Issues and Conflict

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ABSTRACT: This chapter reviews the contentious issues approach to world politics. This approach focuses on specific issues that states contend over, such as territorial sovereignty, maritime resources, and the usage of shared international rivers. States' choices among foreign policy options, such as militarized force, bilateral negotiations, or third party mediation, depend on the salience or importance of a contested issue. Data collection projects designed to test propositions from the issue approach are discussed. Findings from studies employing these datasets are summarized, including the linkage between territorial disputes and militarized conflict, as well as the more general pattern of militarization of highly salient issues. Several factors that improve the chances for peaceful conflict management are identified. Directions for future development of the issue-based approach include further research on the onset of new issue claims, the evolution of issue rivalries, the role of domestic and international institutions in issue management, and the role of issues in civil wars.

INTRODUCTION

International relations theorists implicitly assume that international conflict begins for a reason. Clausewitz' famous statement that war is the pursuit of political goals by military means reflects this idea, suggesting that conflicts begin because of nation-states' desire to achieve their respective goals on one or more contentious issues. Many explanations for militarized conflict and war revolve around specific issues as sources of conflict, ranging from leadership of the international system to control over territory. Yet more than thirty years ago, Michael O'Leary (1976: 321) lamented, “everybody knows that issues are important...But what is equally obvious is that this ‘obvious’ fact has made little, if any, impact upon systematic research in the field.” Sixteen years later, Paul Diehl (1992: 337) noted that “despite initial positive reviews and more than a decade of time, the issue paradigm approach has not germinated such that its use is seriously evident, much less widespread, in the discipline.”

That situation has changed dramatically in the past two decades. The contentious issues approach to world politics has made great strides due to path-breaking theoretical work on contentious issues as well as data collection efforts that have allowed for systematic testing of issue-based hypotheses. For example, the territorial explanation of war has made significant advances in the interstate conflict literature. Territorial claims involving specific disagreements over the ownership of territory have been shown to be one of the most important causes of militarized dispute onset and escalation to interstate war (Huth 1996; Hensel 2001; Huth and Allee 2002; Hensel and Mitchell 2005; Senese 2005; Senese and Vasquez 2003, 2008). Territorial issues have been at the heart of some of the most conflict-prone interstate relationships in the past few centuries, such as conflicts involving Ecuador and Peru, France and Germany, Israel and Egypt, and India and Pakistan. While conflict scholars have long known that contiguity (having a shared land or water border) is an important predictor of militarized conflict (Bremer 1992), research on territorial issues has helped to show exactly why borders are dangerous. Borders that remain contested lead states down the steps to war, while contiguous states with mutually accepted borders are not likely to fight each other (Vasquez 1993, 1995; Senese and Vasquez 2003, 2008). For example, India and Pakistan’s inability to resolve the Kashmir border dispute leaves open the possibility for future militarized conflict, while the United States and Mexico have enjoyed decades of peace following the settlement of their land borders. Furthermore, the lack of territorial disputes can have additional benefits, as settled borders help to create peaceful environments within which democratic institutions can flourish, providing one account of the emergence of the democratic peace (Gibler 2007).

Many of the early contributions were made possible by the collection of variables measuring the issues involved in armed conflict, which were included in data sets such as the Correlates of War project's Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data (Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996), the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) data (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1997), the Comparative Research on the Events of Nations (CREON) project (Herman et al 1973), and data from Kalevi Holsti's 1991 book *Peace and War*. More recently, Huth and Allee have provided scholars with rich time series data on territorial disputes (Huth 1996; Huth and Allee 2002), and the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) project has provided data on territorial, river, and maritime claims (Hensel 2001; Hensel et al. 2008).

The issues approach to world politics offers several advantages over other theoretical perspectives on interstate conflict. First, it can account for significant variation in foreign policy strategies by focusing attention on the importance of disputed issues. Disagreements over some borders result in repeated confrontations and costly wars, while others are resolved completely

through diplomacy. Furthermore, while territorial issues have led to war between many adversaries over the years, those same adversaries don't always fight over other types of issues, such as shared rivers or maritime boundaries. Traditional power-based theories of conflict, such as balance of power theory (Haas 1953) or power transition theory (Kugler & Lemke 1996), have a hard time explaining this variance in foreign policy behavior. Second, the issue based approach also gives us leverage for studying patterns of escalation to militarized conflict. Many early studies that focused on issues recorded the issues that were under contention in militarized conflicts or wars, which was a step in the right direction, but these studies failed to account for similar issues that were resolved solely via peaceful means. While territorial issues are widely regarded as the most conflictual issue, only about half of all territorial claims have produced even a single militarized threat (Hensel 2001), and even fewer have led to full-scale war. This has led scholars to emphasize *issue claims*, or diplomatic disagreements over specific issues, such as borders, maritime zones, or cross-border rivers. Our chapter will discuss many of the insights about effective conflict management that have been gleaned from analyses of issue claim datasets. Finally, the issue-based approach helps us understand more clearly how disputes are related to each other over time and the process of conflict dynamics (Diehl 2006). Many studies on interstate rivalries count the number of militarized disputes in a dyadic relationship without considering how the disputes might be connected. By focusing on what is actually being contested in a dyadic interstate relationship, we can get a much better handle on why some pairs of states become rivals and why some of those rivalries become much more violent than others.

The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows. First, we discuss some of the early theoretical and empirical efforts in the issue-based approach. We describe several datasets that have collected information on the issues at stake in interstate conflicts and issue claims for particular types of issues. Second, we review the major empirical findings in the issue-based literature, focusing our attention on the factors that promote successful conflict management. We conclude by discussing avenues for further work in this field, including a better understanding of how new contentious issues emerge, how international institutions can play a role in managing issues that do arise, and how issues can help us understand the onset and evolution of interstate rivalries. We also argue that the issue-based approach to world politics could be leveraged to understand other forms of conflict, such as civil war.

