

21st Century Territorial Conflict: An Intricate Affair

A Comparative Case Study of 21st Century Fatal Interstate Territorial Conflict

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Introduction

Disputes over territorial claims have historically led to the deadliest interstate conflicts across the globe. Wars stemming from these disputes have occurred more frequently across history than any other cause of conflict and the presence of any territorial dispute between nations increases the probability that these nations will go to war.¹ The Post-Westphalian period (1648-1989) was particularly deadly as 4 out of every 5 wars involved a territorial dispute.² Since the end of the Cold War, there has been an evident trend away from interstate conflict that has continued into the 21st Century. There were 37 major armed conflicts in 1990 but this had lowered to 15 in 2012.³ In 1992, 30% of all nations had gone through some form of political violence while in 2010 it was 13%.⁴ In the first 10 years of the 21st Century only 2 out of 29, or 7%, of ongoing conflicts at the time were interstate conflicts. The total number of wars is the lowest in the last 6 centuries all while the number of states since World War Two have tripled.⁵ The decades following also saw a marked decrease in military fatalities.⁶

Examining the militarization of territorial claims from a historical perspective, one can see such militarization frequently leads to fatal conflict, defined here as 25 or more fatalities.⁷ However, fatal territorial conflict follows the same overall trend noted above. In the 19th Century, 22.9% of all territorial claims led to fatal conflict. This number increased to 32.8% from 1900 to 1945 and remained high at 27.3% from 1946 to 1989. Nonetheless, after the Cold War fatal territorial conflict also saw a sharp decline to 13.3%.⁸ This number is especially low considering that from 1991 to 2001 there were 45 new claims between nations.⁹ That means that only 6 of 45 led to fatal conflict.

This downward trend in conflict frequency comes at a time when the number of states has increased over the past two hundred years.¹⁰ The proportion of international disputes to the number of states has been in decline leading to a reverse correlation effect between the growing number of nations and the risk of major conflict.¹¹ Available data shows that at the end of 2001 there were over 107 ongoing territorial claims worldwide.¹² When continuing into the next decade examining 2002 to 2016 data shows that during this time there were also six fatal territorial conflicts.¹³ Given that the total number of disputes has not dropped drastically and the number of fatal disputes has remained steady there is a continuation in the overall trend away from fatal territorial conflict.

Furthermore, this has been supported by a rise in war aversion across most of the globe leading to a lack of acceptance in the idea of conquest.¹⁴ Following the trend above, the number of extensive alterations to borders through the use of force has been few and far between in the post-

¹ Hensel and Mitchell (2017), 127. Vasquez, 2004.

² Oosterveld et al, 11.

³ Tertrais, 8.

⁴ Ibid, 8.

⁵ Ibid, 9.

⁶ Harrison and Wolf, 1056.

⁷ Following the definition of Armed Conflict used by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program.

⁸ Frederick et al, 105.

⁹ Ibid, 103.

¹⁰ Oosterveld et al, 8.

¹¹ Tertrais, 11.

¹² Frederick et al, 103.

¹³ Uppsala.

¹⁴ Mueller, 306.

World War Two period when compared to all recorded history.¹⁵ This has led to the creation of what Zacher argues is a Territorial Integrity Norm which implies that taking territory by force through conquest is seen as an unacceptable means in global politics.¹⁶

However, conflict over territory remains a risk. Neighbors whose borders are not mutually accepted have a higher probability of going to war than any other dyad when all other factors are equal.¹⁷ Additionally, with technological and economic development, the capacity to fight wars or to conduct military actions has increased as the relative costs of such actions have decreased.¹⁸ Such progress has also spurred globalization which has amplified state integration as well as expanded democratically led states.

The situation presented above shows a world in which the number of states enlarged dramatically after World War Two thus creating a multitude of territorial disputes. Yet, most states have refrained from using force to act upon these claims. Deeper economic integration and expanded diplomatic tools available have incentivized states to settle claims non-violently. This is amidst an atmosphere of changing attitudes towards conflict, especially conquest, notably the presence of the Territorial Integrity Norm and Article 2 of the UN Charter. Likewise, several economic and political benefits come with settled borders while unsettled borders bring avoidable harm.¹⁹

As encouraging as this trend may be, fatal territorial conflict still occurs. Why do some states go against the trend and decide to use force? Moreover, when they do, what effect does the use of such force have on territorial claims given the changing political and normative climate? This thesis will attempt to answer these puzzles by examining the following question:

What leads to fatal interstate territorial conflict in the 21st Century (2002-2016) despite a strong trend away from fatal conflict over territory between states and how effective is fatal force?

As noted by Vasquez and Valeriano, war is multi-causal in the sense that there are different paths to war or a differing set of variables that are sufficient to bring about war.²⁰ In line with this reasoning this thesis will answer the stated question by testing the interplay of state motivations and capacities through a comparative case study. Within each case the relationship of how these factors lead to the use of force will be evaluated. It will also examine the effectiveness of such use, whether a resolution of sorts came about or the conflict remained frozen post military action. The time period was chosen because the cases occurred during a downward trend in conflict frequency.

Through the comparative case study this thesis will show that the lead up to a fatal event is complex, relying upon an intricate interaction of motives and barriers. The findings will demonstrate that such fatal actions have dubious returns thus shedding light on the overall downward trend. This does not mean that force no longer serves a purpose. Instead the analysis suggests that using force to spark new negotiations or reignite stalled ones has utility. Still, despite this limited function, the investigation points to the path of lasting resolution lying in politics, not force.

¹⁵ Mueller, 307.

¹⁶ Zacher.

¹⁷ Vasquez and Valeriano, 294-295.

¹⁸ Harrison and Wolf, 1070.

¹⁹ Simmons., Gartzke., Gibler.

²⁰ Vasquez and Valeriano, 292.

Literature Review

This thesis adds to both the academic debate regarding causation and that of border conflict decline. It does so by demonstrating that even when a state is highly motivated to act upon a dispute, and the costs of doing so are low, the benefits of such action are questionable. In doing so this thesis links these debates. The cases show evidence that while the hurdles to military action may be low enough to be overcome by internal desires, attempting to conquest or assert full control over disputed territory leads to unbeneficial or limited outcomes for the aggressor. Put simply, given the complexity of causation against the uncertain benefits of taking forceful action, it is essentially not worth it for states to do so. Consequently, it is causation itself that is contributing to the overall decline.

Toumas Forsberg highlighted the advantages of the comparative method because it did not fall susceptible to the drawbacks in the explanatory power of single cases or quantitative-focused analyses.²¹ The need for such a case-based multicausal approach is at the core of this thesis. The case study examination will be done by analyzing the interrelated blend of **motivations and capacities** that results in fatal territorial conflict in the 21st century and leads to their varying outcomes. The individual motivations and capacities used within this study will build upon the single factor studies already present within the literature that have previously shed light on territorial conflict causation.

According to Paul Hensel, the core motivation for a state to act upon their territorial claim is the **salience**, or importance, that the claim has. Using an issue-based approach, Hensel has extensively addressed the effect that issue salience has on territorial disputes. Hensel and Mitchell examined the militarized interstate dispute (MID) likelihood of territorial conflicts based on the tangible versus intangible salience of the disputed territory.²² They found that the probability for fatal conflict is higher with intangible salience but they also showed an increased chance for peace motions. Hensel et al continued this research further highlighting the importance of salience when it comes to territorial conflict in both intangible and tangible forms.²³ Additionally, attempts to resolve issues whether peacefully or through military means increases with salience, the only influencing factor is higher cost. Hensel and Mitchell again supported earlier research that shows that MID likelihood increases with intangible salience and that territorial conflict is more likely than other form of conflict.²⁴

Another motivation is the **domestic political situation** within the dyads. Territory with high salience can be used by political leaders to rouse the public and bolster support for action. Studying domestic influences on territorial conflict, Wright and Diehl noted that mixed democratic and autocratic dyads are more war prone due to opposing salience. Democracies engage with higher intangible salience while autocracies focus on the tangible gains.²⁵ Tir also examined domestic political effects through diversionary theory and showed that fatal territorial conflicts increase with domestic political problems.²⁶

²¹ Forsberg, 440.

²² Hensel and Mitchell. (2005)

²³ Hensel et al. (2008)

²⁴ Hensel and Mitchell. (2017)

²⁵ Wright and Diehl.

²⁶ Tir.

In addition to salience and domestic politics this thesis presents a third motive currently not examined within the literature and that is the fruitfulness or lack thereof of previous **international engagement** regarding the disputed territories. This motivation is notable due to its ability to act as a point of frustration within a nation's populace, and the governing elite, as non-violent methods don't seem to be beneficiary. This frustration can also have a multiplying effect on the second motivation as a lack of diplomatic progress can provide ready fuel for leaders hoping to use the dispute for political gain, especially if salience is substantial.

Using the lens of evolutionary game theory, Johnson and Toft write that though territorial behavior exists across the natural world, territorial aggression requires supportive cost-benefit ratios. Humans, like any other creature, are unlikely to claim territory if the costs are too high.²⁷ Acknowledging this observation, and Hensel et al's aforementioned recognition of costs vis-a-vis salience, the three motivations set out in this thesis are juxtaposed against state capacities to act upon territorial disputes.

