



DAVID SOBEK

THE CAUSES OF WAR



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polity

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INTRODUCTION

The 1964 classic movie from Stanley Kubrick (*Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*) portrays the United States and Soviet Union on the verge of nuclear Armageddon. As the crisis evolves, Kubrick depicts both American and Soviet leaders scrambling to avert the impending conflict. To limit misunderstanding, the leaders stay in contact over the phone and the American president even allows the Soviet ambassador into the war room. As rational as they appear in their attempts to resolve the crisis, the two sides are constantly vexed by the irrational. Whether it is the insanity of an American general, the paranoia of both sides, or the drunkenness of the Soviet premier, war appears almost inevitable. As the movie ends, the viewers find that the doomsday devices, which were believed to be the most rational of weapons, ultimately lead to the most irrational of outcomes (nuclear war). How accurately, however, does this movie depict the onset of interstate war?

Wars often appear the epitome of both rationality and irrationality. On the one hand, it makes perfect sense that a state would occasionally use its military to further its national self-interest. On the other hand, wars often exact exorbitant costs on both the defeated and the victor. As such, why would either side of the conflict simply not negotiate a solution and avoid all of the costs associated with war? In many ways, understanding why states choose conflict over diplomacy is the crux of the problem. The onset of war implies an end to diplomacy just as the end of war signals the start of diplomacy. So why do states choose war over diplomacy, given that the vast majority of time they rely on diplomacy to resolve their differences?

Unfortunately no single answer to that question exists. Just as all illnesses of the human body do not derive from a single cause, conflicts of the body politic do not have a single source. This does not mean that one can never understand the onset of war, or discover methods that limit its occurrence or severity. In fact, scholars have developed a number of generalizations about the onset of war. The problem is that none of these individual theories can explain all wars, but they all represent risk factors that are important to any analysis of international conflict.

From this perspective, context matters. A factor that was critical in generating a war in one case may have little effect in another. For instance, researchers have found a significant amount of evidence showing that democracies are less likely to have militarized conflicts with one another. Does this general finding apply equally to all types of democracies? Are poor democracies just as peaceful as rich democracies? Are newly democratized states just as peaceful as consolidated democracies? The answers to these questions touch on the crux of the matter. If the effect on the democratic peace is conditioned on the context, then it becomes vitally important to understand these limits. This book bridges the gaps between risk factors, conditionality, and war.

Understanding war

It is not new to investigate the causes of war but often the theoretical explanations concentrate on a single “cause.” For instance, Waltz (1979) focused on the systemic distribution of resources, Blainey (1988) examined disagreements over the distribution of capabilities, and Organski and Kugler (1980) looked at power transitions. While the single-cause explanations have an intuitive appeal, reality is often not cooperative. If one wants to truly understand war, then the first step is to move away from the “magic bullet” theories that purport to fully explain the onset of international war with a single theory.

The risk of war is influenced by a number of factors, each of which individually alters the probability of conflict. The magic bullet theories of conflict tend to concentrate on one cause as the primary source of war but in reality multiple factors push and pull states closer to, or farther from, armed conflict. In addition, the conditionality of war implies that the importance of the individual causes of war differs

from case to case. So the balance of power may have mattered to the Germans in their decision to attack France in 1940 but played a lesser role in the American decision to invade Iraq in 2003. Why would the cause of war change so dramatically from case to case?

Part of the problem is that international politics can be viewed from a variety of perspectives (or levels of analysis). For instance, one could look at the decision of individual states to initiate wars or how pairs of states (dyads) enter into conflict or even how the structure of the international system affects the amount of conflict. All of these areas of research address the causes of war but they do so at drastically different levels of analysis. So while the characteristics of an individual state may affect its decision to initiate war, they may have little to no effect on the overall level of conflict in the international system. As such, the choice to examine a certain level of analysis may emphasize one cause of war over others. This does not necessarily mean that the other factors do not matter. In fact, this is one place where context enters into the equation.

