

**The Great Asymmetry: American Allies in Times of War**

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## The Great Asymmetry: American Allies in Times of War

Almost seven years after 9/11, the war on terrorism has evolved beyond its original formulation, with implications for both domestic and international politics. From a global and unconditional show of solidarity to the final year of an unpopular president, can we make sense of the war on terrorism beyond the Bush administration? By looking at the Canada-US security relationship in that context, my goal is to understand how these two allies have perceived and responded to the threat of terrorism. Inherent to the dynamic is the considerable power imbalance between the two states, which has implications for intra-alliance interaction patterns.

Although alliances are quite diverse in their manifestations, they are usually created with one purpose in mind: addressing a threat. Once created, alliances sometimes outlive the threats which motivated their creation. It is thus clear that intra-alliance patterns of behavior emerge over time. How do we uncover these patterns? How can we make sense of the actions taken within the framework of a long-standing alliance? These questions grow in complexity when we look at the allies themselves. Not only is the literature biased in favor of alliance formation but the main focus seems to be on great power alliances, which only account for a small portion of alliance interactions (Rafferty 2000). Indeed, a great number of alliances are characterized by power asymmetries, which at first glance, would appear to have a huge impact on the nature of the security relationship. Can the weaker partner hope to gain when dealing with the stronger partner, or is compliance the only option? There is a recurring paradox for the weaker partner engaged in asymmetric security cooperation: it is unclear whether such agreements enhance sovereignty through increased security, or whether it threatens sovereignty by surrendering autonomy to the stronger partner.

In order to understand the asymmetric dynamic, it seems crucial to recognize that, given substantial power differentials, the two allies might not be prone to the same insecurities. By focusing on the internal dynamics of the asymmetric alliance, I aim to address the types of strategies which the weaker party can pursue to achieve its foreign policy goals. I will look at the war on terrorism, but more specifically, the formulation of a Canadian response to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Drawing on House of Commons debates and parliamentary committee reports, I will focus on the foreign policy options considered, and how they were assessed against American requests.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Asymmetry in Alliance Theory

The literature on asymmetric security cooperation, though scarce, has highlighted the tendency of the weaker partner to pursue reactive defensive policies, driven by its ties to the stronger state. In a sense, the theoretical literature on alliances and empirical findings on security cooperation naturally intersect. What is common to both segments (theoretical and case-specific literature) is that they focus on watershed moments, mainly alliance creation, but say little about how the alliance relationship is renegotiated over time. For example, Canadianists' insistence on a "special relationship" condemns the Canada-US defense relationship to theoretical irrelevance because they narrowly circumscribe it as unique (Cox

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<sup>1</sup> The period surveyed is from September 2001 to March 2003.

2005). Another pervasive idea is that the weaker power must carefully manage the alliance because the stronger partner has a tendency to act unilaterally (Roussel 2002). Within alliances, however, we witness events where some players demonstrate considerable autonomy with regards to defense policy. There is evidence to suggest that the security relationship is more complex than is illustrated by the “reactive defense” thesis (Orvik 1973).

For their part, realists suggest that alliances are ruled by existing power differentials. Moreover, the theory presupposes that the dominant power in the alliance will dictate the conditions of cooperation. However, in terms of *specifying* the conditions under which the weaker partner can manifest greater autonomy, we need to look elsewhere (Risse-Kappen 2002). Referring to the US-Canada alliance specifically, Keohane and Nye reject the realist account for making sense of the asymmetric relationship (Keohane and Nye 2001). Although they identify cases in which Canada was able to secure better outcomes than the US, there is no explanation given as to what conditions generated these types of outcomes. However, liberalism does highlight that small powers can influence powerful alliance partners through institutions (Risse-Kappen 1995; Haftendorn, Keohane and Walland 1999).

In other cases, as apparent in the constructivist thesis of “security communities”, the main theory cannot account for variation in intra-alliance behavior patterns. The argument offers a plausible explanation as to why there is an absence of violent conflict between long-standing allies, due to a “shared sense of community” (Adler and Barnett 1998: 333), but has little to say about how intra-alliance expectations play out. This does not shed much light on the non-cooperative outcomes. Furthermore, it cannot help us uncover the particularities of the asymmetric dynamic, for which we need an explanation that specifies the kinds of interactions taking place.

