

# International Conventional War Research

- Explaining International Conventional War Characteristics
- Theories of International Conventional War Onset
- Evidence
- Example: World War I
- Declining Frequency of International Conventional Wars since World War II

# Aspects of International Conventional Wars

- Onset
- Duration/Termination
- Military Outcome or Political Outcome
- Escalation in Casualties
- Choice of War-Fighting Strategies

# Defining International Conventional War Onset

- Unit of analysis: onset of distinct conventional war between two (or more) countries
- Intensity thresholds for counting war onset

# Theories of International Conventional War Onset

- Power/Material Constraints and Preferences
- Balance of Power Theory
- Power Transition Theory
- Democratic Peace Theory
- Other Factors, Conditioning and Independent:  
Uncertainty; Geography; Ethnicity; Trade and Investment; Natural Resource Dependence; Objects of Dispute

# Balance of Power Theory

- Conventional war deterred by defensive coalitions formed in response to perceived threats
- Implication: greater imbalance favoring defensive coalition implies lower probability of war
- Measurement: for every possible threat to each country, must assess expected alliance configurations

# Balance of Power: Complications

- Uncertainty about power and preferences
- Power doesn't apply equally to all possible conflicts: geographical and technological constraints on effective use of power
- Ability doesn't imply will: cost and ideological restraints on alliance formation and flexibility

# Power Transition Theory

- Focuses on onset of great power war
- Probability of war increases as “unsatisfied challenger” approaches power of “satisfied dominant” country
- Complications:
  - 1) emphasizes dyadic rather than systemic power balances;
  - 2) assumes that relative power determines preferences

# Democratic Peace Theory

- Empirical regularity: democracies rarely fight conventional wars with each other
- Mechanisms: norms and institutions
- Norms: values of equal rights and compromise
- Norms and institutions: cost/benefit analysis and electoral accountability
- Institutions: dispersion of executive and legislative power; transparency

# Democratic Peace Theory: Complications

- Definition: What is a democracy? Where do we draw the line?
- Ignores residual variation in preferences associated with:
  - 1) democratic group (institutional variation; “consolidation”; state capacity)
  - 2) non-democratic group (types of highly authoritarian regimes; types of “anocracies” or hybrid regimes)
  - 3) non-regime-based sources of preferences: e.g., ideological or leadership characteristics

# Some Other Factors

- Independent or conditioning impacts: causal pathways and “model specifications”
- Uncertainty about power and preferences
- Geographical and technological constraints on power
- Ethnic and other identity-based ties (ideological, colonial/historical, linguistic/cultural) across borders
- Trade and investment ties
- Natural resource dependence: regime and objects of dispute
- Objects of dispute: types of territorial and policy disputes (depends largely on preferences)
- History of conflict (“ancient hatreds”)

# Evidence

- Statistical evidence in addition to case studies
- Separate regular from historically unusual factors
- Estimate relative importance of regular factors
- Example: Correlates of War research program
- Case studies: apart from specific historical interests, play theory-building role

# Limitations of Statistical Evidence

- Inadequate theory, particular missing or inadequately theorized variables (e.g., preferences)
- Poor or absent measurement (e.g., power and preferences)
- Examples of questionable assumptions:
  - 1) debatable definitions of unit of analysis (e.g., directed vs. undirected dyads) and universe of potential cases (e.g., implausible potential conflicts);
  - 2) independence of cases (use theory to minimize “double counting”)

# Example: World War I

- Dominant explanations: balance of power failure; Austro-Russian “defensive deadlock”; German guilt, due to regime type and leadership
- Balance of power theory: uncertainty about relative power
- Austro-Russian deadlock was a function of German policy since 1870
- German regime type only increased probability of conflict, and did so in a difficult-to-generalize way
- Specific policies of German leaders since Bismarck are largely historically specific

# World War I (Continued)

- Theory to history: theory helps to sort out different possible causes and accents historical specificity; and helps identify their relative importance and conditional impacts in one case
- History to theory: example highlights residual unexplained by theories; indicates possible refinements of existing theories

# “Decline” of Conventional War

- Absolute or relative?
- Cold War: higher potential costs of escalation; regional effects on ethnic and other sources of internal conflicts
- Power imbalance favoring status quo-oriented great powers
- International diplomatic and economic pressure to respect recognized borders
- Ethnic and other internal conflicts may be more difficult to resolve

# Ethnic Conflict Research

- Separate from “Primarily” Non-Ethnic Internal Wars (Intra-Ethnic Wars or Coups)
- Explaining Internal Ethnic War Characteristics
- Theories of Internal Ethnic War Onset
- Evidence
- Examples: Yugoslav Wars of 1990s

# Aspects of Internal Ethnic Wars

- Onset
- Duration/Termination
- Military Outcome or Political Outcome
- Escalation in Casualties
- Choice of War-Fighting Strategies

# Defining Internal Ethnic War Onset

- Unit of analysis: onset of distinct ethnic internal war between state associated with “dominant” ethnic group and “outsider” ethnic group
- Intensity thresholds for counting war onset
- Types of ethnic internal war: wars over territory (independence or territorial autonomy), or wars over state control or policy
- Focus on ethno-territorial internal wars

# Theories of Internal Ethno-Territorial War Onset

Power/material constraint factors (affecting power balance):

- state capacity;
- characteristics of outsider ethnic group (relative size, settlement patterns, location, external kin, informal state capacity);
- geography and natural resources;
- international intervention (quality and quantity; also affects outsider group leadership preferences);
- grievances (current and historical; also affects preferences);
- objects of dispute (largely determined by preferences)

# Theories of Internal Ethno-Territorial War Onset (Continued)

- Leadership preferences over objective-war cost trade-off: more moderate or extremist, or power-seeking (“diversionary”)
- Easier-to-measure proxies: democracy; nature of democratic political institutions; quality of state (or outsider group) governance, over time or at present (GDP per capita, GDP growth per capita, corruption, trade openness); grievances

# Evidence

- Statistical evidence in addition to case studies
- Separate regular from historically unusual factors
- Estimate relative importance of regular factors
- Example: Minorities at Risk research program
- Case studies: apart from specific historical interests, play theory-building role

# Limitations of Statistical Evidence

- Inadequate theory, particular missing or inadequately theorized variables (e.g., preferences)
- Poor or absent measurement (e.g., preferences, international intervention, outsider group informal state capacity)
- Examples of questionable assumptions:
  - 1) debatable definitions of unit of analysis (e.g., states) and universe of potential cases (e.g., ethnically homogeneous states, small outsider ethnic groups);
  - 2) independence of cases

# Examples: Yugoslav Wars of 1990s

Dominant explanations:

- Soviet bloc liberalization and Yugoslav institutions paralyzed state and forced “recontracting” between dominant and outsider ethnic groups between and within Republics (multi-ethnic state collapse);
- Milošević initiated diversionary wars

# Yugoslav Wars (Continued)

Some arguments:

- Preferences: state collapse does not imply war
- Power: war might have occurred without Milošević, as a result of inter-ethnic bargaining failures
- Preferences: if so, violence would probably have been less intense and shorter in absence of extremist or diversionary leaders
- Both preferences and power played a role, because strategy choices of all but extremists are conditional on power

Implication: power should be examined statistically as both an independent and preference-conditioned factor