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Jason W. Davidson. *America's Entangling Alliances: 1778 to the Present*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9781647120283 (hardcover, \$104.95); 9781647120290 (paperback, \$34.95).

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Much of the scholarly debate about President Donald Trump's foreign policy concentrated on whether he had renewed traditional U.S. skepticism of entangling alliances with European states. Jason Davidson's *America's Entangling Alliances* argues that such a view is inaccurate. The United States made alliances from its birth. And, in doing so, it secured important American interests over the past two hundred years.

Davidson's primary target is the familiar narrative that the United States began as a unilateralist or isolationist power, making the turn to internationalism only in the twentieth century. He finds that while American alliances were comparatively rare in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the United States was not averse to forming alliances when it was necessary for its interests. The crucial difference between the periods was not a changing aversion to alliances – a change in American identity politics or strategic thinking – but rather that U.S. interests changed as the nation emerged as a regional and then global power. Furthermore, Davidson argues that the basic realist strategic logic was the same in all periods: the U.S. formed alliances when it was unable to resolve threats without the help of allies.

The historical view of American alliance politics in this book is compelling. Davidson reviews 34 cases of American alliances. He begins with the French in the America Revolution, turns to defense commitments to Latin America (the Monroe Doctrine) and Hawai'i (the Tyler Doctrine) in the nineteenth century, and then describes the full scale and scope of alliances in the post-Cold War struggle against terrorism, Russia, and China. These cases are especially convincing in making two central empirical contributions. First, the book clearly shows that pre-Cold War "alliances are hardly an aberration, as some would have us believe" (xi). Second, he shows that changing patterns of alliance-making can be explained by the changing U.S. position in the world, rather than by changes in American views of the world.

Davidson builds on a neoclassical realist framework to explain changing patterns of American alliance behavior.¹ The theoretical architecture within the book largely treads on familiar ground. Specifically, Davidson argues that if a state is weaker than its rivals, it searches for allies to counter existential threats. However, if a state becomes a regional power, it relies on defense pacts to safeguard its regional interests. If a state becomes a great power, then its behavior depends on the polarity of the system. When the system is multipolar, the great power has incentives to pass the buck to other great powers unless there is a clear danger to its interests. However, when the system is bipolar, states engage in more aggressive alliance-making in order to keep potential allies from forming alliances with a rival.

With this parsimonious realist argument, Davidson explains broad changes in the alliance portfolio of the United States. Before World War II, the United States only formed alliances when it believed that its security was directly threatened and that alliances were central to meeting that threat. After World War II, with the advent of bipolarity, American interests changed. The threat of Soviet power in Europe and Asia produced a new set of threats to U.S. security. The U.S. used the same mechanism – alliance-making – to grapple with threats in the cold war and post-cold war environment, as it did with threats it could not manage in the western hemisphere a century earlier.

This book has tremendous value. The primary contribution is to show that alliances are an American tradition. The most novel element shows that early American strategic thinkers were not blinded by isolationist or unilateralist thinking. They thought seriously about the specific difficulties they were facing and sought to use alliances to supplement the slowly gathering power of U.S. economic and military resources.

Yet, certain aspects of the book might be better developed. One of the less persuasive central arguments involves collective identity. Some constructivist scholars have argued that shared identities or values explain alliance behavior. For example, Thomas Risse argues that NATO formation was a response to shared liberal values in the west.² Davidson treats this as an explanation for all alliances, providing a sustained critique of the claim that collective identities explain alliance formation. In all 34 cases, he looks for evidence of collective identity and it is a major theme in the work.

Davidson makes an important critique of identity-based explanations of alliance-making. In many if not most cases, the United States did not share an identity with its allies. For example, he makes a persuasive case that the U.S. commitment to defend the Hawai’ian kingdom in the 1840s did not arise from a collective identity between Americans and Hawai’ians. Nineteenth-century American ideology, which was premised at least in part on racial attitudes, precluded collective identification with non-white peoples (49-50). Similarly, U.S. commitments in the post-Cold War world, such as Jordan (147), Pakistan (162), and Saudi Arabia (144), do not seem to have been driven by collective identity or shared values.

¹ Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics* 51 (1998): 144-172; Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

² See also Christopher Hemmer and Peter Katzenstein, “Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism,” *International Organization* 56:3 (2002): 575–607.

While Davidson's analysis persuasively shows that many of these commitments were not based on a collective identity, it may somewhat overstate the significance of its lack. First, few constructivists would likely expect collective identities to play a role in many if not most historical cases.³ Constructivists expect American racial or imperial attitudes to play a central role in nineteenth-century U.S. attitudes toward potential allies in Latin America and the Pacific, for example, by creating a civilizing mission for American power.⁴ Work from the last decade that features nineteenth century American Foreign Policy, such as Srdjan Vucetic's *The Anglosphere* and Richard Maas' *Picky Eagle*, highlight how racial differences can promote or hinder international cooperation. The image of the "little brown brother" in the Philippines, for instance, was powerful during American colonization and, from the U.S. perspective, supported and legitimized U.S. entanglement in the islands.⁵ The same race-based images almost certainly played a role in Latin America and Hawai'i, where American ideas about U.S. alliance partners were suffused with racism.⁶ Ideas-based explanations do not rely so narrowly on the idea of collective identity; difference is also a crucial explanation.

