



The Puzzle of Interstate War, Part I: Conflict as Bargaining

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Today's Class

- How to Read Academic Articles
- Conflict as Bargaining



Components of an academic article:

- Abstract
- Literature Review
- Theory/Hypotheses
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion

These elements are present in many articles you will read for this class.



Academic Article Layout

- **Abstract:** Brief summary of main theoretical contribution and findings.
- **Introduction:** Introduces relevant questions driving research.
- **Literature Review:** Relevant prior work which influenced this work.
- **Theory/hypotheses:** Author's proposed explanation for phenomena of interest and expected findings.
- **Methods:** How the author is testing their hypotheses.
- **Results:** What they found.
- **Discussion:** Summary, potential weaknesses and future research directions.



Academic Article Layout

- **Abstract:** Good for a brief summary/refreshers.
- **Introduction:** Useful for getting an idea of the paper.
- **Literature Review:** Can be skipped (in this class).
- **Theory/hypotheses:** Important to understand!
- **Methods:** Can be skipped (in this class).
- **Results:** Have a general idea of what this says, but don't get stuck in the details.
- **Discussion:** Often useful as a summary of key findings.



Central Question

Given the massive costs of war, why do states fight?



Key Terms

- War
- Interstate War
- Crisis Bargaining
- Status Quo



Battle of Stalingrad





Battle of Stalingrad



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Battle-of-Stalingrad>



Battle of Stalingrad

- July 1942 - February 1943
- German offensive intended to capture Stalingrad turns into grinding urban warfare. Soviet forces eventually triumph.
- Estimated casualties:
 - 740,000 Axis casualties.
 - 790,000 Soviet casualties.
- 1.5 million combined casualties (for a low estimate!)
- This seems like a terrible way to settle disputes.



Class Activity

Define “war” without looking at the next slide!



What is War Anyway?

- What is a reasonable definition of war?
- Components of a war:
 - Violence
 - At least 2 clear sides
 - Some minimum amount of loss of life
- **War:** “must involve sustained combat, involving organized armed forces, resulting in a minimum of 1,000 battle-related combatant fatalities within a twelve month period” (CoW Interstate Wars Codebook pg. 1)
 - Both sides must be capable of “effective resistance”
- Most IR definitions of war are built on or just use this definition.



War Definition Implications

Under this definition, which of the following are wars?

- **Rwandan genocide?** No, because Tutsi victims were not organized or able to effectively resist Hutu militias.
- **Cartel and gang violence?** No, not “organized” like regular state military units.
- **9/11?** No, because no sustained combat, no organized armed forces, and few or no combatant fatalities (depending on whether terrorists are classed as combatants).

Note that this definition excludes these kinds of violence.



Interstate Wars

- **Interstate War:** a war (as defined prior) in which all combatants are states.
- Not the only type of war...
 - Civil/intra-state wars, non-state wars, extra-state wars
- But it is the type we're focusing on for this part of the course.



Interstate War Statistics

FIGURE 3.1 *The Percentage of States Involved in Interstate War per Year, 1820–2017*

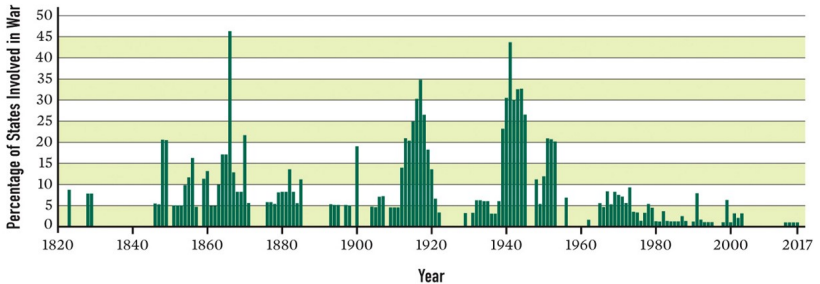
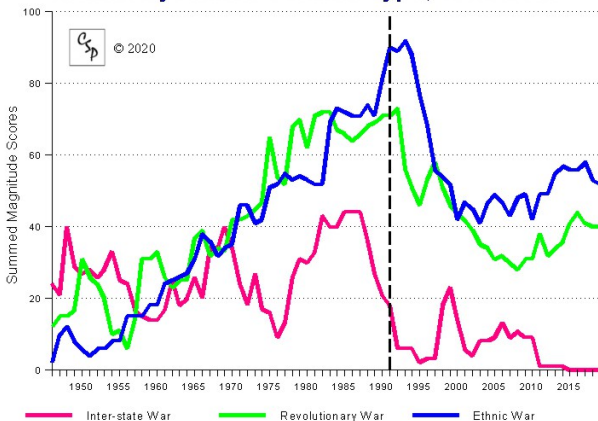


Figure source: Meredith Reid Sarkees and Frank Wayman, *Resort to War: 1816–2007* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010).
Updated to 2017 by author.



