

Chapter 12. International Peace and Conflict

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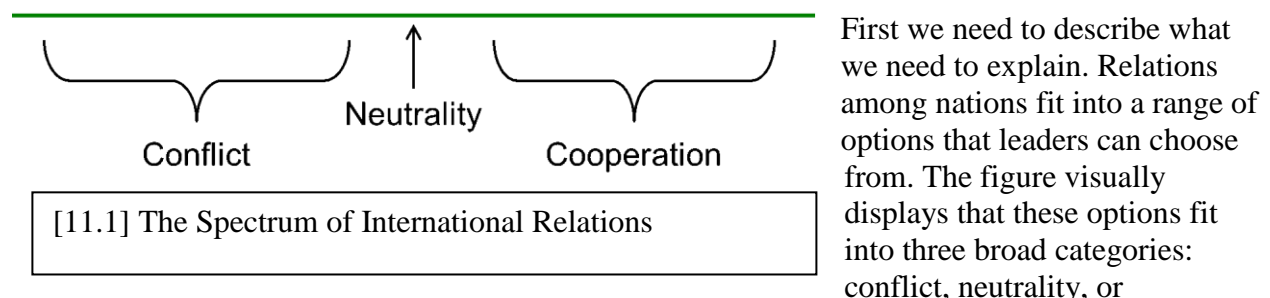
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Introduction

If you read the news on any given day, you would think that countries are frequently in dispute with each other. In reality the number of conflicts that leads to wars among countries has greatly dropped since the end of the Cold War. Most armed conflicts these days are within countries and are referred to as civil wars. These wars may include conflicts between ethnic, religious, or economic groups. This chapter will cover the many types of conflicts and also examine peace maintenance throughout the world.

Conflict and Cooperation among Nations

The study of international relations (IR) focuses on a simple, broad question: Why do some countries fight wars to settle their differences while others are often at peace? The attempt to answer this question is as old as human civilization itself. The answers also span a large volume of approaches. This chapter will highlight some of the more widely debated theories.



First we need to describe what we need to explain. Relations among nations fit into a range of options that leaders can choose from. The figure visually displays that these options fit into three broad categories: conflict, neutrality, or cooperation. Before detailing what is meant by these three concepts, it is important to know that countries often have parallel and linked foreign policies.

Parallel foreign policies refers to being in conflict with a country regarding one issue while cooperating in another. Under this condition, we would need to mark multiple points to see where any pair of countries fit. For example, the US and Europe have had many trade disputes that would bring them into the conflictual side of the line. Yet they are very cooperative regarding security under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military alliance.

Linked foreign policies do not differentiate between issues. If a pair of countries are in conflict in one issue area, there will be a spillover into another one. Iran's desire to have nuclear weapons was met with dissatisfaction by many countries. Their conflict with Iran on this issue spilled into their economic relations when they decided to cut off trade and investment. Iran, of course, did not like these economic sanctions, which deepened the conflict the country had with European countries and the US.

At the center point of *neutrality*, leaders can choose to acknowledge the existence of other countries, including their problems. However, they prefer to limit interactions or not take sides

on an issue. The classic example of this is Switzerland, a country that has no formal military alliances and only joined the United Nations in 2002. However, it is engaged in international economic exchanges and treaties, but in limited ways.

On the figure's left side are all the possible degrees of conflict that countries can have with each other. They may have small disagreements on one end or enter into wars at the far end. A point on the conflict side of the line can move in either direction. An escalation of the dispute can bring countries closer to war. Before the outbreak of World War II, Adolf Hitler annexed several territories that caused conflict between Germany and other European powers. Efforts to stop military expansion were unsuccessful and war resulted between the opposing sides after Germany invaded Poland.

On the other side of neutrality are all the possible degrees of cooperation. Cooperation can be small in scale like agreeing to accept and distribute mail coming in from overseas. The extreme end is an integration of decision making into regional or international organizations. This means that countries believe that making decisions as a group is more beneficial than doing so alone. They therefore are locked into a more permanent mode of cooperation where specific issues will always be resolved in a cooperative manner. A good example of this is the European Union (EU), an entity that joins member states together to make decisions regarding a large array of economic, political, and social issues. We will examine the EU in some detail in a later chapter.

Discussion Question 1

What are some current examples of conflict, neutrality, or cooperation among countries?

International Actors

Answering the fundamental question of why we see international cooperation or conflict requires us to also identify the actors involved. The first, and some scholars argue as the most important actors, are the states of the international system. As defined earlier, states comprise a set of law making and enforcing institutions that govern people in a politically defined territory. Individual state leaders comprise another set of actors. They interact with each other at the state level to decide on foreign policy and at the international level with other leaders. Groups within countries can also be important actors since they may influence national leaders on foreign policy.

