in economic assistance, and the sanctions from the 1998 nuclear tests were removed (Malik, 20). Pakistan was also offered extensive debt restructuring and was recently named a “non-NATO Strategic Ally,” which allows the Pakistani army to purchase sophisticated American military equipment. It is clear that the case of Pakistan definitively supports the hypothesis of this paper.

The next case study that will be examined will be the relationship between the United States and Uzbekistan. Before September 11th, 2001, and continuing to this day, Uzbekistan is run by a corrupt authoritarian regime. In addition, it also has one of the most deplorable human rights records in the entire region. Elizabeth Wishnick cited Human Rights Watch as characterizing Uzbekistan as having one of the most deplorable human rights records in the entire region, where torture, restriction of media, and a ban on independent parties and social movements still exist (Wishnick, 30). There is almost no reason for the U.S. to be drawn to the Uzbek economy, and no pressing national security reasons for the U.S. to have developed an alliance with Uzbekistan before the war on terrorism. If anything, there are compelling reasons of national security that should prevent the U.S. from developing a bilateral relationship with Uzbekistan. Any U.S. military presence in that country would clearly make both China and Russia uneasy, thereby upsetting the regional balance of power.
The above-mentioned reasons clearly establish the logic of why the United States would have no desire to form an alliance with Uzbekistan. However, that is exactly what occurred after the beginning of the war on terrorism. Uzbekistan only qualifies for one of the primary categories that consist of its assistance potential: geographical significance and the ability to allow the U.S. to maintain military bases in a region where they previously could not, and would have quick access to trouble spots. Despite having just a minimal assistance potential and a very long list of reasons that should prevent Washington from approaching the country, the U.S. developed an alliance with Uzbekistan after 9/11. The change in R was also fairly substantial and beneficial for the corrupt Uzbek government. In FY 2001, Uzbekistan received $5 million more additional foreign military financing than even NATO-ally Turkey: a democratic government (Wishnick, 29). Despite all the factors that would imply the impossibility of an Uzbek/American alliance, it was created solely as a result for its minimal contributions to the war on terror. In exchange, the U.S. not only dramatically increased funding to the Uzbeks, but even signed a defense treaty with them. This case study further supports the stated hypothesis, and even further illustrates the amazingly high premium that the United States places on cooperation from countries in the war on terrorism.

Due to the small number of countries involved in this study, as well as the unavoidable imprecision of results that have been obtained using a variable invented solely for this analysis (which may be subject to different interpretations for different cases), it is not possible to make any kind of an assertion of causality. Short of performing a more complex statistical analysis, it is only possible to state whether or not there appears to be a correlation between the independent and dependant variables.
Conclusion

The results that have been demonstrated in this paper will contribute to the existing literature if only due to the fact that nothing appears to have been written yet on this specific subject. This study by no means will have a dramatic impact on the existing field of literature. However, it would be an extremely interesting idea to refine and retest with a larger sample as well as more precision in terms of the variables. The framework that has been laid out in this case-oriented approach could easily serve as a platform to determining the validity of the hypothesis in a far more reliable fashion. There are a number of inherent flaws and limitations in this study, some of which I have already referred to. The main flaw that really stands out from everything else is the fact that given the parameters of this experiment, and told how to categorize the data, there would be no consensus on the status of a number of countries level of bilateral relations or alliances with the United States. Ultimately, the hypothesis of this paper may only be feasible within the framework that has just been presented. Because of the lack of unanimity about certain categorizations, it would be difficult to show anything more than some level of correlation between the two variables, especially when moving beyond the limits imposed by a case-oriented format.

Refining the criteria used in this paper to measure “assistance potential” would be the only possible manner in which causality could possibly be demonstrated. To do this, one would have to create a numbered scale that would be able to accurately differentiate at least between low, medium, and high levels of assistance potential. Then one would
have to separate all the countries in Asia into two primary groups: those countries that did not have a relationship with U.S. before 9/11, and those that did. Additionally, after accomplishing all of that, it would be necessary to break down the latter group into sub-sections consisting of countries whose bilateral relations with the United States fundamentally changed after 9/11, and those that retained the status quo etc. (not necessary or pertinent to run through each step).
Works Consulted


Malik, Mohan, Dragon on Terrorism: Assessing China’s Tactical Gains and Strategic Losses Post-September 11. Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002


