THREATS OF THIRD PARTY INTERVENTION AND TERRITORIAL CONFLICT
An analysis of American policy with regards to Berlin and Kuwait

William Schlickenmaier
19 December 2002
Seminar on Territorial Conflict

Word count: 13,379

Conflicts between two states over a particular piece of territory have been an element of the international system for centuries – since the rise of the nation-state states have disputed the territorial demarcations between themselves and other states. This has led to a great deal of theorizing as to why these conflicts emerge – enduring rivalries, economics, nationalism and security have all been used to attempt an explanation of these conflicts. A lingering question is whether or not these conflicts are preventable. How can states be kept from attacking each other over territory? One solution is through the intervention of a third party. Such a third party can have a radical effect on the calculations of both states, especially the state interested in territorial revision.

Third party intervention in territorial conflicts is an imperfect solution. Sometimes, the intervention only comes after a conflict has broken out, in which case the intervention did not prevent the conflict in the first place. Third parties often seek to prevent territorial conflict by threatening such an intervention. These threats may be costly, but in general do not require the material outlay of an actual intervention. Some threats have the desired effect, while others do not. Why? This study seeks to find the conditions under which the threat of third party intervention will prevent territorial conflict.

Here I will refer to the three state actors by the following labels: the state choosing to make territorial gains is the "aggressor," the state whose territory is desired by the aggressor is the "target," and the state intervening is the "third party." These are not meant to be value labels – especially in the case of the aggressor state, there is a moral implication, not the reasoning for the use of the term. In addition, I will refer interchangeably to "states" and to the leadership of states. Any time that the state is referred to as a unitary actor, I mean to discuss the leadership regime of the state – bureaucratic politics or domestic politics may influence on the action of the state, although I do argue here that the actors are rational.

Why does this matter? If there are circumstances under which threatening intervention will work, and circumstance under which it will not, states may be able to lessen the number of territorial conflicts through the prudent usage of threats. States can therefore mitigate conflict. In addition, the reason why states may be able to intercede and prevent territorial conflicts has theoretical implications, reinforcing a particular argument. If states act based on power calculations in this case, then it may reinforce a realist rather than liberal or constructivist interpretation of international politics and foreign policy.

The specific study of territorial conflicts rather than other forms of conflict has an impact as well. Territorial conflicts have a tangible *casus belli* – control over a particular piece of territory – which may lead to more clarity in the case than conflict over economic rights or ideology. It is true that many territorial conflicts, including those examined here, had other facets, be those nationalistic, economic, or ideological. However, what they do hold in common, and have in common with other territorial conflicts, is that the primary reason for the conflict is territory. Territorial conflicts can be more difficult to solve than other forms of conflict, and can lead to escalation and confrontation on a level apart from other forms of conflict.[1] In fact, some would argue that "territory is probably also the main issue over which states fight wars."[2]

---

[1] See Huth, Paul K., "Territory: Why Are Territorial Disputes between States a Central Cause of International Conflict?" in *What Do We Know About War?* ed. John A. Vasquez. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000) 99-100: "If we understand that high stakes are involved in territorial disputes, then we would expect leaders to accept higher costs to obtain highly valued ends…" He goes on to discuss how

There are some limitations that I must impose at the outset on this study. First, when examining third party intervention, I will limit myself to the threat of intervention by a third state, rather than by a multilateral institution or coalition of states. If a coalition is threatening to intervene, in the cases I examine I will look at the primary states, which in both of my cases happens to be the United States.[3] I am also limiting myself to interventions on one side – threats of intervention by one state on the side of the target state, rather than threats of intervention by a state on the side of the aggressor state, or by threats of intervening into both states.

Given this, I will examine three potential reasons for the success of third party intervention threats in preventing territorial conflict. The first potential reason is an argument for signaling. Third party intervention threats succeed when that party has a credible commitment to intervene, based on costly signals or a prior history of intervention. Since this third party has demonstrated its willingness to intervene, the likelihood of such intervention is so high that the aggressor state is deterred. The second focuses on the sort of capabilities offered by the third party – that threats of intervention will succeed when the third party possesses the capabilities to shift the balance of forces from offense dominance to defense dominance. Since the third party can make the attack too costly, it deters the aggressor state from attacking. The final potential reason focuses on the value of the target to the aggressor. Threats by a third party will succeed in preventing conflict from breaking out when the target state is relatively valuable to the

---

the linkages between the utility of military force and territorial conflict make escalation more likely (101-102).

[2] Fearon, James D., "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49:3 (Summer 1995), 408.

[3] I recognize that this removes a potential alternative hypothesis – that of regime type.

aggressor state. As such, the threat will succeed when linked with "side payments" designed to compensate the aggressor for the territory.

Of the potential reasons for the success of third party intervention threats, I argue that the most convincing is the signaling argument. The balance of power matters, and the relative capabilities of the aggressor state when matched up against the potential capabilities of a target state along with an intervening state could have a critical impact. However, whether or not the environment is offense dominant or defense dominant will have little impact. The argument for relative value is more convincing, but I believe that territorial conflicts in particular are not conducive to side payments because of the inherent value of the territory[4], and because of the domestic political ramifications and precedent-setting for a third party to offer side payments – the "Munich problem."[5] Therefore, third parties will be unwilling to offer side payments in territorial conflicts. Signaling has a greater effect, because here I choose to focus less on why aggressor states choose to take territory and more on why third parties can be successful in preventing aggressor states from doing so. It may possible to manipulate the relative value of the territory, but I argue that in fact that relative value is manipulated by the commitment of a third party to intervene. Whether or not this commitment is believed is a critical element of measuring the value of a territory.

---

[4] Huth in Vasquez, 100: "…also why it would be unattractive to leaders to avoid conflict by renouncing territorial claims or offering substantial concessions.

[5] This assumes that domestic politics and precedent-setting matter to states when making foreign policy decisions. If this is the case, as I argue, then the 1938 appeasement of Hitler by the British and French should play a role in foreign policy decision-making post-1938. Jervis, Robert, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30:2 (January 1978) notes that the "politics of the interwar period [speaking here about the period between the two World Wars] were shaped by the memories of the previous conflict and the belief that any future war would resemble it." (192) This is true of crisis management as well as military strategy and conflict.

I will use two case studies to highlight these hypotheses: the Berlin crisis of 1948-49, and the Iraq/Kuwait conflict of 1990. In both cases, the United States acted as a third party making threats to prevent changes in the status quo. In the case of Berlin, the threats succeeded – in 1990, they did not. Why? Both cases have much in common – both were small territorial enclaves adjoining far larger areas under the direct or indirect control of the aggressor state. In both cases, the aggressor state had a far greater military capability than the target state. But there is substantial variation among the cases – one of which being that while the Berlin case is a prime example of a Cold War conflict, the Iraqi-Kuwait crisis can be distinguished from the broader Soviet-American conflict. The other primary difference between the two cases is that while the Berlin case was a successful prevention of territorial conflict, the Iraqi case was not. Therefore, one case may highlight the success of third party intervention threats, as the other demonstrates its failure.

Signaling Rationale for Successful Threats

Hypothesis: The threat of intervention by a third party will deter a territorial conflict when the threat is credible – when the third party has a credible commitment to intervene.

Uncertainty is inherent in any decision to go to war. What if the third party is bluffing? If this is the case, then any change coming from a threat made by a state matters not. "Cheap talk" is a problem in international politics, and while any commitment made by a state has a certain level of prestige bound to it,[6] the possibility

[6] Fearon, James D., "Signaling versus the Balance of Power and Interests: An Empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38:2 (June 1994) 241 on *audience costs*. See also 254, ftn 14, that "minor power leaders may tend to have lower domestic political audience costs for backing out of a crisis."

remains that a state will commit to intervene and yet not follow through on said intervention[7] – or, that the aggressor state will not believe the threat.

