

PSC/IR 106: The Democratic Peace Theory

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<https://williamspaniel.com/classes/ps-0500-2017/>

Outline

- Brief History of IR Theory
- The Democratic Peace
- Explanations for the Democratic Peace?
- Correlation Does Not Imply Causation
- The McDonald's Peace Theory
- Economic Interdependence
- The Rise of China

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Roadmap

- Before: Unitary actor assumption
- Now: Perhaps type of government matters
- Next week: Perhaps leaders matter

Intellectual History

- For the majority of IR's history, scholars assumed that states were identical except for in relative power (Realists)
- Other scholars challenged this assumption in the 1980s
 - Evidence overwhelmingly supports the second group

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The Democratic Peace Theory

Democracies tend not to fight other democracies.

Ultimately, the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere. Democracies don't attack each other.
(1994 State of the Union)



Democracies don't go to war with each other. And the reason why is the people of most societies don't like war, and they understand what war means.... I've got great faith in democracies to promote peace. And that's why I'm such a strong believer that the way forward in the Middle East...is to promote democracy. (2004 Press Conference)



Are democratic countries more
peaceful?

Answer: Kind of.

Democracy + Democracy = Little
War

Democracy + Democracy = Little War

Democracy + Non-Democracy = Some War

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Democracy + Non-Democracy = Some War

Non-Democracy + Non-Democracy = Some War

Some Caveats

- How do we define democracy?
 - Is Mexico a democracy?
 - Is Russia a democracy?
 - Was the United States in 1796 a democracy?

Some Caveats

- How do we define war?
- Correlates of War is the standard dataset for war (1816-present)
 - Requirements
 - 1000 battle deaths (lots of death)
 - At least 100 battle deaths per side or 1000 troops committed (balanced fight)
 - Continuous conflict

Some Caveats

- Democracies sometimes do fight other democracies
 - Ancient Greece
 - War of 1812
 - Spanish-American War
 - Lebanon/Israel Six Day War
 - Kargil War

Some Caveats

- Democracies aren't always friendly to democratic ideals
 - Iran 1953
 - Indonesia 1957
 - Chile 1973
 - Nicaragua 1984

Some Caveats

- Very few democracies existed before the end of World War II
- Most of the democracy versus democracy data we have comes from the Cold War
 - But just about all of the democracies were allied against communism at the time!

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How does democracy cause
peace?

Theories of the Democratic Peace

1. Culture of contracts
2. Transparency
3. Electoral incentives

Theories of the Democratic Peace

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Culture of Contracts

- Behavioral explanation for the democratic peace
- In democracies, citizens have incentive to cooperate through contractual agreements
 - Violence is not allowed

Theories of the Democratic Peace

1. Culture of contracts
2. Transparency
3. Electoral incentives

Transparency

- Rationalist explanations for war: uncertainty about resolve causes conflict
- How can rival states be uncertain about a democracy's level of resolve?
 - Public polling data is readily available to *everyone*, including the evil dictators of the world
 - Less private information → less war

Theories of the Democratic Peace

1. Culture of contracts
2. Transparency
3. Electoral incentives

Electoral Incentives

- *Selectorate*—the pool of individuals who can make up winning coalitions
- *Winning coalition*—a group of individuals necessary to remain in power
 - Democracies: Half of all voters plus 1
 - Autocracies: Military commanders, a handful of politicians

Electoral Incentives

- War is costly, but some benefit
- Easy to buy off a small number of people
 - Saddam Hussein → steal Kuwaiti oil → buy off his cronies
- Hard to buy off a large number of people
 - Since democracies share the burden of war relatively equally, democratic leaders have less incentive to fight

Democracy + Democracy → Little
War

Democracy + Democracy → Little War

Non-Democracy + Non-Democracy → Some War

Democracy + Democracy → Little War

Democracy + Non-Democracy → A Little More War

Non-Democracy + Non-Democracy → Some War

Democracy + Democracy = Little War

Democracy + Non-Democracy = Some War

Non-Democracy + Non-Democracy = Some War

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What is the difference between correlation and causation?

