

Introduction

This book is about alignment politics in the Global South. By alignments, I refer specifically to agreements between two or more states to undertake defense-related security cooperation.¹ In the pages that follow, I attempt to address a critical question for international relations theory and practice: how do the small states and middle powers of the Global South tend to align with the great powers in pursuit of their security interests?

The Global South—sometimes called the developing world or third world—is the home to most of the earth's population and many of the most pressing challenges to international security. As defined here, it includes the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and most of Asia and Oceania. Only Europe, North America, and the highly industrialized democracies of Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand are excluded. Within the developing world, only China has the military, nuclear, and economic muscle to be considered a bona fide great power alongside the United States, Russia, and arguably France and the United Kingdom. The rest of the Global South is populated by small states and middle powers. These states—which I label developing countries (DCs) despite the imperfections of that term—generally lack formidable independent power capabilities. Unlike the great powers, they usually cannot affect the international security landscape dramatically on their own. However, many occupy strategic positions, and collectively their choices have enormous consequence.

The alignment preferences and policies of developing countries are important for a number of reasons. They affect the overall global distribution of power by adding to the resources of some great powers and constraining others. They also shape the strategic character of particular regional environments. Sometimes DCs align in a manner that fosters peace and stability in their environs. At other times they align, either intentionally or accidentally, in a way that contributes to instability and conflict. That they do is important, because interstate conflict since 1945 has usually occurred in various parts of the developing world, not on the home turf of the great powers. Finally, in an era of globalization and asymmetrical conflict, the most dangerous exporters of insecurity are not necessarily the mightiest of nations. Cooperation from DCs can be the key to great-power efforts to meet the menaces of terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and other nontraditional security threats.

With so much at stake, international relations theory needs to address the alignment behavior of states in the Global South. To date when theorists have addressed this topic, they have focused primarily on explaining how states choose sides amid

great-power competition. Consequently they have clung to a trichotomy that implies that states have only three basic options: *balance* against the great power that appears the most powerful or menacing, *bandwagon* with it, or remain as neutral as possible. In the real world, as any policy practitioner knows, DCs and other states have a wider range of alignment options. Theory needs to better account for that fact.

In this book I argue that DCs usually attempt to stake out positions between the stark alternatives of balancing, bandwagoning, and neutrality. In most cases, they do tilt toward one or more great powers and establish security cooperation to manage the principal perceived challenges to their interests. They usually try to limit their alignments, however, stopping shy of stalwart military pacts and hedging their bets in various ways. This behavior is nothing new. Great powers have long sought to drive strategy in meeting international security challenges, obtaining help from allies near and far. The governments of DCs play a different game, seeking maximum great-power commitment to their security interests while trying to minimize the price of obtaining that support. In a nutshell, they seek the greatest rewards at the smallest risk.

The past several years have certainly confirmed that dynamic. In late 2001 U.S. President George W. Bush cast the options of balancing and bandwagoning in moralistic tones, boldly declaring that states were “either with us or against us [in] the war on terror.”² Most DCs have tilted toward America in the campaign against terrorism, but few have offered the unflinching support that U.S. officials demanded. Limited alignments have been the order of the day. In Afghanistan the United States has led an international force to oust the Taliban, but its allies have offered different levels of support. Some have been willing to fight, some to provide humanitarian relief, and some only to commit money. The military and intelligence services of America’s most important regional ally—Pakistan—have provided support that helps keep the Taliban on their feet. U.S. efforts to track down terrorists have met with some close cooperation but also with elements of resistance and frequent Pakistani attempts to keep the relationship at arm’s length. This behavior should not come as a great surprise; America’s Cold War cooperation with Pakistan was similarly characterized by shades of gray.

The Iraq War is an even more striking example. In 2003 the United States drew up war plans only to find that two of its key friends in the Middle East—Turkey and Saudi Arabia—would deny use of their territories for an invasion. Assembling a coalition for the controversial war required expending an untold sum of U.S. political capital, and coalition membership plunged when the going got tough. For better or worse, the fact that so many DCs have withheld stalwart support for the Bush administration’s multifaceted campaign has constrained America’s ability to drive the international security agenda. Again, these patterns are hardly new. America’s allies in the developing world split over Vietnam, European nuclear defense, Middle East policy, and a range of other issues during the Cold War. Then as now, a general reluctance among DCs to forge tight alliances has imposed significant limits on great-power prerogatives, blurring the lines between friends and foes and

complicating the execution of grand strategies. Limited alignments have thus had profound international security consequences that leading theoretical approaches—which cling to the trichotomy of balancing, bandwagoning, and neutrality—are apt to miss.