A key capacity is the **trade interconnectedness** of the dyads. Tir found that trade does have a significant effect of fatal MIDs.²⁸ Likewise, Lee and Rider observed that trade interdependence decreases the likelihood of MIDs as well as decreasing power politic strategies of governments.²⁹ Work on examining the effect that bilateral versus multilateral trade has on disputes by Martin et al noticed that bilateral trade ties between dyads decreases the probability of conflict but the opposite effect was found when multilateral ties were stronger as the state was not too dependent on any one bilateral relationship.³⁰ Rowan and Hensel analyzed whether economic development has rendered territorial expansion obsolete and noted that it did not impact the beginning of claims nor their militarization.³¹

Military capacity has also been examined through work by Bell who studied the capabilities of the dyads and found that disparity in power increases MIDs and reduces settlements, especially when the more powerful state does not hold territory or has to make concessions.³²

Lastly, **political accountability** as a deterrent on military action related to territory has seen limited scholarship. What literature is present has mainly been demonstrated by investigating the role of democracies in territorial disputes. Gibler and Braithwaite shed light on the effect of joint democracy by showing that in terms of fatal territorial conflict the effect is only significant in largely peaceful regimes.³³ Ghatak et al studied the effects of democratic peace and found that it does not lower the probability of armed territorial conflict and that it only has an effect on lower level conflict.³⁴ James et al study of the Western Hemisphere supports the limitations that democratic peace has on territorial MIDs but shows that recent experience with war will influence dyads to find peaceful solutions.³⁵

²⁷ Johnson and Toft, 31, 37.

²⁸ Tir.

²⁹ Lee and Rider.

³⁰ Martin et al.

³¹ Rowan and Hensel.

³² Bell.

³³ Gibler and Braithwaite.

³⁴ Ghatak et al.

³⁵ James et al.

The cost-benefit analysis inherent in this thesis links the literature regarding territorial conflict causation with that of the overall decline in territorial conflict. Simmons shows that border disputes have opportunity costs even in non-militarized disputes. This affects trade, travel, communications, and foreign investment. Set borders however, encourage economic relations.³⁶ Gartzke noted that while economic development increased the capability of states it also negated the need for conquest and that it is more beneficial for states to trade as it is cheaper than conflict.³⁷ Lake and O'Mahony observed a correlation between a reduction in state size and the decline in interstate conflict. They argued that as average state size decreased the need for territorial conquest has likewise waned.³⁸ Gibler marked that with settled borders comes policy freedom for states as well as an increased likelihood for negotiation and compromise regardless of regime type. Cooperation such as trade is easier and settled borders can decrease government centralization and militarization. It may even be critical for political development.³⁹

The existing literature regarding causation analyzed their respective subjects through quantitative studies based on either the Issue Correlates of War data set for Paul Hensel's work or the Correlates of War data set for most of the other scholars mentioned.⁴⁰ These data sets are ideal when examining the role of individual factors on territorial claims across time, in this case primarily the post-Napoleonic period to the end of the 20th century. Nonetheless, the large temporal window of these studies lies atop the changing global political paradigm mentioned in the last chapter. Thus, its ability to explain the dynamic nature of fatal territorial conflict in the contemporary period is limited. Having said that, it is clear from the literature that these factors do play some causal role in territorial conflict. Unfortunately, what is also clear is that none of them establish an overall smoking gun.

Following Vasquez and Valeriano, this thesis recognizes that naturally the single factors previously researched are interrelated phenomena. Therefore, it treats them as such through a case study allowing for an integration of insights beyond the limitations of quantitative studies, an asset noted by Harrison and Wolf.⁴¹ The addition of states' capacities to act upon claims when motivation is present allows for an in depth exploration of the cost-benefit ratios mentioned by Toft and Johnson within a real world context. Likewise, the advantages of the comparative method cited by Forsberg are leveraged.

This research will investigate the interaction of factors that turn territorial conflicts fatal. As stated, in order to study this interplay in depth this thesis will use a comparative case study. In comparing the cases this paper will use the single factors previously researched in the literature as variables to be analyzed. The effectiveness of previous international engagement and domestic political accountability will be added to further enhance the inquiry. Further augmenting this study is an ancillary examination into force effectiveness on changing the status quo of territorial disputes. The combination of both cause and effect provides a two-fold addition to the debate. First is a within case exploration into the multiple variables of contemporary territorial conflict causation. Second, is

³⁶ Simmons.

³⁷ Gartzke.

³⁸ Lake and O'Mahony.

³⁹ Gibler.

⁴⁰ Except Martin et al who examined all cases from 1950-2000.

⁴¹ Harrison and Wolf, 1069.

an investigation of why the use of military force in general on claims is in decline as its efficacy may be waning. These two additions are interrelated thus adding to the contribution.

Research Design

Given that the literature has found compelling results for multiple individual aspects of conflict causation, this thesis agrees that no single facet can be fully considered to be the leading cause of territorial conflict. Instead this research will investigate the interaction of factors that turn territorial conflicts fatal. As stated, in order to study this interplay in depth this thesis will use a comparative case study. Empirical data from Uppsala Armed Conflict data set identifies six cases of fatal territorial conflict that have occurred in the 2002-2016 timeline. The following four will be used as the case studies in this thesis.

South Sudan and Sudan (Heglig/Panthou)

Azerbaijan and Armenia (Nagorno-Karabakh)

Georgia and Russia (South Ossetia)

Ethiopia and Eritrea (Badme)

In addition to being within the stated timeline, these cases were chosen based on the following criteria:

- 1) Each endured one or more encounters that fulfill the 25 fatalities or more threshold defined to be fatal by this thesis.
- 2) The outcome of the fatal action was different across all cases, resulting in a spectrum of resolution, or lack thereof, among the cases.
- 3) Each had previous levels negotiation or attempted resolution.

Besides the selection criteria, the cases above are well suited to answer our question due to their diversity. Along with the geographical difference each case offers a differing history of conflict and national development. The source of the territorial conflict likewise varies due to these differences. An in-depth examination of the tested factors is possible due to the richness of information available for each case. Lastly, all cases in this thesis also fall under the category of militarized interstate disputes. As such, the findings should also hold for conflicts under this definition as long as they fit the selection criteria above.

Examination of the cases will be done by applying the following hypotheses:

- 1) Domestic political forces combined with ineffective international engagement leads to fatal territorial conflict when bolstered by sufficient state capacity and when the salience of the disputed territory is high.
- 2) Fatal force is not effective in changing the status quo of the territorial dispute.

The first hypothesis examines the cost-benefit ratio present within each case. Namely, the significant impetus to act militarily and change the status quo coupled with low barriers upon the state to do so. To explore this interaction this thesis will use the single factors previously researched in the literature as variables to be analyzed.

Three motivations are stated within the hypothesis that foster a necessary environment wherein a nation is spurred to act upon its territorial disputes. The desire for a nation to act will be examined through:

1) High Saliency

The saliency of the disputed territory will be examined within each case study to determine the intangible or tangible saliency to the state. Territory high in intangible saliency is important due to its ethnic or cultural significance to a populace while territory having high tangible saliency has coveted economic importance.

2) Domestic politics

The domestic political situations of each nation leading up to and during the conflict will be examined by providing a brief history of the political environment.

3) International Engagement

The engagement of third-party nations or organizations will be examined in order to determine if there was engagement and, if so, how was the previous engagement ineffective in resolving the existing territorial disputes. Ineffectiveness will be determined by contrasting the duration of diplomatic efforts to resolve the disputed territory against any mutually successful outcomes.

The will of a nation will be juxtaposed with their capacities to change the status quo in their favor. The capacities studied are:

1) Military Advantage

The military budgets and personnel of each nation will be examined to determine if aggressors only act on their territorial motivations when superior military force is enjoyed. Relative military capabilities data will be gathered from the National Material Capabilities Data set which is part of the Correlates of War data sets.

2) Trade Interconnection

The trade ties of each nation will be examined to determine the trade relations, or lack thereof, present between the dyads thus testing the effectiveness of trade interdependence. Trade data will be gathered from the World Bank Group's World Integrated Trade Solutions Data or the Observatory of Economic Complexity data set from the MIT Media Lab.

3) Domestic Political Accountability

The political and civil openness of the society will be examined in order to evaluate the autocratic or democratic nature of the dyads along with the freedom of its populace to resist government actions. The democracy level or governance data will be gathered through the Polity IV Project from the Center of Systemic Peace. Polity IV data scores each nation from 10 to -10, the former being democratic with lower scores given to autocratic governments. Freedom House's Freedom in the World reports will determine the political and civil rights of the populations within the dyads.

The interaction of the factors will be explored within each case in four parts. First, each will begin with a brief description of the fatal event. This will be followed by the conflict history and the domestic political situation during the lead up to the fatal action identifying the three tested motivations of each state in doing so. Second, the outcome after the fatal action will be described allowing for a testing of the second hypothesis. Third, state capacities through data depicting the trade relationship, power disparity, and political accountability among the states will be presented. Last, a within-case analysis will tie the evidence together. This will simplify the findings into a narrative in order to flesh out the hypothesized interactive nature of the complementary factors. Following this will be a comparative analysis across all the cases, further strengthening the findings.

