

PART II

Issues and Sources of Conflict



Territory as a Source of Conflict and a Road to Peace¹

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Diplomats have long seen that territory is a persistent source of conflict, but what has not been known is that once neighbors settle their territorial disputes, they can have long periods of peace and prosperity, even if new salient issues arise. In this way, territory is a key both to war and to peace. This chapter will review the major findings on territory within the international relations field and discuss its implications for conflict resolution. Emphasis is placed on interstate war because this is where most of the research has occurred. Although there are implications for intrastate and civil war, more research in this area is needed before the conclusions here could be confidently applied to that area.

INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

Territorial issues have often been a focus of diplomatic efforts in the international community. A fairly large body of international law exists dealing with boundary disputes. Similarly, territorial disagreements have been at the center of the efforts of international

institutions—e.g. the International Court of Justice and boundary disputes. Despite such efforts, territorial disputes have been quite intractable. Even when they pose no danger of war, these issues can linger for years as did the El Chamizal dispute between the USA and Mexico (see Lamborn and Mumme, 1988). More ominously, when they fester for decades without going to war, they can (as in the Falklands/Malvinas dispute) suddenly erupt into a war (see Kacowicz, 1994: Ch. 7). Until recently, however, international relations scholars have not placed any special theoretical significance on territory as a fundamental cause of conflict or war. Realist theory has consistently seen all issues, including territorial issues, as reducible to the issue of power (Morgenthau, 1960: 27). It is the struggle for power within an anarchic system, not any specific issue that *causes* war. Territory may be a motive for war, but it is its role as a source of power that is crucial for realists.

While realist approaches have dominated much of international relations (IR) theory, this is not to say that theories of

conflict focusing on territory as a unique source of conflict have not been constructed. Many of these have looked at territory through biological and evolutionary lenses (see Ardrey, 1966), but these have usually been dismissed in political science as overly deterministic. As the social sciences have become more influenced by post-modernism and constructivism, such approaches have fallen even further out of favor, while such seemingly biological concepts, like territoriality, have been re-conceptualized in constructivist terms (Sack, 1986; Blanchard, 2005). Consequently, the extent to which territory is of causal significance has sometimes been underestimated.

In recent years, this has changed. First, advances in the life sciences, including ethology and neuroscience, have made political scientists argue that their theories cannot ignore the insights and research of these disciplines in explaining human behavior and decision making (Masters, 1989; Rosen, 2005). Within international relations, most scholars who take work in the life sciences seriously adopt a non-deterministic approach, like Vasquez (1993), who in his territorial explanation of war argues that humans are both genetically predisposed to certain behaviors (like territorial conflict) but are also able to change behavior in response to ideas (what Somit, 1990: 569 calls “soft-wired” as opposed to “hard-wired”).

New research in evolutionary psychology and on the biological and neuro-psychological basis of territoriality has added to our understanding of where territoriality comes from (see Alcock and O’Neill, 1987; Buss, 1995). While this work is often grounded in socio-biological assumptions, its findings still must be dealt with. Related to this perspective is the issue of crimes of passion and how they may be associated with territory. Even though research on individuals may not apply to collectivities, one of the more relevant insights of this work is that the emotional/biological response to territorial questions is conditioned by our evolutionary past (Simmons, 1998). Since collectivities, do seem to respond to territorial issues in

a manner that is often in excess of a strict cost/benefit analysis, this literature may give us some clues as to why.

A second and more influential reason for the change in attitude has been the release of a new data set on militarized interstate disputes from 1816–1992 by the Correlates of War project (Jones et al., 1996) that includes data on territorial disputes and has led to a surge of quantitative research on territory and war. This has produced some important findings that show that territorial disputes are highly war-prone.

One of the puzzles raised by this research is why territorial issues can be so intractable when on the surface it appears that territory is both tangible and divisible. Some answers place great emphasis on reputation effects (Walter, 2003). Reputation is certainly a component, but in and of itself it is too narrow an emphasis to provide a complete answer, and it overlooks other processes that can be useful for conflict resolution. Quite some time ago, Mansbach and Vasquez (1981: 234–250) pointed out that conflict and cooperation consists of three separate but interrelated dimensions—opinion (agreement–disagreement), behavior (positive and negative acts, e.g. carrots and sticks), and psychological attitude (friendship–hostility). They hypothesize that over time, persistent disagreement leads to an over-reliance on negative acts and coercion. These acts instead of changing the issue position of the other side engender psychological hostility, which in turn encourages disagreement.

Such a vicious circle directly affects the way issues are framed. A conflict spiral can transform concrete and tangible stakes, such as territory, by infusing them with symbolic and even transcendent qualities. Symbolic stakes are more intractable because giving in on them implies giving in on all the other stakes they represent or, at minimum setting, a precedent that will lead to a slippery slope of losses (here is where a reputation effect is most relevant). Transcendent stakes involve a further and different transformation. Here, the conflict

process makes the stake representative of very salient (typically moral) values, like freedom, honor, and identity.

Infusing concrete stakes with symbolic and transcendent qualities makes them intangible and difficult to divide. Territory often becomes infused with these qualities in the conflict process. For Serbs, the land at Kosovo Polje is not just the earth with a certain mineral content; it is where the battle of Kosovo took place in 1389. It is representative of their soul, their history, their destiny (White, 2000: Ch. 6; see also Newman, 2006).

