Part I

Broad Insights from Political Science to Molecular Behavior

1 Cooperation and Conflict in International Relations

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Introduction

The most fundamental questions in international relations are: "Why do states go to war?" "How can interstate conflict be prevented or ameliorated?," and "What are the pathways to greater international cooperation?" In considering these questions, the dominant paradigm in international relations, *political realism*, emphasizes the enduring propensity for conflict among self-interested states seeking their security in an "anarchic" international environment, that is, one where there is no central authority to protect states from each other or to guarantee their security. Hence, international cooperation is thought to be rare, fleeting, and tenuous – limited by enforcement problems and each state's preference for larger relative gains in any potential bargain because of its systemic vulnerability (Morgenthau, 1949; Waltz, 1979). At the extreme, states find themselves in a security condition of mutual distrust that resembles a prisoner's dilemma game. (See Box 3.1 in Chapter 3 for a description of various games.) Maintaining an equilibrium in the international system through a balance of power and limited cooperation are all that can be hoped for; a situation where war, large-scale violent conflict, is natural and merely "diplomacy by other means" (von Clausewitz, 1989). This is not to argue that international relations are in a constant state of war, rather that they exist within the shadow of war as a final arbiter.

The major alternative paradigm, *political liberalism*, focuses on identifying ways to mitigate the conflictual tendencies of international relations. Liberals argue that shared economic interests such as international trade that produces divisible, absolute gains from cooperation (win-win situations where relative gains are thought to be less essential) are a restraint on bellicosity. Liberals also note that common or cosmopolitan norms (such as democratic values and respect for human rights) can restrain the resort to violence and provide a means for settling disputes peacefully, particularly in disagreements between democracies (Box 1.1). Liberals also believe that international institutions (multilateral organizations, regimes, and laws) can help address the problems of creating and enforcing agreements in anarchy and help solve cooperation dilemmas. Finally, liberals urge the development of collective security to keep the peace through the coordinated actions of the entire international community (such as the United Nations [UN]) or a federation of like-minded states rather than relying on the war-prone balance-of-power system (Kant, 1983; Doyle, 1997).

Box 1.1 Democracies and International Conflict

Although the idea that democracies are more pacific in their international relations than states with more authoritarian forms of government can be traced to the writings of Immanuel Kant, it was not until the 1980s that scholars developed systematic evidence that mature democracies almost never go to war with other democracies. This finding led to the theory of the "democratic peace," which variously argues that (1) peaceful norms of dispute resolution that prevail within and between democracies, (2) citizen enfranchisement that constrains and slows the martial ambitions of leaders to take their citizens into wars, and (3) transparency in communication aided by a free press that reduces miscalculation in international relations all contribute to the democratic peace. There are several important caveats to the democratic peace. Most importantly, democracies are not more peaceful than other states generally; they are as likely to get involved in wars as authoritarian states, either against authoritarian states or via imperial wars. Further, democratizing states, those transitioning to democracy, are often unstable and war prone, especially multiethnic states that struggle to meet popular demands while protecting minority rights.

More recently, *political constructivist* approaches to international relations, drawing from sociological and linguistic theory, have emphasized that non-material, ideational factors, not just material interests and national and international institutions, are critical to understanding the formation of preferences and the possibility of cooperation. As the name implies, for constructivists, the interests and identities of states are highly malleable and context-specific and the anarchical structure of the international system does not dictate that conflict is the norm and cooperation the exception. Rather, the process of interaction between and among agents shapes how political actors define themselves and their interests: "self-help and power politics do not flow logically or causally from anarchy …. Anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt, 1992, pp. 394–395). Because identities and interests are not dictated by structure, a state's purely egoistic interests can be transformed under anarchy to create collective identities and interests by intentional efforts and positive interaction; think, for example, of the transformation in French–German relations from enmity to amity with the creation of the European Union after a century of warfare between the two states.

What's Science Got to Do with It?

What has been the relationship between these theories and the scientific understanding of the physical and biological world? Since the Enlightenment, classical international relations scholars have developed their theories of the social world consistent within the dominant vision of physical reality. They have implicitly relied on the

ontology, epistemology, and conception of human nature that predominated in the natural sciences for their social theories. In the field of politics and international relations, for example, the prevailing materialist/positivist/realist paradigm assumes the following:

- Ontologically, a Cartesian duality exists between observer and observed, between physical events and subjective human consciousness: each exists from its own side independent of the other and an unbridgeable gulf separates matter from mind.
- Epistemologically, objective truth is knowable through third-person methods of science focused exclusively on the material world, what some call "foundationalism" – the rational, self-directed search for permanent and authoritative principles of human knowledge (Toulmin, 1992). In physical and social science, the goal is to uncover deterministic patterns of behavior. As such, scientific facts are necessarily separate from values.
- Behaviorally, human nature, governed principally by reason, is essentially self-interested, and human action reflects the rational pursuit of one's preferences.

