Main Topic: Explore the causes of civil war, civil war negotiations, and international responses to civil war

1 Key Terms

- civil war
- insurgency
- center-seeking vs separatism
- first-strike advantage
- ethnic fractionalization
- fear equation
- Responsibility to Protect
- Brahimi Panel and Report

2 Key Themes/Ideas

Q. What is a civil war?
Answer: Civil war is a violent conflict between domestic, organized armed groups fighting over political power with a certain level of annual violence.

Q. Why has the frequency of civil war increased since World War II?
Answer: New civil wars are not breaking out at a very high rate, but existing conflicts take longer and longer to resolve. The greater rate of war outbreak than war ends makes the number of civil wars appear to be increasing.

Q. Where are civil wars more likely?
Answer: Fearon and Laitin argue that many would-be insurgents have grievances, but only a few escalate to civil war. As a results, civil wars are more likely in countries where there are strong conditions for sustaining insurgency including oil wealth, mountainous terrain, and low GDP (state capacity). Surprisingly, ethnic fractionalization does not predict civil war!

Q. What is the international treatment regime for civil wars?
Answer: It describes how international actors respond to civil war through a combination of mediation, peacekeeping, and peace-building.

Q. Why is it difficult to resolve civil wars?
Answer: It is a very sticky commitment problem. Once a rebel group gets over a military/violent capability, both sides cannot trust the other to peacefully disarm.

Q. What additional barriers to negotiation exist?
Answer: Stedman argues additional barriers to negotiation may arise as the result of (1) security dilemmas, (2) perceptions and stakes, (3) pathologies of leadership, (4) rhetoric of total war, and (5) factionalization and intraparty conflict.

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PoliSci 101: Intro to IR

Week 8 Recap

3 Key Readings

- Fearon and Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”
- Fearon and Laitin, “Neotrusteeship in Weak States”
- Stephen Stedman, “Negotiation and Mediation in Internal Conflict,” chapter 10
- FLS Chp. 6, 219-237

4 Review Questions

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

- Your friend Crazy Charlie makes the following statement: “Compared to interstate wars, civil wars kill more and last longer. Since these two factors make the expected costs of fighting civil wars higher, there should be a larger bargaining range and make the occurrence of civil wars less likely than interstate war.” Explain to CC why this is not correct.

- Fearon and Laitin find that ethnic fractionalization in a country does not increase the likelihood of civil war, but this still remains a popular explanation for political violence. If there does not appear to be a significant correlation, why does this remain a popular explanation for civil war? What alternate story could explain this result?

- Does Fearon and Laitin predict the rise of ISIS and Boko Haram given their statistical results? Why or why not?

- Can rationalist explanations for war explain why civil wars start? If so, which mechanisms are plausible and why?

- How can the international community improve conditions within a country to enhance the probability of a negotiated settlement? Is this likely to occur with Syrian Civil War peace negotiations? Why or why not?

- Stephen Stedman argues that civil wars can be hard to end through settlement due to a security dilemma, but security dilemmas assume an anarchic system. How can this possibly apply in civil wars where state governments continue to exist?

- What enforcement mechanisms do negotiated settlements commonly employ to overcome the disarmament dilemma? How do they relate to the institutional agreements we talked about in lecture and section? (Hint: see Syria Civil War and Game Theory Cheat Sheet)

- Third-party intervention into civil wars, like peacekeeping, tends to be correlated with higher casualties, longer durations, and fewer negotiated settlements. Why could peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention be associated with these costs? What could explain why TPI and peacekeeping are associated with more deadly conflicts?

- The Israeli-Palestinian case is often described as a conflict stemming from issue indivisibility. Over what issues do these two sides have different interests? Which of these issues are more divisible? Which are less divisible? Does either side have incentives to exaggerate the indivisibility of some issues? Do both sides? How could the two sides use bargaining strategies such as linkage and support from third parties to resolve conflicts over these issues?