As stakes become more symbolic and transcendent, they encourage disagreement, which in turn leads to more negative coercive acts, which then leads to more hostility. At the same time, a shift to more symbolic and transcendent stakes leads the contending actors to make certain kinds of proposals for the disposition of an issue. In brief, symbolic and transcendent stakes lead actors basically to make zero-sum proposals for settling the issue. Proposals of this type give one side all the benefits and make the other bear all the costs. This is because such stakes tend to be intangible and cannot be divided, thereby encouraging proposals of the winner-take-all type.²

The above analysis should make it clear that it is not conflicts that are intractable, but issues that are intractable. Theory and research will be more productive if we think in terms of *intractable issues*, rather than intractable conflicts. What makes some conflicts difficult to resolve is that the underlying issue has certain characteristics, like it being intangible or over territory that has been infused with symbolic qualities. These in turn lead to zero-sum proposals which hamper negotiations.

TERRITORY AND CONFLICT: EMPIRICAL PATTERNS

As a field, international relations has relied on theory to identify the conditions under which conflict resolution is most apt to be successful (Zartman, 1989) and the kinds of

techniques that can be implemented to deal with specific problems (Pruitt and Rubin, 1986; Kriesberg, Northrup et al., 1989; Burton, 1990). Empirical research on specific cases of success and failure (Bercovitch and Jackson, 1997) have also been analyzed to delineate certain patterns that can be useful for understanding the dynamics of conflict and its resolution, management or settlement (Bercovitch and Diehl, 1997; Zartman and Rasmussen, 1997).³ In the last decade, there has been a great deal of systematic research on territorial disputes which has given us a much more complete picture of the role of territory in bringing about conflict that leads to war. In this section, we outline the principal patterns that have been delineated by this research.

Conflict at the most basic level involves disagreement, and disagreement is inherent in social behavior. Not all disagreements need end in violence, however. Most practitioners of conflict resolution become concerned when disagreements are handled with the use of militarized force. Crossing this threshold puts the conflict into a different category, one where the risk of war has suddenly increased, even though most interstate attempts to handle issues through the use of force do not escalate to war. Thanks to the Correlates of War project, we now have a fairly complete record of all instances of the threat or use of force between legally recognized nation-states from 1816–2001. Such instances are called militarized interstate disputes (MIDs).

Using MIDs as the dependent variable, it has been found that states with territorial disagreements are more apt to have a MID than states without territorial disagreements (Senese and Vasquez, 2003). Territorial disagreements appear to be special kinds of issues in that their presence encourages the use of militarized force.

A second factor that is related to the threat or use of force between states is whether they are neighbors. States that are contiguous (by land or within 150 miles of water) are more apt to have a MID than non-contiguous states (Senese, 2005).

It is reasonable to assume, as the territorial explanation of war would expect, that disputes between neighbors involve territory, although this hypothesis has not been fully tested. What tests we do have consistently show that neighbors fight not because they are contiguous and have frequent interactions, but because they have territorial disputes (Hensel, 2000; Vasquez, 2001; Ben-Yehuda, 2004; Senese, 2005). This means that territory is more important than contiguity in terms of the onset of war.

Once territorial disputes emerge between two states, whether they are neighbors or not, they are more apt to recur (Hensel, 1994). We also know that states that have territorial disputes are likely to become enduring rivals (have six or more MIDs within a 20-year period) (Vasquez and Leskiw, 2001).⁴ From research on rivalry and protracted conflict, we know that disputes that recur between the same two states have a greater risk of escalating to war (Goertz and Diehl, 1992a; Brecher and Wilkenfeld, 1997; Diehl and Goertz, 2000). Since territorial disputes recur, we would expect that they would have a higher probability of going to war than other types of disputes.

In fact, the major finding we have in conflict studies is that territorial disputes have a greater probability of ending up in war than other types of disputes, specifically regime and policy disputes. This was one of the first findings on territory and war using the MID data and it has been confirmed in several studies. The simplest and most straightforward test is in Vasquez and Henehan (2001: 128). They find that territorial disputes have the highest probability of going to war in the 1816–1992 period (.091) compared to regime disputes (.078) and policy disputes (.033). A comparison of the conditional probabilities with the overall base probability of war, which is .058, shows that territorial and regime disputes are significantly more apt to escalate to war than expected by chance and that policy disputes have a significantly lower likelihood of going to war than the base.

Vasquez and Henehan (2001: 134–135) also test this hypothesis controlling for historical

era (1816–1945, 1946–1992) and whether the two states in a dispute are both major states (e.g. Germany, UK), both minor, or major–minor. These controls generally reconfirm the findings. The only exceptions are that under certain circumstances, regime disputes have a higher probability of war when both sides are minor states or when the dispute occurs in the post-1945 period. Nevertheless, territorial disputes account for most war escalations—53 of 97 (54.6%) compared to only 9 of 97 (9.3%) for regime disputes for the entire 1816–1992 period (Vasquez and Henehan, 2001: 131).

Note, however, that territorial disputes are not necessary conditions for war, but only increase the probability of war when they are present. Other issues can also give rise to war. Vasquez and Henehan (2001: 131) show that 31 of the 97 (32%) war escalations arise from policy disputes. Territory is responsible for only one category of war, albeit the most frequent.⁵ In work seeking to classify types of wars, Valeriano and Vasquez (2005) find that territorial wars account for the majority that have occurred from 1816–1997. Looking at multilateral wars, they get even stronger results in that 20 of the 28 (71.4%) multilateral wars can be classified as territorial wars.