Developing country alignments will continue to exert a heavy influence on the course of international security in the coming decades, and limited alignments are likely to be the continuing norm. Most DCs will seek some external security aid and protection, but without obvious, Cold War–variety strategic lines in the sand, most DCs will see little reason to forge rock-ribbed defense pacts. That pattern could eventually change as China, Russia, and India rise. As a more robustly multipolar world begins to take shape, DCs will have to choose whether and how to adjust their alignment positions. If strong threat-balancing tendencies prevail, a rising power like China may face a ring of containment by solid American allies. If DCs bandwagon in an effort to ride the wave of the future and secure future gains, China or other ascending giants could win friends that help propel it toward superpower status and usher in a more genuinely bipolar or multipolar era.

If limited alignments are the norm, the Global South will be a more complicated but somewhat less polarized place. DCs will forge flexible security relations with their great-power protectors, adjusting their positions subtly over time to reflect regional and domestic concerns and the changing global balance of power. The United States will find it increasingly costly to play the role of global sheriff and maintain clear strategic primacy if ambivalent security partners offer fewer basing privileges and if coalitions shrink. However, if DCs eschew tight alliances, other great powers will also find it more difficult to mount a serious challenge to the status quo. I argue that this pattern of alignments is the most likely. It is important for both theorists and policymakers to understand why.

MY ARGUMENTS

In this book I contend that DCs generally favor limited alignments, particularly in the post–Cold War order. I argue that DCs rarely remain strictly nonaligned; they usually tilt toward one or more great powers to obtain some measure of security support. However, they usually try to avoid tight alliance relationships when they have a meaningful choice in the matter. They normally prefer and pursue limited alignments, because they believe flexible security arrangements will provide the best ratio of risks to rewards under conditions of strategic uncertainty. Alignment with a great power brings rewards—such as defense support and various forms of aid—but also carries the risk of diminished autonomy and the related hazards of dependency, abandonment, or entrapment. Both the risks and rewards of a stalwart alliance often exceed those of a more limited, flexible security arrangement. I contend that unless a DC faces an unmanageable threat and identifies a credible and capable great-power ally, its leaders usually expect the marginal risks of a tight alliance to outweigh the marginal rewards. Thus they conclude that a middle position between

neutrality and outright alliance maximizes their security utility, and they have an incentive to tilt only partway toward their preferred great-power protector.

I argue further that limited alignments are likely to be particularly preponderant in the current era of American strategic primacy. Allying tightly against the United States is dangerous, whereas close alliance with America presents heightened risks of entrapment or abandonment due to unrivaled U.S. might. Moreover, few DCs perceive the need to forge tight defense pacts with or against America in a period of relative peace among the great powers.

Balancing, Bandwagoning, and Neutrality

My arguments attack one of the key conceptual structures in international security studies—the trichotomy of balancing, bandwagoning, and neutrality.³ Contemporary theories generally present alignment politics as a choice between those three basic options. The first option is to balance. The dominant claim in the literature is that countries align to pool their capabilities against common adversaries when they cannot stand safely on their own. Structural realists like Kenneth Waltz argue that the anarchic nature of the international system gives states of all sizes an incentive to align against the most powerful state in the system. Thus “secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side.”⁴ Implicit in his argument is the assumption that an unrivaled great power will at least sometimes use its might to dominate others. States either balance to avoid subjugation, or they may eventually disappear.

Most scholars agree that DCs do not align strictly on the basis of power distributions, and Stephen Walt improved on the balance-of-power thesis by arguing that states generally align to balance against the foreign state or coalition that poses the greatest threat. Steven David, Deborah Welch Larson, and others have rightly argued that internal politics, economics, and ideational factors also affect alignment policies. Those critiques offered a valuable contribution by drawing much-needed attention to the power of domestic imperatives in shaping security strategies, particularly in the Global South. However, like Walt, they focus on how states choose sides amid great-power competition, concluding that DCs and other secondary states normally align to balance against the sources of both internal and external security threats.⁵

The second option in the conventional alignment trichotomy is to bandwagon. Walt defines bandwagoning as aligning with the state that poses the principal external threat and argues that it is rare, usually occurring only when states are very weak, when allies are unavailable, or when the spoils of war are about to be divided.⁶ Randall Schweller defines bandwagoning differently, as alignment with the most powerful or promising state in the international system. He asserts that states often “bandwagon for profit” to secure revisionist gains rather than protection.⁷ Like most other alignment theorists, he focuses on how states choose sides and tells us little about the forms that security cooperation is apt to take.

