

# POLS 318: Theories of IR

## Lecture 8 (09.15.2020): Rationalism in IR

Rotem Dvir

Texas A&M University

*rdvir@tamu.edu*

Department of Political Science  
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# Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 Rational Choice Model
- 3 Rational Choice - War
- 4 Rational Choice - Deterrence
- 5 Extra Material

# Review

## WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Domestic politics and global interactions.
- Internal 'demands' shapes international behavior.
- Two-level game: win sets, negotiations.
- Government structure and conflict duration.
- Public opinion and military intervention.
- The Suez Crisis (1956).

Questions?? Email me!

# The Rational Actor

## BACKGROUND

- Rational choice theory - analytic tool (Neorealism, Liberalism).
- Rationality - definition.
- Describing a rational decision process.
- Dynamic 'updating'.

# Rational Choice Model

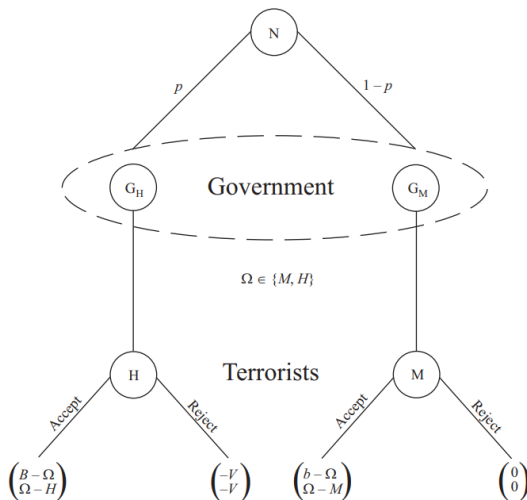
## Advantages

- Parsimony.
- Clear and observable implications.
- Easier to generalize.

## Limitations

- Human cognitive capacity is limited.
- Ignores emotions.
- Bounded Rationality, Satisficing behavior.

# Applying Rationality in IR



# Rational Choice Model

## Assumptions

- ① Agnostic about preferences.
  - ② Ordered preferences.
  - ③ Transitive preferences.
  - ④ Stable preferences.
  - ⑤ Unitary actor.
- Observable implications.
  - Internal consistency.
  - Simplify complex political problems.

# Is war rational??





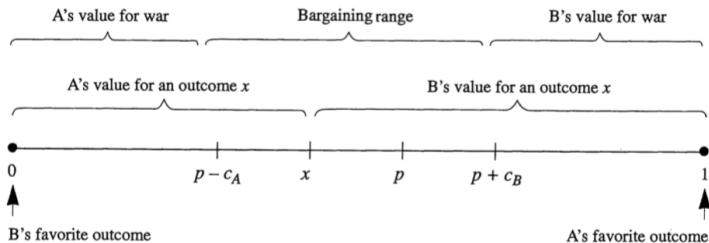
# Rational War

## Fearon (1995)

- Why use a rational approach?
- Potential explanations for war.
- Realist arguments - what are they missing?

*Wars are costly and risky, so rational actors should be able to locate negotiated settlement prior to engaging in violence.*

# The Bargaining Range



- War is ex-post inefficient.
- Rational actors should find an accepted bargain, rather than war.
- So, why then?

# Rationalist explanations for War

## Private Information and Misrepresentation

- Wars → miscalculations (power, willingness to fight).
- Communication can solve these issues!
- Incentives to **misrepresent** information and win wars.

### Incentives:

- ① Exaggerate willingness or capabilities → deter rivals.
- ② Conceal capabilities → look stronger.
- ③ Conceal willingness → not an aggressor.



# Rationalist explanations for War

## Commitment Problems

- Structural conditions and enforcement.
- Anarchy, power advantage and renegeing on agreements.
- Preventive Wars → commitment problems.
- Pay war costs now  $\gg$  accept unfavorable future bargain.
- Example: Germany and Russia (1914).

# Extended Nuclear Deterrence

## Fuhrmann and Sechser (2014)

- Rational choice - commitment problem.
- Defense alliance with a nuclear power.
- Actions or Words?
- Commitment → renege on a defense pact?

# Rational conflict behavior

## Sending Signals

- Public declaration of defense.
- Taking action - troop deployment.
- Defense pacts → mostly verbal commitments:
  - ① US - Rio pact.
  - ② USSR - Finland (1948-1991).
  - ③ The Arab League (1950-present).
- Public announcement → commitment mechanism (**hands tying**).
- Costly signal: reputation, credibility.
- Nuclear powers and public verbal defense.

# Alliance Commitment

## Propositions

- Public defense pact with nuclear power → less conflict risk.
- Nuclear allied troops deployed → less conflict risk.

## Why stronger commitment?

- 1 Shift local balance of power.
- 2 "Tripwire" forces signal larger involvement.
- 3 Signal resolve by nuclear ally.

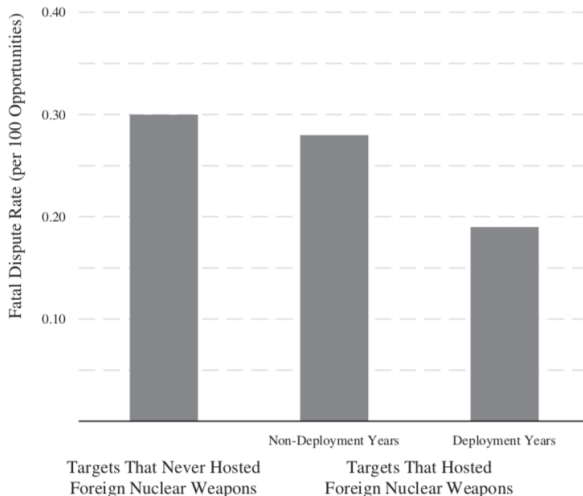


# Nuclear Patrons (1950-2000)

Host Country	Nuclear Patron	Years	Defense Pact
Belgium	United States	1963–2000	Yes
Canada	United States	1964–1984	Yes
Cuba	Soviet Union	1962	No
Cyprus	Great Britain	1961–1975	No
Czechoslovakia	Soviet Union	1969–1990	Yes
Denmark	United States	1958–1965	Yes
East Germany	Soviet Union	1958–1991	Yes
Great Britain	United States	1954–2000	Yes
Greece	United States	1960–2000	Yes
Hungary	Soviet Union	1974–1989	Yes
Italy	United States	1956–2000	Yes
Malaysia	Great Britain	1963–1965	Yes
Mongolia	Soviet Union	1967–1992	Yes (1967–91), No (1992)
Morocco	United States	1954–1963	No
Netherlands	United States	1960–2000	Yes
Philippines	United States	1957–1977	Yes
Poland	Soviet Union	1967–1990	Yes
Singapore	Great Britain	1965–1970	No
South Korea	United States	1958–1991	No

# Nuclear Patrons (1950-2000)

## Nuclear deployments and severe conflicts



# Recommended readings

## More studies on Rationalism in IR:

- ① Powell, Robert. (2006). "War as a commitment problem." *International organization* 60, 1: 169-203.
- ② Goddard, Stacie. (2006). "Uncommon Ground: Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy" *International Organization* 60, 1, 35-68.
- ③ Bak, Daehee. (2018). "Alliance proximity and effectiveness of extended deterrence." *International interactions* 44, 1, 107-131.

# Survey Task 2

*Submit by Midnight, September 21!*

