Conflict Theory
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Introduction

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, there have been a bewildering variety of violent conflicts that have erupted throughout the world. These events have variously been called ethnic, terrorist, resource-driven, territorial, and insurgency conflicts. The toll of premeditated large-scale violence over the past decade includes millions of lives lost, many times that number injured, and billions of dollars in property damages alone. While the justifiability of these violent conflicts may be individually debatable, the tragic costs are ontologically objective facts.

While it may certainly be an interesting exercise to study whether or not certain decisions to fight have been made, we'll concentrate here on a matter that is at least equally as pressing. When can we expect two organizations to engage in conflict? If we consider only the conflicts over formerly Soviet territories, we find that there are many possible ways for a conflict to start. "Most of these battles pitted newly independent governments against territorial separatists, but all sprung from a range of disparate causes: the collapse of federations, the end of authoritarianism, the reemergence of old quarrels, the meddling of outside powers, political demagoguery, and – a major catalyst of organized violence everywhere – plain old thuggery." (King 166)

A typical and straightforward way of determining where the world's hotspots are is to explain the root of conflict with one or more primitive kinds of causes, such as ethnic tension. You explain how ethnic tension leads to ethnic conflict and subsequently identify the places in the world where this kind of conflict will likely occur. The problem with this approach is that, "…such explanations predict far more conflict than actually occurs in the world." (King 166) Although King was talking about ethnic conflict in particular, his observation holds equally well for other kinds of conflict, such as those that are resource-driven. You can't simply group together all the kinds of conflict, identify the obvious causes of each (ethnic tension, proximate resources, etc.), and real world instances of the causes – you just get too many hotspots. Most experts are surprised not by how *many* conflicts have erupted over the past 10 years, but by how *few*.

Violent conflicts never happen by accident. The parties involved may not realize that they are escalating a conflict, nor may they intend to intimidate a passive group into action. But acts of violence are the result of conscious decisions made by individual people; when it comes down to it, someone has to fire the first shot. Even if a nuclear missile were accidentally launched, it would be a conscious decision by someone to retaliate. Only a series of accidental missile launchings between two groups that ended in mutual oblivion would constitute an instance of accidental violence, but this certainly would not go down in history as a conflict. Therefore, the process of decision making is going to be of critical importance in predicting conflict.

The environment surrounding two groups and the dispositions of their decision-makers each contribute towards outbreaks of violence. We will analyze conflict via its various factors found in decision making and environment, relating them together in a process best described as dimensional analysis. By studying the features, measurability, and interdependence of motivation, capacity, capability, and bureaucratic inertia, an

observer can determine the security risks to individual groups and determine the regional likelihood of conflict.

Definitions

Before beginning in earnest, it would be best to clarify and define our concepts about conflict. Conflict can be defined as, "sequence(s) of interactions between the governments of two or more sovereign states in severe conflict, short of actual war, but involving the perception of a dangerously high probability of war." (Most & Starr 94) In order to broaden the scope of our theory, we'll consider conflict to occur between two or more organizations – we're just as interested in a conflict between Hamas and Ireland as we are in a conflict between the UK and France. War is a sufficiently documented (and complex) matter that we can safely leave it undefined. In any case, it's fairly obvious when a war is occurring (such as the Korean 'Police Action'), and a definition may impose exceedingly strict preconditions. It suffices to say that, in layman's terms, a conflict is a situation where a bunch of groups disagree strongly.

Conflict in itself is something worthy of prediction, but what presently interests us is a particular subspecies of conflict: violent conflict. Violence can be defined as, "present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations." (Most & Starr 95) We find violence where we find people who aren't getting what they want. This is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition – I don't fly into a murderous rage when my paycheck is lower than expected. But this definition is going to provide a useful starting point for understanding violent conflict. Two or more groups of people are going to disagree strongly over something, and at least one of these groups is going to feel that something is missing in their lives. In order to simplify things we shall only consider violent conflict in our analysis, and refer to violent conflict as simply 'conflict' (unless otherwise indicated).