A similar criticism can be addressed to the strategic culture theorists. Definitions of strategic culture are as diverse as its manifestations. There are, however, certain elements which are common to all interpretations: “[...] shared assumptions and decision rules that impose a degree of order on individual and group conceptions of their relationship to their social, organizational or political environment” (Johnston 1995). For these assumptions and rules to be considered as a coherent national strategic culture, they must be relatively stable over time. However, if strategic culture is said to be constant, how can this approach help us understand the variation in foreign policy decisions? Strategic culture can explain certain inclinations, like support of multilateralism, peacekeeping and arms control, but beyond that, it is hardly a theory equipped to explain intra-alliance patterns of behavior, in all their complexity and variance.

To explain the variation in intra-alliance behavior, Zartman brings us a step closer to uncovering the asymmetric dynamic. He investigates how weaker parties can negotiate with the stronger parties and still get something, what he refers to as the “structuralist dilemma” (Zartman 1997). He makes the surprising argument that asymmetry produces better agreements. He does this by rejecting realist definitions of power as force; and instead, focuses on persuasion, influence, leverage and pressure. A striking finding for his discussion is that in none of the cases explored by Zartman did the weaker power act submissively. Instead, it compensated for its weakness through several strategies, like appealing to principle or building coalitions on particular issues (Zartman 1997: 18). The problem is that his cases of asymmetric bargaining all involve non-security issues such as trade agreements. However, in international security, it is hard to subtract force from our definition of power. Therefore, I

must account for how material power differentials impose constraints on alliance relationships.

However, focusing on material power exclusively obscures other goals pursued by the alliance partners, which is the main problem with the economic theory of alliances, where smaller alliance partners are portrayed as free riders (Nunez 2004). This explanation takes full account of the asymmetric dimension of alliances. According to this theory, defense burdens are expected to be shared unevenly among allies, where the stronger partner bears the brunt of alliance costs, while the weaker ally enjoys a free ride (Sandler 1993). An alternative hypothesis from the economic tradition is that burdens are shared according to the benefits respectively received by the allies (Sandler 1993). Apart from burden sharing, the theory tells us little about how the weaker partner can overcome, if it indeed can, its position of weakness when it comes to making specific security decisions.

These theorists nonetheless concede that changes in capabilities might precipitate alliance renegotiation. But I argue that precisely because the alliance is asymmetric, such changes in capabilities do not weigh heavily in the balance. This is the case because structural differences separate leading powers from other powers. Power capabilities will only have an important impact in the context of symmetric alliances, where relative considerations of power can and do alter the balances of forces within the alliances. In the context of asymmetric alliances, the types of strategies pursued by both partners are better indicators for understanding intra-alliance behavior and divergent decision-making.

This section has provided a cursory look at the literature that could shed light on intra-alliance behavior between asymmetric powers. As I have argued above, the assessment of the intra-alliance relationship is strongly influenced by where you stand: the core state and its weaker partner do not face the same constraints. Nevertheless, the outcome is not necessarily dictated by the stronger power, which is what I investigate.

## **2. Understanding Asymmetric Alliances: Conceptual Clarifications**

In focusing on asymmetric security cooperation, I zero in on alliances between two unequal partner states which have become institutionalized through routine meetings among state officials, as well as integration of military cooperation. In the Correlates of War Formal Interstate Alliance Dataset (1816-2000), the United States shares a defensive pact with Canada, which is a commitment “to intervene militarily on the side of any treaty partner that is attacked” (Gibler and Sarkees 2004: 215). Defensive pacts are opposed to less intrusive commitments, such as neutrality and non-aggression pacts, or ententes. This classification does not take into account offensive obligations, which are nonetheless important due to the risk of entanglement, or automatic involvement, in wars initiated by the stronger partner (Snyder 1997).

