Territorial Conflict

POSC 3610 – International Conflict

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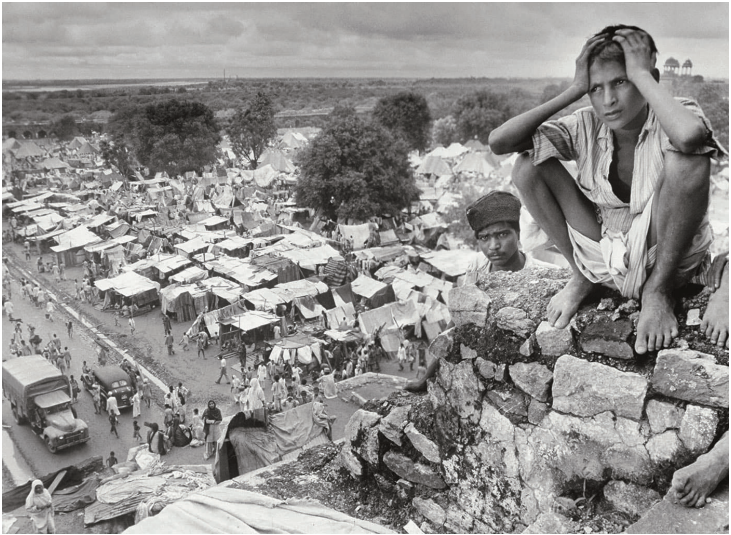
Goal for Today

Discuss the primacy of territory to understanding inter-state conflict.

MIC of the Day: First Indo-Pakistani (Kashmir) War (MIC#1238)




TAJ PALACE
QUEEN OF THE LAKE
NEW GREEN VIEW
TOP-ERIN

The "Correlates" of War

We knew very little of the issues states contest in war by the 1990s.

- Diehl (1992): data limitations, structural realism, the "black box" of the state.

However, we understand as politics as "who gets what, when, and how" (per Harold Laswell).

- In IR, we had no real understanding of the "what."
- Distribution problems pervade *all* levels of politics.

But, it seems issues must be underlying inter-state conflict.

- Contiguity was our clue, but not our answer.

The Contiguity Arguments

1. Opportunity
2. Interactions/Willingness

The Problem of Opportunity

The opportunity argument suggests neighbors fight because they can.

- We've yet to observe war in the Nigeria-Mongolia dyad, for example.
- Bolivia has fought Paraguay lots of times, but never Botswana.

What this is really predicting is the projection of great power status.

- Non-contiguous states should fight when they are powerful enough to send the military to great distances.
- This would work well in the case of the U.S.

The Problem of Opportunity

Beyond that, this argument has limited explanatory value.

- It basically explains a (rare) outcome with what amounts to a constant.

i.e. you're almost always going to have the same neighbors.

- Cases like the partition of Poland are exceptional events.

We're left with arguing about "necessity" for cause of the sampling frame.

The Problem of Interaction

The interaction argument suggests states fight over points of interest.

- Neighbors would have more points of interest as they interact more.
- The more sources for disagreement, the more likely they militarize.

The Problem of Interaction

However, this link is questionable.

- We do not have to accept the premises.
- More interaction may create more opportunity for cooperation.

This argument is incurably underspecified.

Territoriality

Vasquez argues neighbors fight because they disagree about the distribution of territory among them.

- Contiguity is a raw proxy for territorial disputes.

Territoriality

His argument draws upon a variety of sources.

- Primitive anthropology: land is important to survival and fecundity.
- Evolutionary psychology: aggression in defense of territory is a learned response.
- Sociobiology: we are “soft-wired” to violence toward that end.

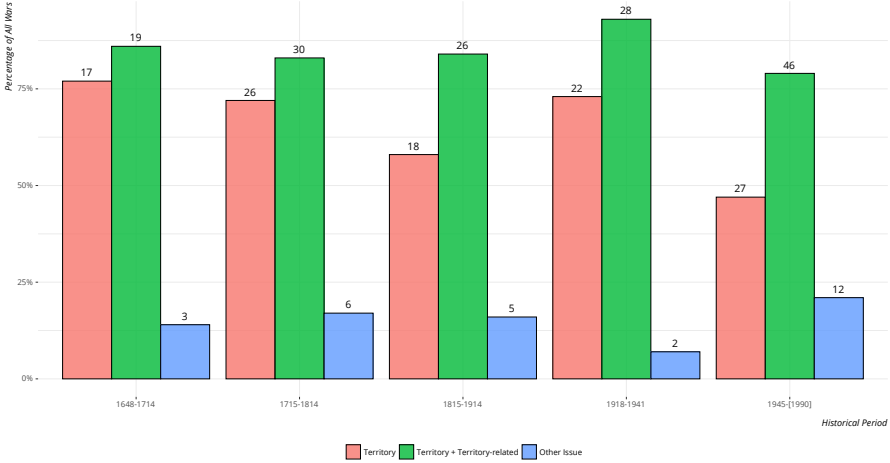
This aggregates to the level of the state in the international system.

