

# Interstate war

Francisco Villamil

War, peace, and political violence

UC3M, Fall 2023

# Introduction

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  - Invasion

Is this an inter-state war?

# FINANCIAL TIMES

FRIDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2022

INTERNATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

USA \$2.50 Canada C\$3.00

This reckless war could ultimately destabilise Russia itself — FT VIEW, PAGE 16

## Putin unleashes Ukraine assault

- World leaders unite to condemn Europe's biggest challenge in 80 years
- Scores of casualties reported in fierce fighting across the country
- Gas prices soar and benchmark Brent crude oil tops \$100 threshold



REUTERS/RIA Novosti

Is this an inter-state war?

## Azerbaijan and Armenia on the Brink of War After Deadly Clashes

Dozens are reportedly injured in the worst round of violence between the two countries in years.

BY DAN HAVERTY | SEPTEMBER 28, 2020, 6:14 AM



FT, September 2020.

# Is this an inter-state war?

## China holds naval exercises in Taiwan Strait

Live-fire drills send warning to Taipei over greater independence and closer US ties



Chinese warships and fighter jets take part in a military display in the South China Sea on April 12 © Reuters

Charles Clover in Beijing, Edward White in Taipei and Ben Bland in Hong Kong APRIL 18  
2018



FT, April 2018.

# Why is important to distinguish wars from ‘non-wars’?

- Because we want to know how it relates to other situations, e.g.
  - when do disputes escalate?
  - when do civil wars lead to an interstate conflict?
  - how frequent is unilateral aggression?

# Why is important to distinguish wars from ‘non-wars’?

- Because we want to know how it relates to other situations, e.g.
  - when do disputes escalate?
  - when do civil wars lead to an interstate conflict?
  - how frequent is unilateral aggression?
- This has to do with the understanding of violence or aggression as a *method* (not an end in itself) substituting for something else

## Inter-state wars

- Sustained, military clash between two or more countries  
→ ≠ unilateral aggression, ≠ disputes

# Inter-state wars

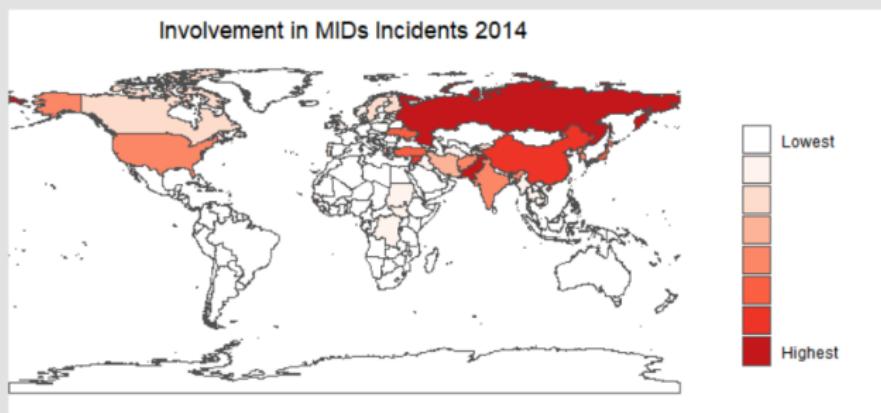
- Sustained, military clash between two or more countries
  - ≠ unilateral aggression, ≠ disputes
- How do we measure them?

We usually employ intensity thresholds

- We want to separate wars from minor clashes or skirmishes (e.g. the Himalaya battles between China and India in 2020)
- A war can also be short: the Six-Day War (Israel & Egypt) in 1967 killed +20,000



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## Recent News

- [New COW Co-Directors April 18, 2022](#)
- [NMC 6.0 Data Available July 22, 2021](#)
- [Dyadic MID 4.02 Data Available June 20, 2021](#)
- [Dyadic MID 4.01 Data Available February 21, 2021](#)
- [MID 5.0 Data and Materials Available November 9, 2020](#)

[More News...](#)

## About the Correlates of War Project

Welcome to the Correlates of War (COW) project homepage. COW seeks to facilitate the collection,

# Measuring interstate war

- Coding wars in the Correlates of War project  
(<https://correlatesofwar.org/>)
- “sustained combat, involving organized armed forces, resulting in a minimum of 1,000 battle-related fatalities (later specified as 1,000 battle-related fatalities within a twelve month period)”
- Differentiating interstate wars from other types of wars (extra-state, intra-state, non-state)

# Correlates of War data project

- COW War Data, 1816 – 2007
- Militarized Interstate Disputes
- National Material Capabilities
- Militarized Interstate Dispute Locations
- Others
  - Alliances, Contiguity, Territorial change, Defense Cooperation Agreement, etc

# Understanding war

- Why do wars break out?