To clarify the motives behind alliance commitments, I rely on Morrow’s autonomy-security trade-off model. According to him, alliances provide states with two kinds of benefits. The first benefit, security, is defined as a state’s ability “to maintain the current resolution of the issues that it wishes to preserve”; while the second benefit, autonomy, is defined as “the degree to which it pursues desired changes in the status quo” (Morrow 1991: 908). The concept of autonomy will thus be understood as a capacity to act independently on specific

policy issues. In this study, both autonomy and security will be analyzed from the weaker partner's position.

The qualification of asymmetry is slightly more controversial. There are two definitions of asymmetric alliances. The first focuses on power capabilities, where one can differentiate between major and minor powers. Minor powers are defined as states not belonging to an identifiable list of major powers, as compiled by the Correlates of War. An asymmetric alliance is thus a formal commitment between a major and a minor power (Gibler and Rider 2004: 316). The second definition focuses on the types of gains made through alliances. Here we can distinguish symmetric alliances, where "both allies receive security or autonomy benefits", from asymmetric alliances, where "one ally gains security and the other autonomy" (Morrow 1991: 905). Power status (first definition) and the gains sought (second definition) are usually consistent (the weak seek security; while the strong seek autonomy).

According to this logic, the durability of asymmetric alliances is due to complementary interests between the partners. Since the strong ally pursues autonomy and the weak ally pursues security, the asymmetric partners have strong incentives in favor of a formal commitment, namely an alliance. This is where I part ways with Morrow. If these motives were present at the time of alliance creation, they are not set in stone. The partners might choose to renegotiate the alliance when particular issues arise. It is reasonable to expect that, when contemplating joint military action, allies undergo such reevaluations of their interests and motives in function of the issue at hand. Thus, within the broader framework of the alliance, where the overarching goals are complementary, there might be sequences when the motives vary (alignment vs. non-alignment on certain issues). What should be clear from the above discussion is that perceptions of threat matter and change over certain issues, with the specification that these might coincide or differ between allies.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Although the theory Walt (1984) puts forth in *Origins of Alliances* is about alliance formation, his argument about the sources of threat can be applied here. Since I focus on intra-alliance interaction patterns, it is important to differentiate between conditions that motivate alliance formation and conditions that shape subsequent interactions. If we use Walt's four sources of threat, we can imagine that the allied states will keep appraising aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power and aggressive intentions beyond the initial decision to ally (Walt 1984: 21-26). Therefore, his theory also allows for a dynamic study of alliances, where both commitments and threats are reevaluated over time.

Moreover, since the alliance is composed of sovereign states, we cannot take for granted that they will have the same assessment of threat, especially when it comes to identifying aggressive intentions. I argue that this is amplified by power asymmetries.<sup>2</sup> For example, if the weaker partner's threat perception differs from that of the stronger partner's, the former can either hold out or seek alternative strategies to pursue its foreign policy aims (Hirschman 1945). When, however, the weaker partner shares the stronger partner's perception of threat, the weaker partner may be less reluctant to surrender autonomy to the stronger alliance

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<sup>2</sup> In the case of symmetric allies, shared threat perception should lead to a joint cooperation plan, where the command structure reflects the relatively equal standing of the partners. When there is disagreement over threat perception, a general stalemate is likely, due to the parity of power between the allies; or the alliance might also break down (Zartman 1997).

partner. Even in this case, certain strategies may be available to increase leverage and decision-making input. Given the asymmetry in power, joint action translates into a substantial curtailment of the weaker partner's autonomy, due to dependence on the stronger partner's overwhelming material capabilities. It is not a decision based on convenience, but rather on necessity (Gruber 2000).