The democratic peace argues that pairs of democracies are less likely to experience conflict. This theory is clearly cast at the dyadic level of analysis which generates a degree of parsimony. Sacrificing that parsimony, however, allows for a more nuanced picture. So while pairs of democratic states are more peaceful, researchers have found that this may not apply to newly democratized states. In this instance, a factor for the state level of analysis (democratization) affects a dyadic theory (democratic peace). The effect of context, however, is more than simply the interaction of the levels of analysis; rather, certain contexts may alter the way states perceive the international system.

While states often find themselves confronted by situations that could lead to war, the precise costs and benefits associated with war differ from case to case. For instance, domestic politics can play a critical role in determining the perception of national interests of the state. In addition, the domestic institutions can constrain leaders in varying ways. As such, we would not expect an elected democratic leader to calculate the costs and benefits of a war in the same way as a military dictator. This means that two states facing the same situation may make vastly different choices. So for Hitler in 1940 the balance of power mattered more than domestic support but for Bush in 2003 domestic support played an important role.

In many ways, context provides a structure for the interaction of states that emphasizes some causes of war over others. Theories that ignore the role of context may mistakenly believe that an individual factor is more (or less) important than it is in reality. As such, the

effects of context do not make understanding war impossible but provide a way to deepen our knowledge both of the dynamics of individual cases and of the explanatory power of different theories of war. From this perspective, context generates an interactive, as opposed to additive, effect.

The difference between additive and interactive effects is critical. For instance, assume that two factors affect the likelihood that a state will initiate an international war. Factor A generates a 10 percent probability that a state will initiate a war, while factor B generates a 20 percent probability. We can imagine four possible situations: neither factor A nor B is present, factor A is present but not B, factor B is present but not A, and both factors A and B are present. This means that when neither factor is present, the probability of war is 0 percent. The presence of factor A but not B leads to a 10 percent chance and the presence of factor B but not A creates a 20 percent probability. So what happens when both A and B are present?

Perhaps the best way to answer that question is to look not at the odds of war but at the probability of peace. Since only one of the factors is needed to trigger a war, in order to maintain peace both factors need to generate peace (or not war). So the question becomes what are the odds that both factors A and B will generate peace? The answer is simply the multiplication of the two individual probabilities of peace, i.e., 90 percent (factor A) times 80 percent (factor B). So when both factors A and B are present, we would expect peace 72 percent of the time and war 28 percent of the time. While we determined the probability by multiplying the two probabilities, the effects are assumed to be “additive” in the sense that the result was a simple combination of the two individual effects.

The joint presence of A and B, however, could also produce an interactive effect. Imagine that, when we empirically examine the international system, we find that our predictions about the effects of A and B are accurate except for one case. In particular, what if the probability of conflict when they are both present is 40 percent instead of 28 percent? What does this imply? It could be the case that the theory is incorrect but it could also be the case that the presence of both A and B generates an interactive effect. When an interactive effect is present, it leads to an outcome that is more than the sum of its parts. This interactive effect is similar to the concept of emergence, i.e., the component units interact and generate an outcome not explainable by their “simple laws,” or general patterns of behavior. Systems that

contain emergence are “driven by the behavior of individual actors who are moved by their own incentives, goals, and calculations” (Jervis 1997: 16).

The interactive effects can be seen in the rush to the First World War. In the years leading up to the war, the political and military leaders felt that the offense had become dominant. As a result, the leaders felt that the first state to successfully mobilize their forces would gain a tremendous advantage in any conflict. In addition, the major powers of Europe had entangled themselves in a set of tight alliances that essentially split them into two main groups: the Triple Alliance (Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary) and the Triple Entente (Britain, France, and Russia). While the belief in the offense and the tight alliances would each individually increase the risk of war, these two factors interacted to create an exceptionally unstable environment. So when Austria-Hungary began to mobilize against Serbia and the Russians mobilized to defend Serbia, it started a chain reaction which led to German mobilization, followed by French and British mobilization, and then ultimately to Germany’s attack against France.

