THE STATE LEVEL OF ANALYSIS
PART 2

Ch. 6: What Causes War? - National Attributes Theories
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Internal Conflict, & War Weariness
Rationalism & Constructionism
1.1. Political Instability and Warlike Tendencies

Are politically stable or unstable states more likely to engage in war?

Scapegoat Theory
The *scapegoat theory* or, alternatively, the *diversionary war theory* assumes that when states are beset with deteriorating economic conditions, ethnic divisions, increasing political opposition, or civil strife and rebellion, their leaders will seek to end these internal woes by initiating conflict with an external foe.

Presumably, war is undertaken in the belief that it will rally the masses around the flag in the face of a "foreign threat," and that a healthy dose of patriotism is the best medicine for the internal problems facing the government. The *external foe*, then, becomes a *scapegoat*.

Internal problems are either blamed (unjustly) on the external opponent and victory over the scapegoat is touted as essential to reverse the wretched internal situation, or the war is simply used by the government to divert the attention of citizens from the internal situation.

Whether the use of war actually alleviates the internal situation is, of course, another question.
Autocratic governments are less constrained in their ability to go to war, but democratic regimes are more dependent on the necessity of popular support and therefore perhaps more inclined to use foreign adventures to affect the domestic political situation. (remember Falkland?)

We have already mentioned the propensity for the United States to become involved in "militarized international disputes" during election years, especially if this coincides with a period of economic stagnation.

Richard Rosecrance's classic study of international instability within nine different European systems from 1740 to 1960 discovered that the domestic insecurity of political elites was one of the most important causes of Major Power war. However, the type of political system did not seem to matter; elites in democratic and non democratic systems alike sought relief from internal troubles through war.
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND THE VALIDITY OF THE SCAPEGOAT THEORY

- Also, Richard Ned Lebow's investigation of "brinkmanship crises" in the 20th century also underscored the importance of domestic political uncertainty. 10 of the 13 crises were initiated by leaders who perceived their rule to be vulnerable to domestic opponents; in 4 of these 10 cases, the political system itself was weak and unstable.

- More recently, scapegoat arguments were commonplace in journalistic attempts to fathom the Argentine government's decision to wrest the Falkland Islands from Britain by force of arms in 1982. Severe economic problems in both Argentina and Britain had led to increased political opposition to both the Galtieri and Thatcher governments, thus providing the former with a strong incentive to take the Malvinas by force and the latter with an equally strong reason to reverse the situation through war.
1.2. Political Instability and Warlike Tendencies

Are politically stable or unstable states more likely to engage in war?

Death Watch Theory
“Kick them while they’re down” Theory
Not all wars were preceded by civil strife, and civil strife has not always led to war. Nevertheless, in the 125-year period (1815-1939), that Geoffrey Blainey examined in his study at least 31 wars (representing just over 50% of all wars during the period) were immediately preceded by civil conflict in one of the belligerent nations. An important relationship clearly exists between internal and external conflict. But what theory might explain this relationship?

Bailey noted that in those 31 wars in which civil unrest preceded external conflict, war was not usually initiated by the strife-torn state. Instead, most of the wars were initiated by outside powers, with the internally troubled state in the role of the victim.

Blainey argues effectively that nations do not generally start wars to quell their own internal revolts. Instead, wars occur because internal conflicts change the balance of power between states. Internal strife in stronger countries lowers their margin of superiority and tempts other nations to strike at the most opportune moment.

These situations in which foreign leaders sit - rather like vultures in trees - waiting for monarchs in the target state to die and bring on political uncertainty Blainey calls "Death Watch Wars." (Ottoman Empire in WWI, Iraq-Iran war)
CAN THE DEATH WATCH THEORY EXPLAIN THE CAUSE OF WAR?

