

History of US Military Alliances

September 11, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. ET
Rayburn House Office Building Room 2045

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

NATO's Origins

- Legacies of the Second World War in Europe
- Early Cold War and the Soviet threat
- West European demands for American military protection
- Formation of NATO (1949) to “Keep the Germans Down, the Soviets Out, and the Americans In”

Managing NATO in the Cold War

- Joint military exercises
- US nuclear umbrella
 - With British and French nuclear forces after late 1950s
- US Supreme Command (SACEUR)
- Contrast: European desire for “dual control” of nuclear weapons
- French desire for more autonomy

End of the Cold War and the Expansion of NATO

- East European demand for NATO protection
- Partnership for Peace with Russia
- NATO expansion in Eastern Europe and the Baltics
- NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999
- NATO article 5 defense of US after 9/11
- NATO in Afghanistan
- Controversies over burden-sharing
- Ukraine expansion?

Key policy takeaways

- NATO is successful because it reflects security demands of constituent members
- NATO is a consensual alliance (Geir Lundestad: “Empire by Invitation”)

- But NATO perpetually contends with differences among members
- NATO always requires a disproportional contribution by the US
- NATO is as essential for US and European security in 2024 as it was in 1949

US Alliances in Asia

Importance of the Korean War

- No US alliances in East Asia before the Korean War
- US occupations of Japan and South Korea
- Korean War's influence on Asian perceptions of US as a threat
- US-Japan Peace Treaty
- Mutual Security Treaties with ROK and ROC
- SEATO

How the structure of US alliances in Asia emerged

- Unlike NATO, US alliances in East Asia have never been multilateral but have resembled a hub and spokes system.
- The reasons for this are debatable, and historians' perceptions of why this was the case are changing with the emergence of new documents from allies.
- Proved surprisingly durable during the Cold War and survived a number of crises, including:
 - Taiwan Strait Crisis
 - Anpo Treaty Protests in Japan
 - Changes of government in South Korea

US-China Relationship and US Alliances

- During the early Cold War, alliances focused on containing China and Soviet Union.
- Nixon shocks of the early 1970s
- Taiwan Relations Act (1979)
- Evolution of US-ROK and US-Japan alliances in post-Cold War era
 - Sino-American Rivalry
 - Environmental, public health, supply chains.

US-Latin American Alliances

- Latin American countries have long been some of the United States' most important—and overlooked—military partners
- Military alliances in the region fall along a spectrum from formal to informal

- Formal alliances tended to be less frequent and more successful, while informal alliances tended to be more common and less effective
- History of US–Mexican military relations illustrates the dangers of informal alliances, especially in two important areas:
 - Immigration
 - US unilateral military measures have proven ineffective or harmful
 - The Mexican government historically has shown little interest in preventing its citizens from moving to the United States.
 - The Mexican government has been more willing to cooperate in detaining and deporting people from other countries who seek to cross Mexican territory to get to the United States.
 - War on Drugs
 - The US and Mexican governments have taken an increasingly militarized, cooperative approach to drug control in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.
 - This militarized approach has escalated violence in Mexico and failed to stem the flood of drugs into the United States.

Participant Biographies

Gregg Brazinsky is professor of history and international affairs at George Washington University and director of the Asian studies program at the Elliott School. His books include *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans and the Making of Democracy* and *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry during the Cold War*. He is completing a book on Sino-North Korean relations and researching a new project on American relations with Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea.

Renata Keller is an associate professor of history at the University of Nevada, Reno. She is finishing a hemispheric history of the Cuban Missile Crisis titled *Nuclear Reactions: The Cuban Missile Crisis and Cold War in Latin America*, forthcoming in fall 2025. Her first book, *Mexico's Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution*, won multiple awards, and her research has been funded by the NEH, the Library of Congress, the Fulbright Foundation, and the Social Science Research Council.

Dane Kennedy is professor emeritus at George Washington University. He is the author of eight books, including *Mungo Park's Ghost: The Haunted Hubris of British Explorers in Nineteenth-Century Africa*; *The Imperial History Wars: Debating the British Empire*; *Decolonization: A Very Short Introduction*; and *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia*, and editor or co-editor of three others. He served as director of the National History Center from 2014 to 2020.

Jeremi Suri holds the Mack Brown Distinguished Chair for Leadership in Global Affairs and is a professor in the Department of History and the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author and editor of eleven books, including *Civil War By Other Means: America's Long and Unfinished Fight for Democracy*; *The Impossible Presidency: The Rise and Fall of America's Highest Office*; *Liberty's Surest Guardian: American Nation-Building from the Founders to Obama*; *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*; and *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*. His writings appear in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, and other media.

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