The hypothesis that territorial disputes between nation-states are highly prone to war has been tested by numerous scholars in different ways and using different data sets. The earliest published studies were by Senese (1996) and Hensel (1996), both of whom group policy, regime, and other disputes into a single non-territorial category. Senese (1996) finds that territorial MIDs are more prone to having fatalities than non-territorial disputes regardless of whether they go to war or not. He infers that there is something about territorial disputes that makes decision makers willing to sacrifice lives rather than give in to demands. Similarly, Hensel (1996) shows that not only are territorial MIDs more prone to fatalities, but they incur the highest fatalities (in that a war by definition must produce at least 1000 battle deaths). Ben-Yehuda (2004) using International Crisis Behavior (ICB) project

data also finds that crises involving territorial issues are more war-prone than other types of crises.

One of the criticisms of the above sort of studies is that they may be prone to selection bias, i.e. that it is not territorial MID that bring about war, but the factors which bring about territorial MID in the first place that make for war. Several sophisticated analyses have tested for this possibility and none of them have found selection effects operating in the MID data (Senese and Vasquez, 2003; Senese, 2005; Rasler and Thompson, 2006). What the above studies find is that while territorial claims or contiguity may increase the probability of a MID arising, it is the presence of a territorial MID (and not territorial claims or contiguity) that make war likely.

All of this research suggests that conflict resolution should make the settlement of territorial disputes a focus of its efforts, since territorial disputes are highly war-prone and account for most interstate wars and rivalries. But where does one begin and are all territorial disputes alike?

One optimistic set of findings, which is also consistent with the territorial explanation of war, is that it is not territorial disputes that greatly increase the probability of war, but how they are handled and whether they lead to a rivalry. Recent work (Valeriano, 2003; Rasler and Thompson, 2006) has shown that rivalry and the timing of events prior to and during a territorial dispute are critical for the escalation to war and termination of outstanding territorial claims. This view challenges the conventional wisdom that territorial disputes in and of themselves lead to militarized action and warfare. Rather, territorial issues lead to rivalry, which then leads to intense disputes and war. It follows that settling a territorial issue is not simply demarcating a border (say in Kashmir), but resolving all the other questions, like the symbolic and transcendent value of the territory, which are endemic to a rivalry. Unless the rivalry relationship is addressed, the vicious circle of conflict to which rivalries

are prone will not be broken and the territorial dispute is unlikely to be settled.

Rivalry (Diehl and Goertz, 2000; Thompson, 2001) is an essential variable because issues at stake within such a relationship fester and repeat. Rivalry is a situation of historic animosity where any and all issues at stake between the disputants take on a serious and deadly tone. One state would slash its own nose in order to deny a benefit to its rival. It is during these situations that territory becomes dangerous and war-prone. One state may take a portion of territory and settle the question for the time being, but if the rivalry persists, that territorial issue will repeat and reemerge even decades later.

The timing of events during a territorial disagreement is crucial to the outcome of settlement efforts. Rasler and Thompson (2006) find that war is unlikely over a territorial issue in the absence of an ongoing strategic rivalry. Valeriano (2003) finds that war and enduring rivalry are unlikely without territorial issues and power politics tactics such as alliances, simultaneous disputes, grand strategy development, and arms races occurring prior to the onset of rivalry.

Senese and Vasquez (2005) show that as states resort to various forms of power politics to get the other side to accept its territorial demands, the probability of war progressively increases. Trying to deal with territorial issues by seeking outside allies, building up one's military, or engaging in repeated militarized confrontations produces a security dilemma that makes the other side respond in kind. The research shows that each time one of these practices is employed, there is a concomitant increase in the probability of war (ranging from around .50 to .90 for 1816–1945). During the Cold War, alliances and arms races are not a significant factor, but this may be a function primarily of the impact of nuclear weapons which acted as a restraint on superpower competition (Senese and Vasquez, 2005). How territorial disputes are handled once they arise makes a big difference in the probability of war and provides an opening for effective conflict resolution intervention and points out the importance of timing.

These findings raise the question of what distinguishes the territorial disputes that go to war from those that do not. One answer to that question (as exemplified by the above research) is in terms of process—it is the process by which actors handle territorial issues that distinguish those that go to war from those that do not. One such key factor is whether territorial MIDs recur.⁶

Another and equally plausible answer as to why certain territorial disputes are more war-prone is that it is something intrinsic to the issue itself—its salience or the type of territory under question. Goertz and Diehl (1992b) measure the area of the territory and the size of its population to get at the importance of the territory in question. Hensel (2001) adds to the salience measure, indicators of economic resources, homeland vs. colonial territory, ethnic identity, and mainland vs. offshore territory. He finds some evidence that salience is important not only for predicting war, but also the probability of peaceful settlement. From his perspective, salience forces leaders “to do something” and that can be either engaging in nonviolent practices (like negotiations or mediation) or going to war. Hensel (2001: 83) rightly regards these as substitutable means. The pressure “to do something” may also account for why intangible territorial issues have more peaceful settlements than tangible territorial issues, even though intangible territorial issues have a higher probability of going to war and having MIDs.

