

# Collusion Among Adversaries

Matt Malis

Interdepartmental Political Economy Group (IPEG)

2 April 2026

Slides: `mattmalis.github.io/slides`

# The Puzzle of Provocation

Intuitive logic of provocation:

- ▶  $A$  wants conflict, but wants  $B$  to make the first move
- ▶  $A$  says or does something (essentially costless) to “provoke”  $B$
- ▶  $B$  attacks, fighting ensues

## WAR-ENTRY PLANS LAID TO ROOSEVELT

Britain Releases Her Data  
on Talks With Churchill

LONDON, Jan. 1 (AP)—Formerly top secret British Government papers made public today said that President Franklin D. Roosevelt told Prime Minister Winston Churchill in August, 1941, that he was looking for an incident to justify opening hostilities against Nazi Germany.

The account of the Roosevelt-Churchill talks was contained in 950 volumes of British War Cabinet papers made public for the first time.

The papers covered the period from January, 1941, to July, 1945, the largest collection of formerly secret British records ever released at one time.

### Churchill Quoted Indirectly

Churchill's account of Roosevelt's attitude toward the war was contained in the minutes of that Cabinet meeting. The minutes, quoting Churchill indirectly, said:

"He [Roosevelt] obviously was determined that they should come in."

"If he were to put the issue of peace and war to Congress, they would debate it for months," the Cabinet minutes added.

"The President had said he would wage war but not declare it and that he would become more and more provocative. If the Germans did not like it; they could attack American forces."

## *Bush Was Set on Path to War, British Memo Says*

 Share full article



By Don van Natta Jr.

March 27, 2006

LONDON - In the weeks before the United States-led invasion of Iraq, as the United States and Britain pressed for a second United Nations resolution condemning Iraq, President Bush's public ultimatum to Saddam Hussein was blunt: Disarm or face war.

But behind closed doors, the president was certain that war was inevitable. During a private two-hour meeting in the Oval Office on Jan. 31, 2003, he made clear to Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain that he was determined to invade Iraq without the second resolution, or even if international arms inspectors failed to find unconventional weapons, said a confidential memo about the meeting written by Mr. Blair's top foreign policy adviser and reviewed by The New York Times.

### Discussing Provocation

Without much elaboration, the memo also says the president raised three possible ways of provoking a confrontation. Since they were first reported last month, neither the White House nor the British government has discussed them.

"The U.S. was thinking of flying U2 reconnaissance aircraft with fighter cover over Iraq, painted in U.N. colours," the memo says, attributing the idea to Mr. Bush. "If Saddam fired on them, he would be in breach."

# The Puzzle of Provocation

Puzzle:

- ▶ How can it be both in  $A$ 's interest to *provoke*  $B$ ...
  - ▶ ...and in  $B$ 's interest to *be provoked*?

# The Puzzle of Provocation

Puzzle:

- ▶ How can it be both in  $A$ 's interest to *provoke*  $B$ ...
  - ▶ ...and in  $B$ 's interest to *be provoked*?
- ▶ How can costless communication between adversaries influence conflict behavior?

# Overview

This model:

- ▶  $A$  wants support from a third party (domestic audience, ally, etc) for conflict against  $B$ 
  - ▶ needs to convince them that  $B$  has hostile intent

# Overview

This model:

- ▶  $A$  wants support from a third party (domestic audience, ally, etc) for conflict against  $B$ 
  - ▶ needs to convince them that  $B$  has hostile intent
- ▶ Through cheap-talk provocation,  $A$  induces  $B$  to take an action which:
  - ▶ improves  $B$ 's conflict payoffs
  - ▶ makes  $B$  more likely to fight
  - ▶ makes the third party support  $A$ 's choice to fight

# Overview

This model:

- ▶  $A$  wants support from a third party (domestic audience, ally, etc) for conflict against  $B$ 
  - ▶ needs to convince them that  $B$  has hostile intent
- ▶ Through cheap-talk provocation,  $A$  induces  $B$  to take an action which:
  - ▶ improves  $B$ 's conflict payoffs
  - ▶ makes  $B$  more likely to fight
  - ▶ makes the third party support  $A$ 's choice to fight

⇒ the adversary leaders collude to manipulate the third party's behavior

# Contribution

Distinction from **audience costs**:

- ▶ message is intended to *provoke*, rather than *deter* as in AC
- ▶ message can be private or public
- ▶ strategy is *less* effective for democratic leaders

# Contribution

Distinction from **audience costs**:

- ▶ message is intended to *provoke*, rather than *deter* as in AC
- ▶ message can be private or public
- ▶ strategy is *less* effective for democratic leaders

Distinction from **diversionary war**:

- ▶ insufficient for  $L$  to show hawkishness / competence in conflict
- ▶ must also show that the international environment (i.e.  $F$ 's type) makes those attributes valuable

# Contribution

Distinction from **audience costs**:

- ▶ message is intended to *provoke*, rather than *deter* as in AC
- ▶ message can be private or public
- ▶ strategy is *less* effective for democratic leaders

Distinction from **diversionary war**:

- ▶ insufficient for  $L$  to show hawkishness / competence in conflict
- ▶ must also show that the international environment (i.e.  $F$ 's type) makes those attributes valuable

Novel mechanism of cheap-talk diplomacy between adversaries:

- ▶ coordinating action to collude against a third party

# Overview

## Outline:

- ▶ Model setup
- ▶ Benchmark: no communication
- ▶ Private communication
- ▶ Public communication
- ▶ Cases

# Model Setup

Players  $L$  (she),  $D$  (they),  $F$  (he):

- ▶ leader  $L$  and domestic actor  $D$  within Home country  $H$
- ▶ foreign leader  $F$  (unitary actor)

# Model Setup

Players  $L$  (she),  $D$  (they),  $F$  (he):

- ▶ leader  $L$  and domestic actor  $D$  within Home country  $H$
- ▶ foreign leader  $F$  (unitary actor)

Sequence:

- ▶ types  $\theta_L, \theta_F$  realized, obs. privately

# Model Setup

Players  $L$  (she),  $D$  (they),  $F$  (he):

- ▶ leader  $L$  and domestic actor  $D$  within Home country  $H$
- ▶ foreign leader  $F$  (unitary actor)

Sequence:

- ▶ types  $\theta_L, \theta_F$  realized, obs. privately
- ▶  $L$ : private message to  $F$ , provocative ( $s = 1$ ) or reassuring ( $s = 0$ )

# Model Setup

Players  $L$  (she),  $D$  (they),  $F$  (he):

- ▶ leader  $L$  and domestic actor  $D$  within Home country  $H$
- ▶ foreign leader  $F$  (unitary actor)

Sequence:

- ▶ types  $\theta_L, \theta_F$  realized, obs. privately
- ▶  $L$ : private message to  $F$ , provocative ( $s = 1$ ) or reassuring ( $s = 0$ )
- ▶  $F$ : prepare ( $r_F = 1$ ) or not ( $r_F = 0$ )

# Model Setup

Players  $L$  (she),  $D$  (they),  $F$  (he):

