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Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman

BDM&L examine the empirical support for the independent and joint effects of key systemic variables and tie them to individual dyadic approaches, in an effort to evaluate the merits of the two approaches in terms of their ability to explain international conflict.

They first evaluate the systemic variables—the distribution of power among nations (balance of power and hegemonic approaches); the number of poles in the system (bipolar or multipolar) and the tightness of these poles (cohesiveness of the poles)[1]. Combining these 3 variables can create 8 types of systems: 1) tight, balanced, bipolar; 2) tight, balanced, multipolar; 3) tight, preponderant, bipolar; 4) tight, preponderant, multipolar 5) loose, balanced, bipolar; 6) loose, balanced, multipolar; 7) loose, preponderant, bipolar; 8) loose, preponderant, multipolar. Their investigation then assesses the impact of each as well as the combinations through three equations:

$Conflict = a + b_1 tightness + b_2 polarity + b_3 balance$ —equation 1 assesses the independent effects of each dimension.

$Conflict = a + b_1 (tightness)(polarity)(balance)$ —equation 2 combines interactively the three attributes.

$Conflict = a + b_1 tightness + b_2 polarity + b_3 balance + b_4 (tightness)(polarity)(balance) + b_5 (tightness)(polarity) + b_6 (tightness)(balance) + b_7 (polarity)(balance)$ —equation 3 accounts for the interactive as well as independent effects of the three dimensions.

BDM&L use two data sets: one where the unit of analysis is the year and the other where the unit of analysis is the conflictual event itself. They then run a probit analysis. Model 3 is the most significant and the most accurate statistical evaluation—of 97 events that did not escalate to war, 94 are correctly predicted.

BDM&L then attempt to tie in the individual level approach. They believe that the international system is the aggregate manifestation of individual actions based on individual incentives.

1. Each of these could be used to explain war or peace. For example one hypothesis is an imbalanced system tends to be peaceful and a balanced system tends to be conflictual.

They assume that—1) decision makers behave as expected utility maximizers 2) decision makers subjectively assess the expected gains and losses from either challenging or not challenging some potential adversary. They then proceed to construct a predictive model based on these assumptions with the qualification that the probability that a national leader will choose to use force against an adversary increases in a monotonic fashion with their estimates of expected utilities from challenging versus not challenging the opponent.

The conclusion is that the policies held by states, the distribution of power in the international system and the possibilities for power to be aggregated through alliances are all systemic attributes that do affect a decision maker's assessment of what is to be gained through challenging another state and the probability that it actually would be gained. However, they find no evidence that decision makers act as if they were significantly constrained by variations on the structural attributes they examine.