Huth (1996) and Huth and Allee (2002) classify territorial claims according to type—ethnic (including bordering minorities of the same ethnic group), strategic, and economic. They find that ethnic and strategic territorial claims are highly conflict-prone—in terms of escalation and war. Conversely, they find that territorial claims associated with economic resources are prone to peaceful resolution, especially if they involve developing countries. Here, joint ventures and the need for capital can provide incentives to resolve the issue. Further refinement of typologies that look at the substantive nature of territorial issues (e.g. border adjustments vs. core

territory, etc.) is an area that might prove productive for matching the right conflict resolution techniques with the relevant type of issue.

One factor that has long been a characteristic that is seen as making it more difficult to settle an issue is the number of actors involved. Multiple actors are seen as making negotiations and compromise more difficult. Brecher and Wilkenfeld (1997) provide some evidence (using ICB data) for this with regard to international crises—showing that multiparty crises are more prone to escalation and the use of violence. Petersen, Vasquez, and Wang (2004) show the same is true of multiparty MIDs in terms of their having an increased probability of going to war. Of interest is that they demonstrate that this relationship is especially true of multiparty territorial disputes. Similarly, Valeriano and Vasquez (2005) find that most multiparty wars arise out of territorial disputes rather than regime or policy questions.

The research on territorial disputes has shown that it is an important source of conflict and that it is also a key factor (if not *the* factor) in the outbreak of interstate war. Since it is such an important factor, it is essential that territory be the focus of attention for war avoidance and reduction, but the territorial explanation of war is more optimistic than that. It maintains that among neighbors, territory is so important that once this issue is settled, it can lead to long periods of peace, even if other salient issues arise. This hypothesis is one of the major testable differences between the territorial explanation of war and realism, which sees war as inherent in the struggle for power. We turn now to research relevant to this claim about the relationship between territory and peace.

TERRITORY AND PEACE: EMPIRICAL PATTERNS

Vasquez (1993: 146) has stated: “If the territorial divisions among neighbors are not challenged but accepted as legitimate,

peaceful relations can govern. Most borders once satisfactorily settled remain so for long periods of time.”

Is it the case that once a border is mutually accepted that peace can reign?⁷

The earliest systematic evidence we have on this is from Kocs (1995). Examining all contiguous states from 1945–1987, he finds that war is not very likely if neighbors accept their border and have no territorial claim against one another. War is about 40 times more likely to break out between contiguous states if they are involved in a territorial disagreement that has never been resolved (Kocs, 1995: 172). Kocs’ evidence is indirect in that acceptance of a border is based on the absence of a territorial claim and not some direct measure of border legitimacy.

Gibler (1996, 1997) has two studies that show that settling a territorial dispute is related to peace between states. Gibler’s (1996) first study is done in the context of work on alliances that shows that certain types of alliances are followed by war within five years (Levy, 1981). One type that is not is an alliance made to cement a territorial settlement. Only 1 of 27 territorial settlement treaties is followed by a war of any kind (Gibler, 1996). In a more systematic study, Gibler (1997) shows that alliances that settle territorial disputes also have a pacifying effect on interstate rivalry, which, as noted earlier, is very prone to war.

Using recently collected data on all territorial claims made between states from 1816 through 2001 for the Western Hemisphere and Western Europe, Hensel (2006) finds support for the proposition that if territorial claims are settled (either violently or nonviolently), then there is a decreased probability of subsequent MIDs. Overall, he finds that once a territorial claim has been settled, the probability of a subsequent MID goes down significantly below the probability of having an MID when a territorial claim is present (Hensel, 2006: 15). This finding supports the hypothesis that settling territorial claims between neighbors will result in a significant reduction of all militarized conflict, not just war. In addition, the reduction in conflict is

over any issue and not just a reduction in territorial MIDs (Hensel, 2006: 1).

How can territory have this peaceful and even transformative effect on relations between neighbors? The reason is that once borders are accepted; they can fulfill their role in the modern global system as international institutions. Borders, as Simmons (2006: 253–259) points out, are not just sites of contention, but international institutions that provide a number of mutual benefits (see also Blanchard, 2005).

Borders are international institutions in that they are a set of practices that allocate physical space according to a constructed understanding of reality. Borders divide space and allocate sovereignty, which gives a host of rights to certain individuals and groups and not to others. Borders say, in effect, that in one space such and such can be done and in this other space, these other rules apply. This is what it means to own the land and to have sovereignty over it. Borders can have a tremendous impact on identity, ways of life, and so forth (see Sahlins, 1989).

Simmons (2006) focuses on the economic benefits derived from borders as institutions, which are considerable. Accepted boundaries provide a demarcation of sovereignty and recognition of one another’s laws and regulations regarding property rights, investment, and trade. When boundaries are not accepted, it is difficult to engage in extensive economic interaction because uncertainty is so high. Uncertainty undermines the normal stability of expectations about the future on which contracts are based. This can be most easily seen with regard to property rights and direct investment. When borders are in contention, there is a lack of consensus on the applicability of basic ground rules in certain geographical spaces.

In contrast, acceptance of boundaries allows parties to see where sovereignty lies and what laws apply. Stable borders embody an institution that allocates certain legal competencies as well as embodying a set of mutual understandings about rules and norms that apply with regard to what the border means and who can do what on each

side of the border. In fact, many scholars (Goff, 2000; Simmons, 2006) conclude that, in spite of theories suggesting the decline of the state, borders remain an important factor in international politics. Henrikson (2000) suggests that “good neighborhood” or *bon voisinage* treaties should be concluded to force states to accept the territorial boundary lines and encourage cooperation.