The predominant political conclusions flowing from these tenets are that insecurity and conflict naturally arise in groups of independent, materially real, self-interested actors. Thus, the benefits of cooperation are unlikely without a fear-based, hierarchical social contract domestically and, by extension, a balance of power among self-interested states acting in the anarchic international environment (Hobbes, 1651/1979; Morgenthau, 1949).

As noted above, liberal social thinkers working within this physical paradigm see greater possibilities for international cooperation if (1) institutional arrangements or international society can mitigate systemic anarchy, and (2) rational actors, over time, seek reciprocal cooperation (Jervis, 1978; Axelrod, 2006). Fundamentally, liberal schools of thought do not challenge the existing ontological or epistemological assumptions.

Although Enlightenment thinkers drew their conclusions about human nature from empirical observations of action within the social realm, since the time of Darwin, some materialist social thinkers have attempted to connect with the natural world through the life sciences to explain behavior – a different sort of naturalism. These approaches explicitly incorporate humans' biological legacy and psychological makeup into their understanding of human nature. They recognize that human beings and human brains can be understood as shaped by an evolutionary process and that events occurring within individuals may be as important to understanding their social behavior as events occurring between them. For example, the evolutionary paradigm suggests that the human brain has developed reliable, specialized functions that help it understand and navigate social interactions – such as interpreting threats or weighing value in exchange – and that this biological inheritance must be accounted for, along with environmental factors – such as culture and institutions – in explaining behavior (Barkow et al., 1992). Psychological approaches likewise focus on human agents and ground their theories on the innate nature of humans and the human mind and the limits and possibilities of behavior. Overwhelmingly, these approaches support the

notion of self-interest as the norm in human behavior and altruism the exception, and they endorse the materialism and objectivism of physical scientists. Human behavior is considered the emergent product of "indifferent physiochemical processes" where "selfishness and a ready penchant toward violence are the principal elements of our nature" (Davidson and Harrington, 2002, p. 20). Consequently, social theorists should feel comfortable asserting that human behavior can be assumed to be largely rational and self-interested, and they should be free to focus their attention on social variables, like ideas and institutions, in explaining state and interstate interactions.

The third paradigm for understanding international relations, political constructivism, maintains that social agents create their own contexts and that these contexts shape social agents (Onuf, 1989). Thus, it rejects the subject–object dualism of objectivist, materialist science and views human nature as socially, linguistically, or normatively created (constructed); infinitely malleable; and largely detached from the physical world. Human behavior can be understood, or, more accurately, interpreted through the subjectively determined categories, institutions, and ideas of humans' own making. So, for example, although the human organism is not exempt from the evolutionary process that shaped it, because reality is overwhelmingly socially determined, humans can be effectively divorced from their biological inheritance. The resulting explanations for social behavior therefore focus on the importance of culture, language, institutions, and other human artifacts alone. Social phenomena can be understood from the outside in. Conclusions about the "nature" of social behavior derived from this approach are necessarily contingent and provisional and not generalizable claims. By emphasizing the role of shared beliefs and social forces that shape reality, constructivism mostly disregards agents' internal motivation and innate biological and psychological constraints and capabilities.

Beyond this tacit, arm's length relationship with the natural sciences, mainstream political science and international relations theories have not ventured and the reasons for the separation are historical and practical more than philosophical. Historically, since the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, for example, biological theories and concepts have been used in nefarious ways to promote or justify social pathologies such as colonialism, racism, and fascism. It is understandable, therefore, that social scientists have avoided considering explicitly the biological sciences in part because of the pseudo-certainty these approaches historically bestowed on several social evils. A practical reason to avoid new developments in the physical and biological sciences are the issues of complexity and uncertainty. Social scientists lack the specialized knowledge to connect with the natural sciences generally, and revolutionary changes in scientific understandings of the physical and biological worlds instigated by quantum physics and neuroscientific findings, regarding the plasticity of the human brain and behavior specifically, are highly esoteric and not yet fully agreed upon or understood. Thus, social thinkers have little ability or appetite to delve into these fields to consider their political implications until after the dust settles. In disengaging from the natural sciences, however, social theory may be missing an opportunity to find insights into important questions, a topic addressed later in the discussion of national reconciliation.