In the first place, a threat to intervene must be realistic. A state must possess the capabilities to intervene in a territorial conflict. In general, if a state has the military capability to affect a territorial conflict, it should be able to make a realistic threat – but pure force size does not dictate this. For example, the People's Republic of China has the largest army in the world, but it lacks the power projection assets to intervene in a territorial conflict in the Middle East or Latin America. It can intervene in conflicts on its borders and involving neighboring states, but without a substantial blue-water navy or airlift capability, its threats to intervene must be weighed against their ability. This is the first element of a credible commitment – the ability to live up to the commitment.[8] Otherwise, threats are empty rhetoric.

What will lead an aggressor state to believe that a third party will live up to its commitments and intervene? The best evidence comes from history – whether or not the third party has lived up to previous commitments, and whether or not said third party has a history of intervention. If a state has never intervened in a territorial conflict, it may be harder for the aggressor state to believe its threats. If, on the other hand, the state has a history of involvement and of following up on threats with action when those threats were not believed, then it is more likely that the aggressor state will believe the present threat.[9] Therefore, it is ironic, but a failed threat or two can in fact increase a third

[7] Fearon, James D., "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41:1 (February 1997) 68: "When a state's leaders threaten to use military force against another state, they generally would prefer not to carry out the threat, even if they would, in fact, be willing to."
[8] Capabilities are therefore a necessary condition for a credible commitment, but not a sufficient condition.
[9] This is an example of the balance of interests that when tied to the balance of capabilities, Fearon states, yield a widely accepted theory of deterrence success. See Fearon 1994 238.

party's credibility. If a state is always believed, and never has to follow through on a threat, it increases the likelihood that at least once, the state has bluffed. This increases the incentive to call the bluff.

History also plays a role in whether or not the particular territorial conflict will lead to intervention. It serves as a signal of the balance of interests France is more likely to intervene in Central Africa than the United States, whereas the US is more likely to intervene in Latin America. Recent history also plays a critical role – the United States has been more likely to involve itself in Europe after 1939 than it was beforehand. If a state's bluff is called, this is a failure of the threat, because it has not prevented conflict. However, if a state's bluff is called, and that state is in fact bluffing, the credibility of the state's threat diminishes greatly. Time may play a role in diminishing the power of a credible commitment, as would changes in the regime of the third party that would bring into question previous commitments.

Yet there is a way for the third party to mitigate the problem of credible commitment. Through the use of costly signals, it can show that it is not bluffing.[10] These can include things like pre-positioning soldiers in the target state as a "tripwire," without deploying enough forces to change the balance of power, but still threatening escalation. Public declarations of the intent to intervene are another costly signal, because they commit the state to its course of action.[11] Such costly signals can have a serious effect on the aggressor state's perception of the third party's intentions. If a third party state makes its threat through private, discreet channels, and makes no overt sign which could be interpreted as a reinforcement of the threat, what are the leaders of the

[10] I am here indebted to James Fearon's work on costly signaling – see Fearon 1997.
[11] Fearon 1994 – see footnote 5 above in this paper.

aggressor state to believe? That the third party is simply being prudent? Or is the third party unwilling to deal with the possible negative ramifications of intervention?[12]

The sort of costly signals highlighted here are less mobilization of forces and more the sort of moves such as public declarations and the use of "tripwire" forces that incur audience costs.[13] Said costs have a more binding effect because they influence public opinion, and also make war more likely. This escalation provokes restraint on the part of the aggressor state. The other form of costly signals – what Fearon calls "sunk costs," do not raise the costs of conflict in the same way as tied hands.[14] For a third party to mobilize its forces, unless it plans on intervening in the same manner as Russia did in the First World War, does not necessarily lead to an increase in the costs of commencing conflict. Since third parties at least in these cases are not territorially contiguous (if they were, mobilization might tie hands rather than sink costs[15]) such forms of mobilization are a cheaper signal than the use of tripwire forces or public declarations of support.

As mentioned earlier, conflict is costly to all parties entering in. It may be just as costly for a third party to intervene as for an aggressor state to undertake the first territorial conflict. The aggressor states being examined here are adjacent to the target state, or control territory adjacent to it. The third party must come in from abroad. While this may be a limitation of the cases examined here, transportation costs for the third party are higher than for the aggressor state. In addition, it is questionable whether or not

---

[12] Fearon 1997, 71 on Clinton's halfhearted signals and their failure in Bosnia.
[13] Fearon 1997, 70.
[14] Sunk costs such as mobilization are going to have a particular cost no matter what the outcome of the crisis – you have to pay mobilized soldiers and suffer the economic consequences whether a war breaks out or not. See Fearon 1997, 82.
[15] In this way, sunk costs are even less effective than tying hands. Mobilizing the National Guard or the Reserves in the US may have an effect on the conduct of conflict, but will not change the outcome of a crisis in Europe or the Middle East in the same way as a tripwire rapid deployment force. At the same time, there are no pure cases of these signals (Fearon 1997, 70), and mobilization does provide a signal of commitment in the same way as an alliance treaty, especially in a democracy.

the intervention is in the third party's national interest. National interests are fuzzy, even when clarified through declaratory policies – there is always the chance that the state is bluffing, or that said national interest might be outweighed by a fear of going to war.

Third party states must therefore demonstrate that they are willing to intervene for their threats to succeed. A state may have a preponderance of power, but if it is believed to be isolationist, or that a particular conflict does not affect its vital interests, the aggressor state may find an opportunity to strike. Third party states can clarify their stances on intervention through the maintenance of a history of strong commitment and through costly signaling, which when effective should reduce the uncertainty of intervention in the eyes of the aggressor state to a point where it will not attack for fear of the repercussions. As such, the independent variable in examining these threats is whether or not a third party state acts to increase the credibility of a threat issued in order to prevent territorial aggression. The dependent variable is whether or not aggression occurs – and from a causation perspective, I must demonstrate that in fact this aggression occurred because of a lack of credible commitment or that it was deterred because of the credibility of the deterrent threat.

Defense Dominance Rationale for Successful Threats

The threat of intervention by a third party will deter a territorial conflict when said intervention would shift the balance of forces from offense dominance to defense dominance.

If the leaders of states act in a manner to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs, then changes in the costs and benefits of conflict should have a corresponding effect on the willingness of leaders or states to enter into war. A power asymmetry between two states may invite conflict, or may invite the weaker state to accede to the wishes of the stronger. Territorial revision would result in either case. However, if a third party makes a threat to intervene on the side of the weaker state, which is here assumed to be the target state, this may redress the balance.

While capabilities matter – Voltaire's argument that "God is on the side of the big battalions"[16] – the offense-defense balance is determined by a combination of technology, geography, domestic factors and diplomacy.[17] It is true that there is no such thing as a purely defensive weapon or for that matter a purely offensive weapon, but there are some weapons such as mines and fortifications that can have a greater defensive impact than an offensive one.[18] Jervis argues that the modern period may be offense-dominant or defense-dominant.[19] Van Evera argues that in fact the post-World War II era has been defense-dominant because of nuclear weapons.[20] However, if this were the case there would be no need for intervention to shift the balance in these territorial conflicts from offense dominance to defense dominance. I argue that in fact, both of the environments examined here were situations of offense dominance. The premise behind nuclear weapons as a cause of defense dominance is a result of the development of second-strike capability,[21] and this had not developed by 1948. The Soviets were still developing their nuclear capacity, and the American capacity for nuclear attack was limited. Just as

[16] While this is a commonly quoted aphorism, the actual statement by Voltaire better mirrors the offense-defense balance: "God is not on the side of the big battalions, but on the side of those who shoot best." See The Columbia World of Quotations (1996) #63037.
[17] Van Evera, Stephen, "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War," in *Theories of War and Peace*. Ed. Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Coté, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999) 66. Jervis 1978 argues that the two main factors are technology and geography (194).
[18] Jervis 1978 197.
[19] Jervis 1978 198.
[20] Van Evera 68.
[21] Jervis 1978 198.

importantly, Stalin knew of American limitations.[22] As for the Iraq case, the dyad between Iraq and the United States was not a nuclear dyad – while the US had nuclear weapons, Iraq did not. Furthermore, in neither case did the target state possess nuclear weapons. As such, the introduction of a nuclear weapons state as the third party could yield defense dominance by offsetting the conventional forces superiority of the aggressor.