In operationalizing the variable of threat perception, I highlight a strong connection with the way a threat is framed by foreign policy decision-makers in the dominant state and how these claims are received by allied states. As Richard Price points out, perceptions of threat "are genuinely held by decision-makers and citizens" (Price 2004-2005, 148). Since we are dealing with democracies, we acknowledge that democratically elected leaders must take account of public approval and so, will be cautious in justifying their foreign policy positions (Martin and Fortmann 2001). However, public opinion evaluations only provide a rough guide for assessing the climate of foreign policy decisions. By itself, public opinion is only part of the picture because political leaders seek to influence and control public opinion through framing. The precise mechanisms operating within this relationship are not well understood. In this regard, Entman draws a cascading diagram of how information trickles from political leaders, through the media, all the way down to the public (Entman 2003). He mentions that the relationship from top to bottom is more straightforward; but that it is unclear how much public opinion can make its way up to political leaders and truly influence foreign policy decision.

Suffice it to say that framing is initiated by top decision-makers. Indeed, "while the securitization process is in principle completely open, in practice it is structured by the differential capacity of actors to make socially effective claims about threats [...]" (Williams 2003: 514). The identification of these frames, as introduced in the United States and received by its special allies will be the point of departure for assessing threat perception. The extent to which there are discrepancies in framing efforts by the two alliance partners will serve as an indicator to the nature of intra-alliance interactions that follow.

As one would expect, an asymmetric military alliance involves much higher stakes for the weaker partner. Perhaps this is not reflected in burden-sharing, but certainly in terms of what the alliance entails. The weaker partner must acknowledge the possibility that security cooperation might be under US control. This possibility has strong implications for decision-making input as potentially peripheral, a considerable blow to sovereignty. Transferring authority in such matters requires strong justifications. The worst fear is automatic involvement in any US conflict, what Glenn Snyder refers to as the fear of entrapment (Snyder 1997).

I therefore suggest that allies may not necessarily hold similar perceptions of threat, which has implications for the course of action chosen. For example, the weaker alliance partner can either choose to curtail its autonomy and defer to the stronger ally's leadership or find ways to manifest its autonomy through various strategies. These can be laid out in a spectrum ranging from the most submissive to the most autonomous courses of action: transfer of troops under foreign command, cooperative concessions, equal collaboration, rules violations (where the rules are defined within the framework of the alliance, as more or less specific obligations), unilateral tendencies on particular issues, refusal of explicit demands made by the ally, and defection. This framework applies to the initial decision between allies in favor or against joint mobilization, and not the interactions that follow. It is highly conceivable that the

weaker ally seek autonomy-strategies within and throughout the course of a coalitional mission.

The challenge with using threat perception as a main variable is operationalization. How can one systematically identify how a threat is perceived so as to yield reliable results? The first step is to identify the event which initiated the process of threat perception, to compare and relate each ally's assessment of the threat. This is mostly a given with regards to 9/11, since this event was unambiguously identified as a threat by the United States and its allies. Nevertheless, the subsequent reevaluations of the threat created important inconsistencies between the American and Canadian interpretations.

The second step consists in looking at how decision-makers present the issue at the domestic level. A public condemnation of the events will not necessarily translate into action; whereas declaring a 'war on terror' can give us a clearer indication of the policy avenues being contemplated. Indeed, framing has been an important component in how the public will perceive different policy alternatives.<sup>3</sup>

H1: When asymmetric allies express dissimilar messages concerning the threat, the weaker ally is more likely to opt for autonomy-seeking strategies.

Acknowledging that threats may be perceived differently by Canada and the United States, the former may seek strategies that reconcile American expectations with its own foreign policy concerns.

#### 4. Competing Explanations

The above discussion based on threat perception is strongly linked to the constructivist strand of international relations. It is therefore important to bring in competing explanations from the realist and liberal schools. The realist explanation will be based on the nature of the security environment while the liberal explanation will focus on the degree of institutionalization of the alliance.

The realist view would see the security environment strongly influence the amount of pressure the alliance leader will exert on its smaller allies. Such constraints would be especially strong during the Cold War, given the bipolar structure (Waltz 1979; Walt 1993). This leads to my competing hypothesis:

H2: The more threatening the security environment, the more pressure the dominant ally will exert on its partners.

In the post-Cold War world, no single state could be identified as the dominant threat, as had been the case during the Cold War with the Soviet Union. There was a period of transition in the 1990s, where the challenges of weak states and unstable dictatorships preoccupied Western nations, but not in the sense of being the potential targets for aggression. No existential threat dominated the conduct of international security as of yet. This, of course, was altered by the events of September 11, which ushered a new unifying theme, namely the war on terrorism.