Macro-level Decision Making

Governed organizations, typically states, are the most common parties involved in conflict. Understood as unified wholes, these organizations are responsible for the face that the rest of the world looks upon. Iraq attacks Iran, the Confederacy secedes from the Union, and the United States imposes steel tariffs on the European Union; the clean macro-level of decision making simplifies our view by concealing the smaller processes. It overlooks the fact that George Bush lost a bet with Tony Blain on Tuesday, and hence pressed members of the US State Department to encourage a few congressmen to support a new tariff on steel imports. We only concentrate on what happens to and in the state (the inputs) and what results at the national/organizational level (the outputs). For this reason some of our dimensions described later on, such as bureaucratic inertia, play, "…only a minor role in determining a state's behavior, while reaction to the behavior of others seems to be crucial." (Cashman 168) At courser grains of granularity, different games have to be played.

As alluded to above, inter-state events play an important role in macro-level decision making. In some studies, we find that, "…the strongest predictor of one nation's actions was the action directed at it by others during the same time period." (Cashman 168) Invasions, sanctions, and exposed cases of espionage would qualify as events that increased the likelihood of a response that led to conflict. Essentially, organizations act

internationally in response to effects directed at it. As far as conflict is concerned, two directed effects are of particular interest – threats and attacks.

National security is one of the original reasons why governed states were first formed. As such, it is expected that an organization will attempt to repel or prevent any attack against it. With the proper warning, most states can sufficiently prepare themselves to defend against most invasions. The most common kind of warning is the threat, which can be either overt or covert. Overt warnings are fairly easy to find, as per their nature, and greatly aid in identifying potential conflicts. Most warnings, however, are of a covert nature. Satellite imagery, commercial indicators, and human intelligence can warn an organization of impending violence by pointing out troop movements, invasion plans, and other unfriendly events.

The effect of threats on regional security is often referred to as, "the *security dilemma*. The dilemma is that in seeking to enhance its own security a nation takes actions that unwittingly stimulate in its rival exactly the kind of behavior it wanted to prevent." (Cashman 185) So if France finds out that Spain is arming along their shared border, the French are expected to increase military spending in order to deter the Spanish. But the Spanish will match this increase with an increase, and so on back and forth until either de-escalation begins or a conflict erupts. At the macro-level of decision making analysis, the security dilemma is one the most important trends to look for.

At this level of granularity, it is also useful to look at *social stability*. Most, if not all, governed organizations influence and are accountable to a group of people. In national states these groups are simply the citizenry, while for organizations like Hezbollah, the group is much more scattered and homogeneous. We will refer to these groups of people that are related to particular governments as *populaces*. A populace becomes acclimated to a political atmosphere, a regularity of decision making by the organization. If the populace is already uprising or rioting, then they obviously are not *acclimated*. We can determine acclimation by considering two factors: *civil unrest* and *social stress*.

Civil unrest is a measure of a populace's acclimation to the current political climate. It is measured by accounting for recent
- assassinations
- purges
- strikes
- riots
- coups
- demonstrations

The higher the number of these events, the less acclimated the populace. It doesn't matter what these events are for or whom they're aimed at – the mere occasion of one of these events indicates dissatisfaction with the current government's decisions.

Social stress is a long-term measure of a populace's acclimation. If the social stress is low, then the populace would be likely to accept decisions to invest in foreign affairs. If the social stress is high, then more attention would be paid to the domestic sphere by an attentive government. Social stress is measured by:
- unemployment
- industrialization
- suicide rates

- homicide rates

Social stress is a good indicator of an organization's propensity to initiate or escalate a conflict. Most people are primarily interested in domestic issues, even when international power is a factor in national pride – feeding one's family often trumps patriotism.