- ▶ leader  $L$  and domestic actor  $D$  within Home country  $H$
- ▶ foreign leader  $F$  (unitary actor)

Sequence:

- ▶ types  $\theta_L, \theta_F$  realized, obs. privately
- ▶  $L$ : private message to  $F$ , provocative ( $s = 1$ ) or reassuring ( $s = 0$ )
- ▶  $F$ : prepare ( $r_F = 1$ ) or not ( $r_F = 0$ )
- ▶  $D$ : support  $L$  ( $r_H = 1$ ) or not ( $r_H = 0$ )

# Model Setup

Players  $L$  (she),  $D$  (they),  $F$  (he):

- ▶ leader  $L$  and domestic actor  $D$  within Home country  $H$
- ▶ foreign leader  $F$  (unitary actor)

Sequence:

- ▶ types  $\theta_L, \theta_F$  realized, obs. privately
- ▶  $L$ : private message to  $F$ , provocative ( $s = 1$ ) or reassuring ( $s = 0$ )
- ▶  $F$ : prepare ( $r_F = 1$ ) or not ( $r_F = 0$ )
- ▶  $D$ : support  $L$  ( $r_H = 1$ ) or not ( $r_H = 0$ )
- ▶  $L$  and  $F$  (simultaneously): take aggressive action ( $a_i = 1$ ) or not ( $a_i = 0$ )

# Model Setup

Conflict overview:

- ▶ Conflict with strategic complements
  - ▶ Kydd (1997, 2000, 2005); Schultz (2005); Baliga & Sjöstrom (2012)

# Model Setup

Conflict overview:

- ▶ Conflict with strategic complements
  - ▶ Kydd (1997, 2000, 2005); Schultz (2005); Baliga & Sjöstrom (2012)
- ▶  $L$  and  $F$  each uncertain whether the other has SH preferences ( $\theta_i$  low) or PD preferences ( $\theta_i$  high)

# Model Setup

## Conflict overview:

- ▶ Conflict with strategic complements
  - ▶ Kydd (1997, 2000, 2005); Schultz (2005); Baliga & Sjöstrom (2012)
- ▶  $L$  and  $F$  each uncertain whether the other has SH preferences ( $\theta_i$  low) or PD preferences ( $\theta_i$  high)
- ▶  $D$  has SH preferences
  - ▶ only wants to support if conflict is inevitable
  - ▶ doesn't want to increase risk of conflict by supporting

# Model Setup

## Conflict overview:

- ▶ Conflict with strategic complements
  - ▶ Kydd (1997, 2000, 2005); Schultz (2005); Baliga & Sjöstrom (2012)
- ▶  $L$  and  $F$  each uncertain whether the other has SH preferences ( $\theta_i$  low) or PD preferences ( $\theta_i$  high)
- ▶  $D$  has SH preferences
  - ▶ only wants to support if conflict is inevitable
  - ▶ doesn't want to increase risk of conflict by supporting
- ▶ Each side wants the other side to not attack

	$a_F = 0$	$a_F = 1$
$a_H = 0$	0, 0	
$a_H = 1$		

	$a_F = 0$	$a_F = 1$
$a_H = 0$	0, 0	$-\alpha + w_i(\theta, r),$
$a_H = 1$	$\alpha + w_i(\theta, r),$	$w_i(\theta, r),$

- ▶  $w_D(\theta, r) = \theta_D + r_H \delta_H \phi$ , for  $\phi > 0$
- ▶  $w_L(\theta, r) = \theta_L + r_H \delta_H$

- ▶ private types  $\theta_L, \theta_F$ , with  $\theta_i \sim G_i(\cdot)$  on  $[\underline{\theta}_i, \bar{\theta}_i]$ :
  - ▶ each leader's willingness to take the aggressive action (or, dissatisfaction with SQ)
  - ▶  $\theta_D$  common knowledge,  $\theta_D < -\phi \delta_H - \alpha$

	$a_F = 0$	$a_F = 1$
$a_H = 0$	0, 0	$-\alpha + w_i(\theta, r),$
$a_H = 1$	$\alpha + w_i(\theta, r),$	$w_i(\theta, r),$

- ▶  $w_D(\theta, r) = \theta_D + r_H \delta_H \phi$ , for  $\phi > 0$
- ▶  $w_L(\theta, r) = \theta_L + r_H \delta_H$

- ▶ private types  $\theta_L, \theta_F$ , with  $\theta_i \sim G_i(\cdot)$  on  $[\underline{\theta}_i, \bar{\theta}_i]$ :
  - ▶ each leader's willingness to take the aggressive action (or, dissatisfaction with SQ)
  - ▶  $\theta_D$  common knowledge,  $\theta_D < -\phi \delta_H - \alpha$
- ▶  $r_H, r_F$ : support/preparation/mobilization for conflict

	$a_F = 0$	$a_F = 1$
$a_H = 0$	0, 0	$-\alpha + w_i(\theta, r),$ $\alpha + w_F(\theta, r)$
$a_H = 1$	$\alpha + w_i(\theta, r),$ $-\alpha + w_F(\theta, r)$	$w_i(\theta, r),$ $w_F(\theta, r)$

- ▶  $w_D(\theta, r) = \theta_D + r_H \delta_H \phi$ , for  $\phi > 0$
- ▶  $w_L(\theta, r) = \theta_L + r_H \delta_H$
- ▶  $w_F(\theta, r) = \theta_F + r_F \delta_F$

- ▶ private types  $\theta_L, \theta_F$ , with  $\theta_i \sim G_i(\cdot)$  on  $[\underline{\theta}_i, \bar{\theta}_i]$ :
  - ▶ each leader's willingness to take the aggressive action (or, dissatisfaction with SQ)
  - ▶  $\theta_D$  common knowledge,  $\theta_D < -\phi \delta_H - \alpha$
- ▶  $r_H, r_F$ : support/preparation/mobilization for conflict
- ▶  $\delta_H, \delta_F$ : benefit from mobilizing (reduction in conflict costs)

	$a_F = 0$	$a_F = 1$
$a_H = 0$	0, 0	$-\alpha + w_i(\theta, r),$ $\alpha + w_F(\theta, r)$
$a_H = 1$	$\alpha + w_i(\theta, r),$ $-\alpha + w_F(\theta, r)$	$w_i(\theta, r),$ $w_F(\theta, r)$

- ▶  $w_D(\theta, r) = \theta_D + r_H \delta_H \phi$ , for  $\phi > 0$
- ▶  $w_L(\theta, r) = \theta_L + r_H \delta_H$
- ▶  $w_F(\theta, r) = \theta_F + r_F \delta_F$

- ▶ private types  $\theta_L, \theta_F$ , with  $\theta_i \sim G_i(\cdot)$  on  $[\underline{\theta}_i, \bar{\theta}_i]$ :
  - ▶ each leader's willingness to take the aggressive action (or, dissatisfaction with SQ)
  - ▶  $\theta_D$  common knowledge,  $\theta_D < -\phi \delta_H - \alpha$
- ▶  $r_H, r_F$ : support/preparation/mobilization for conflict
- ▶  $\delta_H, \delta_F$ : benefit from mobilizing (reduction in conflict costs)
- ▶  $\alpha$ : benefit of taking advantage of opponent (/cost of being taken advantage of)

