Territory:

Theory and Evidence on Geography and Conflict

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Most research on the sources of militarized conflict between nation-states has emphasized characteristics of the states themselves or of the larger interstate system, with little emphasis on the geographic context of relations between states. Vasquez (1998), for example, finds that realist variables such as capabilities and alliances account for most variables and hypotheses used in quantitative research during the 1960s and early 1970s. The contents of this volume and such compilations as the *Handbook of War Studies* (Midlarsky, 1989) indicate a substantial broadening of the research agenda since the 1970s, although a number of chapters continue to address capabilities or alliances and many of the additional chapters address such non-geographic topics as democracy, norms, and the historical context (in the form of interstate rivalries). The current chapter considers empirical research on geography and militarized conflict, in order to understand the role of geography as a context or source for conflict.

Diehl (1991) distinguishes between arguments treating geography as a "source of conflict," indicating that conflict occurs specifically because of geographic factors, and geography as a "facilitating condition for conflict." Vasquez (1995) distinguishes geographic factors by the nature of the factor in question, identifying three general theoretical perspectives. The territoriality perspective -- consistent with Diehl's "geography as a source of conflict" -- suggests that geography is important primarily because states fight over territorial issues. The other two perspectives -- associated more closely with Diehl's notion of a "facilitating condition for conflict" -- suggest that geography is important primarily because it influences the ease with which states can reach each other militarily (the proximity perspective) or the frequency with which they interact with each other (the interaction perspective).

This chapter considers the theoretical arguments of these major explanations that have been suggested to link geography with interstate conflict processes. The empirical evidence on each explanation is examined, supplemented by several original analyses to help evaluate the explanations and resolve the empirical controversies among them. The chapter concludes by discussing some of the implications for current and future scholarly research on interstate conflict. As will be seen, the territoriality explanation of geography and conflict receives the strongest support, although there is important evidence that proximity affects interstate conflict as well and there have been few direct tests of the interactions approach.

Territoriality

A common approach to studying interstate conflict begin with a disagreement between two or more states over some type of contentious issue(s). Depending on how the states attempt to settle these issues, they may or may not become involved in serious political conflict, and they may or may not escalate their disagreements to the threshold of militarized conflict or war. Under such a conception of conflict processes, the nature of the issues at stake between two

states should influence both their bargaining strategies and the consequences of the bargaining process. In particular, issues that are seen by decision makers as being more "salient," or important, are expected to be more likely to lead to militarized conflict and more difficult to resolve to both sides' satisfaction (Mansbach and Vasquez, 1981; Vasquez, 1993, 1998; Hensel, 1999).

Although many types of issues may be salient enough to lead to war, the territorial perspective suggests that territorial issues are especially salient and especially likely to lead to conflict and war (Vasquez, 1993, 1995, 1996; Hensel, 1996b). Perhaps because of this salience, most recent empirical research on contentious issues has focused on disagreements over territory. Scholars have argued that territory is "conspicuous among the causes of war" (Hill, 1945: 3), "perhaps the most important single cause of war between states in the last two or three centuries" (Luard, 1970: 7), or "the source of conflict most likely to end in war" (Vasquez, 1993: 124). Territory is often seen as highly salient for three reasons: its tangible contents or attributes, its intangible or psychological value, and its effects on a state's reputation.

In the most basic sense, territory can be viewed as important because of the tangible factors that it contains (Goertz and Diehl, 1992: Chapter One; Hensel, 1996b; Newman, 1999). Many territories have been the subject of dispute because they contained (or were thought to contain) valuable commodities or resources, such as strategic minerals, oil, fresh water, or fertile agricultural land. Certain territories are considered valuable because they provide access to the sea or to other commerce routes, particularly when they include deep water ports, warm water ports, or control over strategic waterways. Territory may also be seen as important for its population, particularly when it includes members of an ethnic or religious group that inhabits a neighboring state.

Another tangible benefit of territory is its contribution to a state's perceived power and security. Strategic territories such as the Golan Heights may allow for advance warning of an impending attack and may contribute to national defense, particularly to the extent that the territory in question contains defensible geographic features. Fearon (1995: 408) argues that territory with such strategic attributes can be an important source of war even for adversaries who would otherwise prefer a negotiated settlement, because the transfer of strategic territory can alter the two sides' relative bargaining positions. That is, control over the transferred territory may greatly increase the gaining side's chances for successful attack or defense in a future confrontation, which may make both sides reluctant to allow the peaceful transfer of such territory to an adversary.

Beyond its physical contents, territory can also be important to states for less tangible reasons (Goertz and Diehl, 1992: Chapter One; Hensel, 1996b; Newman, 1999). Territory is argued to lie at the heart of national identity and cohesion, with the very existence and autonomy

of a state being rooted in its territory (e.g., Murphy, 1990: 531). Many territories are seen as important for their perceived historical connections with a state or its citizens, particularly to the extent that the territory in question was the scene of significant events for a culture or religion. Examples include the Serbian attachment to Kosovo, considered the historical center of Serbian culture and identity, and the tendency for some Israelis to refer to the West Bank as "Judea and Samaria" (names that date back to Jewish rule over the area in biblical times). Similarly, Bowman (1946: 177) argued that there is a "profound psychological difference" between the transfer of territory and other types of interstate interactions or treaties, because of the strong personal feelings and group sentiments evoked by territory.

This intangible or psychological importance of territory may result in the creation of what Fearon (1995) terms "effectively indivisible issues." To Fearon, most disputed issues can be divided between two antagonists in such a way as to make peaceful compromise preferable to war for both sides. Although nearly all issues are divisible in the sense that they can be divided peacefully, perhaps through side payments or linkages with other issues, some issues may become effectively indivisible because of mechanisms such as domestic politics. Fearon (1995: 390) mentions the example of territory: "nineteenth- and twentieth-century leaders cannot divide up and trade territory in international negotiations as easily as could rulers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, due in part to domestic political consequences of the rise of nationalism."[1] Toft (1997) makes a similar point regarding ethnic conflict within states, arguing that the members of a nation can develop an attachment to territory that becomes indivisible from their conception of self and nation, essentially preventing compromise over what is seen as a vital part of the national identity. In short, territory is often argued to have "a psychological importance for nations that is quite out of proportion to its intrinsic value, strategic or economic," and territorial disputes are seen as arousing sentiments of pride and honor more rapidly and more intensely than any other type of issue (Luard, 1970: 7; see also Vasquez, 1993).

In addition to its tangible and intangible value, territory can be important for reasons of reputation (Hensel, 1996b). That is, if a leader gives in to an adversary on territorial issues despite the tangible and/or intangible importance of the territory, other adversaries might be encouraged to press their own demands on other issues. There is evidence, for example, that reputational considerations affected the British reaction to Argentina's invasion of the Falklands. Lebow (1985: 117-118) notes concerns by the British defense ministry and the *Economist* about

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1. It could be argued that generally concrete, tangible stakes such as territory might be more amenable to peaceful division and settlement than more symbolic stakes such as prestige or ideology. Yet the psychological importance of territory would seem to counter any potential advantages that might be gained from the concrete territorial object of dispute, by infusing the disputed territory with symbolic or transcendent qualities that make division more difficult (see Vasquez, 1993: 77-78).

the risks to British interests in Gibraltar, Belize, Guyana, Diego Garcia, Hong Kong, and Antarctica if Britain were to back down over the Falklands.

Schelling (1966: 118) makes a similar point about the importance of reputation in crisis behavior: "what is in dispute is usually not the issue of the moment, but everyone's expectations about how a participant will behave in the future. To yield may be to signal that one can be expected to yield..." To Schelling (1966: 124), a country's reputation is one of the few things to be worth fighting for; even parts of the world that are not intrinsically worth the risk of war by themselves can be important because of the precedents that may be set for events in other parts of the world and at later times. Furthermore, Toft (1997) argues that state leaders may risk war to retain apparently "worthless" territories, out of the fear that acquiescence in one situation may lead to future challenges by other groups. Because of the high perceived salience of territory, then, states' actions over territorial issues may be more likely to produce reputational effects than actions over other types of issues.