The two hypotheses set up a cause and effect examination across the cases. Once the cause has been analyzed within each case, the effect of the use of force can be determined. These cases present the use of force within an overall downward trend away from fatal action. That means that the effect of such use should be negative or negligible or else fatal action would be more common. Hence the second hypothesis. By testing both, the findings provide an in depth look at conflict causation while also addressing why fatal territorial conflict is declining.

South Sudan and Sudan

Event

On the 10th of April, 2012 5,000 troops of the Sudan People's liberation Army of South Sudan drove 25km into the territory of Sudan and occupied the Heglig/Panthou village area along the border between the two nations.⁴² After holding the territory for ten days, South Sudan finally bowed due to an outcry by the African Union, United Nations and United States and retreated their forces leaving between 367 to 1099 casualties in its wake.⁴³ South Sudan stated that it was not only claiming its own territory but also responding to recent bombings of southern villages from Sudanese forces that had occurred during the end of March after skirmishes between the two.⁴⁴ Leaders from both nations stated there was no interest in a full-scale war but from the South Sudanese perspective they sought to "recover" Heglig/Panthou while Sudan was "liberating" its land.⁴⁵

Conflict History

Heglig, as it's called in Sudan, or Panthou as it's called in South Sudan, is a border region that has been under dispute between the two nations since South Sudan became independent in 2011 after a history of civil warfare.⁴⁶ Up until 2003 Heglig/Panthou was generally considered to be a part of Unity State and would therefore be considered part of contemporary South Sudan. This changed during negotiations of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the two nations that began in 2004. During negotiations the Government of Sudan stated that Heglig/Panthou was in fact part of Western Kordofan State and thus within the boundaries of Sudan.⁴⁷ Maps presented at the time were not detailed enough to decisively show where Heglig/Panthou belonged. The CPA was signed in January of 2005 and ended more than 20 years of conflict. Under the agreement there were two protocols, one addressing the demarcation of another contested territory, that of Abyei, and another establishing the sharing of oil revenues, that proved to be highly controversial.⁴⁸

Heglig/Panthou could also be regarded as belonging to Abyei through an interpretation of the 2005 Abyei Boundary Commission, however, this brings additional issues.⁴⁹ Under the CPA, Abyei was due to hold a referendum on whether it wanted to be a part of Sudan or the newly independent South Sudan. However, this referendum never took place.⁵⁰ This was due to the fact that neither side could decide who should vote in the referendum as Abyei has long been central to two indigenous groups, the nomadic Arab Misseriya who are from the north and would thus vote to remain with Sudan and the Ngok Dinka of the south who would vote with South Sudan. The before mentioned Abyei Boundary Commission could not clearly determine who the original inhabitants of Abyei were.⁵¹ The decision to not hold the referendum angered South Sudan as it was not decisively awarded Abyei and thus possibly Heglig/Panthou.⁵² To further complicate matters Sudan brought the demarcation of the border around Abyei to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague who ruled in favor of Sudan. This can be seen as the Court awarding Heglig/Panthou to Sudan, however,

⁴² Johnson, 561., Check and Mdlongwa, 4.

⁴³ Ylönen, 13., UCDP, Government of Sudan-Government of South Sudan.

⁴⁴ Ottaway and El-Sadany, 14. UCDP, Government of Sudan-Government of South Sudan.

⁴⁵ UCDP, Government of Sudan-Government of South Sudan.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Johnson, 565.

⁴⁸ Check and Mdlongwa, 3.

⁴⁹ Ottaway and El-Sadany, 11.

⁵⁰ Check and Mdlongwa, 4.

⁵¹ Ibid, 4.

⁵² Ottaway and El-Sadany, 6.

some scholars object to this interpretation.⁵³ The fact that neither the Abyei Boundary Commission nor the 2009 court ruling directly address Heglig/Panthou was used by both sides in their claim. The CPA also included the establishment of a North-South Technical Border Commission to decisively demarcate the border within six months of the signing of the CPA but this again did not happen.⁵⁴

Heglig/Panthou is rich in oil and this is central to the conflict as its production played a key role in the economies of both nations. In 2011 oil accounted for 60-70% of government revenue in Sudan and 98% in South Sudan. The Heglig/Panthou region itself generated 75% of Sudan's oil production.⁵⁵ However, 75% of all oil was produced in South Sudan with many of the oil fields being located on the border. Sudan thus lost 75% of its total pre-independence reserves as a result of the South's departure.⁵⁶ Additionally, oil production in South Sudan had to be piped through Sudan to Port Sudan. After the declaration of independence South Sudan stopped sharing oil revenues with Sudan resulting in a \$1.7 billion loss for the Sudanese government. In response, Sudan issued an oil transit fee of \$32 per barrel on South Sudanese oil, 80% of revenue. This was naturally rejected by the South who in turn offered 41 cents per barrel. Many attempts were made by both governments to find an amicable solution but none could be agreed upon. In February of 2012 the government of Sudan confiscated \$185 million worth of oil from South Sudan claiming it was collecting back payments of transit fees. South Sudan stopped all oil shipments to Sudan as a result.⁵⁷ During the occupation of Heglig/Panthou Sudanese oil exports were cut in half while South Sudan could not export any of its own oil.⁵⁸

Domestic Politics

Domestically both sides faced many dilemmas. Sudan was dealing with many internal problems including Darfur and armed conflicts in other southern regions of its territory along with economic pressure as the result of international sanctions and Criminal Court indictments against members of its government.⁵⁹ This led to credibility problems for the government of Sudan from its own people in addition to socioeconomic displeasure.⁶⁰ South Sudan was also dealing with internal violence and challenges to its ruling government. The South Sudanese people lacked national unity due to the internal ethnic diversity within South Sudan. It also was very poor and lacked basic infrastructure in many regions partly as a result of corruption and government incompetence.⁶¹ With these vast domestic challenges both the Sudanese and South Sudanese governments used the border conflicts to distract both their own citizens as well as the international community. Additionally, it provided an outside enemy figure that granted a sense of national unity which was particularly important for the South Sudanese as it created a sense of common "Southernness" while opposing northern Arabs.⁶²

⁵³ Ottaway and El-Sadany, 11., Johnson, 567.

⁵⁴ Ottaway and El-Sadany, 10.

⁵⁵ Ylönen, 12.

⁵⁶ Ottaway and El-Sadany, 8., Ylönen, 12.

⁵⁷ Ottaway and El-Sadany, 9.

⁵⁸ Ylönen, 14.

⁵⁹ Check and Mdlongwa, 4., Ottaway and El-Sadany, 7-8.

⁶⁰ Ottaway and El-Sadany, 19.

⁶¹ Ottaway and El-Sadany, 14-16., Ylönen, 17-18.

⁶² Ylönen, 18.

Outcome

After the main brunt of the hostilities ended, negotiations were held during the following months led by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel and Ethiopia acting as host. In September of 2012 both nations signed a partial peace agreement, an agreement on oil transition fees as well as an agreement on security arrangements that called for a demilitarized zone to be created along the border. Under the agreements both sides pledged to officially demarcate the border and cooperate on other borders issues leading to talks regarding the status of Abyei that were held in October.⁶³

National Capabilities and Accountability

Data on the total military expenditures of Sudan for 2012 is unavailable, however, the nation spent a total of \$1,163,000,000 in 2011. The manpower of Sudanese forces totaled to 109,000 personnel. South Sudan had a lower military budget of \$819,000,000 in 2012 but had a larger force consisting of 140,000 troops.⁶⁴ In terms of government statue neither side was considered democratic with Sudan scoring a -3, making it a closed anocracy, while South Sudan was considered by Polity IV to be a failed state.⁶⁵ Both Sudan and South Sudan were considered as “Not Free.” Sudan had bottom scores in political and civil rights while South Sudan scored slightly better in both.⁶⁶

Trade

Despite the economic ties mentioned above neither side had a particularly deep trading relationship outside of oil. Sudan’s main export destinations were the United Arab Emirates, China and Canada while its main import partners were China, India, and Saudi Arabia. South Sudan only made up .15% of Sudan total exports.⁶⁷ Data from 2015 shows that South Sudan’s top export nations were Algeria, Pakistan, and Uganda while it received most its imports from Uganda, Pakistan, and the Netherlands. Imports from Sudan were only .69% of all South Sudanese imports.⁶⁸

Analysis

Domestically South Sudan had many political reasons to force the question of Heglig/Panthou militarily. Neither nation was considered a democracy and both were plagued by internal issues. For South Sudan the conflict provided a distraction for its people and the international community. Achieving such military feats also provided the nation with a sense of identity and pride that was solely needed as the nation lacked strong national unity. Sudan was in a similar position regarding its internal dilemmas and the opinion of the national government in the eyes of its people and the world. However, neither governments wished for a long drawn out conflict as a long civil war had just ended between the two and such a conflict would have been economically and potentially politically devastating.

In economic terms both nations shared weak trade ties. Nevertheless, the production of oil and sale of oil is critical to both and thus they were economically tied to the resource. Heglig/Panthou’s oil richness made it high in tangible salience and this is essential to the motivations of the South Sudanese invasion as well as Sudan’s defense. Sudanese forces enjoyed more resources

⁶³ UCDP, Government of Sudan-Government of South Sudan.

⁶⁴ Singer, NMC Data.

⁶⁵ Marshall and Gurr.

