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January 2022

RESEARCH SUMMARY

My research focuses primarily on the causes of interstate war, foreign policy decision-making, political psychology, and qualitative methodology. Here I summarize my past research and place my current research agenda in the context of my earlier work on the historical evolution of war; dynamics of power relationships, including theories of balance of power, power transition, and preventive war; domestic politics and war, including diversionary theory, political oppositions, and audience costs theory; political economy of war and peace, including the militarization of commercial rivalries and the relationship between economic interdependence and conflict; the psychology of decision-making, including prospect theory and time horizons; qualitative methodology; the First World War; and my Handbook of Great Power Wars project. Please see my [CV](#) for the titles of works cited here and for a more complete list of my publications.

Historical Evolution of War

My work on the historical evolution of war centers around my 1983 book, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495-1975*, along with some shorter studies (1982 and 2001, the later with Thomas Walker and Martin Edwards). The book describes my data set on great power war over the last five centuries of the modern great power system, provides descriptive statistics, and explains the declining frequency but rising severity of great power warfare. I have also worked with T. Clifton Morgan on war contagion (1986) and on the relationship between the frequency and seriousness of war (1984). In *The Arc of War: Origins, Evolution, Transformation* (2011), William Thompson and I extend the analysis of the evolution of war back another eight millennia. We emphasize the coevolution of war, threat perception, political economy, military and political organization, and weaponry from early tribal systems to the contemporary period. More recently, I joined in debates with Steven Pinker, Joshua Goldstein, and others on the hypothesized decline of interstate war and how to explain it (2013).

Dynamics of Power Relationships

My ongoing research projects on theories of balance of power, power transition, and preventive grow out of my long-standing interest in the dynamics of power in international relations. After my earlier work on alliances (1981), the offense/defense balance (1984), polarity (1985), and hegemonic war (1985), I embarked on a reconceptualization of balance of power theory (2003, 2004). William Thompson and I demonstrate that during the last five centuries great powers have generally balanced against hegemonic threats in the European system (2005) but not in the global maritime system (2010). Thompson and I are now working on a book on balance of power theory. One of our tasks is to explain the puzzle that although balancing has worked to block

the emergence of hegemony in European system during the last millennium, hegemonies have emerged in other autonomous continental systems, including during the Warring States period in ancient China.

Balance of power theory is often contrasted with power transition theory. I have highlighted some limitations of power transition theory in my work with Jonathan DiCicco (1999, 2003) and applied the theory to the rise of China (2008). More recently, Andrew Greve and I broaden the theory's central but under-theorized variable of (dis)satisfaction to include status dissatisfaction, and applied the concept to the Sino-Japanese power transition of the late 19th century (2018). I am currently working with Christiaan Bedrij-Arpa on two interrelated papers. In one we argue that power transition theory and balance of power theory are actually complimentary and that they can be integrated to provide a more complete explanation of great power competition. The other paper goes beyond standard treatments of industrialization as the primary mechanism driving power transitions and focuses on financial revolutions as a historically infrequent but consequential alternative mechanism. We apply our theory to the rise of Britain in the century following the Glorious Revolution of 1688. We also argue that British fears that a French financial revolution would propel France past Britain was an important cause of the French Revolutionary Wars in 1792.

In my long-standing research program on preventive war, I clarify the meaning of the concept and specify the conditions under which states are most likely to adopt preventive war strategies (1987, 2008, 2011). I also conduct several historical studies to illustrate different theoretical propositions relating to preventive war. I question the argument that democracies do not fight preventive wars in a study of Israel in the 1956 Sinai Campaign (2001). I distinguish between revisionist and status quo preventive war strategies and explore the interaction between prevention and preemption in a study of German strategy in 1914. Norrin Ripsman and I examined the mysterious case of why a rapidly rising Germany did not precipitate a preventive war in the 1930s (2007, 2012). We argued that British expectations that the distribution of power would shift in their favor by the late 1930s led them to adopt a "buying time" strategy of appeasement, which we contrast with standard conceptualizations of appeasement (2008). Whereas most of the literature on preventive war looks at the perceptions and calculations of the preventer, William Mulligan and I examine the perceptions and behavior of the target, with an historical study of Russia in 1914 (2017). Eventually, I plan to integrate all of this work into a book length treatment of preventive war.

Domestic Politics and War

My work on domestic politics and war began with a 1988 review essay, my studies of the diversionary theory of war (1989, 1992), and analyses of the domestic sources of alliances and alignments with Michael Barnett (1991, 1992). One neglected implication of diversionary theory is that political oppositions, anticipating that a successful war would benefit the party in power, might adopt the politically risky strategy of opposing

war. William Mabe and I explored the motivations and constraints underlying the phenomenon of politically-motivated opposition to war (2004), which I developed into a formal model with Patrick Shea and Terrence Teo (2014). This pattern has important implications for signaling theories, suggesting that in the absence of additional information the domestic opposition's behavior does not necessarily send an unambiguous signal of the government's intentions.

An alternative domestic political theory of signaling emphasizes "audience costs," defined as the domestic costs a leader pays for making a foreign threat and then not following through. After my earlier conceptual contribution (2012), Michael McKoy, Paul Poast, Geoffrey Wallace, and I (2015) argued that if scholars are correct that audience costs are driven by public concerns about inconsistency between a leader's statements and actions, along with the reputational consequences of that inconsistency, then publics should also punish leaders for "backing in" to a conflict after first promising they would stay out. Our experimental study confirmed this hypothesis, but demonstrated that punishment is higher for backing out than for backing in to a conflict. More recently, Jayme Schlesinger and I, in an historical study of British behavior in the 1863-64 Schleswig-Holstein crisis, demonstrate that a variety of domestic political processes can interfere with standard audience costs mechanisms. We argue that the assumptions underlying formal models and experimental scenarios of audience costs fail to adequately capture the complexity of the politics of signaling.