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<sup>3</sup> Framing refers to the ability of political actors to present their cause so as to echo the public's values (Geddes and Guiraudon 2004: 334-353).

Under this banner, one could finally fit all the disparate threats which had plagued the post-Cold War order: they were asymmetric in nature, difficult to locate and proliferated in weak or stateless societies. A main enemy was identifiable once again, since terrorism was personified by Al-Qaeda and terrorist-harboring countries. However, the absence of a near-peer, clearly-identifiable foe should make the alliance more flexible, as the dominant power's preeminence, territorial integrity and survival, are currently unchallenged.

The second competing explanation finds its logic within liberal institutionalism. Here, it is hypothesized that the degree of institutionalization may have an impact on the asymmetric dynamic. The moment of creation does not predetermine the following intra-alliance interactions. Time is a strong component in understanding this dynamic. With time, if allies engage in peacetime military coordination and invest in the formalization of their alliance, it is arguably solidified (Holsti, Hopmann and Sullivan 1973). Despite this process of consolidation, empirical studies have shown that alliance performance does not become more reliable (Leeds and Anac 2005: 199). In other words, allies are no more likely to commit to war initiatives, no matter how formalized or enduring the alliance commitment.

Alternatively, as an alliance becomes increasingly consolidated over time, the initial commitment is no longer put in question. This may translate in alliance partners being more creative in regards to the original requirements. Even if power differentials remain unchanged, an alliance which is more institutionalized should allow weaker alliance partners more leeway in achieving their aims vis-à-vis the dominant power, when those aims do not coincide. Since the dissolution of the alliance is no longer feared, they may view the costs of autonomy as bearable.

Moreover, the presence of multiple security institutions, which are common to both the dominant partner and its special allies, may allow the latter to forum shop. Forum-shopping refers to the ability of states to choose the most strategic venue to pursue their aims. In other words, forum-shopping can be viewed as "A key strategy for actors seeking to influence outcomes is to push issues to arenas, which work to their advantage" (Kellow and Zito 2005: 46-47). This leads to the final hypothesis:

H3: The presence of parallel security institutions will encourage the strategy of forum-shopping on the part of weaker alliance partners.

When considering these alternative explanations, the realist hypothesis should be more relevant for assessing the dominant power's behavior. For Canada, the perception of threat, in relation to the United States, circumscribes the types of strategies available for a response. The high degree of institutionalization and membership in multiple security organizations also allow Canada to seek out different forums to stake its claims. Making use of these different levels of interactions, Canada appeared as a very cautious player in its approach to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

## **5. Overview of the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq**

At the outset, the intervention in Afghanistan proceeded in two phases: 1) the military campaign to overthrow the Taliban regime, known as Operation Enduring Freedom; 2) the UN multinational force to bring stability to the capital of Kabul, ISAF (International Security



Assistance Force). Both missions were initially under American command: “US leadership of an expanded mission would mark the first time in history that one nation commanded both a multilateral peacekeeping operation and a military effort inside a country simultaneously” (Marten 2002-03: 47). With its NATO allies, the United States began operations on October 7, 2001. At that point, the decision to join the initiative was based on a coalition of willing nations. The original mission, which was to root out the Taliban, was not sanctioned under the UN. The war on terrorism is, and has been from the beginning, an American enterprise with support from its allies. Although there was indeed a UN resolution, it was not a sanction of approval upon the armed intervention to oust the Taliban regime (Richter 2005). Rather, it occurred on December 20, more than two months after the beginning of the confrontation. The resolution only aimed to secure the newly installed Karzai government.