Correlation

- When A is present, B tends to be present as well and vice versa

Correlation

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 - When two democracies are present, peace tends to be present as well

Correlation

- When A is present, B tends to be present as well and vice versa
 - When two democracies are present, peace tends to be present as well
- This tells us nothing about causation!

Correlation

- For the moment, assume there actually is a causal relationship
 - Correlations can exist randomly
 - A fair coin appears biased every now and then
 - We have statistical tests to ensure this is not the case

Problems with Inferring Causation

1. B causes A.
2. A and B cause each other.
3. C causes A and B.
4. A causes C which causes B. But D also causes C which causes B.

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Example: United Nations Failure?

- Presence of United Nations troops is correlated with the outbreak of civil war. Therefore, we should not station U.N. troops in hotspots.

Example: United Nations Failure?

- Presence of United Nations troops is correlated with the outbreak of civil war. Therefore, we should not station U.N. troops in hotspots.
 - But U.N. troops go to the *hardest* places to keep the peace. Of course they fail frequently!

Peace Causes Democracy

- Democracies are not as efficient as autocracies
 - Benefit: check and balance on power
- With external threats, citizens might be willing to concentrate power
 - So democracies only arise in places not prone to war

Problems with Inferring Causation

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Example: Wealth and Democracy

- Democracy is correlated with high domestic wealth. Therefore, democracy causes wealth.

Example: Wealth and Democracy

- Democracy is correlated with high domestic wealth. Therefore, democracy causes wealth.
 - Yes.
 - But wealth also gives the middle class political power. So wealth causes democracy. The relationship goes both ways.

Democracy and Peace

- Perhaps democracies causes peace but peace also causes democracy
- We cannot estimate the effectiveness of democracy by looking at the correlation between democracy and peace

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Example: Arms Races

- Arms races are correlated with the outbreak of war. Therefore, arms races cause war.

Example: Arms Races

- Arms races are correlated with the outbreak of war. Therefore, arms races cause war.
 - No. Bargaining problems (i.e., rationalist explanations for war) cause war. States engage in arms races to prepare for war.

ARMS RACES



WAR

**BARGAINING
PROBLEMS**

```
graph TD; A[BARGAINING PROBLEMS] --> B[ARMS RACES]; A --> C[WAR];
```

A flowchart with a red box at the top containing the text 'BARGAINING PROBLEMS'. Two red arrows point downwards from this box to two separate boxes below. The left box is green and contains the text 'ARMS RACES'. The right box is purple and contains the text 'WAR'.

ARMS RACES

WAR

Democracy, Economics, and War

- Perhaps wealth causes democracy
- Perhaps the creation of wealth (i.e., trade) causes peace

```
graph TD; WEALTH[WEALTH] --> DEMOCRACY[DEMOCRACY]; WEALTH --> PEACE[PEACE];
```

WEALTH

DEMOCRACY

PEACE

Problems with Inferring Causation

1. B causes A.
2. A and B cause each other.
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Cold and the Cold

- Cold weather and sickness are correlated.
Therefore, cold weather causes sickness.

Cold and the Cold

- Cold weather and sickness are correlated.
Therefore, cold weather causes sickness.
 - Not quite. Cold weather forces people indoors.
Sharing cramped spaces allows germs to spread more easily.

```
graph LR; A[COLD WEATHER] --> B[BEING INDOORS]; B --> C[SICKNESS]
```

