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Preliminaries

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Introduction

Much has been written on the causes of war; little has been learned about the subject. There are two reasons for this. The first is that the theoretical assumptions used to study the phenomenon are flawed and often erroneous. The second is that individual scholars have tried to do too much too soon. Typically, a single scholar working alone has tried to review a number of wars, reflect on their commonalities, and reach a conclusion. The end result has been some insightful suggestions, but little real evidence or documented generalizations. In the last twenty-five years, this has begun to change. Building on the pioneering efforts of Lewis Richardson and Quincy Wright, a community of peace researchers has emerged, with scholars testing very specific hypotheses and trying to document in a rigorous fashion the patterns of behavior associated with war.

What distinguishes this book on war from previous ones is that it will employ the large number of empirical findings generated in the last twenty-five years as the basis of its theorizing. Although this research has added important pieces of evidence that have moved the field beyond the imprecise and often contradictory explanations of the past, no clear theoretical explanation seems to be emerging from this process, although there is research that suggests such explanations. Because of inconsistencies and anomalies in the findings as well as differences in measurement and research design, the meaning and significance of these findings are hardly self-evident. Rather, they exist as a set of clues or pieces of a puzzle that need to be put together.

A scientific explanation will not just emerge from the research process, but must be constructed carefully from the evidence. While the empirical work on delineating various factors associated with war and specifying models of the war process can continue by testing various hunches, it has failed to date to provide a coherent explanation of war. One of the reasons for this may be that the dominant realist perspective that should be providing such an explanation has simply not been up to the task. It has not been able to explain inconsistencies in a satisfactory manner, and

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an entirely new theoretical approach may be needed, one that will put both existing findings and unresolved questions into a perspective that makes sense of both (see Vasquez, 1983a; Banks, 1985; Mansbach and Vasquez, 1981).

What needs to be done is to stand back from the findings and see what they are trying to tell us. Rather than treat the scientific process in a conservative deductive manner as suggested by philosophers of science as varied as Hempel (1966), Popper (1959), and Lakatos (1970), we might be better served by being more radically inductive, for at least the moment, and treating existing evidence as a good detective would treat clues. We would then try to piece the clues together as we would a puzzle, hoping that as we did so we would come across a clue that would suggest new hypotheses. These new hypotheses would then tell us where to find the missing pieces of the puzzle and in doing so would provide a way of deductively testing the theoretical explanation we had constructed so far. Since a number of research efforts using existing data on alliances, polarization, capability, arms races, bargaining, decision makers' perception, status, and crisis escalation (among others) have been completed or are approaching completion, this is an ideal time to implement this strategy and try to synthesize a theoretical explanation that can guide the next stage in data collection and hypothesis testing.

The scientific research on war and peace in the last twenty-five years has demonstrated that induction can bear important fruit. That research now constitutes a sufficiently critical mass of evidence to provide a real turning point in the long human effort to discover the causes of war. If the turning point comes, it will support J. David Singer's inductive notion that in attempting to understand war, emphasis must be placed on systematic data collection and description so as to produce a body of empirical generalizations. Once the patterns or correlates associated with war are known, then it will be possible to explain them. What is significant about the scientific study of war from the perspective of the philosophy of inquiry is that progress and cumulation have not come from deriving a hypothesis, testing it, and reformulating it in light of the evidence. If one takes that positivist approach, then the findings seem much more inconsistent, ambiguous, and farther away from cumulation than they in fact are. If, however, one treats the findings as an aid to discover inductively what patterns precede war, then there is greater reason for optimism.

The debate on induction versus deduction has often been confused because there has been a failure to distinguish the logic of discovery from the logic of confirmation (Nagel, 1961; Scheffler, 1967), as well as a

tendency to ignore that in practice inductive and deductive procedures do not oppose each other but go hand in hand. Many of the logical arguments against induction hold only on the question of how to validly test theories (the logic of confirmation). This book is concerned primarily with the logic of discovery. I review existing findings not to see if they confirm a particular explanation, but to see if in the absence of any *confirmed* explanation a new explanation consistent with the evidence can be *discovered*.[1] This new explanation must then be tested before it can be accepted.

