

POLS 318: Theories of IR  
Lecture 22 (04.05.2021):  
Territorial Disputes

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Spring 2021

# Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 Territory - Introduction
- 3 Issue-Based approach
- 4 Territory and Wars
- 5 Extra Material

# Review

## WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Deterrence, coercion and military power.
- The efficacy of military (air) power.
- Denial/punishment, demands, target regime type.
- Duration - democracies vs. dictators.
- Targeting nonstate actors - Vietnam, Russia.
- Ineffective counterinsurgency.

Questions?? Email me!

# Introduction

## Contiguity and War



# Explaining Wars

## A Realist Logic (Vasquez 1995)

- Clashes when seeking power.
- Neighbors → fight more...
- Long distance wars require capability **and** opportunity.

# Explaining Wars

## (1) Proximity

- Close proximity → opportunity and willingness.
- The *Loss-of-strength gradient* - power projection.
- However...
- Distance - constant → opportunity, not a cause.
- Military innovation and "shrinking" world.

# Explaining Wars

## (2) Interactions

- Conflict of interests and wars.
- More interactions → more disagreements.
- Yet...
- Interactions also increase cooperation.
- Tensions reduce interactions.

# Explaining Wars

## (3) Territoriality

- Inability to resolve territorial issues → violence.
- Territory issue - the willingness to fight (proximity - opportunity).
- Territorial issues → high probability of war.
- But why territory?
- The essentials of human survival...
- Interactions and territory.



# Explaining Wars

## Territorial Issues $\neq$ other

Table I. Frequency of Wars Involving a Particular Issue<sup>a</sup>

Type of issue	Historical Periods				
	I (1648–1714)	II (1715–1814)	III (1815–1914)	IV (1918–41)	V (1945–)
Territory <sup>b</sup>	17 (77%)	26 (72%)	18 (58%)	22 (73%)	27 (47%)
Territoriality-related Issues <sup>c</sup>	2 (86%)	4 (83%)	8 (84%)	6 (93%)	19 (79%)
Subtotal Cumulative	3 (14%)	6 (17%)	5 (16%)	2 (7%)	12 (21%)
None of the Above					
Total Wars	22	36	31	30	58



# Issues in Foreign Policy

## Issue-based Approach (Hensel et al. 2008)

- Definition: a disputed point or question, the subject of a conflict or controversy.
- Political objectives over issues (rather than power).
- Classifications:
  - Tangible: security, wealth, survival.
  - Intangible: culture, identity, influence, prestige.

# Issues in Foreign Policy

## TOOLS OF POLICY

- Large pool of policy options.
- Diplomacy: negotiate (bilateral, mediation).
- Threats: economic, military.
- Use of force.

# Issues in Foreign Policy

## Issue Salience

- Importance and level of attention.
- Salience → value of issues to leaders and public.
- Varying degrees of salience to issues.
- Territory → salient. Why?
- Individual survival.
- Tangible and intangible values of territory.

# Issues in Foreign Policy

## Issue Salience and policy

- Salient issue? more competition and resources.
- Territory → violent (military) action.



# Issues in Foreign Policy

## Issue-based Approach (Hensel et al. 2008)

- Analysis: contentious issues and conflict/peaceful solutions.
- Main results:
  - ① Territory → high likelihood of militarized conflict.
  - ② Maritime issues are lower.
  - ③ Issue salience and militarized dispute.

# Territorial Issues

## Territory and escalation (Wright and Diehl 2016)

- Why territorial disputes escalate to wars?
- Domestic institutions and interactions (debates).
- Hard-liners and political influence.

## Outbidding

- Internal debate promotes aggression.
- Prevalent in territorial issues.
- Compromise in dispute is less likely.



# Territorial Issues

## Outbidding and regimes

- Outbidding in democracy - a selectorate logic.
- Territory → a public good (intangible value).
- Compromise? risk of losing the "coalition".
- Democracy and territorial dispute:
  - ① Hard and long bargaining.
  - ② Escalation potential.

