



 Hacer KAYA
Kırıkkale University

Research Article - Araştırma Makalesi

THE BALANCE OF POWER THEORY, ALLIANCES AS BOTH CAUSE AND SHIELD OF WAR: NATO AND SCO

In an anarchic international system, states form alliances in order to feel more secure. These alliances, which may be for the purpose of balancing their power or preventing the emergence of a hegemonic power, also create a contradiction as to whether the balance of power leads to war or peace. Therefore, there is a distinction in the literature as to whether the balance of power leads to war or peace. This distinction is basically between realists, who argue that alliances prevent war, and liberals, who argue that the balance of power further spreads war. While realists argue that alliances prevent war and guarantee peace through the balance of power, liberals argue the opposite, that is, alliances cause war or expand the scope of existing war.

The study addresses the aforementioned debate in the literature. Both theses are examined through the example of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for the sake of completeness and accurate comparison, and a comparative analysis is made with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Finland and Sweden's initiatives to become NATO members and Russia's clear stance against Ukraine's membership in the Alliance brought NATO's deterrence back to the agenda. This is directly related to the fifth article of the Alliance. Because Ukraine's membership means that Russia's attacks will be limited. This study examines this debate in the literature with a special focus on NATO's Article 5, which is seen as its greatest deterrent.

Keywords: Balance of power, Alliances, Liberalism, NATO, Realism.



Received/Geliş Tarihi

02 February 2025

Accepted/Kabul Tarihi

24 August 2025

Publication/Yayın Tarihi

31 August 2025

Corresponding

Author/Sorumlu Yazar

Hacer KAYA

hcrkya95@gmail.com

DOI: 0.69494/jirps.1631596

Cite this article

Kaya, H. (2025). The Balance of Power Theory, Alliances as Both Cause and Shield of War: NATO and SCO. *Journal of International Relations and Political Science Studies*, (14), 65-88.



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Introduction

Since the concept of 'power' has an important place in the discipline of international relations, most issues are dealt with within the scope of this concept. 'Balance of Power Theory', which is a strategic method frequently used by states, is only one of these issues. Therefore, this theory constitutes the conceptual framework of the study. The theoretical framework of the study is shaped around the perspectives of realists and liberals on the balance of power. In this context, a comparative analysis of the realist and liberal perspectives on alliances is made with a special focus on NATO. In order to better understand NATO's deterrence, a comparative analysis with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is employed, as well. While realists argue that alliances create deterrence by enabling states to establish a balance of power and thus block the path to war, liberals argue that alliances increase the risk of war through the balance of power and spread war by drawing the entire alliance into the war. Thus, it is aimed to deepen the subject by revealing the differences and similarities between the two alliances in terms of structure, membership and deterrence mechanisms.

Based on the question of whether alliances are the cause or the shield of war, this study focuses on the general trend in the literature and the reason for this general trend. In doing so, the deterrence mechanisms of NATO and SCO are compared as a case study. The hypothesis of the study is that alliances are a shield against war. In other words, according to the study, being a member of NATO is one of the most important obstacles to war. Because although NATO's Article 5 has been used only once in history, it remains the most effective deterrence method. Russia is particularly opposed to Ukraine and Georgia becoming NATO members. This shows that the deterrence of this article is effective even today.

Realists argue that in an anarchic international system, states are forced to maximize their power in order to feel secure and this puts them in a security predicament^[1], while liberals argue that states get themselves into this predicament because they misperceive each other's actions. Therefore, these two views diverge in analyzing the relationship between wars and alliances, too. While realists argue that alliances create deterrence by enabling states to establish a balance of power and thus block the path to war, liberals argue that alliances increase the risk of war through the balance of power and spread war by drawing the entire alliance into the war.

[1] In international relations, a security dilemma is a situation in which a state's efforts to increase its security may be perceived as a threat by other states, leading them to increase their own security in response (John Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism: A Study in Theories and Realities*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951, pp. 157).

One of the most important points determining whether alliances are a cause or a shield of war is the international conjuncture. In this context, if an alliance is made in a conjuncture where there are tensions between the parties, this will lead to misunderstandings and cause counter-alliance structuring. On the other hand, on the other hand, an alliance made within a harmonization process will not be perceived as a threat and there will be no need to take countermeasures. In fact, it is understood that the difference of opinion between realists and liberals in the literature emerged for this reason. Because according to them, the establishment of an alliance in a tense international system will either obstacle or cause war. Realists think that since states maximize their power through alliances, the other side will not dare to do so, while liberals think that this situation will disturb the other side more. How alliances are formed within the structure of the international system has also influenced the perspectives developed against them.

In the period between 1815-1870, the level of alliance was low and the frequency of war was high, while between 1871-1900, the level of alliance was high but the frequency of war was quite low (Singer and Small, 1966). These statistical data presented by Singer and Small mostly support the realists' view. Two cases can be given as examples: The first one is the European harmonization process. Since there was no trust problem between states in this process, the alliances made did not lead to war, on the contrary, they contributed to the development of relations between states. On the other hand, in a period of escalating tensions and a gradual decline in mutual trust, NATO, which was established in 1949, led to the formation of a counter-alliance in 1955, the Warsaw Pact.

