Political Science 12: IR -- Third Lecture
3 Why Are There Wars?
Why Is There So Much Peace in the World?

- Most nations are at peace most of the time
- American deaths from:
  - 9/11: 2,986
  - Terrorism: A few dozen per year
  - Iraq War: 4,491 US KIA (174,000 Iraqi IBCp)
  - Murder, average year: 15,000
  - Car accidents, average year: 42,000
  - Lightning, average year: 90
The Percentage of States Involved in War per Year, 1820–2010
War Is Puzzling

• War is costly
• Blood and treasure
• States would rather get what they want without going to war
• “In war, the aggressor is always peace-loving; he would prefer to take over our country unopposed.”

—Karl von Clausewitz
Why Are There Wars?

1. What states fight over
2. War as outcome of a failed bargain
3. War from incomplete information
4. War from commitment problems
5. War from indivisibility
6. How to make war less likely
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What States Fight Over

- Territory

Territorial Claims in the Kashmir Region
What States Fight Over

- National policy
- Regime type
- Ethnic or religious divisions
What States Fight Over Territorial Disputes and the Risk of Interstate Conflict, 1950-1990
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War as Outcome of a Failed Bargain

Alternative explanations for war
1. Anarchy
2. Misperception
3. Domestic politics
Additional Features of War

War attributes
1. Intensity - casualties per time period
2. Duration - number of months/years
3. Scope - number of participants
4. “Decisiveness” - subjective
Additional Features of War

Intensity

1. Most wars are “nice little wars.”:
   Low intensity conflicts, localized wars

2. Inverse relationship between intensity and duration

3. Positive relationship between intensity and scope (# of participants)

4. Intensity might be positively related
Additional Features of War

Duration

1. Most wars are relatively short
2. Low intensity contests -- tend to be long because they are not decisive
3. Wars of attrition -- tend to be long because goal is to exhaust opponent
4. High intensity contests -- can be short because they are informative
Features of War, cont.
FIGURE 1. Cumulative Frequency Distribution of Severity of Interstate Wars, 1820–1997

\[ \log P(S>s) \]
(cumulative frequency)

\[
\log P(S>s) = 1.27 - 0.41 \log s \\
R^2 = 0.985 \quad N = 97
\]

Source: COW data.
Features of War, cont.
War as Outcome of a Failed Bargain

• Bargaining

• Coercive bargaining (aka “crisis bargaining” or “coercive diplomacy”)

• “Do what I ask or else!”
War as Outcome of a Failed Bargain

The Costs of War and the Bargaining Range
War as Outcome of a Failed Bargain: A Model of War

CASTLE A

CASTLE B
A Model

Fertile farmland

Castle A

Castle B
A Model of War

- The object of contention (the green line) can be anything that states are in conflict over.
A Model of War

Current Border

Probable new border if A and B fight
A Model of War

Costs of fighting to A

Costs of fighting to B

Probable new border if A and B fight
A Model of War

Net value of fighting to A

Net value of fighting to B

A

B
A Model of War

Range of possible border settlements that both A and B prefer to fighting
A Model of War

B's proposal for a new border

Current Border
For any A and B, if

- War is costly
- The object of contention is divisible

Then there is always at least one negotiated settlement that A and B will both prefer to war.
Bargaining and the Status Quo

- Status quos that State A will challenge
- Status quos that neither state will challenge
- Status quos that State B will challenge

A
State B’s ideal point

$p - a$
$p$
$p + b$

State A’s ideal point
B
Deterrence
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War from Incomplete Information

• Leads to two bargaining mistakes:
  – Yielding too little
  – Demanding too much
War from Incomplete Information

• Incentives to misrepresent
• May seek to appear weaker or stronger
• May want to keep adversary guessing
A thinks that the probable new border if A and B fight is here.
B says, “No--the probable new border if we fight is here.”

A thinks that the probable new border if A and B fight is here.
B has a secret weapon, putting the *actual* probable new border if they fight here.

A thinks that the probable new border if A and B fight is here.

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**Bluffing**
War from Incomplete Information

• Communicating resolve
  – Brinkmanship
  – Tying hands
  – Paying for power
War from Incomplete Information

• Communicating resolve
  – Brinkmanship
  – Tying hands
  – Paying for power
Brinkmanship: The Cuban Missile Crisis
War from Incomplete Information

• Communicating resolve
  – Brinkmanship
  – Tying hands
  – Paying for power
War from Incomplete Information

- Communicating resolve
  - Brinkmanship
  - Tying hands
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War from Commitment

Problems

• What if you find a settlement in the bargaining range?
• Can you trust your adversary to honor a deal?
War from Commitment
Problems

• Bargaining over the future
• Preventive war
• Preemptive war (war in response to first-strike advantages)
War from Commitment
Problems

• Preventive war
  – Power shift: Even if states agree to a deal in the bargaining range now, the rising power may be tempted to use its power to revise the deal later.
Bargaining and Shifting Power

(i) Initial power distribution
A deal that both states prefer to war today

(ii) Future power distribution following the rise of State A
The best possible deal that State B can get in the future
Bargaining and First-Strike Advantages

Note: The upper line depicts the expected outcome of a war started by A. The lower line depicts the expected outcome of a war started by B.
War from Commitment
Problems
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War from Indivisibility
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How to make war less likely

• Raise costs
• Increase transparency
• Outside enforcement
• Divide indivisible goods
Dividing Apparently Indivisible Goods