

# PS 0500: IR Basics

William Spaniel

[williamspaniel.com/classes/worldpolitics](http://williamspaniel.com/classes/worldpolitics)

# Agenda

- Sovereignty
- Anarchy
- Proximate vs. Underlying Causes
- The Strategic World

Who are the major actors in IR?

# Some Actors

- International organizations
- Domestic leaders
- Non-governmental organizations
- Multi-national corporations
- Military alliances

# Some Actors

- International organizations
- Domestic leaders
- Non-governmental organizations
- Multi-national corporations
- Military alliances
- States

# States vs. States

## States

- United States of America
- France
- Japan
- Georgia (Former SSR)

## States

- California
- New York
- Texas
- Georgia (Peaches)

# States vs. States

## **States = Countries**

- United States of America
- France
- Japan
- Georgia (Former SSR)

# States vs. States

## States

- United States of America
- France
- Japan
- Georgia (Former SSR)

**States are *sovereign* entities**



# What is sovereignty?

- Definition: the monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a territory

# What is sovereignty?

- Definition: the monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a territory
- A “state” is the sovereign entity of a territory

# What is sovereignty?

- Definition: the monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a territory
  - Murders, gang violence, etc. are illegitimate
  - National governments often delegate the power
    - Example: local police
    - But the authority to use of force originates from the state's permission

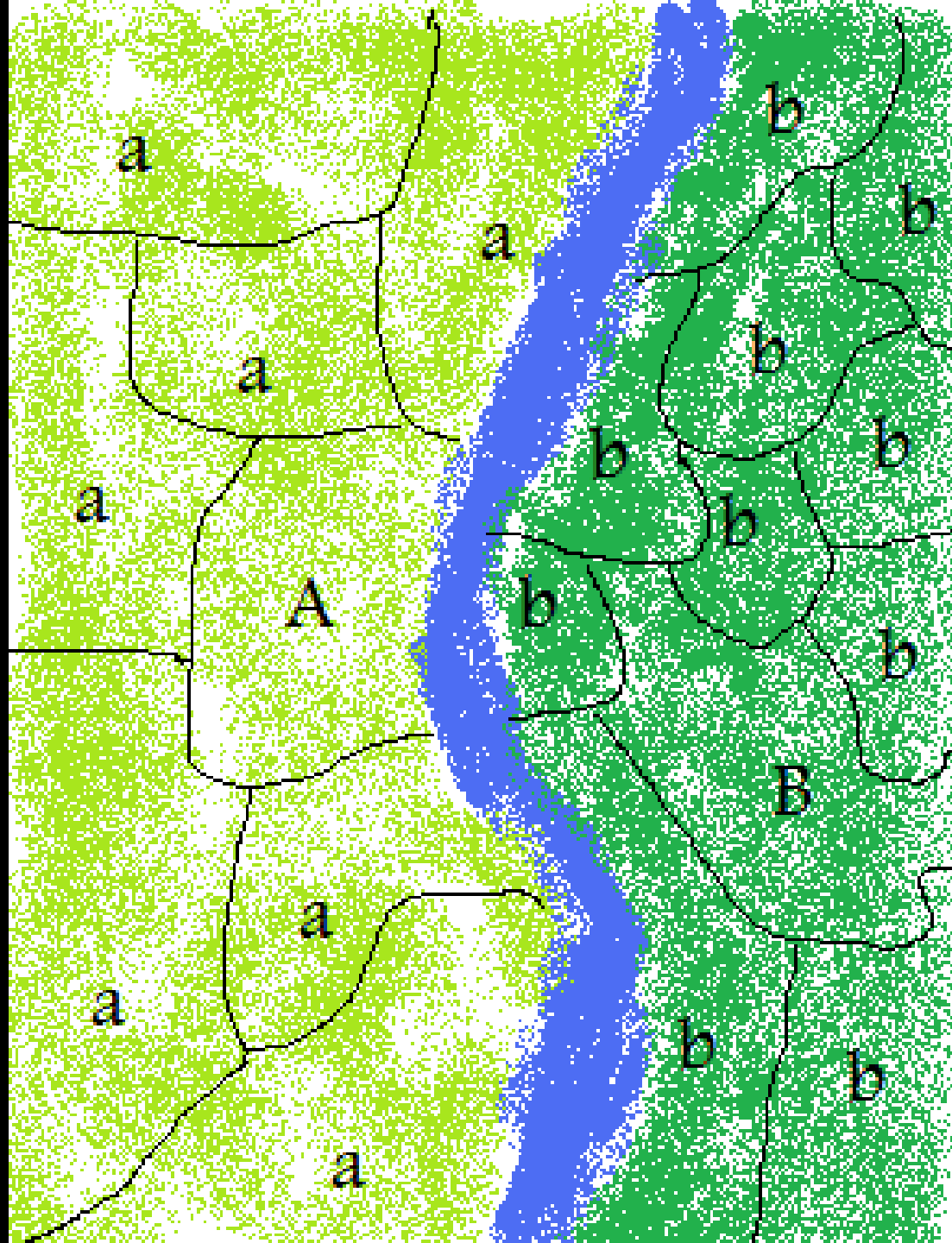
# What is sovereignty?