EARLY WORK ON CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

Some of the earliest research on contentious issues focused on general patterns of foreign policy and was largely descriptive in nature. In the first systematic effort to theorize about contentious issues, Rosenau (1966) developed an issue typology based on the tangibility of the issue's ends, or "the values which have to be allocated," and the tangibility of the means "which have to be employed to effect allocation."[1] Rosenau's typology identified four primary issue areas in foreign policy interactions: "'status area' (intangible ends/intangible means), 'human resources area' (intangible ends/tangible means), 'territorial area' (tangible ends/ intangible means), and 'nonhuman resources area' (tangible ends/tangible means)."[2] Numerous empirical studies

[1] "Tangibility is…whether a stake's end can be photographed and its means purchased… Intangible ends are those that cannot be seen directly, such as prestige, status, and rights. A tangible means…must be purchased before it can be used; thus troops or money are tangible. Intangible means are… verbal actions, such as diplomatic communications or negotiations, or nonverbal actions of diplomatic personnel" (Vasquez, 1983:181).

[2] For other typologies in this literature see Wolfers (1962), Lowi (1964), Zimmerman (1973), and Mansbach and Vasquez (1981).

demonstrate that tangible issues involve fewer actors, less frequent and durable contention, and more cooperative interactions (Rosenau 1966; Mansbach and Vasquez 1981; Vasquez 1983; Bercovitch and Langley 1993; Hensel and Mitchell 2005). Intangible issues, on the other hand, are more difficult to settle and experience increased risks of militarized conflicts with fatalities (Schelling 1960; Pruitt 1971; Rubin and Brown 1975; Fearon 1995; Brams and Taylor 1996; Hensel and Mitchell 2005).

Other early research on issues characterized real world interactions based on the number or frequency of issue-based conflict or cooperation events. The CREON project (Herman et al 1973) coded events based on Rosenau's foreign policy typology. O'Leary (1976) counted the number of issues over which different pairs of states interact. Beyond issue frequency, Mansbach and Vasquez (1981) examined variation in foreign policy behavior across different issues. They found that U.S.-West German and U.S.-Soviet behavior during the Cold War varied significantly by issue area, with certain issue areas generating almost exclusively conflictual behavior and others generating almost exclusively cooperative behavior. For example, U.S.-West German conflict centered around Nazi-related questions, while U.S.-Soviet conflict focused on arms control issues (Mansbach and Vasquez 1981: 23-26). A more recent data collection effort, the Kosimo Databank on Political Conflict, also codes issues at stake in domestic and international political conflicts, including border disputes, ethnic/religious conflicts, and internal power struggles (Pfetsch and Rohloff 2000).

More recent studies of issues emphasize how issues influence militarized conflict, rather than on the general patterns of conflict and cooperation studied in earlier research. One common focus of issue-based research is the examination of issues involved in known cases of militarized conflict in order to see which issues have been involved in the most crises or wars. The International Crisis Behavior (ICB) project (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1997) identifies five possible issues at stake in interstate crises: military/security, political/diplomatic, economic/ developmental, cultural/status, and other. The Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) dataset (Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996) employs a four-value typology for issues, based on the type of status quo that the disputants seek to revise through armed conflict: territory, regime, policy, and other. In the MID 2.1 dataset from 1816-1992, policy issues are the most frequent (present in 56% of all disputes), followed by territorial issues (35%) (Senese and Vasquez 2008: 42).

Luard (1986) and Holsti (1991) examine the primary issues at stake in wars over the past few centuries, with both studies finding that territorial issues have been among the most frequent sources of war in the post-Westphalia era. Holsti (1991: 308) finds that territorial issues constituted between 42% to 67% of all wars in the 1648-1941 period. However, territorial issues may be declining as a source of conflict in recent years, comprising only 24% of wars in the 1945-1989 Cold War era (Holsti 1991, 308). Nationalist, state creation, and regime survival issues have become more predominant in recent years. Research on territorial conflict has confirmed the patterns of frequent territorial issues in war using broader definitions of militarized conflict. This literature demonstrates clearly that territorial issues are more escalatory than non-territorial confrontations (Gochman and Leng 1983; Vasquez 1993, 1995; Huth 1996; Senese 1996; Hensel 2000, 2001; Vasquez and Henehan 2001; Huth and Allee 2002; Hensel and Mitchell 2005; Senese 2005; Senese and Vasquez 2003, 2008). Geopolitical issues also dominate contentious interactions between democratic states. Mitchell and Prins (1999) find that maritime and resource (oil and fishing) claims have been the most frequent issues involved in militarized disputes between democracies since World War II. Yet the issues examined in many of these studies are only identified after the outbreak of militarized conflict; little is known about how

common these different issues are in world politics or about how countries with similar issue disagreements have been able to avoid militarized conflict.

ISSUE CLAIM DATASETS

More recent research employing the issue-based approach has sought to remedy this problem by focusing on the issues that may give rise to militarized conflict, tracing their dynamic patterns from the beginning of diplomatic interaction over the issues to the resolution of the issues at stake. Two prominent datasets employing this approach are Paul Huth and Todd Allee's (2002) territorial dispute dataset and Paul Hensel and Sara Mitchell's ICOW dataset (Hensel et al 2008). In this section, we describe these issue claim datasets in more detail, followed by a review of the findings that are generated with these more detailed datasets on issue conflicts.