Geography may also lend a hand to the defense. Switzerland, for example, has far greater geographic security than Kaliningrad. Technology and geography, therefore, must affect the calculus. In both of the cases examined here, geography benefited offense dominance – a small territorial enclave without defensible borders nearly encircled by an aggressor state.[23] As for Van Evera's arguments on political order and diplomacy, while popular governments can use guerrilla warfare to bolster the defense, states which are ruthless enough may be able to overcome this problem.[24] And diplomatic factors are in fact the subject of the analysis here – threats by a third party constitute a diplomatic shift which should move the balance from offense dominance to defense dominance.

Does this in fact occur? Is there a difference between offense dominance and defense dominance, and in fact, is this noticeable? Certain geographic constraints add to defense dominance or offense dominance. A state ringed by water has greater defense dominance, especially with regards to territorial conflict when we discuss matters of annexation and invasion, than a state bordered by broad plains. The fates of Poland and

[22] See Zubok, Vladislav, and Konstantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
[23] Van Evera notes that indeed, the "open terrain of the Middle East" is conducive to offense dominance. 69.
[24] Van Evera 70; on the "ruthlessness debate," see Liberman, Peter, *Does Conquest Pay? The Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Britain in the World Wars this century speak to the power of geography. Technology mitigates this. For example, Britain was relatively invulnerable in the 19th century, but the advent of air warfare may not have made her more prone to invasion, but did increase the ability of rival states to punish her. However, technology alone does not dictate whether a strategic environment is offense dominant or defense dominant. Technology must be harnessed to strategy in order for the strategic environment to change. In 1914, railroads were believed to lead to offense dominance by allowing states to more quickly invade their neighbors. However, when used in conjunction with interior lines of communication, railroads in fact aided the defense far more they did the offense, to which years of trench warfare could attest.[25] It is true that there are certain weapons, such as anti-tank guided missiles or land mines, which are "more" defense-dominant than tactical fighter aircraft or main battle tanks, but even they when harnessed correctly can be used to aid an offensive strategy. This is the primary problem with questions of offense and defense dominance, and makes evaluation of the relative dominance difficult.

The independent variable here is that a threat of military intervention is made by a third party which would in fact shift the prevailing strategic environment from one of offense dominance to one of defense dominance. The dependent variable is whether or not these threats succeed in preventing a territorial conflict. It is also critical to guarantee that the causation follows from the independent to the dependent – that not only does conflict occur or not occur, but that it in fact occurs or fails to occur because of the shift in the strategic environment. If the balance is already locked into defense dominance, there is no point in intervention. And if the intervention would not shift the balance, then

---

[25] Sagan, Scott D., "1914 Revisited," in *Conflict After the Cold War*, 2nd Ed. Ed. Richard K. Betts (New York: Longman, 2002) esp. 416-417.

the intervention may have prevented conflict but not for the causal reason hypothesized here.

The primary problem with this theory is whether or not the intervention would in fact shift the strategic environment from offense dominance to defense dominance.[26] It assumes that offense dominance is the characteristic of the strategic environment in the first place – if it were not, then intervention would be unnecessary in the first place. It also assumes that the strategies and technology of the intervening state are enough to overcome the environment of offense dominance, since a threat of intervention cannot change the geographic realities within which a state may find itself. Given that these criteria are met, then this alternate explanation posits that a change premised on a threat will lead the aggressor state to choose not to intervene. It is true that the offense-defense relationship has a special application for territorial conflict,[27] but even in respect to territory Levy notes that offensive and defensive tactics, if not offensive and defensive strategies are necessary,[28] blurring the offense-defense balance.

Relative Value and Side Payment Rationale for Successful Threats

Hypothesis: The threat of intervention by a third party will deter a territorial conflict when the target territory is valuable to the aggressor state for economic reasons, and subject to negotiation and "side payments" in conjunction with threats.

The relative value of a territory to an aggressor can substantially affect the power of a threat. Territory that is less valuable to the aggressor state will yield to threats of intervention, whereas when an aggressor values a territory more, it will not be deterred.

[26] See Levy, Jack S., "The Offensive/Defensive Balance of Military Technology," in *Conflict After the Cold War*, 2nd Ed. Ed. Richard K. Betts. (New York: Longman, 2002).
[27] Levy 430-432.
[28] Levy 432.

Successful threats will combine potential coercion and compellence with "side payments" designed to compensate the aggressor for what he would have gained in his territorial conquest.

The rationale here is that some territorial conflicts are fought for primarily economic reasons, while others are fought for more symbolic and nationalist reasons. Those conflicts over nationalism and other symbolic politics are less "divisible" than economic conflicts[29], even when those economic conflicts are over territory.

This raises the question of what Fearon calls "issue indivisibilities."[30] These are issues which "by their very natures, simply will not admit compromise." Therefore, we must question whether or not territory is an indivisible problem. I argue that in fact, it is not, especially when the *casus belli* in a territorial conflict is control over territory for economic reasons. Territory can be at times problematic because the arguments over its control appeal to "sentiments of patriotism and nationalism to justify support for territorial claims."[31] It is difficult to mitigate national feelings once harnessed.[32] However, granting this, when territorial conflicts revolve around economic factors, it is easier to bargain in a delimited space where solutions can be found short of conflict. This assumes that the aggressor state is in a state of relative economic decline, especially compared to the third party – the idea of an advantaged partner versus a disadvantaged

[29] For more on indivisibility, see Toft, Monica Duffy, "Indivisible Territory and Ethnic War," *Weatherhead Center for International Affairs* Paper No. 01-08, December 2001.
[30] Fearon 1995 381-382.
[31] Huth in Vasquez, 100.
[32] Huth in Vasquez, 101: "Having invoked nationalist principals [sic] to legitimize territorial claims, leaders open themselves up to charges of hypocrisy and deceit if they subsequently make substantial concessions to settle a territorial dispute."

partner in Grieco's analysis.[33] Because of this economic imbalance, the third party can offer side payments in terms of economic remuneration which would redress the reasons why the aggressor state is going to war.

If the actors in a bargaining space are rational – that is, if the leaders of states making decisions to go to war or to intervene in conflicts focus on the logic of costs and benefits, then an appeal to costs and benefits should serve to prevent conflict. In other words, to quote Fearon, "what prevents states from reaching an *ex ante* agreement that avoids the costs they know will be paid *ex post* if they go to war?"[34] Arguments to nationalism have a certain power, but my argument in this hypothesis is that in fact the primary reason for seeking territorial aggrandizement is economic. This economic benefit can vary – it can be in the form of natural resources, or an attempt to coerce credits from wealthier states, or even in an attempt to provoke or terminate international aid. However, there are clear sunk costs in conflict. It is rare if ever for a national economy to benefit from a war.[35] More often substantial conflicts lead to economic disruption as workers leave industry and are mobilized, as the civilian economy is retooled to produce weaponry, and as consumer confidence drops. These are relatively certain costs. On the other hand, the benefits of territorial conquest are uncertain.[36] Even if Liberman is correct and there are resources to be drawn from territorial conquest, whether or not those resources offset the losses in conflict cannot be known before the outbreak of hostilities. In addition, this does not account for international hostility and

[33] Grieco's analysis of Snidal in Grieco, Joseph M., "Understanding the Problem of International Cooperation: The Limits of Neoliberal Institutionalism and the Future of Realist Theory," in *Neorealism and Neoliberalism*, Ed. David A. Baldwin. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 319-320.
[34] Fearon 1995 383-384.
[35] The only example I can think of is the American economy during World War II, which benefited from both the invulnerability of the North American continent to enemy attack and the massive potential unused because of the Great Depression.
[36] Liberman.

sanction against states who violate sovereignty norms and engage in territorial conquest. Because the economic costs of conflict are relatively well known before the outbreak of hostilities, while at best the benefits are unknown, there should be some space for bargaining.