As for the post-1945 cases, the evidence he against the collective identity-based justification does not handle nuanced historical arguments well. For example, in discussing NATO, Davidson's central argument is that Portugal undermines the collective identity argument because it was not a democracy. This overlooks two key features of many constructivist arguments. First, although Portugal not a democracy, there was a strong ideological affinity between it and other North Atlantic states because of its government's staunch anti-Communist stance. Furthermore, Portugal could have been considered a part of "western civilization," permitting a feeling of collective identification, even in the face of its government's anti-democratic practices. Second, even if there was no form of identification with Portugal, collective identification with other western states may have been sufficient to encourage the United States to form an alliance. That is, the United States could have had an inherent interest in supporting Portugal, with whom it did not identify, in order to support other western European states, with whom the United States did identify.

³ For an interesting exception, see Zoltán I. Búzás, "The Color of Threat: Race, Threat Perception, and the Demise of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902–1923)," *Security Studies* 22:4 (2013): 573-606.

⁴ This features in different ways for contemporary scholars. See, for example, Taesuh Cha, "The Formation of American Exceptional Identities: A Three-Tier Model of the 'Standard of Civilization' in US Foreign Policy," *European Journal of International Relations* 21:4 (2015): 743-767; Roxanne Lynne Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines," *International Studies Quarterly* 37:3 (1993): 297-320; Richard W. Maas, *The Picky Eagle: How Democracy and Xenophobia Limited U.S. Territorial Expansion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020); Srdjan Vucetic, *The Anglosphere: A Genealogy of Racialized Identity in International Relations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁵ Paul A. Kramer, *Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Leon Wolff, *Little Brown Brother: America's Forgotten Bid for Empire Which Cost 250,000 Lives* (New York: Longman, 1970).

⁶ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Eric T. L. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

The central point is that in concentrating so narrowly on collective identity-based explanations to explain specific cases of alliance formation, Davidson's argument does not adequately refute broader ideational explanations that are more likely relevant in the historical contexts the book explains. Yet, even with these issues, Davidson's critique of collective identity-based explanations is the most sustained treatment of the idea of which I am aware to date, and this provides another reason to read and take the book seriously.

A second concern about the argument pertains to omitted alliances that were historically central to U.S. expansion. In the context of North American security politics, the primary threat to American expansion was not European powers, but American Indians. Davidson is right that this was an important security threat, especially to settlers.⁷ His view is that "Americans were rightly convinced that they could prevail without the need for allies" (31): the American preponderance of power meant that it could go-it-alone. American Indians thus appear in the book as rivals, never as allies.

Yet American Indian diplomacy was more nuanced. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the United States relied heavily on American Indian allies in its conflicts with foreign empires in the Revolutionary War, the Black Hawk War, the Seminole wars, the Creek War, wars on the plains, wars in the southwest, and even in the American Civil War.⁸ Diplomacy and alliance-making with American Indian nations was likely the most commonly practiced American diplomacy in the nineteenth century. If one includes North American security concerns as a dominant issue for American policymakers during this period, as Davidson does, then one needs to expand beyond European allies to include indigenous nations.

This may not pose a problem for Davidson's theoretical argument. It is possible that neoclassical realism provides an explanation for these alliances. Davidson's theory already provides a sketch of an explanation. In North America, the threat was that a balancing coalition of Native American nations would form a powerful alliance, perhaps including European rivals. As in the Cold War, the United States courted allies in an effort to prevent them from joining a potential enemy coalition. For example, by making promises to the Oneida during the American Revolution, the Continental Congress perhaps sought to prevent all of the Iroquois nations from joining with the British.⁹ In other words, within North America, power and threat may have driven American alliance policy. But a fuller analysis is necessary to make the case that realism can be extended to this diplomatic arena.

⁷ Andrew A Szarejko, "Do Accidental Wars Happen? Evidence from America's Indian Wars," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6:4 (2021).

⁸ For a sample of works focusing on American Indian allies, see Annie Heloise Abel, *The American Indian as Participant in the Civil War* (Cleveland: Arthur Clark Company, 1919); Joseph Glatthaar and James Martin, *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Eric Grynaviski, *America's Middlemen: Power at the Edge of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); John Hall, *Uncommon Defense: Indian Allies in the Black Hawk War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Laurence Hauptman, *Between Two Fires: American Indians in the Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

⁹ Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972); Max M. Mintz, *The Seeds of Empire - The American Revolutionary Conquest of the Iroquois* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Timothy Shannon, *Iroquois Diplomacy on the Early American Frontier* (New York: Viking, 2008).

In short, the treatment of North American security politics is narrow. Davidson does much more than most realist scholars to open up the black box of nineteenth-century history. In doing so, however, his approach is selective in a way that prevents a fuller understanding of the kinds of threats American political elites viewed as salient.

In sum, *America's Entangling Alliances* is well worth reading and engaging. It succeeds admirably in demonstrating the core argument that alliances were a traditional American foreign policy tool. The ambitious scope and breadth of the book, which succinctly uses a single analytic framework to make sense of almost three dozen cases across more than 200 years, is also praiseworthy. For scholars who are interested in American foreign policy, alliance politics, or security studies in general, this book is an excellent read and will provide important ways of thinking about how the United States will redraw its alliances in the post-Trump era.

Eric Grynaviski is an Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the George Washington University. His most recent book, *America's Middlemen* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), won the award for Best Book on Foreign Policy by the American Political Science Association's Foreign Policy section and Best Book on Diplomacy by the International Studies Association's Diplomatic Studies section.