Huth and Allee's Territorial Dispute Dataset

Huth (1996) collected information on all territorial disputes from 1950-1990. This was extended temporally in a study by Huth and Allee (2002), which provides data on all territorial disputes between 1919-1995. As noted earlier, this dataset goes beyond previous approaches that simply record whether border disputes are at stake in known militarized conflicts and instead tracks the dynamic conflict management process of all border disputes, including some that never become militarized. Huth (1996) reports a total of 129 dyadic territorial disputes between 1950-1990, while Huth and Allee (2002) identify 348 dyadic territorial disputes over the longer 1919-1995 time period. The format for both of these datasets is similar; they include a variety of information about the characteristics of the claimed territories and the relationship between the claimants, as well as information about how these disputes were managed. The dataset records 1528 rounds of diplomatic talks, 374 militarized disputes, and 40 interstate wars over the contested territories.

Huth and Allee (2002) identify several phases of territorial disputes. The first phase involves a potential challenger's decision to challenge the territorial status quo. This challenge can occur through diplomacy only or through the threat or use of military force. In all possible dyad years in which territorial disputes are ongoing (6542 cases), 67% are characterized by status quo maintenance, 27% involve diplomatic negotiations, and 6% involve the threat or use of military force (Huth and Allee 2002: 45). The second phase occurs in the negotiation stage and captures the degree to which the challenger and target states make concessions in a given negotiation round. In 1528 total negotiations, no concessions are made by the challenger 63% of the time and by the target 64% of the time (Huth and Allee 2002: 51). Thus most negotiations do not settle the underlying border dispute. The final phase captures the states' decisions to escalate a border dispute to the level of a military confrontation or war. More limited escalations occur in 76%-82% of the 374 total militarized disputes, while full scale war with 1000 or more battle-field deaths occurs in 18%-24% of the cases (Huth and Allee 2002: 54).

Huth and Allee (2002) also collect information on the importance of the disputed territory to each side. This is based on the strategic importance of the territory, the economic value of the territory, and the presence of ethnic co-nationals living on the territory. They also report on the history of conflict management efforts, including stalemated diplomatic talks and prior militarized interactions over the disputed territory. They find that challenges to the status quo by the threat of military force are more common if the territory is strategic, although strategic value has little effect on the outcomes of diplomatic talks.

The Issue Correlates of War Issue Claims Dataset

The Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) project (Hensel 2001; Hensel et al 2008) takes a broader approach to the collection of issue conflicts by focusing on a wider variety of geopolitical issues. In addition to border disputes, the ICOW project also identifies competing interstate claims to maritime areas and rivers that cross international boundaries. The three core ICOW datasets for territorial, river, and maritime claims are collected using comparable coding rules and procedures. All three datasets begin with the requirement of explicit diplomatic contention by official government representatives over one or more specific territories, cross-border rivers, or maritime zones.[3]

Using a similar coding strategy to Huth and Allee (2002), territorial claims in the ICOW dataset are based on diplomatic disagreement over the ownership of a specific piece of territory between two or more states.[4] Such claims range in scope from demands for small border adjustments or uninhabited islands to claims over the full territory of the target state. Claimed territory often has tangible value to one or both states, such as strategically defensible positions or valuable resources that are thought to be located in the territory. Some territorial claims also involve intangible salience, such as an ethnic, religious, or other identity basis, when one or both claimants' kinsmen live in the territory or it contains sites of great cultural or religious significance (Hensel 2001; Huth and Allee 2002; Hensel and Mitchell 2005; Hensel et al 2008). While many territorial claims are managed and settled peacefully with no resort to military force, others have produced repeated armed conflicts, such as Alsace-Lorraine, the Golan Heights, or Kashmir.

River claims involve disagreements between two or more nation-states over access to or usage of a shared river (Hensel, Mitchell, and Sowers 2006; Brochmann and Hensel 2009). Typical grounds for the disagreement include a downstream state's objection to pollution, excessive irrigation, or the construction of dams by an upstream state, which will decrease or degrade the quantity and quality of water available to the downstream state. Several notable cases have led to militarized conflict, such as numerous incidents between Israel, Syria, and Jordan in the 1950s and 1960s surrounding attempts by each side to divert water from the Jordan River, and more recent threats between Turkey, Syria, and Iraq over the construction of dams on the Euphrates River. Other disagreements have been managed more peacefully, such as Mexican-American disagreements over pollution, damming, and water diversion in the Rio Grande, the Colorado River, and their tributaries.

Maritime claims involve disagreements between two or more nation-states over access to or usage of a maritime area (Nemeth et al 2009). Some cases, like the “Cod Wars,” involve one state (Iceland) claiming a territorial sea area that is not recognized by others (Great Britain). Other disputes arise due to two or more coastal states having competing claims to areas where their economic exclusive zones overlap, such as the maritime disagreements between North and South Korea which have escalated to several deadly clashes in recent years. Such disputes often stem from a disagreement over the status of an uninhabited “rock” as an island, such as Venezuela’s maritime claims around Aves Island and counterclaims raised by nearby Caribbean

[3] The ICOW project also collects a number of supplementary datasets, including historical state names, multilateral treaties of pacific settlement (MTOPS), and colonial history data. Documentation, codebooks, and data from all of these ICOW datasets are publicly available on the ICOW project website at <http://www.paulhensel.org/icow.html>.

[4] The ICOW project uses the term issue claim to denote any diplomatic disagreement over a specific international issue. The phrase “dispute” is utilized to denote militarized confrontation over the issue. This is distinct from the Huth and Allee (2002) project, which uses the word “dispute” to denote disagreement over any territory, whether it is diplomatic or militarized.

states. Also, for economic reasons, citizens of one nation may simply violate another states' territorial sea or economic exclusive zone. U.S. tuna fisherman, for example, do not recognize Peru's claim to a 200 mile territorial sea limit. Fishermen often follow migratory fish stocks, which can produce conflict once the fishermen have violated another nation's sovereign maritime area, as the Canadian-Spanish conflict over the Grand Banks in the mid-1990s illustrates.