Emergence, or the interactive effects, occurs in systems that are composed of copies of a limited number of components, such as states. The individual components obey simple laws and are connected to one another, forming an array that may change (Holland 1999: 6–10). In general, emergence is used to explain a system where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Mainzer 1997: 3–5; Holland 1999: 121–2). As Holland notes (1999: 225), “there are regularities in system behavior that are not revealed by direct inspection of the laws satisfied by the components.” In fact, Jervis (1999: 61) argues that actions in an emergent system “have unintended effects on the actor, others, and the system as a whole, which means that one cannot infer results from desires and expectations and vice versa.”

Emergent phenomena are embedded in a context that determines their function (Holland 1999: 226). So wind-generated waves could strike rocks in one instance, leading to erosion and the formation of a beach, but on other occasions the waves could hit a sandy beach and spur erosion that ultimately weakens the size of the waves. In terms of international politics, it is often argued that the democratic peace is generated by some conflict-dampening effect of either norms or institutions. Harrison (2002: 150), however, found that “many sections of Kant’s writings appear not to rely on the benign tendencies of liberal states, but stress conflict as the source of the emergence of pacific relations.” This does not mean that the democratic peace is incorrect.

What it implies is that the democratic peace may be an emergent phenomenon.

This discussion of emergence and context does not mean that understanding international politics is impossible. In fact, the presence of emergence offers an opportunity to better understand the outcomes that we see in the international system. To reach this promise, however, theories require a mechanism that allows for the generation of the emergent behavior, i.e., they cannot simply be aggregations of component unit interactions. In addition, the theories need to take into account the possibility that the effect is not constant, i.e., context matters.

Building truly emergent theories of international relations requires researchers to think in terms of interactions, i.e., how do the various conditions affect the probability of conflict when they occur simultaneously? Perhaps the easiest analogy for emergent theories is to think of them as recipes. A cake, for example, does not simply require the correct ingredients; it also matters how they are combined, heated, and so on. Simply placing flour, milk, eggs, and sugar into a bowl (without mixing or baking) would not make a cake. Would this outcome imply that flour, milk, eggs, and sugar are not ingredients found in cakes? Of course not. Cakes are more than simply the sum of their ingredients. A cake is an emergent outcome when the ingredients are combined in the proper manner.

Just as there are recipes for cakes, one can also think about recipes for war. The critical question is really how these ingredients combine to generate international conflict. Scholars implicitly build emergent theories of international conflict, although they do not often speak of it as such. For instance, Copeland (2000) builds his theory by integrating three strands of realist thought (classical realism, neo-realism, and hegemonic stability theory). Vasquez (1993) builds his “steps to war” theory by detailing how the actions of the states interact to greatly increase the risk of war.

Understanding war also requires one to move across the levels of analysis. In other words, the onset of conflict in a given dyad is certainly related to the characteristics of that dyad (joint democracies, balance of capabilities, amount of trade, and so on), but it is also related to the characteristics of both the individual states and the international system. For instance, it could be the case that democratic peace theory is accurate but the effect may be magnified when the international system is bipolar or when international trade is relatively open and free. It could also be the case that democratic peace is less effective when the states are major powers with global concerns.

Determinism versus probabilistic theory

Theories, regardless of their level of analysis, can fall into two broad categories: deterministic or probabilistic. Deterministic theories offer a set of cause-and-effect relationships that always hold; in other words, if condition X is present then outcome Y will always happen. Probabilistic theories offer a set of cause-and-effect relationships that hold more often than one would expect simply by chance alone. In other words, a probabilistic theory would argue that the presence of condition X increases the likelihood of outcome Y. While at first glance it appears that a theorist should strive for deterministic theories, the choice between developing probabilistic or deterministic theories is often contingent on the area of study.

