1 *Leaders*

Joaquim Alberto Chissano, the second President of Mozambique, stepped down from power on February 2, 2005 after serving his country for 19 years. During his rule, Mozambique experienced economic progress, democratic development, and pacification. The civil war that had ravaged the country for 16 years came to an end in 1992 when a UN-sponsored peace accord was signed in Rome between President Chissano and the Renamo leader, Afonso Dhlakama. Elections were held two years later and again in 1999, which Chissano and the Frelimo party won. In 2004, President Chissano announced that he would not run for a third term, even though Mozambique's constitution would allow him to do so. Rather, he voluntarily retired and let a successor be selected. For all his services to his country, President Chissano was awarded the first Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership, a great honor meant to celebrate his outstanding contributions to peace, prosperity and democracy, but also . . . *a lot of money*: 5 million US dollars over 10 years and 200,000 US dollars annually for life thereafter, in addition to up to 200,000 US dollars a year for 10 years towards the winner's public interest activities and good causes.

The prize is the brainchild of Dr. Mo Ibrahim, a Sudanese businessman and telecommunications mogul, who, after selling his main business, set up a charity foundation devoted to fostering democratic governance and economic development in Africa. But rather than funding health care projects or civil works, Dr. Ibrahim's foundation adopted a revolutionary approach to charity: to promote development by changing the incentives that drive political leaders in office.

Aid and development projects, two of the traditional approaches of charity organizations, are discounted, because they do not directly address the political sources of the persistent stagnation and underdevelopment of African societies and economies. Aid and development projects do not alter how leaders govern their countries. Development and prosperity, in Dr. Ibrahim's view, flow from good governance; and

good governance depends on how leaders strike a balance between private gains and public benefits to pursue their political careers.

The assumption that underlies the Mo Ibrahim Prize is that the fate of leaders once they are *out of office* is a key determinant of how they run their countries. The assumption runs as follows: When leaders face impoverishment and retribution once they are out of office, they would be doggedly determined to enrich themselves, squash any opposition, trample over any legal restraint in order to cling onto power. Power is their lifeline. When leaders can expect a safe retirement, however, they would take a different perspective on how to govern. In a recent interview with the *Financial Times*, Dr. Ibrahim explained that

> African leaders [. . .] look to retirement as they would to the edge of a cliff, beyond which lies a dizzying fall towards retribution and relative poverty. "We don't have financial institutions for ex-presidents to go and run, or boards of great companies. There is life after office in other parts of the world. I just read that Tony Blair was paid half a million pounds to make a speech in China. People like Blair always have a place in society, they have secure financial futures," he says. Ibrahim believes he has created an attractive alternative to clinging on to power.[1]

In this book, we show that Dr. Ibrahim's intuition identified a fundamental factor that drives leaders' performance in office. Not just with respect to good governance, but also with respect to international conflict, leaders and their political incentives make a difference. We argue that the fate of leaders and the political processes of

[1] The interview was published on February 15, 2008 in the celebrated series *Lunch with the FT*, and is available at www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c6a7d87a-d93b-11dc-bd4d-0000779fd2ac.html. See also BBC News, June 3, 2005, "Is There Life after the Presidency?" http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4607269.stm, which quotes the National Democratic Institute to say "many African presidents cling to power beyond constitutionality and democratically tolerable limits, in part because life after the presidency is seen to offer little in compensation to the riches, stature and security of being in power." In the feedback below the article, one respondent from Zimbabwe wrote: "Former presidents should be respected because of what they did for a country. However at the same time, when Mugabe becomes a former president, my views will change." Finally, Mengistu Haile Mariam, the former leader of Ethiopia, who was deposed in 1991 and fled to Zimbabwe, lamented to his interviewer: "African leaders are unlucky. There are very few who can live among their people after they lose power . . . I worked so hard, so tirelessly for Ethiopia. It grieves me that I cannot grow old on Ethiopian soil" (quoted in Baker (2004, 1492)).

leadership turnover shape leaders' decisions to initiate international conflict. We explain *why* and *when* political leaders decide to initiate international crises and wars. Our theory of conflict presents a new and, we believe, powerful way to look at the fundamental question of international relations: what are the causes of war and the conditions for peace? Our answer simply reformulates a famous dictum about war by the historian E. H. Carr (1946, 109): "War lurks in the background of international politics just as revolution lurks in the background of domestic politics," argued Carr. In our theory, war lurks in the background of international politics *because* revolution – a forcible or violent removal from office – lurks in the background of domestic politics. As the domestic political conditions that create stable and peaceful processes of leadership turnover improve, therefore, the scourge of war will also fade.