Both outright balancing and bandwagoning strategies are ideal types that imply tight alliance. Walt concedes that “balancing and bandwagoning are ideal types,”

which tell us more about the motives for an observed alignment than the form it takes. He argues that “states that choose to bandwagon will not leave themselves completely vulnerable, and they may offer only modest support to the dominant power.” Similarly, “states that choose to balance may also seek cordial relations with their opponents, while simultaneously obtaining protection against them.”⁸ Walt thus acknowledges the occurrence of limited alignments but downplays it theoretically. His objective is to explain as parsimoniously as possible how states choose sides, not to account for the extent of their resulting security cooperation.

In this book I do not attempt to distinguish between balancing and bandwagoning behavior or to resolve which definition for bandwagoning is better. That debate largely focuses on the motives for security cooperation: do states usually align defensively to meet threats or to advance more offensively minded interests? In practice, those assessments are difficult to make. A state that is better equipped to protect itself is often better able to expand its power as well, and governments doubtlessly align for a mix of motives in individual cases. My goal is not to disentangle the offensive and defensive interests that drive DCs to align. Instead I focus on determining how often DCs pursue limited alignments, and how often they embrace tight ones—whether for profit, protection, or both.

The third ideal-type option states have is to keep their heads down and try to remain neutral. Paul Schroeder has referred to this strategy as one of “hiding” from great-power competition.⁹ Staying entirely neutral is difficult and often dangerous, however, and true nonalignment is comparatively rare. Most DCs perceive the need for outside support in defending their security interests, and unless larger states deem a country to be strategically and politically unimportant, external pressures to align are normally considerable. Robert Rothstein thus describes nonalignment as an “eternal myth,” often desired but seldom viewed as feasible in practice.¹⁰

The alignment trichotomy has been theoretically attractive, partly because it is relatively elegant and easy to understand. The centrality of that conceptual structure in Cold War theoretical discourse also reflects the fact that Western scholars and statesmen had obvious policy interests in understanding how states choose sides in a divided world order. However, by trying to identify the foremost threat or opportunity that drives a country to choose sides, existing theories downplay the complexity of alignment politics. They also give short shrift to the importance of risk and uncertainty in alignment decisions. In the real world, governments clearly have a range of possibilities between neutrality and tight balancing or bandwagoning alignments. DCs usually do not declare strict allegiances or hide from the great powers; more often, they attempt to maneuver subtly and use great-power feuds as a source of leverage. Theory needs to come to grips with reality and explain nuances in alignment politics, not just idealized forms of behavior.

The Middle Path

International relations theorists have only begun to explore the range of options between strict neutrality and tight balancing or bandwagoning alliances. They have

done so largely by focusing on ways that states can either soften existing alliances or hedge their bets to reduce reliance on alliance structures.

Soft Balancing

Some scholars have focused on how policymakers attempt to reduce reliance on rigid alliance structures by using other means to constrain potentially menacing or overbearing states. Robert Pape and T. V. Paul have developed the notion of *soft balancing* as an alternative to the *hard balancing* concept that dominates the traditional literature. Whereas hard balancing implies the use of military buildups and strong countervailing alliances to keep a problematic great power in check, soft balancing implies an ad hoc strategy of using multilateral institutions and loose diplomatic ententes for the same purpose.¹¹

Pape and Paul argue that major powers have engaged in soft balancing behavior in recent years, seeking to limit American influence by denying some U.S. requests for security support and mobilizing opposition to America in the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and other diplomatic forums. Sometimes states engage in both soft balancing and a degree of hard balancing against a potential adversary. For example, as Pape and Paul note, China and Russia often opposed the United States diplomatically in the early post-Cold War period and also entered a very limited countervailing alignment through their 1996 “strategic partnership.”