COLD
WEATHER

BEING
INDOORS

SICKNESS



COLD
WEATHER

BEING
INDOORS

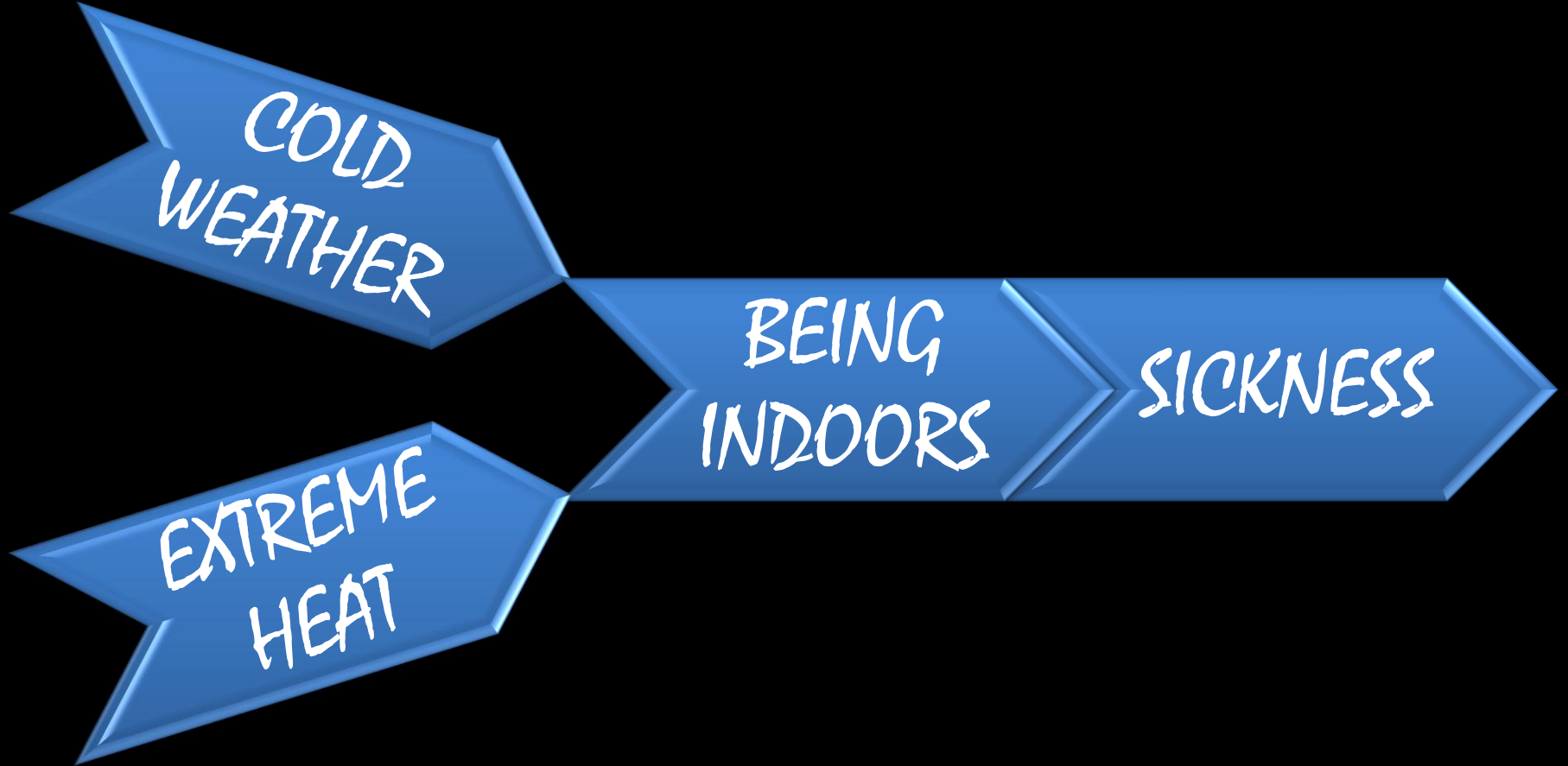
SICKNESS

COLD
WEATHER

BEING
INDOORS

SICKNESS

EXTREME
HEAT





DEMOCRACY

BEING