Founded in 1949, NATO had no direct impact on the Korean War, which started in 1950. However, especially NATO's involvement in the Korean War led to both the formation of a counter-alliance and the involvement of all members in the war. These two defense organizations went into an arms race on the grounds of deterrence, but there was no hot conflict between the two alliances. War was prevented as alliances created deterrence for each other. As a result, alliances are not the only way for states to engage in war (Vasquez, 2009), but a way to prepare for or avoid war (Gibler, 1996).

The study focuses on how realists and liberals establish the link between alliances and wars, and examines the practical implications of their arguments. In this context, the balance of power theory is explained, followed by the approaches of realists and liberals to this theory. Then, the subject is discussed through the example of NATO, its comparison with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Finally, it is discussed whether NATO is still a deterrent alliance that prevents war today.

I. The Balance of Power Theory

Alliances are one of the most common ways of creating a balance of power. McGowan and Rood (1975) define alliances as a situation in which at least two states make a military commitment to fight or remain neutral against at least one other state; Snyder (1997) defines alliances as formal unions formed by states to use (or not to use) military force against states other than their own members in certain situations; and Walt (1987) defines alliances as a formal or informal security cooperation relationship between two or more sovereign states. In other words, according to them, alliances emerge in the presence of an external threat (Fedder 1968).

There is a tendency in the literature that alliances are the primary instruments that foreign policy makers can use in a balance of power situation. This is because alliances enable leaders to preserve the pluralism of the system and ensure the survival of the system's main actors, even at the expense of solidarity (Dinerstein, 1965).

According to Waltz (1979), if there is a distinct political theory of international politics, it is the balance of power theory. Some scholars think that this theory is a guide for statesmen, while others think that it is a cloak that hides imperialist policies. Some believe that the balance of power is the best guarantee of state security and world peace, while others argue that it is in fact the cause of most wars (Little, 2007).

According to Kaplan (1969), there are six basic rules of a balance of power system: First, states have the incentive to increase their capacities but prefer mutual negotiations to war; second, states would rather go to war than fail to increase their capacities; third, they will stop war if it involves the elimination of a major actor; fourth, they will take action against states or coalitions that seek to become dominant in the system; fifth, they would work to limit states that tend to adhere to the principles of supranational organization; and finally, they would work for a defeated or destroyed core actor to return to the system and regain its status as a core actor or for a state that was not previously a core actor to join the core actor classification.

Morgenthau (1948) categorizes the reasons for the formation of the balance of power under four headings: policy towards a specific situation, the existence of a de facto situation, ensuring an equal distribution of power in the system and preventing any conceivable distribution of power, while Walt (1985) argues that the two main reasons for states to establish a balance are to prevent a potential hegemon or to increase their own influence by joining the weaker side.

On the other hand, Walt argues that states form alliances to balance threats rather than to counter them, but Little (2007) argues that this alliance may also lead to the formation of a counter-alliance[2].

In the United Nations (UN) Security Council, the Russia-China duo frequently confronts the US-UK-France trio. In this respect, a new East-West antagonism has emerged. In fact, by acting together in the Council, China and Russia are trying to maintain a balance of power with the West, with which they are in competition in many areas. Another example is the attempt to preserve the existing balance of power and distribution of power between Italy and Germany, Pakistan and India, and Argentina and Brazil (Demirel 2019). The US-Russia rivalry in Syria was a mutual struggle between the two sides to turn the balance of power in the region in their favor and protect it. What happened in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya is an example of a similar situation.

Abbé de Pradt (1815) argues that the balance of power means war, while peace is identical with solving problems according to moral, economic and ethnographic virtues. Kant agrees with Pradt, calling the balance of power a *Hirngespinnst* (unattainable wish, dream, delusion) (Haas, 1953). According to Cobden, the balance of power is a monster. It is not an error, mistake or trick, but an undefined, indefinable, incomprehensible nothingness (Cobden, 1867).

In conclusion, there are opposing views in the literature that the balance of power is both positive and negative. Representatives of both views use examples from history to support their arguments. In this study, these two views are discussed. Realist and liberal views on whether the balance of power resulting from alliances between states prevents or spreads war are presented.

II. Alliances as “War Shields”: A Realist Perspective

According to the realist balance of power theory, alliance building is one of the ways to avoid war and promote peace through force, as the uncertainties inherent in anarchy encourage balancing behavior (Walt, 1988). Therefore, many realists argue that alliance building as a response to threat helps to prevent war (Vasquez, 2009). Although realists see war as a natural phenomenon, they argue that there is a way to eliminate war or limit its scope and that this way is through the ‘balance of power’ (Dalkılıç, 4).