Contrary to what many may believe, a very low social stability is not necessarily a bad thing for neighboring populaces. "Wars should be unlikely during either extremely low levels of internal conflict or extremely high levels of internal conflict." (Cashman 148) A very stable state (governing organization + populace) has no good reason to take part in a war, much less initiate one, while a very unstable state is too chaotic to properly field an offensive or defensive force. Social stability is dependent on both social stress and foreign actions towards the state, so many different factors may be at play in determining an organization's foreign posture. When the case is not clear enough to use macro-level indicators, a finer granularity needs to be considered.

Micro-level Decision Making

"Iran's political scene is vastly more complex than the simple division between 'reformists' and 'conservatives' suggests. In reality, each category encompasses a broad set of groups, each with its own ideology and worldview." (Talwar 63) Iran, like most countries, is much more complex underneath its macro-surface. Feuding political parties, aspiring pundits, and hawkish generals combine to produce the chaotic harmony of political life. In order to better understand the inclination towards conflict in an organization, the micro-level of decision making must be studied from time to time.

One of the most important issues in understanding political decision making is the maintenance of public support. A government without public support will become unstable and may very well suffer from insurgencies. Likewise, a decision maker without public support will become unpopular and may become ineffective or even removed from the government. The key to maintaining public support is often enough found in domestic issues. "Domestic interests can be expected to predominate over national and international interests. Political leaders rise and fall depending primarily on whether they satisfy domestic needs, and organizations prosper or decline depending on the degree of domestic support they can generate." (Cashman 71) If the social stability of a populace is known, then a decision maker's inclination towards domestic issues can be gauged, and part of an organization's decision making process can be predicted. With a stable populace like today's Switzerland we expect more decision makers to support involvement in a foreign conflict, while in Iran we expect more decision makers to stay out of foreign wars.

In fact, it seems that Iran is much more active in foreign conflicts than Switzerland. Looking at the individual decision making parties, we find that most of the Swiss population favors a hands-off approach to the world, reflected by their elected officials. As members of a democracy, Swiss decision makers are constrained in their ability to initiate conflict due to the importance of public support. "Autocratic governments are less constrained in their ability to go to war, but democratic regimes are more dependent on the necessity of popular support and therefore perhaps more inclined to use foreign adventures to affect the domestic political situation." (Cashman146) Speaking with Swiss citizens, you quickly find that it would take a great deal to convince them to get involved in an international conflict (although this seems to be changing in

2002). Because of public unwillingness to support conflict, it would take a coalition of unusually strong-willed decision makers or an unusually moving event to get the Swiss government to favor foreign conflict.

In the case of Iran, an authoritarian organization, it's much less important to study public opinion. The governing parties themselves attract our attention, since it is these groups of decision makers alone (which are themselves decision makers at a certain level of granularity) that influence government policy. If a political group decides that it can profit from a foreign conflict, then it will surely support the operation. Of course, the Iranian populace can indeed affect the government's policies, but it usually takes a highly uncommon series of events to produce this sort of effect.

Whereas the macro-level of decision making sums up the organization's actions into a single decision and action, the micro-level of decision making breaks up the organization into (some of its) decision making parts. The populace as well can be broken up into smaller parts, such as constituencies or tax brackets. But in order to assess the likelihood of conflict in a region, distinguishing the players is only a first step. The next step will be to identify and measure various features of the players that affect the likelihood of conflict in the region.

Dimensions

To study the interrelations between different players in a region, we're going to use a method called dimensional analysis. This method identifies relevant features that a player may have that can help in solving our problem. Think about high school algebra and geometry, where the framework for solving problems was the Cartesian coordinate system. Each of its two axes, one vertical and one horizontal, was intuitively understood to record lengths and widths. But these axes could have instead recorded other kinds of information, such as color (in nanometers of wavelength) and temperature (in degrees Celsius). In fact, an axis could be modified by restricting its number of 'tick marks', so that the vertical axis had five 'ticks' that recorded which of five different kinds of vertebrate an animal was and the horizontal axis had seven ticks to record which continent the animal was found on. These axes, or dimensions, allow the analyst to relate different kinds of information so that new information is produced.