- NO - The Death Watch Theory of War essentially concludes that domestic conflict in state A provides the opportunity for state B to attack, but it does not address the underlying cause of state B's attack on state A. In other words, this theory doesn’t help explain why the state B attacks the state A. It only explains why now (i.e., when). (Since the state A is weak.)
DO THE DEATH WATCH THEORY AND SCAPEGOAT THEORY COMPLETELY CONTRADICT EACH other?

- Many would claim so. The Death Watch Theory advocates that government’s with internal conflicts aren't likely to attack foreign states; instead, they attack the rebels within.

- If the disorder isn't serious, the government doesn't need to seek war with outsiders. If the situation is extreme, government leaders will be much more inclined to seek peaceful relations externally in order to devote their attention and their resources to internal problems.

- Additionally, serious internal dissent reduces the political reliability of the military as well as the internal political cohesion necessary to pursue an external war.

- Indeed, most nations involved in war at the same time as they were beset by unrest at home have been anxious to seek external peace: Russia in 1905 and 1917, Germany at the end of World War I, the United States during the later stages of the Vietnam War.

Do the death watch theory and scapegoat theory completely contradict each other?
The relationship between internal and external conflict may well be curvilinear. Wars should be unlikely during either extremely low levels of internal conflict or extremely high levels of internal conflict. However, moderate levels of internal conflict might be conducive to *diversionary (scapegoat) war*.

Further on, it is still possible, as **Jack Levy** contends, that during extremely high levels of internal conflict, elites will not behave rationally, but will instead develop a "fortress mentality" and become more risk-acceptant.

The stress that accompanies such internal strife may lead both to greater chances of *misperception* and to greater psychological need to attain foreign policy successes, even if these entail enormous risks.
1.3. Political Instability and Warlike Tendencies

Are politically stable or unstable states more likely to engage in war?

Internationalization of Civil Wars
The internationalization of civil wars is yet another pattern that explains the link between internal and external conflict.

Internal revolutionary groups engaged in civil wars frequently forge strong ties with foreign governments to assist their revolt, and the government itself also forms ties with external powers to assist it internally against the rebels. Such ties between rebels and foreign governments were present in 26 of the 31 wars studied by Blainey.

Modern examples of civil wars that have become internationalized are abundant: Vietnam, Angola, El Salvador, Chad, Afghanistan, and most recently Syria and Ukraine.

Thus, civil wars show a penchant for becoming international wars through two different paths: a direct external attack on a government weakened by internal strife or through aid to rebel groups fighting against the government.
1.4. POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND WARLIKE TENDENCIES

Are politically stable or unstable states more likely to engage in war?

REVOLUTIONARY TRANSFORMATION THEORY
Zeev Maoz offers another look at the link between internal and external conflict. Maoz suggests that an important consideration in the explanation of international conflict is its link to two kinds of revolutionary changes: the birth of new states out of revolutionary or violent struggles and the revolutionary transformation of older political systems.

States emerging from revolutionary births or midlife transformations are likely to receive a chilly welcome into the club of nations, and political elites within these revolutionary states may perceive the international environment to be hostile.

Political elites in the older, more established states in the system may perceive the goals and ambitions of these new states as a threat to themselves and to the current international order.

And indeed, states that have gone through revolutionary beginnings or transformations may harbor quite different conceptions of world order.

Thus, the political transformation of states through revolutionary means creates mutual distrust between old and new states in the system which can lead to violent conflict. Since this mistrust is mutual, the initiator may be either the newly transformed state or members of the old order.
YES & NO - The scientific data gives us a mixed answer to the question of whether domestic conflicts cause external conflicts. There is actually a conflict between the historical evidence, confirming the causality, and cross-national evidence compiled by political scientists that does not do the same, at least not very strongly.