⁶⁶ Freedom in the World, Sudan 2012., Freedom in the World, South Sudan 2012.

⁶⁷ WITS, Sudan 2012.

⁶⁸ Simoes and Hidalgo.

and a higher budget at the time of the conflict but were outnumbered by their southern counterpart. South Sudan could be seen as a weaker aggressor but was able to hold its own against the better equipped Sudan.

The international community was not able to stem the build up to the conflict despite the African Union and the United Nations already being heavily involved in the region, particularly Abyei.⁶⁹ However, international engagement did limit the conflict as South Sudan could only hold the territory for ten days under diplomatic pressure despite achieving initial military success. Furthermore, diplomatic engagement from regional partners and governmental bodies was critical in the bilateral agreements made after the conflict.

⁶⁹ Ottaway and El-Sadany, 12.

Azerbaijan and Armenia

Event

During the early days of April, 2016 the so called “Four Day War” began when heavy fighting broke out between the armed forces of Azerbaijan and the forces of the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, with their main ally and benefactor Armenia, along the Line of Contact separating Azerbaijan and the disputed region.⁷⁰ During the conflict Azerbaijani forces took control over two strategic high grounds under heavy resistance. This was the first change on the ground of this “frozen” conflict since a ceasefire was signed in 1994.⁷¹ This change cost an estimated 141-263 lives over the four days of April 2nd to 5th.⁷²

Conflict History

Nagorno-Karabakh is a mountainous region of around 17,000 square miles of Azerbaijan with a population of 38,000, mainly Armenian, people.⁷³ The region has been an issue between Azerbaijan and its neighbor Armenia since the turn of the 20th century with the ethnic roots of the conflict dating back as far as the 7th century as both Azerbaijan and Armenia claim Nagorno-Karabakh as being the origin of their identities religiously, culturally, and linguistically.⁷⁴ The end of World War One marked the beginning of the current conflict as it is seen today when Nagorno-Karabakh was declared to be part of the then Azerbaijan Democratic Republic during the Versailles Peace Conference.⁷⁵ This decision was carried on during the formation of the Soviet Union under a decree made by the Soviets in 1921 that the region of Nagorno-Karabakh was to be part of Soviet Azerbaijan. This immediately created a problem in the region so much so that Nagorno-Karabakh was granted autonomous status within Azerbaijan a mere two years later in 1923. Things remained relatively quiet until the waning days of the Soviet Union when the Regional Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh decided unilaterally to transfer the region to the full control of Armenia in 1988. This was naturally rejected by both Azerbaijan and the Supreme Soviet.⁷⁶

As a result war erupted between Azerbaijan and Armenia almost immediately after the two nations declared independence in 1991.⁷⁷ The war, which cost 20,000 lives and led to massive internal displacement of refugees, lasted until 1994 when a ceasefire was brokered between the two nations with the help of the United States, Russia, and France.⁷⁸ By the end of the war Armenia controlled all of Nagorno-Karabakh, which declared an unrecognized independence, as well as seven surrounding provinces.⁷⁹ Under the ceasefire agreement, formally called the Bishkek Protocol, there was to be a withdrawal of troops and the implementation of a peacekeeping force but this never took place. After the war the 160-mile Line of Contact was established between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding captured provinces. There have been 7,000 ceasefire

⁷⁰ Simão, 1.

⁷¹ Price et al, 2.

⁷² UCDP, Government of Azerbaijan: Nagorno-Karabakh.

⁷³ Hirose and Jasutis, 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 6-7., 2.

⁷⁵ Abilov and Isayev, 291.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 292.

⁷⁷ Hirose and Jasutis, 9.

⁷⁸ Price et al, 1., Bayramov, 117.

⁷⁹ Price et al, 1.

violations since then with major spikes in conflict reaching the fatality threshold required by this thesis in 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2015 all in addition to the most fatal 2016 occurrence.⁸⁰

Militarization and military budgets increased on both sides due to the lack of forward movement on the diplomatic front.⁸¹ Negotiations were led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group which has been headed by the United States, Russia, and France since 1997.⁸² Ten years later, after several failed negotiations, both nations agreed to a set of guiding principles for a peaceful settlement called the Madrid Principles in 2007. However, no serious progress had been made since. Outside of the Minsk Group there was only minimal involvement from the international community and even after the 2016 incident only general condemnations of violence were made by the UN, EU and nations in the region and no one blamed one side or the other.⁸³ Russia played a central and interesting role as a mediator and benefactor in the conflict. Russia had close military ties with Armenia having troops stationed in the country as well as provided eased access to Russian military equipment. Armenia was also a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and was thus in an alliance with Russia.⁸⁴ Russia was also the top military supplier of Azerbaijan making up 69% of Azerbaijan total arms imports in 2016. Azerbaijan has purchased \$4 billion worth of arms from Russia since 2013.⁸⁵

Domestic Politics

Politically, Azerbaijan had a few reasons to act militarily and reignite the conflict. First, Azerbaijan deemed that 20% of its territory was currently under Armenian occupation.⁸⁶ Azerbaijan was an oil rich nation and used its increased wealth to fund an expanding armed force. With regards to Nagorno-Karabakh the region had become the main foreign policy issue for the nation. The country wished to change the fact that it was seen as the defeated side in the conflict as well as the status quo of the current negotiations.⁸⁷ Additionally, during the spikes in incidences along the Line of Contact, Azerbaijan was facing an economic downturn due to sagging oil prices.⁸⁸ This applied socio-economic pressure on the central government. Nagorno-Karabakh served as a great tool for the central government as patriotic feelings toward reclaiming the lost territory were very high amongst the general public.⁸⁹

The 2016 clash seemed to bring benefits as it provided Azerbaijan with strategic and morale improvements on the battlefield as well as increased the popularity of the government.⁹⁰ Armenia was not under such domestic pressures in 2016 but its government remained strong on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh.⁹¹ As a result of Azerbaijani actions the Armenian government was hardening its stance but it had little reason to upset the current circumstances due to its close relationship to Russia and the fact that it had a solid place at the table because it was considered the victor of the war.⁹² Additionally, sharp critique from the public including violent political actions and protests in

⁸⁰ Price et al, 2., UCDP, Government of Azerbaijan: Nagorno-Karabakh.

⁸¹ Simão, 1., Bayramov, 125.

⁸² Price et al. 3.

⁸³ Bayramov, 117, 123., Zolyan, "The Karabakh Conflict", 115.

⁸⁴ Price et al, 4.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 4.

⁸⁶ Price et al, 3., Abilov and Isayev, 293.

⁸⁷ Simão, 1-2., Zolyan, "The Karabakh Conflict", 113.

⁸⁸ Zolyan, "Understanding", 2.

⁸⁹ Simão, 1-2.

⁹⁰ Bayramov, 120.

⁹¹ Zolyan, "Understanding", 3.

⁹² Simão, 2.

2016 made it impossible for the Armenian government to make any concessions as many considered Nagorno-Karabakh to be Armenian land.⁹³

Outcome

After the Four Day War both nations met in Vienna in May of 2016 and in Saint Petersburg in June of 2016. Under negotiations led by the US and Russia several minor proposals were agreed upon.⁹⁴ However, even the minor proposals including mechanisms for observation of incidents did not come to fruition and a permanent settlement remained elusive.⁹⁵ The reasoning behind this is that both nations stand on total opposites when it comes to ending the conflict. Azerbaijan states that Nagorno-Karabakh must be under its direct control.⁹⁶ It also refuses to negotiate with officials from Nagorno-Karabakh and only talks with Armenia.⁹⁷ This has led to the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic being completely locked out of negotiations.⁹⁸ Armenia for its part wants self-determination for Nagorno-Karabakh and a recognition of its independence. As such it believes that the conflict is a civil war within Azerbaijan and that in order for the peace process to progress Azerbaijan must negotiate with Nagorno-Karabakh while it acts only as an intermediary.⁹⁹ The impasse between the two is made more critical as the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh has become essential to state legitimacy and nation-building in both nations.¹⁰⁰

National Capabilities and Accountability

The most recent data regarding the national capabilities of Armenia and Azerbaijan comes from 2012. During that year Azerbaijan enjoyed an advantage over Armenia both in terms of personnel and military expenditures with a budget of \$1,761,000,000 against \$402,000,000 and 67,000 troops compared to 49,000 for Armenia.¹⁰¹ Politically Azerbaijan was considered to be an autocratic state according to Polity IV data while Armenia fared better being an open anocracy.¹⁰² Azerbaijan's autocratic state was also reflected in the Freedom House data being considered "Not Free" with the corresponding low scores in political and civil rights.¹⁰³ Armenia, again, was considered "Partly Free" with intermediate civil and political ratings.¹⁰⁴

Trade

Armenia maintained strong economic ties with its key ally in the region, Russia. At the time of the conflict it was both its largest import and export partner making up 30.78% and 20.63% respectively. Its other top export partners were Bulgaria and Georgia while its other main import partners were China and Turkey. Azerbaijan only accounted for 0.07% of imports and 0.14% of exports.¹⁰⁵ 2015 data shows that Azerbaijan exported mainly to Western Europe with its top three export partners being Italy, Germany and Spain. It, however, received many imports from Russia

⁹³ Bayramov, 125., Hirose and Justis, 12.