- Sovereign entities are not supposed to meddle in the internal affairs of other sovereign entities
- This norm is well-established today but was not always the case

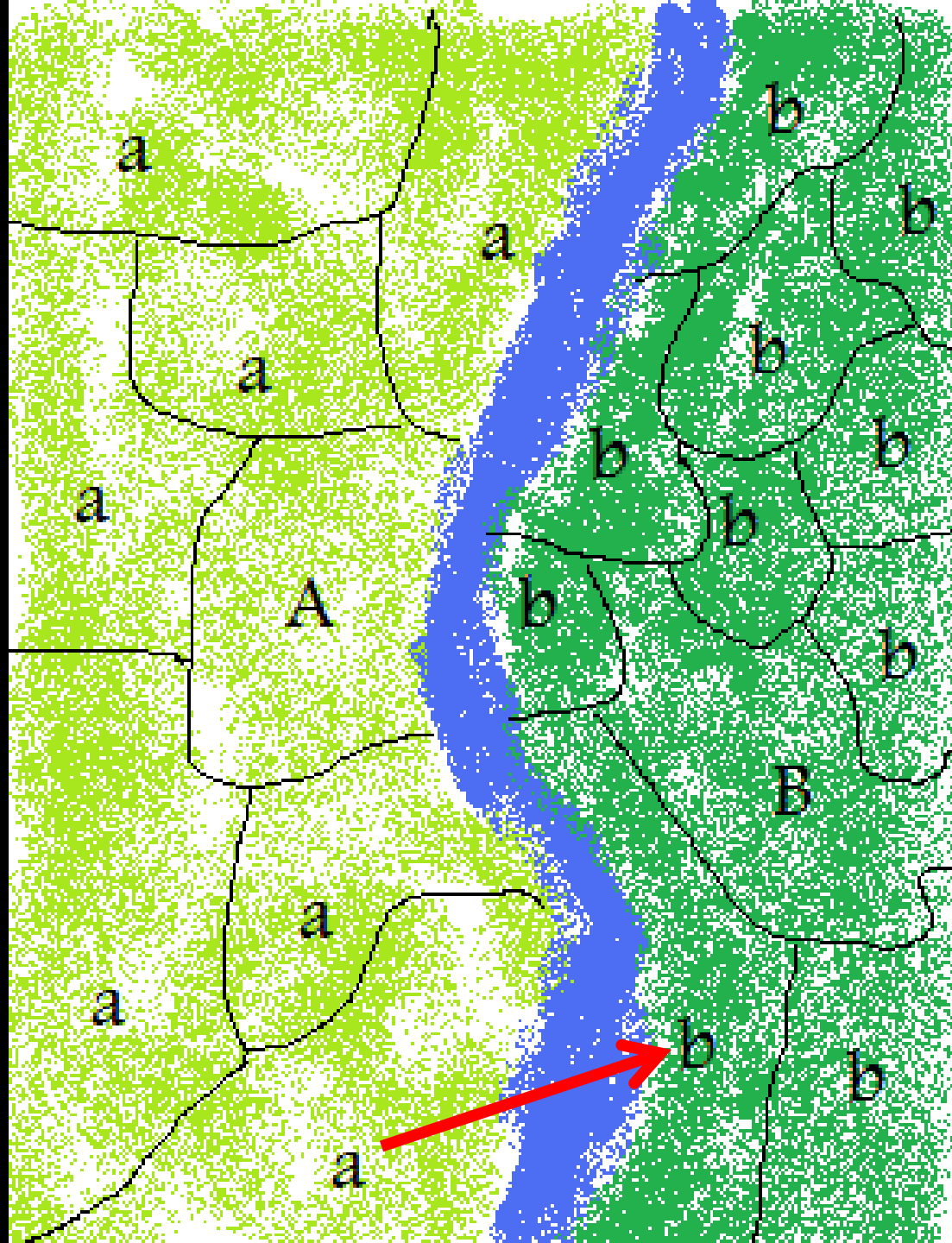
# Trivial Analogy

- Parents have sovereignty over their children
- If you threw a baseball into your neighbor's window, your neighbor does not punish you
  - Your neighbor has to ask your parents for compensation

