

PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study of international conflict suffers from an oversupply of theories and a shortage of comprehensive comparative empirical tests. Theories in international relations are typically tested a few at a time, resulting in serious misspecification in analysis, a lack of comparable data sets and findings, and a lack of cumulation in our understanding of international relations. With a plethora of theories, conjectures, and hypotheses of international conflict in hand, we believe that it is appropriate and necessary to conduct a thorough empirical appraisal of those arguments. It is also important and necessary to devote significant attention to several important theories of international relations that have been especially poorly tested, in particular the so-called expected utility theory of war. Empirical tests of variants of expected utility theory have been executed in very limited settings, despite expansive claims about the theory's power and scope. Given the limited tests of most theories in international relations, claims about the power of this and other theories are often overstated.

Different theories, hypotheses, and conjectures about the sources of international conflict are typically seen as competing explanations for observed behavior. Our advocacy of comparative testing emerges from a different view. We conceive of international political actions as emerging from a variety of causes. Most theories focus on one or a limited set of these causes, ignoring the others. Theories focusing on multiple sources of behavior need not be contradictory; rather, they may be either complementary or competing. Following this logic, many theories or hypotheses may simultaneously be correct. We argue that traditional conceptions of and debates over competing approaches to international relations theory that suggest that one theory is necessarily right and another necessarily wrong are dated and not helpful in understanding actual behavior. Instead, while some theories are independent, others are overlapping. Multiple theories purporting

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to explain a single phenomenon (such as war) may be valid. If this perspective is correct, then cumulative scientific progress in international relations will be made more rapidly if we shift to analyses that focus both on what *set* of theories is valid and on the *relative explanatory power* of those theories. While multiple theories may each explain part of reality, not all theories are created equal, and some theories have more empirical relevance than others. But we cannot tell this without engaging in broad comparative empirical testing.

Unfortunately, typical research designs complicate attempts to evaluate claims about the validity of a broad set of theories of international conflict or the relative power of competing or complementary theories. We develop an appropriate research design for such analysis. We use a methodology based on block maximum-likelihood tests and relative risk analysis that allows us to assess what theories contribute additional explanatory power to our understanding of international conflict, even after taking into account the effects associated with the empirical measures associated with a large number of other theories. We also develop software to allow the creation of the type of data necessary for the analysis we advocate, to allow precise replication, and to encourage further comparative theory testing. This same software allows us to conduct a more thorough empirical test of the expected utility theory of war than has been executed before.

In particular, we evaluate the relative strength of sixteen different explanations for international conflict drawn from the system, dyadic, and monadic levels of analysis, ranging from hegemonic stability theory to expected utility theory to the democratic peace proposition. We include key variables from these popular theories of conflict in a multinomial logit analyses of dispute and war behavior. We find that many theories suggest factors that contribute in important ways to both the initiation and the escalation of militarized disputes. However, while many theories do contribute to the overall prediction of international conflict, most theories are quite weak individually and are generally comparable in terms of predictive effect. We demonstrate that in terms of empirical explanatory power there is no existing single dominant theory of international conflict in the international relations literature. Rather, we must take into account variables from several different theories to explain international conflict more accurately. This is the first empirical test to include key variables from so many theories of international conflict in a single analysis.

As is the case with most large research projects, we owe an enormous debt to a wide range of friends and scholars. This project began with

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an idea for a paper suggested by the late Ken Organski in 1992. But what started out as an apparently straightforward replication project morphed along the way into something quite different. The end result is part data management venture, part software development project, and part gigantic hypothesis testing effort. Most important, perhaps, we have both undergone a tremendous evolution in our thinking about the way that the intellectual energies of competing research programs fit together in both complementary and antagonistic ways. As you will find as you work through the book, we gore a lot of oxen along the way. While we bear full responsibility for any errors or unfair accusations, we owe a great deal to the people who helped sharpen our spears.

We received assistance and advice from a wide range of people and institutions. At the outset, Ken Organski goaded us into taking on the project. His exhortations helped us through a couple of the points where authors all too frequently throw in the towel. We dearly miss his energy, spirit, and friendship. Without Bruce Bueno de Mesquita's long discussions and assistance to Bennett, the project would never have gotten off the ground. Joshua Goldstein's advice about the importance of careful replication was both wise and heeded to the best of our abilities. Alex Wendt read several chapters and gave us insightful suggestions for ways to knit together parts of the literature that are often seen as mutually exclusive. Bruce Russett read multiple drafts and tolerated numerous long-winded and one-sided discussions about the deeper meaning of our results. Stam remains gratefully indebted to Russett for his constant support in this and many other endeavors. Rogers Smith, Dan Reiter, Bill Wohlforth, Steve Brooks, Errol Henderson, and Daryl Press at numerous times all served as welcome sounding boards and provided insightful criticism when it was much needed. David Yoon, Alastair Smith, Ken Schultz, Jeff Lewis, Don Green, Ken Clarke, Bear Braumoeller, Neal Beck, and Chris Achen read and commented on several of the chapters and provided invaluable methodological advice.

We presented various sections of the book at political science departments around the country, where numerous critical (and even some constructive) comments improved the final product. These talks include seminars held at the government and political science departments at Dartmouth College, Pennsylvania State University, Harvard University, Yale University, Cornell University, the University of Washington, the University of Michigan, the University of Dublin, and Ohio State University. The version you hold in your hands is vastly improved over the talks inflicted on often very patient and helpful colleagues.

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the *British Journal of Political Science*, and *International Studies Quarterly* for publishing our initial papers evaluating some expected utility theory models and exploring the importance of fundamental research design decisions. The advice from numerous anonymous reviewers at these journals and at the University of Michigan Press was enormously helpful. While critical reviews are not always pleasant to read, they make for a much better final product. Jeremy Shine at the University of Michigan Press deserves much credit for his support for the project, even as its completion dragged out past our early and overly optimistic expectations. Thanks also go to J. David Singer for his contributions to the discipline and also for his patient reading and careful comments on a late draft of the manuscript.

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