	$a_F = 0$	$a_F = 1$
$a_H = 0$	0, 0	$-\alpha + w_i(\theta, r),$ $\alpha + w_F(\theta, r)$
$a_H = 1$	$\alpha + w_i(\theta, r),$ $-\alpha + w_F(\theta, r)$	$w_i(\theta, r),$ $w_F(\theta, r)$

- ▶  $w_D(\theta, r) = \theta_D + r_H \delta_H \phi$ , for  $\phi > 0$
- ▶  $w_L(\theta, r) = \theta_L + r_H \delta_H$
- ▶  $w_F(\theta, r) = \theta_F + r_F \delta_F$

- ▶ private types  $\theta_L, \theta_F$ , with  $\theta_i \sim G_i(\cdot)$  on  $[\underline{\theta}_i, \bar{\theta}_i]$ :
  - ▶ each leader's willingness to take the aggressive action (or, dissatisfaction with SQ)
  - ▶  $\theta_D$  common knowledge,  $\theta_D < -\phi \delta_H - \alpha$
- ▶  $r_H, r_F$ : support/preparation/mobilization for conflict
- ▶  $\delta_H, \delta_F$ : benefit from mobilizing (reduction in conflict costs)
- ▶  $\alpha$ : benefit of taking advantage of opponent (/cost of being taken advantage of)
- ▶ Assume  $\delta_i > \alpha > 0$ :
  - ▶ better to prepare in advance than catch your opponent off-guard

# Eighty-eighth Congress of the United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

*Began and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday, the seventh day of January, one thousand nine hundred and sixty-four*

## Joint Resolution

To promote the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia.

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas these attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

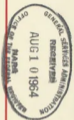
Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Sec. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

*John W. McCormack*  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*  
*Lee Harvey*



*... the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.*

## Interpretations of $L/D$ relationship

$L$  (agent)

$D$  (principal)

---

Leader

Voter / domestic constituency

## Interpretations of $L/D$ relationship

$L$  (agent)

$D$  (principal)

---

Leader

Voter / domestic constituency

Executive

Legislature

## Interpretations of $L/D$ relationship

$L$ (agent)	$D$ (principal)
Leader	Voter / domestic constituency
Executive	Legislature
Protégé state	Patron state / “international community”

## Interpretations of $L/D$ relationship

$L$ (agent)	$D$ (principal)
Leader	Voter / domestic constituency
Executive	Legislature
Protégé state	Patron state / “international community”

## Interpretations of $L/D$ relationship

$L$ (agent)	$D$ (principal)
Leader	Voter / domestic constituency
Executive	Legislature
Protégé state	Patron state / “international community”
Military leadership	Civilian government

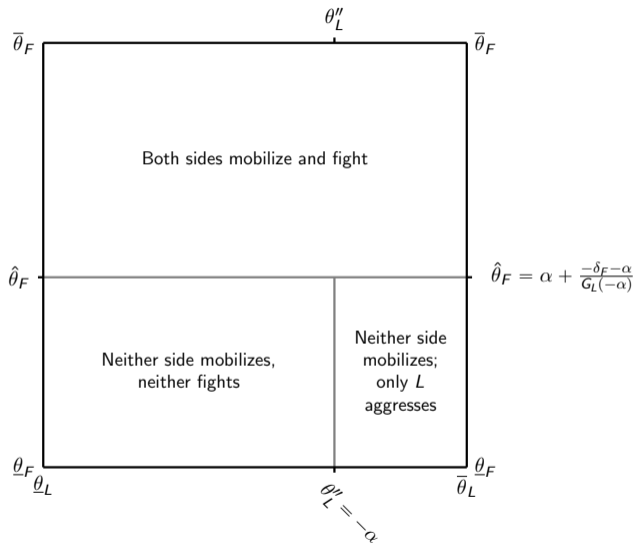
## Plan for analysis

At the conflict stage, the (fight, fight) eqm,  $a = (1, 1)$ , is always supported

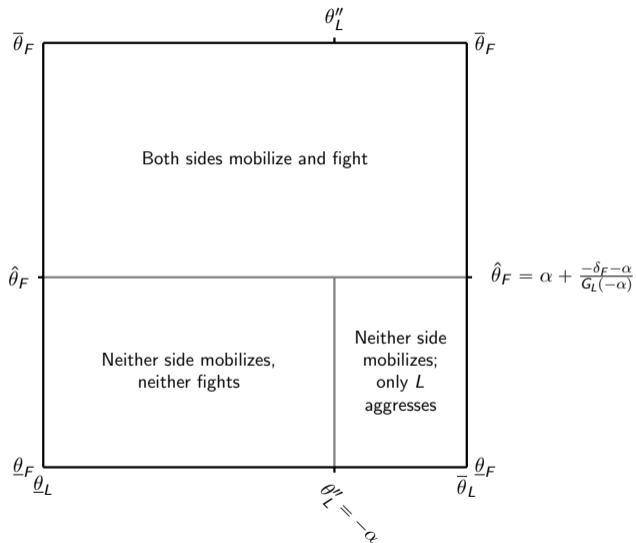
- ▶ if players anticipate  $a = (1, 1)$ , then both want to prepare,  $r = (1, 1)$

Goal: characterize the most cooperative eqm that can be supported

# Non-Communication Equilibrium

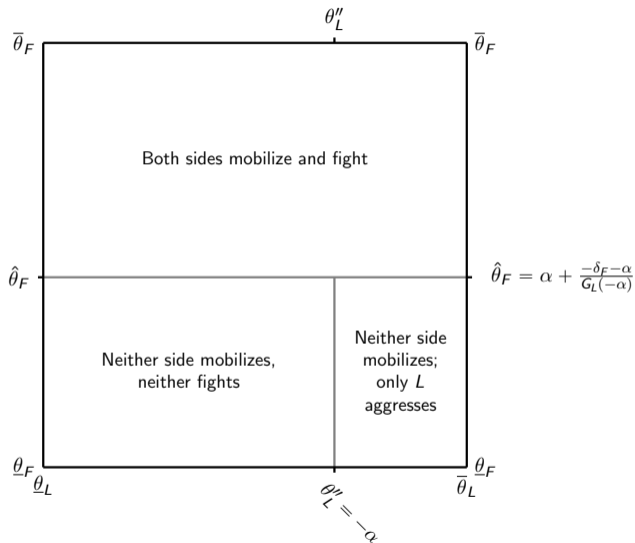


# Non-Communication Equilibrium



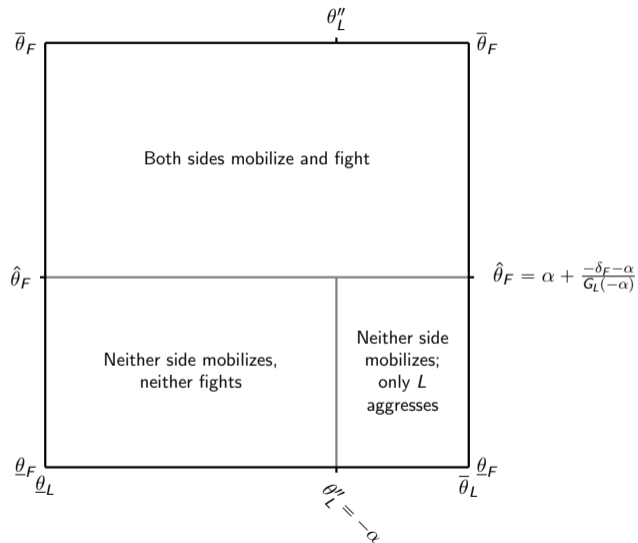
- ▶  $F$  uncertain re:
  - ▶ will  $L$  reciprocate cooperation