[2] An alliance formed to counter the power of a state or group of states is called a counter-alliance. This alliance is formed to balance the balance and deter a possible attack. F.i.: 1949 NATO-1955 Warsaw Pact. (Michael Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: History and Theory*, 1996, London, Routledge).

Classical realists believe that states should increase their power in the face of threats and one of the ways to do this is to form alliances (Vasquez, 2009). In other words, with the balance of power they establish against the threat, states secure themselves without the need for war.

For realists, alliances are about pooling capabilities and are often formed to balance powerful states (Waltz, 1979) or states perceived as threatening adversaries (Walt, 1987) in a process described as 'hard balancing'[3]. Schroeder (1976) and Mearsheimer (2001) also embrace the idea that alliances can be formed preemptively to restrain enemies and that states join alliances to protect themselves from threatening states or coalitions. By keeping all states under control, the balance of power system prevents the occupation of other states' territories as it does not allow any state to become more powerful (Zinnes, 1967).

In other words, the balance of power system ensures the status quo and prevents potential conflicts. In this sense, the main purpose of alliances is to prevent war by increasing the ability to deter conflict (Morrow, 1994; Fearon, 1997; Smith, 1998). Accordingly, as alliances provide information to allies, they will deter their enemies from challenging them or force them to submit to them (Leeds, 2003).

The nineteenth century was the only period in the last 500 years in which the confrontational effects of alliances were moderate. Only 44 percent of all alliances ended in war (100 percent in the sixteenth century, 89 percent in the seventeenth, 73 percent in the eighteenth and 81 percent in the twentieth), and none of the 'great power' alliances were followed by a 'great power' war within five years of their inception (Levy, 1981 Table 7). Based on these statistics, Wayman (1990) argues that in order to infer that alliances have an effect, the amount of wars after alliances must be statistically higher than the amount of wars before alliances are formed. Since the above statistics also show that the amount of alliances made before the war is small, Wayman rejects the link between alliances and war.

Wallace (1985) draws attention to the international conjuncture to explain the relationship between alliances and war. According to him, alliances in the twentieth century were formed to create winning coalitions, while alliances in the nineteenth century were formed to create balancing mechanisms in the classical balance of power sense.

[3] Hard balancing is a strategy designed to maintain the balance of power. It aims to counter the rise of other countries by using their own military and economic power. This often involves increasing military spending, forming alliances and engaging in an arms race (Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, 2003, Ithaca, Cornell University Press).

The two most peaceful periods of the nineteenth century, the period of European harmony of 1816-1848 and the Bismarckian period of 1871-1895, were already characterized by mutual trust between states, and therefore alliances formed during these periods were not perceived as a threat. Therefore, whether an alliance causes a war or not is also related to the period in which it was formed.

The balance of power established by the Russia-China duo against the US-UK-France triumvirate in the Syrian Civil War prevents the dominance of one side in the region and war between the parties. In conclusion, Vasquez (2015) argues that alliances can be part of a comprehensive and functioning peace system when they are used not as a means to increase power but as a means to constrain unilateral behavior and encourage states to abide by the rules of the game. Based on all the above arguments and examples, it can be concluded that alliances are a shield of war. In other words, the existence of an alliance is an important obstacle to war.

III. Alliances as “A Road to War”: A Liberal Perspective

According to liberals, wars are not caused by the anarchic structure of the international system, but on the contrary by states’ misperception of each other. Therefore, liberals argue that an alliance established in the international system will be misunderstood and will lead to the formation of counter-alliances by escalating the competitive environment. It is argued that there is a general tendency in the literature that “Alliances neither prevent war nor promote peace, but rather are linked to war”. Gibler argues that alliances that threaten the security of another state will neither prevent war nor promote ‘peace through strength’ as realists expect, but rather increase mistrust (Vasquez, 2009).

The liberals’ claim coincides with the findings of a study conducted by Singer and Small in 1966, which examined the alliance and war behavior of states from 1815 to 1945. In this study, it was concluded that states with high levels of alliance activity also ranked high in terms of the amount of wars they fought, while states with low levels of alliance formation had low levels of involvement in war. Levy (1981) reached a similar conclusion in his study and found that the majority of alliances (56 to 100 percent depending on the type) resulted in a war involving at least one of the allies within five years of their formation. Moreover, Levy’s finding that ‘great power’ alliances are more likely to lead to war than other alliances suggests that alliances involving large states are more prone to war than other alliances.

Ostrom and Hoole (1978) argue that there is usually a time lag between the alliance and the outbreak of war, so that the alliance does not directly cause the war, but nevertheless helps to worsen the situation that increases the likelihood of

war. The First World War is a classic example of this. Because every step taken to increase security was perceived as an increasing threat by the other competitor. In this competitive environment, every alliance was perceived as nothing but a threat, and counter-alliances were formed as the most obvious (and appropriate) response to this threat. The counter-alliance offsets most, if not all, of the capability advantages created by the initial alliance. This eliminates the possibility of alliances functioning as a kind of preventive (or deterrent) against wars with an overwhelming concentration of power (Dean and Vasquez, 1976; Wallece, 1973). As a result, alliances not only better prepare the parties, but also draw states into the war and cause it to escalate and spread. This both prolongs the duration and increases the destructiveness of war (Vasquez, 2009). Based on all the above arguments and examples, it can be concluded that alliances have a war-promoting feature in that they involve all members in war. In other words, rather than preventing war, the existence of an alliance increases the risk of war and expands the scope of an existing war.

