Module 13

**Transition: From international war to civil war**

Peaceful end of Cold War and absence of great power war appears to prompting a change in locus of war: from interstate to civil war

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Violence, death, and genocide from these conflicts of horrific scale, caused by territorial disputes over sovereignty

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Great War of Africa, DRC, 1998-, 5+ million dead

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Rwanda, 1994, 800,000 dead

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Bosnia, 1992-1995, 100,000 dead

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Liberian civil wars, 200,000(?) dead

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Today’s class: what role for the United States in influencing the course of these conflicts?

**What changes with the end of the Cold War?**

Post 1964: Cold War moves out of Europe and into periphery (Vietnam)

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Both United States and Soviet Union support many autocratic regimes with foreign aid and military transfers

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End of Cold War brings end of American and Soviet support for these regimes

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Absence of foreign support and diminished expectation of great power intervention creates local incentives to challenge their rule

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Internal collapse of Soviet Union, prompted in part by nationalism, creates many new states with mixed ethnic composition

**Why does war occur?**

Bargaining model of war

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An assumption: all wars costly

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A puzzle: if all wars costly, then why can’t parties reach some peace settlement that would leave all participants better off than fighting?

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Explanations for why wars occur should focus on why states fail to reach and/or sustain this mutually beneficial settlement

**Bargaining failures and war**

Two key explanations for bargaining failure to reach a political settlement

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Confidential information coupled with incentives to misrepresent lead one side to offer insufficient concessions; other side opts to try and secure greater division of issue through war (one side overestimates their capabilities, too greedy)

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Commitment problem: difficulties associated with contracting over time, willingness to abide by terms, shifts in power, resolve

**The commitment problem**

Commitment problem: inability of side with rising power to promise or commit to abide by the terms of any settlement indefinitely in the future

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Organizations fight if think adversary will demand (in the future) revisions to terms of any pre-conflict settlement

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Fight rather than face a future of repeated concessions through extortion

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Concern that growing power will enable such demands for revision

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Often due to shifts in distribution of military power

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Creates expectations that agreement not self-enforcing, more powerful will demand more concessions in the

future

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Example: the challenge to securing peace in 2020 while the side that is growing weaker worries about what concessions it might have to make in 2025

**Sources of the commitment problem in civil war (I)**

Shifts in the internal distribution of political or military power

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Potential sources of shift: withdrawal of support from external patron, democratization, emergence of social movement or political party (Communism) (iraq)

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Examples

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American and Soviet withdrawal after Cold War

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US withdrawal from Iraq (demographic imbalances in democracy, Sunni v. Shi’ia)

**Sources of the commitment problem in civil war (II)**

Ethnic imbalances: ethnicity as a device to mobilize groups

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Minority groups tempted to secede; majority groups fight to preserve unity and access to resources in entire territory

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Risk of tyranny of majority: how majority commit to respect minority rights; and not exclude minority groups from positions of power in government and economy?

**Sources of the commitment problem in civil war (III)**

Power imbalance along economic lines

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Income inequality

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State-owned natural resources

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Commitment problem: poor majority cannot commit not to seize assets of wealth minority once in power through nationalization or taxation, democracy to redistribute money

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Wealthy minority sides with military, government; supports repression

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Examples:

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Venezuela under Chavez

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Oil in Iraq

**International intervention in civil war (I)?**

Most civil war do not end with disputants finding bargain on their own—one side imposes solution or third party helps enforce. Why?

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Civil war different from international war: one side has to disarm

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Disarmament creates intense period of vulnerability because no longer use military force to punish other side if do not abide by peace terms

**International intervention in civil war (I)?**

This is commitment problem: fear of one side not fulfilling peace obligations coupled with vulnerability of disarmament leads to continuation of war

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Civil war has destroyed institutions (judiciary, police, power-sharing like federal division, minority rights) used to solve this enforcement problem

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Can substitute third party guarantee (B. Walter) if:

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External state has self-interest in upholding

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Third party willing to use force if necessary

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Can signal resolve to stay the course

**International intervention in civil war (II)?**

Moral hazard problem: mechanism of insurance actually encourages risky behavior that trying to deter

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Often talked about in context of financial bailouts

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For secessionist groups that are losing civil war, can create incentive to leave civilian population vulnerable

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Genocide or attacks on civilians can prompt international intervention

**International intervention in civil war (II)?**

Important insight: shouldn’t treat third party as neutral

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As strategic actor in larger bargaining game that can shape how war is fought through threat or expectation of participation in war, not just with actual intervention

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Paradoxical result: threat of intervention (which might be designed to deter attacks on civilians) might actually make it more likely by encouraging weaker side to fight and allow civilians to be targeted

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Kuperman (LBJ) moral hazard problem, like Posen (isolationism and offshore balancing)

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Skeptical view: associated with isolationism or offshore balancing in US grand strategy debates

**RECAP: International intervention in civil war**

Key: external actors like the United States as strategic participants even without intervening

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Intervention can help to alleviate commitment problem and help end civil war by easing risks of disarmament

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But a potential paradox: sometimes robust expectations of intervention can make civilian targeting more likely through moral hazard problem

**Discussion of Simon/Stevenson and Byman Reading**

**Simon**/**Stevenson** – statement of grand strategy, restrain/offshore balancing, like Posen, focus on regional stability(end of liberal ideas supporting), pullback in Palestine and Israel

Note that this is an application of a set of grand strategy ideas or principles…which ones?

Why pullback in Palestine and Israel? Not nested in the belief about domestic pushback or domestic resistance to American commitments, instead, shifting regional dynamics outside of US

Changing regional dynamics: oil, altered strategic priorities of allies (Saudi Arabia), diminishing effectiveness of US military power (Saudis against Assad(Iran))

How answer larger questions in module about American intervention in civil war? What follows?

**Byman**-criticism of national security discourse in the US that lumps all terrorist groups together implies that a similar set of policy would work for all, more intervention before civil wars occur, state-building

Distinguishing among terrorist groups-note different organization of groups

Which ones hold territory? ISIS, Hamas, Hezbollah, like governments v. Al Qaeda

Connections between civil war and terrorism: destabilize government

-counterterrorism often means intervening in civil war

Statebuilding to prevent civil war and terrorism