At the international level, we can observe actors that transcend countries. *International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs)* are entities that advocate specific policy positions in global affairs and do not represent any state. Greenpeace, as an example, is a global environmentalist organization that uses direct action and lobbying to address global issues like climate change and commercial whaling. They make public issues important to the organization and offer policy recommendations for states and international governmental organizations to follow.

Another set of actors are *multinational corporations (MNCs)*. Similar to INGOs, MNCs do not represent any state. They are business enterprises that have headquarters and operations in two or more countries. Among the largest well known MNCs include Microsoft, Nestlé, Coca-Cola, Toyota, and Exxon. As these examples illustrate, they differ widely in the types of products and services that they provide. They influence international politics by advocating for policies and regulations that allow them to continue or expand profitable operations.

The actors described in this section vary in the power to influence international politics. It would be inaccurate to say that one type of actor is automatically more powerful than another type. We can, however, argue that particular actors are more or less powerful than others. For example, not all states are equally powerful. For instance, China has more influence in world affairs than the small South Pacific nation of Fiji. We may also be able to argue that a very large MNC can be more influential than a small state.

Discussion Question 2

List some examples of the most powerful states, INGOs, and MNCs. In what ways can the examples on your list influence international affairs in general? In other words, what makes them so powerful?

International Issues

War has been a recurring and enduring pattern of behavior among peoples since the beginning of recorded history. Many political scientists have studied the causes of international wars and conditions for peace. We will examine traditional theories of war and peace in the next section. This section provides an overview of some of the newer issues in international relations.

Civil War

Civil war involves armed conflict between two or more opposing groups within a country with the aim of controlling the state. Although this may sound like a domestic problem, it does have international implications and therefore may require international action. Take, for example, *refugee crises*. People attempting to escape the violence will seek refuge in another country. Depending on the number of refugees and the economic conditions of the receiving country, the influx of people can produce political problems. In recent years, Europe experienced large waves of mass migrations from people attempting to escape armed conflict in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The introduction of so many people caused disputes among the European countries regarding how to handle them.



[11.2] Za'atri camp in Jordan for Syrian refugees

Another humanitarian issue that arises from civil wars is the international community's role in intervening to stop killings and destruction. Civil wars in the distant past were viewed as exclusively domestic problems and the world community refrained from intervening. Since the end of World War II and the creation of the United Nations, the new norm is more interventionist. That is, the international community would take up the

responsibility to bring the disputing parties to the negotiating table and end the fighting as soon as possible. During and after developing a peace settlement, international forces often come in to keep the peace by enforcing cease fires, separating combatants, and monitoring activities on the ground.

In many civil wars, combatants unfortunately participate in crimes against humanity. The prohibition of such crimes are governed by international agreements such as the Geneva Conventions. War crimes can result from orders given by top political and military officials or committed by people further down the command structure. Regardless, treaties give the international community the authority to punish such criminals. The past procedure had been to establish special tribunals to try accused individuals for specific conflicts. Early modern era examples include the Nuremberg Trials (which convicted Nazi war criminals) and the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (also known as the Tokyo Trials, which convicted Japanese government officials). More recently, special tribunals ruled on war crimes that occurred during the Balkan and Rwandan civil wars. Since 2003, the International Criminal Court has served as a permanent tribunal to try accused individuals.

Domestic and International Terrorism

Terrorism, like civil wars, have taken on an international dimension. *Terrorist groups* comprise individuals that attempt to use violence to achieve political objectives. Because these groups are generally small when compared to their governmental adversaries, they apply a strategy that frighten people like blowing up areas to inflict mass damage and deaths. The unpredictability of their violence puts the general public on edge. Terrorists project a perception of great strength with the intent to scare societies into submitting to their demands.

Terrorists use terrorist acts to achieve domestic aims. Domestic examples include the Irish Republican Army (Britain), ETA (Spain), and the Ku Klux Klan (US). Their tactics are generally unsuccessful. However, this does not deter domestic terrorist groups in carrying out their acts.

The strategies in capturing terrorist members usually rest on domestic law enforcement, although they often rely on international cooperation when terrorists are assisted outside their country.

International terrorism is different in that they do not solely target their domestic government or society. They believe that foreign governments use their governments and therefore target the former as the true culprits behind their grievances. The basic strategy is to frighten the foreign government and people into not interfering in the domestic activities.