The side payments being discussed here are not solely cash contributions – they depend on the economic situation within which an aggressor state finds itself and the way in which some sort of territorial conflict is to remedy the economic situation. Side payments can include concessions on natural resources such as arrangements on oil prices, or can include the cessation of what is considered by the aggressor "economic warfare." In some ways, this blurs the line between side payments and issue linkages. As such, I will focus here on concessions to be made which would have immediate economic ramifications – "payments" of some sort or another, rather than the sorts of issue linkages discussed, for example, in the bargaining over Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba.[37]

The independent variable here is a threat of military intervention made by a third party in conjunction with an offer of side payments to compensate the aggressor state for its potential losses. The dependent variable is whether or not territorial conflict breaks out and whether or not this happens because of the combination of threat and side payments. If conflict breaks out, then whether or not this hypothesis fails depends on whether or not an appropriate combination of threat and side payment was offered, if at all. The level of "appropriateness" depends on the economic situation of the aggressor

[37] This is a reference to the tradeoff between Soviet missiles in Cuba and American missiles in Turkey, although again, the issue of side payments versus issue linkages remains admittedly fuzzy. In the case studies below, I will attempt to limit myself, but I will note that I do not believe that the difference between side payments and issue linkages here should make a difference as long as both focus around the logic of compensation.

state – a token bribe would not be sufficient, but the balance between threat and side payment must exist. Side payments without some sort of threat imply that no threat was made, and here we seek to study the impact of those threats. On the other hand, if conflict fails to break out, in order for this hypothesis to be proven correct it is necessary that the third party make a combination threat and side payment offer, and that said offer be accepted by the aggressor. If conflict does not break out but the offer is not accepted, then either the conflict did not revolve around economic issues, an assumption of this theory, or the aggressor was deterred for another reason.[38]

The primary problem with this hypothesis is that it assumes that aggressors will be satiated. A side payment should not lead to demands for further payments. If this is the case, then the threats will have had no impact. From a historical perspective, this hypothesis is problematic because, as mentioned above, it conjures memories of Munich. Threats made in conjunction with side payments can be seen as inherently weak threats, negotiating from a position of economic strength but strategic weakness. If this is the case, then states will choose not to proffer these sorts of bargains. This also assumes that territorial conflicts, even those fought for economic purposes more than anything else, are divisible. If territorial conflicts are in fact indivisible by their nature, then side payments will fail because they will not answer the "all or nothing" appeal.

Berlin 1948-1949: Conflict Prevented

Allied occupation of Germany at the end of the Second World War was not meant as a permanent solution. Even if occupation were to continue, partition was not the ideal.

---

[38] The first of these two possibilities should not occur because as argued earlier, both of these case studies were of conflicts over economics.

However, friction between the Western Allies on one hand and the Soviet Union on the other over control of the various zones led to the hardening of the two sides in Germany. Things came to a head in 1948 when the American, British, and French zones combined through a currency reform into the Federal Republic. The Soviets retaliated with the blockade of West Berlin.

Berlin was an aberration in the partition of Germany. While the Soviets controlled the entire eastern zone around Berlin, the city itself was partitioned like the Nazi state itself into four zones of control – American, British, French, and Soviet. When the western zones of Germany unified into one state, the western zones of Berlin unified into the "free city" of West Berlin. Yet this city still found itself in a precarious position. It was entirely encircled by the German Democratic Republic, controlled at the time by Soviet occupation forces.

From a strategic perspective, Berlin appeared untenable. The balance of forces favored the Soviets in Europe in general – while the Red Army had demobilized after World War II, American demobilization was far greater. The British and French were focused on domestic economic reconstruction through the European Recovery Program. The Germans were recovering from six years of war. In addition, the Soviets had a logistical advantage when compared to the Americans – it was far easier for the Soviets to reinforce their garrisons in eastern Germany than for the Americans to reinforce theirs in the west.

Yet territorial conflict did not break out here. The Berlin blockade was countered by the Anglo-American airlift of supplies, preventing West Berlin from being "choked off." Was the blockade a form of territorial conflict? While it is true that from a legal perspective blockade is an act of war, the lack of violence in the Soviet actions implies that while they dearly wished to take Berlin, they were unwilling to do it by force.[39] They chose not to invade West Berlin and take it. Why?

If Berlin were isolated diplomatically, it is likely that the Soviets would have taken it, in 1945 if not in 1948. However, West Berlin, and the Federal Republic in general, had a powerful patron – the United States. The US served as a third party, threatening intervention on the side of the target state (Western Germany and West Berlin, since there was as of 1948 no Federal Republic) in order to prevent revision by the aggressor state (the Soviet Union). Explicit and implicit threats on the American part made the Soviets think twice about taking Berlin. In the end, they chose not to do so. What was it about the American threat that made the Soviets back down?

Could the Americans have put enough forces into Berlin, or into West Germany for that matter, to deter a Soviet invasion? It is unlikely that the US could have stopped the Soviets from taking Berlin, even if they could have prevented a general invasion.[40] Berlin was as mentioned earlier isolated from the rest of West Germany, its only land linkage coming through a highway which could have easily been choked off. In fact, some American plans for storming down the highway to reopen Berlin were rejected because of the ease with which the Soviets could have cut off the American advance. And no matter how many forces the US could have mustered within the limits of West Berlin, they were confined by geography to a force that could be outweighed by the

---

[39] I argue that while the Berlin crisis qualifies as a territorial dispute, it does not fit the model of a territorial *conflict* because there was no outbreak of armed combat.

[40] Shlaim, Avi, *The United States and the Berlin Blockade,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 35; Miller, Roger G, *To Save A City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2000) 29. And even then, the ability of the US to rollback or defend against a Soviet invasion of western Germany was questionable.

Group of Soviet Forces Germany. On the other hand, the United States of 1948 enjoyed a nuclear monopoly. But this was not going to last. The Soviets tested their first atomic device the next year, far earlier than the Americans might have expected, but expected for the Soviets. The Americans might have believed that the atomic lever gave them the ability to coerce Moscow, to deter them from attack and even compel them to take other actions, but Stalin knew the progress of his atomic program.[41]

These military forces would not have shifted the strategic environment from offense dominance to defense dominance. The Soviet military was still the same instrument used to drive the Nazi armies from the gates of Moscow and Stalingrad to the Elbe. Heavy with armor, it was an offensive machine. A more defensive military force would have focused more on infantry and artillery than armor. On the other hand, the American forces in Germany, and worldwide for that matter, were composed in a similar fashion. The US Army was still composed as it was in 1945, when it swept into western Germany. Also heavily armored, it was not a defense-dominant force, and the force in Berlin was no exception to this. It is true that the US had a limited stock of atomic bombs, which could have potentially reinforced the defense, leading to a Van Evera version of nuclear defense dominance.[42] However, as mentioned earlier, this version of defense dominance revolved around second-strike capability. And even American assets were limited – Gaddis notes the deployment of "*apparently* atomic-capable bombers to Britain [emphasis mine]"[43] but also notes that the American ability to shift the balance was limited. When linked to geography and Berlin's isolation, no threat of American

---

[41] Zubok and Pleshakov 46: "The Kremlin leader knew about US demobilization, and the very slow growth of the American atomic arsenal after the war."
[42] Van Evera 68.
[43] Gaddis, John Lewis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 48.

intervention in Berlin would have shifted the balance of force from offense dominance to defense dominance. The military option mentioned above was not defensive, but rather an armored stroke.

The case to be made for signaling as a reason why the Soviets chose not to take Berlin in 1948 is far stronger. Did the United States in 1948 have a history of credible intervention? It had promulgated the Truman Doctrine, assuming British responsibilities in Greece and Turkey. The Marshall Plan was a stunning allocation of resources, a demonstration of the wealth of the US and its willingness to maintain a free Europe.[44] While before World War II, a decision maker in Moscow could make the case that the United States would not stand for Berlin, the evidence of American action during and after the war tended to reinforce the credibility of the American commitment.