While a relationship probably exists between internal and external conflict, it is obscured somewhat because several different causal mechanisms are needed to explain this association:

- through the *scapegoat mechanism*, states torn by moderate civil strife seek foreign conflicts to solve domestic problems;
- through the *death watch mechanism*, states experiencing serious internal weakness or conflict are attacked as easy prey by their opponents;
- through the *internationalization of civil wars*, rebels and governments alike may attain external allies and turn domestic conflicts into international wars; and finally,
- through the process by which *revolutionary regimes* are brought into existence, interstate conflict may be precipitated between the supporters of the old international order and the new revolutionary states.
INTERNAL & EXTERNAL CONFLICT: IMPLICATIONS

* The existence of a direct relationship between internal and external conflict implies that the world would be a much more peaceful place if states themselves were more peaceful places to live. The idea is that international conflict could be substantially reduced if internal conflicts could be reduced or eliminated.

To some extent, U.S. foreign policy in the post-World War II era has been predicted on just such a presumed link between the reduction of internal conflict and prevention of external conflict. The general purpose of American foreign aid—whether Marshall Plan aid to western Europe, Alliance for Progress aid to Latin America, or Caribbean basin aid—has been to prevent internal disturbances in the receiving countries that might make those states fertile grounds for Communist revolution or attractive targets for aggression. The rationale for foreign aid programs has been that economic unrest leads to internal political unrest, which leads to external (communist) subversion or assault.

There is, of course, a second set of assumptions as well: that economic aid will bring about economic growth and development, that such growth will result in stable social and political conditions, and that this will prevent the rise of strong, left-wing radical groups.
2. PREVIOUS WAR HISTORY AND WARLIKE TENDENCIES

Are the nations with previous war history more or less prone to engage in war again?

War Weariness Theory
A CYCLE OF PEACE AND WAR

The British historian **Arnold Toynbee** claimed to have identified a cycle of **peace and war**. The 100-year cycle, repeated over the centuries, consisted of the following sequence: a **general war** was followed by a period of **peace**, then by a **cluster of small wars**, a second period of **peace**, and finally by another **general war**.

Toynbee's tentative theoretical explanation was that war made a deep psychological impression on those who lived through it, and these men and women were hesitant to have their children's lives disrupted by similar experiences. A whole generation of leaders whose lives had been molded during **wartime** were determined to keep the **peace** as long as they ruled. Eventually, however, a new generation would come to power. Never having experienced firsthand the horrors of war, they were much more inclined than their elders to test the waters of combat. The result would be a **series of small wars** - larger wars presumably still being avoided due to the aversion to such things handed down to them by the previous generation. The period of peace following these small wars would finally be shattered by another **great war** - a war that would come about only when the last memories of the first great war had been erased by the death of the wartime generation. Then, of course, the cycle would start over again. Toynbee's **100-year cycle** was almost a perfect fit when matched with the period between the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century and World War I.
The explanation given by Toynbee for this cycle of war and peace is generally referred to as the war weariness theory. It predicts that nations that have recently experienced a long and costly war should be the most peaceful—at least in the short term. Conversely, states that have endured long periods of peace are probably most likely to experience war in the near future. As Blainey observes, the theory ironically implies that we should beware Sweden and the Canary Islands.

To some extent the war weariness theory draws on psychological arguments. It maintains that political leaders who have directly experienced the devastation of war are deeply touched by the experience—presumably at a conscious level, but perhaps unconsciously as well. The experience of war results in a strong aversion to war, and this war wariness affects these leaders' personalities, their operational codes, their images of the world, and their value preferences. This explanation operates at the individual level of analysis.
The war weariness theory also operates at the level of the nation-state. Here the theory implies that the common experience of a severe and destructive war has made an impression on the collective psyche of the nation. War weariness becomes part of the "collective national consciousness" or part of the "national character" or the "political culture." In other words, there is a collective psychological phenomenon that is shared by the population. War weariness is not a personal characteristic as much as it is a national attribute.