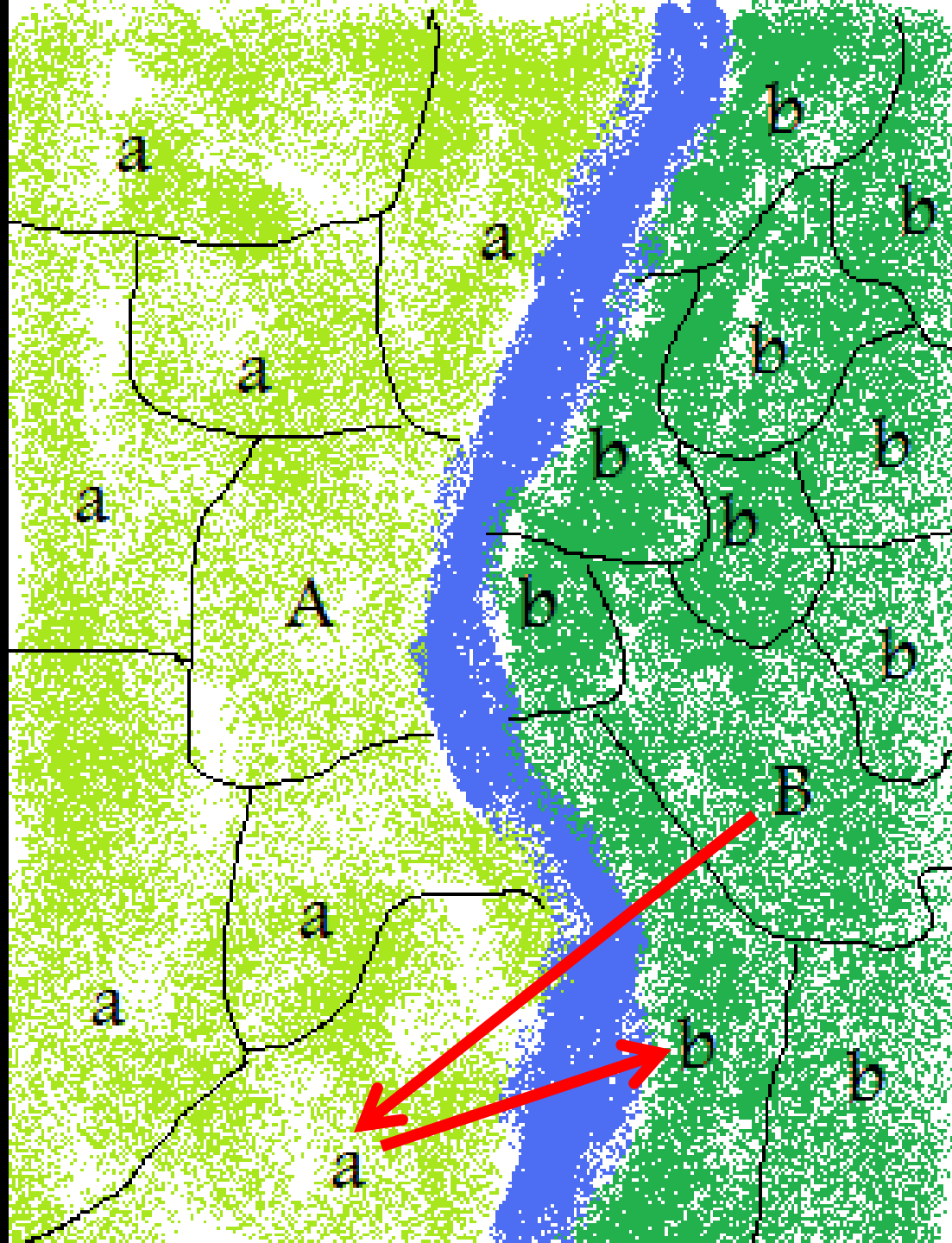
**Without  
Sovereignty**



