# Alliance-Building in Post-War Europe: Lessons for Russia

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**Abstract**
Although great powers may forge ad hoc coalitions to attain their short-term goals, this does not diminish the role of long-term strategic alliances. The alliance theory has long become a separate strand of IR. However, most scholars have focused more on external rather than internal threats to account for alliance choices. The authors review the existing literature on the formation of alliances and, shifting the focus to the struggle for power between internal political actors, propose a theory that explains

the formation of asymmetric alliances. By extending support to friendly political groups, great powers can build alliances with those countries where the elites are facing formidable opponents. On the contrary, leaders who rule unchallenged have little incentive to rely on external patrons. The article examines the cases of postwar Italy and Yugoslavia to test the proposed hypotheses. The conclusions drawn from the analysis help formulate recommendations that can be used by Russia in its current strategic environment.

Since the U.S. military operation in Iraq in 2003, researchers have been noting the growing popularity of so-called coalitions of the willing (Grant, 1999; Nadotchei, 2010; Stuart, 2004), that is, ad hoc alliances built to attain specific foreign policy goals. As flexible informal constructs, they are opposed to "traditional unions" that are gradually becoming a thing of the past due to their sluggishness (Silayev and Sushentsov, 2017). Military-political alliances involving a broad spectrum of participants are unable to quickly respond to emerging threats because coordinating positions becomes too difficult. Therefore, as the logic goes, great powers should not rely on a wide range of partners in achieving their objectives, "or else the mission will be dumbed down to the lowest common denominator" (Rumsfeld, 2002).

At first glance, it may seem that this trend will lead to the rejection of long-term alliances as such. However, that may be a far-fetched conclusion for several reasons.

***Firstly,*** that view is based on a narrow interpretation of alliances as formal commitments formalized in a collective security treaty, which leads to the creation of a military-political organization with coordinating bodies. However, a high degree of institutionalization is hardly a necessary feature of alliances, although it may serve as a means of expanding cooperation to a wider range of areas.

***Secondly,*** the recent U.S. operations cannot be considered fairly representative examples. The International Security Assistance Forces

in Afghanistan consisted of contingents from 28 NATO member states. During the international coalition's operation against ISIS, the United States received significant assistance from France, Great Britain, and Germany, which sent in ground units, as well as from a number of other European countries that trained Iraqi troops and provided financial support. Although those U.S. campaigns were not conducted under NATO's auspices, they invariably involved its major members, which indicates that NATO countries share long-term interests, goals, and principles.

*Thirdly,* George Bush's policy is more of an exception to the general rule. In the 1990s, NATO adapted to new realities as an international institution, owing largely to the Clinton administration's efforts (Wallander, 2000). Barack Obama proclaimed a return to multilateral action as a foreign policy priority. The question of whether his declarations were followed by real steps remains open. However, it was during his presidency that systemic incentives for strengthening American alliances had begun to appear. One of them was the rise of China. With time these incentives became so significant that even Donald Trump, with his idea of "obsolete" NATO, could not break up the alliance. On the contrary, despite disagreements, the alliance's role in ensuring stability in a turbulent world was recognized as "indispensable," and China was added to the list of main threats (NATO, 2020). Currently, there is a strong consensus in the American political establishment and expert circles regarding the value of alliances (Brooks et al., 2012; Esper, 2020), and it is likely to grow stronger during Biden's presidency.

One of the main advantages of alliances is that they split the costs of maintaining security and stability in general and conducting military operations in particular (Campbell, 2004). Before raising the issue of inequitable burden sharing, one must not forget that national security costs will have to be borne in any case, so it seems more prudent to share at least some of them with allies and deal with threats preemptively.

For Russia, alliances can also serve as an effective tool of ensuring national security. This applies to both responding to threats in certain

regions (Central Asia, South Caucasus) and protecting the interests of the country globally (Middle East, Latin America). Moreover, alliances along the perimeter of the Russian border serve as a guarantee against further expansion of hostile blocs, since keeping an ally in its orbit by definition prevents it from defecting to the opposing camp.

