Main Topic: Explore three different rationalist explanations for war and understand how foreign policy is actually made.

1 Key Terms

- bargaining range
- mutual optimism
- private information
- costly signaling
- behavioral theory of war
- preventive war
- bureaucratic politics model
- organizational politics model

2 Key Themes/Ideas

Q. What are the three types of foreign policy-making described in Allison and Professor Weinstein’s lecture?

Answer: The three most types of foreign policy-making are (1) the rational politics model, (2) the organizational politics model, and (3) the bureaucratic politics model.

Q. What is the bargaining model of war?

Answer: The bargaining model of war argues that because war is costly, there exists a bargaining range or set of mutual peaceful deals acceptable to both parties that is preferable to war. War occurs when bargaining fails and states offer deals outside this bargaining range.

Q. What are three reasons why bargaining may fail and war still occurs?

Answer: Professor Fearon argues the three pathways to war stem from (1) mutual optimism, (2) private information, and (3) commitment problems.

Q. What factors change the size of the bargaining range?

Answer: Issues that can affect the size of the bargaining range are (1) changing the probability of victory and (2) changing the costs of war (or willingness to fight the war).

Q. Why does private information lead to war?

Answer: Private information can make bargaining failures more likely because there is greater uncertainty about a state’s resolve (or willingness to fight) as well as uncertainty about the probability of victory (or military capabilities). States often bluff or misrepresent their willingness to fight to secure better negotiated bargains, but this can backfire.

Q. How do we solve problems of misperception, private information, and “cheap talk” in bargaining?

Answer: States can overcome problems related to cheap talk through costly signaling. This can emerge as either (1) ‘tying hands’ or (2) creating ‘sunk costs.’
PoliSci 101: Intro to IR

Week 5 Recap

3 Key Readings

- FLS, Chapter 3, 89-133 and Chapter 4, p. 143-154
- Lake, “Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory”
- Allison, “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis”

4 Review Questions

Check your understanding of this week’s material and key ideas with the following questions.

- How do each of the three foreign policy-making models explain the Cuban Missile Crisis according to Allison? Do any of them seem relevant to Lake and understanding why the 2003 Iraq War started?
- Are theories about rationalist explanations for war applicable to non-state actors like terrorists who are often deemed “irrational?”
- Some work argues that war may not be a bargaining “failure”, but actually preferable to negotiated settlements because it solves issue of private information by forcing other states to reveal their capabilities through fighting which then makes bargaining easier. Would Professor Fearon and Lake agree or is war always inefficient?
- North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is notorious for threatening to nuke the United States with relative frequency, but most policymakers and scholars believe he is “bluffing” or attempting to misrepresent his willingness to fight in order to secure better negotiated settlements for his country (namely, food aid). How can policy-makers differentiate between leaders who “bluff” and leaders who are being serious? What kind of cues or “costly signals” might they look for to inform their decision?
- Behavioral theories of war argues that leaders are human - they have a tendency to misinterpret information to match their own prior beliefs and interests. In this sense, behavioral theories argue that wars arise to misperceptions and not private information.\(^1\) Are these theories mutually exclusive?
- Does Lake believe rationalist or behavioral theories explain the start of the 2003 Iraq War better? What evidence does he provide in favor of each? Do you agree?
- How would rationalist explanations for war explain the start of World War I and the July Crisis? How would behavioral theories of war respond? Do you find one more compelling or not?

\(^1\)See Robert Jervis “Perception and Misperception”

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