States, Nations, and the Great Powers

Why are some regions prone to war while others remain at peace? What conditions cause regions to move from peace to war and vice versa? This book offers a novel theoretical explanation for the differences in levels of and transitions between war and peace. The author distinguishes between “hot” and “cold” outcomes, depending on intensity of the war or the peace, and then uses three key concepts (state, nation, and the international system) to argue that it is the specific balance between states and nations in different regions that determines the hot or warm outcomes: the lower the balance, the higher the war proneness of the region, while the higher the balance, the warmer the peace. The international systemic factors, for their part, affect only the cold outcomes of cold war and cold peace.

The theory of regional war and peace developed in this book is examined through case studies of the post-1945 Middle East, the Balkans and South America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and post-1945 Western Europe. It uses comparative data from all regions and concludes by proposing ideas on how to promote peace in war-torn regions.

Benjamin Miller is a professor in the School of Political Sciences at the University of Haifa, Israel. He is the author of When Opponents Cooperate: Great Power Conflict and Collaboration in World Politics (1995).
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The Sources of Regional War and Peace

Benjamin Miller
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Preface and acknowledgments

This book investigates the origins of regional war and peace. My interest in this subject can be traced back to the first day of a major regional war in which I actively took part as a very young soldier – the 1973 Yom Kippur War. On the first day of that war I found myself engaged in tank battles with Syrian forces and in the early morning of the day after I – together with a few other Israeli soldiers – was surrounded by a major Syrian armored force in a very small bunker in the southern part of the Golan Heights.

I will not go here into the details of the very frightening experience in that bunker and following experiences later in the war. But such traumatic events have left me with a strong desire to look for an explanation for the occurrence of armed conflicts, notably those which escalate to large-scale violence, and how to manage, reduce, or overcome such conflicts and to move from war to peace.

As a student of Kenneth Waltz at the University of California, Berkeley, I fully realized the importance of the international system, and specifically the great powers and their influence on a great variety of events in world politics. Thus, my first book focused on the sources of conflict and cooperation among the great powers. Even though the great powers exercise important effects on regional affairs as well, as this book fully acknowledges, I have felt that they do not provide the only answer to the great differences among different regions with regard to their level of war and peace. Thus, I faced two major challenges:

1. To define the general type of effects the great powers have on regional war and peace as compared to the effects of the regional and domestic factors. Here came the idea – developed in this book – that rather than just a dichotomy between war and peace, we may have “cold” and

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“hot/warm” war and peace situations: the great powers affect the cold outcomes, while the regional/domestic factors affect the more intense hot outcomes.

2. Which are the key regional/domestic factors that provide the most powerful explanation of the variations in war and peace among regions and of the transitions of regions from war to peace and vice versa? My thinking and research have led me to the idea that the concepts of “state” and “nation,” and especially the balance between them, as explained in this book, while overlooked in the mainstream international relations theorizing on war and peace, deserve a closer look. Indeed, they are especially crucial for understanding the phenomenon of regional war and peace – both civil and interstate wars and a significant number of “mixed” domestic and transborder violent incidents.

This process of a search for an explanation of the regional war and peace puzzle has been a long one, sometimes enjoyable and at times frustrating. At least one big advantage of such a protracted process is that it enabled me to benefit from the wise advice of many wonderful people. Thus, I have accumulated a lot of debts to numerous colleagues and students even if, unfortunately, I may have forgotten to acknowledge some of them here. While the comments improved the manuscript quite a bit, I remain, of course, fully responsible for the book’s content.

The initial stages of thinking about these issues started in an exciting fellowship year at the Center for International Studies at Princeton University. I would like to thank Professor Aaron Friedberg for giving me the opportunity to spend the year in such a stimulating environment and to benefit also from the many insights of George Downs, Michael Doyle, Robert Gilpin, and Bill Wohlforth, as well as Ilene Cohen, among other engaging people at the Princeton Center. My conversations and exchanges with Jack Levy, Ed Rhodes, Matthew Randall, and Jeffrey Taliaferro were also helpful in shaping my theoretical thinking on war and peace issues.

When I came back to teach at the Hebrew University, a group of colleagues helped to develop the initial ideas I brought from my stay at Princeton – particularly Hillel Frisch, Avraham Sela, Norrin Ripsman, Galia Press Bar-Nathan, and Elie Podeh, as well as Yitzhak Brudni, Raymond Cohen, Uri Bialer, Yaacov Bar Siman-Tov, Sasson Sofer, Arie Kacowicz, Michael Brecher, and Emanuel Adler. In addition to my faculty colleagues, a group of very able graduate students worked
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During my stay as a visiting professor at Duke University, a number of colleagues posed tough challenges to my ideas and the direction my study was taking. I hope that, by forcing me to rethink some propositions and methods, they have helped me to improve the manuscript. I especially appreciate the regular meetings I held with Robert Keohane over lunch – always after he had read some portion of the study and was ready with written comments and suggestions. Extremely helpful and challenging were also Joe Grieco, Hein Goemans, Peter Feaver, Chris Gelpi, and Martin Seeleib-Kaiser. All read some important portions of the study and provided detailed and insightful comments. Other helpful and supportive colleagues at Duke included Don Horowitz, Bruce Jentleson, and Allan Kornberg. Also at Duke a group of graduate students was both demanding and helpful in its questioning and assistance. Among them were Jonathan Van Loo, Phil Demske, and the participants at a joint graduate seminar given by Hein Goemans and myself, who discussed the typescript at length.

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