One of the well-known international terrorist organizations is al-Qaeda which masterminded the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. While many experts agree that al-Qaeda has some degree of centralized leadership, it has become more of a movement since the NATO alliance's invasion of their headquarters in Afghanistan and the US killing of its leader, Osama bin Laden. The past and current leadership attempts to promote an ideology of an international conspiracy to destroy Islam and that Muslim governments like Saudi Arabia are tools of the US. The al-Qaeda leadership strongly encourages their followers to plan and carry out attacks in the US and Europe. The aim is to remove foreign support so that al-Qaeda can destabilize the Middle East and create a government that would adhere to their interpretation of Islam. Given their international scope of operations and decentralized methods of planning, combating them requires international cooperation.

Climate Change

The link between human activity and the average rise in global temperatures is a hotly contested issue in the US but less so around the world. The large body of evidence accumulated over decades of research by an international body of scientists points to a rise in both *greenhouse gas (GHG)* levels and temperature. While the earth has had periods of climate change, our current period coincides with our industrial activities and not with natural trends. The buildup of GHG levels, such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and ozone (O₃), from burning fossil fuels produces a shield that does not allow thermal radiation to escape into the atmosphere. The trapped heat increases both air and ocean temperatures, which in turn produces harmful consequences. The melting of glaciers increase sea levels harming coastal cities and islands. Shifting weather patterns produce increases in catastrophic floods and droughts. Also, as humidity and precipitation patterns change, infectious diseases can spread into new areas.

The reduction of GHGs needs a global commitment since the actions of a small group of countries are unlikely to produce significant change. However, there are short-term economic concerns that make some countries reluctant to cooperate. Reducing GHG levels requires shifting from using fossil fuels to renewable forms of energy and increasing fossil fuel efficiency so that it does not release as much GHGs. The solution, unfortunately, incurs costs. The switch to renewables requires investment in the infrastructure and technologies. Increasing fuel efficiency and reducing GHG emissions can lead to higher prices for large items like automobiles and trucks. Some countries that have large acreages of rainforests, like Brazil, are asked not to cut them down since they absorb CO₂. Brazil, however, can argue that not exploiting the rainforest's timber, minerals, and grazing and farm lands will reduce its ability to economically grow. Therefore, solutions require a balance between costs and benefits to induce global cooperation.

Discussion Question 3

How effective are the global efforts currently in place to address the above issues? Pick one issue area and one agreement in answering this question.

Theories of Conflict and Cooperation

Why do some states cooperate to solve the issues brought up in the last section? Why do some countries find themselves in disputes and why do some of these disputes end in an armed conflict? IR theories help us develop possible answers that can be tested with evidence.

Power Transition Theory

Many IR theories focus on the power of states as a means to explain cooperation or conflict. *Power Transition Theory (PTT)* explains that the international system is hierarchically ordered based on state power. At the top of the hierarchy is the *preponderant power* that loosely governs the international system with the aid of great powers. Today, the US arguably holds the position of a top power and countries like Britain help the US. Together they establish the patterns of international system, a status quo that is mutually beneficial. The *status quo* is a general term that captures such things as the borders of countries, who is and who is not allowed to have nuclear weapons, what is considered a legitimate territorial takeover, just to name a few. The preponderant power and the allied great powers are, by definition, satisfied with the status quo they create.

The other members of the hierarchy can be broken down into two groups: smaller satisfied powers that benefit from the status quo and great, middle, and smaller sized states that are dissatisfied by the status quo. The latter group can choose to fight against the preponderant power and its allies or accept the status quo. An example of one that fights against the status quo is Iran. Iran believes it has the need for nuclear weapons to protect itself against the larger powers and to perhaps influence the Persian Gulf region. Since it is a dissatisfied power, the US and its allies have placed economic sanctions on Iran in an effort to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Central to PTT is what happens when there is a serious challenge to the international status quo by a state that wishes to become the new preponderant power. The theory argues that when two countries achieve approximately equal power, with one being dissatisfied, a major war will occur. This was the case when Germany attempted to become the strongest power in World War I and again in World War II. The power transition point can be peaceful if the new preponderant power is satisfied with the status quo established by the old one. This explains why the US did not fight a war with Britain during the former's rise. The US was satisfied with the order Britain established and Britain was satisfied with the changes the US wished to make.

Balance of Power

Balance of Power Theory's explanation for why some countries go to war or cooperate is also based on relative power. However, the logic and conclusions are different than PTT. Balance of Power Theory assumes that the international system is anarchic since it lacks a set of self-enforcing global institutions. Instead, countries rely on themselves if they wish to be secure in an international system of unequal powers.