Therefore, the question of how to find and, equally essential, keep allies and build mutually beneficial long-term relations with them is of paramount importance. The answer to it, presented as a system of theoretical generalizations made during comparative empirical analysis, would have considerable prescriptive value. Knowing what influences the choice of allies, large states could offer them cooperation if suitable prerequisites for that are present, or give up costly support if it does not lead anywhere.

The purpose of this article is to elaborate a mid-level theory that would shed light on alliance-building patterns. The first part of the article reviews academic literature on alliances. Further, the authors formulate the provisions of their own model which takes into account the flaws of existing concepts. In the same section, we propose hypotheses, based on the aforementioned theory, regarding states' foreign policy preferences when choosing an ally. To test them, the authors conduct a comparative historical analysis of the Soviet Union's relations with Italy and Yugoslavia in the post-war period. Italy and Yugoslavia were chosen because they represent outlying cases (Gerring, 2006) which the realist approach dominating the literature cannot explain. Moreover, their comparison allows us to highlight a number of important patterns in the formation of allied relations. The final section contains our assessment of whether the theory can explain other historical phenomena and conclusions on how to acquire allies and maintain allied relations. Finally, based on these conclusions, we analyze Russia's strategy in relations with its close partners and give practical recommendations.

## THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ALLIANCE-BUILDING

International relations science has accumulated a considerable pool of literature on alliances (Istomin, 2017). However, most of the

studies focus on the relationship between members of an alliance (Cha, 2010; Leeds, 2003; Morrow, 1991), while the question of how and why alliances are formed in the first place remains largely overlooked. When trying to answer it, the authors either give specific historical accounts without making generalizations (Korolev, 2019; Marks, 2003) or rely on statistical methods, identifying correlations rather than tracing each element in the cause-and-effect relationship (Crescenzi et al., 2012; Fomin et al., 2019; Jackson and Nei, 2015). When exploring motivations for states joining an alliance, most authors, implicitly or explicitly, rely on the tenets of realism. Although other factors encouraging states to form alliances have also been looked at in scholarly works (Istomin and Baykov, 2019; Layne, 2007), they can be viewed as derivatives of states' desire to expand influence and ensure their own security.

However, the traditional balance-of-power model (Waltz, 1978, p. 163) is unable to explain a number of paradoxes, including why after World War II Western European countries chose to ally with the United States, which dominated in terms of overall potential and military power, rather than join forces with the Soviet Union, which had suffered heavy losses in the war.

An attempt to fill this gap was made by S. Walt, for whom aggregate power is only one of the factors that states take into account when choosing a balancing strategy. It must be supplemented with geographical proximity of a potential adversary, as well as its offensive capabilities and intentions. Together, they determine the level of threat posed by a state. Countries are more afraid of those powers that threaten their existence, even if they do not enjoy absolute predominance in the international system (Walt, 1985).

Walt's model represented a step forward: it partially explained why Western Europe preferred an alliance with a benign hegemon—the United States, rather than a dangerous regional neighbor—the USSR. On the other hand, it is not free of its own limitations. Firstly, this model does not explain the behavior of all European countries. For example, due to its geographical remoteness from the USSR, Italy had little reason to fear for its sovereignty. The country is separated from

the continental powers by the Alps which shield its northern border. Rome was protected from a sudden Red Army invasion, and therefore, its signature under the Washington Treaty appears puzzling, given the restrictions an alliance imposes on independent decision-making.

On the other hand, there is no historical data confirming Yugoslavia's intention to join NATO, even though after the break-up with Stalin, Tito had every reason to assess the Soviet Union's intentions as aggressive. Nevertheless, instead of joining the opposing bloc, the marshal did not want to burden the country with military obligations.

Secondly, even when realism claims to be successful in explaining the outcomes, its predictions based on certain variables without a detailed analysis of the motives for joining a particular alliance constitute a simplification. Correlation is not equivalent to causation. Many decision-makers of that time seriously doubted that the Soviet leadership was planning to invade Western Europe (Memorandum, 1948; McKinzie, 1972). Moreover, the North Atlantic Alliance was conceived as a political rather military organization designed to prevent instability within European states (Sayle, 2019, p. 16).