Other Arguments for Territory's Importance

1. Tangible value
    - "Strategic value" largely falls here too.
2. Intangible value
3. Reputation concerns

Percentage and Frequency of Wars By Issue Type, 1648-1990

Most wars over time have been fought over territory or territory-related issues than other issue types.



Data: Vasquez (1993) via Holsti (1991). Note: counts appear on top of the bars by issue-type.

Thinking About Onset *and* Escalation

With CoW-MID v. 2 to thank, a slew of studies in the 90s-00s showed territorial disputes led to war more than other issues. However:

- Efforts at unifying analyses at onset and escalation phases lagged (again: data limitations).
- Theoretical efforts also lagged a bit as well.

Per Senese and Vasquez (2003, Table 1), it's plausible that:

- Territory is conflict-prone, but not war-prone
- Territory is war-prone, but not conflict-prone.
- Territory is both conflict-prone *and* war-prone.
- Territory is neither of these (i.e. we've screwed everything up).

What Does This Look Like Dyadically?

Unit of analysis: non-directed dyad-year

- *dyad*: a pairing of any two states (e.g. USA-Canada, India-Pakistan)
- *year*: should be intuitive
- *non-directed*: USA-Canada and Canada-USA are observationally the same.
  - Useful for explaining simple onsets.
  - Operationally: keep the dyad where `ccode2` > `ccode1`.

Dependent Variables

Dependent Variables: (i.e. the thing(s) we want to explain)

- *confrontation onset*: binary, indicates a unique confrontation onset in dyad-year
- *sum of minimum fatalities*: total (minimum) estimated fatalities in dyad-year
- *sum of maximum fatalities*: total (maximum) estimated fatalities in dyad-year
- *dyadic war*: whether a confrontation escalated to over 1,000 dyadic (minimum) fatalities

Main Independent Variable(s)

Main Independent Variable(s): indicators of disputed territory

- *Territorial claim*: whether there is a territorial claim in the dyad-year (ICOW)
- *Territorial rivalry*: whether the dyad is characterized as in a spatial (i.e. territorial) rivalry (Thompson and Dreyer, 2012).

One lament: we could benefit from better data on this front.

- ICOW is promising, but still under development.
- Rivalry is a better measure of salience, but also a measure of rivalry.
- The old `revtype` variables in CoW-MID are unusable (e.g. Gibler, 2017; Gibler and Miller, Forthcoming)

The Percentage of States in the State System with at Least One Territorial Claim, 1816-2015

You kind of see the implied Pax Britannica early in the data, and what unification/nationalism movements did for the emergence of more territorial claims.

Data: ICOW (provisional, 1.1). Claims extended by me (reasonably, I think) on case-by-case basis for an exercise in 2016. Use with caution, but see Miller (forthcoming).

Table 1: A Select Group of 19th Century Territorial Claims for the United States

Claim No.	Name	Challenger	Target	Beg. Claim	End Claim
2	Passamaquoddy Bay	2	200	181601	181711
4	St. Croix-St. John Rivers	2	200	181601	184210
6	49th Parallel	2	200	181601	181810
8	Oregon Country	2	200	181601	184607
8	Oregon Country	2	230	181601	182102
8	San Juan Islands	2	200	184607	187210
10	Alaska	2	365	182202	186703
10	Alaska	200	2	187208	190310
14	Florida	2	230	181601	182102
16	Texas	2	230	181601	182102

Note:

Data: ICOW (provisional, 1.1)

Table 2: The Three Ongoing Territorial Claims for the United States

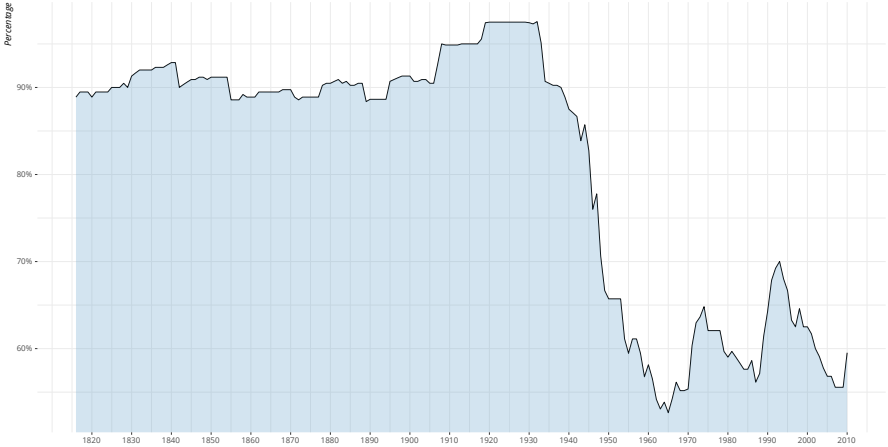
Claim No.	Name	Challenger	Target	Beg. Claim	End Claim
5	Machias Seal Island	2	20	197108	201599
44	Guantanamo Bay	40	2	196009	201599
46	Navassa Island	41	2	193501	201599

Note:

Data: ICOW (provisional, 1.1). Extensions into 2016 are my codings, not ICOW's.

The Percentage of Spatial (Territorial) Rivalries, Among All Rivalry Types, 1816-2010

Most rivalries concern territory. Almost all of them did prior to 1816. Fewer concern territory now, but it's still the most common rivalry type.