At other times, soft balancing implies more of an effort to restrain one’s friends. For example, Pape and Paul use the concept to describe French and German behavior before the 2003 Iraq War. In such cases, the term *soft balancing* can be a bit confusing because America’s NATO allies were not aligning against the United States in an overall strategic sense.¹² France and Germany remained U.S. treaty allies—engaging in extensive cooperation in counterterrorism, Afghan reconstruction, and many other areas—but sought to restrain their mighty ally, especially on the question of Iraq. Rather than forging a military alliance against America, they merely sought to put some limits on their tight security relationship with the United States.

Soft balancing resembles what Schroeder has referred to as “transcending”—attempting to constrain a great power through norms and institutions rather than alliances.¹³ These related concepts certainly point to an important facet of international relations, but they are better considered a supplement (or alternative) to security alignments than a type of alignment strategy per se. Through diplomacy, norms, and institutions, states can reduce their dependence on alliance structures to some degree. This often makes it easier for DCs and other states to keep their alignments limited.

Hedging

In recent years numerous international relations theorists have used the term *hedging* to describe efforts by states to provide for their security while avoiding overly

antagonistic alliance relationships. Evelyn Goh defines hedging as a set of contingency-planning strategies in “a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality” and instead cultivate a foreign policy that avoids “choos[ing] one side at the obvious expense of another.”¹⁴ Although few other scholars have defined the term as clearly, most treat hedging as an overarching foreign policy strategy in which a state engages with a potential rival through economic and political means while taking countervailing protective measures in the security sphere.

Defined this broadly, hedging is ubiquitous in the contemporary order. Robert Art sees European states “hedging their security bets” to avoid too much dependency on the United States. Eric Heginbotham and Richard Samuels assert that Japan has engaged in a “dual hedge,” preserving an alliance with the United States while opening to greater commerce with China, and Rosemary Foot describes China as hedging by expanding political and economic ties with Washington while setting up bilateral and multilateral security structures in case of a rainy day.¹⁵

Similar behavior is evident throughout the Global South. William Wohlforth argues that “hedging [has been] the dominant strategy among Russia’s neighbors” since the mid-1990s as they seek to come out from under Moscow’s shadow. Daniel Markey describes Pakistan’s ambivalent relationship with the United States since September 2001 as an example of hedging. Benjamin Miller argues that U.S. allies in the Arab world are choosing to hedge their bets and limit their alignments with America to avoid falling too far into the U.S. orbit and antagonizing their own populations. Analysts have pointed to a particularly important and obvious pattern of hedging behavior in Saudi Arabia.¹⁶ Several analysts of Southeast Asia have seen similar patterns of risk-averse foreign policy behavior as countries try to hedge their bets in the context of an uncertain Sino-American relationship and other shifting international currents.¹⁷

The literature on hedging in foreign policy is helpful, both because it depicts an important behavioral trend and because it rightly draws attention to the importance of risk aversion and uncertainty in the formulation of security strategies. Risk and uncertainty are particularly critical in driving the actions of vulnerable DCs, which often perceive themselves as small ships in a tempestuous ocean of international affairs. However, the literature is not specific enough about the relationship between broad hedging strategies and security alignments. Leading works on hedging imply that even stalwart alliances can be part of broad hedging strategies if accompanied by robust political and economic engagement. For example, some of America’s most rock-ribbed allies engage routinely with some of its greatest potential strategic nemeses. Japan’s behavior toward China is a case in point. If any type of alliance can be part of a hedging strategy, the concept is not terribly useful in helping illuminate the nuances in alignment politics.

This book focuses more narrowly on the security dimension of interstate relations. My argument that DCs tend to pursue limited alignments is not at all inconsistent with the empirical observation that they often hedge their bets in various

ways. Indeed, I argue that one of the benefits of limited alignments is that they avoid drawing lines in the sand, thus leaving doors open to DCs to diversify their economic and diplomatic relations. I do not endeavor to provide a composite theory of foreign policy, however. My goal is to explain the precise types of alignments that DCs tend to pursue with great powers in the security sphere: tight alliances, limited alignments, or no significant security ties at all.

The Meaning of Limited Alignment

Empirically I distinguish between tight alliances, limited alignments, and nonalignment based on the different levels of security cooperation that each entails. Tight alliances are often established by formal treaties and generally involve deep, institutionalized defense relationships. They often carry mutual defense obligations as well. These formal alliances—such as NATO, the Warsaw Pact, or the U.S.-Japan alliance—often carry the greatest commitments, partly because they require a public signature or ratification process and legislative or judicial review. Tight alliances are not always based on formal treaties, however. Sometimes tight informal alignments form, cemented not by legal and bureaucratic features but by a sense of shared interests, private commitments, and established cooperation through basing facilities, intelligence sharing, and substantial joint military operations. Examples include the Sino-Vietnamese alliance during the Vietnam War or U.S. ties to Israel since 1967.