The Changing Nature of Global Conflict

In contemporary international relations, the realities of conflict and cooperation have changed over the last half century and there is good news, and bad, to report. First the good news: interstate conflicts, the historical focus of most international relations theory, have declined substantially and all but disappeared. In 2011, for example, the lone interstate conflict was a low-intensity war between Thailand and Cambodia. Putting aside the possibility that certain interstate conflicts could result in thermo-nuclear exchange and end planetary life as we know it, some say we should rejoice in our good fortune and the better angels of our nature (Lebow, 2010; Pinker, 2011). Such a celebration may be premature, however, as the recent conflict between Russia and Ukraine reminds us or as growing tensions in the South China Sea portend. Further, as discussed below, contemporary civil wars often embroil other states and create regional and global problems. Nonetheless, Figure 1.1 illustrates the waning of interstate wars over the past several decades.

There are many competing and complementary explanations for the decline of interstate war. Some of the more notable assertions reference the following factors as contributing to the diminishing of interstate war:

- States are more economically interdependent.
- The increase in democratic states reduces the number of potential belligerent dyads.
- Europe, the historical location of many interstate wars, is at peace.
- The possibility of nuclear escalation constrains interstate violence.
- Increases in communication technologies reduce the likelihood of war caused by misperception or misunderstanding.
- The benefits of war are lower than in the past and the costs are higher.
- War fatigue from World War I and World War II exists.
- International norms have changed and violence is no longer a legitimate means for settling disputes.

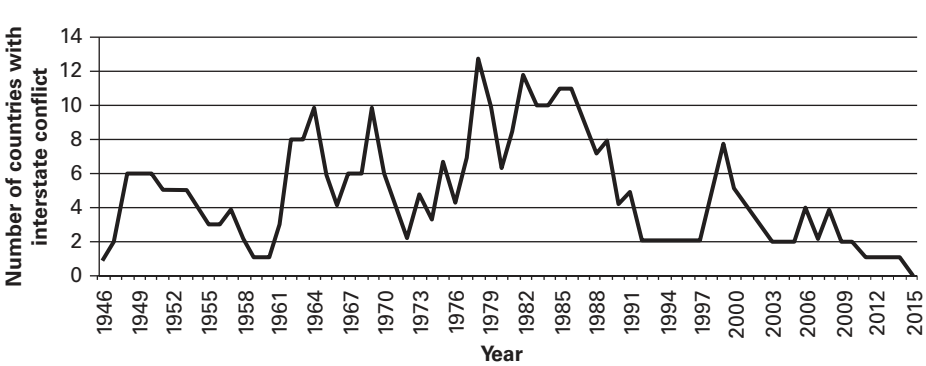

Figure 1.1 Declining interstate conflict. *Source*: Monty G. Marshall, Major Episodes of Political Violence (MEPV) and Conflict Regions 1946–2012, Center for Systemic Peace, 2013.

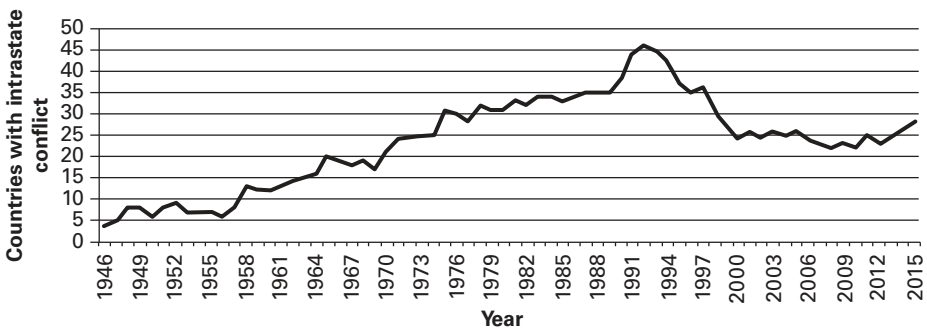

Figure 1.2 The rise of intrastate conflicts. *Source*: Monty G. Marshall, Major Episodes of Political Violence (MEPV) and Conflict Regions 1946–2012, Center for Systemic Peace, 2013.

- Greater institutionalization of international politics creates venues for negotiation and enhanced cooperation.
- More effective conflict management techniques – such as conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding – defuse or shorten wars.