Methodologically, this book does not follow the typical positivist approach that specifies a proposition, operationalizes its concepts, collects data and constructs a research design that adequately tests the proposition. Instead, what this book does is employ a synoptic review of all relevant evidence to see what has and what can be learned about the onset of war – what in some disciplines is called a meta-analysis (see Hunter, *et al.*, 1982). Such efforts always raise two questions: First, is it possible to compare studies that have different statistical analyses or measures, or are designed at different levels of analysis? Second, is there not a danger that such an effort will treat findings as more definitive than they are? Both of these are important questions, but in practice they turn out not to pose insurmountable obstacles. In terms of comparing studies, this is more of a statistical dilemma than a philosophy of science problem. On the statistical level, a Pearson's r of 0.15 and a Yule's Q of a 0.15 are not equivalent and tell us different things about a relationship. Philosophically, however, they are comparable in that they both tell us that the proposition has produced a "weak" association (see Vasquez, 1983a: 179–80). Statistical findings can be compared to make philosophical assessments about the empirical adequacy of various explanations. If this could not be done, then what would be the point of doing research in the first place? More importantly, in terms of the logic of discovery, differences in research design and measurement, even flaws and measurement errors turn out to be very useful because they provide clues about what might really be going on across a series of studies, particularly those that get different results using basically the same data set.[2]

This brings us to the second question, the danger of treating findings as more definitive than they are. This, of course, can be a problem with simplistic analyses that categorically assert what "science" has found,

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[1] Of course, explanations are not discovered as if they had a pre-existing status, but are constructed by human minds.

[2] For an example of this, see Mueller (1971) who compares different surveys using different phrasing of questions with good effect.

but it is not a problem if one is careful in assessing the evidence and explicit about one's judgments. In this analysis, I have taken pains to present the reader with all the various pieces of evidence I have examined to reach the conclusions I have drawn. Often I repeat in the text or footnotes the actual findings. If a study has been criticized or followed by studies that have inconsistent findings, I give these equal attention. In this process, I have tried to act like a judge rather than a prosecuting attorney or defense counsel.

It is important to take this perspective if one wants to get at the truth or at least learn something from research. Unfortunately, some analysts wish to pursue skepticism's agenda and seek to use scientific studies to show that nothing can be known. Ironically, it is often the anti-quantitative and anti-scientific who take this tack. They then become "super positivists" using positivist criteria to show that a research design is flawed, a measure invalid, or a finding trivial. Having satisfied themselves that scientific research cannot produce knowledge, they then proceed to ignore it and study international politics in a considerably less rigorous and even speculative manner. I hope this book will show readers who have been seduced by this attitude what they have been missing.

I have approached the literature neither in a naive nor overly skeptical way, but as a detective looking for clues. In the end, of course, I have had to make judgments about measurement validity, research designs, and how much weight to place on a particular finding. Evaluation of empirical research requires that such judgments be made. To think otherwise is to misunderstand the nature of scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, this does not mean that judgments need be arbitrary. Whenever an important question is at stake, I trace for the reader the thinking process I went through in making a particular interpretation. Although it would be tiresome to do this for each judgment, I have done it enough so that the reader can make a judgment about how much confidence to place on my evaluation of a particular body of research.

These questions are important because, in this book, I try to uncover the dynamics of war and peace in the modern global system by examining the patterns of behavior delineated by existing research. These patterns, rather than a set of axioms, will be the foundation of my explanation. Instead of assuming that people either as individuals or as collectivities act in certain ways (as rational actors or utility maximizers, for example), I will try to base my explanation on what we empirically know about how people actually behave in certain situations. In other words, I will tend to explain how one action leads to another by saying that in those kinds of

circumstances, what we know about people tells us that they will act in that way for these reasons or because of these factors, rather than explaining the action by a model based on an untested axiom. What this means is that my propositions will often be linked not by mathematical or logical deduction, but by historical contingency.

War is a very complex subject, in part because war does not result from a single set of causes. There are many paths to war, and in this analysis I try to delineate the modal (typical) path by which relatively equal states have become embroiled in wars with one another in the modern state system. I had initially hoped that a single explanation of war over all of history could be constructed. Instead I have come to the conclusion that there are different types of war and that each type can be preceded by different causal sequences. To explain war requires identifying the various paths that lead to war. What makes this even more complicated is that these paths may vary over long periods of history. In this book, I believe I have identified one path, for one type of war, in one historical era, the modern global system (1495 to the present).

In trying to identify the causal sequences that precede wars, I distinguish between underlying and proximate causes. Underlying causes are fundamental causes that set off a train of events (the proximate causes) that end in war. Of all the various issues over which wars can arise, I have found territorial disputes between neighbors to be the main source of conflict that can give rise to a sequence of actions that ends in war. Since all neighbors usually must, at some point in their history, contend with this issue, and because this issue is an issue over which most neighbors are apt to fight if they are involved in a war with one another, I see territorial disputes as an underlying cause of war. Whether or not it will give rise to war, however, will depend on how the issue is treated (the proximate causes). Since how states treat each other varies according to a number of characteristics, the proximate causes of war are much more varied than the underlying causes. Thus, while territorial disputes can be the origin for all types of wars, each of the different types of wars has its own proximate causes.