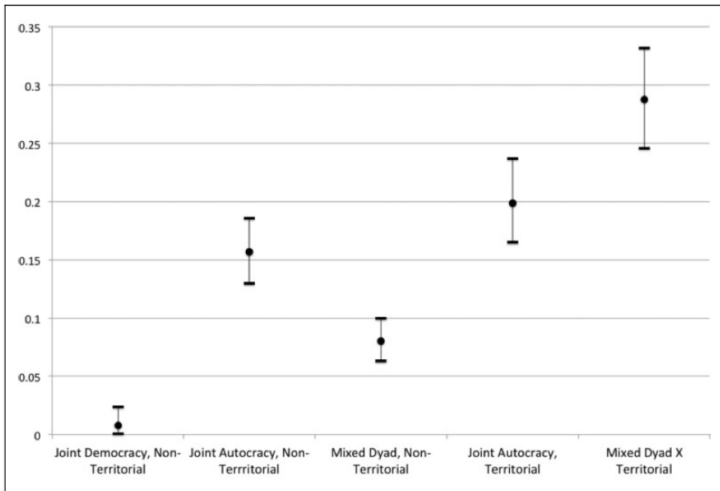
# Territorial Issues

## Outbidding and regimes

- Autocrats → less escalation potential. Why?
- Stalemate is better than losing resources.
- No costs for backing-down.
- Unpack autocracies:
  - Personalist → fight over territory (small coalition).
  - Others - wars less efficient to obtain private goods.

# Territorial Issues and Wars

▸ WarsAutocrats



# Territorial Issue Salience

## Political Motivations (Tir 2010)

### DIVERSIONARY WAR THEORY

- Domestic political motivations for war.
- Leaders highlight foreign policy crisis.
- Divert attention from domestic concerns (economic, social, political)

# Diversionary War

## Why 'initiate' a crisis?

- Shift public focus from leader's incompetence or domestic failures.
- Generate support - the Rally around the flag effect.
- Main problem?
- Evidence is mixed.
  
- Morales - Bolivia (1879 War of the Pacific).
- Croatia - Slovenia (2005, 2008).
- South Korea - Japan (Dokto Islands - 2006).

# Diversionary War

## Territorial Diversion

- Territory dispute → strong public sentiment.
- Why?
- Ingroup - outgroup mechanism and threat perceptions.
- Territory - emotional, mobilizing, societal bonds.
- 2005 Israel disengagement from Gaza [▶ TerritoryEmotions](#)
- Divert attention with territorial issues.

# Diversionary War

## Territorial Diversion

- Analytic benefit of territorial issue and diversion.
- Strong ties to land - identity, culture.
- Motivation to fight over land.
- Economic and strategic costs.
- Not always a rational process (Israel - Gaza settlements).

# Diversionary War

## Territorial Diversion - an individual level perspective

- Psychological underpinnings.
- Land as *Zero-Sum* - indivisible, no compromise.
- Brute force as the only option.
- Prospect theory - territory as a reference point.
- Risk taking in a loss domain.





# Diversionary War

## Territorial Diversion (Tir 2010)

- Leader divert public using a territorial dispute.
- Yet...
- Potential costs for diversionary war:
  - ① Long war - costs  $\gg$  diversion benefits.
  - ② Rally effect - not certain, and short-lived.
  - ③ Post war blame on leaders.

## Results

- Low popularity increase territorial conflict likelihood.
- Economic crisis  $\rightarrow$  weaker motivation for diversion.
- Diversion has limited effect vs. strategic incentives.

## Recommended readings

More studies on territorial disputes:

- 1 Fang, Songying, and Xiaojun Li. (2020). "Historical ownership and territorial disputes." *The Journal of Politics* 82, 1, 345-360.
- 2 Kim, Nam Kyu. (2020). "Territorial disputes and individual willingness to fight." *Journal of Peace Research* 57, 3, 406-421.
- 3 Carter, David B., Rachel L. Wellhausen, and Paul K. Huth. (2019). "International Law, Territorial Disputes, and Foreign Direct Investment." *International Studies Quarterly* 63, 1, 58-71.

# Territorial Issues and War