Deterministic theories are mostly found in the natural sciences, such as physics and chemistry. For example, the law of gravity argues that two masses will attract one another along a straight line connecting the two center masses. Practically, this means that all objects on earth, unless acted upon by another force, will fall. Because this theory is deterministic, any instance where this does not occur automatically disproves the theory. For example, Einstein's theory of gravitational lensing, which argues that massive bodies would bend light waves, was tested during a solar eclipse in 1919. When astronomers found that the sun bent light exactly as Einstein predicted, it was seen as confirmation of the theory. If, however, the light did not bend, then the theory would have been discredited.

This method of testing theories is generally referred to as naive falsificationism and is most often associated with the work of Karl Popper. In general, most scholars believe that falsifiability differentiates scientific from unscientific fields of study, i.e., falsifiability makes astronomy a science and astrology not a science. Popper conceptualized science as the replacement of a falsified theory with another falsifiable theory, which may or may not be replaced in the future. Over the long run, this implies that scientific fields see a general increase in understanding across time. This process, however, works best in areas that have deterministic processes.

Unlike the natural sciences, probabilistic theories generally occur in the social sciences, such as political science, sociology, and economics. Theories in these fields do not make equivocal statements as to cause-and-effect relationships. For instance, the aforementioned democratic peace argues that democracies are less likely to go to war with one another but it does not state that they will never go to war (although

such an outcome would still support the theory). For this theory, one example of two democracies engaging in a war will not disprove the democratic peace. Disconfirming evidence of the democratic peace would occur if democracies went to war with one another just as often as they entered into wars with non-democracies.

Probabilistic theories make naive falsificationism, as Popper describes it, an unrealistic standard. This does not mean, however, that theories of international relations should be unfalsifiable. Imre Lakatos argued that scientific fields progressed across time by increasing their understanding. This is done by the replacement of an old theory with one that accounts for everything explained by the old theory and offers some new insight (known as excess empirical content). In this case, scientific fields are differentiated from unscientific fields by the progression of knowledge. So for Lakatos a theory does not need to explain everything, just more than the alternatives.

Why probabilistic theories?

Why would social sciences, in general, and international relations, in particular, rely on probabilistic theories? Would it not be better to strive for laws of human behavior that detail unerring cause-and-effect relationships? The short answer to these questions is that it is simply not possible, or a lot less likely, for law-like relationships to develop in the social sciences. The choice of probabilistic theories in social sciences is driven by the nature of subjects of observation. In other words, when one wants to study human behaviors, probabilistic theories are the best set of explanations. Cioffi-Revilla (1998: 5) was correct when he argued that political outcomes are uncertain, where they are “neither predetermined (with probability 1) nor impossible (with probability 0).”

One of the main reasons that probabilistic theories are needed in the social sciences is the reflective nature of individuals. Unlike in physics or chemistry, the units of analysis in the social sciences are generally self-aware. Often these units examine past behaviors to determine the best course of action. This reflectivity means that any strong relationship that occurs will be observed and this will cause the units to change their behaviors. So imagine that one found a law of international war where the use of strategy X guarantees victory. How would states react to this information? Obviously, they would all adopt strategy X which would inevitably lead to a war where a state using

strategy X loses. This creates an ironic situation where the stronger the relationship, the less likely it will maintain in the future.

Another major obstacle to the use of deterministic theory in the social sciences deals with the (ir)rationality of individuals. In order for international politics to develop truly deterministic theories, states (and individuals within states) would need to act consistently in a rational manner. While it may be the case that states and individuals often behave rationally, this may not be universally true. The implication for theory building is that irrational acts will create errors. For example, condition X may lead a state to choose policy Y but in some instances a leader will act irrationally and choose Z. If theories of international politics were deterministic, then this one case would be sufficient to refute the theory. Probabilistic theories, however, can incorporate these sorts of errors when analyzing the validity of a theory.

Finally, probabilistic theories may be most appropriate simply because portions of political outcomes are simply uncertain and unpredictable. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli noted this when he argued that “I think it may be true that fortune determines one half of our actions, but that, even so, she leaves us to control the other half.” Whether Machiavelli was correct in his estimate of 50 percent is debatable but it is clear that some portion of political outcomes is simply uncertain. In some ways, predicting political outcomes is similar to predicting the outcome of a sporting event. While a large part of the outcome is determined by the skill of the players and coaches, the outcomes are not completely determined. As a result, we have the stylized quotes so often used by sports announcers: “any given Sunday,” “that is why they play the game,” and so on.