Our leader theory of international conflict sheds new light on the momentous finding of a small, but growing, group of scholars that has documented a profound transformation in the nature of war over the twentieth century and beyond. Mary Kaldor (1999), Robert Jervis (2002), Jeffrey Record (2002) and, above all, John Mueller (2004) have pointed out that modern war, the type of interstate war that developed from the Napoleonic revolution, has been in decline, a rarer and rarer occurrence, soon to become a relic of the past. Incredible though this claim might sound while the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are raging, there has been a marked decline in the number of conflicts which we might legitimately call interstate wars. Instead, we have been experiencing, directly or indirectly, new forms of warfare, increasing instances of internationalized civil war, asymmetric warfare, or insurgent warfare where the boundaries between what is war and what is violent crime and terrorism are vanishing (Gleditsch *et al.*, 2002). These scholars argue that technological transformations, democratic institutions, the memories of the carnage of World War I, and new attitudes about violence in modern societies all contribute to make war between modern developed nations an anachronism. In their view, war can no longer serve as a viable mechanism to solve international disputes.

Our argument explains this empirical trend, while eschewing any teleological undertones that might creep into alternative explanations. We argue that the taming of political violence in leadership succession significantly contributes to the taming of international political

violence. What remains of warfare when the risk of violent and forcible removal from office is reduced to nil is what modern, civilized, and decent societies have to do to police thugs and to protect their citizens and innocent populations from the violent actions of bandits, criminals, and brigands.

1.1 The central question

Now, as always, states fight wars. As one of the most destructive forms of human behavior, war and its study lie at the very heart of the discipline of international relations. It is not surprising, therefore, that much theoretical work has been done to explain the causes of war initiation. What is surprising, however, is the relative paucity of effort to understand and explain why and when leaders decide to engage their country in war. In theories that explain war as the result of impersonal forces such as capitalism, the offense–defense balance or multipolarity, leaders appear irrelevant. However, almost all wars begin because of conscious decisions by leaders. This book, therefore, seeks to answer the question: why and when do leaders go to war?

1.2 The central argument

Our answer starts from what is by now the conventional wisdom. The fundamental cause of international conflict is that the opposing parties have incompatible demands: each side demands more than the other side is willing to concede. From the perspective of the political leaders in charge of the conduct of foreign affairs, an explanation of international conflict thus requires an explanation of why and when leaders demand more than their opponent is willing to concede. We propose that a leader's international demands crucially depend on his calculations of the *private* costs and benefits of international conflict. Such private benefits can severely shrink or altogether eliminate any bargaining range created for unitary rational actors by the costs of war. This argument by itself is not new. A significant literature in international relations and comparative politics argues that leaders choose policy with an eye to one particular private benefit: their continued stay in office. Theories of diversionary war – which we discuss in detail in the next chapter – for example, argue that leaders seek to initiate international conflict when they face a high probability of

losing office. We argue that such a focus on just the leader's tenure in office is too narrow. Our fundamental innovation is to argue that leaders consider a broader range of private costs and benefits. Specifically, leaders choose policy with an eye not only on the probability, but also the *manner* and *consequences* of losing office. For perhaps less than obvious reasons, the manner and consequences of losing office turn out to be closely related. Leaders who lose office as a result of a lost election, term limits or voluntary retirement – more broadly, in a regular manner – rarely suffer subsequent personal punishment. Leaders who lose office in a violent or forcible manner such as a coup or revolution, however, almost always suffer additional punishment in the form of exile, imprisonment or death.

Starting from this broader range of potential costs and benefits, we argue in Chapter 2 that leaders who anticipate a regular removal from office – e.g. term limits, elections, etc. – have little to gain and much to lose from international conflict. They have little to gain because even victory does not decrease their probability of a regular removal from office. They have much to lose because defeat increases the probability of a forcible removal from office, with all its unpleasant consequences. Leaders with a high risk of a regular removal from office, we argue, become *less* likely to initiate international conflict. In a nutshell, we identify a mechanism for peace: international *peace* obtains because of such leaders' domestic political insecurity.

In marked contrast, leaders who anticipate a forcible removal from office – e.g. a looming revolt, revolution or coup – have little to lose and much to gain from international conflict. The ability to choose the time, place, and circumstances of conflict initiation gives leaders a golden opportunity to neutralize dangerous rivals who threaten a revolt or coup. More importantly, with an already high risk of a forcible removal from office – with its unpleasant associated consequences – potential defeat is less of a deterrent for such leaders: their punishment is truncated. Leaders with a high risk of a forcible removal from office, therefore, become *more* likely to initiate international conflict. In a nutshell, we argue that such leaders are, literally, *fighting for survival*.