Among the findings of the same study by Singer and Small (1966) is the statistical evidence that alliances make wars more deadly and longer. The data obtained through the study shows that there is a consistent correlation between being at the top levels of defense pacts, being at the top in terms of battle casualties, and the length of the war. Similarly, the longer a country stays in an alliance, the higher its combat losses and the number of years of war. These links are even stronger for pre-war alliances. Another study supporting the conclusion that alliances function to spread wars was conducted by Randolph Siverson and Joel King in 1979. They concluded that a war between two states that have not joined alliances is much less likely to spread than a war between two states that have joined alliances.

IV. NATO's Deterrence from the Balance of Power Theory Perspective: A Comparative Analysis with the SCO

After the Second World War, the European states needed an alliance in order to recover more quickly in economic, military and security matters. The USSR, which both left the war strong and geographically close to the region, accelerated the process of rebuilding the disrupted balance of power of the European continent. Therefore, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington DC on April 4, 1949 with the addition of the USA, Canada, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Portugal and Italy to the signatories of the Brussels Treaty, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in order to provide common defense against an attack from any external power (NATO, 2023).

At the time of NATO's creation, four main objectives were intended to be fulfilled. The first goal and the main objective was to signal the creation of a collective defense against the perceived threat of the USSR. The second was for the countries of Western Europe to take responsibility for their own security and to take back responsibility for their own security. NATO's third objective is the creation of a strong, broad society based on democratic principles, individual freedom and the rule of law, thereby creating a peaceful international community. The fourth is to create the institutional structures that will enable these objectives to be fulfilled. NATO is important both as a security belt for Western Europe and as a means for the United States to fulfill its own foreign policy objectives. The security system policy that the US tried to implement was to encircle the USSR against the threat of the USSR and communism in a 20,000-mile circle starting from Europe (Tezcan, 2012).

The Warsaw Pact, officially the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, was a military alliance established on May 14, 1955 to counter the NATO threat. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the pact came to an end. The dissolution of the USSR and the disappearance of the Soviet threat made NATO's existence questionable and therefore NATO changed its mission and vision, adopting a "where there is a threat, NATO is there" approach. One of the formations established as an alternative to this unipolar order of the US is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Because the similar problems experienced by the states that left the USSR led them to act jointly in foreign policy. Although it has differences, this new organization has become a kind of a different version of the Warsaw Pact and aimed to establish a balance of power in Asia this time against NATO.

On April 26, 1996, the Shanghai Five was formed by the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and was renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization after Uzbekistan joined the organization at the 2001 summit meeting (Çelik, 2016). In recent years, the rise of China in the Asian region, both economically and militarily, and the desire of the United States, Russia and China to dominate the region's underground resources have pushed the states of the region to regional integration and brought common security interests and policies to the agenda. The reason for the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is based on this background. The desire to take a common stance against the United States is the most important factor pushing Russia and China to cooperate (Eren, 2017). Russia sees NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe and the Black Sea basin as a threat, while China is uncomfortable with the US's pressure and criticism on human rights, its arms trade with Taiwan and its actions in the South China Sea (Harada, 1997).

Turkestan states, which are squeezed between Russia and China, have chosen to conduct their relations with these two states through the element of balance in order to maintain their existence. The Turkestan states' participation in the SCO is a result of these historical balancing policies. After September 11, 2001, with the US invasion of Afghanistan, the US factor emerged as a third factor in addition to the dominant position of Russia and China in Central Asia (Çolakoğlu, 2004).

In 1998, at the third Summit of Heads of State of the Organization in Almaty, Kazakhstan, it was decided to establish an anti-terrorist center in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. However, this counterterrorism center was transferred to Uzbekistan by the decision taken at the Tashkent summit on June 17, 2004 on the grounds that it was a move against the United States, and the bases of Khanabad in Uzbekistan and Manas in Kyrgyzstan, which were under the use of the United States, were closed upon the call of the Organization. In addition, the members of the organization, which convened in Dushanbe in 2008, discussed the South Ossetia conflict between Russia and Georgia, and the members stated that they were in favor of Russia at the summit (Eren, 2017). For China, the organization is a tool to increase its influence (Özdaşlı, 2012), while for Russia, it is a mechanism that ensures that the contacts between the breakaway Turkic Republics and China take place under its control (Andican, 2006). In addition, China is also trying to prevent interference in its dispute with Taiwan through its SCO power (Eren, 2017).