**Without  
Sovereignty**

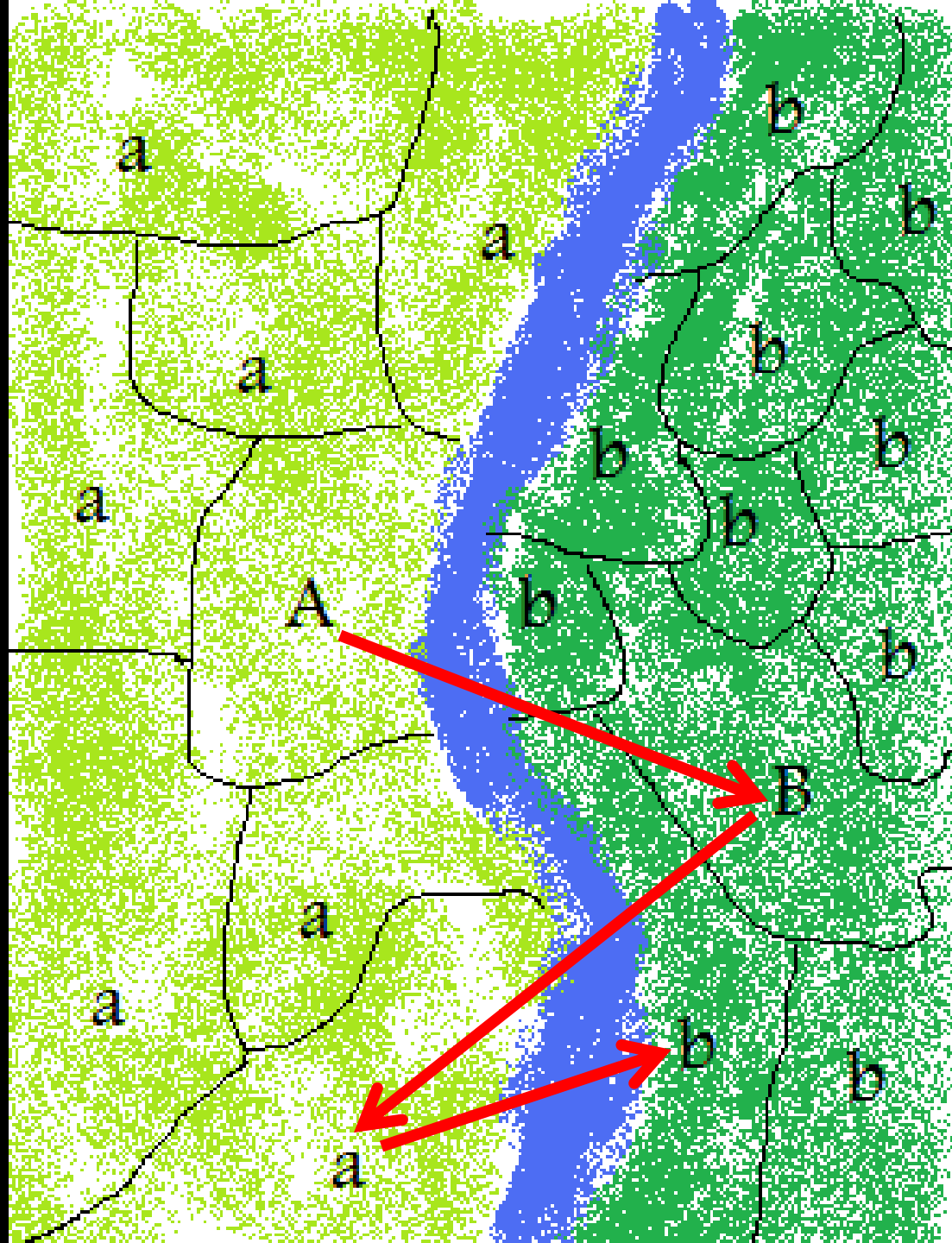