The theoretical importance of territory has been used to suggest a series of implications for the study of interstate conflict. First, if territorial issues are more salient than most other issues because of their tangible, intangible, and/or reputational importance, then interaction over territory should be different from interaction over other issues. The literature on territorial disputes (e.g., Vasquez, 1993, 1995, 1996; Hensel, 1996b) suggests that territorial issues should be more prone to militarized conflict behavior than most other issue types, and confrontations over territory should be more escalatory than confrontations over other issues. As Brecher (1993: 153) argues, the more basic the values at stake in a crisis situation, "the higher the cost crisis actors are willing to incur to protect them, and the more extreme will be their crisis management (value-protecting) technique."

Similarly, territorial issues are argued to be more difficult to resolve than most other types of issues. Bowman (1946: 178), for example, noted that any territorial solution -- no matter how fair it may seem -- carries with it the risk of future attempts to regain lost territory. Arguments may always be raised in the future about past historical claims to the lost territory, especially in border zones of mixed ethnic or linguistic composition, and subsequent incidents may always be used to re-focus attention on such historical claims. Bowman (1946: 180-181) further suggested that two or more states can often have irreconcilable claims to the same piece of territory, and that in some territorial disputes there may be no logical solution that both sides can find acceptable. Vasquez (1993) thus suggests that territorial issues can be very difficult to settle, and that if two adversaries are unable to settle their territorial questions early in their relationship, the resulting dispute is likely to last for many years.

Proximity and Interactions

In contrast to the territorial explanation's focus on territory as a "source of conflict", the proximity and interaction perspectives focus attention on territory as a "facilitating condition for conflict" (Diehl, 1991). These perspectives suggest that even if territory and borders "do not *cause* wars, they at least create *structure of risks and opportunities* in which conflictual behavior is apparently more likely to occur" (Starr and Most, 1978: 444; italics in original). These two perspectives suggest that territory is primarily important to the extent that it contributes to proximity between two actors. Proximity between actors in turn influences force projection capabilities, threat perception, and interaction opportunities -- each of which can affect the likelihood of interstate conflict and war.

Proximity and the Loss of Strength Gradient

The most basic argument on proximity as an explanation for conflict and war is that war can only occur between states that can reach other militarily. Boulding's (1962) "loss of strength gradient" reflects this proximity perspective, arguing that the political and military strength of a state is greatest within its borders and declines as the state tries to project it farther beyond its borders. Knowing this, a state should be less likely to attempt to project its military strength farther from home, given the resulting reduction in capabilities.

Several scholars have drawn from Boulding's loss of strength gradient in studying interstate conflict. Gleditsch and Singer (1975) and Garnham (1976) consider the effect of proximity on war behavior, measuring proximity by the distance between two states' capitals. Bueno de Mesquita (1981: 83) also includes the effects of distance as a discount factor affecting a state's expected utility for conflict with a particular adversary, arguing that "the greater the distance between a nation's seat of power and the place where its power must be brought to bear in a war, the smaller the proportion of its total capabilities that it can expect to use." Although the effects of great distances can be offset somewhat by a high utility for military conflict with the other state or by a leader's propensity for accepting risks, a greater distance decreases the expected utility that a state has for conflict or war against a given opponent. Similarly, Lemke (1995) attempts to identify pairs of states that can reach each other militarily, based on distance, the type of terrain between the states, and their technology levels. Lemke's data collection produces a set of cases "that might have had a war," excluding "dyads that have no prospect of fighting" because they "physically do not have the opportunity to fight" (Lemke, 1995: 29).

The implication of such approaches is that two adversaries that can not reach each other with sufficient military capability must be considered unlikely to become involved in militarized conflict, regardless of any other conditions that might be expected to influence conflict. Major powers are typically assumed to be able to project their military capabilities anywhere around the world, with the result that many applications of the proximity approach explicitly limit the

effects of proximity to the remaining states in the interstate system. For so-called minor powers, though, states that are not considered sufficiently proximate are often excluded from analyses of conflict behavior, or at least expected to be very unlikely to start conflict over contentious issues, considerations of relative capabilities, or any other potential cause.

Proximity and Threat

The loss of strength gradient and its intellectual descendants focus on the obstacles posed by geographic distance for military force projection. A second argument based on proximity suggests that events closer to home are seen as more threatening than more distant events, and therefore more salient to policymakers. Starr and Most (1978), for example, argued that bordering states face greater uncertainty in their relations than more distant states, which can exacerbate the well-known security dilemma of world politics and lead to the outbreak of conflict. Similarly, Walt (1987: 23) suggests that states choose alliance partners based on the level of perceived threat from other countries, and that "states that are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away."

Diehl (1985, 1991) captures this threat-perception element in suggesting that proximity affects states' willingness for conflict, as well as their opportunity. Events such as political instability or revolutions are thus more worrisome to policymakers when they occur in a neighboring state than when they occur in more distant states. Furthermore, states often define their national security perimeters based on proximity, as with the Soviet desire to keep Eastern Europe as a defensive perimeter after World War II. As Gochman (1990: 1) suggests, "the immediacy of, as well as frequency of interaction with, neighboring entities are likely to foster the recognition and belief that proximate actors pose significant threats and opportunities with regard to self-interests." Gochman does not suggest that distant states never pose security threats, but he does argue that leaders will tend to pay closer attention to that which is near than that which is distant.

The threat dimension of proximity is expected to compound the effects of proximity that derive from military reachability. Nearby states are thus expected to be more likely than more distant states to engage in conflict because of their overlapping interests and perceived security threats, as well as because of their ease in projecting sufficient military capabilities against each other. It should be noted, of course, that it is extremely difficult to distinguish between these two expected effects of proximity, so most analysts do not attempt to make this distinction. Indeed, it can even be difficult to distinguish the territorial and proximity arguments, at least to the extent that most territorial claims involve proximate adversaries; contention over a shared border can be an important source of the conflicts of interest and security threats that are thought to characterize bordering states.

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Interaction

The interaction perspective on territory and conflict suggests that territory is important primarily because it facilitates interaction between actors. From this perspective, states that are located near each other -- particularly those that share a geographic border -- will tend to interact more than states located farther apart. For example, Bolivia typically interacts much more frequently with Brazil than it does with Botswana or Bangladesh. The interaction perspective then suggests that greater interaction leads to a greater likelihood of conflict between states, much like Richardson's (1960) observation that people are more likely to be killed by close family members (with whom they interact frequently) than by complete strangers.

Empirical Patterns

Recent research has tested propositions drawn from each of the three general theoretical perspectives. I now consider the empirical evidence that supports each perspective, beginning with general patterns before addressing more specific tests of the proximity, interactions, and territoriality perspectives. I then supplement this evidence with a series of original analyses and consider the relative support for all three perspectives.

Geography and the Frequency of Militarized Conflict

The contention that geography is related to militarized conflict and war is intuitively appealing, and appears to fit with a quick reading of recent history. Many recent crises and wars appear to possess a territorial component of one type or another. Examples range from fighting between Croatians, Serbs, and Muslims over land in the former Yugoslavia to conflicts over the Golan Heights, Kashmir, and the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands. Even crises and wars that lack a systematic territorial component frequently appear to involve neighbors. Systematic research on militarized conflict supports this preliminary impression about the importance of geography.

One important pattern relating geography to conflict concerns the frequency of conflict and war between neighboring states. The proximity approach suggests that the vast majority of all interstate conflict should occur between proximate neighbors, as does the interactions approach (at least to the extent that neighbors interact more frequently than more distant states). Although the occurrence of conflict between contiguous states does not necessarily indicate the presence of a territorial dispute, conflict between neighbors is also generally consistent with a territorial explanation for war. As Vasquez (1993: 134) notes, neighbors are more apt to have concerns about each other's territorial ambitions than are other pairs of states, so a clustering of conflict between neighbors would not be inconsistent with a territorial explanation.