While the organization aims to restrict US military freedom of action in the Asia-Pacific, the main US suspicion of the SCO is its military power. Although both Russia and China have stated that the SCO is not a military bloc, the Peace Exercise in the Ural Mountains in 2007 and the Peace Mission exercises in 2012 and 2016, following the drills conducted after 2003, have made the US and NATO cautious (Eren, 2017). Therefore, the US, which has made regional alliances against the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with states such as Australia, the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, New Zealand, South Korea and Thailand, is trying to increase its power in the Pacific by trying to attract India and Indonesia to its side (Deniz, 2013). On the other hand, Türkiye, a NATO member, became a dialogue partner of the SCO in 2013, following its application in 2011. The President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has stated that Türkiye's application for full membership to the EU could be withdrawn in exchange for Türkiye's acceptance as a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Can Baydarol, Vice President of the European Union and Global Studies Association, stated that the SCO is more about politics than economics and that the organization is an alternative to NATO, not the EU (Erem, 2022). Reasons such as the increase in the cultural and military activities of the organization, the shift of the focus of attention of NATO member countries towards the SCO, and the rising power of China are seen as threats by the US and NATO.

This threat perception between the SCO and NATO can be characterized as soft tension. The fact that there has not yet been a hot conflict between the parties disproves the thesis that alliances lead to war. Moreover, NATO's presence creates deterrence for the SCO and the SCO's presence creates deterrence for NATO.

In international relations, deterrence is the prevention of a possible action of an opponent through words or deeds. It is divided into two categories: deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment. Deterrence by punishment is to keep alive the possibility of making the aggressor regret their actions by retaliating with nuclear weapons in the event of an attack. As the name suggests, the possibility of punishment creates fear in the enemy and prevents him from attacking. Defensive deterrence, on the other hand, is based on a different logic. Here, it is essential to convince the enemy that if it attacks, the cost of occupation will be as high as possible and that it will not be able to achieve its objectives on the ground. In other words, it is aimed to prevent the enemy from attacking by pushing him to make rational calculations (İlhan, 2023; Adamsky, 2018).

Wayman (1985) found that alliance polarization increased just before the Korean War. One of these alliances, and the most important one, is NATO. Although the establishment of NATO did not directly cause the Korean War, it is the biggest example of how an alliance can lead to war (Jones, 1955). Because the US and its allies were involved in the war when they had not planned to be. Türkiye sent troops to the Korean War in order to become a member of NATO, which joined the war in order to prevent a balance of power that the USSR could establish in the Asian region to the detriment of NATO, that is, America. In this context, while NATO was involved in the war with all its members, it also caused a party that wanted to be a member of the alliance to join the war. With NATO's participation, the war spread to more areas and the destructive power of the war increased. It also led to the formation of a counter-alliance-the Warsaw Pact in 1955. So, the link between the Korean War and NATO confirms the liberal thesis.

On the other hand, the idea that NATO was established not to get involved in a war but to prevent one (Huntley, 1969) confirms the realist view that alliances prevent war through deterrence. According to this idea, the existence of NATO means the absence of war. In other words, NATO, which was established against the threat of the USSR, reduced the risk of possible war by creating a balance of power. Thus, it is possible to explain the realists' argument that alliances reduce uncertainty and thus reduce the risk of war through NATO.

The deterrence umbrella that NATO provides to its members is based on punitive deterrence.

This deterrence, which finds its meaning in the famous fifth article of the alliance treaty, lies in the commitment of the entire alliance to respond militarily in the event of an attack on one of the member states (İlhan, 2023).

If we analyze the thesis of the liberal perspective that alliances cause war by spreading conflicts, again through NATO's fifth article, according to this article (NATO, 2008):

“The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.”

Since an attack on Europe or North America is deemed to be an attack on all members and the threat can be responded to collectively by acting in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter (inhak.adalet.gov.tr, 2023), which envisages the entire alliance going to war, this article increases the risk of war and spreads conflicts. This article was applied for the first and only time in NATO history for the September 11 attacks, and NATO troops were deployed to Afghanistan in the aftermath of these attacks. While this is a direct example of the liberal thesis, the fact that the article has only been used once raises questions. However, the realists' thesis is also justified in this regard, as the existence of the article continues to maintain its importance as the most important deterrence factor. This is because member states are reluctant to use this article. Their reluctance also harms the deterrent effect of the article. Thus, Russia, in particular, will not hesitate to resort to more violence when it feels the threat against it diminishing.

“The Wales Summit, which is considered as a turning point for the “New NATO”, was convened on September 04-05, 2014 under the shadow of the Ukraine Crisis and a Readiness Action Plan was prepared at the Summit, which also included recommendations for Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine. Assurance Measures, which include support for allies under imminent threat, and Adaptation Measures, which envisage long-term and structural changes, laid the foundations of the New NATO (NATO Summit in Wales, 2014).