INDOORS



PEACE



DEMOCRACY

TRADE

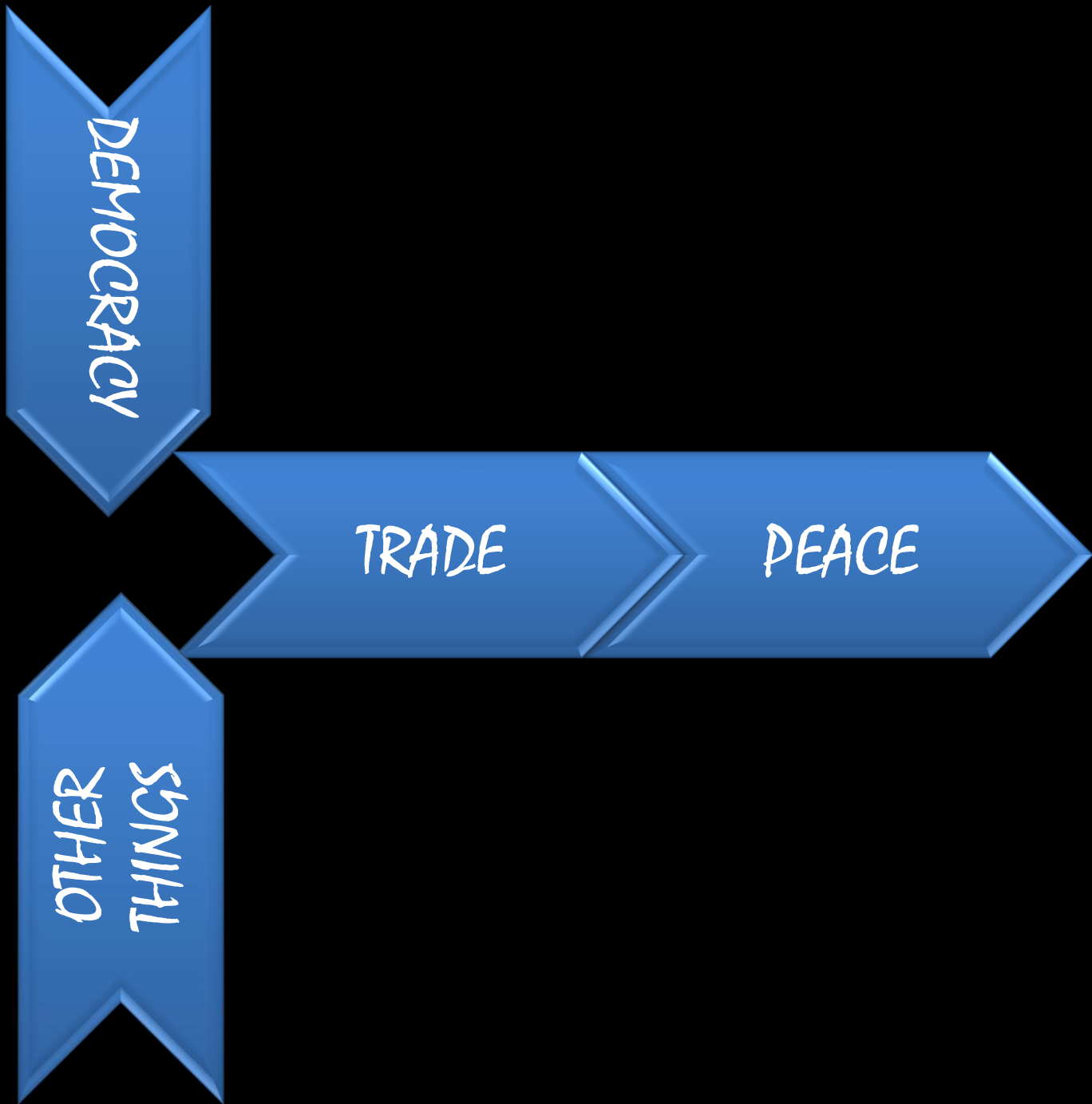
PEACE

DEMOCRACY

TRADE

PEACE

OTHER
THINGS

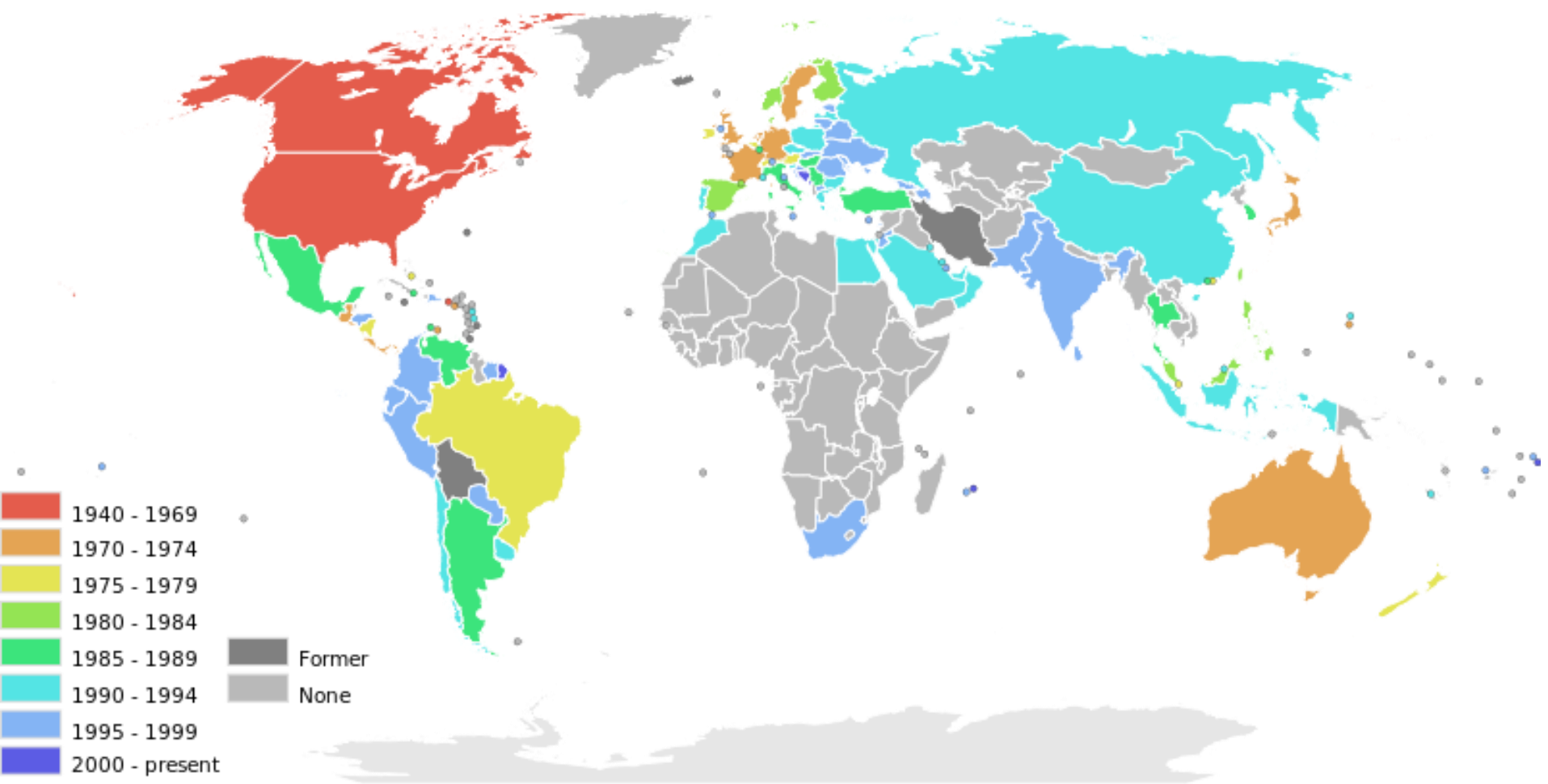


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McDonald's Peace Theory

- Countries with McDonald's restaurants tend not to fight other countries with McDonald's restaurants
 - Originates from a 1996 NYT article by Thomas Friedman