⁹⁴ Price et al, 6., Bayramov, 120.

⁹⁵ Zolyan, "The Karabakh Conflict", 117.

⁹⁶ Hirose and Jasutis, 12.

⁹⁷ Minasyan, 132.

⁹⁸ Zolyan, "Understanding", 3.

⁹⁹ Hirose and Jasutis, 12., Minasyan, 134.

¹⁰⁰ Minasyan, 132.

¹⁰¹ Singer, NMC Data.

¹⁰² Marshall and Gurr.

¹⁰³ Freedom in the World, Azerbaijan 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Freedom in the World, Armenia 2016.

¹⁰⁵ WITS, Armenia 2016.

making up 15.6% of its total. Turkey and the United States followed as its second and third largest import partners.¹⁰⁶

Analysis

The territory of Nagorno-Karabakh had high intangible salience due to the cultural connection that both nations had to the region. Additionally, atrocities against civilians that occurred during the war and the hardening of emotions that were left in the wake of that conflict had increased the importance of the region in the minds of both the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations.¹⁰⁷

Diplomatically the continued sparks that this conflict created can be attributable to a failure in the peace process particularly under the Minsk Group. Negotiations had been underway since 1994 and though all parties agreed to certain parameters regarding how a possible permanent solution could be obtained little real progress had been made. This led to a lack of faith in diplomacy amongst those directly involved all while the international community found pressing the issue to be potentially too politically costly despite the increasing severity of the incidents.¹⁰⁸

Domestically, the ruling governments of both nations used the conflict as an easy means to flare up patriotism and used up media air time that may have been negatively introspective. Since the conflict was so emotionally and politically charged this led to a cycle in which whenever one nation acted the other had to respond in kind. The military disparity between the two nations was representative of their respective economic strength. Though, Azerbaijan might have been able to fund a strong military, Armenia had easy access to equipment through Russia so neither side could claim enough superiority to achieve a full military victory.

Lastly, economics did not seem to be a barrier to increased conflict as trade was not an essential tie between the two though cross border business has since increased.¹⁰⁹ Both nations did have strong economic relationships with members of the Minsk Group though that seemed to only bring continued interest just not enough to bring about a solid solution.

¹⁰⁶ WITS, Azerbaijan 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Abilov and Isayev, 296.

¹⁰⁸ Minasyan, 132.

¹⁰⁹ Hirose and Jasutis, 13.

Georgia and Russia

Event

On August 7th, 2008 Georgian armed forces began shelling Tskhinvali, the capital of the “Republic of South Ossetia,” a semi-autonomous region in Georgia.¹¹⁰ The initial attack was a prelude to a full-scale ground assault by 12,000 to 13,000 Georgian troops along with tanks and armored vehicles that began that evening.¹¹¹ By the next day Georgian armed forces controlled most of Tskhinvali and the surrounding countryside in what was called a defense operation meant to protect Georgian civilians and the territorial integrity of the nation.¹¹² To the surprise of Georgia, its neighbor to the north, Russia, responded heavily to the attack by invading Georgia with a force of 14,000 preceded by air attacks both in South Ossetia and in Georgia proper on August 8th.¹¹³ Georgia declared war on Russia as a result.¹¹⁴ Russia framed their response as a humanitarian intervention and a means to enforce peace in the region as Russia was the guarantor of security for people in the Caucasus.¹¹⁵ Russian forces retook Tskhinvali along with most of South Ossetia and began to attack undisputed Georgian territory by August 10th. It occupied the Georgian city of Gori close to the South Ossetian border on August 11th.¹¹⁶ In addition to the conflict in South Ossetia, Russian and local forces had also invaded from Abkhazia, another disputed region in western Georgia, on August 10th.¹¹⁷ Russian naval forces destroyed most of the Georgian navy in the Black Sea and landed troops in the coastal town of Poti on the same day.¹¹⁸ By the end of August 11th Russia controlled South Ossetia, Abkhazia and most of western Georgia.¹¹⁹ A cease fire brokered by France was finally agreed upon by both parties on August 12th ending the conflict.¹²⁰ An estimated 615 to 859 casualties were a result of the August 2008 war.¹²¹

Conflict History

The history of South Ossetia’s desire to be independent from Georgia dates back to the 1920s and through its time as an autonomous region within Georgia under the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union began to collapse, South Ossetia wanted to be part of the Russian region of North Ossetia and not part of an independent Georgia. This led to a war between Georgia and South Ossetia from 1991 to 1992 that resulted in 2,000 to 4,000 deaths.¹²² South Ossetia has been a quasi-independent region since a ceasefire was signed 1992 with Russia peacekeepers being present ever since.¹²³ After the 2004 Rose revolution the relationship between Georgia and Russia began to sour even more as Russia took more interest in South Ossetia and Abkhazia by offering citizens of the two regions Russian passports. Georgia for its part began to create closer ties with NATO.¹²⁴ Small

¹¹⁰ Cheterian, 159.

¹¹¹ Mouritzen and Wivel, 60.

¹¹² Ibid, 61.

¹¹³ Cheterian, 162., Mouritzen and Wivel, 61-62.

¹¹⁴ Nichol, 5.

¹¹⁵ Mouritzen and Wivel, 85., Nichol, 5.

¹¹⁶ Nichol, 5-6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 6.

¹¹⁸ Cheterian, 159., Nichol, 7.

¹¹⁹ Mouritzen and Wivel, 62.

¹²⁰ Cheterian, 155.

¹²¹ UCDP, Government of Georgia-Republic of South Ossetia.

¹²² Nichol, 2.

¹²³ Pain, 12., Nichol, 2.

¹²⁴ Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 309.

violations to the previous ceasefire agreement began to occur in June of 2008.¹²⁵ In July of 2008 exchanges of shelling occurred and Russian planes violated Georgian airspace.¹²⁶

Even before the conflict began there was direct international involvement due to the fallout from the previous war in South Ossetia. There was a UN mission in Abkhazia and an OSCE mission in South Ossetia but neither mission had the support or the mandate from the international community to establish some form of lasting peace.¹²⁷ As the conflict began to heat up in 2008 many in the West including the EU, OSCE and the Council of Europe expressed their concerns and tried to cool down the situation but to no avail.¹²⁸ Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice even travelled to Georgia in July of 2008 to find a way to relax tensions where she also underscored the US's support of Georgia's territorial integrity.¹²⁹

Domestic Politics

Mikhail Saakashvili made Georgian territorial unity a campaign promise when he was elected after the 2004 Rose Revolution.¹³⁰ Georgian officials were bolstered by recent successes in the nation regarding other territories and thought that it was in a strong position to unite its state and fight off any opposition.¹³¹ This belief was supported by a massive military buildup in the years preceding the August 2008 war with the budget having grown from \$50 million in 2003 to over \$1 billion in 2008 including the addition of modern equipment and capabilities.¹³² Furthermore, some Georgian officials believed that if armed conflict would erupt over South Ossetia the United States would assist Georgia by applying pressure on Russia diplomatically due to Georgia's close ties in the war on terror and possible NATO membership.¹³³ Despite this, peaceful attempts were made by the Georgian government to come to an agreement with their South Ossetian counterparts in 2005 and 2007 but both attempts were rejected by South Ossetia.¹³⁴

Russia strengthened its governmental ties to South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008 leading up to the conflict and increased the number of peacekeepers.¹³⁵ Additionally, it helped train its local militia units and made energy, welfare, and visa agreements.¹³⁶ By the time of the war 80% of people living in South Ossetia and Abkhazia had Russian citizenship.¹³⁷ South Ossetians for the most part had no interest in being part of Georgia. 60% of its population is non-Georgian and 75% of its total population has anti-Georgian views.¹³⁸ In March of 2008 the Russian Duma stated that either an armed attack or Georgia's membership into NATO would lead to South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence.¹³⁹ Moreover, Russia had agreed to support South Ossetia when its neighbor North Ossetia joined the Russian Federation in 1991.¹⁴⁰

¹²⁵ Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 312.

¹²⁶ Nichol, 4.

¹²⁷ Cheterian, 165.

¹²⁸ Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 313., Nichol, 4.

¹²⁹ Nichol, 4-5.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 3.

¹³¹ Pain, 11-12.

¹³² Cheterian, 158., Mouritzen and Wivel, 65.

¹³³ Cheterian, 163-164., Mouritzen and Wivel, 74.

¹³⁴ Nichol, 3-4.

¹³⁵ Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 312.

¹³⁶ Pain, 13.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 17.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 12.

¹³⁹ Mouritzen and Wivel, 83.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 91.