Data: Thompson and Dreyer (2012) strategic rivalry data. Spatial rivalries coded for whether `type1` or `type2` was 'spatial'.

Control Variables

Control Variables:

- CINC proportion (W/S), land/water contiguity, major powers in the dyad, defense pact, joint democracy, advanced economies

Other notes: (i.e. things that academics care a lot about)

- Confrontation data: Gibler and Miller (Forthcoming)
- Sample: politically relevant dyads (i.e. neighbors and/or dyads with a major power)
- Onset estimated using logistic regression.
- Fatalities estimated with Heckman sample correction, selecting on ongoing confrontations.
    - Otherwise: basic OLS ("linear regression").
- War model is probit with Heckman sample correction.

Table 3: A Dangerous Dyad-ish Analysis of Inter-state Conflict

	Conf. Onset	Min. Fatalities	Max. Fatalities	Dyadic War
Territorial Claim	1.064***	0.110	0.051	0.021
	(0.054)	(0.149)	(0.164)	(0.117)
Territorial Rivalry	0.420***	0.474***	0.575***	0.407***
	(0.062)	(0.137)	(0.150)	(0.103)
Land Contiguity	0.836***	-0.060	-0.100	-0.168
	(0.069)	(0.172)	(0.188)	(0.125)
Other Contiguity	0.496***	-0.318	-0.338	-0.368*
	(0.093)	(0.211)	(0.231)	(0.168)
CINC Proportion	0.648***	-0.018	-0.176	-0.287
	(0.093)	(0.218)	(0.239)	(0.180)
Both Major Powers	0.813***	0.976***	0.888***	0.914***
	(0.089)	(0.215)	(0.236)	(0.150)
Major-Minor	0.199**	0.470**	0.461**	0.481***
	(0.067)	(0.148)	(0.162)	(0.113)
Defense Pact	0.054	-0.276*	-0.347*	-0.372**
	(0.061)	(0.137)	(0.151)	(0.136)
Joint Democracy	-0.834***	-0.416+	-0.481*	-4.500
	(0.088)	(0.215)	(0.235)	(68.792)
Min. GDP per Capita in Dyad	0.095***	-0.209***	-0.258***	-0.067*
	(0.017)	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.026)
Num.Obs.	107798	2338	2338	2338

Note:

I'm aware that there's a separation problem in Model 5 for joint democracy. Stay out of my mentions.

How to Interpret a Regression Table Like This

1. Find the variable(s) of interest.
2. Look for direction (positive/negative)
3. Look for “stars” (to determine statistical significance)

Table 4: The Important Results of Our Analysis (Omitting the Control Variables)

	Conf. Onset	Min. Fatalities	Max. Fatalities	Dyadic War
Territorial Claim	1.064***	0.110	0.051	0.021
	(0.054)	(0.149)	(0.164)	(0.117)
Territorial Rivalry	0.420***	0.474***	0.575***	0.407***
	(0.062)	(0.137)	(0.150)	(0.103)
Num.Obs.	107798	2338	2338	2338

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5: The Important Results of Our Analysis (Omitting the Control Variables and Color Coded)

	Conf. Onset	Min. Fatalities	Max. Fatalities	Dyadic War
Territorial Claim	1.064***	0.110	0.051	0.021
	(0.054)	(0.149)	(0.164)	(0.117)
Territorial Rivalry	0.420***	0.474***	0.575***	0.407***
	(0.062)	(0.137)	(0.150)	(0.103)
Num.Obs.	107798	2338	2338	2338

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6: The Important Results of Our Analysis (Omitting the Control Variables, Color Coded, Identifying Significance)

	Conf. Onset	Min. Fatalities	Max. Fatalities	Dyadic War
Territorial Claim	**1.064*** **	0.110	0.051	0.021
	(0.054)	(0.149)	(0.164)	(0.117)
Territorial Rivalry	**0.420*** **	**0.474*** **	**0.575*** **	**0.407*** **
	(0.062)	**(0.137)**	**(0.150)**	**(0.103)**
Num.Obs.	107798	2338	2338	2338

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Takeaways

Territory is a root cause of confrontation onset and escalation.

- Dyads with territorial issues are more likely to experience confrontation onset.
- Confrontations in these dyads are more likely to be severe.
- Confrontations in these dyads are more likely to escalate to dyadic war.
- The territorial rivalry indicator might be a better indicator than the claim indicator, if you had to pick one (c.f. Gibler and Miller, forthcoming).

Other Considerations

- Claims and rivalry indicators only mostly agree (c.f. Miller, forthcoming)
- The claims data have a lot of dogs that don't bark (c.f. Miller et al. 2020, Miller, 2022)
- Absent a single, more coherent measure of "territorial dispute", we work with what we have.
- Attribution is still tricky here, and it's mostly implied.

Conclusion

Territory is effectively a root cause of war.

- More wars are fought over territory than other issues.
- Consistent relationship at onset and escalation phases.
- Contiguity is, in effect, a rough proxy for disputing territory.
- Data limitations preclude more confidence in what we know.

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