

State strategies

Balancing

Balancing is a strategy adopted by a state when it assumes responsibility to prevent the attempt of an aggressor state to change in its favour the current balance of power between the two. Therefore, it is a strategic option that aims to increase a state's power to successfully face the power of another state or the threat that an adversary state or a group of states pose to it. It can be divided into two forms: internal and external balancing.

Internal balancing constitutes the predominant strategy adopted inside an anarchic international system, where states are driven towards self-help. It includes a state's efforts to upgrade its capabilities by intensifying its effort to make the best out of its domestic sources of power. By resting upon the exclusive mobilization of its own resources, the balancing state aspires to acquire enough power, which will enable it to survive and maintain the current balance of power.

External balancing deals with forming alliances and coalitions, which aim to increase the state's actual power through its cooperation with other states with common needs, interests, and enemies. Above all, it is the cooperative effort of some actors against the common threat posed by another actor.

Overall, internal balancing is more reliable and precise than external balancing. States are less likely to misjudge their relative strengths than they are to misjudge the strength and reliability of opposing coalitions. On the other hand, internal balancing presupposes a longer period than external balancing, which can be realized quickly. Nevertheless, in most cases, both kinds of balancing are combined.

Coercion

Coercion lies in one state's attempt to secure benefits from another state by compelling its government to think or act in a certain way using the threat of violence. This threat, alongside the controlled escalation of a crisis, forces the adversary to comply with the will of the coercive state. Therefore, coercion is the change of the status quo through the threat of violence.

This strategy provides states with the ability to achieve their goals or inflict damage on the opponent without employing brute force, which differentiates it from the concept of attack. For the coercion strategy to be successful, it must not end in war. There are two main prerequisites for it to work correctly.

- 1) The state that adopts a coercive strategy (state A) must have enough military power so that the pressure being put on the adversary (state B) is combined with the high probability of A winning in a military clash in case it loses control of the crisis' escalation. The relativity of the cost is just as important as in the case of deterrence. A has to put B into a situation where it will face a greater cost if it does not comply with the compelling threat than if it does. In this way, A has

the escalation dominance, i.e. the ability to constantly increase the cost of non-compliance of B until it destroys B, which cannot do the same. This being the case, the national interest of B will eventually force it to choose the least detrimental option, which is compliance with its enemy's demands.

2) A has to have a strong incentive but also display its existence to B. B has to know that A possesses the means and the will to carry out its threats. In this way, the threats' credibility is enhanced, resulting in them becoming a crucial factor in the decisions made by B.

Deterrence

Deterrence is the ability of one state to cancel a non-desired action from another state. More specifically, deterrence is a state's threat to use military force to influence another state's behaviour and prevent the other state from adopting an aggressive attitude. The deterrent state aims at maintaining the status quo through the threat of the use of force. Therefore, non-violence is what distinguishes it from defence.

A key element of deterrence is the concept of relative cost. The cost that is to be inflicted on the aggressor should exceed any possible benefit he could gain if he pursued the altering of the status quo. Deterrence is not the result of persuasion but the result of the deterrent state's threat and consequently of the fear of the state that is being deterred regarding the consequences of using force against it.

Thus, the adversary is not persuaded by arguments or logic but is pushed or forced into a particular behaviour out of fear. In this context, the threat is balanced only by another threat. That is because the one who wants war is not necessarily willing to achieve victory at any cost.

The threat mainly targets the opponent's psychology, seeking to curb his will. It must a) be clearly stated, b) clearly define the limits of the opponent's actions and c) be credible. However, the credibility of the deterrent state's threat and the value of the cost from the deterred one are subjective.

To say that country A deters country B from doing something is to imply the following: 1) that A conveys to B a threat to inflict punishment or deprivation of values if it embarks on a particular course of action; 2) that B might otherwise embark on that course of action; 3) that B believes that A has the capacity and the will to carry out the threat, and decides for this reason that the course of action is not worthwhile.

Mutual deterrence

Mutual deterrence is a psychological and subjective state of affairs in which two or more powers deter each other from doing something. For it to exist, three conditions have to be met:

The two states prevent each other's actions using threats.

Had these threats be absent, these actions would take place.

Mutual threats are clear and credible, and each side perceives them as such.

Potential opponents are hesitant in the face of possible disaster because the prospect of winning against an opponent with equal strength is uncertain. In other words, the cost of a war between relatively equal opponents tends to be prohibitive. No state that acts in its interests will act in a way that will cost it more than the expected benefit. Thus, the two opponents are forced to coexist without any of them retreating from their positions. Deterrence is reconciliation between those who do not reconcile.