Even more than the historical record of the US as an intervening third power in the 1940s, costly signals demonstrated that the United States was ready to intervene to defend Berlin, no matter the cost. Primary among these signals was the Berlin airlift. This more than any other costly signal showed the importance with which Washington regarded Berlin.[45] Had it been less valuable, the US would have made a token diplomatic protest and caved in, or at the very least backed down on currency reform. American unwillingness to do so, given that these reforms were designed to strengthen Berlin and the rest of the nascent West German republic[46], bolstered the credibility of any threat the US made. Having already spent so much to reinforce Berlin, they were less likely to

---

[44] Zubok and Pleshakov 50.
[45] Gaddis 48.
[46] Davison, W. Philips, *The Berlin Blockade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958) 281: "A reciprocal relationship existed between the Berlin blockade and formation of a West German state. On the one hand, a viable West German government probably would have been impossible to form if Berlin had fallen. On the other hand, creation of the Federal Republic helped to bring about the end of the blockade."

back down than at the beginning of the crisis. As it wore on, in fact, American resolve grew. One can make the case that in fact, this bolstering of American resolve led to the Soviets backing down in 1949.

In addition to the signal sent by the airlift, there were American forces in Berlin. Throughout the Cold War, the "Berlin Brigade" served not only in occupation duty in the mid-1940s, but also as a "tripwire."[47] In effect, the United States put forces into Berlin knowing that given the balance of power, those forces would be overrun. However, by putting those forces in the line of fire, they increased the value of Berlin to themselves and the risk the Soviets ran if they chose to overrun it. Instead of simply taking Germans in an occupation of Berlin, the Red Army would have to fight Americans. The specter of escalation loomed far greater when American forces were on the front line than when mere diplomatic commitments tied a territory to a third party intervening state. Because of the presence of US forces, it would have been far harder to acquiesce in Soviet territorial revision. The Berlin Brigade demonstrated the value of Berlin to the US, and sent a signal to the Soviets that any sort of attempted territorial conflict would be met by force. In the same way, any decision to remove those forces would have been seen by the Soviets as a weakening of the American commitment. The forces never left Berlin.

American declaratory policy on Germany was a final costly signal committing the US to the defense of Berlin. Even before the advent of intercontinental-range ballistic missiles, when US policymakers said that Berlin or Paris was the same value as Chicago or New York, the United States had made clear its willingness to defend Western Europe against aggression. Policymakers such as Kennan and Acheson had laid out the specifics of containment, which was at its heart a deterrence policy. While the Berlin crisis

---

[47] Fearon 1997 70.

preceded the North Atlantic Treaty, at which point the US formally committed itself to the defense of Europe, American statements and actions before and during the Berlin crisis publicly committed the US to defend Berlin.[48] To back down would be far easier had those statements not been made, but since they were, they served as a costly signal, demonstrating American resolve and willingness to intervene on the behalf of Berlin.

The question of relative value, on the other hand, is a fair one. Some scholars argue that in fact, the Soviets were not interested in Berlin. Roger Miller states, referencing Vojtech Mastny, that "contrary to popular belief, the purpose of the Berlin crisis was to reverse political decisions already taken by the Western powers, not to force the Western garrisons out of Berlin."[49] However, he contradicts himself earlier in that same chapter, when he quotes Joseph Stalin as saying "Perhaps we can kick them [referring to the Americans in Berlin] out"[50] and later when he notes that the Russians in Berlin "believed that the Western powers had little option other than to acquiesce to Russian demands or to abandon Berlin to the Soviet Union."[51] I argue, as do other scholars[52], that in fact the Soviets were very interested in Berlin, and that the US would have to give in to the blockade, either by making political and economic concessions or by giving up West Berlin.

[48] The primary example of this was the Truman Doctrine, which while it specifically focused on Greece and Turkey, was meant to be a general statement. Another example was the publication of the "X" article in *Foreign Affairs*, which although anonymous was generally known to be written by George Kennan and advocated by members of the American national security establishment.
[49] Miller 32 quoting Mastny. Miller does note in an aside that "eliminating Western influence and activity in Germany remained a long-term Soviet goal."
[50] Miller 3.
[51] Miller 35.
[52] See Shlaim 11, Morris, Eric, *Blockade*. (London: Hamilton, 1973) 90; Bering, Henrik, *Outpost Berlin* (Chicago: Edition Q, 1995) 84 citing Davidson, and again Miller 3. Also, see Gaddis and Zubok and Pleshakov.

However, the Soviets were not willing to go all the way to war to get Berlin – Tusa and Tusa note that Western policymakers believed "that the Russians would try *anything short of war* [emphasis mine]."[53] The question here becomes whether or not this unwillingness to go to war was based on a cost-benefit calculation of the benefits of gaining West Berlin versus potential conflict, or whether it was based on the credibility of the American threat and their likelihood to respond. Costs and benefits were critical to the Soviets. The currency reform entered into by the Western powers posed a major threat to Soviet economic supremacy over the Eastern zone, and the effectiveness of the Marshall Plan was a dangerous precedent for Soviet satellite states longingly looking westward.[54] The costs of allowing Berlin and the Western powers to continue their economic reforms was high, and a loss for the West over Berlin would have created a very real crisis of confidence among Western European states. Success on Berlin, which was believed possible through a blockade, would have yielded remarkable fruits in terms of crippling American credibility, as European states might not believe that the Americans would come to their aid. In addition, Berlin was a trouble spot for the Soviets from a political, diplomatic and intelligence perspective. It was a Western outpost within the Communist bloc, the only one situated within the Iron Curtain. To remove it would have created enormous benefits. But these benefits had to be weighed against the potential costs of conflict. Would the Germans mount a substantial defense against the Soviets moving into Berlin? No – in fact, at this time, Germany was demobilized. What of the American troops in Berlin? While they would have put up a valiant fight, they

[53] Tusa, Ann, and John Tusa, *The Berlin Blockade* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988) 118.
[54] Zubok and Pleshakov 50.

were no match for Soviet arms. As such, the costs did not outweigh the benefits within Berlin itself.

Then why did the Soviets choose not to go to war, to invade Berlin? Zubok and Pleshakov note that "Stalin's actions in 1947-1948 were based on the correct assumption that he was not risking war with the West."[55] But this assumption was rooted in the idea that if Stalin pushed too hard, he would risk war. Miller, referencing both Gaddis and Zubok and Pleshakov, makes the case that "Stalin refused to face another war and was thus prepared to half Soviet expansionism *in the face of Western resolve*. At no point was the Soviet dictator prepared to challenge the Americans or the British *when they made their interests clear*. [emphasis mine]"[56] As such, American resolve and credible commitments signaled to the Soviets that escalation was possible, if not probable, and this was enough uncertainty to make Stalin hedge his bets.

But what of side payments? If this was a primarily economic crisis, focused on the Soviet desire to prevent German economic recovery[57], what side payments could have been offered to the Soviets, and why were they accepted or not? One potential side payment could have been Marshall Plan aid. In fact, this was offered to the Soviets earlier in the post-war period – but it was rejected. The Soviets saw the Marshall Plan as a different form of warfare against the Communist bloc.[58] And in fact, there was some merit to this. The United States as a self-interested actor offered Marshall Plan aid to

[55] Zubok and Pleshakov 52. Gaddis 30 notes this, but focuses on capabilities.
[56] Miller 14, with references to Gaddis 31 and Zubok and Pleshakov 45.
[57] Bering 84 referencing Davison.
[58] For example, Ambrose, Stephen E., and Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise To Globalism* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1997) 84: "Militarily, only with a healthy economy could Europe support the troops necessary to stop the Red Army."

Europe to benefit itself, and did the same in its offer to the Soviet Union.[59] And the Soviets did not believe in the merit of Marshall Plan aid, either, as Gaddis notes.[60] In this environment, side payments were impossible because neither side would believe that they were a fair remuneration for the territory in question. In addition, Stalin was only willing to discuss issue linkages and side payments, but not until Berlin was within his control.[61] The Soviet objective was to destroy American credibility.[62] As such, the argument that side payments could resolve this crisis fails in comparison to the argument for signaling.