Finally, Walt's model has limited practical value and suffers from excessive determinism. Geography becomes an inevitable factor that predetermines the foreign policy orientation of states from the very beginning. Although Stephen Walt adds aggressive intentions as a variable, his model, in general, leaves little room for choosing allies. It seems that Western Europe was destined to join NATO no matter who would have come to power in those countries after the end of the war. Under these conditions, decision-makers will not be in a position to attract other states to their side, and researchers will be unable to formulate recommendations.

At the same time, history is replete with examples when the position of the elites played a decisive role in shaping the foreign policy of their countries. One can therefore assume that there are certain levers of influence on the foreign policy orientation of states and try to imagine the mechanism of its selection in the form of a theory that would have a sufficient level of abstraction, but at the same time would not overlook essential factors.

## THE THEORY OF ELITES AND THE FORMATION OF ALLIANCES

The perception of states as unitary actors is based on the idea that only systemic theories can explain international political phenomena (Waltz, 2010, p. 37), and that the analysis of domestic political variables is not justified. This can be contested by the fact that the preferences of some domestic political players are correlated with each other in a certain way at the international level, which makes them systemic (Moravcsik, 1997).

Since Walt wrote his landmark work, many realists have abandoned the idea of the monolithic nature of the state, juxtaposing the ruling group—the elite—to society (Schweller, 2004). A number of authors noted that in most cases there was no threat to the survival of the state. On the contrary, the ruling regime is constantly under pressure as it tries to stay in power, so the elites at the helm of the state will primarily pursue their own group interests.

Steven David analyzed specific features of the Third World alignment strategy and concluded that in an unstable political environment, state leaders "appease the international allies of their domestic opponents," in order to "split the alignment against them and focus their energies on" the biggest threat (David, 1991). Barnett and Levy in their article (1991) confirmed that "internal—as opposed to solely external—threats to government rule provide additional incentives for state leaders to seek an external alliance, for they might secure material resources that can then be used to counter domestic threats to the regime." The authors also referred to Third World countries where the elites "stand alien from society," and "their rule is often maintained by a narrow base of political support and fragile coalition."

The results of these studies have significant theoretical value, but in order to be used for analyzing a wider range of phenomena, the models themselves need to be refined, because the political struggle is not confined to Third World countries. In different historical periods, it takes place in most states in the form of civil war or, more often, elections. The result of political confrontation often determines a state's conduct in the international arena as well as its internal political

development. In the struggle for power, elites are likely to rely on external financial and diplomatic support (Mastanduno et al., 1989) and subsequently form an alliance with foreign countries. In this work we propose a more universal alliance-building model, which is not limited to Third World countries. The mechanism of alliance formation and the factors affecting the choice of a partner will be described below.

Coups and elections are regarded as two sides of the same coin—the struggle for power. To win it, competing elites use external assistance that allows them to enlist the support of a certain part of the population. Thus, the state appears as a two-level structure: on the upper level the struggle unfolds between various groups—elites, the bottom level being occupied by the masses. Since governance without legitimacy is difficult and costly, elites struggling for power seek the support of the masses, promising certain benefits in return. Elite groups have double rationality: they pursue their own interests (both material and nonmaterial), as well as strive to stay in power as long as possible, because access to it allows them to achieve the first goal.

This concept correlates with Putnam's two-level game theory (1988). He argued that "politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among [domestic] groups," and to stay in power "national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures." If a rival group offers a more attractive set of benefits to the domestic audience, its opponents will either lose elections or be toppled from power as a result of a coup. Therefore, in order to influence the outcome of the struggle, the state concerned must provide the friendly group with financial or diplomatic support that would enable it to show people the benefits of cooperation. The group that has come to power will form an alliance with the state that provided the assistance. So external support can help boost the legitimacy of the elite, thus increasing its chances of coming to power and securing it.

The scope of the theory is limited by a number of necessary conditions. Firstly, the external force should be interested in the success of a particular elite group. This interest can have both a strategic basis—the desire to strengthen influence in the region or prevent the expansion of the network of enemy military bases—and ideological

roots (Layne, 2007, pp. 33-34; Haas, 2005). From an analytical point of view, however, the motivation of an external actor is not so important, since the study focuses on domestic political dynamics. Secondly, it is implied that there are alternative external partners, each of which stakes on its own supporters.