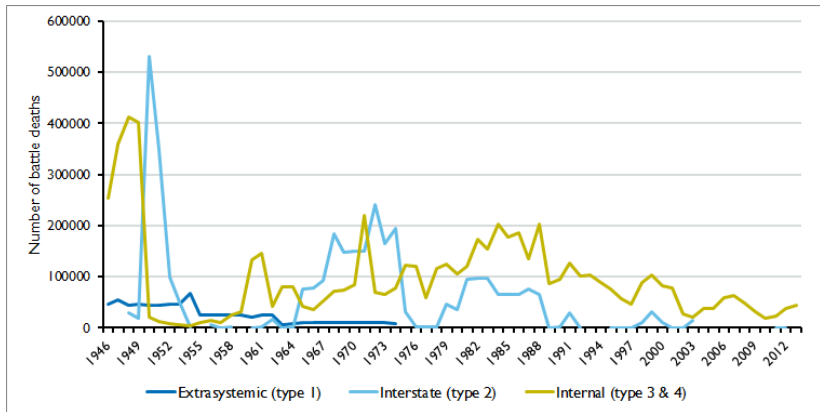
Interstate War Statistics

Trends by Armed Conflict Type, 1946-2019





Interstate War Statistics





Interstate War Stated Reasons

- Territory
- National policy
- Regime type
- Ethnic or religious divisions



Interests, Interactions, and Institutions

So, why does interstate war happen?

- Conflicting *interests* are necessary, but not sufficient to explain war, as many states have differing interests but few go to war.
- International system lacks *institutions* that can reliably settle disputes and enforce peace (anarchy), but this only permits war without explaining its occurrence.
- However, this environment does permit the *interaction* of bargaining.

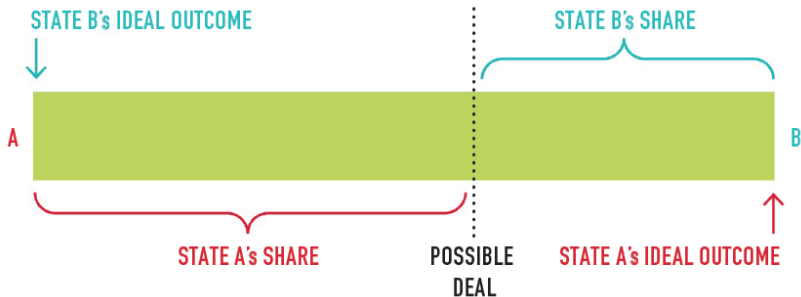


Crisis Bargaining

- Due to this anarchic system, war is a possible outcome whenever states are trying to divide some good (e.g. territory, policy, regime) in a zero-sum interaction.
- **Crisis bargaining** occurs when at least one state seeks to influence this bargaining by using or threatening force.
- Two things determine which deals are acceptable to belligerents during crisis bargaining: the **costs** and **likely outcome** of war.

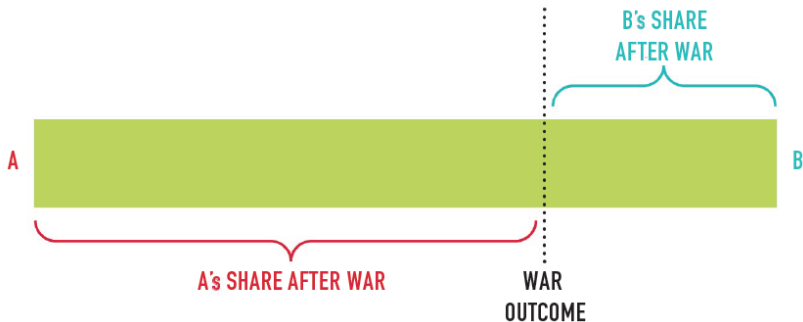


Bargaining Model





Expected War Outcome





War is Costly!

- However, the outcome is not the whole story.
- War is costly both in terms of military losses and broader destruction of infrastructure and populations.
- We can conceptualize these costs as a negative value, decreasing the total utility a state gets from a war outcome.

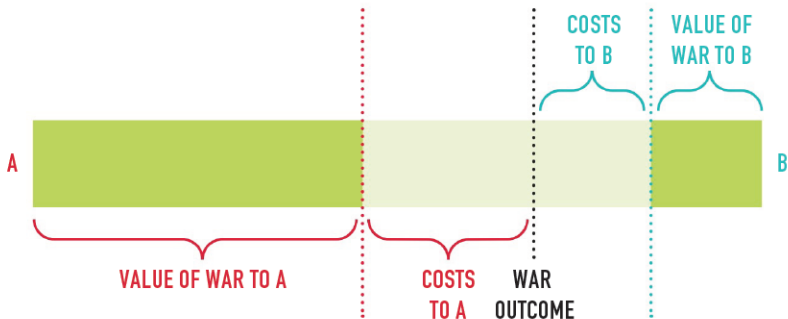


Bargaining Model: Utility Functions

- Say the territory is a divisible good with value 1.
- The war outcome is x and costs are c .
- State A's utility is $U(x) = x - c$
- State B's utility is $U(x) = 1 - x - c$
- These utility functions ensure that the bargaining situation is accurately represented.



War is Costly!





Bargaining Range





Bargaining Range Implications

- The existence of the **bargaining range** implies a fundamental puzzle of war.
- Given the existence of a bargaining range, there is always some deal that both sides would prefer to war.
- Why do states choose war, given the existence of both the costs of war and the existence of a deal that both sides prefer to war?



Alternative (Failed) Reasons for War

- Anarchy/security dilemma
- National policy
- Regime type
- Ethnic or religious divisions

None of these explain why war occurs, given the presence of a bargaining range.



Bargaining Model

So, how does the bargaining model explain war? Stay tuned...