# Non-Communication Equilibrium



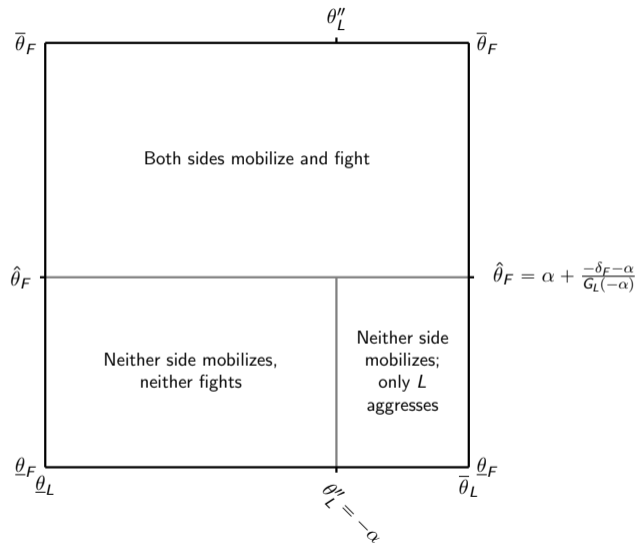
- ▶  $F$  uncertain re:
  - ▶ will  $L$  reciprocate cooperation
- ▶  $F$ :  $r_F = 1 \iff a_F = 1$

# Non-Communication Equilibrium



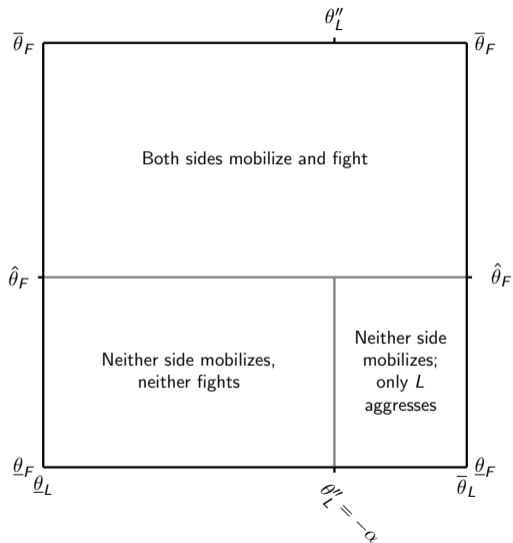
- ▶  $F$  uncertain re:
  - ▶ will  $L$  reciprocate cooperation
- ▶  $F$ :  $r_F = 1 \iff a_F = 1$
- ▶  $D$ :  $r_H = r_F$

# Non-Communication Equilibrium

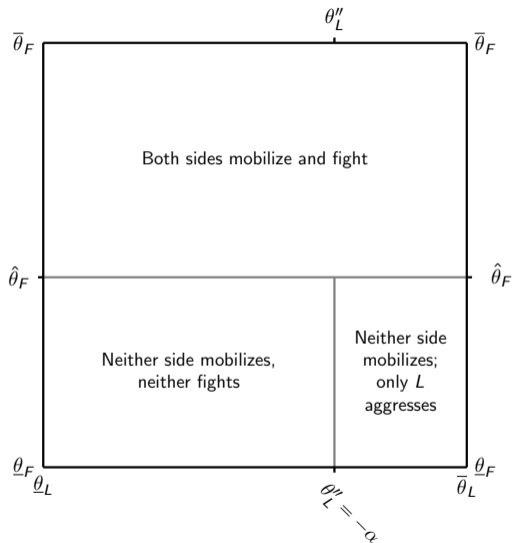


- ▶  $F$  uncertain re:
  - ▶ will  $L$  reciprocate cooperation
- ▶  $F$ :  $r_F = 1 \iff a_F = 1$
- ▶  $D$ :  $r_H = r_F$
- ▶  $L$ :  $a_H = 0$  only if:
  - ▶  $r_F = 0$  and  $\theta_L < \theta_L''$

# Non-Communication Equilibrium

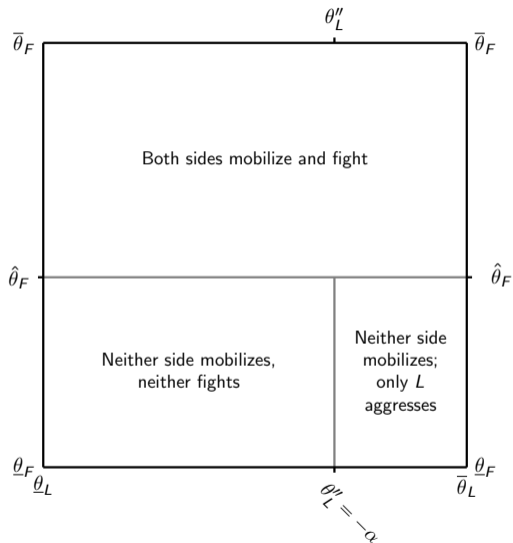


# Non-Communication Equilibrium



Problems with the non-communication eqm:

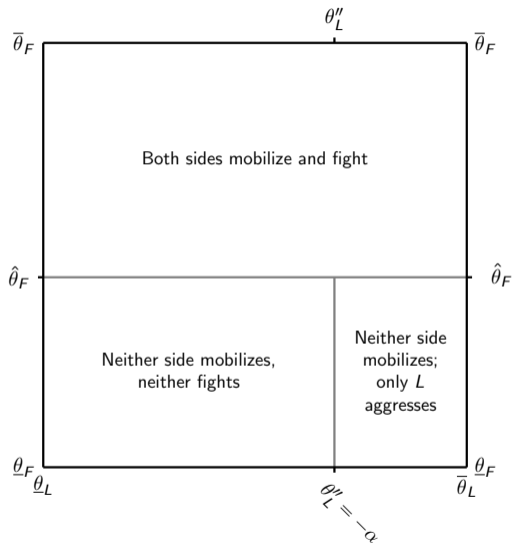
# Non-Communication Equilibrium



Problems with the non-communication eqm:

- ▶ with low  $\theta_L$ , moderate  $\theta_F$ :
  - ▶  $F$  mobilizes, leading to conflict
  - ▶ but everyone would prefer peace

# Non-Communication Equilibrium



Problems with the non-communication eqm:

- ▶ with low  $\theta_L$ , moderate  $\theta_F$ :
  - ▶  $F$  mobilizes, leading to conflict
  - ▶ but everyone would prefer peace
- ▶ with high  $\theta_L$ , low  $\theta_F$ :
  - ▶ conflict is inevitable
  - ▶ but  $F$  doesn't prepare
  - ▶ and  $L$  doesn't get  $D$ 's support

# Private Communication Equilibrium

$L$  and  $F$  will play cutpoint strategies in  $\theta_i$

## Private Communication Equilibrium

$L$  and  $F$  will play cutpoint strategies in  $\theta_i$

- ▶  $L_\ell$ , or  $\theta_L < \theta'_L$ : reassure; and fight only if  $F$  mobilizes

## Private Communication Equilibrium

$L$  and  $F$  will play cutpoint strategies in  $\theta_i$

- ▶  $L_\ell$ , or  $\theta_L < \theta'_L$ : reassure; and fight only if  $F$  mobilizes
- ▶  $L_m$ , or  $\theta_L \in (\theta'_L, \theta''_L)$ : provoke; but fight only if  $D$  supports

# Private Communication Equilibrium

$L$  and  $F$  will play cutpoint strategies in  $\theta_i$

- ▶  $L_\ell$ , or  $\theta_L < \theta'_L$ : reassure; and fight only if  $F$  mobilizes
- ▶  $L_m$ , or  $\theta_L \in (\theta'_L, \theta''_L)$ : provoke; but fight only if  $D$  supports
- ▶  $L_h$ , or  $\theta_L > \theta''_L$ : provoke; and fight unconditionally

# Private Communication Equilibrium

$L$  and  $F$  will play cutpoint strategies in  $\theta_i$

- ▶  $L_\ell$ , or  $\theta_L < \theta'_L$ : reassure; and fight only if  $F$  mobilizes
- ▶  $L_m$ , or  $\theta_L \in (\theta'_L, \theta''_L)$ : provoke; but fight only if  $D$  supports
- ▶  $L_h$ , or  $\theta_L > \theta''_L$ : provoke; and fight unconditionally
  
- ▶  $F_\ell$ , or  $\theta_F < \theta'_F$ : never mobilize; and fight only if  $D$  mobilized

# Private Communication Equilibrium

$L$  and  $F$  will play cutpoint strategies in  $\theta_i$

- ▶  $L_\ell$ , or  $\theta_L < \theta'_L$ : reassure; and fight only if  $F$  mobilizes
- ▶  $L_m$ , or  $\theta_L \in (\theta'_L, \theta''_L)$ : provoke; but fight only if  $D$  supports
- ▶  $L_h$ , or  $\theta_L > \theta''_L$ : provoke; and fight unconditionally
  
- ▶  $F_\ell$ , or  $\theta_F < \theta'_F$ : never mobilize; and fight only if  $D$  mobilized
- ▶  $F_m$ , or  $\theta_F \in (\theta'_F, \theta''_F)$ : mobilize and fight iff provoked

# Private Communication Equilibrium

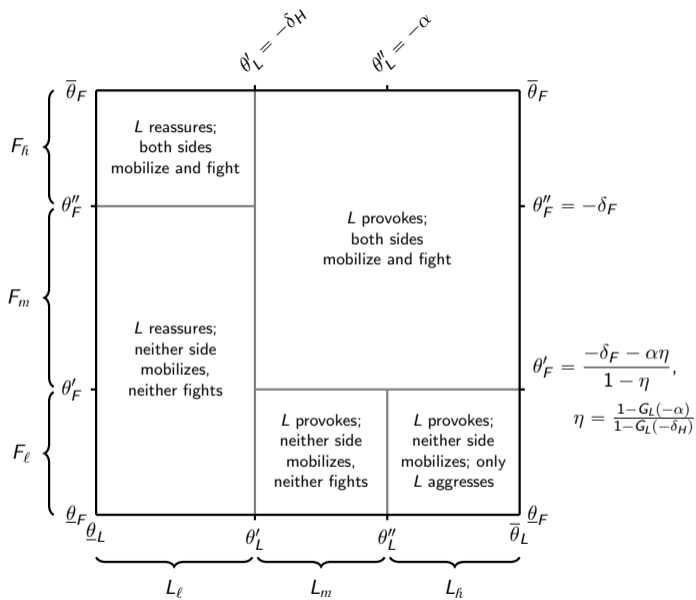
$L$  and  $F$  will play cutpoint strategies in  $\theta$ ;

- ▶  $L_\ell$ , or  $\theta_L < \theta'_L$ : reassure; and fight only if  $F$  mobilizes
- ▶  $L_m$ , or  $\theta_L \in (\theta'_L, \theta''_L)$ : provoke; but fight only if  $D$  supports
- ▶  $L_h$ , or  $\theta_L > \theta''_L$ : provoke; and fight unconditionally
  
- ▶  $F_\ell$ , or  $\theta_F < \theta'_F$ : never mobilize; and fight only if  $D$  mobilized
- ▶  $F_m$ , or  $\theta_F \in (\theta'_F, \theta''_F)$ : mobilize and fight iff provoked
- ▶  $F_h$ , or  $\theta_F > \theta''_F$ : always mobilize and fight

# Private Communication Equilibrium

$L$  and  $F$  will play cutpoint strategies in  $\theta$ ;

- ▶  $L_\ell$ , or  $\theta_L < \theta'_L$ : reassure; and fight only if  $F$  mobilizes
- ▶  $L_m$ , or  $\theta_L \in (\theta'_L, \theta''_L)$ : provoke; but fight only if  $D$  supports
- ▶  $L_h$ , or  $\theta_L > \theta''_L$ : provoke; and fight unconditionally
  
- ▶  $F_\ell$ , or  $\theta_F < \theta'_F$ : never mobilize; and fight only if  $D$  mobilized
- ▶  $F_m$ , or  $\theta_F \in (\theta'_F, \theta''_F)$ : mobilize and fight iff provoked
- ▶  $F_h$ , or  $\theta_F > \theta''_F$ : always mobilize and fight
  
- ▶  $D$  matches  $F$ 's action



# Private Communication Equilibrium

Mechanism:

- ▶  $L_m$  and  $L_f$  want  $D$ 's support for conflict with  $F$ 
  - ▶ need to convince  $D$  that  $F$  is likely to attack, even if  $D$  doesn't mobilize

# Private Communication Equilibrium

Mechanism:

- ▶  $L_m$  and  $L_f$  want  $D$ 's support for conflict with  $F$ 
  - ▶ need to convince  $D$  that  $F$  is likely to attack, even if  $D$  doesn't mobilize
- ▶ when  $F$  gets the provocative message:
  - ▶ unsure whether  $L$  is "bluffing", or  $L$  would actually attack without  $F$  mobilizing first

# Private Communication Equilibrium

Mechanism:

- ▶  $L_m$  and  $L_f$  want  $D$ 's support for conflict with  $F$ 
  - ▶ need to convince  $D$  that  $F$  is likely to attack, even if  $D$  doesn't mobilize
- ▶ when  $F$  gets the provocative message:
  - ▶ unsure whether  $L$  is “bluffing”, or  $L$  would actually attack without  $F$  mobilizing first
- ▶  $F_m$  mobilizes iff provoked
  - ▶ even though he knows that doing so will sway  $D$  to support

# Private Communication Equilibrium

Mechanism:

- ▶  $L_m$  and  $L_f$  want  $D$ 's support for conflict with  $F$ 
  - ▶ need to convince  $D$  that  $F$  is likely to attack, even if  $D$  doesn't mobilize
- ▶ when  $F$  gets the provocative message:
  - ▶ unsure whether  $L$  is "bluffing", or  $L$  would actually attack without  $F$  mobilizing first
- ▶  $F_m$  mobilizes iff provoked
  - ▶ even though he knows that doing so will sway  $D$  to support
- ▶  $D$  supports conflict iff  $F$  mobilizes
  - ▶ even though they know  $F$  may just be reacting to  $L$ 's provocation

# Private Communication Equilibrium

Summary:

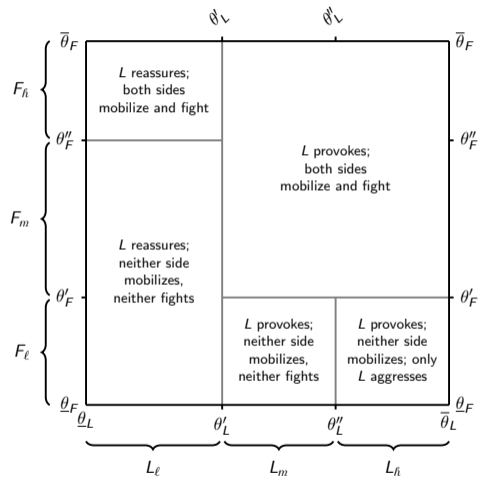
- ▶  $L$  can enlist  $F$ 's help in getting  $D$ 's support for conflict
  - ▶  $L$  and  $F$  “collude” to manipulate  $D$ 's behavior

# Private Communication Equilibrium

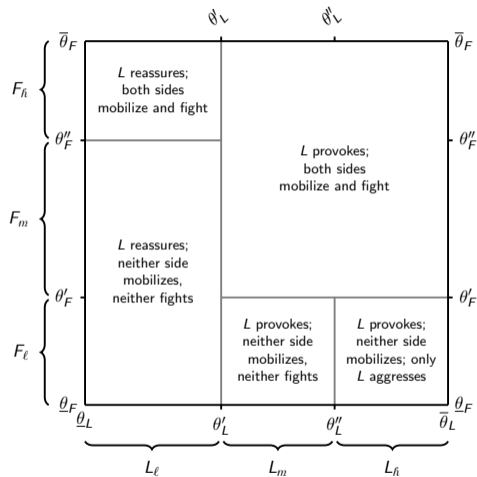
## Summary:

- ▶  $L$  can enlist  $F$ 's help in getting  $D$ 's support for conflict
  - ▶  $L$  and  $F$  “collude” to manipulate  $D$ 's behavior
- ▶ Corollary: if  $L$  can *provoke*  $F$ , then  $L$  can also *reassure*
  - ▶ cheap-talk message can prevent  $F$  from attacking

# Comparative Statics

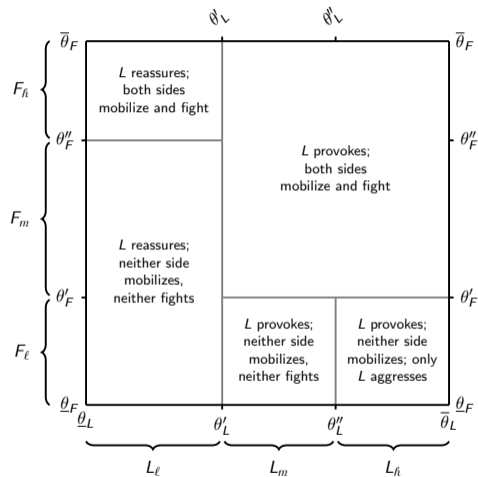


# Comparative Statics



Consider increasing  $\delta_H$ :

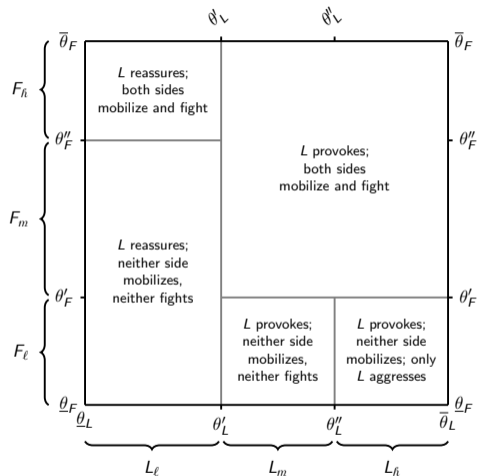
# Comparative Statics



Consider increasing  $\delta_H$ :

- ▶ meaning  $L$  more dependent on  $D$ 's support
  - ▶ more democratic, or more concerned with international legitimacy

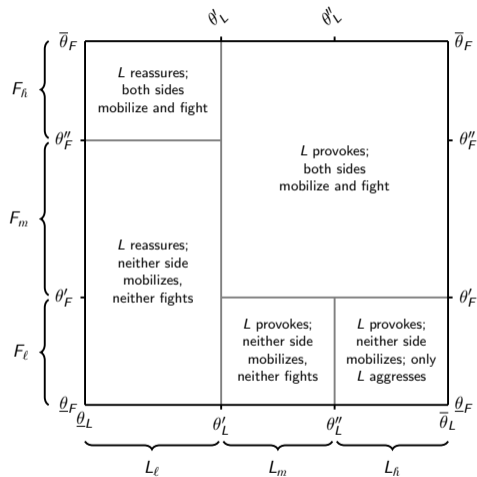
# Comparative Statics



Consider increasing  $\delta_H$ :

- ▶ meaning  $L$  more dependent on  $D$ 's support
  - ▶ more democratic, or more concerned with international legitimacy
- ▶ Consequence of increasing  $\delta_H$ :
  - ▶  $L$  more likely to try to provoke ( $\theta'_L \downarrow$ )
  - ▶  $L$ 's provocation is *less* effective (i.e.  $F$  is less responsive to  $L$ 's message) ( $\theta'_F \uparrow$ )