Limited alignments entail lower commitment and a less binding security relationship. They typically include arrangements for preferential arms sales, joint training exercises, and other forms of military aid. Such relationships are usually public, but they do not carry a general pledge of military support in the event of a crisis or a general commitment to engage in joint combat operations. Limited alignments seldom give a great power basing privileges. Instead, great-power partners may enjoy commercial access to military facilities and some degree of logistical or technical assistance. Examples include contemporary U.S. ties to Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

In this book a tight alliance refers to an arrangement involving at least two of the following features: a formal defense treaty or widely acknowledged informal pact, semipermanent or permanent basing rights, joint combat operations, or a significant alliance bureaucracy. When two states do not have at least two of those features, I consider them to be in a limited alignment. Even when a formal treaty is in place, if none of the other elements is apparent, I describe the relationship as a limited alignment. The substance of security cooperation is the determining factor for this analysis.

Finally, genuine nonalignment implies the lack of significant security cooperation with any great power. A nonaligned DC may exchange defense delegations from time to time, and it may share some information with a great power, but it does not engage in serious joint exercises or training, and it usually does not grant great powers access to defense facilities, even on a commercial basis. Figure 0.1 schematically summarizes the basic alignment options that DCs possess vis-à-vis a great power.

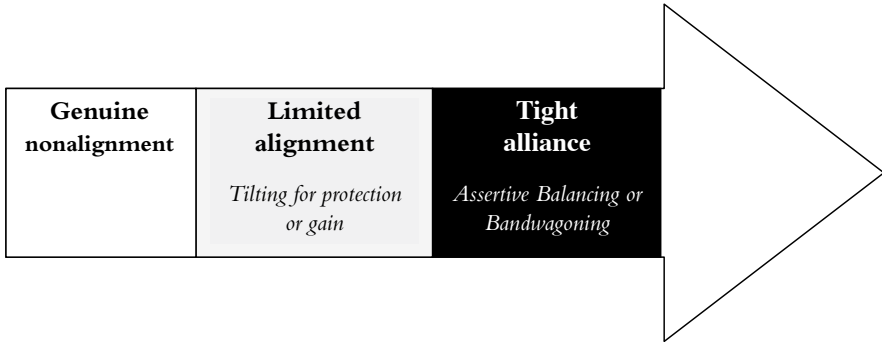


Figure I.1 Range of Options

Source: Author's compilation

When a state pursues limited alignment, it steers a middle path between the stark ideal-types of outright, decisive alliance and genuine nonalignment.

Why DCs Favor Limited Alignments

The leaders of DCs try to limit their alignments for many of the same reasons people often resist firm commitments in everyday affairs. In international politics and in other domains, people seek to strike the best possible balance between the risks and rewards of cooperation and to keep their options open. On Wall Street, investors seldom put all of their money on one stock; at the racetrack, spectators rarely bet their life savings on a single horse. In affairs of the heart, partners seek love and fulfillment but often limit their commitments or see other people when they fear abandonment or a loss of freedom. In each of these cases, the actor in question tries to preserve options as a form of insurance, because it is unclear what the future holds. That DCs behave similarly should come as no surprise. After all, international politics is conducted by officials pursuing many of the same kinds of interests as ordinary people—interests including power, wealth, safety, and status.

When the leaders of DCs decide how to align, they carry out the same informal risk-and-reward calculus that informs people's choices in other areas of life. They try to maximize their expected utility, obtaining as many rewards as possible at a minimum level of risk. The rewards of great-power alignment include protection from internal and external threats, as well as economic and political assistance. If alignments bore no costs, DCs would have every incentive to form tight alliances with powerful protectors to secure military, economic, and political aid. However, stalwart security arrangements with powerful partners do entail real hazards for DCs. They can diminish the weaker partner's independence, alienate other states and domestic actors, and create significant risks of entrapment or abandonment.