Divide and rule: buck-passing

"Divide and rule" is a strategy that allows a state to face its adversary indirectly. There are three different branches of it: a) bait and bleed, b) buck-passing, and c) alliance prevention.

Buck-passing is an alternative to balancing strategy, in which a state is eager to face the power of a potential adversary indirectly. It is a defensive approach that rests on conveying the cost to third parties. It can be used in several situations, such as when a state faces more than one enemy. In Buck-passing, the state realizes the need to stop the empowerment of its enemy. Still, it searches for another state to face it, either because it is not strong enough to do it by itself or because it wants to avoid the cost that a confrontation would bring.

That is done 1) by keeping good relations with the adversary so that an early crisis is avoided, 2) by distancing itself from the "victim" so that it is not carried into the war if it erupts, and 3) by choosing a powerful enough state to play that role to pose a threat to its rival, thus forcing him to focus on it. If it succeeds, its rival ends up contained without any involvement of the first state and with zero cost. However, failure can come in two different forms.

First, the victim may not manage to contain the enemy, which results in him becoming even stronger and thus a bigger threat. Second, the victim may acquire much power through that process and end up posing a threat too. In case of failure, the "victim" or the enemy may end up too empowered.

Divide and rule: bait and bleed

"Bait and bleed" is one strategy that allows a state to face its adversary indirectly. It is an aggressive approach that aims to increase the state's relative power, which starts the process. That is achieved by weakening its opponents by exacerbating their discrepancies, causing a rivalry between them or a confrontation.

Moreover, this strategy can be used in an already existent conflict, in which case, the state tries to increase the duration of the conflict and the damage the two sides inflict on each other. It is a low-cost strategy and at the same time a high-uncertainty one.

If it succeeds, the country that enacts it does not wear out, and its relative power increases while it stays on the margin. If it fails, the state's relations with its enemies are worsened, and the antagonism augments. Multipolar systems provide fertile ground for this kind of strategy.

Divide and rule: alliance prevention

"Alliance prevention" aims to not allow the empowerment of the adversary through the establishment of an alliance. The cost of this approach is equivalent to the means used. If the state uses diplomacy, then failure signifies the creation of the enemy alliance. However, if military means are used, the antagonism between the two sides increases, and the first state receives a blow to its status.

Rally round the flag

A "rally round the flag" effect is the sudden and substantial increase in the government's public approval in times of war. Only wars (or other spectacular events like a large-scale terrorist attack or pandemics) consistently provoke sizable rallies. These significant events elicit an emotional reaction from citizens and a self-identification with the nation.

The mental connection between society and the government is crucial in the face of a crisis. It results in society and political elite standing together and sharing the predominance in the war as their primary goal, thus enhancing social cohesion. Moreover, the stronger this connection becomes, the more viable the government ends up. On the contrary, if this mental connection is absent, the state will collapse under the war effort's weight and intensity.

The rally phenomenon is usually measured as a surge of public approval for the head of state when the nation is involved in an international crisis. Two hypotheses have been offered for why this surge of support occurs: (1) patriotism, as individuals respond to a threat by identifying with an in-group, in this case, the nation and its president. Patriotism holds that citizens rally to the president in times of international crisis as the anthropomorphic symbol of national unity- a kind of living flag.

The president becomes the focus of national attention, symbolizing national unity and power. (2) Opinion leadership, as the information environment changes because opposition leaders fall silent or support the president during a crisis and a portion of the public follows those elite partisan leads. However, public opinion does not praise the president's policy itself, citizens just rally around him out of need, and thus it is only a temporary phenomenon.

Sources:

Ilias Kouskouvelis (2004) Εισαγωγή στις Διεθνείς Σχέσεις

Kenneth Waltz (1979) Theory of International Politics

John Mearsheimer (2001) The Tragedy of Great Power Politic

Konstantinos Koliopoulos (2008) Η Στρατηγική Σκέψη από την Αρχαιότητα Έως Σήμερα

Georgios Spyropoulos (2010) Διεθνείς Σχέσεις

Hedley Bull (1997) The Anarchical Society

Ilias Kouskouvelis (2000) Αποτροπή Και Πυρηνική Στρατηγική Στον Ψυχρό Πόλεμο

Panagiotis Kondylis (1998) Θεωρία του Πολέμου

Hedley Bull: The anarchical society

Spyros Litsas (2010) Πόλεμος και Ορθολογισμός

Spyridon Litsas (2014) Ιλιάδα και Διεθνής Πολιτική

IR101 NEWS TEAM