1.3 Leaders in the study of international politics

We next briefly describe the historical arc of research on leaders in international relations. Since Waltz (1954) introduced the three

"images" of international relations, scholars have based their explanations of international relations in general and international conflict in particular on one of these three images or levels of analysis (Singer, 1961).[2] While scholars accept the usefulness of the three images to structure their research, at various times the field as a whole favored one image over the others. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, following the path-breaking work of Snyder, Bruck and Sapin (1962), a majority of scholars in the field focused on individuals and leaders and their psychological attributes to explain international relations. (A decade earlier Leites (1951) blazed this trail with his work on the organizational code of the politburo.) The seminal work of Waltz (1979) forced a major shift in focus, as the field by and large switched its focus to the international system. The discovery of the 'democratic peace' in the late 1980s – early 1990s (Doyle, 1983a, b; Russett, 1993) brought another shift in focus, this time to the state and its attributes. In the wake of the rational choice revolution and its emphasis on methodological individualism, in the last five years scholars such as Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* (2003) have brought the field full circle by a renewed focus on the role of leaders. This time, however, the focus is not so much on the psychological attributes of leaders as on their incentive structures and institutional constraints.

In particular, Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* (ibid.) build a general theory of politics, the *selectorate theory*, that explains the balance between the production of public goods – policies that benefit everyone in a society such as civil freedoms, national security, and economic prosperity – and the production of private benefits for rulers and their supporters. They define the selectorate as the set of people who potentially have a say in the selection of leaders, while the winning coalition is the set of people whose support the leader needs to retain to remain in power. In their theory, the balance between the provision of public and private goods depends upon the size of the selectorate and the size of the winning coalition. Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* (ibid.) show that in societies where leaders are selected by large winning coalitions

[2] The first image proposes that the attributes of individuals are central to explanations of international relations; the second gives pride of place to the attributes of states; while the third seeks explanations for international relations in the attributes of the international system. Of course, other political scientists have proposed different levels of analysis. Wolfers (1962, 3–24) proposed two, Jervis (1976, 15) four, and Rosenau (1966) five levels of analysis.

with large selectorates, leaders find it more efficient to resort to the production of public goods rather than private benefits to remain in power. In a concise summary of their theory, Morrow *et al.* (2008, 394) claim that "Democratic politics in our theory is a competition in competence to produce public goods; autocratic politics centers on the purchase of the loyalty of key supporters."

Like Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* (2003), we too place leaders at the center of our analytical approach. As they do, we postulate that political leaders are the central node that mediates the political and military dynamics that underlie the threat and use of force in the international arena. In our theory, however, it is not just staying power *per se* that matters; it is the personal fate that leaders would envision for themselves when they are *out of office*. As a consequence, while recognizing that Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* (ibid.) offer a fundamental contribution to the study of politics, we do not privilege coalition building as the key explanatory factor of leaders' policy choices. Nor do we evaluate how specific personal characteristics of leaders, from their cognitive styles to their educational and military backgrounds, affect their decisions about war and peace (Hermann, 1977; Horowitz, McDermott and Stam, 2005).

Rather, we assess how leadership turnover, and what happens when the leaders no longer control the levers of power, shapes leaders' decisions about international conflict. Our theory cuts across the important comparison between the conflict patterns of democratic and non-democratic countries, the fundamental question in international relations theory in the last 20 years. We echo Samuel Huntington's famous opening statement in his celebrated treatise, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, in downplaying the importance of the form of government to understand politics. When it comes to decisions about international conflict, the most important political distinction among countries concerns how leaders are selected, replaced, and treated when in retirement.

1.3.1 Is war costly for leaders?

In our previous research on leaders and conflict, we established two empirical facts. First, we showed that leaders are more likely to initiate an international conflict when they face a low *overall* risk of losing office (Chiozza and Goemans, 2003). In other words, contrary to

traditional theories of diversionary war, we showed that when leaders are more likely to lose office they become less likely to initiate international conflict.[3] Second, we showed that the assumption that war is *ex post* inefficient which underpins the foremost rational-choice explanation for war, the bargaining model of war, does not hold for leaders (Chiozza and Goemans, 2004b).

The assumption that war is *ex post* inefficient is incompatible with our claim that leaders can obtain private benefits from war. The assumption posits that "[a]s long as both sides suffer some costs for fighting, then war is always inefficient *ex post*" for rational unitary-actors (Fearon, 1995, 383). The assumption that war is *ex post* inefficient simply means that the "pie" at stake between two actors will be smaller after a war than before war, because war shrinks the available pie.[4] Hence *both* sides could gain if they could come to an agreement that would avoid such costs of war; there would be more pie to divide. Rational unitary actor explanations of war must then explain what impedes bargains that avoid the costs of war. Fearon (ibid., 381) proposed that three – and only three – mechanisms could form the basis for rational explanations for conflict between *unitary* rational actors. Private information (and incentives to misrepresent such information), commitment problems, and issue indivisibilities explain why unitary rational actors sometimes end up in *ex post* inefficient conflict.[5]

We posit that even though their country-as-a-whole will surely suffer as a result of war, under certain circumstances war may pay for leaders. Fearon (ibid., 379, fn. 1) explicitly recognized this could form the basis of alternative mechanisms to explain war, but did not explore this possibility.[6] To explore the potential of this approach, we assessed

[3] In our previous research (Chiozza and Goemans, 2003) we deliberately considered only the overall probability of losing office, and did not distinguish between the probability of a regular and the probability of a forcible removal from office.