Outcome

After the initial days of the conflict the United Nations Security Council met several times to draft a response but all ideas were rejected by Russia or China.¹⁴¹ Given its clear advantage in the conflict Russia was likewise able to dictate terms of peace talks that were held after the initial ceasefire agreement. This included the establishment of military bases in South Ossetia and Abkhazia with the permanent stationing of Russian troops. Russia also increased its economic and political ties with the regions.¹⁴² Most importantly, on August 26th Russia recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.¹⁴³ This created an international outcry with Nicaragua being the only state to also recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia while all others, including close Russian allies, refused.¹⁴⁴ Besides this verbal repudiation other responses were dampened. Some in the EU called for a stabilization force sent to the region but this idea was rejected. Others called for more diplomatic responses to Russia including sanctions or the withdrawal of Russia's hosting of the Sochi Olympics but neither took place.¹⁴⁵ The United States for its part provided only harsh words and an end to possible future nuclear talks.¹⁴⁶

National Capabilities and Accountability

Russia vastly outmatched Georgia in terms of military capability even with the latter's growing military strength with a 2008 budget of \$40,484,000,000 compared to Georgia's \$1,037,000,000. This unevenness is more apparent when examining the military personnel available to each nation at the time of the conflict with Georgia having an overall force of 21,000 while Russia enjoyed an advantage of 1,027,000.¹⁴⁷ Politically neither nation was considered totally autocratic with Russia being considered an open anocracy while Georgia was a full-fledged democracy.¹⁴⁸ Freedom House data shows slightly worse ratings with Russia being considered "Not Free" receiving low scores in both political and civil rights.¹⁴⁹ Georgia was only considered "Partly Free" with median civil and political rights ratings.¹⁵⁰

Trade

Georgia had strong trade ties with Turkey as the nation was its top export and import partner. Russia accounted for only 7% of imports and 1.9% of exports. Its other two major partners were Azerbaijan and Ukraine.¹⁵¹ To Russia, Georgian trade was even less important totaling only .12% of exports and an even lower .02% of imports.¹⁵²

Analysis

Reclaiming South Ossetia and Abkhazia was high on the political wish list for the Georgian government. This promise to its people was also fueled by a possible over estimation of its own forces and a misjudgment of outside help possibly from the United States despite its relationship or

¹⁴¹ Nichol, 17.

¹⁴² Ibid, 14.

¹⁴³ Cheterian, 156.

¹⁴⁴ Pain, 17.

¹⁴⁵ Nichol, 18-19.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 27.

¹⁴⁷ Singer, NMC Data.

¹⁴⁸ Marshall and Gurr.

¹⁴⁹ Freedom in the World, Russia 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Freedom in the World, Georgia 2008.

¹⁵¹ WITS, Georgia 2008.

¹⁵² WITS, Russian Federation 2008.

words that may indicate such support. As such Georgia is seen by most as the aggressor in the conflict despite its clear risks.¹⁵³ Russia viewed the war as saving its people from an aggressor.¹⁵⁴ This is logical given the close ties that it was forming with the region leading up to the conflict. It also saw the war as a means to warn the West that it remains committed to maintaining its sphere of influence and that interference would be challenged.¹⁵⁵

Internationally the roots of the conflict were not settled in the previous war. Neither an international presence on the ground nor a Russian peacekeeping force physically present prevented Georgian actions. After the conflict Georgia was militarily and economically devastated and thus in a weakened state.¹⁵⁶ This coupled with the fact that its adversary carried so much weight on the international stage led to any international objection to Russia's actions after the conflict being mute. Thus, Georgia was even further away from its overall goal of reclaiming the territories, perhaps making such an objective permanently impossible in the future.

Neither side had particularly strong trade ties so any economic interaction was not a deterrent either to Georgia's aggression nor to Russia's intervention. Two other interesting facets of this case is that Georgia is both considered more democratic and had the smaller military force but is seen as the aggressor nation. It is true that it attacked a disputed territory that it regarded as its own and not Russia proper but given the support that South Ossetia and Abkhazia had from Russia such an attack was clearly a miscalculation. This miscalculation could have been rooted in the importance that these regions serve to the Georgian state as they are clearly crucial political matters as well as symbols of Russian inference in Georgia's nation building.

¹⁵³ Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 313.

¹⁵⁴ Pain, 14.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 15-16.

¹⁵⁶ Nichol, 12.

Ethiopia and Eritrea

Event

Ethiopia and Eritrea exchanged artillery fire beginning on June 12th, 2016 near the Eritrean border town of Tsorona. The following two-day battle resulted in at least 25 fatalities among the combatants with some estimates stating casualties in the 100s.¹⁵⁷ Eritrea and Ethiopia both recognized the engagement and claimed they were merely defending themselves against aggression from the other.¹⁵⁸ This brief but deadly skirmish was the last flare up in an 18-year-old conflict between the two nations that has its origin in another town called Badme.

Conflict History

The historical relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea dates back to the cooperation between the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) to overthrow the regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991.¹⁵⁹ Afterwards, the EPRDF and the EPLF formed transitional and provisional governments in both forces' nations respectfully. Eritrea voted for full independence in 1993 which was accepted graciously by the EPRDF.¹⁶⁰

Relations took a turn for the worst in 1998 when the two nations began to disagree on multiple issues namely Eritrea's decision to coin its own currency, Ethiopian access to Eritrean ports and the lack of a clear and accepted border.¹⁶¹ In May of that year war commenced when Eritrea assaulted the border town of Badme.¹⁶² After two years of failed negotiations and stalemate on the battlefield, Ethiopia conducted a major offensive that reversed all Eritrean gains and forced Eritrea on the defensive. With the situation now seemingly in Ethiopian hands a ceasefire was established in June 2000 along with a peace agreement brokered in Algiers in December with the participation of the African Union, European Union, United States and host Algeria.¹⁶³ The war led to between 70,000 and 100,000 deaths and over a million displaced persons.¹⁶⁴

Under the Algiers Agreement a 25 km Temporary Security Zone, patrolled by the UN through the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), was created. Importantly, the agreement also established the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC) which was tasked with delineating the disputed border based on the previously existing colonial borders.¹⁶⁵ Its decisions were to be final and binding to each party. In 2002, the EEBC made its decision and while it awarded less critical areas to Ethiopia it consequently gave Badme to Eritrea. Though Badme contained few resources and had no real strategic value it was seen as crucial politically to both regimes so the decision was not accepted by Ethiopia at first.¹⁶⁶

Though Ethiopia later accepted the decision unconditionally in 2004 the initial rejection and hesitation threatened the credibility of the agreement and seriously harmed relations between the

¹⁵⁷ Wrong, 52., Woldemariam, 407., UCDP, Government of Ethiopia-Government of Eritrea.

¹⁵⁸ UCDP, Government of Ethiopia-Government of Eritrea., Woldemariam, 408.

¹⁵⁹ Lyons, 167-168.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 168.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 168.

¹⁶² Lyons, 168, Lorton, 102.

¹⁶³ Lyons, 168.

¹⁶⁴ Lyons, 168, Lorton, 101.

¹⁶⁵ Lyons, 168.

¹⁶⁶ Lyons, 168-169., Toft and Johnson, 7.

two.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, despite their acceptance, Ethiopian troops stayed in the disputed territory around Badme.¹⁶⁸ This meant that they remained a threat as they were only a short distance away from the Eritrean capital Asmara.¹⁶⁹ Even with Ethiopian troops remaining in Badme, Eritrea connected itself to the town via telecommunications and air connections.¹⁷⁰ Likewise, Eritrea considered Badme to be occupied territory under Ethiopia and held that the ruling was backed by international law and therefore its decision was conclusive.¹⁷¹ Frustrated, Eritrea began to push the issue in October 2005 by banning UNMEE flights in its territory. As a result, the UN withdrew half of its forces and the situation started to deteriorate.¹⁷²

Failed international action followed with the UN Security Council passing the ineffectual Resolution 1640 threatening Eritrea with sanctions if they did not allow the UNMEE to continue unhindered.¹⁷³ The United States along with participants in the Algiers Agreement both made unilateral and multilateral attempts that proved unsuccessful. However, little effort was really made into enforcing the mandates of the Algiers Agreement or decisions of the EEBC.¹⁷⁴ Eritrea wanted Ethiopia to be forced into complying with the EEBC.¹⁷⁵ Ethiopia, having maintained a superior position on the ground with a stronger military, was in no rush.¹⁷⁶ It wanted further dialogue on the “normalization” of relations but the meaning of this was unclear.¹⁷⁷ Eritrea thought that the purpose for any further dialogue could only be a means to reinterpret the ruling.¹⁷⁸

Meetings of the EEBC conducted throughout 2006 could not bridge the diplomatic impasse as Eritrea declined.¹⁷⁹ This led to the eventual dissolution of the EEBC without having delineated the border on the ground in November 2007. In August 2008, the UNMEE aborted its mandate. Consequently, Eritrean troops reoccupied the established Temporary Security Zone.¹⁸⁰ A continued state of war resumed with sporadic clashes in addition to the 2016 event most notably when Ethiopia occupied Eritrean villages around Tsorona in 2012 and attacked other Eritrean sites in 2015.¹⁸¹

Domestic Politics

Domestically, both governments turned increasingly authoritarian following the Algiers Agreement. Though they encountered internal opposition any dissent was squashed through arrests and expulsions using the border issue as justification.¹⁸² Within Eritrea under President Isaias Afwerki what opposition was present was splintered and believed to maintain close relations with Ethiopia. The small and vulnerable ruling elite used Ethiopia’s failure to fully implement the Algiers Agreement and its mandate, namely the EEBC, as a political weapon.¹⁸³

¹⁶⁷ Lyons, 169.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 167.

¹⁶⁹ Wrong, 51.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 53.

¹⁷¹ Lyons, 167., Woldemariam, 409.

¹⁷² Lyons, 169.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 169.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 169, 175.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 169-170.

