Why War?

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Why Do Nations Fight?

• Nations go to war for some of the same reasons as individuals fight

• There are also bound to be differences.

• Differences are not “causes” but can “flavor” unique features of states at war

• As opposed to a mugging, barroom brawl, domestic disturbance.
Why Nations Fight?, continued

- We must understand war to promote peace
  - Analogy to illness (need to understand disease)
  - We don’t understand war very well.
- May be why peace has proven so difficult
Definitions

- Definitions of War:
  - Correlates of War Project: 1000 battle deaths
Definitions, continued

• UN has no definition of war, only aggression:

  • “the use of armed force by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, as set out in this Definition.”
Definitions, continued 2

• Countries and casualties:
  • At least two countries (or one country and a group that wants to become a country)
  • Lots of killing primarily directed at changing actions of the country, not individuals.
  • Other groups fight, but this is not war in the strictest sense.
  • Nations sometimes fight, but it is not a war because too few dead (same causes?).
Literature

• Just about everything related to warfare has been suggested as a cause.
  • Coincidence is not causation
  • It is tempting to think that because something happens along with fighting, it is the cause
    • Viruses & moisture (don’t go out in the rain!)
    • Circular logic: war causes war.
  • No easy answers.
  • Lazy scholarship is a factor
Causes of War

• Many plausibilities, few certainties:
  • Human nature: people are just prone to fight.
  • Kant: “The state of peace among men living in close proximity is not the natural state; instead the natural state is one of war, which does not just consist of open hostilities, but also in the constant and enduring threat of them.” Problem: why usually do individuals and nations not fight? How do they manage to stop if this is their nature?
Causes of War, continued

• Greed/Values/Character (Hitler was a bad person so of course he started a war).

• What about “good” leaders? Lincoln effectively started the American Civil War (by refusing to allow southern states to secede from the Union).

• Heroes in legend initiate force, but are selfless.

• Circular logic (know them by their deeds?)
Causes of War, cont. 2

- Animosity/hatred
  - “Historic tensions”
  - “Ethnic conflict” (Robert Kagan)
  - “clash of civilizations” (Sam Huntington)
- Religious differences.
- A constant cannot explain a variable.
Causes of War, cont. 3

• Difference:
  • Many differences could cause of conflict.
  • Differences do divide (bible story of genesis/tower of babel/origination of world politics)
    • They also abound.
    • Much less warfare than there is difference.
  • Difference is not easily resolved by fighting (skin color/language/etc. does not change)
  • So how do these contests end?
Causes of War, cont. 4

• Demographics: Lateral pressure, youth bulge.

• Individual/social construction:
  • War is learned behavior. People and countries fight because they are taught to fight.

• Arms: Naval arms race between Germany and UK leading up to WWI.

• Capitalism: Variant of arms/greed.
  • “War is a racket” General Smedley Butler.
  • View post-WWI was war caused by merchants
Causes of War, cont. 5

• Class warfare: Marxist interpretations gathered considerable attention in the mid-20th Century.

• Power: Most common explanation.
  • Definition of power:
    • “The ability to influence” (circular logic).
    • Also, “the ability to make a country do something it would not do otherwise.”

• Anarchy: “War occurs because there is nothing to prevent it” Waltz.
Theoretical Tradition of War

• Thucydides:
  • War begins out of imbalance of power
    • Fear opponent was rising in power
    • Concern over alliance structures
    • Desire to dominate neighbors
    • Desire that neighbors not be dominated by another state
  • Hubris, bad leadership, fickle populace, great man (Pericles), conniving (Persians)
Theoretical Tradition, cont.

- Carl von Clausewitz: war is struggle for power.
- Morgenthau: war is the result of the failure of the balance of power.
- Waltz’s three images:
  - Individuals (Great man theory, personal passions)
  - Domestic Politics (varieties of regimes and the conduct of politics locally is externalized)
  - International Politics (systemic forces)
Theoretical Tradition, cont. 2

- Waltz really “skips over” dyadic politics
- Advocates for peace typically accept “realist” explanations for war, and work toward remedies.
  - May not be appropriate.
  - Since Realists do not have a theory of war.
  - Systemic forces do not explain variation
  - Anarchy is a constant
  - Balancing is rare
“Modern” Approaches

• “Normal” Theories of war:
  • Offense/defense balance
  • Cult of the offensive
  • Domestic Politics
• Bueno de Mesquita: minimally dyadic theory.
  • Conflict results from rational calculation.
  • Probability of victory x value for winning.
“Modern” Approaches, cont.

• Blainey & symmetry: whatever causes something must, in its absence “uncause” something.

• Fearon: What can cause war, but changes over time (so that it stops causing war after awhile?)

• Many ways to resolve conflict.
  • Tendency to identify conditions that make war possible and to assume that they make war necessary.

• War is product of indivisibility, commitment problems, and uncertainty.
Conclusion

• Myths of War:
  • MYTH #1: Human beings are the only species that kill one-another.
    • Many animals kill in pursuit of food/territory/mates. Force limited to direct competition.
  • MYTH #2: 20th century most deadly century.
    • Most violent deaths, but also most people (far more humans living in 20th century).
    • Adjusted for the risk of being killed, 20th century is among least dangerous centuries.
Conclusion, continued

Trend in Conflicts in Europe

$y = -0.0391x + 85.686$

$R^2 = 0.4058$