It is important to note that the scope of support may vary depending on a large state's resources and interests. By expanding support, it is possible to satisfy the majority of people and disarm the junior partner's domestic political opponents for a long time. Limited support can help save resources in the short term, but reliance on a narrow group is fraught with growing public discontent, which can provoke a change of elites if the existing regime's patron suddenly refuses to support it with armed action.

The theory also suggests that popular leaders, whose position is not endangered, hardly need outside help. Therefore, they are more likely to maintain decision-making autonomy and stay away from military-political blocs.

Theoretical analysis can be summarized in the following hypotheses:

*H1: Countries will tend to form an alliance with the state that provided the greatest support to the friendly elite, thereby ensuring its rise to power.* Support can vary from economic assistance and reconstruction programs to the use of military contingents to prevent an unfriendly group from coming to power, and to a propaganda campaign to discredit it. In addition, it can be provided by way of diplomatic gestures, for example, by supporting territorial claims, which will also boost the elite's legitimacy in the eyes of the people, or advocating the country's accession to a prestigious international organization.

*H2: The more precarious the position of the incumbent elite group, the more likely it is to seek external support.* If the government comes to power with broad popular support and does not face a competing group, it is unlikely to want to limit its freedom of maneuver by making allied commitments.

Based on these hypotheses, the following expectations can be formulated. In the postwar years, the states whose governments

received significant assistance during the election campaign and promises of economic reconstruction would cooperate with the United States. On the contrary, the states that the Soviet Union managed to cut off from external assistance or attracted to its side by providing support to left-wing forces would side with the Soviet Union. States whose governments enjoyed broad popular support and did not need external assistance would distance themselves from either of the great powers by pursuing an independent non-aligned policy. They will rely on external assistance only when there is a risk that the incumbent elite may split up and the ruling group may weaken.

## THE ELITES' STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN ITALY IN THE LATE 1940S AND ITS IMPACT ON THE COUNTRY'S CHOICE OF THE WESTERN COURSE

Italy was occupied by American and British forces in 1943 and finally liberated a year later. Two political forces dominated the country's political landscape. By the end of 1945, the Communist Party of Italy had 1.7 million members. It enjoyed wide popularity due to its role in the resistance movement during the war. Given the party's revolutionary spirit, the Greek scenario could not be ruled out. However, it never came to a civil war: Stalin took a circumspect view regarding the participation of the French and Italian communist parties in the government (Pons, 2005, pp. 205-220), urging them to form coalitions with other political forces, since at that time the Soviet leader still hoped to further cooperate with the Western allies and receive loans to fund the USSR's restoration (Pons, 2000).

Moscow's cautious course changed when the Marshall Plan was announced. On July 3, 1947, one of the most prominent Italian Communist Party leaders, Umberto Terracini, warned Soviet Ambassador M. Kostylev that the Moscow-imposed ban on participation in the Marshall Plan could be used by the West against the USSR and Italy, meaning Italy headed by the communists (Meeting, 1947). The politician was extremely concerned about the Soviet position on this issue, given the fact that the Italian communists generally supported participation in the plan, and was afraid that the refusal would tarnish their popularity (Martinelli and Righi, 1992).

The Italian communists urged Moscow to make a public statement pledging economic assistance if they won the elections, albeit without success. Stalin, aware of the economic situation in the Soviet Union, evasively stated that such a step would become extremely dangerous and would be regarded as a violation of the country's sovereignty (Pons, 2001). Moreover, the Soviet leader did not consider it necessary to offer diplomatic support as compensation for the refusal. On the issue of Trieste, Stalin's position did not help boost the popularity of the Italian communists either, as he informed Togliatti that the city would have to be left under Yugoslavia's jurisdiction (Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, 1996). This dealt a heavy blow to the Italian communists, who began to seriously contemplate an armed coup before the elections.

The Soviet leadership was quick to respond: on March 26, 1948, Vyacheslav Molotov sent a cable to Ambassador Kostylev, instructing him to notify Togliatti that the USSR considered the use of force an extreme measure that had to be resorted to only if the "reactionary forces" took up arms (Pons, 2001). In Molotov's view, an armed uprising would have been a gamble at that time. As a result, the Italian communists found themselves in a stalemate: the Soviet Union's stance on the Marshall Plan and its inability to offer an appealing alternative made the party look like a reactionary force, while no promise of support if it came to power in a non-parliamentary way made the revolution senseless (Efimova, 2007).

