

Information, Comittment, and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905

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The Bargaining Model of War

Assumptions:

- War is an inefficient way of settling conflicts
- Most often, a negotiated settlement is possible because both sides prefer this to fighting
- Three different paths that cause war between rational unitary actors (Fearon 1995):
 - Existence of private information with incentive to misrepresent such information
 - Commitment problems
 - Indivisible issues

Private Information

- If actors disagree about relative power than they will disagree about outcome of war
- Similar expectations about consequences of war means negotiated settlement will happen Sharing information eliminates private information problem and encourages peaceful agreement
 - Problems:
 - misrepresentation of military capabilities and resolve
 - Suspicion that adversary is misrepresenting information
- Private Info + Incentives to Misrepresent Info:
 - Increases the likelihood that the bargaining process fails

Commitment Problem

- Arises even with absence of private information
- Sources of problem shape expected bargaining power:
 - Offensive military advantages
 - Power shifts
 - Objects of dispute (e.g. territory)
- Commitment problem lowers likelihood of negotiated settlement → war
- “better-now-than-later” logic to defeat the opposition or at least limit its growth capability while in position of power

Indivisible Issues

- For negotiated settlement to be successful, both sides need to agree on a division of goods that reflect the balance of power
- Material goods can be divided but intangible goods are not
 - Goods with ideological or religious values
 - “sacred space”
- To facilitate distribution of these goods:
 - side payments, issue linkages, or rotating control of the space can help but domestic constraints are a factor

The Russo- Japanese War: Related Literature

- Only argues that a problem of information exists:
 - Disagreements about relative power
 - Repeated compromise efforts by the Japanese but Russia underestimated Japan's military
 - Fearon (1995) argues Japan had better information about Russia than Russia had on Japan
 - If Japan revealed their information it would put them in the position of weakness, reducing their likelihood of winning the war
- Doesn't talk about Russian sources that lead to the dispute over relative power
 - Russia's misconceptions based on internal factors:
 - Racial and cultural use of stereotypes and psychological bias
 - Competition between rival domestic and bureaucratic leadership

Related Literature

- Commitment problem evident in Russia's preventive logic:
 - Japanese calculated that their odds of winning would decline over time
 - Time pressure for action sooner rather than later
- Rationalist Informational path to war is incomplete
 - This argues asymmetric information leads to war
 - Source of informational problems is the incentive to misrepresent capabilities and resolve & societal ability to tolerate cost of war
 - Only explains how there is incentive to lie but not why asymmetric info causes war
 - Ignores other sources
 - Psychological, cultural, domestic, political, organizational
 - Uses private information and asymmetric info interchangeably

Theory

- By applying a modified bargaining model to the 1904–1905 Russo–Japanese War, Stretch & Levy argue that the primary causes of the war exhibit a combination of the commitment problem and preventative logic in line with Russia's rising power over Japan, in addition to problems of information growing from dispute over relative power and resolve associated with Russia's unwillingness to come to a negotiated settlement.

Non-rationalist Influences on Information Failures

- Asymmetric Info = Rational + Non-Rational Processes
 - Distorted images of the enemy created by large set of factors (cognitive, emotional, political, cultural)

Non-rational Factors

- Reliance on singular “lessons of history” → military overconfidence
 - Rejection of negotiated settlement
- “motivated biases”
 - Driven by policy interests & state of emotional well-being
 - Shape assessments of intelligence through a political & psychological mechanism
- Bureaucratic and organizational factors
 - Role of organizational autonomy and parochial interests inhibits information sharing across intelligence agencies
- Societal factors
 - Cultural attitudes shape stereotyped images of enemy and affect evaluation of an adversary’s capabilities and intentions
 - Influence on state preference

Historical Background of the War

- Russian expansion into East Asia began in mid-1800s
- Construction of Trans-Siberian Railroad in 1891
 - Increase in power through expected increase of capabilities in the Far East
- Japan
 - Belief that foreign rule of Korea would be a threat to national security
 - "line of advantage"- buffer zone needed to protect the home front and raise Japan's future power
 - Economic control of the continent (secondary concern)
- Sino-Japanese war 1894-1895
 - Treaty of Shimonoseki- Japan forced China to cede Taiwan and strategic Liaodong Peninsula (included Port Arthur in Manchuria)
 - Denounced by Russia

