Chapter 8: Power in Global Politics and the Causes of War

I. Introduction

II. The quest for power and influence

A. Power has always been central to studies of conflict
B. Hard power
C. Soft power
D. Structural power
E. Purposes of power
   1. Aggression
   2. Defense
   3. Deterrence
   4. Compellence
   5. Swaggering
F. The elements of power capabilities as a means to achieve power
   1. Capabilities are an actor’s means of achieving power
      a. Military capability
      b. Economic resources
      c. Natural resources
      d. Population
      e. Geography
   2. Intangible resources
      a. Resolve
      b. Leadership and skill
      c. Intelligence
      d. Diplomacy
G. Conclusions about power
   1. Many elements of power cannot be measured before an actor uses its capabilities
   2. Power is perceptual
   3. Power is relative
   4. Power is contextual
5. Relative power only becomes visible after it has been exerted
6. Sometimes a power relationship can only be inferred, as in deterrence

III. The causes of interstate wars

A. The individual level: human nature and psychology
1. The desire for power
   a. Classic realist arguments look to human nature and the lust for power
   b. Most classical realists view humans as egoists with an innate desire to amass power so as to dominate others
2. Innate aggression
   a. This argument views war as a product of inherent aggressiveness
   b. Aggression is an instinct necessary for the preservation of the individual and the species
3. Decision-makers and war
   a. Rational actor model (RAM)
      (1) Assumes decision-makers want to minimize losses and maximize gains
      (2) Assumes they have clearly defined preferences
      (3) Decision-makers pursue policies that achieve their preferences at the least cost
      (4) Limitations
         (a) Decision-makers never have perfect information
         (b) They operate with limited time and information
      (5) Variation: Expected utility theory
         (a) Leaders consider the consequences associated with alternative courses of action
         (b) They compare costs and benefits of alternative outcomes and consider the probability of each occurring
         (e) They will go to war when they believe the expected utility of war exceeds the expected utility of negotiation or appeasement
   b. Cognitive approach
      (1) Assesses distortions in perception owing to
ambiguities in real-life situations under conditions of stress

(2) Decision-makers cannot assimilate and interpret all the information needed to make rational decisions

(3) They see what they expect to see

(4) They assume others see the world as they do

(5) Cognitive self-delusion and misapplication of analogies explain why misperception is common in foreign policy

c. Affective models

(1) Leaders’ personal emotions distort perceptions and reduce the quality of decision-making

(a) Stress

(b) Shame and humiliation

d. Prospect theory

(1) Considers how “framing” of problems influences decision-making

(2) Leaders may take risks to achieve gains, but will be cautious to minimize losses

B. The unit level: foreign policy and war

1. Bureaucratic politics

a. Policies are the product of competition and bargaining among interest groups and government agencies

b. Bureaucracies compete for prestige, larger staffs, and budgets

c. Each agency has its own policy preferences and defines problems in ways that give it more responsibility and clout

d. Infighting and compromise among bureaucracies produce policies that do not reflect any single interest

2. Organizational politics

a. Foreign policy is a product of the coordinated effort of large national agencies

b. Each agency is responsible for some part of national policy

c. Each has its own standard operating procedures (SOPs) that influence how it responds to routine problems

3. Culture
a. War is an invention or a social institution that comes to be viewed as a legitimate way to handle certain situations
b. The only way to limit war is to replace it with a new institution to resolve disputes

4. Regime type
a. Democratic peace theory posits that democracies are more peaceful, at least in relation with one another
b. Provides two explanations for peaceful relations among democracies
   (1) Democratic norms emphasize nonviolent means of conflict resolution
   (2) Democratic institutions increase transparency and slow the decision to go to war
c. Has remained a subject of intense debate
   (1) Findings vary depending on how one defines democracy
   (2) Transitional democracies may be more aggressive and war-prone, even with other democracies
   (3) Theorists debate whether democracy is really the reason for peaceful relations

5. Economic systems and war
a. Liberalism
   (1) Believe that free-market capitalism brings peace
   (2) War is bad for business
   (3) Economic interdependence ensures prosperity is dependent upon the prosperity of others
   (4) War wastes economic resources and severs trade
b. Marxism
   (1) Anticipates global conflict as capitalism spreads
   (2) Gaps in wealth produce class conflict that will climax in revolution that will end capitalism
   (3) Foundational thinkers
      (a) John Hobson
      (b) Vladimir Lenin

6. Nationalism
a. There has been relatively little theorizing about the impact
of nationalism on war

b. Nation-states are more likely to become involved in wars when national groups pursue the recovery of lost territories

