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