Historical Background of the War

- Triple Intervention of 1895: Russia, Germany, and France interject on behalf of China to have Liaodong returned to China
 - Payment to Japan for territory and Japan has to reluctantly accept
- Outcome encouraged further Russian expansion
 - Pressures China into leasing naval base at Port Arthur (securement of warm-water export)
 - Exploits boxer rebellion to gain control of Manchuria
 - Inroads to Korea
 - Training of Korean army
- April 1902 Agreement: promises to withdraw from Manchuria
 - Reneges on promises
- Japan starts several negotiations with Russia starting in 1898–1904
 - Bargaining processes fails
 - Launch of successful surprise attack on Russia's naval base on Feb. 8, 1904

Obstacles towards negotiated settlement

- Territories under dispute = high strategic value
 - Increased suspicions of exploitation of power
 - Evidence of a commitment problem
 - Pressure in Japan for “better-than-now-later” logic
 - Regional superiority over Russia Japan because railroad is yet to be complete
 - Naval build up since war with China
 - Naval strength of Japan = Russia’s naval strength
 - Time constrain to act now because recent peak cannot be sustained

Russia's Expansion

- Balance of Power increasingly shifting in Russia's favor
 - Land power
 - Faster mobilization of troops through railroad alarmed Japan
 - Buffer zone shrinking via expansion into Korea
 - Naval power
 - Russia trying to expand fleet through facilities at Port Arthur
 - Increased Japan's need to strike while their naval powers were relatively similar
 - Financial strength
 - New taxes and borrowing from the territory payments as result of the Sino-Japanese used to finance naval build-up
 - Spending high
 - Taxes causing national unrest

Negotiations

- Russia fails to follow through on evacuation commitment
- Japan agrees to protest through negotiations
 - First proposal Aug. 1903
 - Japan negotiates predominant rights in Korea without concessions and recognizes Russia's predominant rights in Manchuria
 - Russia responds by demanding that Japan would be excluded from northern Korea, whilst Russian forces occupy massive area of Manchuria
 - Japanese de-militarization in land north of 38th parallel
 - Japan rejects
 - 2nd round Oct. 30, 1903
 - Japan offers:
 - Russian sphere of influence in Manchuria
 - Japanese sphere of influence in Korea
 - 50 km neutral zone on Manchurian-Korean border
 - Additionally, Japan won't militarize any parts of Korean coastline to avoid threatening Russian ship lanes
 - Russia offers previous proposal and Japan again rejects

Negotiations

- Third round of bargaining unsuccessful
- Final round:
 - Japan again offers the settlement they initially wanted in Aug. 1903 on January 13, 1904
 - Japan basically wants Russia to stay out of Korea, respect China's territorial integrity and the rights of other powers under existing treaties, and Japan would respect Russia's special interests in Manchuria
 - Russia's failure to comply led to the decision to war

Reason for War

- Japanese perspective → Commitment Problem
 - No case for military overconfidence
 - 50/50 chance of victory
 - Belief that Japanese navy could beat Russia's navy but they would lose about half their ships as cost of war
 - Japanese power position continuing to deteriorate

Information Asymmetries

- Russian military leaders significantly underestimates Japan's ability and willingness to fight
 - Russia convinced of their military and naval superiority
 - Historical attitude of military over-confidence
 - 19th century European history experiences of war
 - Racial and cultural attitudes of superiority
 - Racial slurs and overall language of superiority against the Japanese military
 - Cultural stereotypes = misleading intelligence reports
 - Russian thinking that imperialism was a civilizing mission for Central and East Asia
 - "peaceful penetration" through economic and financial domination

Information Asymmetries

- Army's top officials ignore numerous reports from military personnel & French counterparts about Japanese capabilities
- Political factor
 - Competing factions with different policy preferences competing for influence of the Tsar
 - Domestic and bureaucratic groups had own expansionist plans but Tsar distorted flow of information to top Russian political leaders who pressured him to bypass information in formal intelligence reports
 - Domestic politics of Russia send signals to the outside world that increased Japanese suspicions of exploitative power

Role of Third Parties

- External pressure was a large factor contributing to the outbreak of war
 - Anglo-Japanese alliance
 - Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia
 - Confidence that England had secured French neutrality meaning no repeat of Triple Intervention of 1895
 - Lack of intervention
 - England did nothing to prevent the conflict
 - Encouraged Japanese to fight
 - Lack of strong US stance against Russian expansion efforts

Conclusion

- Outbreak of Russo-Japanese war as direct cause of commitment and information problems of the bargaining model
- Sources of private information, incentives to misrepresent data, psychological, societal and political factors can distort information and thus the assessment of relative capabilities and resolve
- The causal relationship is proven through a two-step model linking the explanation of sources (either rationalist or non-rationalist) to explaining the path from information asymmetries (non-rationalist) to war