Kuwait 1990-1991: Conflict Provoked

In the 1980s, the West did not perceive Saddam Hussein as a threat to international security. The Israeli attack against the Osirak reactor notwithstanding, most Western states did business with the Iraqi regime, especially given that it was in a bloody and protracted conflict against the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose militant rhetoric and actions against American nationals provoked fear among American policymakers. The United States even provided intelligence support to Hussein in his war against Iran. However, as the war ended, Saddam became less useful to the US. The war also proved ruinous to the Iraqi economy. Charging that Kuwait was drilling what was rightly Iraqi oil, and applying previous claims to sovereignty over Kuwait, Hussein invaded and occupied Kuwait in early 1990. The United States felt this action to be unacceptable, and

---

[59] Ambrose 85 - "Despite Marshall's famous sentence stating that the policy was 'directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos,' in fact Kennan and the State Department did not want Soviet participation and did all that they could to prevent it while making it appear that a genuine offer was being made."
[60] Gaddis 41: "His [Stalin's] ambassador in Washington, Nikolai Novikov, warned that the American offer to the Soviet Union could not be sincere."
[61] Zubok and Pleshakov 52: "As a tactician, Stalin left all options open. *He preferred first to oust the former Allies from the city, and only then* [emphasis mine] to bargain with them on a German settlement."
[62] Morris 90, Zubok and Pleshakov 53.

mounted an enormous military operation to expel Hussein from Kuwait. The Persian Gulf War was a success, given its limited aims. It did not drive Hussein from power, nor did it seek to – the war aims were a return to *status quo ante*, and the return to the Kuwaiti regime of sovereignty over its territory. This was a territorial conflict, but did it have to happen? Was the Gulf War necessary, or could the United States have prevented Hussein from invading by making threats in advance of his occupation?

In 1990, Kuwait was in a situation similar to that of Berlin in the 1940s. It was a small territorial enclave bordered by a much larger aggressor state. In fact, Iraq had never recognized the status of Kuwait as an independent state, and believed it to be a province rightfully restored in time to the state. In addition, the balance of capabilities favored an Iraqi offensive, and Kuwait enjoyed no geographic advantages like those Switzerland possesses.[63]

So what could have stopped Iraq from taking Kuwait by force of arms? The target state was not devoid of arms, but the balance was so great that it could not be redressed alone. Its other adjoining neighbor, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, had a strong economic base, but again, lacked substantial military might. The most powerful militaries in the Middle East, with the exception of Iraq itself, were further west – the Syrian and Egyptian war machines tested in the decades before by war with Israel. However, there was one other actor which could have played a role in preventing Iraq from invading – the United States.

As mentioned above, the US had a prior relationship with Saddam Hussein. The two had not been partners as such, but operated under the principle of "the enemy of my

[63] Van Evera 69.

enemy."[64] This still meant that the US and Iraq could do business together. In addition, the US was the most powerful military in the world, and American security needs were explicitly tied to the Middle East. Even before the promulgation of the Carter Doctrine, the United States had shown an interest in seeing the peace maintained in the Mideast. So why did it fail here? Why did Iraq invade Kuwait, given that the US did not want it to? Why did the threat fail?

Arguments based on the balance of forces and the offense-defense relationship are problematic, although there is a better case to be made for an American intervention shifting the balance than in 1948. As of the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq had the fourth largest army in the world, and was considered a formidable military machine. Yet it had just emerged from eight years of bloody conflict with Iran. And while it had a substantial superiority over Kuwait, a Kuwait tied to the United States would be far harder to defeat. And Kuwait had a preferable geographic situation to that enjoyed by Berlin in the 1940s. It was not entirely encircled by Iraq – there were sea lanes to it through the Persian Gulf, and it shared a substantial border with Saudi Arabia. It would be far easier for American forces to reinforce Kuwait than it would be for them to hold Berlin. In addition, the United States had transformed its military from its demoralized post-Vietnam structure to a far more robust capability, thanks to the Carter and Reagan buildups. And Iraq lacked Great Power backing – they were a Soviet arms client, but the USSR had shown a notable lack of interest in supporting Iraq, Gorbachev being more concerned with the collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and domestic reform than in provoking the United States, his new partner.

---

[64] Jentleson, Bruce W., *With Friends Like These* (New York: Norton, 1994).

Even if Iraq could have mounted an offensive against Kuwait, one thing for which by 1990 American forces were trained was in fighting on the defensive. Thanks in part to the Berlin crisis of 1948 and the hardening of Cold War lines in Europe, American military forces had drilled regularly in how to combat a Soviet offensive across the Fulda Gap into West Germany. The US's skills and material advantage could have swung the balance over to Kuwait, based on sheer numbers. And a Kuwait tied to the United States might have been protected by the American nuclear umbrella, this extended deterrent providing Kuwait with unassailable defense dominance. And yet none of these factors prevented Hussein from invading.

Was Saddam rational in 1990? He limited his actions in time of war – he never used chemical weapons against Israel, even though he knew that such actions would provoke an Israeli response and potentially destroy the American-led coalition. He never invaded Saudi Arabia, even before the United States built up its forces there in Operation Desert Shield. And he appeared to make the decision to invade Kuwait not on a whim, but based on a belief that it would profit his regime by doing so. This is rational – and if so, then threats should have some sort of impact. Yet the threat of American intervention did not stop him, even though such an intervention would have a substantial effect, and in fact did have a substantial effect in Operation Desert Storm.

If defense dominance and should have made war less likely between Iraq and Kuwait, and yet conflict broke out, then the signaling argument – in fact, a lack of signaling – should explain why Iraq decided to invade Kuwait. And the evidence shows that this was the case. Iraq did not believe that the American commitment to intervene on the side of the Kuwaitis was credible, and thus it discounted the American threats it did receive.

From a historical perspective, there were three events which led Hussein to believe that the US was weak and unlikely to mount a serious challenge to his invasion of Kuwait. First was the Vietnam experience. The United States came out of Southeast Asia chastened, humbled, and it was believed in many circles that the US was less likely to extend itself overseas as a result.[65] The other two events were directly related to the Middle East. In his 1980 State of the Union Address, then-President Jimmy Carter declared that "an attempt by any outside forces to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."[66] Four months later, American willingness to operate in the Middle East was put to the test – and the United States failed, when the attempt to rescue American hostages held in Iran ended in a fiery debacle at Desert One. Three years later, the US ignominiously removed its forces from Lebanon, inserted there to aid in peacekeeping efforts, after a suicide bomber killed 241 Marines at the barracks in Beirut. The combination of Desert One and Beirut, along with the Vietnam experience in general, convinced Saddam Hussein that the US was too weak to credibly commit to backing Kuwait, and that he would be safe in carrying off his invasion plans.

---

[65] Linked to this was a pattern perceived in Baghdad of American detachment from territorial revision. Freedman and Karsh quote an Iraqi telegram intercepted by US intelligence which "[gave] numerous examples of American passivity during international crises – Turkey and Cyprus, China and Tibet, the Soviet Union and Afghanistan." Freedman, Lawrence, and Ephraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990-1991* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 59. While the causation in this hypothesis on the part of the Iraqis is suspect to say the least, this does not deny that it was believed by Iraqis.

[66] Text available http://www.c-span.org/executive/stateofunion/sou80_trans.asp

Aside from the historical legacy leaving the US in a difficult position to prove its credible commitments, American policymakers failed to use costly signals to demonstrate that they were prepared to intervene to stop Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. There were no American soldiers in Kuwait. No matter how small the force, it would have served the same purpose as the Berlin Brigade – a tripwire which would have forced Saddam to realize the potential of escalation. Invading a small state such as Kuwait is far more palatable than taking on the United States military. The US also failed to publicly support Kuwait in the same way that it did West Germany. On the one hand, the potential of Kuwait falling into Iraqi control may have been less troublesome than the potential of West Germany, or even just Berlin falling into Soviet hands. Yet from an economic perspective, Kuwait controlled by Iraq would be more problematic – Iraq would then have a far greater sway over global petroleum prices. In fact, the Carter Doctrine was designed to prevent this from happening in the first place. Yet Hussein and others believed that the United States was more concerned with Europe and Northeast Asia than with the Middle East.[67] Without costly signals, Saddam believed the historical evidence.