A complete theory of war weariness would have to specify the link between the war weariness of society as a whole (or certain groups within society) and political decision-makers. The presence of popular aversion to war implies that, at least in a democracy, people will make known to the government their predisposition for peace and that government policy will reflect the wishes of the people. Even in authoritarian countries this collective support for peace cannot be discounted entirely; dictators, too, must take into consideration such widely held sentiments. Consequently, other state level attributes may not matter greatly; states with similar histories of war experience should act similarly in the future.
THE RELEVANCE OF WAR WEARINESS

- War weariness has relevance for war initiation, but not necessarily for war involvement. It is concerned with the effect of a costly previous war on a nation's desire to start a new war. However, if a nation is attacked, war weariness will count for little. War weariness is not likely to prevent a nation from participating in a war if it has been attacked.

- One might in fact hypothesize that nations that have recently experienced war are more likely to be attacked than other nations. Opponents may sense the spirit of war weariness in such a nation and see this as a sign of weakness. Similarly, a state weakened by a costly previous war might be seen as an easy target by other states.

- If the war weariness theory is true, wars are caused by states whose resentment toward war - generated by the devastation and death of a previous conflict - has begun to lose its potency over the course of time. The implications of this theory are fairly pessimistic. There is good news and bad news. The good news is that wars can be prevented. The bad news is that the only way to prevent them in the future is to fight them in the present - and even this won't prevent war indefinitely.
Some scholars claim that the war weariness theory does a lousy job of explaining the outbreak of World War II, a major war that occurred just two decades after the end of World War I. Leaders of the nations of Europe were all part of the generation whose lives were molded by the what had been the most horrible war in history. Surely, if any generation were to be war weary, this would have been the one. Certainly, our confidence in the war weariness theory must be reduced by such a glaring example of events that run counter to the theory.

Some scholars would argue that this argument is weak and would claim that WWI and WWII are essentially one war that was not initially resolved, in a sense that there was no clear loser and clear winner. Thus, after a prolonged truce of some 20 years, the war was just reignited after all sides in the conflict had reorganized and recovered from initial losses. It has been 71 years since the end of WWII and Germany, the country that initiated both, WWI and WWII, has not started a war. Why? Because WWII was finished and had definite winners and losers.
**ARE WINNERS OR LOSERS OF THE PREVIOUS WAR MORE PRONE TO INITIATE A NEW WAR?**

* In most cases, **winning states** experience a **lesser degree of devastation and suffering** than losers; therefore, they should be **less war weary**; their **physical capabilities** might be **enhanced** as the result of victory; victory might raise levels of nationalistic fervor and create a **climate of optimism** about war; it might solidify in power (or bring to power) a "**hawkish**" political faction identified with the success of the war; or it might **reinforce a cultural norm of aggression**; all of this making them more prone to future aggression.

Some would argue that actually **the loosing side** might be in some cases the most likely to take up arms again in the near future. Certainly, the **desire for revenge** would be a strong motivating factor, as would be the associated desires to regain lost territories, peoples, and resources, arguing, once again, that these were the main motives for Germany to start WWII.

If we take into consideration that WWII is only a continuation of WWI, then it would be hard to argue on this sole example that winners and losers are equally prone to start a new war and that the War Weariness Theory is not well founded because of contradictory evidence.
It may be that a decisive end to the war has resolved all outstanding issues, removing the political causes for future wars. (sic! political causes)

It may be that a nation's resources have been so depleted that is is physically unable to pursue war. (sic! economic causes)

A decisive victory by one side may have created a balance of power so lopsided that those who have grievances are nonetheless deterred from redressing these grievances through force. (sic! military power)

Therefore, an empirical link between war and subsequent periods of prolonged peace does not necessarily confirm the hypothesis that frustrating war memories prevent the reemergence of a cataclysmic war for a century. (sic! psychological cause)

Is this implying that the true causes of war and peace are always economic and political and that the “national spirit” does not matter so much?
The results of empirical research are mixed.

**YES** - In their analysis of wars from 1816 to 1965, *Singer and Small* conclude that neither initiators nor defenders were very likely to initiate war within a decade, though winners were far more likely to initiate subsequent wars than losers.