¹⁷⁶ Lyons, 167, 169, 170., Woldemariam, 412.

¹⁷⁷ Woldemariam, 409.

¹⁷⁸ Wrong, 52.

¹⁷⁹ Lyons, 169.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 167.

¹⁸¹ Woldemariam, 413-414.

¹⁸² Lyons, 170.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 171.

The imposing danger of an impending invasion from Ethiopia was used by President Afwerki to maintain unlimited conscription into the military, end independent journalism, detain citizens without a trial and prevent any competition through elections.¹⁸⁴ In 2013, junior officers, fed up with endless military constriction launched a failed coup attempt against the president.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, Eritrea was under an arms embargo imposed upon it by the United Nations Security Council. This along with the fact that many of the youth were fleeing the country to avoid conscription left it militarily weakened.¹⁸⁶

Increased authoritarianism for the sake of security also fueled economic decline and this put the government in a situation in which retreating from the conflict would result in it being forced to address the many problems without any more justification.¹⁸⁷ Eritrea's economic troubles were further amplified because it had cut ties with much of the world community after the war.¹⁸⁸ President Afwerki expelled all international organizations in 2006.¹⁸⁹

A similar story unfolded in Ethiopia when Prime Minister Meles Zenawi attempted to prevent his own ruling party from fracturing.¹⁹⁰ Parliamentary elections were held 2005 which resulted in large gains by the opposition but were claimed to be fraudulent and subsequently not accepted.¹⁹¹ Opposition leaders along with journalists were then arrested following the criminalization of dissent and the increased curbing of civil society.¹⁹² However, in 2008 an economic crisis began to unravel across Ethiopia as inflation soared above 40% leading to rising food prices that left 12% of the population in need of food assistance. The economic and humanitarian disaster harmed support of the ruling EPRDF and increased opposition.¹⁹³

Prime Minister Meles passed away in 2012. His death led to a waning of political influence from the existing minority ruling elite.¹⁹⁴ Beginning in late 2015 protests were occurring within Ethiopia against the minority rule of the existing government. Then Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned in 2018 and Abiy Ahmed was appointed as the new prime minister.¹⁹⁵

Outcome

After years of tensions resulting in the 2016 fatal event, change in the dyadic situation began in 2018 with the new government leadership of Ethiopia. Upon entering office new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced Ethiopia's unconditional acceptance of the EEBC's findings.¹⁹⁶ Shortly afterwards, Ethiopia and Eritrea signed two new agreements. The first reestablished diplomatic ties and called for transportation and communication links between the two countries. More consequently, the second agreement ended the state of war and both nations agreed to adhere to the 2002 EEBC decision with regards to its territorial disputes.¹⁹⁷ Additionally, each side abandoned

¹⁸⁴ Wrong, 54.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 57.

¹⁸⁶ Woldemariam, 413.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 411.

¹⁸⁸ Wrong, 55-56.

¹⁸⁹ Lyons, 170.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 171.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 172.

¹⁹² Ibid, 172-173.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 173.

¹⁹⁴ Woldemariam, 419.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 418.

¹⁹⁶ Wrong, 50.

¹⁹⁷ UCDP, Government of Ethiopia-Government of Eritrea.

their proxy wars in Somalia.¹⁹⁸ Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts and commitment to ending the 20-year long conflict.

National Capabilities and Accountability

2012 data shows that Ethiopia led Eritrea handily in term of military spending with \$254,000,000 compared to a 2011 amount of \$78,000,000. However, while Eritrea was behind in funding it was ahead in manpower through its forced conscription with a 2012 force of 202,000 compared with Ethiopia's 138,000.¹⁹⁹ From 2016 at the time of the border skirmish to 2018 when the peace agreement was signed neither nation was considered a free government. Both scored poorly in terms of political rights, civil liberties and freedom.²⁰⁰ Polity IV data echoes these findings with 2013 data showing Eritrea to be an autocracy with Ethiopia only doing slightly better as a closed anocracy.²⁰¹

Trade

Ethiopia and Eritrea did not share strong bilateral trade ties. Goods imported into Eritrea from Ethiopia accounted for only 0.03% of total imports according to 2003 data.²⁰² 2017 data shows that a majority of Ethiopian goods were destined for China, the US and Western European nations. Likewise, a majority of imports came from the same regions as well as India and Turkey. Eritrean trade ties lied in Asia with China, South Korea and the Philippines being top export destinations along with Spain and nearby Sudan. It also received imports from China and Sudan with other goods coming in from Egypt, Spain and Brazil.²⁰³

Analysis

Both Ethiopia and Eritrea's modern history has been shaped by the 1998-2000 war and thus mistrust ran deep within the rivalry. The importance of the conflict in the legitimacy of the ruling parties meant that hostility was allowed to endure and be used as a means of cover for the curtailing of political and human rights within both nations. In addition to the stalemate at the border both regimes believed the other was on the verge of collapsing and fought proxy conflicts in Somalia.²⁰⁴ Eritrea attempted to sow dissent by supporting rebel groups within Ethiopia.²⁰⁵ In an ongoing war of words the global war of terror was exploited by both to frame the other as a terrorist state.²⁰⁶ These attempts further deepened mistrust and showed the centrality that the conflict had to each nations' pride.

Both sides held advantages and disadvantages over the other. Ethiopia was the wealthier party and held control militarily on the ground. Eritrea was stronger in numbers albeit through forced conscription. It also had the legitimacy of the EEBC decision. This lack of a clear upper hand only served to solidify the stalemate. Though economic forces played a role in the internal turmoil of both nations bilateral trade between the two was not a factor.

¹⁹⁸ Wrong, 51.

¹⁹⁹ Singer, NMC Data.

²⁰⁰ Freedom in the World, Ethiopia 2016, 2018., Freedom in the World Eritrea 2016, 2018.

²⁰¹ Marshall and Gurr.

²⁰² WITS, Eritrea 2003.

²⁰³ Simoes and Hidalgo.

²⁰⁴ Lyons, 170.

²⁰⁵ Woldemariam, 412.

²⁰⁶ Lyons, 178.

The Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict was in close proximity to the Red Sea and was thus of geopolitical importance to major international players such as the US, China, and European powers France and Germany.²⁰⁷ Despite the participation of these nations and other international bodies the world community's inability to force Ethiopian compliance of the EEBC led to disillusionment within Eritrea. Likewise, Eritrean actions further increased sanctions and international alienation thus distrust was again sown between the parties.

In the years following the fatal event internal pressure began to mount. Eritrea tightened its grip much to the detriment of its people. Pressure on the ruling elite eventually won over in Ethiopia with the election of Abiy Ahmed. This change in leadership caused a transformation of the conflict and allowed for a shift in narrative towards reconciliation. Though reconciliatory gestures were made in the past, including when Ethiopia called for sanctions relief on behalf of Eritrea beginning in 2009, the peace agreements signed in 2018 formalized an end to the standoff and a possible new beginning.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Wrong, 51.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 51.

Overall Analysis

What leads to fatal interstate territorial conflict in the 21st Century (2002-2016) despite a strong trend away from fatal conflict over territory between states and how effective is fatal force?

The first hypothesis presented was that domestic political forces combined with ineffective international engagement leads to fatal territorial conflict when bolstered by sufficient state capacity and when the salience of the disputed territory is high. This was predicated on the existence of set motivations for a nation to act and those motivations being supported by a lack of political, economic or military costs. In order to ascertain if the hypothesis was proven it is essential to determine if the necessary motivations were present.

Intangible salience is high in every case. Each disputed territory had an ethnic, cultural, or political importance to both the defending and attacking nations. With Sudan-South Sudan tangible benefits were also a factor. Every case examined came out of turmoil created almost immediately or shortly after state formation. This sparked an initial war over the disputed territory that did not resolve the matter and allowed the issue to fester further fueling its importance to national pride and identity. The connection to socio-ethnic history within each nation likewise deepened the presence the disputed territory had to the nation-building of each aggressor meaning that its recapture was critical while its defense by the other nation was just as paramount.

Domestic political forces were behind every case examined. In the case of South Sudan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia the disputed territory was linked to promises that government officials made to their populace in order to stay in power or to stoke nationalism and distract from negative domestic issues. The territorial dispute was thus key to the continued legitimacy of each states' ruling apparatus. Eritrea and Ethiopia were the clearest example of this facet as the dispute was used to distract from domestic affairs and to curtail political freedoms. Once the conflict was brought to a boiling point it was very hard for these governments to back down as a result. For Sudan, Armenia and Russia defense of their territories or their citizenry had the same high level of political importance and therefore meant that concessions could also not be made.

In every single case there were previous attempts by the international community to resolve the dispute. As noted above, every case examined followed a war between the dyads that did not decide the issue. After the war an agreement was present within each that was created with the help of international partners and was meant as a road map to peacefully settle the disputes. However, the lack of follow through among these agreements was critical. Furthermore, in every case, international action either did not have the power or mandate to bring about a lasting peace or lacked the political will to do so. This meant that violations of the agreements and the post war structures were almost ensured as the international community could not be counted upon to safeguard its provisions nor sufficiently punish infringements.

It is clear that the motivation to act both in aggression and in defense of the disputed territory was present in each case. However, the hypothesis states that what is a necessary driver to action is that the costs are low.