At their meeting on 10 February 2016, NATO Defense Ministers decided to deploy troops in Eastern European countries on a rotational basis. At the meeting, the message was conveyed that the troops to be deployed would be a multinational contingent, so that an attack on allies would be considered as an attack on all allies (Oğuz, 2016), again referring to Article 5.

Despite their good relations with the Western Bloc during the Cold War, neither Finland nor Sweden became a member of NATO. After the Cold War, they joined the European Union (EU) in 1995 but did not participate in NATO's enlargement policy. Therefore, the Finnish Prime Minister, who stated that a possible NATO membership was unlikely, accelerated the steps to apply for membership after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Following this perceived Russian threat, both countries officially applied to become NATO allies on May 18, 2022. NATO-Russia tensions centered on Ukraine have led to a new balancing act in the region. The reason for Sweden and Finland's attempts to become allies is to deter the Russian threat through NATO's presence and reduce the risk of attack.

The Russia-Ukraine crisis has led NATO's deterrence capability to regain momentum. For the alliance, which has recently focused on non-military issues such as partnership rather than military issues due to declining threats from Russia and good relations with Russia, the crisis (Young, 2014) reminded the alliance of the need to refocus on military measures. This transformation from partnership to competition has forced NATO to take measures to reassure the populations of member states and to deter Russia from further moves that could threaten the territorial integrity of the alliance (Calha, 2015). The activities of NATO's Standing Naval Forces (SNF), which patrol the Black Sea on a rotational basis, have been intensified in the Black Sea (Erol, 2012), and the allies have concluded bilateral agreements outside the scope of NATO to send troops and weapons to countries in the region for exercises and training (Harper, 2014). What is also important is the massive aid provided to Ukraine by NATO members. NATO solidarity is demonstrated to Russia through NATO's and member states' individual or group exercises in Eastern Europe and the aid provided to Ukraine (Oğuz, 2016).

The United States provided the largest aid to Ukraine. Looking at other NATO members: Greece, two C-130 military transport planes to Ukraine at the beginning of the war; Sweden, 8 military aid packages totaling 3 billion Swedish crowns (\$287 million); Luxembourg, 75 million euros worth of military aid; Denmark, 2,700 shoulder-fired anti-tank weapons, 2,000 bulletproof vests and 700 cleaning kits totaling \$117 million; Belgium, 200 M72 LAW anti-tank weapons and 5 thousand FN FNC assault rifles, totaling 57 million Euros (Euronews & AA, 2023) and Türkiye, Bayraktar TB2 UCAV and TRLG-230 Surface-to-Surface Missile System, BMC KIRPI Mine and Ambush Resistant (MRAP) Vehicle (Özbek, 2023).

The "Deterrence with Custody" activities, which include Gray Zone Conflicts, Social Resilience and the Forward Presence of military units that will prevent the occupation of Alliance territory to a limited extent, were generally developed against Russia's "New Generation War" doctrine, but the new NATO concept,

which was developed mainly on “Deterrence with Punishment”, has become an important tool in the Alliance’s defense and deterrence policies (Biçer, 2022). Especially since 2014, NATO has transformed into a security organization based entirely on deterrence. There is growing interest and focus on classical NATO defense and deterrence, including force planning, exercises and command structure (Henning, 2020).

By invading Ukraine, Russia has demonstrated that it can use proxies, resort to non-state actors, turn Russian expatriates into voluntary quasi-military forces and engage mercenaries, all of which can be used to threaten or attack many of NATO’s European allies and other countries in Russia’s sphere of interest. Russia has also demonstrated how it can use its political, military and economic power in Syria, how it can wage irregular warfare in Georgia and Ukraine, and how it can engage and develop ties even with extremist groups such as the Taliban, which has regained power in Afghanistan (Cordesman, 2017).

The recent events in Ukraine have shown that NATO and the principle of collective defense remain important, but a greater willingness on the part of European Alliance members to share their contributions fairly would help the Alliance to maintain its unity and strength. Because the United States is more preoccupied with Asia (Trine Flockhart etc. 2014). This reduces the Russian threat to NATO and gives Russia more room for maneuver in Eastern Europe. All member states need to be equally willing and able to reflect the Russian threat. Given the threats in a changing and evolving security environment and the Alliance’s right to self-defense, the NATO Alliance’s actions, defensive in nature, proportionate and consistent with international commitments, continue to be non-proliferation, disarmament, arms control and full adherence to confidence and confidence-building measures to enhance security and reduce military tensions. Deterrence, i.e. preventing conflict and war, is a fundamental element of NATO’s overall strategy to fulfill this major responsibility (Biçer, 2022).

