



## **U.S. Should Choose Allies Which Benefit America**

**By Doug Bandow**

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If America ends up at war, it almost certainly will be on behalf of an ally. Washington collects allies like most people collect Facebook “friends.” The vast majority of U.S. allies are security liabilities, tripwires for conflict and war.

Yet American officials constantly abase themselves, determined to reassure the very countries which the U.S. is defending at great cost and risk. For instance, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL.) recently worried: “what ally around the world can feel safe in their alliance with us?” The right question is with what ally can America feel safe?

Instead of relentlessly collecting more international dependents, Washington policymakers should drop Allies In Name Only (AINOs).

Contra the scare-mongering of hawkish politicians such as Sen. Rubio and his GOP compatriots, the strategic environment today is remarkably benign for the U.S. The world is messy, to be sure, but the number of big conflicts is down. More important, America faces no hegemonic threat or peer competitor and is allied with every major industrialized state other than China and Russia.

All of Washington’s recent wars have been over—from America’s standpoint—unimportant, indeed, sometimes frivolous stakes. Yet Washington is edging toward involvement in another sectarian proxy war, in Yemen, by backing its totalitarian “ally” Saudi Arabia.

Terrorism remains a genuine threat, but falls far short of the sort of existential danger posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Worse, terrorism typically is a response to foreign intervention and occupation. Washington has inadvertently encouraged terrorism by backing authoritarian regimes, joining foreign conflicts, and creating enemies overseas.

Adding unnecessary allies makes this problem worse. In Ukraine, for instance, the Obama administration is under pressure to treat a non-ally as an ally—arming and/or defending Kiev—

thereby confronting Russia, a nuclear-armed state which considers border security a vital interest.

Bringing Ukraine (and Georgia) into NATO would be even more dangerous, inviting a geopolitical game of chicken over minimal stakes. Neither country has ever been considered even a marginal security concern of America.

Of course, both nations have been treated unfairly and badly by Moscow. But that doesn't justify a military alliance, which should be based on interest, not charity. Adding troubled states with limited military capabilities and unresolved conflicts turns the purpose of alliances on their head.

The U.S. long eschewed alliances and other "foreign entanglements," against which George Washington had warned. Extraordinary circumstances during World War II and the Cold War justified temporary alliances.

It makes no sense for Washington to retain responsibility for defending Europe, with a larger economy and population than America—and vastly greater resources than its only serious potential threat, Russia. Much the same has happened in Asia.

The problem is not just wasted resources, but tripwires for war. Alliances deter, but they also ensure involvement if deterrence fails, as it often does. And lending smaller states a superpower's military changes their behavior, causing them to be more confrontational, even reckless.

America and China aren't likely to come to blows over, say, Hawaii, which Beijing has no intention of attacking. But conflict could erupt over irrelevant allied territorial disputes, such as the Senkaku Islands, claimed by Japan and China.

Unfortunately, commitments to marginal allies determine basic U.S. defense strategy. Most prospective conflicts for which Washington plans involve allies, not America directly.

The U.S. should start defenestrating AINOs. Most of these nations would remain close friends. In some cases military coordination at times might be called for, when the U.S. and other nations shared vital objectives.

However, Washington should stop defending South Korea, which has an overwhelming resource advantage over the North. The U.S. should end its European defense dole. Today NATO is effectively North America and the Others even though the Europeans collectively are wealthier and more populous than the U.S.

Even more so the U.S. should not turn conflict-prone nations like Georgia and Ukraine into allies. Washington should be particularly wary about treating less important and less democratic states as allies. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are at most "frenemies," which Washington should deal with as circumstances warrant.

Washington still has an interest in preventing a hostile, hegemonic power from dominating Eurasia. But that possibility isn't likely for decades to come.

America has benefitted much from its relative geographical isolation. It rarely needed allies in the past. It requires even fewer allies today. Washington should create alliances to deter and win wars, not go to war to promote and preserve alliances.

Geopolitics is not a grand version of Facebook, with the objective of amassing as many "friends" as possible. Since most of Washington's military pacts endanger the U.S., America should be dropping, not adding, allies.

*Doug Bandow is a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute. A former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is the author of several books, including Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire (Xulon Press).*