In this analysis, I have tried to identify these proximate causes by looking at the foreign policy practices that lead to war. Among equals, I have found that, within the modern global system, war is likely if the practices of power politics are used to try to resolve territorial disputes. Power politics behavior, rather than preventing war, actually increases the probability that it will break out. This is because the main practices of power politics – alliances, military buildups, and the use of *realpolitik*

tactics – increase insecurity and hostility motivating each side to take harder lines. Coercion fails to produce compliance or compromise because the nature of the issue at stake is such that giving in (especially to an equal) is unthinkable. Under such conditions, the use of power politics produces a set of interactions and domestic political environments that make war increasingly likely. Between equals, war is brought about by each side taking a series of steps that increase hostility and make the issue at hand more intractable. This involves the disputants in a series of crises, one of which escalates to war. Evidence on which steps increase the probability of war and which characteristics of crises make them prone to escalation has been provided by empirical research.

The use of the foreign policy practices of power politics to handle certain territorial disputes will increase the probability of war, but whether power politics will be used depends, in part, on the nature of the global political system in operation. The global institutional context, in particular whether it provides norms and "rules of the game" for resolving issues, has a major impact on whether states will resort to power politics. Preventing war and creating peace involves learning how to build structures that provide mechanisms for resolving issues through diplomacy rather than armed force.

To summarize: In the modern state system one of the main sets of factors that bring about war among equals is the rise of territorial disputes, particularly between neighbors, that in the absence or failure of a global institutional network to resolve the issue politically makes actors resort to the unilateral solutions provided by power politics. Through elaborating this skeletal outline, I will explain why and how wars occur, why some wars expand, and why some historical periods and interstate relationships are more peaceful than others.

In trying to construct these explanations from the various pieces of research, I have found it useful to think in terms of causes and consequences. Many scholars, including the leading peace researcher in the field, J. David Singer, eschew causal language. Many share Hume's reservation that the notion of "cause" inheres within the human brain and not in nature.[3] In addition, there are a host of problems in making causal inferences. Despite these concerns, it is very difficult to construct an

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[3] Like Hume, I agree that a cause is not something that is observed empirically but is imposed by the human mind. Unlike Hume, however, I do not see this as very unusual or problematic, since we now know from linguistics and cognitive psychology that this is true of many concepts and aspects of human language. If we reject the concept of cause because of Hume's empiricist objections, we would have to reject most scientific concepts, the grammar

explanation of *why* wars occur or expand (especially if one is proceeding inductively) without thinking in causal terms at critical points in the analysis (see Dessler, 1991). Thus, I have found it important to distinguish whether some factor is really a correlate or a "cause." I have tried to see if a factor is really something that brings about war or is a consequence of war. I have thought it important in interpreting a study to see if its explanations and findings identify sufficient or necessary conditions of war. I have found it useful in determining the relative potency of variables to speak in terms of underlying and proximate causes. Without prejudicing the deeper philosophical issues, I have retained causal *language* and *thinking* at critical points in the analysis. When I have done this, I have tried to make it clear exactly what I mean by the language and to what empirical referents I am alluding.

Having said that, let me note some areas where I have found causal language misleading and have found the need to correct some of its mechanistic connotations. I have found it misleading to think of war as being brought about because a certain set of conditions or variables are in place. Such Newtonian conceptions and research based on them have not been very fruitful. Rather than seeing war as caused in this mechanical sense, I have seen war as an outcome, i.e. as something that flows out of a set of actions. Rather than seeing war as being *produced* by a set of conditions, I have found it more enlightening to speak of the probability of war increasing as certain actions are taken. To correct these misleading connotations, I have done the following. To emphasize that war comes out of a set of actions, I have spoken in terms of causal sequences and paths to war. To emphasize the probabilistic nature of war, I have spoken in terms of factors that promote or increase the probability of the onset and expansion of war, rather than of sufficient conditions – although I will use the latter phrase from time to time to distinguish these factors from necessary conditions.