[Table 5.1 about here]

Table 5.1 examines the contiguity of participants in militarized interstate disputes and interstate wars. Militarized interstate disputes are interactions between nation-states involving the explicit threat, display, or use of militarized force (Jones, et al., 1996); full-scale wars are militarized disputes that escalate to the point of sustained combat between regular armed forces and result in at least one thousand battle deaths. Over half of all militarized disputes between 1816-1992 and two-thirds of all full-scale interstate wars in this period began between at least two contiguous adversaries, where contiguity is measured by the existence of a direct land or river border between two states. [2] Importantly, these figures have not decreased over time, as improvements in communications or transportation technology have been bringing distant lands closer together. Over half of all militarized disputes and almost every full-scale war in the 1945-1992 period began between at least one pair of contiguous adversaries, representing a noticeable increase from the previous period.[3] Contiguous states thus account for the majority of all interstate conflict, and this pattern actually appears to be strengthening over time.

Another important pattern is the frequency of territorial disagreements in world politics. Conflict between contiguous states may or may not indicate the presence of a territorial dispute, but disagreements over territory offer more direct evidence in support of a territorial explanation for conflict and war. Several recent studies have compiled information on the prevalence of territorial claims in the modern era. Kocs (1995) identifies 41 territorial disputes between contiguous adversaries during the 1945-1987 period, while Huth (1996a) identifies 129 territorial claims that were active between 1950-1990 (some of which involve noncontiguous adversaries). Focusing on a longer time period but a more limited geographic domain, Hensel (1999) finds competing claims to 71 distinct pieces of territory in the Western Hemisphere (North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean) between 1816-1996. It seems clear, then, that territorial disagreements have been common in the modern interstate system.

[Table 5.2 about here]

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2. This table records the contiguity of the initial participants in each dispute or war, or those actors on each side that were involved from the day the dispute or war began. If all dispute or war participants are included, rather than just those who were involved from the very beginning, there is almost no change for militarized disputes, while up to ten percent more wars involve contiguous adversaries. Table 5.1 focuses on the initial participants rather than all participants to avoid inflating the resulting figures by including dispute or war joiners, who may have entered the conflict much later for very different reasons than the initial participants (ranging from the spread of fighting across the border into neighboring states to the pursuit of political or financial gain, as with many Latin American states becoming involved in World War II or the Gulf War).

3. The two exceptions involve the Falkland/Malvinas war between Argentina and Great Britain and the Vietnam war, which is coded in the militarized dispute data set as beginning with an incident between North Vietnam and the United States (and soon spreading to involve many other countries, including contiguous South Vietnam). It may be argued that Table 5.1 overstates the true relationship because an individual dispute or war may involve numerous participants, not all of whom are contiguous. When all participants are considered, a total of 40.5 percent of all dispute participants and 29.2 percent of all war participants share contiguous borders, indicating that many dispute/war joiners are major powers or other distant actors that do not share common borders with the initial participants.

These dozens of territorial claims have produced a great deal of militarized conflict. Table 5.2 illustrates the frequency of territorial issues in the militarized disputes and wars examined in Table 5.1, as well as in an alternative list of wars compiled by Holsti (1991). Over one-fourth of all militarized disputes involve explicit contention over territorial issues, with the remainder involving such non-territorial issues as the composition of governments or disagreements over specific governmental policies. Territorial issues are even more prominent in more severe forms of conflict, with over half of all wars in both the COW and Holsti lists involving explicit contention over territory.[4] This close connection between territorial issues and conflict severity is supported by Kocs (1995), who finds that contiguous dyads with an unresolved territorial claim were more than forty times more likely than other dyads to go to war during the 1945-1987 period.

Focusing on changing trends over time, Luard (1986) and Holsti (1991) suggest that -- especially since 1945 -- territory is becoming less prominent as an issue leading to conflict or war. Table 5.2 reveals that the proportion of militarized disputes involving contention over territory has not changed significantly over time, with a barely perceptible decline from 30.1 percent of all disputes between 1816-1945 to 27.7 percent since 1945. Holsti's list of wars shows a noticeable decrease in territorial issues since 1945, from 56 percent to 45 percent, but the COW war list shows an increase from 53 percent to over 58 percent over this period.[5] Even where there has been a decline, then, territory still accounts for nearly half of all wars in Holsti's list and almost as many militarized disputes as in earlier times. Territorial issues have thus been prominent as a source of interstate conflict and war, both over past centuries and in the post-World War II period.

Based on these first two tables, it appears that both the proximity/interactions and territoriality perspectives contribute to our understanding of conflict processes. Over half of all disputes begin between neighbors and over one-fourth involve territorial issues, while both contiguity and territory are involved in over half of all full-scale wars. These results tell us little directly about the interactions perspective, but given that perspective's close relationship to the

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4. As with Table 5.1, this table focuses on the issues at stake for the initial participants in each dispute or war. The Holsti results are produced by combining Holsti's issue types of "territory," "strategic territory," and "territory (boundary)"; Vasquez (1993) notes that adding territoriality-related issues to these explicitly territorial issues increases the proportion of wars involving territory to as high as 93 percent.

5. It is worth noting that Holsti's list of wars includes a number of cases that are not generally considered full-scale wars between nation-states. His 1945-1989 list thus includes a number of internal conflicts, which would be coded as involving "national liberation / state creation," "maintain integrity of empire," or "state/nation survival" rather than territory. This list also includes a number of lower-level conflicts such as the 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada and the 1983 U.S. involvement in Lebanon, which are technically militarized disputes rather than interstate wars. The apparent decline in territorial issues over this time period, then, may reflect the types of cases that are included in his list rather than a declining importance of territory as a source of war.

proximity argument, these results are certainly consistent with the expectation that most conflict occurs between actors with frequent interaction.

It may be noted that more militarized disputes and wars in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 involve contiguous adversaries than involve territorial issues, which might be used to suggest that the proximity and/or interactions approaches are more useful than the territoriality perspective. The difference is much less for the most severe categories of conflict, though, as both contiguity and territory have been involved in over half of all full-scale interstate wars. Also, this difference is not especially surprising because of the range of possible issues that might lead to conflict. Both contiguous adversaries and states involved in an ongoing territorial claim can easily become involved in disputes over non-territorial issues; Holsti (1991) lists over twenty specific issue types, only three of which are explicitly territorial in nature.

Tests of the Proximity and Interactions Perspectives

Several variants of the proximity and interactions perspectives are tested empirically in the academic literature. The simplest version suggests simply that the existence of a border matters -- i.e., that states sharing a common border are more conflictual than states lacking such a border. A more advanced version of this perspective treats the role of proximity as more continuous in nature than the simple dichotomy of whether or not two states are contiguous. This more advanced perspective focuses attention on such factors as the distance and terrain separating two states, in order to develop a more accurate indicator of the proximity between them.

As indicated by Table 5.1, the majority of interstate conflict has occurred between contiguous adversaries. Further evidence on the relationship between contiguity and the outbreak of conflict comes from Bremer (1992), who tests hypotheses on seven explanations for war. Of these seven explanations, contiguity produces the strongest effect, increasing the probability of war by over 35 times -- more than such common explanations as alliances, major power status, and relative capabilities. After examining the available empirical evidence on "who fights whom, when, where, and why," Bremer (herein) concludes that most states that fight are neighbors. Bremer (1992) even goes so far as to recommend that contiguity should be included in almost all empirical studies of war, at least as a control variable.

Contiguity has also been shown to have strong effects on militarized dispute escalation. Diehl (1985) finds that the probability of dispute escalation to full-scale war is much greater for dyads in which at least one of the states is contiguous to the site of the dispute. Only one of 54 non-contiguous dyads in his study escalated to war, compared to twelve of fifty contiguous dyads -- and twelve of the thirteen wars in the study began in a site that was contiguous to one or both original adversaries. Similarly, Gochman (1990) finds that the proportion of militarized

disputes involving contiguous adversaries is greater for more escalatory dispute levels, and Senese (1996) finds that contiguous adversaries are more likely to escalate to the point of dispute-related fatalities. Studies of war diffusion offer evidence that contiguity is an important agent of war diffusion; states bordering one of the belligerents in an ongoing war are more likely to join the war than other states (Starr and Most, 1978; Siverson and Starr, 1990).