Finally, there was little public acknowledgement of the American threat against Iraq on behalf of Kuwait. Those signals sent to Hussein went through the US ambassador, April Glaspie.[68] The US failed to publicly commit in the same way that it did in Europe in the 1940s. Had it done so, it might have run political risks with a

---

[67] Jentleson 19: "The Glaspie-Saddam meeting was not an isolated incident [as an example of American lack of interest in Kuwait]. It was an affirmation of, not an aberration from, existing US policy."

[68] Jentleson 169-171, Karsh, Ephraim, and Inari Rautsi, "Why Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait," *Survival* 33:1 (January/February 1991) 27; Freedman and Karsh 53 and elsewhere; Cooley, John K., "Pre-war Gulf diplomacy," *Survival* 33:2 (March/April 1991) 127-128. When Representative Lee Hamilton questioned Glaspie during hearings on this question, he asked her, "Did you ever tell Saddam Hussein, 'Mr. President, if you go across that line into Kuwait, weare going to fight'?" Her response: "No, I did not." She also noted that such a statement would be "a change in our policy." Quoted in Jentleson, 171.

domestic populace unprepared to take on war in the Middle East[69] – but it also might have demonstrated to the Iraqis that aggression against Kuwait would not go unchallenged. Instead, American policymakers left the door wide open for Saddam to interpret US actions based on prior actions, and given that, he reached what was in many ways a logical conclusion – the weak United States, despite their great power, did not have the backbone to intervene against an Iraqi invasion. This was not all the fault of the United States – Freedman and Karsh note that in fact "the initial American response was therefore quite strong, to the extent that local Arab governments became anxious lest it inflame the situation and provoke Iraqi action."[70] Such a commitment would have been difficult to put together, but it was possible, even if the US had been bluffing. Reports show that Saddam was preoccupied by the power of the United States, and was convinced that he had to guarantee no American intervention.[71] However, Glaspie made statements which were very easily interpreted as *carte blanche*, labeled by Cooley as not one by two "green lights."[72] And Margaret Tutweiler was quoted before the invasion that "We do not have any defense treaties with Kuwait, and there are no special defense or security commitments to Kuwait."[73] Freedman and Karsh demonstrate the failure of deterrence, and draw it back to the lack of a credible commitment.[74]

---

[69] A senior US official was quoted by the *New York Times* (23 Sept.1990, then quoted in Freedman and Karsh 58) that "we were reluctant to draw a line in the sand. I can't see the American public supporting the deployment of troops over a dispute over twenty miles of desert territory and it is not clear that the local countries would have supported that kind of commitment. The basic principle is not to make threats you can't deliver on."

[70] Freedman and Karsh 51. However, the United Arab Emirates, while having "its sensitivities about openmilitary cooperation with the US," wanted Iraq to notice its relationship with the US. Jentleson 280, ftn 97.

[71] Karsh and Rautsi 26-27; Freedman and Karsh 63: "Saddam was certainly sensitive to the possibility of US interference."

[72] Cooley 127; Karsh and Rautsi use the same sort of language, 27.

[73] Quoted in Jentleson 171.

[74] Freedman and Karsh 63: "Also unfortunate was the readiness to stress the lack of any defense commitment to Kuwait at such a critical juncture, even though it was difficult to assert one."

But what of side payments? If Kuwait was sought for primarily economic purposes, then why could some sort of bribe not prevent an invasion? First it is critical to establish that in fact Kuwait was sought for economic reasons.[75] There were irredentist claims on Kuwait dating back centuries, but the primary motivation for the invasion was to secure revenues lost after the Iran-Iraq war. He also felt himself under attack – "[to Hussein,] the continued violation of oil quotas by some Arab states amounted to a declaration of war on Iraq."[76] Yet the problem with the side payments hypothesis is that here, they were offered, and yet failed to deter Saddam from moving on Kuwait. Before the invasion, most actors believed that in fact side payments would work.[77] These side payments were not limited to Arab states – Ambassador Glaspie led Saddam to believe that "many people in the US approved Iraq's favorite price for a barrel of oil, $25."[78] Some of the potential side payments could not be offered to Iraq by the US because it did not have as much leverage over the international oil market as the Saudis or Kuwaitis. Other forms of side payment would have been more difficult for the US to offer.[79] However, side payments were in fact offered by the Arab states. They were rejected, and Saddam continued his invasion of Kuwait.[80]

[75] Freedman and Karsh 429: "There were many strands to Saddam's insecurity, but the most pressing problem of the summer of 1990 was economic."
[76] Karsh and Rautsi 22; see also Freedman and Karsh 46.
[77] Freedman and Karsh 54: "It was assumed that the crisis would end when the Kuwaitis handed over a substantial amount of cash."
[78] Cooley 127-128.
[79] Freedman and Karsh 429: "The West could have eased this problem [the economic strain] by new lines of credit but that would have been financially irresponsible unless Saddam agreed to hand his economy over to the International Monetary Fund, which he was desperate to avoid."
[80] Freedman and Karsh 59-60 on the offer and rejection of side payments.

In the balance, Saddam was more afraid of the potential for US intervention than interested in bribes, and such a bribe might have only been the beginning.[81] It was the failure of the United States to signal its credible commitment, rather than a shift in the offense-defense balance or the existence (or lack thereof) of side payments which prompted Saddam Hussein to invade Kuwait in August 1990. The counterfactual argument that had the US put together a more credible deterrent, Saddam would not have attacked has been criticized by some arguing it impossible[82], but Saddam's preoccupation with the US belies this. This preoccupation demonstrates that in fact a causal link can be drawn not necessarily between the lack of an American credible commitment and Iraqi threats toward Kuwait, but between the lack of an American credible commitment and the proximate Iraqi decision to invade on 2 August.

Policy Implications

If the conclusions reached by my research hold, they have a substantial impact on American foreign policy decision making. These results may not hold for other states' decisions to intervene abroad, but at least in the case of the United States, it shows that intervention in order to prevent territorial conflict can work. However, this threat of intervention requires a firm commitment in order to succeed. The United States cannot assume that it will cow all potential aggressors by sheer force of arms – that all states will believe that the United States will intervene simply because it can. If this were the case, the US would be engaged in every single conflict worldwide, but this is not in fact the

[81] Freedman and Karsh 429: "As the Kuwaitis recognized, if Saddam was rewarded this time he would soon be back for more… …Our judgement is that only a very large bribe would have persuaded Saddam to pull back his troops once he had determined on his campaign of intimidation."
[82] Stein, Janice Gross, "Deterrence and Compellence in the Gulf, 1990-91: A Failed or Impossible Task?" *International Security* 17:2 (Autumn 1992) 147-179.

case. In the realm of deterring territorial conflict, the US picks and chooses its battles. These choices are very important in that they will determine to which states the US can make a credible commitment and to which states the US will have to work harder in order to deter a conflict.

However, this does provide a blueprint of sorts. The best first step is to have a history of intervention, to show that such a conflict is in the vital interests of the US. However, this is not always possible. An American government seeking to deter a territorial conflict in central Africa may find it far more difficult to show its commitment than when it seeks to deter conflict in Latin America or central Europe. However, the Kuwait case shows that there are ways to overcome the "history problem." Through the use of costly signals, it is possible to show that even given a past history of non-intervention, or worse, of backing down after having made threats, that a third party, here the United States, has a vested interest in preventing the conflict. These signals can include public declarations, or the move of a token element of the US military to the target state (not enough to offset the advantage enjoyed by the aggressor). Given that the US is a democracy where public opinion is critical in decision making, public declarations of support or military maneuvers are even more costly than they would be in an autocracy, where pressures on the leadership regime may be lessened. From a policy standpoint, these costly signals are even more effective, because the rest of the world knows that they are costly to the US.