The theory argues that as countries grow in power, they will become more aggressive. To deter an aggressive posture and develop international stability and peace, countries balance against the strongest. In a situation where there are two powerful countries, their near equal strength deters aggression by each other. By matching each other's strength, one side is unlikely to attack the other because the likelihood of winning a war becomes more uncertain. If there is no second country that is equally powerful, then countries can form limited and temporary alliances to balance against a larger power. Small countries are unlikely to ally with a large power because, according to the theory, the large one will take advantage of the smaller. The larger power may also seek out alliance members in case the alliance formed against it becomes too large.

The critical component is the limited and temporary nature of the alliances. If countries cannot easily switch alliances to continue the balancing strategy, then one side will become larger than the other. Since largeness leads to aggression, the likelihood of war increases as the alliances within the international system becomes more imbalanced.

Democratic Peace

An interesting observation in search of an explanation is the basis of *Democratic Peace Theory*. The observation is simple: in all the wars between countries, we have not seen one between two democratic states. While the observation is solid, there is debate as to why. It is important to note that most scholars do not believe that democracies are less warlike. The evidence demonstrates that they are as likely to fight a war as an autocracy. They just are not likely to fight another democracy.

One explanation for the democratic peace notes that democracies share *norms of dispute settlement*. Within democracies, disputes are settled through arbiters, like legitimate courts. Abiding by the decisions of an independent ruling body fits the principle of the rule of law norm. If the rules and international institutions were legitimately created by democratically accountable leaders, then the institutions can effectively settle disputes, thereby reducing the likelihood of fighting a war to resolve the dispute.

Another explanation centers on *democratic accountability*. Elected leaders are unlikely to enter into unpopular wars since doing so may lead to their removal from power. The average citizen will need to bear most of the costs of war through death and destruction, reduced security, and economic rationing. They will therefore need to believe that the war is worth the sacrifices. Leaders would need to think carefully before engaging in war, and once initiated, may need to quickly end it. If both countries are democracies, these thoughts are given double attention and

are known to both sides. Accordingly, the likelihood of settling a dispute through a peaceful process increases.

Commercial Liberal Peace

The world's level of *economic interdependence* produces two important factors that helps us explain why some countries engage in war and others do not. First, greater interdependence increases the economic costs of war. You are unlikely to want to have an armed dispute with a close trading and investment partner because stopping the imports and exports of products, services, and primary resources would harm your economy and may diminish your ability to fight the war effectively. In addition, economic interdependence helps in getting countries to stop engaging in undesirable actions. This is done through limiting or ending economic transactions, through the use of sanctions, until the undesirable activity ends. The use of a sanction is only effective if the target country is interrelated with the world economy.

Second, greater economic interdependence and the development of effective global economic institutions go hand in hand. Wars sometimes occur due to economic disputes. One state can take actions that may harm the economies of others. Without joint institutions, the disputing parties may not be able to peacefully resolve the problem because no independent and capable agency is in place to assist. Take, for example, the inability to pay back a foreign debt. In the past, when one country could not pay back its debt to another, and the debt was large enough to harm the banking system of the lending country, the lending country would militarily invade and occupy the borrowing country.

This occurred in 1861 when France removed the Mexican government of President Benito Juárez and installed a monarchy under Emperor Maximilian over Mexico's inability to pay back its debts. The action was supported by both the British and Spanish governments because Mexico also owed them money and France would collect their debts as well. It took an armed revolt to remove the French from the country. However, if we fast-forward to the early 1980s, we see a different outcome to a similar dispute. Mexico, again, was not able to pay back its foreign debt. Instead of invasion and occupation to recover the loans, countries worked with international economic organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund, to negotiate how Mexico could restructure its finances and be able to pay back its loans.

Constructivism

Our last explanation for conflict and cooperation examines how countries view themselves, other countries, and the international system. *Constructivists* question the central role of material power in explaining international relations. They instead argue that ideas, identity, and social interactions provide better explanations. The theory's name comes out of the assumption that all interactions are socially constructed and based on historical patterns of behavior. Countries develop a perceived identity of other countries. Therefore, as countries interact, they develop ideas regarding each other and the system as a whole. Some countries are identified with the idea of peaceful resolution, working through international institutions, and developing friendships. Others are identified as more aggressive towards some countries due to historical interactions,

while passive with others. In sum, if you understand the past social interactions of a specific set of countries, you will then understand how they will treat each other today and into the future.

Discussion Question 4

What explains specific cases of cooperation or conflict? Use one theory to explain what you discovered in Discussion Question 3.



The Taiwan Issue. Source: Bloomberg
https://youtu.be/dliWGj_cs8k

Discussion Question 5

After viewing the video, do you think that war between China and the US is likely? Use one IR theory to support your answer.

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