Several studies have also employed more precise measures of proximity than the simple dichotomy of whether or not two states share a common border. Diehl (1985: 1208), for example, called for a more precise indicator of proximity, because "it is probably inaccurate to aggregate all forms of noncontiguity together, implying that a site 100 miles away is as inaccessible as one ten or twenty times that far." Where such indicators have been employed, the results have been promising. Gleditsch and Singer (1975) and Garnham (1976), for example, find that states that fight wars tend to be closer to each other geographically than other states.

Similarly, Bueno de Mesquita (1981: 166) finds that greater distances preclude many states from initiating military conflict unless they have substantial capabilities. Major powers initiate 89 percent of the "long-distance wars" in Bueno de Mesquita's study, as compared to only 40 percent of the "neighborhood wars." Lemke (1995) also finds that "relevant" dyads in which both states can reach each other militarily (based on distance, terrain, and technology) have been much more likely to become involved in militarized disputes or wars than other dyads in the same region.[6]

In short, numerous studies offer evidence that is consistent with the proximity and interactions explanations, although most of this evidence involves simple contiguity rather than more sophisticated measures of interaction or proximity. Contiguous states are more dispute- and war-prone than more distant states, and they are more likely to escalate their confrontations. Unfortunately, these existing tests have been unable to distinguish between the proximity and interaction perspectives. It is unclear whether contiguity (or total geographic distance) is important because it leads to greater interactions, because it offers greater opportunities for reaching an adversary militarily, or for some other reason; Bremer (herein) suggests that the impact of proximity probably reflects both enhanced opportunities to fight and increased willingness to fight.

Despite some favorable evidence, though, there is reason to question the value of the proximity and interaction perspectives as primary explanations for militarized conflict. As Vasquez (1995) notes, proximity is basically a constant; countries rarely move closer together or

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6. Lemke's original 1995 article deals with Latin America; more recent studies by the same author have produced similar results for Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

farther apart over time.[7] As a result, the proximity explanation faces difficulties in accounting for the outbreak of rare events such as conflict and war, since a constant independent variable can not account for fluctuations in a dependent variable. Proximity may be a necessary condition for war, at least in the trivial sense that states must be able to reach each other before they can fight, but it does not seem to be a satisfactory cause war in and of itself.[8]

Also, the interaction-based perspective encounters difficulties in explaining why increased interactions should necessarily lead to greater conflict between states (Vasquez, 1995). A substantial literature by scholars such as Karl Deutsch suggests that greater levels of communication and transactions can contribute to cooperation and peace instead of war. Alternatively, states with greater levels of conflict and hostility would seem likely to reduce their interactions as their conflict levels increase, which would contribute to a weakening or reversal of the interactions-conflict linkage.

Another problem with both the proximity and interaction explanations involves their implications for temporal trends in conflict behavior. If the primary reason for a linkage between geography and conflict were simply that geography limits states' capacities to project their political and military strength abroad, then we would expect that these limitations would decrease with improvements in military and transportation technology. Similarly, we might expect that interactions between more distant states should increase with improving technology, as the states are better able to communicate, trade, and otherwise interact with each other than in previous eras. Yet (as noted earlier) time has not weakened the impact of contiguity on conflict. Even with the notable advances in transportation and military technology over the past several centuries, neighboring states still fight each other much more often than do more distant states. As Vasquez (1995) notes, this continued importance of proximity despite technological advances raises serious doubts about the value of the proximity and interaction perspectives.[9]

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7. Change in proximity is possible – albeit rare -- with the acquisition or loss of territory due to military conquest or to the acquisition of colonies or foreign military bases. For example, Ecuador and Brazil shared a border in the nineteenth century, although a series of diplomatic and military developments left Peruvian and Colombian territory between their current borders.

8. Similar charges could be leveled against the territorial perspective, on the grounds that territorial claims often last for many decades. Yet most territorial claims are eventually resolved, offering comparisons of interactions during and after the claim, and many claims also fluctuate over time as the adversaries resolve the ownership of portions of the claimed territory en route to a comprehensive final settlement.

9. This continued importance of contiguity may also be due to the composition of the interstate system. Most of the newly independent states since 1945 (the period during which the highest proportion of disputes and wars involved contiguous states) have been developing states, which typically lack the funding or technology to monitor and respond to events far beyond their own borders. Regardless of the overall state of communications and transportation technology, then, it is not surprising that such newly independent states continue to limit their conflictual interactions to nearby states. Such states are also likely to face substantial problems with unsettled borders, as their former colonial powers often established borders that are seen as illegitimate after independence or left borders undetermined. The increase in contiguous conflict since 1945 may reflect the influence of the territorial perspective as well as the proximity or interactions perspectives, then, although it is not clear that the proportion of conflict involving territorial issues has consistently increased since World War II.

Tests of the Territoriality Perspective

Several studies have identified substantial differences in conflict behavior over different types of issues. Militarized disputes involving territorial issues are much more likely than other disputes to lead to a militarized response by the target state (Hensel and Diehl, 1994; Hensel, 1996b). Senese (1996) finds that disputes over territorial issues typically produce a greater number of fatalities than disputes over other issues. Crises involving "vital issues" (issues of territory or national independence) typically reach higher levels of escalation than do crises over less salient issues (Gochman and Leng, 1983). Similarly, militarized disputes over territorial issues are more likely to escalate to full-scale war (Hensel, 1996b), even when controlling for the effects of dyadic power status, time period, and rivalry (Vasquez and Henehan, 1999). These results indicate that decision-makers are much more willing to risk dispute escalation in order to protect their interests on issues of high salience than when less salient issues are at stake. Territory thus appears to be seen by leaders as highly salient, justifying the risks of escalation in order to protect or advance one's interests much more than other types of issues. Even if threats over less salient issues can safely be ignored, the salience of territory seems to be great enough that a challenge over territorial issues is almost always met with a militarized response (with a corresponding increase in the probability of full-scale war).

Beyond dispute escalation, Hensel (1994, 1996a, 1996b) finds that confrontations over territorial issues are typically more likely to lead to recurrent conflict than confrontations over other issues. Regardless of the type of issues involved, over half of all militarized disputes are followed by another dispute between the same adversaries within fifteen years. Nonetheless, the issues at stake in a confrontation also make a substantial difference in the likelihood of recurrent conflict. When territorial issues are at stake, nearly three-fourths of all disputes are followed quickly by another dispute, and the statistical odds of a recurrent dispute are nearly twice as great for disputes involving territorial issues (Hensel, 1996b). Furthermore, the next militarized dispute between the adversaries tends to happen sooner after a dispute over territorial issues than after a non-territorial dispute, with territorial issues producing almost two years less "stability" before the outbreak of the next dispute than other types of issues. These effects on conflict recurrence and post-dispute stability remain strong even after controlling for the outcome of the past confrontation; disputes over territorial issues are more likely to be followed by recurrent conflict than disputes over other issues, regardless of the dispute's outcome (Hensel, 1996b).[10] Goertz and Diehl (1992) also examine the conditions under which an exchange of territory

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10. These differences are most notable after decisive outcomes and stalemates, with much smaller effects after compromise outcomes -- although the direction of the effect remains the same for all three outcome types, with territorial issues increasing the likelihood of recurrence.

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between states is most likely to lead to recurrent conflict between the same adversaries. They find that future conflict is most likely when the territory is more valuable, particularly when the losing side is stronger than the gaining side militarily and when the exchanged territory involves homeland instead of colonial territory for the losing side.

Several recent studies have focused more explicitly on the dynamics of territorial claims, going well beyond the focus on militarized conflict that has characterized most research on territorial issues. Regarding the initial development of active territorial claims, Huth (1996a) finds that a border is more likely to be subjected to an active territorial claim when the territory in question has a strategic location, high economic value, or shared ethnic or linguistic groups along the border, and less likely when a prior border agreement has been signed to settle the border. Focusing on the participants as well as geographic characteristics of the border itself, a claim is more likely to be raised when there is a prior unresolved dispute for the potential challenger state or a prior loss of territory by the challenger, and less likely to be raised when the challenger had previously gained territory.