My concern that war and peace have been conceptualized in an overly mechanistic manner in the scientific and traditional realist literature reflects a deeper concern that various criticisms that have been made of positivism need to be taken more seriously by those pursuing scientific inquiry. This book was written during much of the debate over positivism (see Ashley, 1987; Shapiro, 1981; Kratochwil, 1989; Lapid, 1989; Hollis and Smith, 1991; Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989), and the analysis herein

underlying language, and a host of other aspects of cognition that seem to be associated with the structure of the brain rather than the empirical environment.

has not been unaffected by that debate. In this book, the importance of history, cultural variation and the role of beliefs and social constructions of reality are emphasized over the role of single factors, like power, or rationalistic explanations. My views are considerably less positivist than even traditional scholars like Gilpin and Morgenthau who see themselves as uncovering timeless laws of politics. More fundamentally, the debate over positivism has affected how I conceive of international relations theory and has provided an opening for reflection, which I have found more congenial to serious theory construction than the strict positivism of the recent past.

These various philosophical issues are pursued in Part I of the book in which I explore the conceptual questions that need to be resolved before constructing an explanation of war and peace. In Chapter 1, I address the question of how the phenomenon of war *should* be conceptualized in order to understand and explain it. Here, I outline the theoretical assumptions about war that I have found useful to make and which are employed in the subsequent analysis. I learned early on that not all wars were alike and that different explanations would be required for different types of war. In Chapter 2, I present and justify a typology of war and argue that each type has its own causes. I then limit myself to explaining wars of rivalry, wars that are fought between relative equals. The concept of rivalry is defined and its dynamics outlined. In Chapter 3, I assess realist contributions to our understanding of war and its failure to provide an adequate understanding of the dynamics of peace and war. I argue that power politics theory, rather than providing an explanation of war and peace, actually reflects an image of the world that decision makers sometimes hold and a set of foreign policy practices that once implemented increase the probability of war. I discuss how the institution of war evolves and the role learning plays in the onset of war by creating and institutionalizing a culture of war at the global level. In a more general sense, this chapter is concerned with how and why violence is used by some collectivities in some periods, and not by all collectivities in all periods.

Part II is the heart of the book. It is devoted to constructing a scientific explanation of the onset and expansion of war and the nature of peace. In each of these chapters, the main scientific findings are put together as pieces of a puzzle to come up with an explanation of war and peace. I begin, in Chapter 4, by examining one of the main underlying causes of interstate wars – territorial disputes. I argue that territorial contiguity is the source of conflict that most frequently leads to wars, and I provide evidence to show that this is the case. The reason why human collectivities will fight

over territorial issues more readily than other issues is not known, but I
speculate that it may have something to do with an inherited tendency
toward territoriality. A focus on territoriality can explain a number of
patterns that other perspectives have not explained. Nevertheless, terri-
toriality should not be conceived of as a drive or instinct that makes war
inevitable. Territoriality makes humans very sensitive to threats to their
territory, but how they deal with these issues is the main factor determin-
ing whether they will go to war. Chapter 5 specifies some of the proximate
causes of war by outlining how war comes about between relative equals
when they treat highly salient issues in a power politics fashion. In this
chapter, I provide a detailed analysis of the empirical literature to outline
the typical steps to war that rivals follow. Delineating the steps to war pro-
vides a way of explaining why some rivalries end in war while others do
not. In Chapter 5, the focus is on why interactions between rivals encour-
age them to take certain steps that lead to war. However, domestic polit-
ical factors are also important in explaining the steps to war, and these are
delineated in Chapter 6, which focuses on the linkage between global and
domestic factors. Chapters 5 and 6 identify the main causal sequence that
leads relative equals to war. Chapter 7 identifies the causal sequence that
leads some wars to expand. In that chapter, I examine the research find-
ings on the scope, severity, and duration of war in order to explain how
some wars expand to become world wars.

These three chapters specify proximate causes, but it is important to
remember that structural factors have a major impact on whether the
interactions that produce the steps to war are likely to be taken. Why
rivals initiate the steps to war in the first place cannot be fully under-
stood without reference to the global institutional context. This is done in
Chapter 8, which examines peace structures and the role of peace in the
onset of war. A full explanation of war must explain how and why a peace
breaks down, encouraging states to resort to the practices of power poli-
tics. This chapter delineates the main factors associated with interstate
relationships and historical periods that are comparatively peaceful. This
demonstrates that world politics need not always be a struggle for power,
that war is not inevitable, and that peace is possible.

The analysis presented in Part II explains war by: (1) looking at how
certain issues become prone to violence if they are handled in a certain
way; (2) identifying the ways in which issues are treated that are most
likely to result in war between equals; and (3) examining how the global
institutional structure permits or discourages political actors from hand-
ling issues in a way that will result in war. In Chapter 9, I integrate the