Main Topic: Explore the decline in interstate war since 1945, domestic political explanations for war, unipolarity, and the rise of China.

1 Key Terms

- Berlin Settlement
- Long Peace
- military-industrial complex
- democratic peace
- economic interdependence
- diversionary war incentive
- unipolarity
- Thucydides’ Trap

2 Key Themes/Ideas

Q. Why does US foreign policy discourage nuclear proliferation?

Answer: The US prefers to offer security guarantees because nuclear weapons are dangerous, vulnerable to terrorists, increase the likelihood of war, and undermine coercive diplomacy attempts.

Q. What explains the Long Peace or the decline of interstate war since 1945?

Answer: There is no one answer, but four possible explanations Professor Fearon considered in class was (1) the democratic peace, (2) nuclear deterrence, (3) the distribution of power (bipolarity/unipolarity), and (4) economic interdependence.

Q. What is the role of democracy and regime type in international politics?

Answer: Liberals argue regime type matters and that democracies behave differently than non-democracies. Realists argue regime type does not matter because anarchy forces all states to arm up and act tough.

Q. How do domestic politics influence the probability of war?

Answer: Domestic politics may change the probability of war because actors like political leaders, businessmen, and military officials may prefer war because they pay little costs, but stand to gain a lot from conflict.¹

Q. Why might democracy reduce the probability of interstate war between democracies?

Answer: Institutional explanations argue democracies create accountability and audience costs to overcome private information problems. Normative explanations argue that democracies prefer peace unless paired with an autocracy. Political economy explanations argue that democracies have less to gain from fighting than autocrats.

Q. How does the distribution of power affect the probability of international conflict?

Answer: Realists argue multipolarity is more dangerous than bipolarity and heightens the risk of conflict due to difficulty estimating who is an ally versus opponent.

¹These hawkish interests do not by themselves cause war, but create more opportunities for conflict.
3 Key Readings

- FLS, Chp. 4, 124-167
- FLS, Chp 15, 548-557
- Mearsheimer, “Can China Rise Peacefully?”
- Glaser, “Will China’s Rise Lead to War?”

4 Review Questions

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

- Why do theories about the democratic peace explain low conflict levels between democracies (a so-called dyadic explanation), but cannot explain the conflict-propensity of one democracy alone (a monadic explanation)?
- Peceny et al. (2002) argues there is also an “autocratic peace” because certain types of dictators do not go to war against each other. What mechanisms could explain this behavior and how do they differ, if any, from explanations for the democratic peace?
- In addition to regime type, liberals also argue commercial trade and economic ties are important to deterring international conflict. Why? How does economic trade between states affect the probability of war and why? What do realists think about economic trade?
- How do domestic causes of war coincide or contrast with the systemic causes of war? For example, are some types of states more likely than others to engage in brinksmanship and other hard negotiation tactics? What groups and societies are more likely to hide information or be less credible? What regime types are best at communicating national resolve?
- The Kosovo War (1998) is sometimes portrayed as a diversionary war by President Clinton to deflect from domestic instability in the wake of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Do you agree? In general, would attempts by U.S. presidents to start a diversionary war be successful? What elements of society, the media, and the government might undermine an attempt to create a rally effect?
- How does the distribution of power affect the costs of anarchy? Under what conditions is international conflict more or less likely and why?
- Why does Professor Fearon argue the effects of unipolarity are “kind of silly” in the current international system?
- Do domestic political explanations for war predict the rise of China make a US-Sino war more or less likely? Do liberal explanations for war predict the rise of China make a US-Sino war more or less likely and why?
- What would Mearsheimer and Glaser both say about Professor Fearon’s argument about the consequences of a rising China? Would they agree or disagree and why?