7. Public opinion
   a. The impact of public opinion on war varies
   b. It is difficult to evaluate the extent to which the public influences leaders as opposed to being influenced by them
   c. Elite-centric models view public opinion as a poor guide for foreign policy
   d. Other models suggest public opinion may set the boundaries for politically feasible policies
   e. The role of public opinion may differ in crisis and non-crisis situations

8. War as a diversion from domestic issues
   a. Leaders may provoke conflict overseas to divert public attention away from problems at home
   b. This evidence in support of this theory is mixed

C. The system level and war
   1. Neorealists emphasize the global system in explaining the outbreak of war
      a. Kenneth Waltz’s global system has three elements that impose a structure
         (1) Ordering principle
         (2) Character of the units
         (3) The distribution of power
            (a) Unipolarity
            (b) Bipolarity
            (c) Multipolarity
   2. Distribution of power
      a. Balance of power theory
         (1) Peace is likely when power is distributed so that no one actor can dominate others
         (2) Actors can balance in two ways
            (a) Internal balancing, or increasing domestic capabilities
            (b) External balancing, or alliances
b. Power transition theory
   (1) Hegemons develop extensive global commitments and shape the global order
   (2) Others accept the hegemon’s leadership because they lack the power to challenge it and benefit from it
   (3) As a hegemon’s power declines and others grow relatively stronger, hegemonic war will ensue

3. Security dilemmas and arms races
   a. Occurs when one actor unilaterally seeks to improve its security, but others perceive this action as hostile
   b. The result is an arms race
   c. The logic of the security dilemma is reflected in Rousseau’s stag–hare parable
   d. The problem of building trust is also reflected in the prisoner’s dilemma game
   e. Disarmament and arms control reduce the risk of security dilemmas in the nuclear age
      (1) Those favoring disarmament believe the weapons themselves cause war
      (2) Those advocating arms control believe that certain types of weapons are more likely to cause war
      (3) Realists tend to promote arms control rather than disarmament
      (4) Liberals favor disarmament
      (5) Constructivists see both policies as useful
   f. Achieving arms control and disarmament
      (1) Numerical limits
      (2) Restrict weapons development, testing, and deployment
      (3) Limit weapons transfers
   g. Obstacles to arms control and disarmament
      (1) Weapons serve as insurance against future conflicts
      (2) Technical hurdles
         (a) Comparing weapons
         (b) Verifying compliance

IV. The causes of intrastate war
A. Individual-level explanations
   1. Civil wars occur in rich political, economic, and historical contexts and a variety of factors reinforce the incentive for war
   2. Social identity theory
      a. Emphasizes the role of psychological processes
      b. Individuals seek to belong to groups that have positive and distinct identities

B. Unit-level explanations
   1. Ethnic hatred
      a. From this perspective, some groups have deep grievances
      b. Controversial explanation
         (1) It cannot explain long periods of peace among groups
         (2) If accurate, it is impossible to prevent future conflict
      c. Example: Serbia and Kosovo
   2. Economic explanations
      a. Loot seeking
      b. Economic gain from war
   3. Justice seeking
      a. Theory of relative deprivation
      b. People rebel when they receive less than they believe they deserve
      c. Examples: Nigeria, Sri Lanka, India
   4. Security dilemmas

C. The fallout of interstate conflict: the global level of analysis
   1. Intrastate conflicts begin as a result of interstate conflict
   2. May be a product of irredentist claims
   3. May also be a product of rivalries that lead external powers to side with different factions that become their proxies in countries in which those external powers are competing
   4. Examples: Angola, Mozambique, Namibia
   5. Syria’s civil war demonstrates how complicated foreign involvement can become

V. Managing intrastate war
   A. Foreign intervention
1. The role of third parties is complicated
2. It may intensify existing conflicts
3. Third parties may intervene to
   a. guarantee the implementation of an agreement and protect foes as they disarm
   b. provide foreign aid

B. Power sharing agreements
1. According to this model, authority must be decentralized and shared among ethnic communities
2. The most successful arrangements are federalism and consociationalism
3. Power sharing arrangements may not be sufficient to resolve conflicts
4. May create conditions for future wars of secession

C. Physical separation
1. Territorial division removes some of the immediate causes of war, including ethnic cleansing
2. If the transfer of population is forced, tensions may intensify

VI. Conclusion
A. This chapter examines one of the most important theoretical concepts in global politics: power
B. Power is difficult to define, measure, or compare
C. There are many different types of power and it has many different uses
D. The chapter also examines the causes of interstate and intrastate wars
E. This task is necessary to prescribe policies that will manage or prevent conflict