

Christensen, Thomas J. and Jack Snyder. "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity" in *International Organization*, Vol. 44, Issue 2 (Spring 1990). pp. 137-68.

Waltz's neorealist theories, while perhaps suitable for the systemic uses Waltz associated them with, have been often been misapplied to predict and analyze individual states' foreign policies. This is not to say that neorealism gives no guidance to states' foreign policies. On the contrary, even Waltz discusses foreign policy choices: the basic argument – that a bipolar world is fundamentally more stable than a multipolar one – stems from the tension and uncertainty that states face in the latter world. In the extreme, a state will either feel so dependent on its allies for security that it allows itself to be drawn into ("chain-ganged") wars in which it has no interest, or be so complacent as to avoid conflict ("pass the buck") even when a new hegemon is rising and threatening its alliance. (Bipolar systems do not hold these perils, because a Great Power in such a system knows that its allies are too minor to risk war over, and incapable of singlehandedly handling any threats.) However, there is no coherent or parsimonious explanation as to why a state will fall into these traps, or even when a state will engage in chain-ganging vs. buck-passing. Waltz dodged the issue, and most subsequent attempts at explanation have been largely unsatisfactory. Barry Posen, though, began a promising avenue of explanation when he implies that chain-ganging is a function of perceived offensive advantage in war, while buck-passing is a result of perceived defensive advantage. Christensen and Snyder hope to systematize this theory, and provide it with a more rigorous theoretical underpinning.

Thus two extra variables are brought into the Waltzian equation. First, the technological and geographical variables that lead to offensive or defensive advantage must be considered in the multipolar world. In times of offensive advantage, a state will fear that with one attack, an enemy could sweep an ally into oblivion and thus alter the balance of power; to forestall this, the state will therefore rush, chain-ganged, to the aid of its allies in any conflict. Conversely, when defense is preëminent, a state will suppose that its ally can ably defend itself against attack; as a result, the state will pass the buck, avoiding paying what it perceives to be unnecessary costs to help its allies. The second refinement of the model is that the offense vs. defense advantage is not in and of itself important. The perception (à la Jervis) of that balance by policy-makers is what counts, because the actions of national leaders are not based on an objective truth, but instead on what those leaders believe the truth to be. The authors propose two bases for misperception: first, the lessons of formative experiences might be retained inappropriately after technological change; second, domestic military power may correlate positively with perception of offensive advantage.

Christensen and Snyder conclude with a lengthy examination of the cases of World War I and World War II in Europe. In World War I, the major powers all believed, falsely, that offense ruled the day; hence they allowed themselves to be chain-ganged into a minor Balkan dispute. In World War II, the major powers assumed that defenses were strong enough to impose brutal costs on would-be aggressors, and therefore ignored the development of the *Blitzkrieg* for far too long, passing the buck onto the Czechoslovaks (or, later, the French) to defend themselves. Alternative explanations for these phenomena are discounted, and the unholy (and one hopes unconsummated) marriage of Waltz and Jervis is proclaimed as "the most parsimonious international system theory that has any hope of explaining and prescribing great power alliance strategies."