Trade does not seem to be much of a factor among these cases because for the most part trade ties between the dyads are weak. That does support previous literature that promotes the

positivity that trade ties have to territorial disputes. With Sudan and South Sudan both nations were very dependent on their economic cooperation regarding the trade of oil. Yet disputes over this cooperation seem to be one of the causes of the conflict and not a hinderance. Moreover, all nations present had established multilateral ties. This supports previous research that shows such multilateral trade can bolster bilateral aggression.

Overall military superiority of the aggressor is present in two of the four case studies. Azerbaijan enjoyed a clear edge over Armenia. South Sudan lacked the military capabilities and budget of Sudan but had larger numbers. This was also the case where a better equipped Ethiopia was against more numerous Eritrean forces. The real exception here is Russia and Georgia, but again, South Ossetian forces were no match for Georgian forces. However, with their ally's support, the aggressor in this case was dwarfed by the defending forces. It is clear that some form of military advantage whether through numbers, quality, or both, is a factor.

The effect that levels of democracy have on the conflicts within the case studies is somewhat inconclusive. Georgia was a more democratic aggressor and its people enjoyed more freedoms than the people of South Ossetia or Russia. However, this was the exception. Both the Sudan and South Sudan as well as the Ethiopia and Eritrea cases lacked political rights and democratic structures. On the other side, Azerbaijan was an autocratic state that was aggressing against a more open Armenia.

The case studies seem to support the hypothesis. In every case the presented motivations and costs feed each other all while heightening the tension between the dyads. Domestic political actors within each aggressor nation were able to use the high salience of each disputed territory to rile up domestic support and political control. This puts these actors in a position where compromise or inaction regarding a change in the status quo, or worse, a loss of the disputed territory, is politically costly to the ruling party or regime. The territory's prominence to the identity of each nation cannot be understated and further heightens the tensions. Popular support for government action is an asset no matter if a nation is democratic or autocratic with the former being even more critical. This may explain that, while domestic political drivers were present in all cases, the democracy level and political rights of nations among the cases were mixed. When domestic political actors have used the salience of a disputed territory as a political rallying cry, actions regarding that territory are expected, perhaps even required, regardless of what government system is in place.

Weak international involvement seems to have two noticeable effects. First, previous involvement that did not bring about a lasting solution to the dispute seems to frustrate each nation as status quos are not changed nor are effective agreements made. That means that neither side can claim any victory in the dispute. However, that is also true for accepting loss of the territory. The second impact is that this inaction bolsters the domestic political drivers as frustration increases and previous diplomatic failures raise questions regarding the will of outside actors to get involved if any unilateral action were taken by the disputing nations. Additionally, in the case of Georgia's actions a misguided belief in outside assistance from third parties seemed to have emboldened them in their cause despite seemingly obvious dangers.

Though weak international action does seem to result in a higher likelihood that the conflict will turn fatal, international pressure after the initial conflict appears to limit the bloodshed. Every conflict examined took place only in a matter of days or months and each was followed by intense

international involvement. This involvement did not necessarily result in a permanent solution although the international community's ability to contain conflicts seems evident.

Once the domestic drivers are in place, nations must look to their ability to change the status quo. If the two disputed nations do not have strong economic ties then the loss of trade in goods or particular materials is not a factor for an aggressor. If those same aggressor nations are also stronger militarily, then reasons against more direct actions are not convincing to either the governing elite or the populace. Belief among the populace that direct actions are justified or even right further pushes the nations toward a tipping point.

Now that the lead up to each fatal event is known, the second hypothesis states that fatal force is not effective in changing the status quo of the territorial dispute.

Even if the aggressor nation does have total superiority, military might alone does not seem to be capable of achieving territorial goals within the cases present. Military conflict did gain Azerbaijan some territory but it did not settle the conflict nor was Azerbaijan able to completely resolve the issue through force. Georgia's use of force led to its complete defeat in the conflict and its ability to regain South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the future is highly doubtful as a result. Nonetheless, the use of force in each case was useful in attracting international attention. South Sudan's attack on Heglig/Panthou did not result in annexation but it did result in talks between the two parties that yielded results. Eritrea and Ethiopia's use of force only exacerbated the stalemate. However, the conflict and its continued bloodshed eventually led to a change in political leadership within Ethiopia.

This change in leadership marks the one total shift in the status quo among the cases present and is why Ethiopia and Eritrea are the real counter case. This is the only case where the disputed territory was fully resolved and status quo completely changed. The importance that domestic politics plays in inflaming conflicts has been noted above but a change in the domestic political situation was likewise key in the territorial resolution. The awarding of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed shows how effective this change is and perhaps also how rare.

The results of the second hypothesis present an interesting find. Hypothesis two was actually disproven. Fatal force was effective in changing the status quo but only in a limited manner. Force was not effective in bringing a total resolution or the complete control of the territory by the aggressor. It was effective in forcing dialogue and causing a reaction from the international community that either lead to a temporary rekindling of dormant talks or some diplomatic advances. However, the first hypothesis has shown what it takes to cause the use of fatal force. When observing the limited benefits such force has one can recognize that the overall cost-benefit to using force is not present. This contributes to the downward trend. Even for highly motivated states the use of force is risky and uncertain especially when other options at resolution are available. Ethiopia and Eritrea display the advantages of taking another path.

Conclusion

Upon examination of the case studies it seems that high intangible salience when coupled with domestic political motivations is a particularly dangerous combination leading to fatal conflict. Weak previous international involvement seems to act as encouragement to such actions as the aggressing parties who are frustrated with the status quo, do not see the international community as a deterrent. Military superiority is just further fuel leading to action and a lack of trade ties emboldens such action. Political accountability, if any, within the conflicting nations does not seem to be a factor if the other catalysts are in place. This is an unfortunate sign as the intangible salience of disputed territories is hard to address as is the use of that salience by domestic governments. What is encouraging is that international involvement does limit the scope of territorial conflict in the 21st century.

The connection to nation-building and cultural history that each territory had within the cases provided fertile ground for aggressive and at times repressive domestic politics. Against the backdrop of military buildups, economic and political issues at home, and a weak international commitment, states see opportunity, perhaps even need, to force unanswered territorial questions. Yet, is force still capable of resolving such issues? According to the analysis that answer is in doubt. Not in any case presented did force fully resolve the disputed territory. For Georgia the use of force significantly harmed their position in the dispute. For Ethiopia and Eritrea not the military action but a change in domestic leadership led to a definitive shift in the dispute. The findings did show that fatal action did force dialogue. This was the case for Azerbaijan versus Armenia and Sudan versus South Sudan. Nonetheless, both of these disputes have yet to be fully settled.

So, is the use of force effective? If the state wishes to assert full control over a disputed territory, which is the most accepted interpretation of a state acting militarily on a dispute, then the findings show that it is not. The use of force itself is costly. This can be in lives and equipment but also in reputation or economic damages. As such, the cases show that while a state can find that the cost to initiate action is lower than the motivation to do so, the overall benefit of such action is dubious.

The findings of this thesis were limited in the scope of the factors examined. As such the cases did not address the impact of rivalries among the dyads. It also did not address issues of compliance and go into detail of why previous international engagement was so ineffective. Legal questions around territorial disputes were not undertaken. Lastly, besides trade, the impact of other economic factors, such as foreign investment, on the conflict was also not studied.

Notwithstanding, other avenues of research were opened by the case studies. Two of the cases took place under Russia's sphere of influence. As such, the role of regional hegemony on territorial disputes deserves more research. Likewise, the findings regarding the use of force to pressure further negotiations relates to the concept of intent. One assumes that a state always wishes decisive and victorious end to a territorial dispute. However, this may not always be the case. There may be benefits to letting a dispute stay unresolved. Finally, the international community's ability to limit fatal territorial conflict was noted. This calls for more attention perhaps across other conflict types as well.

This thesis reaffirmed much of the previous literature regarding the causes of territorial disputes. It particularly showed the importance that salience and domestic politics has on territorial conflicts. Previous work regarding the importance of settled borders on bilateral trade ties was further confirmed. It is notable that in the Ethiopia and Eritrea resolution transportation and communication links were among the first agreements. The Territorial Integrity Norm was also supported as the conquests all failed but sparked an international reaction. On the other hand, results regarding the effect of military power disparities and political openness were less clear and thus their impact on existing literature is unconvincing.

In addition to the evidence regarding the catalysts of interstate conflict in the 21st century, this thesis also showed that peaceful resolution is possible. When such desire comes internally the entire dynamics of a conflict can shift leading to acceptance of previous agreements. This is continued with the reestablishment or strengthening of diplomatic ties between opposing nations. Just as the core cause of many conflicts comes from within, it seems evident that moves toward peace also start there.

Territorial conflicts are an intricate affair. Many of the most dangerous disputes currently underway regarding territory, such as the South China Sea and the Arctic Circle, involve large nations which are very interconnected through trade and have military parity either directly or through alliances. Despite the salience and domestic political significance attached to the territory, this is a hopeful sign. It shows that the cost to any party in acting forcefully toward their claim is potentially very high and the reward of such action is not guaranteed. Nonetheless, the international community, either working through intergovernmental bodies or bilaterally, must maintain a constant meaningful dialogue if the world wishes to keep fatal territorial conflict limited and continue its downward trend in the 21st century.

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