The decision to launch the war in Afghanistan was directly motivated by the September 11 attacks. The conviction that the Taliban regime was a terrorist harbor quickly gathered a coalition in favor of bringing down the regime to address the threat of terrorism (DND 2006). The direct link between the threat of terrorism, as experienced on 9/11, and the US-led initiatives garnered support from American allies. International public opinion initially responded to the threat, but grew divided as the mission endured and became more dangerous. For example, opinion polls following 9/11 clearly indicated that Canada was a full partner in the “war on terror,” and supportive of the military use of force (Parkin 2003, 6). Some seventy percent of Canadians were favorable to joining the US in the war on terror, beginning with Afghanistan (DND 2006). As early as September 12, NATO allies invoked their commitment to mutual defence, as stated in Article V of the Treaty. Official speeches, both by Prime Minister Chrétien and Defense Minister Art Eggleton, framed the issue as Canadian, fully embodying their pervasive commitment and solidarity.

The decision to go to Iraq did not motivate the loyalty of American allies in the same way the Afghanistan war did, which signals a break with the general security framework at the international level. The portrayal of Saddam Hussein as evil, the suspicion of weapons of mass destruction and the impasses suffered at the United Nations all strained the United States’ ability to garner support for an intervention in Iraq. The perception of threat differed greatly on several issues: “... The Bush team’s allegations of an operational relationship between Al-Qaeda and Iraq, in its insinuations that the latter bore some responsibility for the September 11 attacks, and in its charges that Iraq was actively pursuing nuclear weapons components” (Krebs and Kaufmann 2005: 196).

When the United States appealed to Canada for help in 2002 and early 2003, the response was far from the unconditional support demonstrated by the British. Already in 2002, while delivering his State of the Union address, President Bush was setting the frame for Iraq with terms like “axis of evil”, WMDs, Saddam’s ties to terrorist groups and the growing danger posed by the regime (Barry 2005, 217). If we refer back to threat perception, it seems that the Iraq War failed to trigger similar responses in Canada. First, the view that Saddam Hussein represented a threat to international security was not shared. Second, decision-makers distanced themselves from the war in Iraq, instead of presenting the war favorably. Finally, public opinion has been strongly opposed to the American intervention from the start. The request for Canadian help was turned down by Chrétien, who was already well aware that there was no public mandate for such an intervention. Having troops under US command in Iraq was therefore not a credible option for Canada.

This is a case of effective autonomy, given the fact that, despite strong diplomatic pressures, Canada stood firm on the issue, uncoerced. The case of Iraq marks a shift in this respect. It seems that, in the absence of an immediate military threat, Canada has demonstrated particular intransigence. Perhaps, Canadian decision-makers have come to the realization that the US is unlikely to abandon its close allies, for fear of undermining its own established presence in key strategic theatres (Tertrais 2004: 173).

Moreover, the Bush doctrine of preemption represented a daunting precedent to set for a power like Canada (Barry 2005). It represents somewhat of an inversed domino theory, where chasing threats through preemption could quickly spread across continents and multiply American commitments abroad. As mentioned before, fear of entrapment is a constant concern for the weaker power involved in an asymmetric alliance. Therefore, the multiplication of American wars of preemption is not a reassuring prospect. Like the war in Afghanistan, this mission was to topple a regime which posed a threat to international security and was, as in all the cases discussed so far, an American-led initiative.<sup>4</sup>

Although the decision not to participate was pronounced two days before the American invasion, there were clear tell-tale signs. From the beginning, Chrétien was adamant about a UN resolution. However, when pressed for clarifications, he would often avoid a definite answer in one way or another: “throughout this period [Fall 2002-March 2003], the Canadian government’s position was poorly articulated and inconsistently applied, some days indicating support for the U.S. while on other days suggesting the opposite” (Richter 2005, 478). The Canadian perception of threat was clearly non-aligned with that of the United States’, but Chrétien was pushing for different strategies in manifesting Canada’s autonomy: stalling, vague terms, ambiguous stances, and alliance-seeking through the UN, all geared to achieve greater leverage.

The current war in Iraq represents a stretch when considering the general framework of the war on terrorism because it seeks impossible goals, namely “perfect security and absolute safety in the midst of an unwinnable war on terrorism” (Harvey 2005). Whether or not the war on terrorism is winnable is matter of debate, but Harvey’s insights about the attempt to achieve absolute safety is an illusionary guide for foreign policy, one which is unlikely to rally many subscribers.