**Without  
Sovereignty**

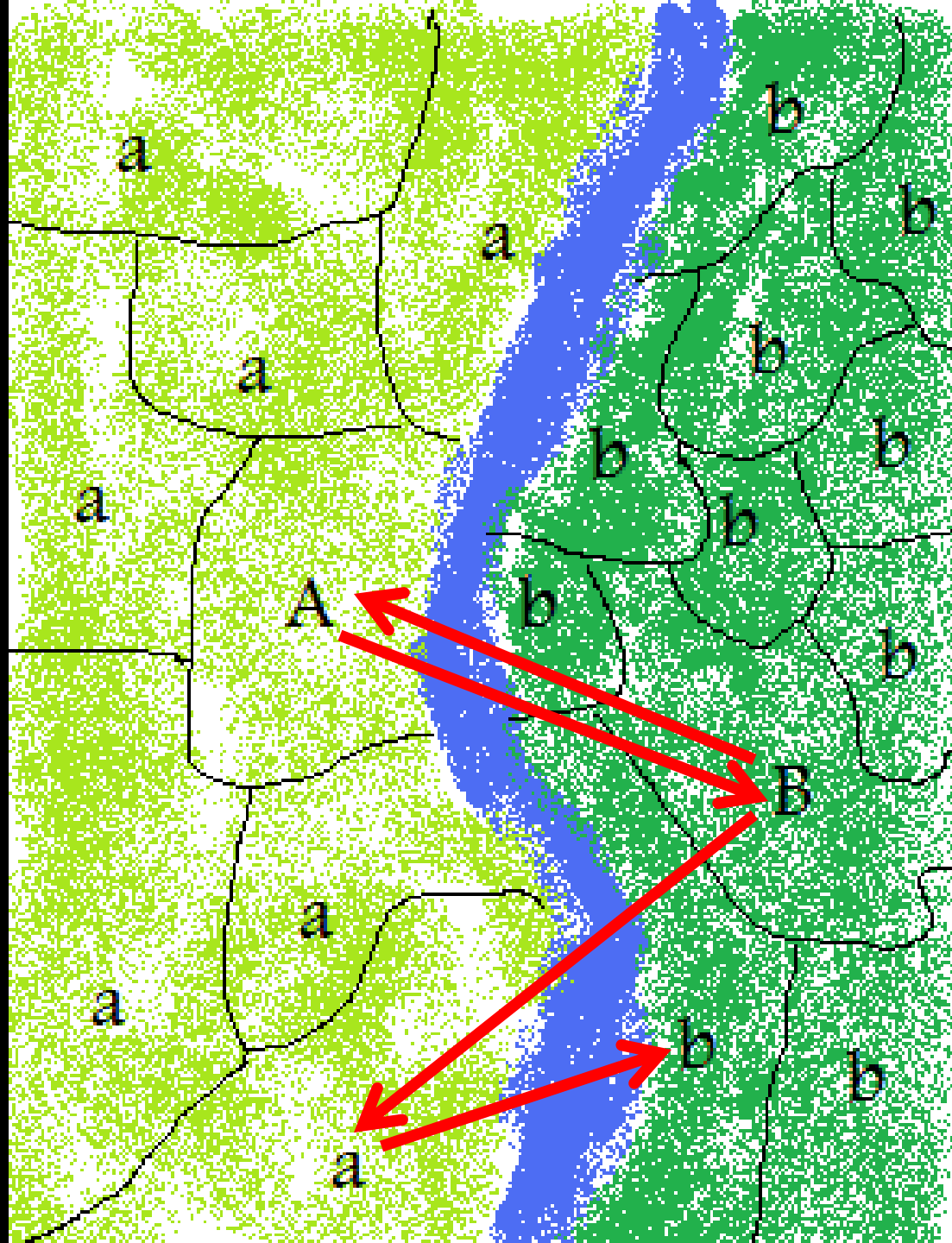