Because of the cost of these signals, they cannot be used all the time. This is why the US cannot simply threaten to intervene anywhere where there is a territorial conflict and expect the conflict to die down. If it were appealing to the logic of sovereignty, or if its threats would succeed because of a balance of forces, then the US could undertake far sweeping commitments which in a signaling model are impossible. There is an inverse relationship between the number of commitments a state can take on and the credibility of new commitments. States understand the logic of overstretch, and if the US were to be involved in the deterrence of multiple territorial conflicts at a time, taking on new ones might be difficult. It has been done – the US managed to keep forces in Europe and Korea throughout the Cold War, and in fact those forces were a demonstration of the willingness of the United States to commit. However, those commitments arose out of a bipolar world wherein the US could justify its commitments not only on the grounds of sovereignty but also in terms of the worldwide fight against communism. Today, leaders might attempt a similar argument based on the worldwide fight against terrorism. But at present, this logic might not be so apparent to other states.

Conclusions

The cases clarify that neither an offense-defense argument nor the use of side payments in economic crises is sufficient to explain why threats of intervention on the part of a third party succeed or fail. The offense-defense relationship is murky enough that it is very difficult to tell when this shift occurs, if ever.[83] On the other hand, side payments make a certain amount of sense – but they were tried and failed. So what works? Threats of intervention are effective – that is, they prevent territorial conflict – when the third party in question makes a clear and credible commitment to the target state.

[83] Levy.

At first, this may seem self-explanatory. Threats need to be perceived in order to function. Yet the logic of threatening intervention is somewhat different, because credibility is in fact more important here than in a dyadic relationship between aggressor and target state. A threat made by a target state against an aggressor is inherently credible because that aggressor has made threats against it. For a third party to make a threat requires that it demonstrate the importance of the conflict, which is not readily apparent. Signaling thus becomes even more central to the argument.

Is there something special about territorial conflicts which impacts the results here? It would make sense for territorial conflicts to focus more on the logic of sovereignty, and in fact one would expect given the basis of sovereignty in control over territory that it would have a greater legitimating effect on interventions. In addition, signaling can play a role in territorial conflict because of the ability of a third party to move forces into the territory being threatened – the "tripwire" idea – which might not deter a state whose war aims did not include control of territory.

Further Research

The primary problem with this research agenda is that it examines only a select handful of hypotheses. There are other potential reasons why intervention might be successful or fail. Primary among those is an argument based on the regime type of the actors in the game. It is true that there is variation among the regime types of the target states, but both the aggressor states examined here were totalitarian dictatorships. Does this make a difference? There is an implication here that all aggressor states are totalitarian or at least authoritarian, and this may not hold up. In addition, the intervening third party in both cases here was the United States. It is true that in one case, American threats did not work, whereas in the other they did. This can be attributed to a failure of signaling, in that pure balance of power politics and normative politics did not play the same role. However, if these hypotheses were to be generalized beyond an analysis of American foreign policy to an examination of state actions in general, the signaling hypothesis might not hold up so well. Do democracies act in a different manner in terms of intervention?[84] Expansion of the case set would allow this alternative hypothesis to be explored.

In addition, further research could come in examining intervention by multiple states and international or regional institutions.[85] Do these groups overcome the collective action problem which arises when states seek to work together? If so, how? They may be less effective than states intervening alone because of this collective action problem, or they may in fact be more effective in making threats because of the greater legitimacy of their actions. Either way, this is a pressing issue and can reveal much from a theoretical and a policy perspective.

---

[84] Kegley, Charles W., and Margaret G. Hermann, "How Democracies Use Intervention: A Neglected Dimension in Studies of the Democratic Peace," *Journal of Peace Research* 33:3 (1996) 309-322.
[85] Diehl, Paul F., Jennifer Reifschneider, and Paul R.Hensel, "United Nations intervention and recurring conflict," *International Organization* 50:4 (Autumn 1996) 683-700.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ambrose, Stephen E., and Douglas G. Brinkley. *Rise To Globalism.* New York: Penguin Putnam, 1997.

Bering, Henrik. *Outpost Berlin*. Chicago: Edition Q, 1995.

Cooley, John K. "Pre-war Gulf diplomacy." *Survival* 33:2 (March/April 1991) 125-139.

Davison, W. Philips. *The Berlin Blockade*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958.

Diehl, Paul F., Jennifer Reifschneider, and Paul R.Hensel. "United Nations intervention and recurring conflict." *International Organization* 50:4 (Autumn 1996) 683-700.

Fearon, James D. "Signaling versus the Balance of Power and Interests: An Empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38:2 (June 1994) 236-269.

Fearon, James D. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49:3 (Summer 1995) 379-414.

Fearon, James D. "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41:1 (February 1997) 68-90.

Freedman, Lawrence, and Ephraim Karsh. *The Gulf Conflict,1990-1991*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Friedman, Thomas L. "US Gulf Policy: Vague 'Vital Interests'." *The New York Times* 12 August 1990, p. A1.

Gaddis, John Lewis. *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Gordon, Michael R. "US Deploys Air and Sea Forces after Iraq Threatens 2 Neighbors." *The New York Times* 25 July 1990, p. A1.

Grieco, Joseph M. "Understanding the Problem of International Cooperation: The Limits of Neoliberal Institutionalism and the Future of Realist Theory," in *Neorealism and Neoliberalism*. Ed. David A. Baldwin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Huth, Paul K. "Major Power Intervention in International Crises, 1918-1988." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42:6 (December 1998) 744-770.

Huth, Paul K. "Territory: Why Are Territorial Disputes between States a Central Cause of International Conflict?" In *What Do We Know About War?* Ed. John A. Vasquez. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.

Jentleson, Bruce W. *With Friends Like These*. New York: Norton, 1994.

Jervis, Robert. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma." *World Politics* 30:2 (January 1978) 167-214.

Karsh, Ephraim, and Inari Rautsi. "Why Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait." *Survival* 33:1 (January/February 1991) 18-30.

Kegley, Charles W., and Margaret G. Hermann. "How Democracies Use Intervention: A Neglected Dimension in Studies of the Democratic Peace." *Journal of Peace Research* 33:3 (1996) 309-322.

Kennan, George F. *Memoirs: 1925-1950.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1967.

Levy, Jack S. "The Offensive/Defensive Balance of Military Technology." In *Conflict After the Cold War*. 2nd Ed. Ed. Richard K. Betts. New York: Longman, 2002.

Liberman, Peter. *Does Conquest Pay? The Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Miller, Roger G. *To Save A City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2000.

Mobley, Richard A. "Gauging the Iraqi Threat to Kuwait in the 1960s." *Central Intelligence Agency Studies In Intelligence* 11 (Fall-Winter 2001).

Morris, Eric. *Blockade*. London: Hamilton, 1973.

Parrish, Thomas. *Berlin in the Balance*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1998.

Sagan, Scott D. "1914 Revisited." In *Conflict After the Cold War*. 2nd Ed. Ed. Richard K. Betts. New York: Longman, 2002.

Sciolino, Elaine. "Envoy No Longer Silent." *The New York Times* 21 March 1991, p. A15.

Shlaim, Avi. *The United States and the Berlin Blockade.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

Staniland, Martin. "Getting To No – The Diplomacy of the Gulf Conflict, August 2, 1990 – January 15, 1991." *Pew Case Studies in International Affairs* 449. Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 1993.

Stein, Janice Gross. "Deterrence and Compellence in the Gulf, 1990-91: A Failed or Impossible Task?" *International Security* 17:2 (Autumn 1992) 147-179.

Toft, Monica Duffy. "Indivisible Territory and Ethnic War." *Weatherhead Center for International Affairs* Paper No. 01-08. December 2001.

Tusa, Ann, and John Tusa. *The Berlin Blockade.* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988.

Van Evera, Stephen. "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War." In *Theories of War and Peace*. Ed. Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Coté, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999.

Zubok, Vladislav, and Konstantin Pleshakov. *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.