Failure may be an orphan, but success in reducing interstate wars has many claimants.

While interstate wars have declined, Figure 1.2 illustrates that intrastate (civil) wars have become more numerous, peaking at the end of the Cold War and remaining the dominant feature in global conflict. Today, a much greater percentage of conflict in the international system takes place within states rather than between states.

Civil wars now constitute the major threat to international peace and security because they frequently embroil other states and non-state actors in their conflicts, and they destabilize wider regions by creating weak, fragile, or failing states that foster a host of transnational problems such as refugee flows, genocide, terrorism, environmental degradation, interstate crime, and infectious disease contagion, among others. This is the bad news regarding conflict trends. The current "civil" war in Syria is an object lesson in how civil conflicts are internationalized, as this war also serves as conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran over dominance in the Islamic world and among Russia, America, and Turkey for influence in the Middle East. Syria also quickly became a haven for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and related terrorist groups, and the forced migration of millions from Syria has profoundly impacted neighboring Turkey, the European Union, and North America.

Civil wars also enmesh the international community when the failure of a state to protect the human rights of its own citizens results in gross violations of international norms, such as the prohibition of genocide and prompt "humanitarian intervention" by other states or international governmental organizations such as the UN or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Recent conflicts in the horn of Africa and in

the Balkans are examples of internationalized civil conflict caused by a state's failure to protect its own people.

Making matters worse, many of these intrastate conflicts possess features that make them more intractable and protracted than interstate conflicts. Civil conflicts have been estimated to last more than ten times longer than interstate wars, and are more likely to return to violence after settlement efforts than interstate wars (Bennett and Stam, 1996; Collier et al., 2001; Fearon, 2004). Various estimates of recidivism in civil conflicts range from 40 to 90 percent depending on the methodology employed (Walter, 2009; World Bank, 2011). Lasting peaceful settlement of civil conflicts is rare – a subject I return to below – absent military conquest by one side, a "victor's peace," such as the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka in 2009, or massive third-party intervention, such as the interminable UN peacekeeping operation in Cyprus. In short, most civil conflicts are never formally resolved and often reoccur.

Peaceful settlement of civil conflicts is problematic because of acute "security dilemmas." The notion of a security dilemma comes from the realist understanding of international relations wherein actions taken by a state to increase its own security (expanding its military expenditures, for example), cause reactions from other states (such as an arms race), which in turn lead to a decrease rather than an increase in the original state's security and instability in the system. This dilemma flows naturally from the posited nature of the international system in which self-interested states pursue their security in an anarchic environment. As applied to civil conflicts, the security dilemma facing warring factions can be more acute because a war settlement requires one side to lay down its arms (state sovereignty means a monopoly in the use of force by the government within its territory) and then live together with its former adversary. Conflict between states at least allows for the parties to withdraw behind national borders and for both sides to provide for their own defense against future aggression in most war settlements (Walter, 2009).

Further, civil conflicts are difficult to resolve peacefully because they often concern "existential" values that go to the heart of the identities of the warring factions and are, by nature, difficult to compromise relative to a dispute over material issues such as a border disagreement between nations. Civil conflicts are often defined by disputes between parties of different ethnicities, religions, and races. These intrastate differences reflect, in part, the legacy of colonialism, which left behind multiethnic states where a tradition of playing one group against another and where the ruling group often monopolizing political authority and being unresponsive, if not exploitative, toward the needs of other groups, had been part of a divide-and-rule strategy of the colonial power. After formal decolonization, new national elites often continue to manipulate these cleavages for their personal and communal advantage by perpetuating negative images of the other and stoking communal antagonisms. The connection between colonialism and current civil strife can be seen in the geographic distribution of recent civil conflicts, which are predominantly in former colonial territories in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Because postcolonial conflicts often cleave along

ethnic, tribal, religious, and/or racial lines, these existential values become part of the conflict and, when such values are threatened, they do not lend themselves to obvious compromises and settlements in situations characterized by animosity, distrust, and acute security dilemmas.

In some ways, these new forms of conflict harken back to the pre-Westphalian, medieval period, before the formation of distinctive nation-states and the firm establishment of the principal of state sovereignty, in that the boundaries between state and society, internal and external, and war and criminality are blurred. In describing these new wars, Mary Kaldor has noted that they are characterized by consolidation of power along ethnic lines, based on tribalist or communal identities rather than international ideologies (communism or fascism for example); external support by diasporas more than superpowers or ex-colonial powers; irregular and privatized war-fighting strategies often involving terrorism and the use of atrocity rather than standing armies and traditional military strategies; and financial sustenance from criminal trade in natural resources or contraband such as drugs rather than through state taxation and mobilization (Kaldor, 2006).