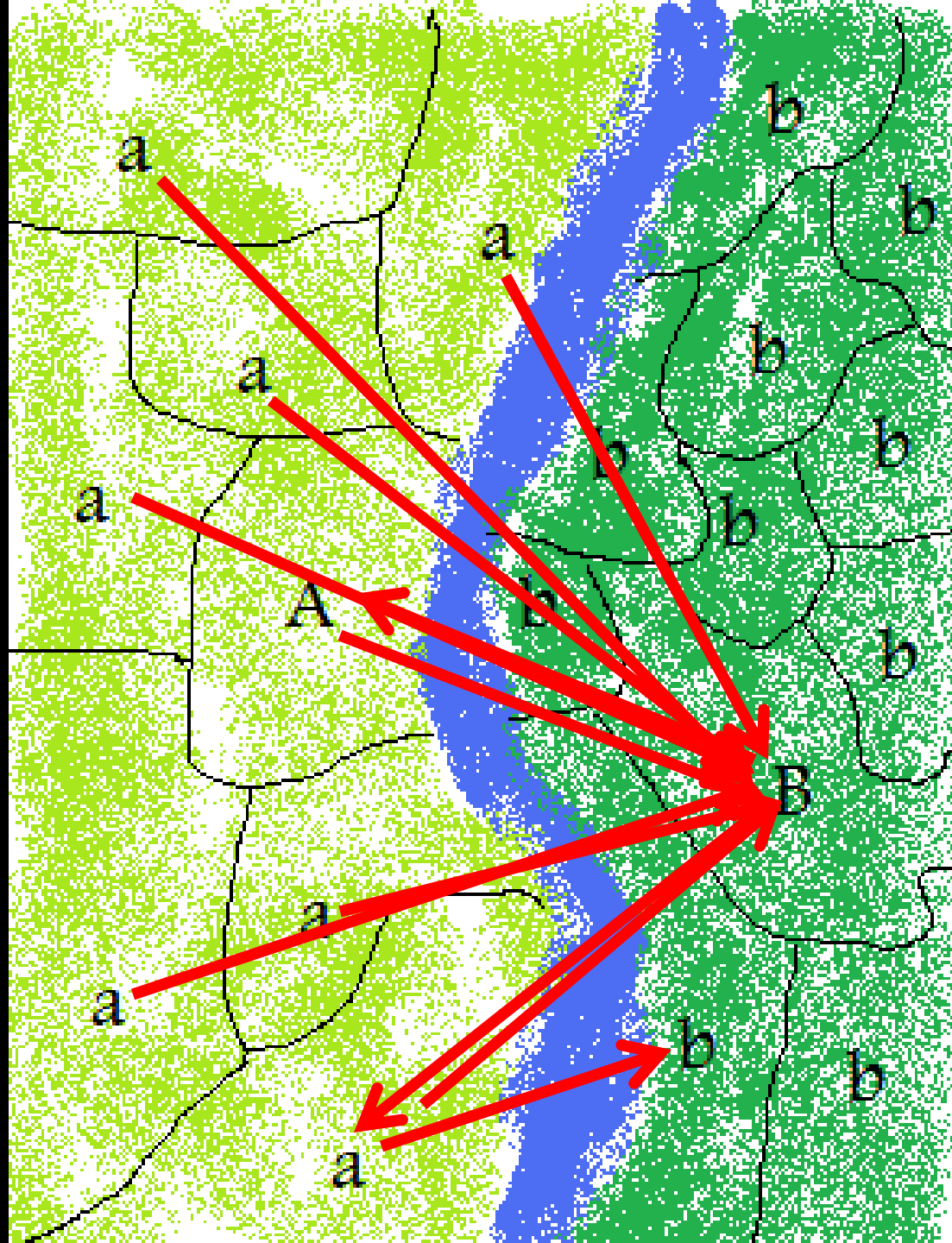
**Without  
Sovereignty**