Focusing on militarized conflict within territorial claims, Huth (1996a) finds that the level of conflict over an ongoing territorial claim is increased by a number of claim characteristics associated with issue salience. In particular, militarized conflict appears to be more likely in the presence of ties to a bordering minority, the presence of shared ethnic or linguistic groups along the border, a stalemate in negotiations, or an attempt by the target state to change the status quo (among other factors).[11] Similarly, Hensel (1999) finds that claim salience increases the likelihood of militarized conflict, along with a longer history of militarized conflict and of unsuccessful peaceful attempts to settle the underlying territorial claim.

The literature on territorial claims recognizes that military action is only one way to settle two states' contentious issues, and has begun to study non-military options as well. Hensel (1999), for example, finds that the likelihood of bilateral negotiations over a territorial claim is greatest when the claimed territory is highly salient and when past settlement attempts have been unsuccessful, although the likelihood decreases when the claim involves an island rather than mainland territory. Non-binding third party settlement attempts are most likely when the territory is highly salient, recent settlement attempts have been unsuccessful, and the two parties are fighting or have recently fought a full-scale war, and less likely when a history of successful settlement attempts suggests that third party assistance is not needed. Binding third party arbitration or adjudication is somewhat less likely when the claimed territory is highly salient, consistent with the expectation that third parties are unlikely to be trusted on matters of vital national interest, and somewhat more likely when there is a longer history of recent militarized

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11. Similar variables are found to increase the likelihood that a territorial claim will give rise to an enduring rivalry, including the strategic value of territory and the existence of ethnic minorities in the border area (Huth, 1996b).

conflict over the territory. Similarly, Simmons (1999) finds that a history of unratified border treaties increases the likelihood of agreement on the submission of a claim to binding arbitration or adjudication.

Finally, several studies consider the ending of territorial claims. Nearly half of Huth's (1996a) territorial claims continued throughout the 1950-1990 period of study, indicating that such disputes can be very difficult to resolve (whether or not they lead to militarized conflict). Huth (1996a) finds the prospects for peaceful resolution of territorial claims in a given year to be increased by the economic value of the territory under dispute and by a past defeat for the challenger (among other non-territorial factors). Peaceful resolution appears to be less likely when the claimed territory has strategic value, bordering minority ties, or shared ethnic or linguistic groups along the border, when the target state attempts to change the status quo, and when there is a prior history of militarized conflict.

Recent research on the territorial perspective thus indicates that states contending over territorial issues appear to behave quite differently from states that have settled their territorial issues or that have never disagreed over territory. Table 5.2 indicates that territorial issues do not give rise to the majority of militarized confrontations between states. Yet research on conflict recurrence and on the dynamics of territorial claims suggests that disagreement over territory greatly increases the probability of militarized conflict at any given point in time, relative to states lacking territorial issues. Additionally, while as few as one-fourth of all confrontations involve territorial issues, these confrontations are much more likely to escalate to dangerous levels than the typical dispute over non-territorial issues. While territory does not come close to accounting for all militarized conflict, then, contention over territory exerts a strong influence on interactions once conflict has begun.

Comparing the Perspectives

The evidence reviewed thus far has generally addressed the three theoretical perspectives separately. I now evaluate the comparative support for each perspective, drawing from several studies with analyses that address at least two of the three perspectives. After reviewing these results, I offer several original empirical analyses to clarify the value of each perspective and to increase our overall understanding of the role of territorial disputes in interstate conflict and war.

Gibler (1996) classifies interstate alliances into several categories, including the territorial settlement treaty in which states "have either exchanged territory or have agreed to the status quo settlement of territory and have then cemented their new relationship with the signing of an alliance" (Gibler 1996: 77-78). Of the 27 territorial settlement treaties since 1815, only four have been followed by future war involving an ally, which is much lower than the probability of war for other types of alliances. As Gibler (1996: 87) notes, this finding offers support for the

territoriality perspective, because it involves a change in conflict levels that follows a change in the territorial issue with no corresponding change in levels of proximity or interactions.

Another relevant finding comes from Vasquez (1996), who examines the escalation of disputes to war within enduring rivalries. In general, rivals go to war under two patterns: rivals that contend over territorial stakes tend to engage in dyadic wars, while rivals that contend over other stakes tend to join ongoing multilateral wars (or avoid war entirely). As Vasquez (1996: 555-556) notes, these findings are consistent with the territorial perspective. Furthermore, in order to evaluate the likely response from the proximity perspective that these wars between rivals arose out of contiguity, Vasquez notes that each of these dyadic wars between rivals involves a dispute over territorial issues. Even if the rivals experienced high levels of interaction and high opportunities for conflict due to their contiguity, then, they were also contending over territorial issues -- thereby supporting the territorial explanation.

[Table 5.3 about here]

Tables 5.3 through 5.6 offer further insight into the effects of territorial issues and contiguity through original empirical analyses. Table 5.3 illustrates the overlap between contiguity and territorial issues in militarized interstate disputes, breaking down each dispute into pairs of participants (dyads) to obtain the clearest illustration of conflict patterns in multiparty disputes that may involve many different adversaries.[12] Roughly half of the dyadic disputes in Table 5.3 (1532 of 3045 disputes, or 50.3 percent) involve neither contiguity nor territorial issues. Of the remaining cases, 495 (16.3 percent) involve both contiguity and territorial issues, 718 involve contiguous states contending over non-territorial issues, and 300 involve territorial issues between non-contiguous states. Both contiguous and non-contiguous adversaries thus contend over territory, with two-fifths of all contiguous disputes (495 of 1213, or 40.8 percent), and less than one-fifth of noncontiguous disputes (300 of 1830, or 16.4 percent) involving territorial issues. While most militarized disputes over territory involve contiguous adversaries, then, a large number do not. Because there are numerous cases where contiguity and issue type do not overlap, the militarized dispute data set allows for an especially useful comparison of the effects of territory and contiguity on conflict behavior.

[Table 5.4 about here]

Table 5.4 examines the impact of both contiguity and territorial issues on dispute severity, measured by whether or not the dispute led to one or more dispute-related fatalities. The occurrence of fatalities represents an important threshold in interstate conflict, creating tangible losses from a dispute that are easily recognized by public opinion and that can limit a leader's flexibility in subsequent policy choices. Table 5.4 separates the militarized dispute data by the

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12. Version 2.10 of the COW dispute data set (Jones, et al., 1996) is used, broken down dyadically following procedures described by Hensel (1996b).

contiguity status of the disputants, in order to compare the effects of territorial issues in disputes between contiguous and noncontiguous adversaries.[13] The proximity and interactions explanations for war would suggest that the issue type in a given dispute should have little impact, with disputes between contiguous adversaries generally being much more severe than disputes between more distant adversaries. In contrast, the territoriality explanation would suggest that the issue type should have a great impact on escalation in both contiguous and noncontiguous disputes, with territorial issues producing greater escalation regardless of the proximity of the adversaries.