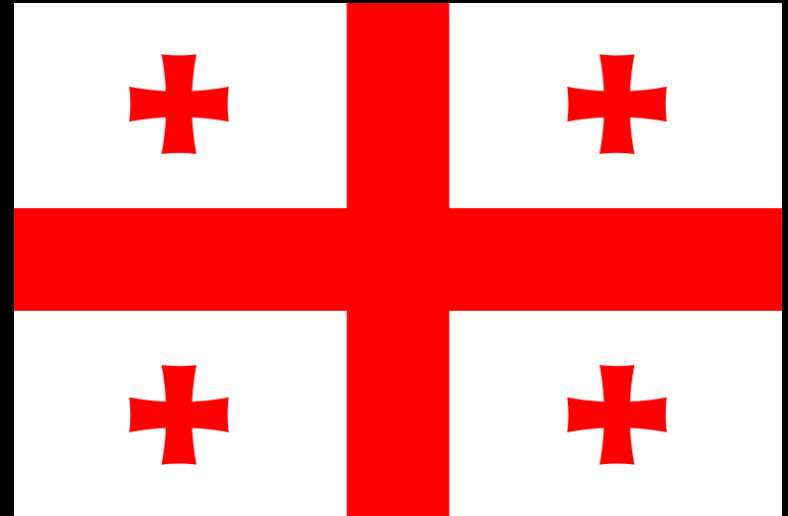


Perfect Theory?

- Yes!

Perfect Theory?

- Yes...until Russia and Georgia screwed everything up in the summer of 2008



But Wait

- “Wars” are armed conflicts with at least 1000 battle deaths
- South Ossetian war only killed 281
- Theory still holds!!!

Correlation versus Causation

- Clearly, Big Macs are not suddenly causing the peace

Correlation versus Causation

- Clearly, Big Macs are not suddenly causing the peace
- But countries with McDonald's tend to be better economically developed and open to trade
 - Perhaps open trade is causing the peace
 - In other words, peace is based in capitalism

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How does trade cause peace?

Economic Interdependence

- Countries that trade with each other tend not to fight each other
 - True for disputes and wars
 - Finding controls for other factors

Economic Interdependence

- Correlation does not imply causation
 - Perhaps causation goes the other way
 - Can we explain why trade relations might *cause* peace?

Explaining the Peace

- Last unit: trade creates a surplus
 - Splitting the surplus makes everyone better off