# Understanding war

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- (We've seen the main IR theories, but neither they only cover wars nor wars are only explained by IR)

# Understanding war



Jacques Callot's *Les Grandes Misères de la guerre* (1633)

# Understanding war

- “War is the continuation of politics by other means”



Carl von Clausewitz  
(*On war*, 1832)

# Understanding war

- “War is the continuation of politics by other means”
- Wars as a rational human phenomenon, against previous Enlightenment view of war as a deviation
  - Even in the 20th century, some still see it that way
- Part of the realist tradition: Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, etc



Carl von Clausewitz  
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# Understanding war

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( $\neq$  termination, consequences, conduct of war ...)
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- IR perspectives: realism, liberalism, constructivism
- Main realist theories:
  - **Balance of power works:** states pursue it internationally, (small) wars avoid larger ones, it deters aggression, etc
  - **International hegemony:** no, alliances are actually war-prone – given international anarchy, we need a Leviathan  
(be careful when hegemony switches, though)

# Liberal theories

## Liberal theories: the democratic peace

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  - Kant already suggested it
- Even if the regularity exists, no agreement on the *why*
  - Democratic culture is more peaceful, democratic leaders are constrained by public opinion... (second image explanations)
  - Common interests of democracies, historical learning process (system-level)

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- Other theories point to the effects of economic prosperity
- Some say that the democratic peace is not because democracy itself, but because of economic interdependences between wealthy countries (which happen to be democracies)

Forbes

## Why Putin Won't Invade Ukraine

Loren Thompson Senior Contributor ©

*I write about national security, especially its business dimensions.*

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Dec 6, 2021, 10:33am EST

**Inevitable sanctions.** NATO isn't likely to send troops to counter a Russian invasion of Ukraine, but its members would impose the mother of all sanction regimes on Moscow. Russia is already subject to U.S. **sanctions** for annexing Crimea, and legislation is pending in the Senate to block operations of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany.

**Domestic opposition.** Russia has reverted to authoritarianism under Putin, but it is still far from being the totalitarian state of its Stalinist past. Putin has to worry about the domestic response to casualties in a Ukrainian war, and knowing this Kyiv (with Western assistance) would work hard to maximize Russian losses in any military campaign.

## Criticizing liberal theories

- These theories have also been challenged, for example:
  - Dyadic effects not taken into account: one side of the trading relationship could use war to increase their advantage
  - Asymmetry can lead to exploitation (Marxists & realists)
- Most evidence suggests conflict-decreasing effect

# Constructivism

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# Constructivism

- It's not only about material stuff, you have to pay attention to **ideology** (broadly defined)
- Leaders' self-perceived position and goals, identities, etc are socially constructed
- 'Anarchy is what states make of it' (Alexander Wendt)
- Importance of **norms**

# Constructivism



President of Russia

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## Article by Vladimir Putin "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians"

July 12, 2021   17:00

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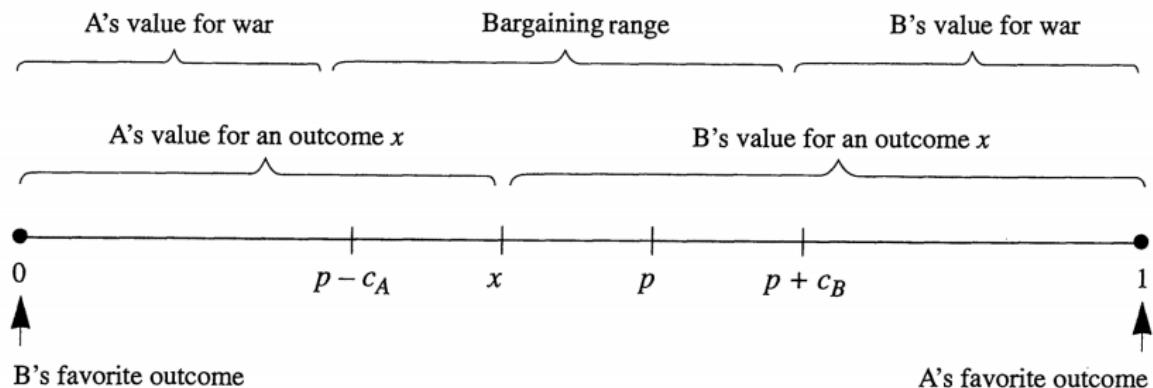
During the recent Direct Line, when I was asked about Russian-Ukrainian relations, I said that Russians and Ukrainians were one people – a single whole. These words were not driven by some short-term considerations or prompted by the current political context. It is what I have said on numerous occasions and what I firmly believe. I therefore feel it necessary to explain my position in detail and share my assessments of today's situation.

