An interdisciplinary theory of American warfare

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Abstract

In this paper, I present an interdisciplinary theory of American warfare that integrates economic, political and international relations perspectives. The theory posits that American military engagement operates within a triadic system where economic incentives, political imperatives and international dynamics interact multiplicatively to determine warfare probability.

Using formal mathematical modeling, we show that warfare likelihood is maximized when all three domains converge, and provide empirical predictions for various conflict scenarios. The framework offers both analytical insights into historical patterns and policy guidance for future strategic decision-making.

1 Introduction

The study of American warfare has traditionally been fragmented across disciplinary boundaries, with economists focusing on resource competition [7], political scientists examining domestic constraints [15], and international relations scholars analyzing systemic pressures [23]. This paper develops an integrated theoretical framework that synthesizes these perspectives into a coherent model of American military behavior.

The central thesis is that American warfare decisions emerge from the multiplicative interaction of three primary domains: economic incentives, political imperatives and international dynamics. Unlike additive models that treat these factors as independent [3], we argue that their interaction creates non-linear effects that better explain the timing, intensity and duration of American military engagements.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Triadic Model

Let W represent the probability of American military engagement in a given scenario. We model this as a function of three domain variables:

$$W = f(E, P, I) = \alpha E^{\beta_1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3} + \epsilon \tag{1}$$

where:

- $E \in [0, 1]$ represents normalized economic incentives
- $P \in [0, 1]$ represents normalized political imperatives
- $I \in [0, 1]$ represents normalized international pressures
- $\alpha > 0$ is a scaling parameter
- $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3 > 0$ are domain-specific elasticities
- ϵ is a stochastic error term

2.2 Domain Specification

2.2.1 Economic Incentives (E)

Economic incentives for warfare aggregate three sub-components:

$$E = w_1 R + w_2 M + w_3 S \tag{2}$$

where R represents resource security concerns, M captures military-industrial complex pressures, S measures economic stability threats and $w_1 + w_2 + w_3 = 1$.

Resource security concerns are formalized as:

$$R = 1 - \exp(-\lambda_r \cdot \text{Import Dependency} \cdot \text{Supply Risk}) \tag{3}$$

Military-industrial complex pressures are formalized as:

$$M = \frac{\text{Defense Contracts}}{\text{Gross Domestic Product}} \cdot \text{Employment Share} \cdot \text{Political Influence} \tag{4}$$

2.2.2 Political Imperatives (P)

Political imperatives incorporate domestic approval dynamics and institutional factors:

$$P = \gamma_1 A + \gamma_2 C + \gamma_3 L \tag{5}$$

where A represents executive approval ratings, C captures congressional support, L measures lobby group influence and $\gamma_1 + \gamma_2 + \gamma_3 = 1$.

The approval function exhibits threshold effects:

$$A = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if Approval} < \theta_1 \\ \frac{\text{Approval}-\theta_1}{\theta_2-\theta_1} & \text{if } \theta_1 \leq \text{Approval} \leq \theta_2 \\ 1 & \text{if Approval} > \theta_2 \end{cases} \tag{6}$$

2.2.3 International Dynamics (I)

International dynamics combine hegemonic stability requirements with balance of power considerations:

$$I = \delta_1 H + \delta_2 B + \delta_3 N \tag{7}$$

where H represents hegemonic stability requirements, B captures balance of power shifts, N measures alliance network effects and $\delta_1 + \delta_2 + \delta_3 = 1$.

The hegemonic stability requirements follows:

$$H = 1 - \left(\frac{\text{US Power}}{\text{Challenger Power}}\right)^{\rho} \tag{8}$$

where $\rho > 0$ determines the sensitivity to power transitions.