Each of the ICOW issue claim datasets identifies explicit claims over territory, rivers, or maritime zones using a variety of historical and news resources. For every claim that is identified, ICOW codes every attempt to settle the claim through peaceful means (bilateral negotiations, good offices, inquiry and conciliation, mediation, arbitration, adjudication, and multilateral negotiations), and examines each militarized interstate dispute between the claimants to determine which disputes were related to which claim(s). ICOW also records a number of variables about the specific characteristics of each claim, many of which are used in the construction of salience indices.

The ICOW dataset provides rich variation in issue salience across issues (between territorial, maritime, and river issues) and also captures variation in the importance of issues of a particular type (e.g. some territorial claims are more salient than other territorial claims). Building on earlier work in the issue literature, issue salience is conceptualized along two dimensions: 1) *tangible salience* is based on tangible values related to security, survival, and wealth; 2) *intangible salience* is based on intangible values of culture/identity, equality/justice, independence, and status/prestige/influence. Some issues, such as territory, are typically high on both salience dimensions, while others like maritime and river claims are high on tangible salience, but low on intangible salience (Hensel et al 2008). Issues with high tangible and high intangible salience will be more likely to experience militarized conflict, will experience multiple attempts by the parties to resolve the contested issues on their own, and will also see repeated attempts by outsiders to help the parties resolve the issues peacefully.[5]

Hensel et al (2008) demonstrate that high levels of issue salience increase the likelihood of issue militarization and ramp up peaceful conflict management efforts to settle issues as well, with similar results across all three issue types. These analyses support the core ideas of the issue-based approach to world politics and show that we can learn a great deal about conflict processes by examining issues from their origins of verbal contention between leaders to their sometimes violent endings. This is also generally consistent with much of the existing research on issues discussed earlier in this chapter, which has found highly salient issues like territory to be involved in many more armed conflicts than other types of less salient issues.

Yet many contentious issues are never militarized, which means that collection of data regarding contentious issues also helps to avoid the selection effect problems that have plagued

[5] Salience for each issue type is measured with a twelve-point index, with six indicators measuring the presence of factors that are expected to make a claimed territory, river, or maritime zone more valuable to states. Each indicator contributes up to two points to the overall total (one point per state involved in the claim). The six indicators for territorial claim salience are homeland territory (versus colonial or dependent territory), historical sovereignty over the territory, populated rather than inhabited land, the presence of valuable resources in the territory, a militarily or economically strategic location for the territory, and the presence of an ethnic, religious, or other identity basis for the claim. The six indicators for river claim salience are homeland territory (versus colonial or dependent territory), navigational importance of the river, level of population served by the river, the presence of a fishing or other resource extraction industry on the river, hydroelectric power generation along the river, and irrigational value of the river. The six indicators for maritime claim salience are homeland territory (versus colonial or dependent territory), strategic location, fishing resources, migratory fishing stocks, oil resources, and relation to an ongoing territorial claim.

research on interstate conflict. A typical strategy in the conflict literature is to identify sets of politically relevant dyads that could potentially engage in conflict using criteria such as shared borders and major power status (Maoz and Russett 1992, 1993; Maoz 1996; Lemke and Reed 2001). Yet even this strategy generates a large number of dyads for whom militarized conflict is virtually unlikely. We see this variation clearly when examining data on contentious issues. Only 44.3% of ICOW territorial claims, 41.4% of maritime claims, and 19.4% of river claims have led to even a single militarized dispute over the issue in question, and these are situations where the two states in question have an actively disputed issue in contention, and thus arguably a higher baseline probability of militarized conflict. Studying the impact of territorial or other issues based only on the issues involved in armed conflict thus risks misleading conclusions from the use of a sample that is systematically different from the larger set of all such issues. Thus an additional advantage of the issue-based approach is that issue claims datasets provide an alternative route for thinking about how to identify dyads with opportunities for militarized conflict (Mitchell and Thyne 2010).

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS ON ISSUES AND CONFLICT

Issue claim datasets have been employed to test a wide variety of hypotheses. In this section, we describe findings relating to several key explanatory variables in the issue literature including issue salience, previous conflict management efforts, regime type, membership in international organizations, and relative capabilities. We also discuss situations in which diplomatic efforts by the disputing parties themselves or with third party assistance are more likely to produce agreements that end a contested issue.

As discussed earlier, the core idea of the issue-based approach is that contentious issues vary in their importance, or salience, and that leaders select different foreign policy tools depending on the salience of the issue at stake. This central idea of the issue-based approach has been tested using ICOW data in the Western Hemisphere, Europe, and the Middle East (Hensel 2001; Hensel and Mitchell 2005; Hensel, Mitchell, and Sowers 2006; Hensel et al 2008; Brochmann and Hensel 2009). Hensel (2001) and Hensel et al (2008) find that high levels of issue salience increase the likelihood of issue militarization and peaceful conflict management efforts to settle territorial, maritime, and river issues. Militarized disputes are five times more likely to occur over land or maritime areas that are highly salient to both sides, containing important resources such as oil and fish (Hensel et al 2008; see also Huth 1996, Huth and Allee 2002). Peaceful diplomatic efforts are two times more likely to emerge over highly valued land borders, maritime zones, or cross-border rivers. Militarization is also more likely if the issues at stake involve intangible dimensions of issue salience, such as ethnic ties or sacred sites (Huth 1996; Hensel and Mitchell 2005). Substantively, these differences are large, as interstate wars are 13 times more likely over territories with intangible salience characteristics (Hensel and Mitchell 2005). As Hensel et al (2008) show, these patterns hold when examining all issue datasets jointly or when breaking them apart into separate analyses for territorial claims, maritime claims, and river claims. Issue salience is thus a very useful concept for predicting foreign policy behavior across distinct issues (territorial vs. maritime claims) and within single issues (highly salient territorial claims vs. less salient territorial claims).