The policy of the communists in Italy and Western Europe as a whole was reduced to pure propaganda. The peace movement had become a conduit for the political interests of the Italian Communist Party, allowing it to attract supporters through peacekeeping rhetoric. However, the protest against the country's accession to NATO and resistance to the deployment of missiles in Italy could not radically change the balance of power in the country.

In the second half of the 1940s, the communists' opponents—Christian Democrats—on the contrary, experienced a rise in popularity amid promises of financial support from the United States. Their plan was to get better conditions of peace for Italy, secure U.S. help to restore the country, and gradually become the West's ally, thus overcoming its

past as an "axis" power. At first, when Rome still needed the support of the USSR on the issue of Trieste and viewed Moscow as a kind of counterweight to London in discussions on the status of Italian colonies (Yergin, 1977), Christian Democrats tolerated communist representatives in the government and maintained partnership with the Soviet Union. However, realizing that reliance on the U.S. presented a chance to stop sharing power with the ICP, Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi decided to take a radical step.

On May 31, 1947, he formed a new government, excluding the communists from it (Olla, 2005). The U.S. welcomed the move and immediately approved the country's participation in the Marshall Plan. New parliamentary elections were scheduled for April 18, 1948. They were preceded by a fierce struggle between Christian Democrats and Communists. Several factors affected their outcome.

Firstly, the Catholic Church condemned communists, urging believers not to vote for "the godless," thus crippling the latter's positions since Italians were deeply religious. Propaganda footage was played across Italy, showing communists demolishing the domes on churches.

The U.S. actively assisted friendly forces in the struggle: the newly created CIA had been tasked with influencing the outcome of the elections. To this end, the CIA carried out a number of operations (Ellwood, 1993; Miller, 1983; Del Pero, 2001): it financed the election campaign of Christian Democrats, and encouraged Italian immigrants in the U.S. to send thousands of letters to their relatives in Italy with appeals not to vote for the communists.

Finally, the promise of financial support for the reconstruction program played an important role. Italians were extremely worried by the economic situation in the country, the possibility of losing a job being particularly stressful. De Gasperi's opponents were aware of this and the fact that reconstruction would be almost impossible without U.S. help. Nevertheless, under Moscow's pressure, they had to reject the plan, blasting it as an attempt of "American imperialism" to worm its way into Europe. However, the pro-Western forces had their own argument in response to this rhetoric: they came up with the slogan

"Europe's reconstruction is peace and jobs!" (Whelan, 2003). The propaganda of the American lifestyle, which in Italy alone cost about $1 million annually, played a prominent role in promoting participation in the Marshall Plan. Documentaries showing Americans coming to work in their own cars were played to the Italian public (Ellwood, 2003).

Initially, the prospects of Italy's joining NATO were quite vague. Firstly, the Allies did not show much enthusiasm in this matter. Secondly, neutralist sentiments were widespread in Italian society. However, given the existence of extra-parliamentary opposition capable of staging an armed uprising, the ruling elites were aware that joining Western military organizations was the only way to ensure stability in the country and stay in power. Accession to NATO put an end to the domestic political struggle and lent stability to the De Gasperi government.

## YUGOSLAVIA'S LIMITED PARTNERSHIP WITH THE USSR AND THE U.S. IN THE LATE 1940S-EARLY 1950S

After the country was liberated by guerrillas led by Joseph Tito at the end of 1945, he proclaimed the creation of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The head of state enjoyed authority he had earned during the relentless struggle against the fascist invaders. In fact, by the time the Red Army entered Belgrade, the national resistance forces had already controlled the whole country (Perović, 2007).

The new state adopted the Soviet model of development (Gibiansky, 1987). In June 1946, the USSR and Yugoslavia sealed an agreement, according to which the latter would be given a commodity loan of $9 million. A year later, the Soviet Union also promised to supply $135 million worth of industrial equipment to Yugoslavia in the following seven years and help to build its industrial enterprises. In addition, Moscow supplied weapons to the Yugoslav army at internal Soviet prices.