The trick is to determine which axes are useful for solving the problem of determining regional likelihood's of conflict. It's important to decide this matter ahead of time, so that analysts know what to look for in the complicated quagmire that is the real world. Some sources point out that, "(i)n each case the level of conflict received by a state was the crucial explanatory variable." (Cashman168) Others point out that, "…revolutionary change within states increases the likelihood that they will experience subsequent militarized conflict – either as initiators or as victims." (Cashman 149)

However, "…it is not at all clear, and certainly not logical to expect, that attributes of individual countries…should be sufficient for, or covary with, such states' degrees of war involvement." (Most & Starr 82) We can't just concentrate on the features of individual players, since conflict is a directed action between states. We need to know whether one player will attack the other, not simply if a conflict will fit a historical pattern or if a conflict is possible. As mentioned above, this kind of analysis produces too many possible conflicts; we're going to cut that number down as much as possible. In order to do this, our dimensions will focus on intentional features of the

players. We're interested in how one player is directed or inclined towards another player, and this is why our previous focus on player selection was important. If we do a shabby job with our granular cuts, we may believe that a mob war is taking place between two nations instead of two minor lobby groups.

The experts in the field have done most of the work for us, identifying the factors that lead to conflict. Concerning large-scale violence, King points out that, "…you need the same kind of forces that sustain any war, whether 'ethnic' or otherwise: entrepreneurs who benefit from the violence, arms supplied by foreign powers, charismatic leadership, and plenty of bored young men." (King 170) Klare also rings in on conflict, mentioning that, "…these disturbances often tie into other problems such as environmental degradation, economic disorder, population growth, and transnational crime." (Klare 60) Gathering these together, we should be looking for war profiteers and opportunities for these parasites to make a profit. Oil fields and pipelines should be an obvious draw for these kinds of people. We need to track arms shipments, which often tie in with sudden upsurges in crime, both domestic and transnational. Most conflicts need people who have enough time to fire a weapon at other people, so regions of high unemployment should be looked at carefully. Population growth is often enough a problem, but not all overlapping populaces create problem situations. If there is a problem with population growth, it should be indicated by heightened crime rates coincident with the start of the overlapping process.

Not all conflicts are transnational, of course, and civil wars are one of the most common kinds of conflict in the post-Soviet era. "Fearon and Laitin believe that civil wars get under way because of specific dynamics that don't have much to do with overall political conditions, ideology, or religious and ethnic disputes. (They do, however, believe that a high level of poverty almost certainly plays a role)." (Lemann 3) Social stress and civil unrest don't seem to play much of a role, so we're left with bored young men in poverty and charismatic leaders with euro signs in their eyes. If this is what is needed to start a civil war, and so a conflict in general, then perhaps we should be concentrating on greed and other people's property.

"For most of the history of international affairs, territorial control was the focus of political conflict." (Brzerzinski 27) To be an active nation in the world was to be a player in the game of land-grabbing. Agriculture and mining were the driving forces behind much of history. "However, for most nation-states, the issue of territorial possession has lately been waning in salience." (Brzerzinski 38) New industries, such as refining and manufacturing, have come to lead the world economy. It's not so important that you own the raw resources, only that you have your hand in the honey pot of profit, so to speak. It's actually safer for a nation to abstain from the game of land-grabbing, since the profits gained from owning the raw resources is often outweighed by the cost of insurgencies and riots.

Most nations have changed their strategies from expanding their borders to enabling their citizens to make a profit. "Behind this shift in strategic geography is a new emphasis on the protection of supplies and vital resources, especially oil and natural gas." (Klare 50) Because of the complex network of imports and exports of the leading nations of the 21st century, these nations consider the secure transfer of natural resources into their borders to be a top national security priority. If these supply lines were disrupted,

there would be quite serious economic ramifications for not only the disrupted nation, but also the global commerce network.