The results presented in Table 5.4 offer greater support for the territoriality perspective than for the proximity and interactions perspectives. Both contiguous and noncontiguous adversaries experience greater levels of escalation (i.e., a higher probability of fatalities in the dispute) when territorial issues are at stake than when only non-territorial issues are at stake. Disputes between noncontiguous adversaries lead to fatalities around one-fourth of the time overall, including 52 percent of the time when territorial issues are at stake and only 24 percent of the time when nonterritorial issues are at stake. Similarly, disputes between contiguous adversaries lead to fatalities around one-third of the time overall, including 42 percent of all disputes over territorial issues and only 26 percent of all disputes over nonterritorial issues. In both analyses, contention over territorial issues significantly increases the likelihood of fatalities relative to contention over other types of issues (p < .001).[14] Regardless of the contiguity of the disputants, then, contention over territorial issues greatly increases the likelihood of dispute escalation to the level of fatalities.[15] Indeed, the impact of territorial issues appears to be even greater in noncontiguous disputes than in disputes between contiguous adversaries. Contention over territorial issues doubles the statistical odds of fatalities in disputes between contiguous adversaries (as indicated by the odds ratio of 2.00), and more than triples the statistical odds of fatalities in noncontiguous disputes (odds ratio = 3.48).[16] This finding is consistent with the

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13. The cases included in Tables 2 and 3 do not sum to 3045 (the total number of cases in Table 1) because of missing data on dispute fatalities for some participants.
14. The X^2 values and p-values in Tables 5.4 and 5.5 measure the statistical significance of the relationship between an independent variable (contention over territorial issues) and a dependent variable (fatalities in a militarized dispute). Higher X^2 values and lower p-values indicate greater statistical significance, or a lower probability that the distribution of cases in the table could have been obtained by chance if the variables are actually statistically independent (Reynolds, 1984).
15. Similar results are produced using alternative indicators of dispute escalation, including the likelihood of a militarized response by the target and the likelihood of escalation to full-scale war. In each case, the likelihood of escalation is much greater for territorial than nonterritorial issues regardless of the contiguity status of the adversaries.
16. The odds ratio is used to measure the substantive, rather than statistical, significance of a table. This number gives the ratio of the statistical odds of a value of the dependent variable (in this case the occurrence of fatalities in a dispute) given the value of the independent variable (Reynolds, 1984). Odds ratio values of greater than 1.0 in Tables 5.4 and 5.5 indicate how much greater are the odds of fatalities in disputes that involve territorial issues than

results of Senese (1996), whose multivariate analyses reveal that contention over territorial issues appears to have a stronger effect on conflict severity than does contiguity.

[Table 5.5 about here]

Table 5.5 offers an additional perspective on the importance of territorial issues, by examining the conflict behavior of states involved in ongoing territorial claims. The earlier tables have examined the conflict behavior of all dyads in the interstate system that have been involved in militarized conflict over any issue. Table 5.5 allows us to examine whether the impact of territorial issues on conflict behavior is limited to disputes over territorial issues, or whether two states' competition over territory spills over to other dimensions of their relationship. If states involved in territorial claims exhibit substantial differences in conflict behavior in disputes over territorial versus non-territorial issues, then we can gain greater confidence in the territorial explanation. That is, regardless of any other characteristics or attributes that might be expected to affect conflict behavior (such as proximity or interactions between them), the issues at stake in a given confrontation would be found to change conflict behavior relative to other confrontations between the same adversaries. Alternatively, if there is little or no difference in conflict behavior between disputes over territorial and non-territorial issues involving the same adversaries, then the results would be less straightforward. We might conclude from the territorial perspective that something about the territorial claim spills over to affect relations between the same states over different issues as well, if both territorial and non-territorial disputes are much more severe than disputes between states not involved in a territorial claim. We might also conclude that some additional factor besides the specific issue(s) under dispute -- perhaps proximity or interactions -- shapes the conflict behavior of states, while the issues themselves make little difference.

Table 5.5 examines the dispute severity of all militarized disputes that occurred during territorial claims between 1950-1990, as identified by Huth (1996a). Slightly over half of these disputes (274 of 519, or 52.8 percent) involve territorial issues, while the remaining 245 remain limited to other issue types. As this table reveals, states involved in a territorial claim are much more likely to escalate to the level of fatalities in disputes over territorial issues than in disputes over non-territorial issues (p < .001, odds ratio = 2.10). Closer analysis of the data (not presented in this table) reveals that disputes between states not involved in a territorial claim reach the level of fatalities around one-fourth of the time (26.2 percent) over the 1950-1990 period covered by Huth's territorial claim data. This figure is statistically indistinguishable from the results in Table 5.4 for non-territorial disputes, 24 to 26 percent of which reach the level of fatalities. Because there is no noticeable difference between these non-territorial disputes and disputes between adversaries not involved in territorial claims, there is good reason to doubt that some additional

in non-territorial disputes; a value of 2.0 indicates that the odds of fatalities are twice as great when territorial issues are at stake.

factor accounts for the greater overall escalation of disputes within territorial claims.[17] If proximity, interactions, or some other factor accounted for the conflict behavior of states in a territorial claim, then we should expect that these same states would behave similarly in disputes over any issues, territorial or otherwise. The most important distinction between territorial claim dyads and other types of adversaries thus appears to lie in their contention over territorial issues.

A final analysis examines the ways that states involved in territorial claims attempt to manage or settle their claims, and focuses on the salience of the territorial issues at stake. The discussion and analyses so far have emphasized militarized conflict and have treated all territorial issues as equally salient. Because the territorial perspective suggests that issue salience is an important influence on behavior, though, it would be desirable to examine salience in greater detail than is possible with a simply dichotomy between "territorial" and "other" issues. Additionally, most theoretical discussions of the territorial perspective (e.g., Vasquez, 1993; Hensel, 1999) see militarized conflict as only one of the possible techniques available to states for managing or settling their issues. Table 5.6 examines the techniques that have been used to settle claims to territory in the Western Hemisphere from 1816-1996, using data drawn from the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) project (Hensel, 1999). The options available to states include bilateral negotiations between the claimants, talks with non-binding third party assistance (good offices, inquiry, conciliation, or mediation), submission of the claim to a binding third party decision (arbitration or adjudication), and the unilateral initiation of militarized conflict.[18] Claim salience is determined by the characteristics of the claimed territory, focusing on four specific indicators: the presence of valuable resources and permanent population centers in the territory, as well as explicit ethnic or religious bases for the claim. For the purposes of Table 5.6, a given claim is considered to take on low salience when none of these four indicators is present, moderate salience when only one is present, and high salience when two or more are present.[19]

[Table 5.6 about here]

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17. Roughly one-third of all disputes within territorial claims (176 of 518 of the cases in Table 4, or 34.0 percent) lead to fatalities, compared to 26.1 percent of disputes outside of territorial claims over the 1950-1990 period covered by Huth's data. This difference is statistically significant ($X2 = 9.89$, 1 d.f., $p < .002$), and the statistical odds of fatalities are roughly one and one-half times as great for disputes occurring in the context of a territorial claim (odds ratio = 1.46).

18. All ICOW project codebooks, papers, and publicly released data sets are available on the World Wide Web at <http://garnet.acns.fsu.edu/~phensel/icow.html>. Militarized conflict is identified as COW militarized disputes involving territorial issues, as reported in the earlier tables; all other settlement attempts are identified by the ICOW data set on attempted settlements of territorial claims in the Western Hemisphere.

19. Ethnic and religious bases have not been involved in any of the modern Western Hemisphere territorial claims used in this table, limiting the value of two of these indicators of claim salience. Virtually identical results are found using a preliminary version of the ICOW data on European territorial claims (some of which include explicit ethnic or religious dimensions), though, suggesting that this simple measure of claim salience appears to function quite well across different regions.

Table 5.6 indicates that bilateral negotiations have been the most common form of action taken over territorial claims, regardless of the salience of the particular claimed territory. Over half of all settlement attempts (51.8 percent) involve bilateral negotiations between the claimants, ranging from 45.9 percent of all settlement attempts for high-salience claims to 66.1 percent of all attempts for low-salience claims. Militarized conflict is the second most common type of settlement attempt, accounting for over one-fourth of all settlement attempts overall and ranging from 16.5 percent for low-salience claims to over one-third for high-salience claims. Non-binding third party settlement attempts are the next most common type, ranging from thirteen to nearly twenty percent of all attempts, and binding third party settlement attempts account for less than six percent of all attempts in each category.

The results presented in Table 5.6 suggest several important conclusions about attempts to manage or settle territorial claims. First, despite the emphasis on militarized conflict in existing research on territorial issues in world politics, militarized conflict accounts for no more than one-third of all settlement attempts in any category of claim salience. Bilateral negotiations are more common than militarized disputes in each salience category, and the two types of third party settlement attempts together are at least as frequent as militarized action for claims with low and moderate salience; it is only for high-salience claims that militarized conflict surpasses the two types of third party action and approaches bilateral negotiations in frequency. The recent emphasis on militarized action over territorial issues, then, appears to overlook most actions that are taken to settle such issues.