Economic interaction and trade, in particular, takes place in the context of a variety of rules and practices reflecting legal standards. These reduce transaction costs and thereby increase profits, but mostly they reduce financial risk. Borders help identify who owns what. In doing so they de-legitimize theft through conquest. Working borders reduce risk and fear, making trade a viable substitution for conquest (Rosecrance, 1986; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003: Ch. 9; Gartzke and Rohner, 2006). Simmons (2006) uses a gravity model of trade to try to estimate the value of trade lost because of a territorial dispute. She points out that the acceptance of a line of demarcation will permit this trade, which would normally exist, to flow. In many ways, what is important is not where the demarcation line is drawn, but simply that it is drawn.

The benefits of borders as institutions for non-economic matters can be even greater. Constructivists have shown that borders serve a number of functions (Blanchard, 2005). Of special importance are the identity and constitutive functions. With the norm of nationalism and self-determination, territory has become a way to ground identity. Another function of borders is to delimit what constitutes the state (Blanchard, 2005: 691–692). The constitutive function originates with national sovereignty and is institutionalized in the Peace of Westphalia and international law. International law recognizes that states, and usually states alone, have political sovereignty over a specific piece of territory.

Mutual acceptance of a border and the existing territorial distribution permits actors to reap the benefits of both of these functions. Contesting the border interrupts the smooth functioning of the border, making for great

uncertainty. This can be seen in the way a border serves to institutionalize a way of life. When borders are accepted, normal interaction and politics come to the forefront. This opens up new possibilities, especially along the borderlands. For Diez (2004: 137), when borders are stable, they are more apt to become porous; what seems to be occurring in this process is that the border “as division” is replaced with the border as “a reference point” that brings people (legal equals) together across a number of stable cross-border interactions. In contrast, contesting borders reinforces them as a focal point of conflict, insecurity, and uncertainty.⁸

A dramatic case for how this process occurs is Western Europe. For centuries, Western Europe’s borders have been contested and fought over in numerous wars. One of the great lessons for peace research is how this war-torn region becomes a security community in the Deutschian sense.⁹ The Schumann plan was based on a theory of peace (Mitrany, 1943) that sees economic integration as a foundation that will spill over to produce political integration and peace. It is this theoretical approach that was used to guide much of European integration, and it is clearly antithetical to realist international relations theory. As such, the ensuing West European peace poses an anomaly for the realist paradigm, in that it is a non-realist theory associated with a set of policies that brings about peace in a war-torn region that had been dominated by realist practices of power politics.

While economic integration is a key, one of the things that distinguish the post-1945 economic integration of Western Europe from the economic interdependence and trade of pre-1914 Europe is that the former is built on a firm acceptance of borders. While the acceptance of borders was not the centerpiece of Europe’s Common Market, but a side-effect, from the perspective of the territorial explanation of war, it was a side-effect that made a crucial difference. In this sense, one of the most important (and overlooked) historical events of our time that produces peace is the acceptance in 1990 of the

German–Polish border by the unified German government.

With the creation of the European Union and its enlargement, acceptance of borders has become a keystone in its strategy for peace. The demand that new states settle their territorial disputes as a price for admission will provide a test of the peace proposition within the territorial explanation of war. It predicts that mutually acceptable borders among these states will give rise to long periods of peace between neighbors. This would be expected to be particularly the case in the context of the European Union, which provides an economic and political structure for institutionalizing borders in a fashion that quickly provides benefits (see Diez et al., 2006).

This conceptual analysis, buttressed by case evidence, supports the general proposition that once territorial disputes are settled, they set neighbors on a road to peace. More importantly, it points to why and how peace occurs. From the perspective of the territorial explanation of war, peace does not involve the disappearance of borders, as some who take a globalization perspective argue (Ruggie, 1993), but their acceptance and desecuritization. Borders are a foundation upon which peace can be built. Globalization involves not so much a removal of borders but an acceptance of them and a set of economic agreements that make them more porous and interactive.

If territory is in fact a key to peace, then there should be some observable trace of this in the historical record. One way to test this notion is to observe periods of peace and see if, in fact, they are associated with the absence (or a reduction in the probability) of war for territorial disputes.¹⁰ Henahan and Vasquez (2006: 290, Table 11.4) provide evidence to this effect. They use Wallensteen's (1984) identification of periods of peace among the major states from 1816 to 1976 (with an update through 1991) to see if in these peaceful periods, territorial disputes are less prevalent.

They find that there are few territorial MID's (in absolute numbers) in these periods of

relative major state peace—1 in 1816–1848, 4 in 1871–1895, 0 in 1919–1932, and 11 in 1963–1991. Interestingly, during the early League of Nations period, territorial disputes are kept completely off the agenda. More systematically, there are 16 territorial disputes during the 101 “relatively peaceful years” (.16 per year) compared to 61 territorial disputes during the 73 “relatively war-prone years” (.84 per year).