**NO** - A later study by *Singer and Cusack* focuses on war participation rather than war initiation. Their general conclusion is that prior war experience seems to have had little effect on the propensity of states to become involved in subsequent wars. Winners of previous wars have a slight tendency toward early reentry into war, but so do defeated states. In fact, the average time interval to the next war is even shorter for defeated states. Although the difference between defeated states and winning states is not statistically significant, the finding points toward the revenge motive and away from the war weariness theory.

**YES** - On the other hand, *Singer and Cusack* conclude that defeated states that have fought costly wars (wars with high fatalities) do seem to be inhibited from participating in wars too soon after their defeat. The combination of defeat and high cost would seem to be much more important than either of these factors alone in explaining why states returned to war so soon after their experiences in previous war.
In his analysis of great power wars from 1816 to 1965, David Garnham finds victorious major powers are no more likely than losers to initiate a future war, nor does he find any relationship between the cost of war and the elapsed time until the next war. He also investigates the classic proposition of Immanuel Kant that democratic states ought to be more susceptible to the war weariness phenomenon than nondemocratic states. He finds no evidence that war weariness has constrained the behavior of the major democracies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - Britain, France, and the United States.

What do you think what the reason is for the latter finding by Garnham? Short- and long-term memory loss on a national level? Or maybe the fact that the national psyche does not matter at all in a decision making process? Something else? Explain.
DOES EMPIRICAL RESEARCH VALIDATE THE WAR WEARINESS THEORY?

NO - Finally, Levy and Morgan study the involvement of great powers in wars between 1500 and 1975. They discover many more instances of nations reengaging in wars in a relatively short period of time than should be expected. The conclusions of their research are almost exactly the opposite of the War Weariness hypothesis.

NO - When Levy and Morgan shift their attention to the hypothesis that the more serious the war, the greater the length of time between wars, the results are similarly disappointing. In short, they are neither able to confirm any of the war weariness hypotheses nor find any distinctive or consistent patterns with regard to the effect of previous wars on subsequent war participation.

It should be noted, however, that since Levy and Morgan investigate the propensity of war weary states merely to become involved in subsequent wars rather than to initiate them, it is not particularly odd that they fail to find support for the theory. They have imposed a stricter test than is warranted by the logic of the theory. Nevertheless, we must conclude that the evidence supporting the war weariness theory is considerably less than compelling.
What shall we make of all this research on the connection between national characteristics and war?

It is hard to escape the conclusion that national attribute theories have done a relatively poor job in explaining the incidence of war.

The only proposition that seems to have been consistently supported is that the size and power of a nation are directly related to the probability that it will be involved in war.

It appears that the presence of contiguous borders with the rival disputant may be a contributory factor, too, and that internal conflict might be associated with interstate war, though there seem to be multiple paths from the former to the latter.

Beyond these findings, it would be difficult to build a comprehensive profile of war-prone states based on any other set of factors. Neither the type of government a state has nor its economic institutions, its economic well-being, its population growth rate, or its previous involvement in war seems to matter much.
Cashman implies that the answer to the question of the cause of war might be at least partially in Harold and Margaret Sprout’s hypothesis, advocating that the behavior of nations is not determined directly by objective environmental factors such as a state’s size, geographical position, or type of government; that these factors can only limit, restrain, and control the outcomes of decisions made by government leaders; and that these factors can influence the decisions of leaders only if they actually perceive such elements in the environment.

Thus, for instance, leaders of capitalist states may think that capitalism requires constant expansion, but it actually does not. Or leaders may perceive that they must pursue an expansionistic foreign policy because of national growth, but they actually do not have to. In other words, according to the Sprouts, the cause of war seems to lie in the misperceptions of the leaders.

To misperceptions, Cashman adds the variables of state size and power and national role conceptions, the latter being also prone to misperceptions. Does this combination give an answer to the question of what causes war?