# Comparative Statics

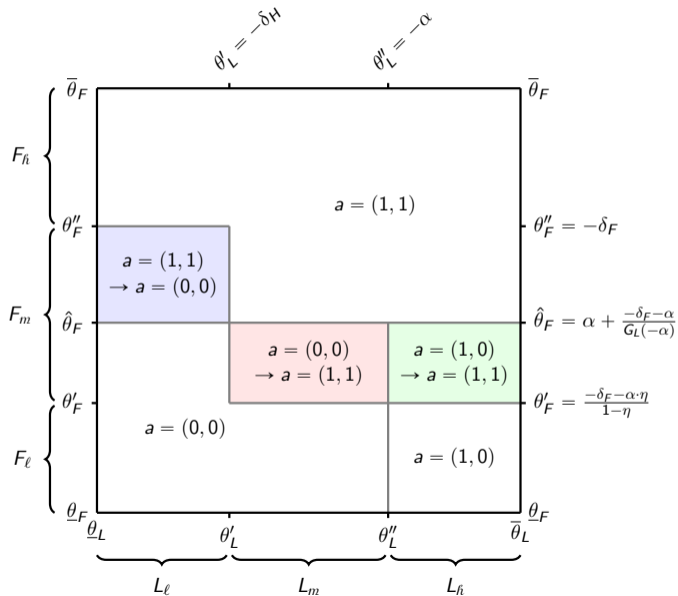


Consider increasing  $\delta_H$ :

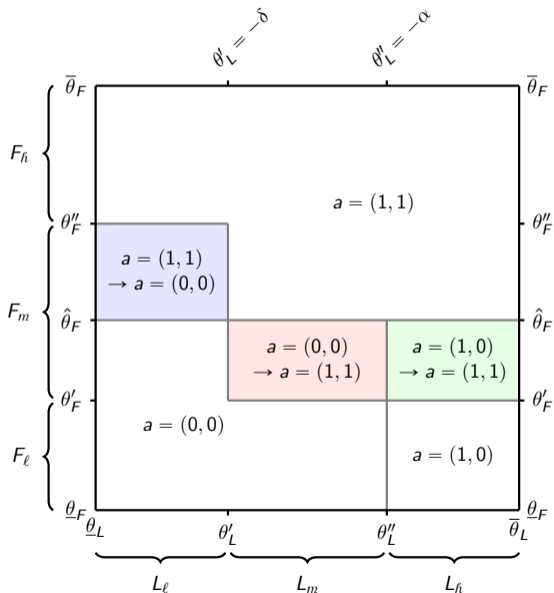
- ▶ meaning  $L$  more dependent on  $D$ 's support
  - ▶ more democratic, or more concerned with international legitimacy
- ▶ Consequence of increasing  $\delta_H$ :
  - ▶  $L$  more likely to try to provoke ( $\theta'_L \downarrow$ )
  - ▶  $L$ 's provocation is *less* effective (i.e.  $F$  is less responsive to  $L$ 's message) ( $\theta'_F \uparrow$ )

$\implies$  contrary to standard audience cost result

# Comparing Private Communication vs. Non-Communication



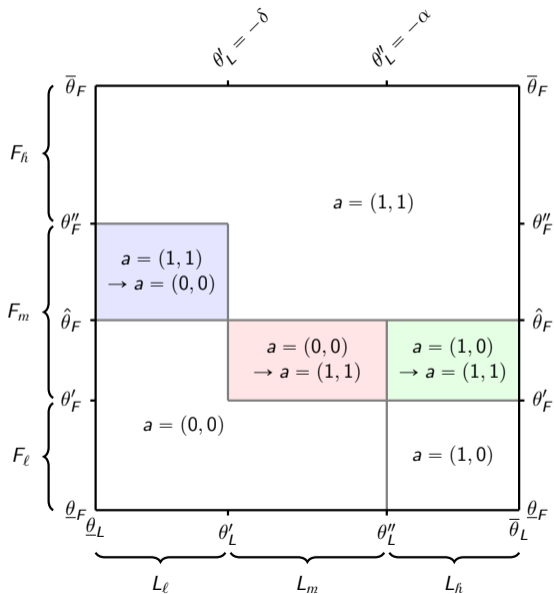
# Comparing Private Communication vs. Non-Communication



Welfare implications:

- ▶ suppose  $G_i \sim U(\underline{\theta}_i, \bar{\theta}_i)$
- ▶ how is each player's expected payoff affected by communication?

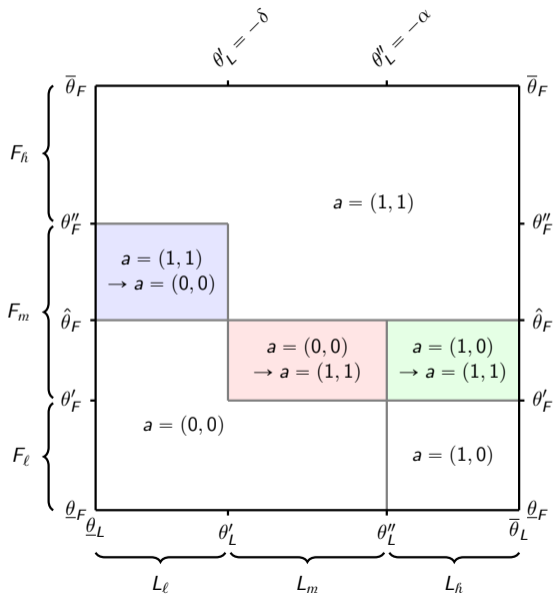
# Comparing Private Communication vs. Non-Communication



Welfare implications:

- ▶ suppose  $G_i \sim U(\underline{\theta}_i, \bar{\theta}_i)$
- ▶ how is each player's expected payoff affected by communication?
- ▶  $L$  and  $F$ : strictly improved

# Comparing Private Communication vs. Non-Communication



Welfare implications:

- ▶ suppose  $G_i \sim U(\underline{\theta}_i, \bar{\theta}_i)$
- ▶ how is each player's expected payoff affected by communication?
- ▶  $L$  and  $F$ : strictly improved
- ▶  $D$ : ambiguous

# Public Communication

Alternative setup:

- ▶  $L$  sends message publicly,  $D$  and  $F$  hear it

# Public Communication

Alternative setup:

- ▶  $L$  sends message publicly,  $D$  and  $F$  hear it

Result:

- ▶ Either the same behavior (if  $\phi < \hat{\phi}$ )
- ▶ or the message is strictly *more* effective
  - ▶ ( $F$ 's mobilization strategy is more responsive to the message)

# Public Communication

Alternative setup:

- ▶  $L$  sends message publicly,  $D$  and  $F$  hear it

Result:

- ▶ Either the same behavior (if  $\phi < \hat{\phi}$ )
- ▶ or the message is strictly *more* effective
  - ▶ ( $F$ 's mobilization strategy is more responsive to the message)
- ▶ reason: provocative message increases  $D$ 's belief that conflict is inevitable

## Interpretations of $L/D$ relationship

$L$	$D$
Leader	Voter / domestic constituency
Executive	Legislature
Protégé state	Patron state / “international community”
Military leadership	Civilian government

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870



## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck ( $L$ )

- ▶ wanted smaller German states ( $D$ ) to unify under Prussia ( $r_H = 1$ ):

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck ( $L$ )

- ▶ wanted smaller German states ( $D$ ) to unify under Prussia ( $r_H = 1$ ):

*I was convinced that the gulf which in the course of history had opened between north and south in our country, because of differences in ways of life and dynastic and tribal loyalties, could not be more effectively bridged than through a common national war against the traditionally aggressive neighbor.*

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck ( $L$ )

- ▶ wanted smaller German states ( $D$ ) to unify under Prussia ( $r_H = 1$ ):