## **6. American and Canadian Interpretations of the War on Terrorism**

The War on Terrorism is an American-led endeavor. As such, US leaders initiated the framing of the threat. Allied states, among them Canada, reacted and responded to this dominant frame, without necessarily subscribing to the American interpretation.

On the American side, references to bringing about justice presupposed a military solution. When President Bush spoke to the United Nations on November 10, 2001, he made his position clear: “The United States, supported by many nations, is bringing justice to the terrorists in Afghanistan. We’re making progress against military targets, and that is our objective” (“President Bush Speaks to the UN,” White House Papers). From its initial formulation, US leaders proceeded to expand the mandate of the War on Terrorism. In his 2002 State of the Union Address (January 29), President Bush highlighted the twin goals of

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<sup>4</sup> With the initial active participation of Great Britain, Poland, Australia and Denmark.

the war: “First, we will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world”.

The second goal relates to a larger definition of the threat to include rogue regimes, where Iraq is explicitly targeted:

Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons over a decade... States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred (White House: January 29, 2001).

The War on Terrorism thus quickly broadened in scope by defining high expectations for American allies, taking an aggressive stance by voicing a series of ultimatums, and finally, by deliberately targeting enemy states.

In contrast to Bush’s recurring promise to bringing terrorists to justice, Chrétien offers a strange echo, in pledging “...to bring them before the courts” (House of Commons Debate, September 18, 2001). The Honorable John Manley, Minister of Foreign Affairs, seems to concur with his leader in highlighting the role of international law in the war on terrorism: “...it is consistent with the policy of the Government of Canada to seek to find orderly and judicial ways to resolve matters of international importance, including ensuring that there is not impunity for international crime” (same debate). Overall, the government appears reluctant to identify the September 11 attacks as an act of war.

More attention to international law is given by the government in its appeal to just war principles, but more specifically, to the proportionality of any military response: “Any military action must equally be anchored in foundational international humanitarian law principles respecting the use of force in armed conflict, the protection of civilians and the doctrines of necessity and proportionality in any responsive military action” (House of Commons Debates, September 20, 2001).

Another striking concern expressed by the members of the government pertains to Canada’s freedom of action and its sovereignty. Prior to the Prime Minister’s meeting with President Bush on September 24, 2001, John Manley reiterated these concerns as he testified to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (SCFAIT), stating that “Working closely with the United States does not mean that we relinquish to them the keys to Canadian sovereignty over immigration matters, border controls and foreign policy” (SCFAIT, October 4, 2001).

From this perspective, the tools of international law and due process can act as a shield American pressure. The Canadian response to the American definition of threat was marked by caution. Canadian leaders pursued a number of strategies to alleviate the pressures of an expanding agenda, namely stalling, endless Parliamentary debates and committee hearings, engaging in multiple forums, and insisting on multilateralism, rather than bilateralism, for issues related to military involvement. However, the opposite is true for matters of continental security and border control, which is the more immediate concern for the government of Canada, following September 11.

In sum, the war on terrorism has a clear offensive dimension for the United States, with A) an expanding list of targets, following the “Axis of Evil” speech; and B) an ultimatum to the international community in building its coalition. For Canada, the emphasis is placed on the fact that terrorism is a general phenomenon with root causes which need to be addressed promptly and requiring a long term effort. The idea of military retaliation is downplayed, pointing to war as an option of last resort. Moreover, the government, on several occasions, refrains to call the terrorist attacks as an act of war, preferring terms that highlight the criminal nature of the act. An act of war and a crime against humanity entail different responses: one involves a military response, the other, an international tribunal.

In the final analysis, the American perception of threat is initially presented as self-defence in response to an attack. From the Canadian perspective, these same considerations and expressions of solidarity are mitigated by the fear of entrapment. The insistence on multilateralism and to the framework of international law can thus appear as a strategy to increase the leverage, autonomy and options of the Canadian government. The avoidance of a spontaneous emergency response is also a preoccupation. Shortly after the terrorist attacks, the Honorable Art Eggleton, Minister of National Defence (House of Commons Debates, September 20, 2001) announces that “there is no imminent threat to Canadians”. Implicit in this statement is an appeal to the normal course of politics, at both the domestic and international levels.