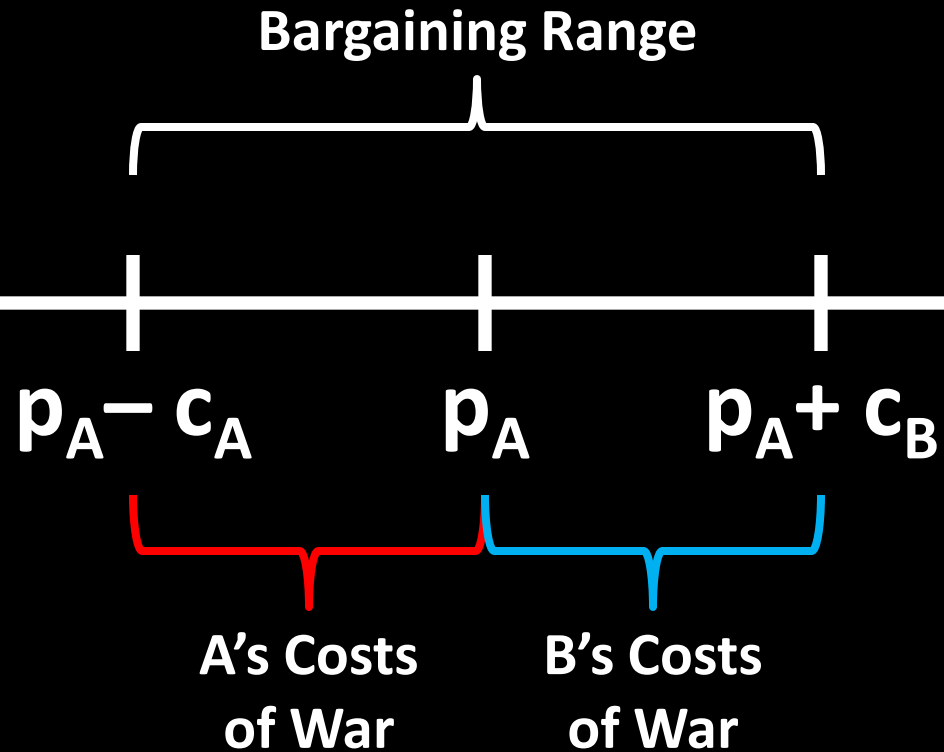
Explaining the Peace

- Last unit: trade creates a surplus
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- Two units ago: range of mutually preferable settlements grows larger as costs grow

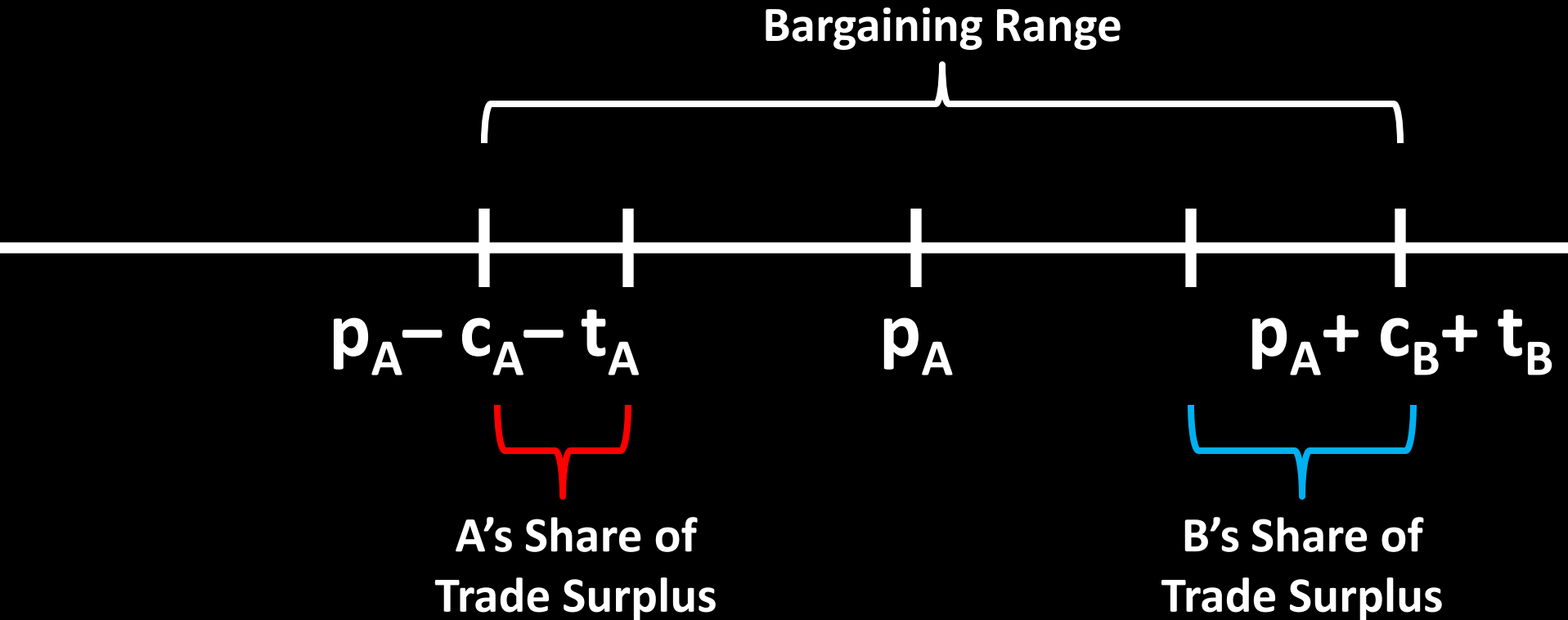
Explaining the Peace

- Last unit: trade creates a surplus
 - Splitting the surplus makes everyone better off
- Two units ago: range of mutually preferable settlements grows larger as costs grow
 - States cannot trade if they are at war
 - So the trade surplus makes war costlier!