The rewards of an alignment tend to rise as security cooperation tightens, but so do the risks. I argue that DCs usually perceive limited alignments as a utility-maximizing

strategy and seek to enter into such relationships. Both the rewards and risks of alignment depend on variables at the international and domestic levels, which I examine in some detail in chapter 1. Existing theories often focus on factors at the international level, such as balances of power and external threat perceptions. However, domestic and ideational variables also provide powerful drivers for DCs' alignment choices and expose them to certain risks that are less acute for wealthy, democratic developed states. This makes DCs particularly likely to favor limited ties and helps explain why pacts like NATO are generally unappealing to states in the Global South.

Uncertainty adds another key reason for limiting security ties and keeping options open. In a fluid international environment, neither the rewards nor the risks of alignment are certain. Thus limited alignments are not only a way of seeking to optimize risks and rewards; they are also a convenient default strategy when policymakers cannot decide on the more risky alternatives of tight alliance or strict non-alignment. DCs usually prefer tight alliance only when the expected rewards are particularly great because they face clear threats and identify a capable and credible great-power protector. In most cases, the magnitude of various threats is unclear or internally disputed, and limited alignment is the safest course of action. Limited alignments reduce the risks of security cooperation but still provide some insurance against the possibility of a grave future threat. They also leave DCs enough autonomy and flexibility to shift course if conditions change.

This is not to suggest that entering a limited alignment is a fail-proof security strategy. In interpersonal affairs, resisting firm commitments often suggests a lack of trust or even a degree of duplicity. When a contract lawyer holds out for a better deal in negotiations, she may win plaudits from a grateful client. Conversely, when she responds to a marriage proposal by saying she would rather date, she may elicit a much less favorable reaction. International politics lies between these extremes. A certain degree of cold-blooded calculation may be accepted as par for the course, but human relationships and reputations also matter. The danger of pursuing flexible, limited ties is that a great power may not rescue or support a DC that it perceives as a lukewarm or fair-weather friend. Consequently, alignment strategies need to be carefully calibrated. In chapter 1, I develop these theoretical arguments in greater detail.

Why Limited Alignments Are So Common Now

Limited alignment strategies are particularly preponderant in the current era of American primacy for several reasons. First, as Wohlforth has argued, unrivaled U.S. power makes it dangerous for DCs to ally tightly against the United States.¹⁸ The comparatively liberal nature of the U.S.-led international order also reduces the demand for assertive balancing strategies, as John Ikenberry, John Owen, and others have claimed.¹⁹ The United States has tremendous military and economic largesse to share with friendly states, and DCs have strong incentives to tilt toward Washington except in rare cases when America presents a clear and present threat to their

regimes (as in Iran, Venezuela, or Cuba). Ironically, U.S. power also makes it easier for DCs to pursue only limited security ties to America. U.S. might has reduced the likelihood of aggression by other large powers, giving DCs less need for tight American alliances to stare down potential adversaries.

Limited alignments are also strongly preponderant today because the risks of tight alliance with an unrivaled power are particularly great. Military and economic muscle gives the United States the capacity to bully smaller partners, which lack an obvious strategic counterweight to its influence. The risk of diminished autonomy is therefore acute, giving rise to concerns even when short-term American intentions appear friendly. DC officials also have added reason to fear abandonment now that an omnipresent Soviet threat no longer compels the United States to come to their defense. Moreover, the risk of entrapment is severe because America seldom needs permission from its allies to exercise its will unilaterally. U.S. leaders can easily override or ignore objections from most of their weaker allies, as long as a few countries provide platforms for the projection of U.S. power. Kenneth Waltz has argued that this fact makes a unipolar system inherently unstable.²⁰ The knowledge that they lack any kind of veto rights inclines DCs to limit their security ties with a leading power that could otherwise drag them into unwanted conflict or tie them to unpopular foreign policies. The war in Iraq is a striking case in point. I elaborate on these arguments in chapter 1.

TESTING MY CLAIMS

I test my claims against ten cases from modern Southeast Asia—the maritime states of Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Philippines and their mainland neighbors of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar. I do not include East Timor, which only recently became independent. I examine each state's relations since 1975 with the three relevant great powers—the United States, China, and the Soviet Union. I code each state's alignment posture in each calendar year as a single observation, judging it to be in a limited alignment, tight alliance, or non-aligned position. That data enables me to test my two basic contentions—that DCs generally pursue limited alignments and that they do so with particular frequency in the contemporary era.