At the 15th Summit of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization held in Ufa, Russia between 8-10 July 2015, the full membership process and procedures of India and Pakistan were initiated. In order to prevent the disputes between India and Pakistan from harming the common policies of the SCO, the “Good Neighbor Agreement” was imposed on the two countries (Eren, 2017). With this defensive deterrent role, the alliance provides evidence for the realists’ thesis by attempting to soften the existing crisis between the two countries. Also, along with founding members such as Russia and China, the full membership of India, the largest state in South Asia, has added a different dimension to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

It is seen that this situation has made the Organization a center of attraction. In particular, Iran, which was subjected to US-based Western sanctions, turned its direction to the east, and the country became a full member of the Organization at the 21st SCO Summit held in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, on 16-17 September 2021 (Güven, 2021). Iran has become a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, despite the UN embargo that countries under the UN embargo cannot become members of the organization. This means that the Organization views the sanctions against Iran as unilateral rather than international.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which has set itself the task of combating the three main and non-traditional security threats of terrorism, separatism and extremism, will serve two purposes in combating these threats are: First, it would give international legitimacy to the constituent states facing problems such as terrorism, separatism and extremism in their fight against these threats. Thus, Russia would be able to act more easily in its war in Chechnya, China in its activities in the Uighur region, Uzbekistan against the radical religious organizations it had to fight against within the country, as well as in the suppression of dissent. In addition, smaller countries like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan would have the support of big powers like Russia and China in combating these threats. Secondly, the founding powers of the organization tried to produce an alternative model to the American model of combating international terrorism through the cooperation mechanism within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It was aimed to prevent extra-regional interventions in the solution of intra-regional problems and to realize the solution within the framework of regional cooperation (Kosaçyov, 2003).

In 2001, after its intervention in Afghanistan, the US strengthened its security cooperation with all Central Asian countries and gained significant influence with the military bases it established in the region. Russia's influence has weakened. Then, the wave of "color revolutions" that started in Georgia in 2003, allegedly financed and organized by the US State Department and the CIA, extended to Central Asia (Komissina, 2016) and escalated the geopolitical struggle over the region between Russia and China on the one hand and the US on the other. In order to emerge successfully from this struggle, the members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have cooperated more intensively within the framework of the organization to ensure intra-regional stability. This led to the strengthening of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Askeroğlu, 2018). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was established to solve border problems between member states, has begun to turn into a balancing factor against the emerging US dominance in the region.

Although the Shanghai Cooperation Organization lacks a collective defense mechanism, as in Article 5 of NATO or Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, member states are ready to take any countermeasures to defend the interests of other member states, as stated in the basic principle of the organization's treaty (Lavrov, 2014). The statement "The Organization is ready to take any countermeasures" is open-ended and establishes the legitimacy for other members to respond to a threat or physical attack against one of the members. Therefore, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s was an important factor that made Tehran, which perceived a security threat from the United States, want to become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. For the Organization, this membership shows that Iran is the pillar of the Organization in the Middle East. So, "security" has become an important issue within the organization. This geopolitical expansion of the organization creates a deterrent effect against NATO in both economic and security matters. Because, just like NATO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization acts as a shield against possible foreign interventions against its members. Although it is not a collective defense organization, it is unlikely that a use of force will be used against the Organization and its members since it states that it will defend and protect the interests and security of its members. Moreover, after its establishment, the Organization was referred to as the "NATO of the East" (Mate, 2009) or "NATO's evil twin" (Morozov, 2006). The Organization stands as the largest and most inclusive bloc vis-à-vis NATO for several reasons, including its expansion and Turkey's close contacts with the Organization.

How would Russia be stopped in a world without NATO? The deterrence effect of NATO's Article 5 is one of the most important factors in curbing Russia's actions. This is why Russia is strongly opposed to other states joining the alliance, especially Ukraine and Georgia. On the other hand, how can the US be stopped without SOC against NATO? The structure of the international system is too large and complex to be unipolar. That is why the existence of alliances is always needed. As a result, the existence of an alliance does not cause war, on the contrary, it prevents the spread of war. However, if Russia were to attack a NATO ally, then the entire alliance would be involved in the war and the thesis that alliances spread war would once again triumph. But, Russia will not want to confront the entire alliance. Or, if one of the SOC members were attacked, the organization would be ready to respond. However, it would not be easy to wage war against the SCO, which has two nuclear-powered members.

Conclusion

The balance of power theory is as important for states and the international system today as it was in the past and continues to be preferred.

For this reason, it is still relevant. The fact that states resort to balance of power when they feel insecure has brought along a debate. In the literature, there is a distinction in terms of time, space, actor elements (parties, allies) and the structure of the international system as to whether the alliances established cause war or eliminate the risk of a possible war. This distinction is between realists, who believe that the established balance of power will lead to an environment of peace, and liberals, who argue that the balance will increase the risk of war.

Considering these two different perspectives, it is seen that alliances that increase the risk of war and spread conflicts are formed in an already existing competitive environment. In times of high threat perception, states make alliances in order to balance their power and deter the threat. Therefore, the other side perceives the alliance established in such an international conjuncture as a threat and forms a counter-alliance. This leads to an increase in tensions between the parties and, moreover, the involvement of one ally in the war leads to the involvement of other allies in the war. Thus, as liberals argue, alliances increase the risk of war and even spread war. This can be explained through NATO's Article 5. Because this article seems to formalize the thesis that alliances spread war. This article, which was used in practice for the first time in history with the September 11, 2001 incident, confirms the liberals' thesis.