Testing the theories of international relations

The testing of theories in international relations has been dominated by the divide between qualitative (case study) and quantitative (statistical) research. Often the debate has been intense and divisive, although the division between the two methods may not be as stark as the intensity of the debate implies. Qualitative scholars often argue that the use of cases allows a researcher to better understand the hypothesized cause-and-effect relationship. The in-depth analysis of a case, or set of cases, can demonstrate a causal factor at work. Quantitative scholars, however, believe that the concentration on a single (or a few) case(s)

may obfuscate a more general pattern. In other words, can you estimate the approval rating of a president by asking one person?

In general, most of the empirical evidence cited in this book comes from quantitative work. This reliance derives from the nature of theories discussed above. If the causes of war are driven by probabilistic factors, can the examination of a single case offer a definitive test? Quantitative scholars would obviously answer that question with a negative. Gerring (2004: 348) makes a similar point about testing probabilistic phenomena by arguing that the “researcher must examine several instances of this phenomenon to gauge the average causal effect of X on Y and the random element of that variation.” The ultimate argument for the use of quantitative analyses comes down to the probabilistic nature of the phenomenon: if the onset of war is not a deterministic process, then the examination of a single case cannot prove (or disprove) a theoretical explanation. Obviously not everyone agrees that quantitative methods are the best for testing theories. In fact, Van Evera (1999: 12) explicitly dismisses the arguments of “orthodox social science methodology.”

Statistical analyses, however, are not a panacea for testing theories. Quantitative analyses are exceptionally useful at finding generalizable correlations between variables. Correlation is not causation. So where a statistical analysis could discover if a pair of dice is fair or loaded, it could not help us understand how or why. The same is true in the study of international politics. For example, the literature is replete with statistical analyses that confirm the democratic peace but these models cannot easily differentiate between the various theories of the democratic peace.

Qualitative analyses provide the opportunity to trace causal mechanisms within a set of cases. This sort of analysis serves two critical purposes. First, it allows scholars to move closer to understanding causation as opposed to the correlation. In order to truly confirm a theory, one needs to demonstrate both a general, statistically significant correlation and a causal pattern within a set of cases. So we know that a correlation exists between joint democracy and a lack of conflict, but how do the democratic institutions and norms operate? Only by looking at cases can one trace the causal mechanisms. Gerring (2004: 348) argues this point when he notes that “case studies, if well constructed, allow one to peer into the box of causality to the intermediate cases lying between some cause and its purported effect.”

Aside from discovering causal patterns, case studies also aid in theory development. As one delves into cases, patterns may emerge

that were not obvious from the more abstract statistical analyses. It may also be the case that causal mechanisms that we expected to find do not exist. In these situations, the case study allows one to generate new hypotheses that could be tested in a statistical model. In this way the difference between qualitative and quantitative is not an either/or choice; rather, they represent two different tools that have various benefits and costs. It is the researcher's job to use the method that best fits their purpose.

This book will rely on the use of case studies as opposed to statistical analyses. This does not mean that quantitative work will be downplayed. In fact, in the development of the theory, I will heavily rely on the previous statistical work. The case studies will build upon this work by both tracing causal mechanism and building the theory. Ultimately, however, the theory developed in this book needs to be confirmed with a general quantitative analysis but, in order to fully espouse the theory, that task will be relegated to future work.

Plan of the book

The rest of the book is organized around the levels of analysis and moves from the state to the dyadic and then finishes at the systemic level. At each level of analysis, some of the most important theories are examined in two main ways. First, the general quantitative evidence in support of (or against) a given theory is presented. Second, two to three important cases are then inspected to further elaborate the theory and understand how context matters.