An important point is in order. In their effort to forge limited alignments, DCs do not always succeed. Consequently, a DC's preferences are not always reflected in alignment outcomes. In some regions of the world and at some time periods, there may be considerable differences between the security arrangements that DCs seek and what they obtain. I thus focus not only on what Southeast Asian states did, but also on what they sought to do, noting discrepancies between apparent preferences and outcomes. As I will show, outcomes provide a reasonably good indicator of preferences in a modern Southeast Asian context.

A finding that a large majority of Southeast Asian states sought limited alignments during a particular period would not prove that DCs do so in all times and

places, but it would add meaningful support for my arguments. By contrast, evidence that Southeast Asian states generally sought strict neutrality or tight defense pacts would considerably weaken the force of my argument. If limited alignments have been less prevalent in Southeast Asia since the end of the Cold War, my second claim suffers a significant setback, if not a definitive death blow.

Why Southeast Asia?

I focus on Southeast Asia partly because of the area's obvious strategic importance. Southeast Asia is located on the front line of the two most significant generational developments in the international security order: the growth of Islamic extremism and the rise of China. It is a diverse region with a sizable share of the world's Muslim population, and it has been an important front in the global campaign against terrorism. The nature of the cooperation that Southeast Asian states undertake with America and other external powers will affect the severity and longevity of the terrorist challenge. These factors alone make the region an important subject of study for international security.

In addition, Southeast Asia is at the crossroads of Asia's economic explosion, which is shifting the overall balance of influence in world politics toward the Pacific. Based on its geographic location beside the awakening Chinese colossus, Southeast Asia is one of the first regions in which the People's Republic of China (PRC) can function as a bona fide great power. It thus provides a possible bellwether for how DCs may align as China becomes more influential in other parts of the world. Numerous analysts have prophesied that the world is embarking on a "Pacific Century." Southeast Asian alignments will play a key part in determining whether the rise of Asian economic and military powers has a stabilizing or destabilizing effect on international security, both within and outside of the region.

There are also good methodological reasons for choosing Southeast Asia. I select a bundle of ten Southeast Asian cases partly to balance the competing objectives of breadth and depth that often bedevil social science research. Modern Southeast Asia provides enough observable alignments to draw meaningful conclusions from the data, but a study of ten countries over three decades is not overly broad. I am still able to undertake a deep enough historical inquiry to ascertain government leaders' perceptions and link them to particular alignment decisions.²¹

Modern Southeast Asia provides an excellent set of case studies for other reasons as well. First, Southeast Asia matters to the great powers, both for strategic and economic reasons. The Soviet, Chinese, and American governments, among others, have all actively pursued influence in the region. Unlike Eastern Europe or parts of Latin America during the Cold War, Southeast Asia has also been relatively up for grabs in a strategic sense; no great power has enjoyed clear hegemony over the region. This gives Southeast Asian governments some leverage in determining their alignment postures and makes their decisions important for international security more broadly—by tilting one way or another, they can meaningfully affect the balance of great-power influence in their area.

Second, the states of Southeast Asia are diverse, varying widely in size, ethnic and religious composition, wealth, geography, and ideological orientation. They include wealthy and poor countries; large and small states; island and landlocked territories; Buddhist, Muslim, and Catholic populations; communist and capitalist regimes. To the extent that they exhibit similar alignment behavior, such behavior cannot easily be dismissed as an exclusively Buddhist, communist, poor-country, or island-nation phenomenon. By contrast, examining only the Arab Gulf states or Caribbean countries would raise the possibility that their alignment behavior results not from a general logic of foreign policy but instead from their status as Muslim-majority or small island nations. Any set of case studies can be faulted for validating or refuting a theory only in a limited geographic and temporal sphere, but the diversity of Southeast Asian countries diminishes the force of that critique.

Third, Southeast Asian states entered the post-Vietnam War period with very different alignment portfolios. Some were heavily aligned and others were relatively neutral. This diversity in starting points adds interest to a study of modern Southeast Asia, enabling one to examine the path-dependence of alignment strategies. Do states that are closely aligned tend to remain that way because of bureaucratic institutions and force of habit? Do states that are less aligned tend to remain that way?

Finally, a number of Southeast Asian countries present what Harry Eckstein famously described as crucial cases—cases that offer particularly easy or difficult tests for a hypothesis.²² If a hypothesis passes a hard test, it scores a major victory. If it fails an easy one, it suffers a potential knockout blow. Southeast Asia presents both types. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Burma have been leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) since its inception in 1955 and should present relatively easy cases for me. If they fail to conform to my expectation, my core argument suffers a significant setback. By contrast, Thailand and the Philippines were strong U.S. allies in the Vietnam War era, and Vietnam was a close Soviet security partner. Those three countries present tougher tests; if they exhibit a preference for limited alignments, my argument gains significant credibility.