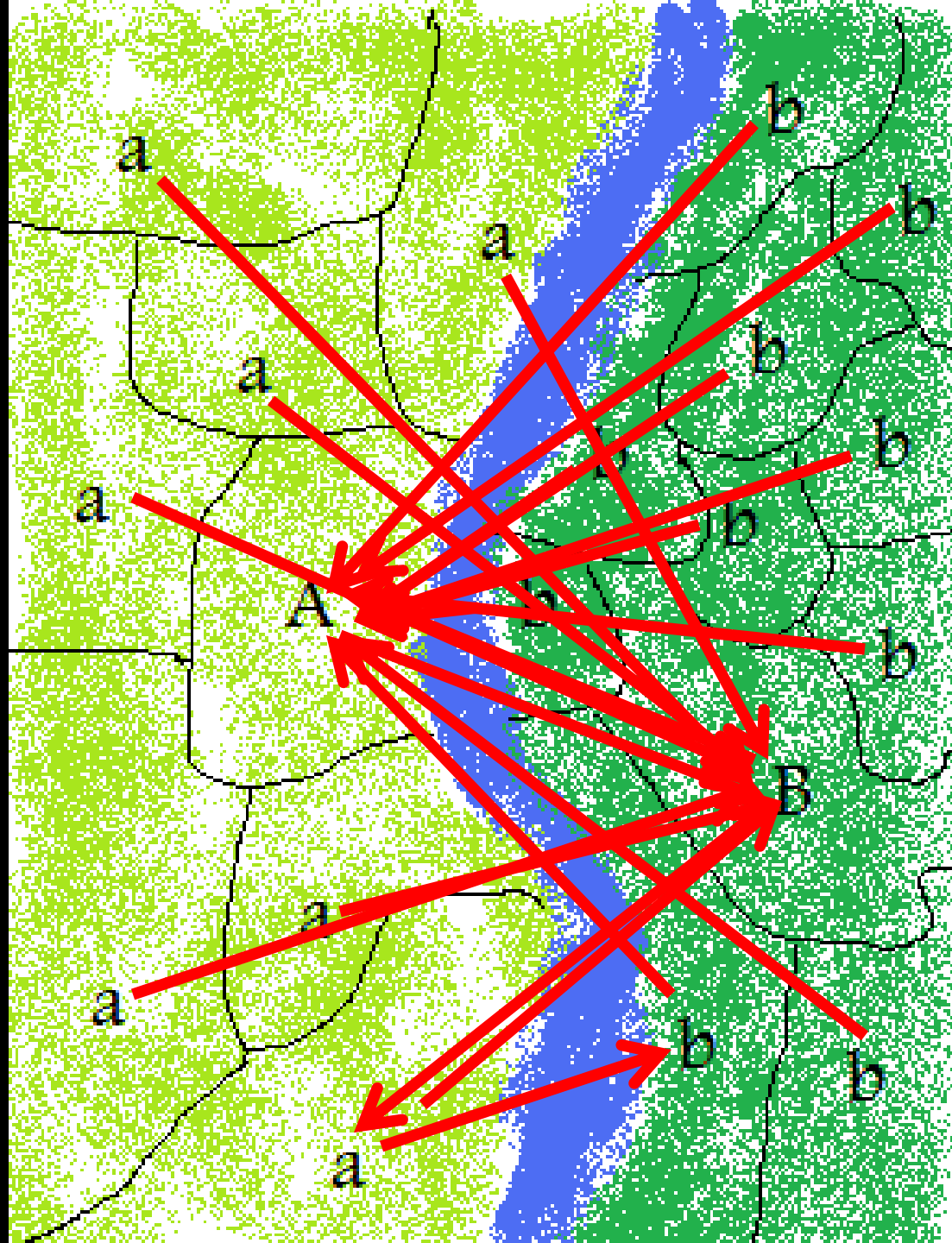
**Without  
Sovereignty**