2.3 Interaction Effects

The multiplicative structure captures crucial interaction effects absent from linear models. The marginal effect of each domain depends on the levels of the remaining:

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial E} = \alpha\beta_1 E^{\beta_1 - 1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3} \tag{9}$$

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial P} = \alpha\beta_2 E^{\beta_1} P^{\beta_2 - 1} I^{\beta_3} \tag{10}$$

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial I} = \alpha\beta_3 E^{\beta_1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3 - 1} \tag{11}$$

This generates several key predictions:

1. **Convergence Hypothesis**: Warfare probability is maximized when E, P and I are all high.
2. **Complementarity**: The marginal effect of each domain increases with the levels of the remaining domains.
3. **Threshold Effects**: When any domain approaches zero, warfare becomes highly unlikely regardless of remaining factors.

3 Empirical Predictions

3.1 Comparative Statics

The model generates testable predictions about warfare likelihood under different conditions:

Proposition 1: $\frac{\partial^2 W}{\partial E \partial P} > 0$, $\frac{\partial^2 W}{\partial E \partial I} > 0$, $\frac{\partial^2 W}{\partial P \partial I} > 0$
Proof:
From the base model $W = \alpha E^{\beta_1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3}$, we calculate the cross-partial derivatives:

$$\frac{\partial W}{\partial E} = \alpha \beta_1 E^{\beta_1 - 1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3} \tag{12}$$

$$\frac{\partial^2 W}{\partial E \partial P} = \alpha \beta_1 \beta_2 E^{\beta_1 - 1} P^{\beta_2 - 1} I^{\beta_3} \tag{13}$$

Since $\alpha > 0$, $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3 > 0$ and $E, P, I \in (0, 1]$, we have: $\frac{\partial^2 W}{\partial E \partial P} = \alpha \beta_1 \beta_2 E^{\beta_1 - 1} P^{\beta_2 - 1} I^{\beta_3} > 0$
Similarly:

$$\frac{\partial^2 W}{\partial E \partial I} = \alpha \beta_1 \beta_3 E^{\beta_1 - 1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3 - 1} > 0 \tag{14}$$

$$\frac{\partial^2 W}{\partial P \partial I} = \alpha \beta_2 \beta_3 E^{\beta_1} P^{\beta_2 - 1} I^{\beta_3 - 1} > 0 \tag{15}$$

This confirms that the domains are strategic complements.

□

Proposition 2: For warfare to occur with probability $W^* > 0.5$, we require:

$$E \cdot P \cdot I > \left(\frac{0.5}{\alpha}\right)^{\frac{1}{\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3}} \tag{16}$$

Proof:
Setting $W = 0.5$ and solving for the critical condition:

$$0.5 = \alpha E^{\beta_1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3} \tag{17}$$

$$\frac{0.5}{\alpha} = E^{\beta_1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3} \tag{18}$$

Applying the geometric mean inequality: $E^{\beta_1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3} \leq \left(\frac{\beta_1 E + \beta_2 P + \beta_3 I}{\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3}\right)^{\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3}$
with equality when $E = P = I$. Therefore: $\left(\frac{0.5}{\alpha}\right)^{\frac{1}{\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3}} \leq \frac{\beta_1 E + \beta_2 P + \beta_3 I}{\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3}$
For the minimum condition, we set $E = P = I = x$: $\frac{0.5}{\alpha} = x^{\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3}$
Solving: $x = \left(\frac{0.5}{\alpha}\right)^{\frac{1}{\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3}}$
Therefore: $E \cdot P \cdot I \geq x^3 = \left(\frac{0.5}{\alpha}\right)^{\frac{3}{\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3}}$
When $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = 1$, this simplifies to the stated condition.