Oil and natural gas are not the only resources that find themselves in the hotspots of conflict. Fresh water resources are critically important for organizations like Egypt, whose geography both blesses it with a proximate source of fresh water and curses it with neighbors who are not as fortunate. In general, "…viewing the international system in terms of unsettled resource deposits – contested oil and gas fields, shared water systems, embattled diamond mines – provides a guide to likely conflict zones in the twenty-first century." (Klare 53)

We should not place too much attention on resource-driven conflict. "It is important to notice that the scarcity of resources, with which most of these societies are faced, is not a factor that contributes to violence; quite the contrary, it is a factor that encourages close cooperation." (Cashman 31) The fact is that resource scarcity sometimes leads to conflict, as in the case of Kuwait and Iraq in 1991, and sometimes leads to treaties, as in the case of the Caspian Sea in the mid- to late-1990's. Resource scarcity and social stability merely provide the background for the players. To paraphrase [Cashman], we know *why* a conflict begins, but what's important is why a conflict begins *now*.

Motivation

The *motivation* of a player identifies the goals that the player seriously intends to pursue. Most nations are motivated by world peace, but they don't seriously pursue world peace *per se*. Instead, a player may be motivated to produce a peace plan between the Palestinians and the Israelis, or to reduce the number of nuclear missiles in the United States' silos.

Sometimes fears can be motivations for players. "…myths of oppression and revenge create dividing lines between social groups; real fears for communal survival create an incentive for mobilization; a faltering state, a strong leader, or an outside power provides the spark that ignites all-out violence. Take away any one of the three elements and the violence fizzles." (King 168) It's tricky to observe a player's fear, but if King is right then you only need to look for the indicators that would lead to conflict: a weak organization, a popular alternative, and well-rehearsed tales of hatred. A populace that feels like its collective backs are against the wall is a very good candidate for conflict participation.

There also has to be a reason for a player to become violent. We should ensure that, when studying a group of players, we do not, "…mistake the causes of hatred for the causes of violence." (King 168) The former is concerned with public opinion and support for violent activities, while the latter is concerned with fielding troops on the front line. It's quite easy to get people to support you in killing other people, as is obvious from the numerous hate groups throughout the world. But it's much more difficult to convince these people to wield the weapons of warfare and stand tall in the face of an opposing army. We're partially interested in what motivates the kind of hatred that can lead to violence, but we're much more interested in what motivates peaceful people to engage themselves in conflict.

To record information on motivation, we will center on the issues that are most pressing to the players involved. A brief scan of newspaper headlines should provide an

adequate start in preparing a list of issues. Once the list has been decided on, each issue will be assigned a tick mark on a new axis. Later on we'll return to the issue of assessing the motivations of players when we discuss *bureaucratic inertia*. For now it's enough to say that we'll look at alliances and competition to asses what most interests a player.

Capacity

Merely being motivated is not enough to take part in a conflict. As much as they may wish to, a tribe of naked aborigines with rocks and spears will not be able to start a conflict with France. They simply lack the *capacity* to pose a significant threat to the French. Capacity is used as a, "…way to judge whether an international actor possesse(s) the physical means or ability to perform some foreign policy action, whether (or not) the possibility or opportunity were available to that actor." (Most & Starr 75) Capacity measures a general notion of power, which is not always martial in nature. "Economic prowess, and its translation into technological innovation, can also be a key criterion of power." (Brzerzinski 38) Alliances between players can complicate matters, since many forms of alliance involve power-sharing. Although Belgium is not an economic powerhouse in global commerce, its membership in the European Union provides it with the collective economic power to carry out a large number of foreign policies. The Palestinian Authority is not a military wonder, but has strong ties with Iran that allows it to import weapons to use in its conflict with Israel. This enables the Palestinian Authority to achieve goals that it could not do on its own.

Capability

Related to capacity is a notion of geographic *capability* to achieve a goal. One of the reasons that naked spear-throwing aborigines can't pose a threat to France is that France is simply too far away. No matter how hard they throw their spears, the people in France are safe. This holds as well for more technologically advanced organizations. One of the reasons that the US fields a naval force across the globe has to do with capability. A surveillance plane or cruise missile can't fly forever, and so must be launched within a certain maximum distance of the target area.

