

Abstract

Great Powers, Regional Powers, and the Balance of Power in Conflict

J. Dana Stuster

2024

When do great powers cooperate with regional powers and when do they fight? This dissertation considers how the distribution of power at the systemic and regional levels of international politics conditions relations between great powers and regional powers and incentivizes conflict, hedging, or cooperation. I propose a general theory of great power-regional power relations. The theory contends that great powers are responsive to competition with other great powers, while regional powers have more limited interests and respond primarily to competition with regional rivals. When states engage in peer competition, they are incentivized to cooperate with other states and look for partners to balance against their rivals. But when a state gains a preponderance of power — a great power achieves unipolarity in the international system or a regional power approaches regional hegemony — their incentives change. Because great powers and regional powers act based on incentives set by different distributions of power, their interests may or may not align, and this sets the stage for cooperation or conflict. The theory is extended to generate expectations for state strategy in conflict and post-conflict settings and tested with a mixed-methods approach. A quantitative cross-case analysis of an original dataset of state strategy in conflicts in the Middle East from 1945 through 2010 and a series of three qualitative case studies on the North Yemen Civil War, the Lebanese Civil War, and the Second Intifada find support for the theory's expectations.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Making Sense of Great Power and Regional Power Strategy	3
1.2	Literature Review	6
1.2.1	Structural Theories of International Politics	6
1.2.2	The Myopia of Structural Theories	9
1.2.3	Regional Powers, Revisited	12
1.2.4	Regions as a Level of Analysis	15
1.3	Theorizing the Agency of Regional Powers	17
1.4	Plan for the Dissertation	19
2	A Structural Theory of Great Power and Regional Power Relations	21
2.1	The Theory in General: Interacting Incentives for State Behavior . . .	22
2.2	Applying the Theory	30
2.2.1	Setting and Scope of Study	31
2.2.2	“Regions” and Powers	33
2.2.3	Independent Variable: Distribution of Power	38
2.2.4	Dependent Variable: State Strategy in Conflict	40
2.3	Hypotheses	41
2.3.1	Alternative Hypotheses	45

2.4	Research Design	48
2.4.1	Quantitative Analysis	49
2.4.2	Qualitative Case Studies	52
2.5	Conclusion	54
3	Middle East Conflicts since 1945: A Quantitative Cross-National Analysis	55
3.1	The Middle East Conflict Behavior Dataset	57
3.1.1	Summary of the Dataset	57
3.2	Identifying Great Powers and Regional Powers	62
3.3	Distribution of Power	67
3.3.1	A Metric for Distribution of Power	67
3.3.2	Classifying Conflicts	72
3.4	Evaluating Hypotheses	76
3.4.1	Comparing Conflict Strategies across Distributions of Power	77
3.4.2	Joint Hegemony	82
3.4.3	Systemic Hegemony	82
3.4.4	Regional Hegemony	86
3.4.5	Joint Competition	91
3.4.6	Discussion	95
3.5	Conclusion	96
4	Regional Hegemony: North Yemen Civil War, 1962-1970	97
4.1	Context	99
4.2	Great Power Responses to Egypt's Intervention in Yemen	103
4.3	The Transactional Turn in U.S.-Egypt Relations	111
4.4	Nasser's Wedge Strategy	117

4.5	Egypt's Evident Decline	120
4.6	The End of Nasser's Bid for Regional Hegemony	125
4.7	Analysis	131
4.7.1	Alternative Hypotheses	135
4.8	Conclusion	138
5	Joint Competition: Lebanese Civil War, 1975-1990	140
5.1	Context and Early Stages of the War	145
5.2	Syria's Intervention and Israel's Red Lines	149
5.3	Pax Syriana or Syria's Vietnam	159
5.4	Syria and Israel Return to Proxy Competition	163
5.5	The Israeli-Syrian War in Lebanon	172
5.6	The United States Takes Up Israel's War	181
5.7	The Israeli-Syrian Balance of Power in Lebanon and the Civil War's Unipolar Coda	190
5.8	Analysis	195
5.8.1	Alternative Hypotheses	199
5.9	Conclusion	203
6	Systemic Hegemony: Second Intifada, 2000-2005	206
6.1	Context	211
6.2	Failure to Deescalate	215
6.3	Role of Regional Power Support	221
6.4	Long-Term Low-Intensity Conflict	226
6.5	U.S. Diplomacy with Israel and the Palestinian Authority	231
6.6	Regional Competition and the Iraq War	235
6.7	Disengagement and Deescalation	238

6.8	Analysis	243
6.8.1	Alternative Hypotheses	246
6.9	Conclusion	248
7	Conclusion	251
7.1	Reviewing the Theory	252
7.2	Evaluating the Theory	257
7.2.1	Great Power Suppression of Regional Powers	260
7.2.2	Regional Hegemony and the Frontier of Influence	263
7.2.3	Unipolarity as Constraint on Revisionist Regional Power Strategy	264
7.2.4	Revisiting Alternative Hypotheses	265
7.3	Contribution to the Literature	268
7.4	Extending the Theory	270
7.4.1	Joint Hegemony and U.S.-China Competition	270
7.4.2	Other Regions of Study	277
7.5	Conclusion: On the Meaning of International Relations Theory (and This Theory in Particular)	278
A	Middle East Conflict Behavior Dataset Codebook	282
A.1	Variables	282
A.2	Conflict Summaries	283
B	Quantitative Analysis Robustness Checks	357
B.1	Multinomial Logit Regression	357
B.2	Conflict-level Analysis	359
B.3	Conflict Phases vs. Post-conflict Phases	361