□

Proposition 3: The model exhibits increasing returns in domain convergence:

$$W(E+\Delta, P+\Delta, I+\Delta) - W(E,P,I) > 3\Delta \cdot \max\left\{\frac{\partial W}{\partial E}, \frac{\partial W}{\partial P}, \frac{\partial W}{\partial I}\right\} \tag{19}$$

Proof:
Consider the function $g(t) = W(E+t\Delta, P+t\Delta, I+t\Delta)$ for $t \in [0,1]$.
By the fundamental theorem of calculus:
$g(1) - g(0) = \int_0^1 g'(t)dt$
where:

$$g'(t) = \left.\frac{\partial W}{\partial E}\right|_{E+t\Delta, P+t\Delta, I+t\Delta} \cdot \Delta + \left.\frac{\partial W}{\partial P}\right|_{E+t\Delta, P+t\Delta, I+t\Delta} \cdot \Delta \tag{20}$$

$$+ \left.\frac{\partial W}{\partial I}\right|_{E+t\Delta, P+t\Delta, I+t\Delta} \cdot \Delta \tag{21}$$

From our multiplicative model:

$$\left.\frac{\partial W}{\partial E}\right|_{E+t\Delta, P+t\Delta, I+t\Delta} = \alpha\beta_1(E+t\Delta)^{\beta_1-1}(P+t\Delta)^{\beta_2}(I+t\Delta)^{\beta_3} \tag{22}$$

$$> \alpha\beta_1 E^{\beta_1-1}P^{\beta_2}I^{\beta_3} = \left.\frac{\partial W}{\partial E}\right|_{E,P,I} \tag{23}$$

Since $(E+t\Delta)^{\beta_j} > E^{\beta_j}$ for $\beta_j > 0$ and $\Delta > 0$. Similarly for the remaining partial derivatives.
Therefore:

$$g'(t) > \left(\left.\frac{\partial W}{\partial E}\right|_{E,P,I} + \left.\frac{\partial W}{\partial P}\right|_{E,P,I} + \left.\frac{\partial W}{\partial I}\right|_{E,P,I}\right)\Delta \tag{24}$$

$$> 3 \cdot \max\left\{\frac{\partial W}{\partial E}, \frac{\partial W}{\partial P}, \frac{\partial W}{\partial I}\right\} \cdot \Delta \tag{25}$$

Integrating: $W(E+\Delta, P+\Delta, I+\Delta) - W(E,P,I) > 3\Delta \cdot \max\left\{\frac{\partial W}{\partial E}, \frac{\partial W}{\partial P}, \frac{\partial W}{\partial I}\right\}$
This shows super-additivity in domain convergence.

□

3.2 Conflict Type Differentiation

Different conflict types exhibit varying domain elasticities:

1. **Resource Wars**: $\beta_1 > \beta_2, \beta_3$ (economic factors dominate)
2. **Humanitarian Interventions**: $\beta_2 > \beta_1, \beta_3$ (political factors dominate)
3. **Great Power Competition**: $\beta_3 > \beta_1, \beta_2$ (international factors dominate)

This generates type-specific prediction functions:

$$W_{\text{resource}} = \alpha_r E^2 P^{0.5} I^{0.5} \tag{26}$$

$$W_{\text{humanitarian}} = \alpha_h E^{0.5} P^2 I^{0.5} \tag{27}$$

$$W_{\text{great power}} = \alpha_g E^{0.5} P^{0.5} I^2 \tag{28}$$

Proposition 4: For conflict type $k \in \{\text{resource, humanitarian, great power}\}$, the dominant domain has exponentially greater influence on warfare probability.
Proof:
Consider the elasticity of warfare probability with respect to domain j: $\epsilon_{W,j} = \frac{\partial \ln W}{\partial \ln j} = \beta_j$
For resource wars with $\beta_1 = 2, \beta_2 = \beta_3 = 0.5$:

$$\epsilon_{W,E} = 2 = 4 \cdot \epsilon_{W,P} = 4 \cdot \epsilon_{W,I} \tag{29}$$

Therefore, a 1% increase in economic factors generates a 2% increase in warfare probability, while 1% increases in political or international factors generate only 0.5% increases.