Moscow's support boosted Tito's regional ambitions. The Yugoslav leader was nourishing the idea of establishing hegemony in the Balkans. When he was still fighting against the Nazis, Tito suggested creating a joint guerrilla command of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Albania,

and Greece, with the former playing the leading role in it (Gibiansky, 2001). Belgrade's desire to include Trieste in the new state provoked a dispute with Italy, which also had designs on it. Tito's insistence, with which he upheld his territorial claims, could have led to a conflict with the Allies (Rabel, 1988). But Tito's ambitions went further and this time targeted neighboring Albania.

To begin with, Tito demanded that Albanian leader Enver Hoxha grant Yugoslav troops the right to use a military base near the city of Korçë. In January 1948, Hoxha was forced to agree, evoking a negative reaction from Moscow. As an alternative to a merger with Albania, the Soviet leader suggested that Yugoslavia unite with Bulgaria. The idea was that this would deter Tito and possibly even help remove him from power. However, the Yugoslav leader met the suggestion unenthusiastically, obviously realizing that its implementation might cause him to lose his own influence.

On March 27, 1948, Stalin and Molotov sent a letter to the Yugoslav leadership, accusing it of pursuing an anti-Soviet policy. After Tito had brushed off the accusations, a copy of the letter was circulated to the leaders of other countries of the socialist bloc. At its June meeting, the Cominform adopted a resolution titled "On the Situation in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia," in which Tito and his supporters were criticized for their departure from Marxism-Leninism (Soveshchyaniya, 1998). In November of the following year, members of the Cominform adopted a new resolution, "The Yugoslav Communist Party in the Grip of Murderers and Spies" (Georgiu-Dezh, 1949). The countries of the socialist bloc ceased diplomatic relations with the republic. Moscow stopped raw material supplies to Yugoslavia and demanded that the countries of people's democracy terminate all economic relations with it (Kostin, 2011). The Soviet Union hoped that the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party would not survive politically and more loyal elements would come to power amid economic isolation.

The Cominform's June resolution called on "healthy elements of the party to force the incumbent leaders to acknowledge their mistakes and correct them, and if they are unable to do so, replace them and nominate new, internationalist leadership of the CPY" (Kruglov, 2011).

Many members of the CPY leadership advocated friendly relations with the Soviet Union. Approximately 20 percent of the party members were on Stalin's side in this dispute (Perović, 2007). In response, the marshal and his followers launched a large-scale campaign to cleanse the party of Cominform supporters: thousands of people were arrested, killed or sent into exile (Banac, 1988).

The expectations of regime change did not come true. The marshal's power was based on people's support and control of the armed forces—at the end of the war, about two hundred thousand guerrillas were under his command. His supporters included representatives of all ethnic backgrounds. All this distinguished Tito from the communist leaders of other socialist countries and gave him confidence in the confrontation with external and internal forces.

He dealt with possible economic difficulties by way of foreign policy maneuvering. Three weeks after the Cominform's criticism of the CPY, Washington and Belgrade settled all issues regarding Lend-Lease payments and compensation for the nationalized American property. The United States unblocked Yugoslavia's monetary assets, and after Belgrade had recognized the debts of the previous Yugoslav governments, it also got access to gold and foreign exchange reserves, which allowed the country to avoid a crisis and opened the way to Western loans (Kostin, 2015).

G. Kennan, U.S. State Department Policy Planning Director at that time, prepared a report on June 30, 1948, detailing the U.S. attitude towards the events in Yugoslavia and stating his strategy of destabilizing the socialist bloc (Miscamble, 1992). He thought that the United States should extend a helping hand to Yugoslavia if it was ready to take a loyal position and cooperate in international affairs (Nelson and Kennan, 1948).

Nevertheless, there was a serious obstacle to cooperation, namely Yugoslavia's indirect involvement in the Greek civil war. However, when in September 1949 the Soviet Union abandoned its obligations under the Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-War Cooperation between the USSR and Yugoslavia signed in 1945, Tito began to seriously fear a Red Army invasion and sealed the border

with Greece, a step that predetermined the outcome of the Greek conflict (Iatrides, 1981). So, the main political barrier that hindered the normalization of relations was removed.