The Political Economy of War and Peace

My work on the political economy of war and peace includes studies of the militarization of commercial rivalry and the relationship between economic interdependence and international conflict. The project on the militarization of commercial rivalries was motivated by the rivalry literature's neglect of both the commercial roots and domestic sources of many strategic rivalries. Focusing on the 17th century Anglo-Dutch rivalry (1998, 1999) and the 18th century Anglo-Spanish rivalry (2011), my coauthors and I demonstrate that standard interpretations of the wars associated with each as "pure trade wars" are misguided, and that in each case domestic politics played a critical role in the escalation of a commercial rivalry to war.

Whereas most studies of economic interdependence, war, and peace examine the impact of trade on conflict, Katherine Barbieri analyze the impact of war on trade. Contrary to the implications of standard liberal and realist theories that trade between wartime adversaries will stop or at least significantly decline with the outbreak of hostilities or before, our interrupted time series and historical case study analyses demonstrated that trading with the enemy often continues during wartime (1999, 2001, 2004). I have recently returned to the question of the impact of economic interdependence on conflict. In a study of the four decade period leading to the First World War, William Mulligan and I broaden the concept of interdependence to include social and cultural as well as economic dimensions, and demonstrate that historically

unprecedented levels of interdependence helped shape power politics in both cooperative and conflictual directions (2019). In another paper Mulligan and I identify several causal mechanisms leading from economic interdependence to war that have been neglected in the literature, and apply our hypotheses to the First World War (2022).

As noted earlier, my work with Bedrij-Arpa examines the role of financial revolutions on power transitions and great power competition.

The Psychology of Judgment and Decision-Making

My work on the psychology of judgment and decision-making in foreign policy includes studies of misperception (1983), learning (1994), prospect-theoretic concepts of loss aversion and risk propensity (1992, 1997, 2000, 2003), time horizons (2007), and threat perception and intelligence failure (2009 with Uri Bar-Joseph, 2012, 2015). I have also written a couple of broader review essays (2003, 2013), and worked with Leonie Huddy and David Sears to co-edit the second edition of the *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (2013). Joined by Jennifer Jerit, we are currently finishing up the third edition, in which I have a more recent review essay. I explore the nature of informational problems in the Russo-Japanese crisis leading to the war of 1904-05, and in the process suggest behavioral modifications to the influential bargaining model of war (2016). Looking ahead, I hope to return to a not-quite-finished paper with Norrin Ripsman that engages the question of why British officials underestimated the growing Nazi threat in the 1930s.

Qualitative Methodology

I have done some review essays on case study methodology (2002, 2007, 2008), the last of which is now my most widely cited publication. I have also written a couple of essays on the differences, similarities, and synergies of diplomatic history and international relations theory (1997, 2001). My work with Gary Goertz on a co-edited book on necessary condition counterfactuals (2008) included our analysis of concepts of causation and led me to conduct two papers on counterfactual methodology (2008, 2015). At some point I hope to write a book-length study of counterfactual analysis in historical research.

The First World War

In addition to the above-mentioned use of the First World War to illustrate different theoretical models and causal propositions, I have undertaken some studies with the more idiographic aim of developing new explanations of the war itself. My initial study of the First World War (1990-91) was guided by a “soft” game-theoretic framework that specified the leading actors’ preferences over the distinct outcomes of peaceful settlement, a local war in the Balkans, a continental war, and a world war. John

Vasquez and I edited a volume on the outbreak of the war that included both political scientists and historians (2014), including my own study of the role of preventive logic German decision-making in 1914. In a formal correspondence with Jack Snyder (2015), I questioned his argument that most great powers perceived 1914 as the optimal time for war, and in a later study with Mulligan addressed the puzzle of why Russia was so confrontational in 1914 when its relative strength would have been much greater three years later (2017). More recently, Mulligan and I published a comparative study of the July 1914 crisis and the great power crises during the Balkan Wars. The study was motivated by the fact that many of the key structural conditions, cultural attitudes, and individual leaders commonly invoked to explain the outbreak of the First World War were present in the earlier crises. Our aim is to explain why the July Crisis, but not the earlier crises, escalated to a great power war.

I have a number of future projects in mind relating to the First World War: an extension of the above-mentioned comparative study to the great power crises of 1905, 1908-09, and 1911, a study of leaders' risky choices in 1914 through the analytic lens of prospect theory, and an application of my rules for counterfactual analysis to the First World War, probably focusing on the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

Handbook of Great Power Wars

I have recently returned to my long-term project on the great power wars in the modern Western system over the last five hundred years. I am revising my 1983 war data, with particular attention to (1) refinements in the dates of entry into and departure from the great power system for each of the great powers; (2) the more precise identification of the initiation and termination dates of each of the 55-60 great power wars since 1495; and (3) the question of whether simultaneous or temporally proximate wars should be disaggregated into separate wars. I hope to put the completed dataset online before long. To facilitate the above project, I am constructing detailed historical timelines of each war. My long-term goal is a set of interpretive essays on the causes of each of the great power wars in the modern system, and a multi-volume study of all great power wars since 1495.