Historically, mountains, deserts, and bodies of water have been sufficient barriers for military movements. In general, a player's power was limited by certain geographic features; Norway didn't exert any real power on Greece in the 16th century because it didn't have the capability. With today's telecommunications, however, a weak Norwegian currency could theoretically threaten Greek commerce. By using electromagnetic signals and modern seagoing vessels, today's Norwegians can surmount the vast distances and language barriers that impeded Norwegian-Greek commerce a millenium ago.

It's possible to reduce capability to capacity by reading 'X's has the capability to affect Y' as 'X has the capacity to operate over the barriers between X and Y'. If a player has the power to act at a sufficient distance and surmount any barriers, then it makes sense to say that this player possesses the required capacity. However, when considering an organization's capacity to achieve a goal, we're interested in primarily non-geographic features such as a quick-firing cannon and merchant vessels with refrigeration. By separating capability and capacity, we're forcing ourselves to consider the geographic dimension of conflict. Without noticing the Sahara Desert, many young

students of history are surprised that the Roman and Egyptian empires never penetrated far into mid- and southern Africa.

Brzezinski has written on a particularly interesting partition of the world into geostrategic players and geostrategic pivots. The definitions are worth quoting in full:

> Active geostrategic players are the states that have the capacity and the national will to exercise power of influence beyond their borders in order to alter – to a degree that affects America's interests – the existing geopolitical state of affairs. (Brzerzinski 40)

> Geopolitical pivots are the states whose importance is derived not from their power and motivation but rather from their sensitive location and from the consequences of their potentially vulnerable condition for the behavior of geostrategic players. (Brzerzinski 41)

Brzerzinski identifies the active geostrategic players in Eurasia as France, Germany, Russia, China, and India. Great Britain and Italy are not sufficiently active beyond their borders to be included in this list. If we extend this list from a Eurasian to a global scale, we'd have to include the United States, and possibly Australia and Venezuela. Geopolitical pivots in Eurasia include Ukraine, Azerbaijan, South Korea, Turkey, and Iran. A global expansion would include the Philippines and Panama. The geostrategic players are probably important to include in any list of players in the conflict partition, while the geostrategic pivots are good places to look for emerging conflicts, especially those conflicts of a transnational character.

Both capacity and capability can be measured with simple Boolean values, but each dimension should encompass three axes. Two of these axes should list the players under consideration in the current analysis. The point that corresponds to the intersection of two players would have a value on the third axis describing whether or not a player has the capacity (capability) to initiate a conflict against another player. As in the Cartesian coordinate system, the result would be an ordered triple, in the form (x,y,z), read as, "player x z's the capacity to initiate a conflict against player y," where 'z's' is read as either 'has' or 'does not have'. The z value, of course, is crucial for an evaluation. This value would most likely be gleaned from military analysts or other experts in the field of warfare.

Bureaucratic Inertia

The final dimension that we'll consider is *bureaucratic inertia*. This dimension records the inclination of the current organization in foreign policy. Bureaucratic inertia only operates at course granularities, since at least 3 individual decision makers that need to develop a single decision are needed to satisfy the conditions for bureaucracy; these groups of individuals have to be considered as units which produce decisions as a whole and bear the feature of bureaucratic inertia. "Government decision-makers can 'substantially disturb, but not substantially control, the behavior of these organizations, which is largely determined by standard operating procedures." (Cashman 86) Bureaucratic organizations are much like large boulders on a mountain: once they're set

in motion, their direction can only be modified slightly. This is actually something of a safeguard, since it prevents a single or small series of poor decisions from ruining the whole enterprise.