In explaining the causes of civil conflicts, scholars fall primarily into one of two camps. First, there are those who focus on the economic opportunity for insurgents to grab political power and economic resources through inter-elite power struggle, criminality, and warlordism in situations where the state control and viability are weak and insurgencies have a good chance of success – the so-called greed explanation (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Alternatively, there are those who focus on "grievances" as the underlying cause of civil strife, particularly the failure of the state to provide access to political participation, economic opportunity, and expression of identity for certain social groups or communities, again often based on colonial-era ethnic, tribal, or religious distinctions (Azar, 1991; Cederman et al., 2013). The failure to provide for the basic political, material, and identity needs of excluded groups is offered as the underlying source of protracted social conflict. Neither explanation is mutually exclusive, and on inspection, several civil conflicts involve a mix of both types of motivation while others begin as one type of conflict, say over political exclusion, and devolve into a conflict over who owns and exploits national resources or secures the benefits from a "war economy" (Keen, 1998).

At a broader level, the growth in civil conflict can be traced to larger social processes such as decolonization, which, as noted, created many new and unstable states with weak central governments and a history of ethnic division. Also, the end of the Cold War, which coincided with the peak number of civil conflicts, is thought to have removed the constraint of superpower influence on intrastate violence. During the Cold War era, one or the other superpower often propped up an authoritarian regime of its liking that suppressed underlying national grievances; Yugoslavia was perhaps the most dramatic example. Finally, the process of globalization itself – the rapid growth of trade, transport, finance, and communication – may have weakened state authority and subjected emerging states to forces largely beyond their control. These nascent states often failed to meet the challenges of globalization, thus creating opportunities for insurgents to challenge the state for control of power and wealth.

Returning to the Prospects for Peaceful, Internal Resolution of Civil Conflicts: The Process of Reconciliation

Despite the general intractability of many civil conflicts and the likelihood of recidivism in civil violence, research by my colleague Peter Brecke and me suggests that the process of reconciliation provides an intrinsic way for states to overcome the intractability of today's dominant form of conflict (Long and Brecke, 2003). We were first drawn to this possibility by many formal and informal observations suggesting that *reconciliation events* – public displays of mutually conciliatory accommodation between antagonists – was somehow integral to mitigating future violence and maintaining social order after violent conflict. Consider four descriptions of "reconciliation events" in very different societies.

- In primate society, Frans de Waal described a fight in the chimpanzee colony of the Arnhem Zoo:

  > It was the winter of 1975 and the colony was kept indoors. In the course of a charging display, the dominant male attacked a female, which caused screaming chaos as other chimpanzees came to her defense. When the group finally calmed down, an unusual silence followed, with nobody moving, as if the apes were waiting for something. Suddenly the entire colony burst out hooting, while one male worked the large metal drum in the corner of the hall. In the midst of the pandemonium, I saw two chimpanzees kiss and embrace . . . the embracing individuals were the same male and female of the initial fight. (de Waal, 1989)

- In subnational tribal relations, the letters of Samuel Sewell captured the following ceremony of Native Americans in the northeast colonies in 1630:

  > Meeting with the Sachem they came to an agreement and buried two axes in the ground . . . which ceremony is to them more significant and binding than all the Articles of Peace, the hatchet being the primary weapon. (Hendrikson, 1989)

- In the national society of South Africa, the *Telegraph* reported on a public handshake and raised arms of President F. W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela in Cape Town, on May 4, 1990, after announcement of an agreement on steps that would lead to talks ending white-minority rule (Alleyne, 2012).
- In the realm of international politics, contemporary historian Hendrick Smith described the signing of a peace treaty and pubic joining of hands among President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel, and President Jimmy Carter of the United States:

  > The elusive, unprecedented peace treaty that Egypt and Israel signed today has enormous symbolic importance and the potential for fundamentally transforming the map and history of the entire region.. . . the best diplomatic estimate here is that the treaty reduced the risk of major war in the Middle East. (Smith, 1979)

Each anecdote contains the same implicit or explicit hypothesis: future violence is less likely to occur, and social order more likely to be restored, if principals to a conflict engage in a formal, public reconciliation event indicating a desire for improved relations.