Also, it seems clear that the salience of the specific territory at stake affects the actions that are taken to resolve a given claim. Militarized conflict over territorial issues is much more common in claims involving high-salience territory, accounting for one-third of all settlement attempts as compared to one-sixth of all attempts involving low-salience territory. Bilateral negotiations account for a lower proportion of all settlement attempts in claims to high-salience territory, with 45.9 percent of all attempts as compared to 66.1 and 54.1 percent in claims to low- or moderate-salience claims. It should be noted that only sixteen of the seventy-one claims in the Western Hemisphere involve high-salience territory, while thirty-six involve moderate salience and nineteen involve territory of only low salience. When the number of claims of each type is considered, each type of settlement attempt is much more likely in high-salience claims, indicating that low-salience claims are likely to lead to little interaction of any type while higher-salience claims attract much greater attention. Based on the totals in Table 5.6, each of the sixteen high-salience claims has generated twelve rounds of bilateral negotiations, nine militarized disputes involving territorial issues, and almost five third-party settlement attempts (most of which involve non-binding mechanisms).

Summary

After reviewing three prominent explanations for the territory-conflict relationship and examining the empirical evidence behind each one, the preceding review of recent research and the original analyses presented herein suggest that each explanation has some explanatory power. Contiguous adversaries are more conflict-prone than more distant states, for example, which helps to support both the interactions and proximity explanations. A considerable body of recent evidence now supports the territorial explanation as well, with conflict over territorial issues tending to be more escalatory and more likely to lead to recurrent conflict, and with more salient territorial issues appearing to strengthen this effect.

To the extent that the evidence favors one explanation over the others, the territorial explanation appears to be strongest. In particular, as Hensel (1996b) notes and the present analysis confirms, the effects of territorial issues apply for both contiguous and non-contiguous adversaries, which suggests that territoriality is especially important. Thus, noncontiguous states that contend over territorial issues show much more escalatory conflict behavior than noncontiguous states that contend over non-territorial issues, just as contiguous states are more escalatory when contending over territorial issues. Furthermore, even when analysis is restricted to states involved in active territorial claims, significant differences remain between individual confrontations over territorial and non-territorial issues.

We should be careful not to conclude from this evidence that proximity and interactions have no impact on conflict behavior. There is too much empirical evidence from research by Bremer, Diehl, Lemke, and others to allow the outright rejection of either model. Additionally, Tables 5.1 and 5.2 indicate that contiguous adversaries account for much more militarized conflict than territorial claims, at least for lower-level forms of conflict. It appears that states that can reach each other militarily and that interact most often account for the majority of militarized conflict, although a good fraction of this conflict involves territorial issues. Furthermore, because there have never been more than several hundred pairs of adversaries contending over territorial issues and there are literally thousands of potential adversaries lacking such issues (as well as adversaries that have already resolved their territorial issues), it appears that the likelihood of militarized conflict at any given point in time is higher for states involved in a territorial claim than for other type of states. In short, the evidence appears stronger for the territorial explanation overall, particularly in studies that allow for direct comparison of the different explanations.

Future Directions

The empirical patterns and theoretical explanations considered in this chapter suggest a number of important conclusions about interstate conflict and implications for future research. Perhaps most important, there can be little doubt that geography affects interstate conflict

behavior in systematic ways. A substantial body of empirical evidence, supported by this chapter's empirical analyses, finds a close relationship between conflict behavior and such geographic factors as contiguity and territorial issues.

I conclude with several suggestions for future research strategies to help resolve questions on the territorial and other explanations that remain unanswered (or that are only answered incompletely). Much of the research reviewed above has compared the expectations of one of the three general theoretical perspectives against the statistical null hypothesis of no systematic relationship among variables. Our understanding of the relationship between territorial disputes and conflict could be aided greatly by the direct comparison of hypotheses from one perspective with counter-hypotheses from another perspective, rather than simply comparing each hypothesis with the statistical null hypothesis. Several possible strategies may be used to design such competitive tests.

One important area in which the expectations of the different perspectives diverge is the impact of changes in the territorial issues u between two adversaries. According to the proximity and interactions perspectives, changes in conflict behavior should result primarily from changes in the level of interactions between states or from changes in the ease with which the states can reach each other militarily. According to the territoriality perspective, though, changes in the issues under contention -- such as the resolution of part or all of a territorial claim -- should be followed by changes in conflict behavior. Vasquez (1993: 147), for example, suggests that how and when two states attempt to deal with their territorial questions can have a "profound effect" on their subsequent relations, "determining the extent to which they will be basically hostile or friendly." Some evidence already suggests that changes in territorial issues produce changes in subsequent conflict behavior, as with Gibler's findings about territorial settlement treaties and Goertz and Diehl's findings about recurrent conflict after territorial changes. Vasquez (1993: 150-151), Huth (1996a: 189-192), Brams and Togman (1996), and Simmons (1999) offer additional suggestions about how territorial disputes might be resolved or managed, ranging from the de-territorialization of disputes to preventive diplomacy or intervention by external actors. Future research should examine the impact of changes in territorial issues; evidence that partial or total settlement of territorial claims reduces subsequent conflict propensities would support the territorial explanation over its proximity and interactions competitors.

Just as changes in territorial issues are only relevant to the territorial perspective as an influence on subsequent conflict behavior, other factors are only relevant to the proximity or interaction perspectives. The proximity perspective suggests that changes in the level of proximity of two states should produce changes in their conflict behavior. If one state gains territory that moves its borders closer to the other (through military conquest, the acquisition of colonies, or other means), then this perspective would suggest that the two states should be more

conflict-prone than they had been previously. If one state loses territory that moves its borders farther from the other, this perspective would suggest that the two states should become less conflict-prone. Similarly, the interaction perspective suggests that changes in two states' interaction levels should produce corresponding changes in those states' conflict patterns. Existing research has not addressed these concerns directly. Future research is urged to develop systematic measures that can capture variations in the degree of proximity and the level of interactions between states. Once such indicators are developed and collected, scholars will be able to study the relationship between changing proximity or interactions and changing levels of interstate conflict. Evidence that is found to support these basic expectations would support the proximity or interaction perspective, respectively, rather than the territorial perspective.[20]

Distinguishing between the expectations of the territorial and proximity arguments is complicated by the high correlation between contiguity and territorial issues. For example, over sixty percent of the militarized disputes over territory in Table 5.3 (495 of 795) involve contiguous adversaries, suggesting that any apparent impact of territorial issues might be attributable at least in part to contiguity. To the extent that noncontiguous states engage in territorial disputes and that contiguous states engage in nonterritorial disputes, though, future research can address the competing theoretical perspectives more directly. The results of Tables 5.4 and 5.5 suggest that territorial issues produce more severe conflict behavior than other issues for both contiguous and more distant adversaries (implying that territory is a better predictor of conflict severity than contiguity) and that states involved in territorial claims are more conflictual in disputes over territorial issues than in those over other issues (implying that territory is a better predictor than interactions, since these states presumably engage in roughly similar interactions over time). Future research is urged to investigate such distinctions further, with an emphasis on cases that are consistent with only one of the competing approaches.