This statistical evidence implies that there is something about these periods that reduces the number and danger of territorial disputes. Two hypotheses are suggested. One is the hypothesis that guides Wallensteen's (1984) study—that peace is associated with major states attempting to establish a common set of rules of the game to guide their behavior (and thereby govern the system). The second is the hypothesis under discussion here—the acceptance of borders. These two hypotheses, however, are not unrelated. For example, in the Congress of Vienna, borders were fixed and at the same time a set of informal rules of the game regulating major state interactions were adopted.

Another body of evidence that peace is associated with the absence of territorial disputes comes from the democratic peace. It is known that democratic dyads (pairs of states) rarely go to war against each other. Is this because they tend not to have territorial disputes? Mitchell and Prins (1999) are the first to explore this question. They find that democratic dyads mostly have maritime disputes and not territorial MID's. James, Park, and Choi (2006) go a step further and argue that territorial disputes can wash out the effects of the democratic peace. Gibling (forthcoming) provides even more evidence that the absence of territorial disputes might be a major reason for the democratic peace. He finds that democratic dyads have few territorial issues, have settled borders with their democratic neighbors, and do not fight each other. He argues that democratic states tend not to fight each other because they have settled their borders. These three studies add to the evidence that peace reigns in the absence of territorial disputes. Further detail

on this process is provided by Allee and Huth (2006) who show that democracies tend to use legal settlements as domestic political cover in their attempts to deescalate territorial disputes and are successful at resolving these (between like-minded democracies) before any threat of force is used (see also Huth and Allee, 2002).

While the research on territory and peace is not as extensive nor as robust as the findings on territory and war, it consistently shows that resolving or settling territorial issues can be a road to peace for neighbors. Neighbors who have settled outstanding territorial claims, regardless of whether they have settled them violently or non-violently, have a much lower probability of militarized conflict (a MID) on any issue than neighbors with a claim, which means they are much less likely to go to war or experience rivalry. The findings imply that states need not be trapped in a vicious circle of power politics, conflict, and war. They are at peace and move on to making the border work for them, as outlined by Simmons (2006) and Diez (2004), and not against them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The above review supports the claim that territory is a key to war and to peace. Learning how to manage, settle, or resolve territorial issues will not eliminate all war, but it will do much to reduce a certain class of wars, especially among neighbors. In this concluding section, we outline some of the implications of the research on territory for the theory and practice of conflict resolution. The implications must be seen as initial suggestions that conflict resolution theorists and practitioners will need to adapt to specific circumstances, since most research does not suggest how one should apply these findings to ongoing conflicts.

An important contribution of the empirical research is that it tells us where we should focus our energies. Interstate war is most apt to occur between neighbors and its source is most likely to be territorial. Therefore, we

should focus on either keeping such issues off the agenda or reducing their salience or intangibility. Attaining this goal will make for peaceful relations between neighbors over the long term. While territorial conflict between neighbors is not uncommon, the empirical research on territory and peace tells us that once borders are accepted, neighbors need not be at high risk of war. Settling or resolving territorial issues between neighbors can have a high and long-term payoff.

A second contribution of the empirical research is that it makes it clear that territorial disputes do not inevitably end in war; it all depends on how they are handled.

A diplomacy of peace must know the difference between practices that increase the risk of war and those that reduce it. Current research on the steps to war suggests that mediators or other outside parties should encourage disputants to avoid making outside alliances or building up their military, which increase threat perceptions. Forming an outside alliance is not going to make one more secure, but will only provoke a counter-alliance. Avoiding alliances will nip this vicious circle in the bud, but avoiding alliances will not be easy because the presence of salient territorial disputes will make states feel the need for outside support. The same security dilemma operates with military buildups. In addition, trying to settle the issue unilaterally through militarized confrontation is going to lead to a sense of rivalry. Each of these factors can be seen as taking the parties along a realist road to war.

Nevertheless, there are many exits off the road to war.¹¹ If one has a territorial dispute, then one should avoid making outside alliances. If one has already made an alliance after a territorial dispute, war might still be prevented by not building up one's military and engaging in arms races. Lastly, a number of crisis management and even crisis prevention techniques can be employed to break a pattern of repeated militarized confrontations, as was learned in the Cold War (George, 1983; see also Axelrod's (1984) analysis of tit-for-tat strategies). Failing to break a pattern of recurring territorial disputes

is the best guarantee of a war. War often arises between neighbors because it is a unilateral way of imposing one's preferred outcome.

A third contribution of the empirical research on territory is to highlight the importance of prevailing norms for the transfer of territory. The modern global system has always had certain norms for the transfer of territory. In the early years, territory was seen as the personal property of monarchs, and it could be transferred through the rules of dynastic succession (including marriage) (Luard, 1986: 101, 110). Since the mid-nineteenth century, nationalism and self-determination has been the dominant norm.

Agreement on norms makes it easier to settle a territorial dispute peacefully. Kacowicz (1994: 75–76, 82, 86) provides some statistical evidence that agreement on norms leads to a peaceful transfer of territory about 80% of the time; whereas disagreement over norms leads to a failure to settle the dispute peacefully about 80% of the time. Indeed, it seems the more stringent the norms, the less likely wars. As Luard (1986: 87) points out, many past wars arose because loopholes or ambiguities within the rules for dynastic succession provided an opportunity for territorial expansion. The lesson here is clear—tighten loopholes and reduce ambiguity. When this is done, it becomes more difficult to claim that one has a legitimate resort to arms. More importantly, however, such norms provide a reasoned basis for expanding common ground and producing a solution that will sell at home.