## Rationalist theories of war

- If we think of states as unitary rational actors, war is actually not rational, your theories do not have microfoundations

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- If we think of states as unitary rational actors, war is actually not rational, your theories do not have microfoundations



**FIGURE 1.** *The bargaining range*

## Bargaining model of war

A ————— B

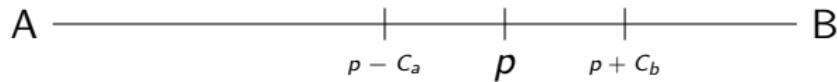
- Imagine A and B are fighting over control of a territory, and A is a bit stronger than B (and both know this)

## Bargaining model of war



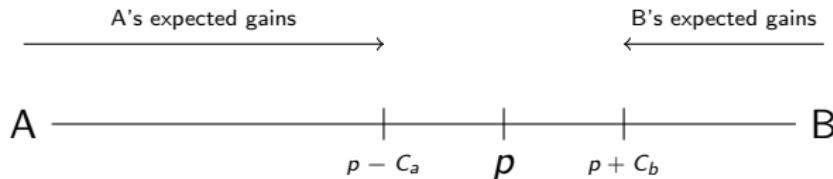
- $p$  is what they expect if they fight

## Bargaining model of war



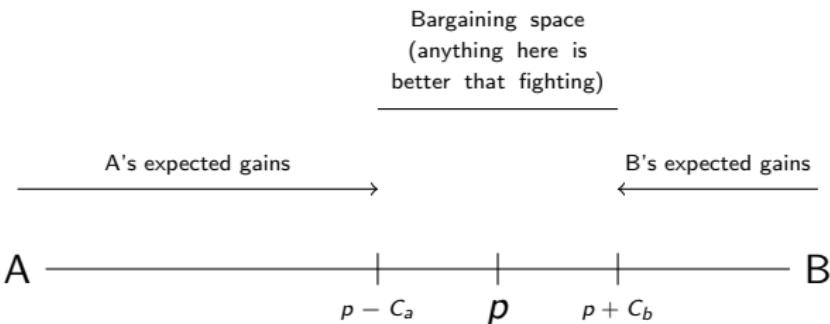
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# Bargaining model of war



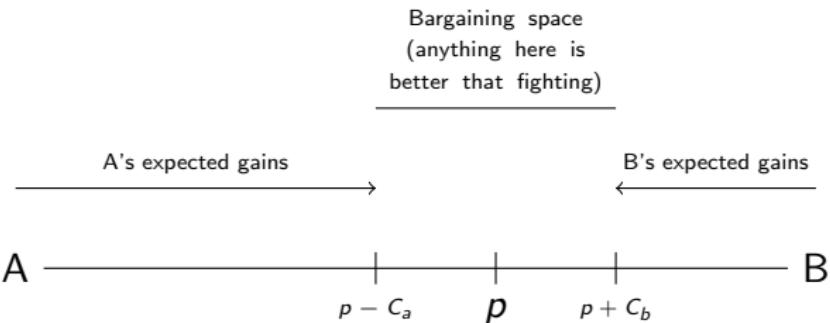
- But war has a cost, so they would end up with a bit less

# Bargaining model of war



- Therefore, under rational conditions, they would be better off if they negotiate before fighting

# Bargaining model of war



- This approach should be able to explain why there was never a nuclear war: the cost is just too high, even taking into account uncertainties

# Bargaining model of war

**War of attrition: How Russia's invasion has reached stalemate**

Area under Russian control



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- Why are states (or opposing parties) unable to reach a peaceful settlement before war? Three possibilities:
- Private information
  - States do not have full information regarding the balance of power (like a Poker game, and war is like showing your cards)

## Rationalist theories of war

- Why are states (or opposing parties) unable to reach a peaceful settlement before war? Three possibilities:
- Commitment problems
  - When any kind of deal is unsustainable because of the incentive structure (e.g. Prisoner's dilemma), as when a declining powerful state has a dispute with an emerging new power

## Rationalist theories of war

- Why are states (or opposing parties) unable to reach a peaceful settlement before war? Three possibilities:
  - Indivisible issues
    - If we are fighting for a piece of land or commercial rights, maybe we can split it up, but what if we are fighting for something sacred, e.g. control of Jerusalem?

## Two problems

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## Two problems

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- Within a state, there might be internal tensions (i.e. leaders are playing two games, one domestically and another one internationally)
  - For instance, war could be beneficial to a leader that wants to avoid being seen capitulating
- Maybe rationality does not always apply
  - Psychological biases, bounded rationality, etc

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- A general theory of war is probably impossible: even if we account for system-level and state-level factors, individual characteristics and the decision-making process are hard to capture (especially empirically)
- Also, some people say that the historical context matter when comparing wars

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- Democracies and capitalist societies rarely fight each other
- Many wars are fought among contiguous states over territorial disputes (which doesn't mean that neighbors usually fight each other)
- Asymmetry does not usually lead to war, and wars are usually fought between strategic rivals

# Interstate war in context

	Target: State	Target: Non-State
Perpetrator: State	Interstate war	State repression Genocide Ethnic cleansing
Perpetrator: Non-State	Mass protests (rebellion) Military coup Political assassination* Civil War Terrorism (Organized crime)	Intercommunal violence*

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- **Hierarchy**



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- **Instrumentality**

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# Connecting logics

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- **Escalation**

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# Connecting logics

- **Hierarchy**

→

- **Instrumentality**

→

- **Escalation**

→

- **Substitution**

→

# Friday seminar



LETTER FROM TAIWAN

## A DANGEROUS GAME OVER TAIWAN

*For decades, China has coveted its island neighbor. Is Xi Jinping ready to seize it?*

By Dexter Filkins

November 14, 2022