Why Start in 1975?

There is no single correct time frame for analyzing Southeast Asian alignments, but I select 1975 as the starting point for several reasons. First, 1975 was a clear watershed in Southeast Asian history. In April of that year, communist Khmer Rouge forces streamed into Phnom Penh, winners of an ugly five-year civil war. Weeks later Vietnamese communist tanks crashed through the gates of the presidential palace in Saigon to punctuate their victory in the war against America. The triumph of communists in Laos soon followed. Communist gains and the U.S. withdrawal from Indochina did not create a tabula rasa in Southeast Asia, but those developments did signify the definitive end of an era in regional politics and forced governments to reassess their alignment policies. In addition, by 1975 almost all the states of modern Southeast Asia had emerged from colonial rule or chaotic civil war and become capable of formulating coherent, relatively independent foreign policies.

Starting in 1975 also enables me to evaluate Southeast Asian alignment behavior for roughly similar periods under both the Cold War and post-Cold War eras, and thus also the claim that limited alignments are likely to be particularly preponderant in the contemporary era. During the Cold War Southeast Asia was characterized by intense strategic and ideological rivalry between the superpowers, with China playing an increasingly important role and contributing to the emergence of a kind of skewed bipolarity—or lopsided tripolarity—in Asia. The demise of the Soviet Union ushered in an era of relative unipolarity as the United States raced ahead of its peers in economic and military terms. In recent years China’s booming economy, modernizing military, and greater political assertiveness have led many to believe that the Asia-Pacific region is returning toward a more bipolar or multipolar system. U.S. embroilment in Iraq and Afghanistan has had a similar effect. The time frame I have chosen enables me to assess how different strategic conditions can affect DCs’ alignment preferences.

Ascertaining Perceptions and Explaining Alignment Choices

Selecting an appropriate case study is not my only methodological challenge. Another difficulty is to ascertain the perceptions of the relevant policymakers. Most scholars agree that elite executive branch officials are the dominant decision makers in Southeast Asia, and I focus my attention accordingly. The most reliable method for ascertaining policymakers’ perceptions is careful historical research. Elite interviews, public statements, the few official memoranda available to the public, and secondhand accounts in the scholarly literature can all contribute to an accurate understanding.

Public statements by Southeast Asian officials must be weighed with particular care to assess their sincerity, since they can be instrumentally motivated. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mohamad Mahathir illustrated the point when he said, “Why should we fear China? If you identify a country as your future enemy, it becomes your present enemy.”²³ I rely partly on public statements but primarily on a broad reading of secondary sources, drawing on the observations and judgments of leading country and regional experts.²⁴ I also base my empirical conclusions on newspaper articles, official documents, and interviews with current or former officials. Where possible, I compare evidence from multiple sources and triangulate to ascertain the most accurate historical picture of modern Southeast Asian alignment politics.

To explain alignment decisions as results of policymakers’ perceptions and beliefs, I rely primarily on process tracing. I use historical sources to show that policymakers identified particular security interests and consciously pursued alignment policies designed to advance them. Statements by leaders, sound inferential reasoning, and conclusions in the secondary literature also provide support for the conclusions I draw. At times, counterfactual reasoning also helps me establish the factors that drove Southeast Asian alignment preferences and policies.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1 begins by developing my two core claims. First, I argue that DCs generally pursue limited alignments with their preferred great-power protectors. Second, I contend that they are particularly apt to do so in the contemporary, post-Cold War international system. Chapters 2 and 3 provide a narrative of Southeast Asian alignment politics since 1975 to furnish data and test my two basic claims. Chapter 2 examines the era from the end of the Second Indochina War to the Paris Peace Accords in 1991, and chapter 3 discusses the period between 1992 and the present. In chapters 4 and 5 I explain why Southeast Asian states have so frequently favored limited alignments, drilling down and analyzing each government's policies and perceptions in some detail. In chapter 6 I examine how changes in the international system have made Southeast Asian states even more likely to prefer and pursue limited alignments during the post-Cold War period. I conclude by reviewing key findings and drawing out some broader implications of this study for international security.