## **7. Discussion**

As previously mentioned, structural differences in power translate into different perceptions of the threat. While the interests of the dominant partner are truly global, smaller alliance partners have more regional interests. The hypothesis on threat perception states that threats may be perceived differently by alliance partners, because of asymmetric capabilities. Smaller alliance partners must balance alliance considerations against the pursuit of their own foreign policy goals. As such, they are unlikely to adhere to expansive definitions of the threat, such as the Bush Doctrine, which have strong offensive dimensions. The decision to support American war initiatives is thus linked to a dual assessment of threat: as embodied by enemy, on the one hand, and the autonomy costs of alliance requirements, on the other hand. Both represent strong constraints on how allies choose to respond and the types of strategies considered. In contrast, the stronger alliance partner need only be concerned with the enemy, which makes his decision-making process qualitatively different from his allies.

The other hypothesis, based on the degree of institutionalization, focuses on the leverage allies may gain through multiple alliance membership. Allies may choose to forum shop, using these different alliance platforms strategically to pursue their foreign policy goals or to buy time in reaching a decision. In the first months of the War on Terrorism, Canada insisted on upholding democracy, via parliamentary consultations and innumerable diplomatic meetings, to buy time prior to committing troops. For example, in contrast to the war in Afghanistan, which was quickly supported by NATO members, the Iraq War initiative shows America’s special allies going to the UN to halt American plans. Tony Blair used both bilateral and multilateral strategies in an attempt to gain legitimate support for the intervention. On the other hand, the US seemed less concerned about the process, with statements revealing that war was inevitable if full compliance by Saddam Hussein could not be achieved (State of the Union Address 2002; West Point Academy Speech 2003). It is clear,

in this sense, that the degree of institutionalization is an important variable, but it acts as an intervening variable, rather than an independent variable. The degree of institutionalization determines the types of strategies available to alliance partners in achieving autonomy from the more dominant alliance partner.

Finally, another area which deserves more attention relates to the United States' willingness to engage in military operations with its closest alliance partners. The extent to which the United States needs its allies is unclear. On a few occasions, American officials have even expressed weariness with regards to allied meddling in the conduct of military campaigns (Gordon 2001-2002). In the case of Afghanistan, for example, it has been reported that "US government officials ... want to maintain US military flexibility to operate ... with minimal non-US interference (Marten 2002-03: 37). These additional questions should shed light on the complexity of intra-alliance interactions, not only between the dominant power and its partners, but between the equal powers within the alliance.

### **Conclusion**

Threat perception seems to have the strongest impact on the course of action chosen. The frame which serves as an umbrella for both the Afghanistan War in 2001 and the Iraq War in 2003 is that of the war on terrorism. Initiated after the September 11 terrorist attacks, the George W. Bush administration ushered in a new uncompromising stance against terrorism and rogue regimes. We can see that this foreign policy framework, which garnered almost unanimous support from the United States' allies at the outset, was confronted with mounting problems as the war on terrorism grew more ambitious in its aims. The Iraq War serves to illustrate the conceptual stretching of the "war on terror" label, creating problems for the United States and its allies. Several policy-makers in allied states were especially critical of the connection which was drawn between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda. The war on terrorism was no longer aimed at rogue regimes harboring terrorism, as initially stated, but was aimed at defining threats in a much broader stroke that did not match their perception of threat.

While the interactions between America and its special allies are mostly US-driven, in terms of leadership and resources, the allies do not necessarily conform to US demands and expectations. Furthermore, the balancing act between alliance commitments and the pursuit of an autonomous foreign policy is omnipresent. This is apparent in the Canadian response following the events of September 11. While the United States perceives threats with a global agenda, Canadian aims are consistent with its international standing. It is not surprising then, that Canada pursues strategies which offer some protection against American unilateralism.

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