*I was convinced that the gulf which in the course of history had opened between north and south in our country, because of differences in ways of life and dynastic and tribal loyalties, could not be more effectively bridged than through a common national war against the traditionally aggressive neighbor.*

- ▶ needed to demonstrate that French Emperor Napoleon III ( $F$ ) had hostile intent

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

Precipitating dispute: Spanish succession

- ▶ Bismarck had tried to maneuver to put Prince Leopold, of the Hohenzollern family (headed by Prussian King Wilhelm I), on the Spanish throne

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

Precipitating dispute: Spanish succession

- ▶ Bismarck had tried to maneuver to put Prince Leopold, of the Hohenzollern family (headed by Prussian King Wilhelm I), on the Spanish throne
- ▶ French demanded withdrawal
- ▶ Wilhelm accepted
- ▶ dispute resolved, as far as French government (in aggregate) was concerned

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

Precipitating dispute: Spanish succession

- ▶ Bismarck had tried to maneuver to put Prince Leopold, of the Hohenzollern family (headed by Prussian King Wilhelm I), on the Spanish throne
- ▶ French demanded withdrawal
- ▶ Wilhelm accepted
- ▶ dispute resolved, as far as French government (in aggregate) was concerned

But, Bismarck not satisfied:

*“... it is important that we should be the party attacked ...”*

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

### Ems Dispatch:

- ▶ French FM Gramont instructed Ambassador Benedetti to seek additional assurances from Wilhelm
- ▶ Wilhelm politely refused; telegraphed Bismarck with account of meeting

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

### Ems Dispatch:

- ▶ French FM Gramont instructed Ambassador Benedetti to seek additional assurances from Wilhelm
- ▶ Wilhelm politely refused; telegraphed Bismarck with account of meeting
- ▶ Bismarck edits the transcript to sound more hostile, and publishes

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

### Ems Dispatch:

- ▶ French FM Gramont instructed Ambassador Benedetti to seek additional assurances from Wilhelm
- ▶ Wilhelm politely refused; telegraphed Bismarck with account of meeting
- ▶ Bismarck edits the transcript to sound more hostile, and publishes

(Original): Wilhelm “decided not to receive the French envoy again but to inform him through an adjutant that His Majesty had now received from the Prince confirmation of the news which Benedetti had already received from Paris, and that he had nothing further to say to the Ambassador. ”

(Published): “His Majesty the King thereupon refused to receive the French envoy again and informed him through an adjutant that His Majesty had nothing further to say to the Ambassador.”

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

Ems Dispatch as a provocative cheap-talk signal

- ▶ intended to ““have the effect of a red rag upon the Gallic bull” (acc. to Bismarck)

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

Ems Dispatch as a provocative cheap-talk signal

- ▶ intended to ““have the effect of a red rag upon the Gallic bull” (acc. to Bismarck)
- ▶ FM Gramont to PM Ollivier:

*“My dear fellow. . . you see before you a man who has just been slapped in the face.”*

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

Ems Dispatch as a provocative cheap-talk signal

- ▶ intended to ““have the effect of a red rag upon the Gallic bull” (acc. to Bismarck)
- ▶ FM Gramont to PM Ollivier:

*“My dear fellow. . . you see before you a man who has just been slapped in the face.”*

- ▶ French public opinion turns strongly in support of war

## Case: Franco-Prussian War, 1870

Ems Dispatch as a provocative cheap-talk signal

- ▶ intended to ““have the effect of a red rag upon the Gallic bull” (acc. to Bismarck)
- ▶ FM Gramont to PM Ollivier:

*“My dear fellow. . . you see before you a man who has just been slapped in the face.”*

- ▶ French public opinion turns strongly in support of war

France “mobilizing” ( $r_F = 1$ ):

- ▶ initiating war on its own timeline, rather than waiting
- ▶ advantageous for France — power shifting towards Prussia

## Case: Gulf of Tonkin incident



## Case: Gulf of Tonkin incident

Gulf of Tonkin incident, Jul-Aug 1964:

- ▶ U.S. taking provocative actions toward North Vietnam
  - ▶ ineffective covert activities (34A), commando raids, subversion attempts
  - ▶ Navy destroyer, Maddox, on radar harassment patrols
  - ▶ North Vietnamese boats attack Maddox ( $r_F = 1$ )
  - ▶ Johnson then sends Maddox and another ship to be attacked again

## Case: Gulf of Tonkin incident

Gulf of Tonkin incident, Jul-Aug 1964:

- ▶ U.S. taking provocative actions toward North Vietnam
  - ▶ ineffective covert activities (34A), commando raids, subversion attempts
  - ▶ Navy destroyer, Maddox, on radar harassment patrols
  - ▶ North Vietnamese boats attack Maddox ( $r_F = 1$ )
  - ▶ Johnson then sends Maddox and another ship to be attacked again
- ▶ Congress passes Gulf of Tonkin Resolution ( $r_H = 1$ ):
  - ▶ authorizing the President to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States to and to prevent further aggression”

## Case: Gulf of Tonkin incident

Gulf of Tonkin incident, Jul-Aug 1964:

- ▶ U.S. taking provocative actions toward North Vietnam
  - ▶ ineffective covert activities (34A), commando raids, subversion attempts
  - ▶ Navy destroyer, Maddox, on radar harassment patrols
  - ▶ North Vietnamese boats attack Maddox ( $r_F = 1$ )
  - ▶ Johnson then sends Maddox and another ship to be attacked again
- ▶ Congress passes Gulf of Tonkin Resolution ( $r_H = 1$ ):
  - ▶ authorizing the President to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States to and to prevent further aggression”
- ▶ Resolution substantially reduced Johnson’s domestic political cost of future military escalation ( $\delta$ )

## Case: South Korea martial law episode, 2024



## Case: South Korea, 2024

South Korean martial law episode, Dec. 2024:

- ▶ Yoon government ( $L$ ) wanted to overcome domestic gridlock
  - ▶ needed to demonstrate to public that NK ( $F$ ) was a threat

## Case: South Korea, 2024

South Korean martial law episode, Dec. 2024:

- ▶ Yoon government ( $L$ ) wanted to overcome domestic gridlock
  - ▶ needed to demonstrate to public that NK ( $F$ ) was a threat
- ▶ “Provoke the North’s attack at the NLL” ( $s = 1$ )
  - ▶ drone flights dropping propaganda leaflets
  - ▶ shooting down trash balloons

## Case: South Korea, 2024

South Korean martial law episode, Dec. 2024:

- ▶ Yoon government ( $L$ ) wanted to overcome domestic gridlock
  - ▶ needed to demonstrate to public that NK ( $F$ ) was a threat
- ▶ “Provoke the North’s attack at the NLL” ( $s = 1$ )
  - ▶ drone flights dropping propaganda leaflets
  - ▶ shooting down trash balloons
- ▶ Provocation unsuccessful; Kim Jong Un did not mobilize
  - ▶ Yoon’s martial law attempt was overwhelmingly rejected by SK public ( $r_H = 0$ )
    - ▶ did not perceive external threat