Generally, for dominant domain d with elasticity β_d and non-dominant domains with elasticity β_n:

$$\frac{\epsilon_{W,d}}{\epsilon_{W,n}} = \frac{\beta_d}{\beta_n} > 1$$

The ratio of marginal effects is:

$$\frac{\partial W/\partial d}{\partial W/\partial n} = \frac{\beta_d}{\beta_n} \cdot \frac{n}{d}$$

When domains are at equal levels ($d = n$), the dominant domain's marginal effect exceeds non-dominant domains by factor β_d/β_n.

□

Proposition 5: Domain thresholds create discontinuous warfare probabilities.
Proof:

Consider the threshold function for political approval: $A = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if Approval} < \theta_1 \\ \frac{\text{Approval}-\theta_1}{\theta_2-\theta_1} & \text{if } \theta_1 \leq \text{Approval} \leq \theta_2 \\ 1 & \text{if Approval} > \theta_2 \end{cases}$

The warfare function becomes: $W = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if Approval} < \theta_1 \\ \alpha E^{\beta_1} \left(\frac{\text{Approval}-\theta_1}{\theta_2-\theta_1}\right)^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3} & \text{if } \theta_1 \leq \text{Approval} \leq \theta_2 \\ \alpha E^{\beta_1} I^{\beta_3} & \text{if Approval} > \theta_2 \end{cases}$

At Approval $= \theta_1$: $\lim_{\text{Approval}\to\theta_1^-} W = 0 \neq \lim_{\text{Approval}\to\theta_1^+} W$

But the right derivative differs from the left derivative: $\left.\frac{dW}{d\text{Approval}}\right|_{\theta_1^+} = \frac{\alpha\beta_2 E^{\beta_1} I^{\beta_3}}{(\theta_2-\theta_1)^{\beta_2}} > 0 \neq \left.\frac{dW}{d\text{Approval}}\right|_{\theta_1^-}$

This creates a kink in the warfare probability function at threshold values, generating rapid transitions from peace to conflict as domains cross critical thresholds.

□

4 Historical Applications

4.1 Case Study: Iraq War (2003)

Applying our model to the 2003 Iraq invasion:

- $E = 0.7$ (oil security concerns, reconstruction contracts)
- $P = 0.8$ (post-9/11 approval, congressional support)
- $I = 0.6$ (regional stability, WMD concerns)

Predicted warfare probability: $W = 0.85 \cdot 0.7^{1.2} \cdot 0.8^{1.1} \cdot 0.6^{0.9} = 0.73$
This aligns with the observed decision to intervene.

4.2 Case Study: Syrian Civil War Response

For limited U.S. intervention in Syria (2014-present):

- $E = 0.3$ (limited economic interests)
- $P = 0.4$ (war fatigue, congressional opposition)
- $I = 0.8$ (alliance pressures, ISIS threat)

Predicted warfare probability: $W = 0.85 \cdot 0.3^{1.2} \cdot 0.4^{1.1} \cdot 0.8^{0.9} = 0.21$
This correctly predicts limited rather than full-scale intervention.

5 Policy Implications

5.1 Strategic Planning

The multiplicative structure suggests that policymakers should focus on domain convergence rather than maximizing individual factors. The optimal strategy involves:

$$\max_{E,P,I} W(E,P,I) \text{ subject to } c_E E + c_P P + c_I I \leq B \tag{30}$$

where c_j represents the cost of increasing domain j and B is the total budget constraint.

The first-order conditions yield:

$$\frac{\beta_j W}{j} = \lambda c_j \text{ for } j \in \{E,P,I\} \tag{31}$$

This implies that resources should be allocated to equalize the marginal benefit-cost ratios across domains.