The next chapter looks at how the power of a state affects the risk of war. In some ways it seems almost axiomatic that stronger states have a greater stake in the international system, which leads them into conflict more often than their weaker brethren. Yet the vast majority of wars involve states that are not major powers. How strong, then, is the relationship between the power of a state and its propensity to enter into wars? Do major powers enter into conflict because they have a greater stake in the international system, or are warlike, aggressive states more likely to become major powers? In general, the bulk of the evidence demonstrates that major powers are more prone to conflicts than minor powers but the evidence cannot conclusively show what drives their aggressive behaviors.

Chapter 2 continues the emphasis on the state but turns to the role of domestic politics. In particular, what happens when the powerful

state is democratic? Would democratic institutions make the state less aggressive? The answers to these questions are actually quite mixed. At first, scholars believed that democracies were more peaceful because the citizens, who would bear the costs of a war, would not elect aggressive leaders. Continued research into the topic, however, found that democracies are just as war-prone as non-democratic states. In fact, one only needs to see the popular support that the Olmert government in Israel had for its initial attacks against Lebanon and Hezbollah. These results do not mean that democratic institutions have no effect on the behavior of a state; rather, they show that being a democracy does not necessarily make a state dovish.

Chapter 3 turns back to the role of power but, where chapter 2 examines the power of the state, this chapter turns to the balance of power in a dyad. Scholars have long argued that the distribution of capabilities (power) is critical in the onset of war but no consensus has developed as to what sorts of distributions lead to war. At first, theorists argued that a balance of capabilities would lead to peace because the sides would be risk-averse and avoid conflict. In contrast, an asymmetry would encourage conflict because the more powerful states would frequently start wars that they knew they would win. Blainey (1988), however, argues the opposite. For Blainey, wars occur because the two sides disagree as to the ultimate outcome of a war. In this case, in a dyad with asymmetry the outcome is quite obvious. So when the stronger state makes a demand, how will the weaker state react? By engaging in a war it knows it will lose? Of course not; it will seek a compromise short of war. When power is balanced, however, both sides will believe they can win which means that neither side has an incentive to seek a negotiated solution. Recent empirical testing has found fairly consistent evidence that balances of power are more war-prone.

Chapter 4 continues to look at dyadic theories but turns to the democratic peace. Where the evidence for democratic pacifism may be scant (chapter 3), ample research has found that democracies are much more peaceful with each other. In other words, democracies are just as conflict-prone as autocracies but they simply do not fight one another (Russett and Oneal 2001). Numerous theories have been developed to explain the democratic peace. First, the structural explanation argues that the institutions of democracies, such as the separation of powers, create time for diplomacy to find a peaceful solution. The second theory, however, relies on the norms (a bargaining culture and peaceful resolution of disputes) that develop in democratic societies. When two democracies encounter one another in the international

system, the norms are triggered but, when a democracy interacts with an autocracy, the norms remain dormant.

Chapter 5 is the last of the dyadic analyses and addresses the role of international trade in lowering (or increasing) the risk of war. Trade has often been cited as a cure for international conflict. Whether it results from the economic interdependence described by Russett and Oneal (2001) or the rise of the “trading state” (Rosecrance 1986), scholars have consistently expected international trade to act as a source of peace. While it may be the case that trade and trading generates connections that enhance peace, some have argued that trade can actually produce conflict (Barbieri 2002). What, then, is the ultimate effect of trade? Could Hegre (2002) offer a solution in that the relationship between trade and war is conditioned by the level of development, where trade produces peace only when both states are wealthy?

The sixth chapter once again investigates the role of power but this time from the systemic level of analysis. Perhaps one of the most enduring debates in international relations is about the effect of the systemic distribution of power. Are multipolar systems (three or more poles/major powers) a source of peace or conflict? Is bipolarity, as argued by Waltz (1979), the most stable or is it hegemony (dominance by a single state)? Oftentimes, the debate surrounding these questions revolves around one’s definition of stability. The bipolar Cold War was peaceful but only if one looks at major power wars. Shift the focus in the Cold War to minor powers and then it does not seem nearly as peaceful. In addition, does stability really mean peace or does it simply mean that states will survive?