In this sense, the growth in the body of international law for adjudicating boundary claims is a great asset and provides a separate (legal) decision game that works with norms for transferring territory. As with norms, a main consequence of international law is that it provides a procedure for determining who should win (or who should get what). Like all decision games, it provides an authoritative allocation of value(s). Agreement on a procedure has two obvious advantages: it provides a way of ending the issue, which may be important if the territory is salient, and it is a procedure that is considerably

less costly than war (and more legitimate in today's international society).

Opting for a binding procedure to determine who wins may also be a way for a leader to avoid the domestic costs associated with the continuation of the issue or the possibility of losing territory. Simmons (1999) shows that leaders are more apt to use arbitration to deal with territorial issues in a highly contentious domestic environment to avoid costs associated with a settlement.

For high salience territorial issues, losing in one decision game often means the actor shifts to another strategy and a new game. Similarly, when the status quo state drags on negotiations for years and sometimes decades, as Britain did with Argentina over the Falklands/Malvinas, it risks a sudden shift to the war game by the revisionist state when an opportune moment arises. Kacowicz (1994: 169, 173) argues that British abandonment of accommodative strategies during the negotiations “in favor of a prolongation of the status quo” led Argentina to shift to a coercive game, which of course backfired. Hensel (2001) also finds a link between the failure to reach a settlement through negotiation and a shift to war.

How can one settle or resolve such issues? There seem to be two main obstacles to reaching an agreement. The first is domestic opposition and the second involves emotional attachments that make the issue intangible and difficult to divide. Each of these are areas where conflict resolution efforts have played a role in the past. Overcoming these obstacles greatly increases the likelihood of success.

Sometimes, even when leaders agree on a solution, domestic opposition or the opposition of relevant non-state actors can overturn an agreement. This has been a perennial problem in the Middle East. It must be remembered that someone must stand for peace at the highest levels, if peace is to be attained. Often, leaders who are hardliners or who have been a successful military leader in the past (see Chiozza and Choi, 2003) are more able to push through an agreement, mostly because they are able to

control hard-line constituencies. This was certainly the case, respectively, with Nixon in recognizing “Red China” and with de Gaulle in Algeria. One cannot always count on such leaders emerging, however. For conflict resolution to be successful, it often boils down to a question of agenda politics where the right leaders appear at the right moment, often in the context of a hurting stalemate (Zartman, 1989). Kingdon’s (1995) model of agenda politics is relevant here.

In the absence of such a concatenation of factors, it is necessary to either impose an agreement externally or think in terms of more long-term processes that will transform the domestic political environment of one or both sides. The external imposition of an agreement is what “great power” diplomacy (e.g. in the Concert of Europe) was all about. When major states are reluctant or unable to impose solutions, then efforts must focus on the long-term process of changing the actor’s issue positions. One long-term solution is to bargain in the context of gaining on another issue that is more salient. This is an unlikely scenario for territorial disputes like Kashmir or Palestine, but issue linkages can play a role in smaller territorial disputes that are visible mostly to those in the border region.

Another alternative is to try to drain the emotional foundation of the issue that leads to hard-line constituencies in the first place, either by letting the issue lie dormant or by taking a more active role in reframing the issue. When issues that have little tangible value are highly conflictive, as when governments fight over land that has little economic value (as Walter, 2003 finds), the most likely reason is that these issues are commanding emotional attention. Conflict resolution theorists and practitioners have tried to deal with this problem by reframing and re-conceptualizing such issues. Instead of treating them as zero sum, they have tried to show how certain solutions can make the issue contention more of a positive sum game or at least not clearly zero sum. The art of conflict resolution is to generate a solution that transforms the issue in this manner.¹²

The prospect of each side winning something significant reduces hostility.

In ethnic disputes, a simple solution is to separate or partition the territory along ethnic lines when this is possible and both sides accept the nationalism norm. Plebiscites supervised by international organizations provide a procedure for implementing the nationalism norm. Autonomous regional governments follow the same logic. Tir (2006: Chs 4, 6) finds that territorial transfers are sometimes successful conflict management techniques, especially if the partition does not divide members of the same ethnic group or punish the loser too harshly, but at other times partition can be problematic.

More often than not, ethnic groups are too intermingled for partition to work. Here, one may want to take Burton’s (1990) approach, which emphasizes the importance of meeting mutual needs. With ethnicity, this approach would emphasize tolerance of different ways of life and permitting a multi-layered use of the same space to practice different cultures. Identity is seen as not zero sum because one’s “Spanishness” should not diminish another’s “Basqueness” and vice versa. In fact, a tolerance and a granting of space, but not necessarily territory, to each identity are likely to increase mutual security. There may still be other issues, such as social integration, prohibitions on intermarriage, and so forth, but the issue is stripped of its territorial content. Extreme mingling of ethnic groups have led some to emphasize human rights’ guarantees to practice one’s identity, and this may work even in non-democratic societies, if human rights are not interpreted so broadly that this effort is seen as one of trying to change the form of government.

An important foundation of this solution is what might be called “de-territorializing” the issue. In this case, ethnicity or identity is not tied to owning a particular piece of territory. Instead, the legal structure permits identity to be practiced non-exclusively anywhere (or exclusively in a certain space or time; for example, in special buildings or on certain days).¹³ Separating specific issues from territory can lead to less conflict because

the variable that produces violence is not ethnicity, but territory.