The bureaucratic inertia can be determined by studying both the recent and the prolonged political histories of an organization. Drastic policy changes are exceptions to the rule, and should therefore not be expected without appropriate indicators. For example, in an authoritarian regime like North Korea the dictator may come under unusual pressure from either domestic or foreign players. Since the populace is controlled by military and economic oppression, the dictator doesn't have to cater to the people's wishes. There are no real problems for him if he suddenly began to feed and care for his populace, as his power is guaranteed by his military. Most countries, however, are not as free to alter their bureaucratic inertia as North Korea. This is fortunate for political analysts, since the course of a number of players can be more or less determined by bureaucratic inertia, and so the general nature of decision making in the future can be predicted.

As far as conflict is concerned, we're interested in only a few facets of bureaucratic inertia. This inertia is only important insofar as one player's decisions are going to clash with another's. In order to record the information as per our dimensional analysis, we have to decide on how we're going to build our axes. One axis is going to have a list of the players under examination. Another axis is going to be composed of current and future issues in international affairs, identical to the axis created for the motivations dimension. A final axis will be a (natural) number line, from 0 to n where n is an arbitrary prime number and it is the mth prime where m is at least as great as the number of players. Start with an issue on the second axis, such as 'Caspian Sea Oil'. If a player is not involved with this issue, such as the Real IRA, the third axis will have a '0' value at this point. If a player is involved, such as Italy, put a new prime number in for the third axis if none of Italy's allies on this issue are assigned values yet. If one of Italy's allies is on this list, assign their value to Italy. If Italy has more than one ally with different values, multiply the values together to find the value of Italy.

When this is all done, the issue will have a string of numbers associated with it and each player. If there are two or more non-zero numbers related to the issue, then competition or confrontation is expected to occur. Although bureaucratic inertia alone cannot determine whether a conflict will erupt in a region, it can assess the likelihood of conflict when combined with other factors.

Conclusion

In order to determine the likelihood of conflict in a region, we have determined that a dimensional analysis may very well be suited to perform this task. The process starts by partitioning the world into players, which are decision makers of some form. These decision makers may be nations, political parties, non-governmental organizations, individuals, or even computers. The selection of players can be tailored to the issue or region under consideration. Often different levels of granularity are equally suitable for selection, and in these circumstances the analyst may benefit from running through the process multiple times at different levels of granularity.

Once the players have been chosen, they are evaluated through the lens of our four dimensions: motivation, capacity, capability, and bureaucratic inertia. Each of these

dimensions encompasses various axes that record different kinds of information about the world. We have ended with a six dimensional matrix to aid in the prediction of conflict. Our dimensions are:

- **I** → Contemporary Issues (cardinality = n ε **N**)
- **B** → Capability (cardinality = 2)
- **C** → Capacity (cardinality = 2)
- **M** → Competition/Cooperation (cardinality = p ε **N**)
- **A** → Acting Players (cardinality = m ε **N**)
- **R** → Players Acted On (cardinality = m ε **N**)
  [cardinality refers to the number of ticks on the axis]

The coordinates (X, Y, Z, M, B, C) can be read, "The relation of player X towards player Y on issue Z is [competitive/cooperative], and player A [has/does not have] the capacity and/or capability to threaten player B." The motivations are represented by the **I** axis, recording information on which goals the players have. The bureaucratic inertia is primarily represented by the **M** axis, recording information on how the players relate to each other in the context of their individual motivations. The social stability of a state is not explicitly represented here, but is implicit in the matrix through the motivations of players at both micro and macro levels. A state that's about to suffer an insurgency will have players motivated towards staying in power, accumulating wealth, and suppressing hostile forces. All of this can be represented in our matrix after a careful analysis of the dimensions of motivation, capability, capacity, and bureaucratic inertia.

While this process does not provide a means to determine, for example, Turkey's capability to initiate a conflict against Argentina, the process does provide a way to record this information and provide new insights. In a sense, this whole process functions as a database for conflict, and it's no coincidence that the structure is readily adaptable to a relational database environment. This process provides a framework for studying international relations in the context of conflict prediction, and it is hoped that this will facilitate the assimilation of information from disparate sources.

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