Furthermore, there are dynamic processes in how issues are negotiated over time. Recent interactions over a contested issue exert a substantial influence on later issue management, with action over a claim -- particularly militarized conflict -- being more likely when there is a history of either militarized conflict or unsuccessful negotiations over the claim (Hensel 2001; Hensel et

al 2008). Huth (1996: 107) also finds that militarized conflict is much more likely over a disputed territory if there was a stalemate in previous diplomatic negotiations and if the parties have experienced prior militarized disputes. These results reinforce earlier findings in the crisis bargaining and interstate rivalry literatures showing that conflict often begets conflict (e.g. Leng 1983; Hensel 1994; Diehl and Goertz 2000; Colaresi and Thompson 2002). Yet, issue datasets help provide firmer linkages across the contested stakes in successive militarized disputes, giving us more confidence in these findings.

We have also learned a great deal about the use and success of various conflict management strategies through analyses of issue datasets. Third parties are more likely to become involved to help resolve contentious issues when the issue is more salient (Hensel 2001; Kadera and Mitchell 2005; Mitchell, Kadera, and Crescenzi 2008; Hansen, Mitchell, and Nemeth 2008), when the international system is filled with more democratic members (Mitchell 2002; Mitchell, Kadera, and Crescenzi 2008), when the issue has been militarized previously (Mitchell 2002; Mitchell, Kadera, and Crescenzi 2008), and when the claimant states jointly belong to a higher number of peace-promoting international organizations (Hensel 2001; Kadera and Mitchell 2005; Shannon 2005, 2009; Mitchell, Kadera, and Crescenzi 2008; Hansen, Mitchell, and Nemeth 2008). Disputing states prefer to settle things on their own through bilateral negotiations when they are jointly democratic and relatively equal in capabilities (Hensel 2001; Mitchell 2002). However, when democratic states seek out third party conflict management, they exhibit a preference for legalistic forms of management, such as arbitration and adjudication (Raymond 1994; Allee and Huth 2006). International organizations are viewed as acceptable mediators if the claimants states are relative equals, share membership in many international organizations, and if the issue is highly salient (Hansen, Mitchell, and Nemeth 2008).

With respect to the success of various conflict management strategies, analyses of issue datasets reveal many interesting patterns as well. Claimant states are more likely to comply with agreements reached to end contentious issues if they are struck with the assistance of international institutions and if the techniques employed are binding on the parties, such as arbitration and adjudication (Allee and Huth 2006; Mitchell and Hensel 2007; Gent and Shannon 2010). Militarized techniques are much less successful than peaceful conflict management techniques in helping parties resolve the underlying issues at stake (Hensel 2003). International organizations are more effective at helping states resolve contentious issues if they are highly institutionalized, if the membership is more democratic, and if the members share foreign policy preferences (Hansen, Mitchell, and Nemeth 2008). The global democratic community fosters the use and success of peaceful conflict management strategies through the spread of democratic institutions and international organizations, creating a greater supply of unbiased, credible mediators (Kadera and Mitchell 2005; Mitchell, Kadera, and Crescenzi 2008; Crescenzi et al 2009). International courts are important players in this process as well, with peaceful agreements being struck more readily between states that can sue each other in the World Court (Powell and Mitchell 2007). On the other hand, peaceful interactions typically observed between democratic states can be threatened by highly salient and previously militarized issues, especially contentious border disputes between rival states (Mitchell and Prins 1999; James, Park, and Choi 2006; Lektzian, Prins, and Souva 2008).

We have also learned a great deal about the management of other geopolitical issues, which moves the literature beyond its initial focus on territorial disputes. Hensel, Mitchell, and Sowers (2006) compare the management of river claims in the Western Hemisphere, Western Europe, and the Middle East, finding that greater water scarcity increases the likelihood of both

militarized conflict and peaceful third party settlement attempts, while river-specific institutions reduce militarized conflict and increase the effectiveness of peaceful settlement attempts. In a series of papers, Brochmann and Hensel examine the emergence of river claims and how those claims are managed once they are underway. Brochmann and Hensel (2009) show that states are more likely to employ peaceful conflict management strategies to resolve ongoing river claims if they have signed prior treaties over the contested river issues. Once negotiations are underway, they find that river negotiations are most likely to succeed when the river is more salient, when the specific problem being discussed is already operational, and when the adversaries share closer overall relations. Much like the relationship observed for territorial claims, negotiation success is less likely when there is a recent history of failed negotiations over the same river (Brochmann and Hensel 2009).

Nemeth et al (2009) examine maritime conflicts in greater detail, comparing institutional solutions to maritime claims (United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS)) to privatization solutions (exclusive economic zones (EEZs)) (Nemeth et al 2009). Their results suggest that EEZs are effective at promoting bilateral negotiations and reducing the chances for militarized conflict, while UNCLOS promotes more active intervention by third parties to resolve ongoing maritime claims and helps prevent the onset of new maritime conflicts. Even more interesting from a policy perspective is that both EEZs and UNCLOS are beneficial for resource management, with fishery catches eventually recovering and rising above their original levels at the time the UNCLOS and EEZ policies were implemented. Another interesting pattern that emerges in analyses of maritime claims data is the failure of the European Union to resolve a majority of claims in which it has intervened as the conflict manager (Hansen et al 2008).