This still leaves the problem of the symbolic quality of territorial issues. Here, territory resists settlement because one piece of territory stands for several others' territories. One way of dealing with this problem is to de-link the stakes. This tack has proven partially successful in the Middle East where the question of Sinai was separated from the question of the Golan Heights and the West Bank/Gaza. Such an approach has the advantage of reducing the number of actors needed to reach agreement, and not holding the solution hostage to the most hard-line group in the coalition and the most intractable territorial stake in the broader issue.

Part of draining territory of its emotional content and making it less of an intangible stake requires dealing with the sense of rivalry that has made the issue take on these characteristics. The current state of knowledge in the field suggests researchers should not focus their conflict management and resolution techniques solely on specific territorial issues in the hope of ending the conflict entirely. It is important that conflict resolution efforts deal with territorial issues in the context of the larger rivalry in which they are embedded; thereby changing the underlying relationship which has framed the issue so that it is intangible and infused with symbolic and transcendent qualities. Dealing with rivalry also helps reduce the influence of domestic hardliners that stir up historic animosity and make issues difficult to settle between states. By recognizing that their collective mutual interest in conflict resolution will produce benefits (especially economic benefits) that are greater than the benefits of continuing the rivalry, a pair of states can make progress towards ending one of the main sources of disagreement and conflict.

CONCLUSION

We have argued and presented evidence to show that territory is a key to war and a key

to peace. There is considerable evidence that the presence of territorial issues and disputes increase the probability of war and conflict. No matter what data set or method used, the results always show support for this important finding. What also seems to be clear is that not all territorial issues are equally prone to war. It seems that states rarely go to war over tangible territorial issues and territory disputed solely for economic reasons; rather, they fight when the territory under question is infused with intangible qualities or is tied to ethnic factions.

How territorial issues are handled once they arise is a crucial variable. If they are handled in a power politics manner, they are apt to repeat and promote rivalry. The first step to ending territorial disputes might be managing the tactics leaders employ to deal with these issues. This will help set the stage for the stable acceptance of borders as an institution, which can provide significant economic benefits to both sides of the dispute.

Peace seems to lie with the settlement of territorial disputes. Recent research has shown that once territorial disputes are settled, neighbors and neighborhoods can have long periods of peace. Future research should focus on concrete examples of how territorial disputes can be resolved and how those disputes can be defused of their transcendent and symbolic qualities. The task for conflict resolution is to apply its insights and practical wisdom to settling the ongoing territorial disputes that still wrack so much of the world. Such an emphasis is apt to have the highest payoffs.

NOTES

1 Our thanks to the editors, Peter Wallensteen, and the participants in the Sage "Conflict Resolution" Conference held in Laxenburg, Austria, June 30–July 2, 2007 for their comments and suggestions.

2 See Dzurek (2007) for a useful effort to create a taxonomy that evaluates the symbolic and tangible values of territory.

3 We use the distinction common in the conflict resolution literature between settlement, which refers to a termination of the issue regardless of the means

employed (i.e. including imposition of an agreement, as in Second World War) and resolution, which refers to a mutual satisfaction with the agreement and one that meets some if not all of the underlying needs related to the conflict.

4 This finding is correlational in nature, while we think that territorial disputes lead to rivalry, there are some cases, like Algeria-Morocco, where the rivalry leads to territorial disputes.

5 Territorial issues also play an important role in civil wars, see Toft (2003), Walter (2003).

6 A key area for future research is what domestic factors make territorial disputes recur.

7 Note this proposition does not mean that it is impossible for wars to occur because of other issues, but simply that between neighbors the probability of war in the absence of territorial disputes is greatly reduced. The pacifying effect of accepting borders between neighbors is much greater than among non-neighbors. Indeed, one possible non-territorial source of wars between neighbors is from contagion effects. This can be seen in the First World War and the Second World War where Germany attacks Belgium in the absence of a territorial dispute between them.

8 Diez (2004) treats the borders in Nordic areas, including the highly autonomous Aland Islands (within Finland), as the paradigmatic case of how territorial conflicts that threaten war at one point can become peaceful and stable at another, and quite porous.

9 For Deutsch (Deutsch, Burrell et al., 1957) a security community is one where the states do not believe that war between them is possible.

10 Such a test implies that the absence or low frequency of territorial disputes is almost a necessary condition for peace. While the territorial explanation of war says that war can arise out of other issues, territorial issues are seen as having a high probability of escalating to war. Because of this, removing them as a source of conflict and war should result in a visible effect in periods of peace, even though it is not going to be a universal effect. Treating the absence of territorial disputes as a sufficient condition of peace would involve a different sort of research, one more like that of Vasquez and Henehan (2001) already reported on above.

11 We take this phrase from J. David Singer, who has used it in conversations in meetings.

12 One way of doing this is to get individuals (outside of government) to meet and come up with possible solutions. This is sometimes done at higher levels in Track Two diplomacy (Montville, 1987). Kelman (1982) has pioneered a more than twenty-year effort to hold unofficial problem-solving workshops between Arabs and Israelis. Such workshops help individuals and groups reframe the issue.

13 Thus, old "blue laws" in the US did not permit most businesses to be open or liquor to be sold

on Sunday, a day of worship under the dominant Christian identity.

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