The outbreak of war in Korea in 1950 also contributed to this process. In November, the U.S. president requested $38 million from Congress for additional assistance to Yugoslavia (Ceh, 2002). Congress granted the request and subsequently passed the Yugoslav Emergency Relief Assistance Act (Campbell, 1967), which envisaged military support to the Balkan country. In April 1951, Yugoslavia received $29 million to strengthen its defense capabilities (Public, 1965). In the same year, an agreement on military assistance was signed and the Mutual Security Act (Mutual, 1951) was extended to Yugoslavia. Although Yugoslavia's accession to NATO was out of the question for ideological reasons, defense relations between the two countries developed quite actively.

Nevertheless, Washington did not want to get involved in a full-scale conflict with the USSR in the Balkans. As a result, the Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation between Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey, signed in February 1953, did not contain military provisions, and specifically stipulated that the document did not affect the obligations of Greece and Turkey in NATO (Treaty, 1953).

Although the treaty of alliance signed by those countries a year later envisaged assistance to the attacked country by all available means (Treaty, 1954), it was stillborn, since the need for deeper military cooperation was soon gone: in 1955-1956 relations with the USSR were normalized. The government in Belgrade, which did not want to take on unnecessary obligations and limit its sovereignty, insisted in 1958 on the withdrawal of the American military mission, retaining interest only in American loans (Anikeev, 2002). In the absence of an obvious threat from the USSR, Yugoslavia started to pursue a policy of equidistance and play a key role in the non-aligned movement (Miskovic et al., 2014).

To sum up, Marshal Tito, who initially relied on the Soviet Union, broke relations with his partner as soon as he felt a threat to his position. Instead, he turned to another donor. The United States committed

considerable amounts of money to back Tito and his supporters despite external ideological incompatibility. The Yugoslav leader was aware of Washington's interest in his state as an example of an independent and alternative socialist model and used its support to obtain assistance that increased his popularity. However, Tito could forgo too close relations with any power due to his strong political position.

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The analysis of the cases above shows that the alliance-building dynamics matches the logic underlying the theory proposed by the authors. In Italy, each of the opposing groups—the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats—relied on the external support of the Soviet Union and the U.S., respectively. The United States, which had sufficient material resources, managed to use them properly in order to win an ally in the Mediterranean. A series of successful psychological operations undertaken at the tactical level and capital infusion helped Christian Democrats win the elections. Strategically, Italy's participation in the Marshall Plan strengthened the popularity of the conservative government and its pro-American orientation (Mansfield et al., 1949).

As for the USSR, it had fewer resources and was unable to offer the same level of financial support to the communists. At the same time, Moscow did not try to make up for it with diplomatic measures: the initial lack of support on the Trieste issue made the Communist Party look like an unpatriotic agent of external influence.[1]

Yugoslavia is an example of a country where the positions of the ruling elite were strong enough to steer clear of close alliances. Marshal Tito enjoyed the support of wide sections of the population, which doomed any opposition to failure. That is why additional Soviet assistance further fueled Belgrade's regional ambitions, which collided with the interests of Moscow's other allies. As a result, the Soviet Union had to make a choice, which provoked a split with Yugoslavia.

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[1] Perhaps the unwillingness to compete for an ally can be explained by the fact that Stalin was pleased with the existing borders of the socialist bloc and preferred instead to focus on the Eastern European states.

Opponents may argue that Tito's reorientation to the United States was rather consistent with the balance-of-threat model. Nevertheless, upon closer inspection, this turn of events rather bears out the logic of the elite theory. Firstly, the regional interests of Yugoslavia and the USSR diverged from the very beginning, but the split occurred a few years later. Secondly, it ended just as unexpectedly even though the differences did not disappear. It is hardly possible to explain the variations of a dependent variable when an independent one remains unchanged. Secondly, the cooling of relations occurred in full compliance with the elite theory: Moscow tried to split the Communist Party and provoke a coup. This did not happen due to Tito's position, but his legitimacy was still based on communist ideology, which explains why he reestablished relations with the USSR after Stalin's death. Finally, during the conflict, the marshal hastened to secure U.S. financial support in order to strengthen his grip.