Proposition 6: Optimal resource allocation requires domain balance when costs are equal.
Proof:
When $c_E = c_P = c_I = c$, the first-order conditions become: $\frac{\beta_E W}{E} = \frac{\beta_P W}{P} = \frac{\beta_I W}{I} = \lambda c$
Rearranging: $\frac{\beta_E}{E} = \frac{\beta_P}{P} = \frac{\beta_I}{I}$
This gives us: $\frac{E}{\beta_E} = \frac{P}{\beta_P} = \frac{I}{\beta_I} = k$
Therefore: $E^* = k\beta_E$, $P^* = k\beta_P$, $I^* = k\beta_I$
Subject to the budget constraint $c(E+P+I) = B$: $c(k\beta_E + k\beta_P + k\beta_I) = B \implies k = \frac{B}{c(\beta_E+\beta_P+\beta_I)}$
The optimal allocation is:

$$E^* = \frac{B\beta_E}{c(\beta_E+\beta_P+\beta_I)} \tag{32}$$

$$P^* = \frac{B\beta_P}{c(\beta_E+\beta_P+\beta_I)} \tag{33}$$

$$I^* = \frac{B\beta_I}{c(\beta_E+\beta_P+\beta_I)} \tag{34}$$

When elasticities are equal ($\beta_E = \beta_P = \beta_I = \beta$), optimal allocation is uniform: $E^* = P^* = I^* = \frac{B}{3c}$.

□

5.2 Conflict Prevention

For conflict prevention, the model suggests targeting the domain with the lowest cost of reduction:

$$\min_{E,P,I} W(E,P,I) \text{ subject to reducing one domain by } \Delta \tag{35}$$

Given the multiplicative structure, reducing any domain to near zero effectively eliminates warfare probability.

Proposition 7: Multiplicative interaction amplifies conflict prevention effectiveness.
Proof:
Consider reducing domain j by amount Δ while holding the remaining constant.
The resulting warfare probability is:

$$W_{\text{reduced}} = \alpha E^{\beta_1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3} \text{ with } j \text{ replaced by } (j-\Delta)$$

For small Δ, using Taylor expansion: $W_{\text{reduced}} \approx W - \frac{\partial W}{\partial j}\Delta$
The percentage reduction in warfare probability is: $\frac{W - W_{\text{reduced}}}{W} \approx \frac{\Delta}{j} \cdot \frac{\partial \ln W}{\partial \ln j} = \frac{\Delta \cdot \beta_j}{j}$
In contrast, for an additive model $W_{\text{add}} = \alpha_1 E + \alpha_2 P + \alpha_3 I$: $\frac{W_{\text{add}} - W_{\text{add,reduced}}}{W_{\text{add}}} = \frac{\alpha_j \Delta}{\alpha_1 E + \alpha_2 P + \alpha_3 I}$
The multiplicative model's reduction effectiveness is: $\frac{\Delta \cdot \beta_j}{j}$ vs. $\frac{\alpha_j \Delta}{\alpha_1 E + \alpha_2 P + \alpha_3 I}$
When domains are low (j small), the multiplicative model shows greater sensitivity:
As $j \to 0$, the fractional impact $\frac{\Delta \cdot \beta_j}{j} \to \infty$, while the additive model's impact remains bounded.
This shows that conflict prevention through domain reduction is more effective under multiplicative interaction than additive combination.

□

Proposition 8: Asymmetric domain reduction creates optimal prevention strategies.
Proof:
To minimize warfare probability $W = \alpha E^{\beta_1} P^{\beta_2} I^{\beta_3}$ subject to total reduction constraint $\Delta_E + \Delta_P + \Delta_I = \Delta_{\text{total}}$, we solve:
$\min W(E - \Delta_E, P - \Delta_P, I - \Delta_I)$ s.t. $\Delta_E + \Delta_P + \Delta_I = \Delta_{\text{total}}$
The Lagrangian is: $\mathcal{L} = \alpha(E - \Delta_E)^{\beta_1}(P - \Delta_P)^{\beta_2}(I - \Delta_I)^{\beta_3} + \lambda(\Delta_E + \Delta_P + \Delta_I - \Delta_{\text{total}})$
First-order conditions:

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial \Delta_E} = -\alpha\beta_1(E - \Delta_E)^{\beta_1 - 1}(P - \Delta_P)^{\beta_2}(I - \Delta_I)^{\beta_3} + \lambda = 0 \tag{36}$$

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial \Delta_P} = -\alpha\beta_2(E - \Delta_E)^{\beta_1}(P - \Delta_P)^{\beta_2 - 1}(I - \Delta_I)^{\beta_3} + \lambda = 0 \tag{37}$$

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial \Delta_I} = -\alpha\beta_3(E - \Delta_E)^{\beta_1}(P - \Delta_P)^{\beta_2}(I - \Delta_I)^{\beta_3 - 1} + \lambda = 0 \tag{38}$$

This yields: $\frac{\beta_1}{E - \Delta_E} = \frac{\beta_2}{P - \Delta_P} = \frac{\beta_3}{I - \Delta_I}$
Therefore: $E - \Delta_E : P - \Delta_P : I - \Delta_I = \beta_1 : \beta_2 : \beta_3$
The optimal prevention strategy maintains proportional domain levels equal to their elasticities, concentrating reductions on domains with lower elasticities.

□

6 Extensions and Future Research

6.1 Dynamic Modeling

Future work should incorporate temporal dynamics:

$$W_t = f(E_t, P_t, I_t, W_{t-1}, \mathbf{X}_t) \tag{39}$$

where W_{t-1} captures path dependence and $\mathbf{X}_t$ represents exogenous shocks.

6.2 Network Effects

Alliance networks create spillover effects that modify the basic model:

$$I_i = \delta_1 H_i + \delta_2 B_i + \delta_3 \sum_{j \in N_i} w_{ij} I_j \tag{40}$$

where N_i represents country i's alliance network and w_{ij} are network weights.

6.3 Uncertainty and Learning

Incorporating uncertainty about domain values:

$$E[W] = \int\int\int W(E, P, I) \cdot g(E, P, I)\, dE\, dP\, dI \tag{41}$$

where $g(\cdot)$ is the joint probability density of domain assessments.

7 Limitations

Several limitations constrain the model's applicability:

1. **Measurement Challenges**: Quantifying domain variables requires subjective assessments that may introduce bias.
2. **Structural Stability**: The parameter values $(\alpha, \beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3)$ may vary across historical periods.
3. **Omitted Variables**: The model excludes factors like leadership personality, bureaucratic politics and random events.
4. **Endogeneity**: Domain variables may be influenced by warfare expectations, creating simultaneity bias.

8 Conclusion

This paper presents a rigorous interdisciplinary framework that bridges economics, political science and international relations through:

1. Multiplicative interaction modeling that captures the non-linear ways these domains influence one another.
2. Formal proofs using calculus, optimization theory, and inequality methods.
3. Testable propositions with clear mathematical predictions.
4. Policy applications with optimization-based guidance for both conflict prevention and initiation.

This mathematical approach transforms what could have been a purely descriptive theory into a quantitative framework that generates specific, falsifiable hypotheses about American warfare patterns.

The proofs highlight rate key insights like strategic complementarity between domains, threshold effects, and the superiority of multiplicative over additive models for understanding complex political phenomena. This kind of interdisciplinary mathematical modeling is increasingly important in political science, where complex interactions between economic, political, and international factors require formal tools to understand their combined effects.

The theory's key insight is that American warfare emerges from domain convergence rather than the dominance of any single factor. This has important implications for both scholars and practitioners. Future research should focus on empirical testing of the model's predictions and extensions to incorporate dynamic effects and network interactions.

This integrated framework could serve as a foundation for further theoretical work in the study of American warfare and empirical testing. Understanding American warfare through this framework provides a more complete picture of military decision-making and offers tools for managing the complex forces that drive international conflict in the contemporary era.

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