Bargaining without Trade



Bargaining with Trade



Bargaining Range with Trade



Bargaining Range without Trade



Explaining the Peace

- Trade makes war less appealing
- The less appealing war is, the less likely bargaining breaks down for most explanations for war

Type of Trade

- Suppose Will and Matt trade mostly *substitute* products
 - Will makes tequila; Matt makes wine
- Suppose Evil Will and Evil Matt trade completely different things
 - Will produces authentic Mexican food and Matt's chief export is Nickelback

Type of Trade

- All else equal, which of these dyads is more likely to fight?
- Why?

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Is China going to kill us any time
soon?

Red Dawn

- A really crummy 2012 movie based on a kinda crummy 1984 film.
- The story of a secret Chinese plot to destroy the United States. Fortunately, Thor saves the day.



Movies Are Silly...

- ...but some Americans are actually worried that China is going to get more belligerent.
- Should we be worried about a Chinese invasion? Should we launch preventive war?

Preventive War

- Silly!
 - Oops #1: China has nuclear weapons.

Preventive War

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 - Oops #3: You thought Iraq was bad...China has one billion people!

Preventive War

- Silly!
 - Oops #1: China has nuclear weapons.
 - Oops #2: U.S and China exchange \$500 billion in trade every year.
 - Oops #3: You thought Iraq was bad...China has one billion people!
- Conclusion: Preventive war is not an option.

But China Will Take Us Over!

- This is paranoia.

But China Will Take Us Over!

- This is paranoia.
 - Oops #1: China enjoys trading with us.

Red Dawn

- A really crummy 2012 movie based on a kinda crummy 1984 film.
- The story of a secret Chinese plot to destroy the United States.
 - Except the producers realized **they wanted to sell the movie to the large Chinese audience**. So they changed the villains to North Koreans post-production.

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- This is paranoia.
 - Oops #1: China enjoys trading with us.
 - Oops #2: They own us already. (China holds \$1.3 trillion of U.S. debt.)

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- This is paranoia.
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 - Oops #4: Did China see what happened in Iraq?

But China Will Take Us Over!

- This is paranoia.
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 - Oops #2: They own us already. (China holds \$1.1 trillion of U.S. debt.)
 - Oops #3: We have nukes.
 - Oops #4: Did China see what happened in Iraq?
- Conclusion: No communist takeover.

But China Will Be Stronger

United States

- 1990: \$5,800,525,000,000
 - First in world.

China

- 1990: \$390,279,000,000
 - Tenth in world.

But China Will Be Stronger

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But China Will Be Stronger

United States

- 1990: \$5,800,525,000,000
 - First in world.
- 2011: \$15,094,025,000,000
 - First in world.
- 2050: \$83,805,000,000,000
 - Third in world (India).

China

- 1990: \$390,279,000,000
 - Tenth in world.
- 2011: \$11,299,967,000,000
 - Second in world.
- 2050: \$205,321,000,000,000
 - First in world.

But China Has Its Own Problems

United States

- 1990: \$5,800,525,000,000
 - First in world.
- 2011: \$15,094,025,000,000
 - First in world.
- 2050: \$83,805,000,000,000
 - Third in world (India).
- 2011 *Per Capita*: \$48,387
 - Sixth in world (Qatar, Luxemburg, Singapore, Norway, Brunei).

China

- 1990: \$390,279,000,000
 - Tenth in world.
- 2011: \$11,299,967,000,000
 - Second in world.
- 2050: \$205,321,000,000,000
 - First in world.
- 2011 *Per Capita*: \$8,382
 - 92nd in world, in between Ecuador and Belize.



Summary

- We have to accept China will have a more prominent role in international affairs
- But we are so preoccupied with our economic relationship, it is not that big of a deal
- China has domestic problems looming