So, the theory proposed by the authors possesses explanatory potential. It points to some crucial factors: the variables it considers independent cause noticeable changes in the object of research. The advantages of this theory also include its parsimoniousness: it provides an insight into a tangle of complex socio-political events by highlighting a limited number of elements that require attention. At the same time, unlike realism, it simplifies things to a point where one can still observe the entire range of phenomena occurring in real political life.

The ability to satisfy research interest is also one of the theory's merits. In contrast to realism, it does not use the vague concept of 'national interest,' which is difficult to operationalize and which lends itself to numerous interpretations. On the contrary, its adherents recognize the existence of group interests, as well as the fact that in order to achieve them, a group does not need to be the size of a nation. History knows many examples when, in order to keep power, the ruling elite sacrificed territory, the unity of the state, and the well-being of its people.

Like any good theory, the theory of elites is clearly formulated. It makes it possible to analyze a concrete situation and make forecasts based on this analysis. At the same time, this clarity makes it possible to prove the theory wrong, for example, by referring to a country where

an unpopular leader manages to stay in power for a long time in the absence of external support or internal sources of funding for a huge repressive apparatus, or a state where, in the presence of two equally popular political parties, each of which is supported by one of the competing great powers, the one that has less financial, organizational or human resources eventually comes to power.

The exposed causal relationships are applicable to a wide range of spatiotemporal phenomena. In other words, the theory works where its original premises are in place. The presence of groups of individuals fighting for power within a country and counting on external support can be found in any historical context and in any part of the world.

At the same time, there are a number of inherent limitations that need to be noted. Firstly, the theory does not analyze the motivation of the great powers themselves, taking the tenets of other models for granted. Secondly, the hypotheses inferred from it need further verification. In particular, it is worth analyzing the cases crucial for the realist theory, that is, those where the realists claim to be able to successfully explain the results of alliance-building by the United States and the USSR.

As for the present, Russia's focus is on geopolitical phenomena that are critical for it. Its leadership is extremely sensitive to the foreign policy orientation of neighboring states (primarily Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Belarus), as well as regions of strategic and economic interest (Syria, Venezuela). However, some of Russia's actions and miscalculations suggest that it still lacks a consistent policy with regard to partner countries.

As the case of Ukraine has shown, after coming to power, "friendly forces" appraise their cooperation quite dearly, playing on the contradictions between Russia and the West and bargaining with the former for concessions on a number of issues. Financial assistance in the form of preferential loans and tariffs is by and large futile, since ordinary citizens rarely see its positive effect. As a result, expenses put a strain on the Russian budget but bring disproportionately low dividends. Given the similarity of cooperation scenarios with Ukraine and Belarus, a number of recommendations seem appropriate.

*Firstly,* it is necessary to link each stage of support to guaranteed distribution of benefits to the population. The potential for cooperation between Russia-"friendly" elite on the one hand and the EU and the U.S. on the other is very limited, as the West imposes a comprehensive package of economic and political preconditions that leaders such as Lukashenko are unlikely to agree to. Therefore, a slightly less ambitious set of reforms can be proposed that will allow people to feel the positive effect of cooperation between the two countries.

*Secondly,* it is necessary to set regular deadlines for revising the volume of assistance, depending on compliance with these conditions. Experience shows that excessive support leads to increased ambitions, which puts the donor at a disadvantage.

*Thirdly,* in the long run, Russia should not be afraid of acting preemptively. The Belarusian case is interesting in this regard. It is not entirely clear whether Victor Babariko was a "Russian" candidate, but the strategy of relying on more progressive forces seems correct. In general, many leading experts believe that Russia should distance itself from Lukashenko and "build a dialogue with the Belarusian opposition, especially since it is not explicitly anti-Russian" (Kortunov, 2020).

As for Syria, the same political and economic recipes apply there. It should only be added that the tactic of maneuvering between regional players, which Russian diplomacy has been using so brilliantly thus far, has limitations. Excessive concessions to Turkey can be a blow to the popularity of the Syrian government, especially when it comes to control over territories. The recent example of Russian mediation in the Karabakh settlement, which is justifiably highly commendable, has shown how much pressure the government can face after signing a treaty that a part of the population views as capitulation.

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