[4] The intuition is powerful: of course war destroys lives, industries, productive capacity. However, as Burk (1982) and others have shown, sometimes war provides a boost to the domestic economy that could not be achieved by any other means.

[5] Powell (2006) shows that issue indivisibilities reduce to commitment problems.

[6] As we will briefly discuss in Chapter 6, in almost all the unitary rational-actor explanations of war, it is unclear what the potential benefits of war could be, except "more is better." This omission has important implications for future research.

whether Fearon's crucial assumption that war is costly also applies to contending leaders (Chiozza and Goemans, 2004b). If war is costly also for leaders, we are back to Fearon's basic explanations. If, however, war is not necessarily *ex post* inefficient for dueling leaders, then there exists room for new leader-level explanations for war.

To that end, in our 2004 article we examined whether contending leaders are worse off after fighting a war than they would otherwise be after fighting a crisis or staying out of conflict altogether. Under the war-is-costly assumption, the tenure-pie to be divided among the opposing leaders must be strictly smaller after war than after a crisis that did not escalate to war. Operationally, the hazard of losing office for winners and losers in wars must be higher than the hazard of losing office for winners and losers in crises and than that of leaders who remained at peace. War would not be negative-sum, for example, if leaders did not face a higher hazard after a draw – which by definition includes both sides – in a war than after a draw in a crisis. When we tested the empirical record about how international conflict affected leaders' hold on power, we found that leaders' tenure prospects were not systematically shortened by international conflict. Moreover, we found that wars are not more politically harmful to leaders than are crises short of war. In other words, war does not seem to necessarily be *ex post* inefficient for leaders. If leaders do not necessarily stand to suffer political consequences from conflict, therefore, a leader perspective on conflict potentially covers a larger spectrum of mechanisms than those built on private information and incentives to misrepresent or commitment problems (Fearon, 1995; Powell, 2006).

We do not seek to supplant rational unitary actor explanations for war, rather, we aim to offer additional rational explanations. Specifically, we argue that leaders sometimes go to war because they can obtain private benefits from international conflict. In Chapter 2, we explain what leaders have to gain and what they have to lose from international conflict. More precisely, we show that there exists a class of political leaders, those who are at risk of being forcibly removed from power, that might use international conflict as their last gamble to save their personal survival. These leaders *fight for survival*.

The mechanisms that explain war in the bargaining model of war continue to be operative. More transparency, more reliable information, and greater role of third parties certainly help reduce the risk

of war (Walter, 2002). These mechanisms, however, need to be complemented. For some leaders, only conflict can interrupt the political dynamics that might lead to their forcible or violent removal. When the noose of the executioner is getting closer, international conflict is a more palatable alternative. We illustrate this theoretical claim empirically in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

In the next chapter, we develop our theory and discuss in detail the most prominent competing leader-level theory, the theory of diversionary war. In Chapters 3 and 4 we test our theory with the help of *Archigos*, our new data set on leaders.[7] In Chapter 3 we examine first whether international conflict indeed does bestow private costs and benefits on leaders. To that end we assess how international conflict affected the hazard and manner of losing office for the leaders in our sample between 1919 and 2003. In Chapter 4 we test our central claim that as the risk of a forcible removal from office increases, so does the probability of conflict initiation. Although Chapters 3 and 4 use some fairly advanced statistical models, we have made an effort to ensure that our arguments and exposition is not cluttered by unnecessary technical details and jargon. For maximum readability we have moved the technical discussions to several appendices, available on the web at the addresses listed on p. xi. In Chapter 5 we leave the data behind to present a detailed historical examination of Central American leaders between 1840 and 1918. We focus on Central America in order to examine the behavior of leaders who face a high risk of a forcible removal from office to trace our causal mechanism up close. *Archigos* indicates that Haiti and the Dominican Republic and the five states of Central America experienced the most forcible removals from office between 1875 and 1919. We examine Central America rather than Hispaniola because the historiography on the latter region before the nineteenth century is very meagre indeed. The history of Central America between 1875 and 1919 displays a striking pattern, whereby a change in the regional ideological balance of power increased the risk of a leader's forcible removal from office. As a result, such leaders repeatedly invaded their neighbors and went to war. We sum up our conclusions and review the explanatory power of our leader-level approach in Chapter 6.

[7] We very briefly describe the data in Appendix A. We earlier introduced the data set to the academic community in Goemans, Gleditsch and Chiozza (2009).