On the other hand, it is observed that the alliances established due to the harmonization process in the 19th century did not lead to war. Since the states did not perceive any threat in this period, the alliances made did not lead to counter-alliances. In other words, the alliances made in a period when there was no competition and there was a process of peace and harmony remained in the nature of the continuity of peace. In such an environment, the purpose of an alliance is to reduce the risk of war rather than increase it. In other words, since the existence of alliances does not always lead to war, the liberals' thesis contradicts itself at this point.

Realists, on the other hand, argue that alliances contribute to the creation and maintenance of peace. According to them, the balance of power created by the alliance will deter the other side and prevent it from attacking. In the study, the realists' thesis that 'Alliances prevent war' is also analyzed through NATO. "NATO's fifth article". In fact, member states are reluctant to invoke this article due to the heavy cost it would create. Therefore, the focus is on the possibility of using the article rather than its use. The article in question seems to be more functional in deterring an attack by the other side.

This is because an attack on a NATO ally will be met with the entire alliance and will be punished. Therefore, the country considering an attack will have to make its plans taking this condition into account and will have to think in more detail before the attack. This is where the war-preventing side of Article 5 comes into play, rather than the war-promoting side. This article reduces the likelihood of an attack against NATO allied countries. But what will the process be like for non-NATO countries? Having lost its *raison d'être* after the Cold War, NATO has expanded its geographical area and adopted the mission of “Where there is a threat, NATO is there”. This has paved the way for involvement in the resolution of conflicts in non-NATO countries. The most important of these is NATO’s siding with Ukraine in the Russia-Ukraine War.

Russia has always opposed Ukraine’s membership of NATO. If Ukraine was an ally of the alliance, the attack would have been less likely to take place. Russia would have to tread more carefully, as it would not want to confront NATO on the grounds of Article 5. On the other hand, the invasion of Ukraine was also seen as a security issue for Sweden and Finland, and led them to put NATO membership on their agenda to counter the Russian threat. These two countries became closer to NATO than ever before and took initiatives to become part of the alliance. As a result of these initiatives, Finland joined the alliance as the 31st member on April 4, 2023, while Sweden became the 32nd member of NATO with a ceremony held in Washington on March 7, 2024. Based on the membership initiatives of Finland and Sweden, it is seen that NATO’s deterrent effect still continues today, especially during the Cold War period. Thus, the claims put forward by realists are confirmed in this framework.

The Finnish-Swedish example given above, in particular, reveals that today, states try to be a part of the alliance in order to benefit from its deterrent power in the sense of preventing war. In other words, there is a general tendency that states join alliances to avoid war. Because states stay away from a conventional war, especially due to the costs it would create, and instead try to protect NATO’s deterrence by organizing exercises. On the other hand, Central Asian Turkic states have also joined the SCO in order to protect themselves from potential conflicts. As a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Iran wanted to create a deterrent effect against the Western threat. This aspiration is not dissimilar to the aspirations of Finland and Sweden to join NATO. Therefore, it is possible to say that participation in alliances has effects on states as a stance against war, to eliminate threats or to secure themselves. The tendency that states participate or try to participate in the balance of power to ensure and protect their own interests serves to protect themselves from the risk of war. Due to these approaches of states, the war-preventing aspect of alliances is more prominent.

In conclusion, an overall assessment shows that alliances are both a shield and a cause of war, but that this situation varies depending on the structure of the international conjuncture, and that alliance members predominantly emphasize the deterrent aspect of the alliance in order to avoid a possible war.

In the literature, there is no study that examines the relationship between alliances and wars by comparing realist and liberal perspectives and arguments and examines it in the specific case of NATO-SCO. Studies examining the relationship between alliances and wars are quite old. However, the Russia-Ukraine war has shown that alliance membership remains the most effective way to deter war. At this point, the need for NATO's existence has once again become clear. Moreover, it was Russia, which was uncomfortable with the alliance, that brought this need back to the agenda. Therefore, this study reveals that understanding and further studying the relationship between alliances and wars is of utmost importance for the measures to be taken and policies to be developed.

The Russia-Ukraine, Russia-Crimea and Russia-Georgia crises have brought to light the fact that NATO must continue to maintain the deterrent power of its fifth article. In this sense, member states should act in greater unity and solidarity and engage in joint expenditures. The United States, whose interest has shifted more and more towards Asia, needs to make its presence felt more in NATO. The Ukraine War has done this to some extent, and the US has been the alliance member that has provided the most assistance to Ukraine. However, NATO's silence on the continent before the war was perhaps the most encouraging factor for Russia.

It is hoped that this study will pioneer future research since there are not enough studies on the subject. The study is a step towards shifting attention to this issue. Examining the relationship between alliances and wars is important in order to analyze more easily how states will behave in times of crisis.

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