EXTENDING THE ISSUES APPROACH

The issue-based approach to world politics has provided great leverage for understanding the variation in the onset and intensity of interstate conflicts and the tools that can be utilized for managing contentious issues peacefully. We conclude our chapter with a discussion about ways to develop new theoretical ideas about conflict management processes further, emphasizing issue claim onset, issue rivalries, and institutions and conflict management. Finally, we discuss the possibilities of generalizing the issue-based theoretical approach to the study of civil war.

Issue Claim Onset

One area that is germane for further exploration is to understand more clearly how new contentious issues arise between states. We know that shared borders provide opportunities for territorial claims and that shared rivers or maritime spaces create opportunities for water-related claims. For example, Brochmann and Hensel (2009) examine the emergence of river claims between states with shared rivers and find that lower levels of water availability, higher demands on water, longer rivers, and rivers that cross borders all increase the likelihood that riparian states will come into diplomatic conflict over a shared river. Scholars can thus take the conflict process back to the beginning so to speak, looking at how new issues arise in interstate interactions.

Brochmann and Hensel's (2009) analysis of the onset of river claims could be expanded to territorial and maritime claims as well. One potential starting point for territorial claims would be the legacies of colonial rule, investigating the likelihood of territorial claims over borders that separate two former colonies of the same colonizer, former colonies of different colonizers, and other types of neighbors. A wide range of scholarship in economics, sociology, political science, and other fields has noted the problems posed by colonization for newly independent states after

the ending of colonial rule. With respect to territorial claims, it can be noted that colonizers often drew artificial colonial borders that reflected their own economic or other interests or the extent of their military control, but that often separated natural political or economic units from the precolonial map or combined antagonistic units that did not wish to share membership in the same colony or state. It can also be argued that colonizers had little urgency to develop clear, well-marked, beneficial borders between their own colonies, because it made little difference which colonial unit included a given silver mine as long as the silver came back to Madrid or London. These arguments would suggest that most former colonial borders should be challenged after independence, particularly when they split a single pre-colonial entity into two or more different states (as with the splitting of the Somali people into Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya) or when they separated two former colonies of the same colonizer. Alternatively, some have suggested that postcolonial states have been able to avoid these problems through the creation of norms or institutions such as *uti possidetis* in Latin America and the OAU in Africa, each of which sought to minimize fratricidal conflicts among the newly independent states after decolonization. There is significant scholarly disagreement about the effectiveness of such norms and institutions, though, with well-respected scholars arguing that they successfully reduced postcolonial conflict and others arguing that they had little effect. Systematic scholarly analysis of the onset of territorial claims would seem to offer the best way to resolve these disagreements.

Another promising starting point for research on the origins of territorial claims involves the role of economic development. It has been suggested by scholars at least as far back as Angell (1914) that more advanced economies derive less benefit from territorial conquest, which should mean that such states would be less likely to initiate territorial claims. Most of the systematic evidence on this subject has been based on militarized conflict data, though, as scholars look for evidence that more advanced economies engage in less armed conflict. This subject can be addressed more directly and more appropriately by comparing states at different development levels in terms of their predilection to pursue territorial expansion, whether through militarized or peaceful means. Rowan and Hensel (2004) offer a preliminary study using ICOW data, showing that development decreased the onset of new territorial claims, although the relationship is only significant in the pre-World War II period. More work is needed on this topic in other regions with rich colonial legacies, such as Africa and Asia.

We also think it would be fruitful to learn more about the origins of new maritime claims. Much of this variation also stems from economic development, although in the opposite direction of that predicted for territorial claims, as more developed states engage in commercial fishing far from their mainland waters. A large percentage of the maritime claims coded by the ICOW project in the Americas and Europe involve highly developed states, as the earlier examples of the Cod Wars and Grand Banks suggest. Initial analyses of issue claim onset in the Americas shows that joint democracy is actually positively and significantly related to the onset of new maritime claims, which is not surprising given that democratic states in these regions are often highly developed economically too. Given that over 40% of all maritime claims have resulted in militarized conflict, this could be an important strain on the democratic peace. On the other hand, maritime issues are the only ones that have seen the emergence of a global organization (UNCLOS) to help resolve conflicting claims. River conflicts often lead to the creation of regional institutions, such as the International Joint Commission, although even this process is threatened in areas with high water scarcity, such as the Middle East (Hensel, Mitchell, and Sowers 2006). Declining oceanic fish stocks and increased pollution may increase the probability for future maritime conflicts, although initial results employing ICOW data suggest that

UNCLOS members are significantly less likely to challenge each other's maritime borders (Nemeth et al 2009).

This discussion points to the benefits from further consideration of two key liberal peace variables: democracy and membership in international organizations. Both of these factors have been shown to reduce the chances for dyadic militarized conflict (Russett and Oneal 2001), but we still have a lot to learn about the causal mechanisms at work. For example, do democratic states respect each other's borders more than non-democratic states? An analysis of territorial issue claim onset would help to unpack this more carefully because we can track the regime type of the potential claimant states (e.g. those that share land borders). We have observed a decline in territorial claims over time in the Western Hemisphere and Europe, which accords with the rise of democratic states, but we cannot know for sure whether this pattern holds globally until we have more complete data for generally less democratic regions.[6] As noted above, preliminary analyses of maritime claim onsets in the Western Hemisphere suggest that democratic dyads are significantly more likely to challenge the maritime status quo in comparison to mixed or autocratic dyads. However, the current regional coverage of the ICOW dataset is focused on relatively democratic and developed states; it will be difficult to draw firm conclusions about the relationship between regime type and claim onset until we have more complete data coverage in less democratic regions.