Future research could also benefit greatly from more precise conceptualization and measurement of issues than has typically been used in existing research. Much of the existing research on contentious issues has employed very limited conceptions of issues, often treating all territorial issues as comparable and testing whether "all territorial issues" lead to different forms of interaction than "all other issues." Realistically, though, there is likely to be great variation both within and between issue categories. Even if "territorial" issues overall are more salient than "policy" issues, for example, there are undoubtedly some territorial issues with very low salience for decision makers and some policy issues with much higher salience. Several recent efforts

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20. There is a risk that such findings could be contaminated by the influence of territorial issues. Changes in the level of proximity between two states also may result in the development of new territorial issues or the settlement of old territorial issues. Similarly, changes in the level of interactions between two states may result from the rise of new territorial issues or from changes in the level of proximity between them. Future studies must be careful to control for changes of this type.

have measured the salience of territorial issues by characteristics of the territory at stake, such as the area and population of the territory or the presence of valuable resources or ethnic minorities along the border area (Goertz and Diehl, 1992; Huth, 1996a; Hensel, 1999). Indeed, Table 5.6 indicates that the salience of claimed territory exerts an important influence on the nature and frequency of attempts to manage or settle territorial claims. Future research on territorial issues should follow similar approaches, attempting to identify factors or characteristics that can help to distinguish between more or less salient territorial issues. It would also be desirable to collect data on additional issues besides territory. The territorial explanation for conflict begins with the assumption that states manage different types of issues differently, and that territory is a particularly salient and dangerous type of issue. The broader issues approach that is associated with this territorial explanation could be tested more effectively by collecting data on the scope and management of non-territorial issues, in order to assess the extent to which territory is treated differently from other issues that are thought to be less salient.

A final suggestion involves the need to focus on the conditions under which states are likely to initiate overt militarized conflict, regardless of their territorial issues, proximity, or other interactions. Factors such as territorial claims and geographic proximity appear to remain largely constant from year to year, barring some infrequent type of change such as a resolution of issues or a change in borders. Yet despite this general consistency over time, most territorial claims do not lead to overt militarized conflict in most years, and most contiguous adversaries are not at war most of the time. Huth (1996a: 106), for example, finds that the territorial claims in his study remain limited to minimal or no diplomatic or political conflict in over half of the years examined. Moderate to high levels of diplomatic and political conflict occur in roughly one-third of the years in his study, while militarized confrontations occur in only eleven percent of the over three thousand years during which a territorial claim is active. Similarly, the nearly 900 (peaceful or militarized) settlement attempts in Table 5.6 are relatively rare events, averaging one attempt for each 5.5 years that a claim is active in the ICOW territorial claims data set. Additional factors would appear to be necessary to explain the year-to-year variations represented by such relatively rare events as escalating a claim to the level of militarized conflict, or negotiating over a long-running claim.

Domestic political factors appear to offer an important part of the answer to these year-to-year variations in activity related to a relatively constant territorial claim. Huth (1996a, 1996b) finds strong results when considering the impact of domestic politics on territorial claims, with domestic factors being more important than many of the traditional realist factors in his models. Further research on the domestic political context would appear to be warranted, with an emphasis on domestic factors that change from year to year and might help to capture more of the fluctuations in conflict behavior or negotiations. For example, social, political, and economic

conditions within a country would appear to be relevant to leaders' decisions regarding foreign policy endeavors. Past research has found evidence that overall conflict behavior can be influenced by yearly fluctuations in economic growth (or stagnation), electoral politics, and domestic political conflict (e.g., Russett, 1990). If such findings have been found to characterize overall conflict behavior against any foreign target, they may produce even stronger effects when considered against the background of a long-running territorial claim. When the Argentine leadership in 1982 chose a foreign target to help rally domestic political support in a time of economic and political crisis, it does not seem accidental that the particular target chosen (the Malvinas / Falkland Islands) had been the subject of a territorial claim for well over a century.

In conclusion, recent research has examined a number of possible explanations for a possible linkage between geography and conflict. There can be little doubt that geographic factors affect relations between states, particularly with respect to the initiation and escalation of militarized conflict. Territorial claims appear to be a leading source of militarized conflict and war, increasing both the likelihood that militarized conflict will be initiated and the severity levels of the resulting confrontations, as well as influencing other forms of (bilateral and multilateral) interactions between states. Geographic proximity also accounts for over half of all militarized conflict in the last two centuries, and appears to increase the likelihood of conflict severity. The impact of interactions has been more difficult to examine directly, because of the lack of appropriate data sets. To the extent that these factors have been tested comparatively, the territoriality approach has produced the strongest results, increasing conflict severity substantially even after controlling for the impact of contiguity or other measures of proximity. Future research on militarized conflict is encouraged to consider both proximity and the issues under contention, as well as to delve deeper into the interrelationship among these factors and their relative strengths and weaknesses.

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Table 5.1: Contiguity and Militarized Conflict

A. Militarized Interstate Disputes

	1816-1945	1946-1992	1816-1992
Dispute began between contiguous adversaries	346 (42.9%)	694 (56.6%)	1040 (51.1%)
No contiguous adversaries	461	533	994
Total	807	1227	2034

B. Interstate Wars

	1816-1945	1946-1992	1816-1992
War began between contiguous adversaries	31 (56.4)	22 (91.7)	53 (67.1)
No contiguous adversaries	24	2	26
Total	55	24	79

Sources: Correlates of War (COW) militarized interstate dispute data set (Jones, et al., 1996); COW contiguity data set (Gochman, 1991)

Table 5.2: Territorial Issues and Militarized Conflict

A. Militarized Interstate Disputes

	1816-1945	1946-1992	1816-1992
Dispute includes territorial issues	243 (30.1%)	340 (27.7%)	583 (28.7%)
No territorial issues	564	887	1451
Total	807	1227	2034

B. Interstate Wars (COW)

	1816-1945	1946-1992	1816-1992
War includes territorial issues	29 (52.7)	14 (58.3)	43 (54.4)
No territorial issues	26	10	36
Total	55	24	79

C. Interstate Wars (Holsti)

	1815-1941	1945-1989	1815-1989
War includes territorial issues	34 (55.7)	26 (44.8)	60 (50.4)
No territorial issues	27	32	59
Total	61	58	119

Sources: COW militarized interstate dispute data set (Jones, et al., 1996); Holsti (1991)

Table 5.3: Contiguity and Territorial Issues in Militarized Disputes, 1816-1992

Contiguous Adversaries?	Nonterritorial Issues Only	Territorial Issues at Stake	Total
No	1532	300 (16.4%)	1832
Yes	718	495 (40.8%)	1213
Total	2250	795 (26.1%)	3045

Sources: COW militarized interstate dispute data set (Jones, et al., 1996); COW contiguity data set (Gochman, 1991)

Table 5.4: Territorial Issues, Contiguity, and Dispute Fatalities, 1816-1992

A. Noncontiguous Adversaries

Territorial Issues at Stake?	No Fatalities	Fatalities in Dispute	Total
No	1088	343 (24.0%)	1431
Yes	124	136 (52.3%)	260
Total	1212	479 (28.4%)	1691

$X^2 = 87.03$ (1 d.f., $p < .001$); Odds Ratio = 3.48

B. Contiguous Adversaries

Territorial Issues at Stake?	No Fatalities	Fatalities in Dispute	Total
No	452	161 (26.3%)	613
Yes	254	181 (41.6%)	435
Total	706	342 (32.6%)	1048

$X^2 = 27.25$ (1 d.f., $p < .001$); Odds Ratio = 2.00

Sources: COW militarized interstate dispute data set (Jones, et al., 1996); COW contiguity data set (Gochman, 1991)

Table 5.5: Territorial Issues and Dispute Fatalities during Territorial Claims, 1950-1990

Territorial Issues at Stake?	No Fatalities	Fatalities in Dispute	Total
No	183	62 (25.3%)	245
Yes	160	114 (41.6%)	274
Total	343	176 (33.9%)	519

$X^2 = 15.33$ (1 d.f., $p < .001$); Odds Ratio = 2.10

Sources: COW militarized interstate dispute data set (Jones, et al., 1996); Huth (1996a)

Table 5.6: Attempts to Settle Western Hemisphere Territorial Claims, 1816-1992

Salience of Claimed Territory	Bilateral Negotiations	Third Party:		Militarized Conflict
		Non-binding	Binding	
Low Salience	76 (66.1%)	15 (13.0)	5 (4.3)	19 (16.5)
Moderate Salience	184 (54.1%)	67 (19.7)	20 (5.9)	69 (20.3)
High Salience	191 (45.9%)	66 (15.9)	11 (2.6)	148 (35.6)
Total	451 (51.8%)	148 (17.0)	36 (4.1)	236 (27.1)

Sources: Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) territorial claims data set (Hensel, 1999); COW militarized interstate dispute data set (Jones, et al., 1996)