The debate over the effect of the systemic distribution of power on international conflict has developed into a debate over the risk-taking propensities of states, where the propensity of states to take risks alters their behavior in the international system (Bueno de Mesquita 1980; Huth, Bennett, and Gelpi 1992). Waltz’s (1979) argument about the dangers of external balancing, for example, is contingent on states being risk-acceptant. In systems with high levels of uncertainty (diffusion of capabilities), states are willing to take the risk of conflict to protect their positions. Deutsch and Singer (1964), however, assume states are risk-averse and thus argue that a diffusion of capabilities inhibits conflict.

Chapter 7 continues to examine the role of power but, rather than focus on its distribution, this chapter examines how changes in the distribution of power affect the international system (mainly in terms of the amount of international conflict). In particular, history has shown that a state’s position as hegemon of the international system

is never permanent. While a state can maintain its position for centuries, history has shown a consistent cycle of states rising and falling as the hegemon. Part of this process is the actual surpassing of the hegemon by the second most powerful state in the system. This transition has often been seen as a high-risk scenario in terms of major power wars. As the challenger approaches the hegemon in power, the hegemon has a strong incentive to launch a pre-emptive war while it still has a military advantage. This implies that hegemonic wars will occur when a challenger is about to pass the hegemon. Recent work by Lemke (2002) has extended this theory to include regional powers and power transitions within these sub-sets of the international system.

The final two chapters of the book both bring together the previous chapters but also look into the role of other forms of violence. Chapter 8 loosens the state-centric view of war and examines violent engagements with non-state actors. The non-state actors can be broadly grouped into purely domestic or transnational in nature. When domestic groups fight the state, it is often characterized as a civil war. Recently, however, we have seen states have conflicts with transnational groups, i.e., Israel versus Hezbollah or United States versus al-Qaeda. These wars, while similar to the interstate conflicts described above, have many divergent characteristics. This chapter is meant to highlight these similarities and differences.

Civil wars (those versus purely domestic groups) differ from interstate conflicts in three main ways. First, the distribution of power between the two sides is often asymmetric, with the state having an overwhelming advantage. Second, the winner of a civil war is most often the side that wins the hearts and minds of the population, i.e., military victory is secondary to political victory. Finally, the belligerents often have to live together within a single state after the end of the conflict. Because of these differences, civil wars tend to have a longer duration, recur more often, and cluster on states with natural resources.

The “war on terror” and Israel’s recent engagements with Hezbollah highlight the renewed importance of transnational groups. While the effect of transnational actors is not unique (see the *Condottieri* of Renaissance Italy), they seem to have taken on renewed importance in the twenty-first century. Conflicts with these organizations differ from interstate wars in two main ways. First, transnational organizations often require either the support of a state, or a region outside the control of a state, to establish a central base of operation. Second, transnational organizations have fairly diffused (cellular) organizational structures, especially as their geographic reach increases. As

with civil wars, these differences make wars against transnational actors different from interstate conflicts. In particular, these conflicts tend to be drawn out, often involve the use of terrorism, and are targeted against regional (Israel) or global powers (United States).

Chapter 9 ends the book by tying together the separate levels of analysis. The ultimate conclusion from the book is not that a single recipe for war exists, just as there is no single recipe for making cookies. What scholars have found, however, is a set of risk factors which increase the probability that a war will occur. The biggest gap in our current understanding is what causes a pair of states to move from the at-risk category to war. In some ways it seems almost accidental, as in the case of the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which led to the First World War. In other cases, it seems as if the precipitating factor was almost redundant, such as the German invasion of Poland that led to the Second World War. This does not mean that we know nothing, or little, about conflict. Quite the contrary, our multitude of theoretical explanations of war allows both scholars and policy-makers to focus their attention on the states most at risk of war. In some ways our knowledge about conflict can be represented by islands of theories that now need to be connected with bridges.