Shared intergovernmental organization (IO) memberships are typically found to reduce the chances for militarized conflict as well (Russett and Oneal 2001), although it is unclear exactly how this process unfolds. Do IOs promote convergence of member states' foreign policy positions, and thus reduce the chances that member states will challenge the issue status quo on particular issues (Bearce and Bondanella 2007)? Or do IOs provide active conflict management assistance to member states (Mitchell and Hensel 2007), which would not prevent the onset of contentious issue claims, but would prevent the escalation of such issues to militarized levels? Some of our own analyses of all three issues in the Western Hemisphere supports the latter perspective, as more shared IO memberships are actually associated with more new issue claims. This finding accords with recent work on Eastern Europe, showing that IO membership promotes lower level conflict, but less frequent high level conflict (Volgy et al 2008). These initial analyses thus suggest that democracies and international organization members do not avoid contentious issues, but rather that they find more efficient ways to manage issues that arise. Yet as above, firm conclusions about the causal mechanisms at work must wait until the completion of data on regions with less experience with international organizations and democracy.

Issue Rivalries

A second broad theoretical innovation for the issues approach is to consider long-term competitive relations between states, re-conceptualizing interstate rivalry based on contentious issues (Mitchell and Thies 2009). There are two well-established rivalry datasets in the international relations literature: one is based on the temporal density of militarized interstate disputes between the same adversaries (Diehl and Goertz 2000; Klein, Goertz, and Diehl 2006), while the other focuses on strategic rivalry by tracing leaders' statements about their primary enemies (Thompson 2001). The collection of data on a variety of contentious issues suggests promising new ways to advance the study of rivalry. One way to do this would be to consider the number of issues at stake between two adversaries at any given point in time, with rivals

[6] Huth and Allee (2002) have global data, although it is limited to the 1919-1995 period. The ICOW project is currently collecting data on issue claims for all regions in the 1816-2009 period.

identified based on contention over multiple issues rather than focusing only on the number of militarized disputes in their historical relationship. Such an approach would help to address many problems with existing approaches to rivalry (Gartzke and Simon 1999). First, this provides a more accurate start date for rivalry because we know when an issue was first contested diplomatically, rather than choosing the first militarized dispute as the beginning of a rivalry. Second, this approach allows us to link militarized disputes to specific issues, something called for in earlier work on rivalry, but never implemented empirically (for a discussion, see Klein, Goertz, and Diehl 2006). Third, identifying rivalries based on issues allows for rivalry to exist, even in the absence of militarization. This provides much needed variation in the set of rivalries, which might be very helpful in understanding which rivalries are most likely to become militarized and lead down the path to war. Finally, this approach raises the possibility of studying issue linkage, as two issue rivals may find benefits in trading positions on one issue for benefits on another.

Mitchell and Thies (2009) develop an issue rivalry dataset using ICOW data in the Western Hemisphere and Western Europe. They identify two types of rivalries: 1) issue rivalries, which are pairs of states with two or more overlapping territorial, maritime, or river claims[7], and 2) militarized rivalries, which are pairs of states with two or more militarized conflicts over the same issue.[8] They identify a total of 66 issue rivalries and 57 militarized rivalries in these two regions. In terms of conflict management, they find that both types of rivalries increase the likelihood of militarized disputes and peaceful negotiations between rival states. However, issue rivalries do not experience a significant increase in the risk of militarized disputes with fatalities. This implies that contentious issues alone are not sufficient for escalatory behavior; rather, the willingness to cross the militarized threshold increases the chances for future militarized confrontation. This result is confirmed in the analyses employing the militarized rivalry measure, as these pairs of states are significantly more likely to experience conflicts with fatalities. This also accords with the empirical patterns of issue claim onset discussed above, as pairs of states that can avoid costly militarized conflict such as jointly democratic dyads do not necessarily avoid diplomatic confrontations over geopolitical issues altogether.

Yet there is still a great deal to learn about the process of rivalry. An emphasis on issue claims helps us determine the origins of rivalry, although current issue datasets allow only for an emphasis on geopolitical issues. Positional rivalries which involve competition between great powers, for example, could be missed in this alternative approach. Even within this somewhat limited issue frame, however, we can still learn a great deal about the dynamics of conflict management. Does the failure to resolve the first contentious issue in an interstate relationship lead to further challenges to the status quo on other issues? Does the militarization of the first contentious issue set the stage for more issues and militarization of those later issues as well? The issue-based approach can offer new insights into the dynamic processes of interstate rivalry.

Institutions and Conflict Management

A third direction for future research is to examine the role of institutions in helping states manage or settle contentious issue claims. It would be interesting to extend earlier analyses of

[7] Mitchell and Thies (2009) code the start of an issue rivalry when the first issue claim begins and the end of an issue rivalry ends when the last issue claim ends. They do not consider issues as being linked if the resolution of one issue occurs more than twenty years before the beginning of the next issue.

[8] In this case, the rivalry is dated from the onset of the issue claim to its ultimate resolution (or as ongoing if unresolved).

river specific treaties (Hensel, Mitchell, and Sowers 2006; Brochmann and Hensel, 2009) to maritime and territorial treaties. As noted earlier, Hensel, Mitchell, and Sowers (2006) find that river specific institutions, such as the US-Canada International Joint Commission, reduce the chances for militarized conflict and improve the efficacy of peaceful negotiations. Do states manage border disputes and maritime issues more effectively if they belong to issue-specific or broader, more general institutions that are geared towards conflict management? For territorial issues, this might involve an examination of data on territorial integrity treaties (Hensel, Allison, and Khanani 2009) and data on military alliances that settle border disputes (Gibler 2007). For maritime issues, relevant data could be collected on treaties related to maritime issues, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Analyzing the role of such institutions could provide interesting information to policy makers as they face multiple forums for conflict management assistance by focusing on the strategies that have been most effective for resolving these conflicts. We could also learn more about the relative effectiveness of different types of international institutions by analyzing how various international organizations (UNCLOS, EU, etc.) and international courts (International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea) fare in the maritime conflict management process.

We have a lot of knowledge about how states' shared membership in international organizations (passively) promotes peaceful conflict management. We also know that these organizations have a good track record when employing arbitration or adjudication to resolve issue claims. What is less well known is the track record of specific organizations and whether it is better to design institutions around specific issues, such as the environment or shared waterways, or whether a more general regional or global organization can garner more effective resources for conflict management. By focusing on the causal mechanisms by which institutions promote conflict management, we can aid policy makers in their decisions to form new international organizations and in their decisions to select particular forums for managing existing issues.

Issues in Intrastate Conflict

Finally, while most research that has explicitly adopted an issue-based approach has focused on interstate relations, this approach also has clear potential connections with intrastate relations. Many interstate territorial claims involve contested sovereignty over territory that contains one's ethnic, religious, or linguistic kinsmen. Similarly, many civil wars and other intrastate conflicts are organized along ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines (Ellingsen 2000; Sambanis 2001). Secessionist movements closely resemble territorial claims in their contention over territorial sovereignty.[9] We could leverage the concept of issue salience in the study of civil conflict by developing indices to capture variation in the importance of contested territory. A good effort along these lines is Toft's (2003) study of geographical issues in ethnic conflicts. To capture the indivisibility of territory, she uses many of the same kinds of measures the interstate literature on issue employs, such as whether the group views the territory as its historical homeland, the length of time the group has lived on the land, and the presence of resources.

[9] Buhaug's (2006) study of secessionist and center seeking civil wars demonstrates that they may have distinct causes, which is consistent with an issue-based approach to conflict. Secessionist civil wars involve sovereignty issues, which may be difficult to resolve, especially if they have ethnic components and involve intangible dimensions of salience, such as sacred religious sites. Rebel goals might also be endogenous, as success in the periphery could change secessionist goals to center-seeking ones. This is another area where the issue-based approach could benefit from an engagement with the civil war literature, as we could think more carefully about whether states' issue related goals change based on their success in managing other issues.

Using data on minority groups at risk, her empirical findings are in line with the issue-based approach, showing that ethnic civil conflict is more likely when groups are vying for their homeland territories. This approach could be generalized by adding additional measures of issue salience, such as strategic location, sacred sites, and population levels. These measures could also be aggregated to the state-year level, which would make them more compatible with other quantitative studies of civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004).

Just as many interstate territorial, river, and maritime claims involve ownership or usage of valuable resources, many intrastate conflicts are at least partially motivated or fueled by control of oil, diamonds, and other resources. Even sub-state political units in established nation-states often find themselves involved in disagreements over territorial sovereignty or cross-border rivers. Recent examples include claims between Maine and New Hampshire over the territory that includes the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and the ongoing disagreement between Alabama, Florida, and Georgia over the use of shared rivers. Civil war scholars have emphasized the importance between point and diffuse resources. Point resources, such as centralized primary diamond mines, are easier for a central government to control, while diffuse resources, such as alluvial diamond mines, are easier for rebel groups to capture (Humphreys 2005; Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore 2005). This distinction could be employed more readily in the issue literature to consider how the characteristics of resources influence their management. Some factors, such as migratory fishing stocks, capture this point/diffuse variation concept, but they enter the issue salience indices only additively. It would be fruitful to categorize resources along the point-diffuse spectrum and see how this influences conflict and cooperation over the issues. On the civil war side, we could also develop the issue-based approach further by focusing on contention of natural resources from their diplomatic origins, rather than back-tracing to see if rebels were looting resources prior to the start of known civil wars (Ross 2004). There might be many situations where potential resource conflicts exist between rebel groups and governments, but these are managed peacefully. The civil war literature tends to treat all state year observations without war as opportunity cases, although the issue based approach to conflict suggests that it might be more productive to identify situations where potential resource or territorial intrastate conflicts exist. We could then learn more about the costly civil conflicts that are avoided through effective negotiations between governments and rebel groups.

Whether they involve secession, resources, or other issues such as control over a state's government, intrastate issues are managed through many of the same techniques as interstate claims; negotiations, mediation, and armed conflict are frequently used in both types of disagreement. In fact, conflict management is one area of general agreement between the interstate and intrastate literatures, as third parties are shown to effective managers in both arenas and strong agreements assist the parties in achieving durable peace (Walter 2002; Fortna 2004, 2008). This is not to say that interstate and intrastate contentious issues are identical or that we should expect to find the same exact patterns, because there are undeniable differences between an issue that involves two nation-states in international anarchy and one that involves a state against a rebel group or one that involves two provinces in a single state.[10] But there is likely to be a great deal that we could learn from the systematic comparison of these different types of actors engaged in contentious issues.

CONCLUSION

[10] For example, Walter (2002) argues that security dilemmas are more acute in intrastate conflicts because defeat by one side could mean annihilation for group members.

In this chapter we describe the issue-based approach to world politics. Unlike traditional realist approaches that focus on power-based contention over broad issues like national security, the issue-based approach demonstrates that it is fruitful to consider variation in contentious interstate issues. The same two adversaries might use different conflict management strategies depending on the salience or importance of the contested stakes. By capturing distinctions in the actual issues under contention, we are better suited to understand the conditions that lead to militarized conflict and the conditions that promote successful bilateral or third party peaceful conflict management.

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