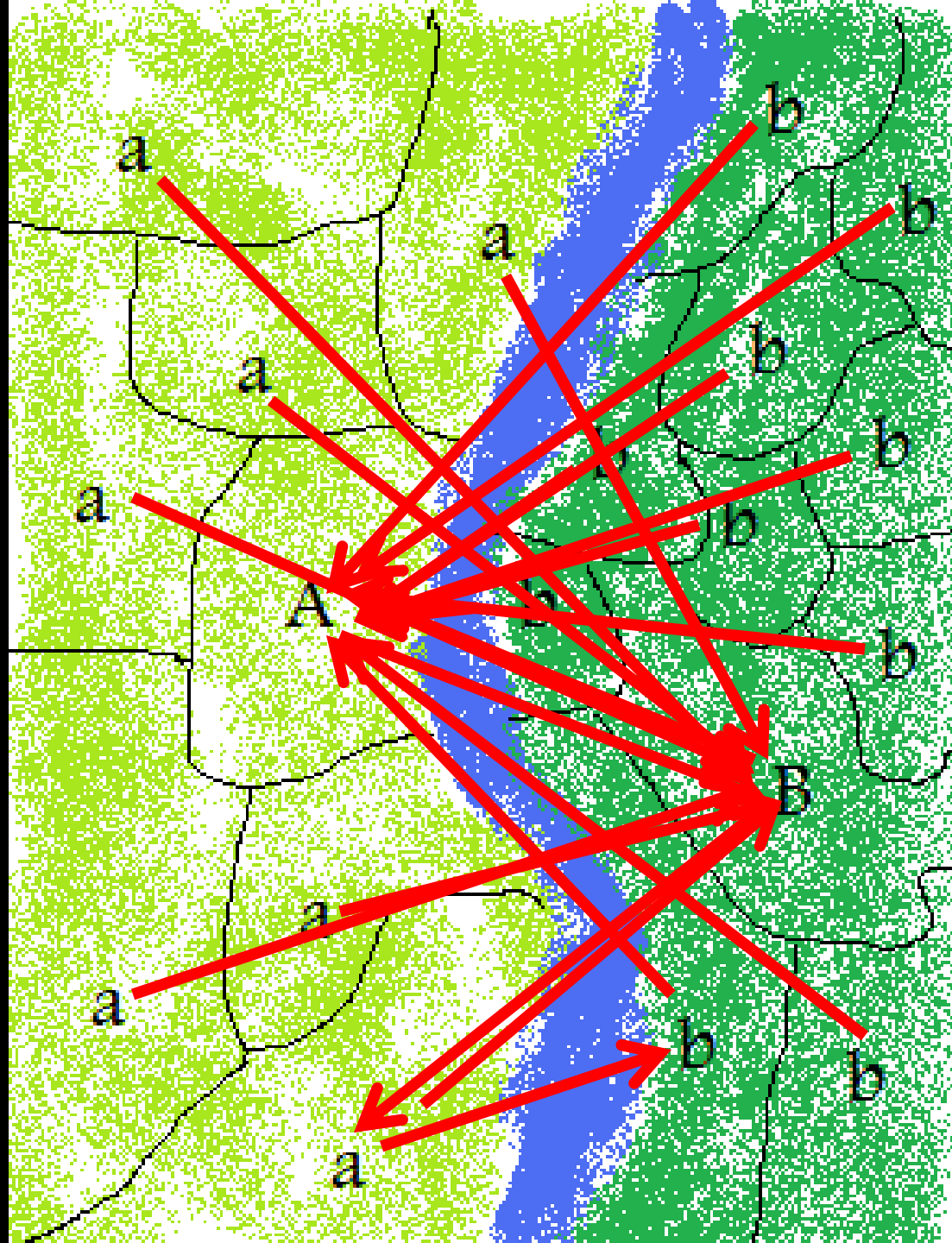
**Without  
Sovereignty**



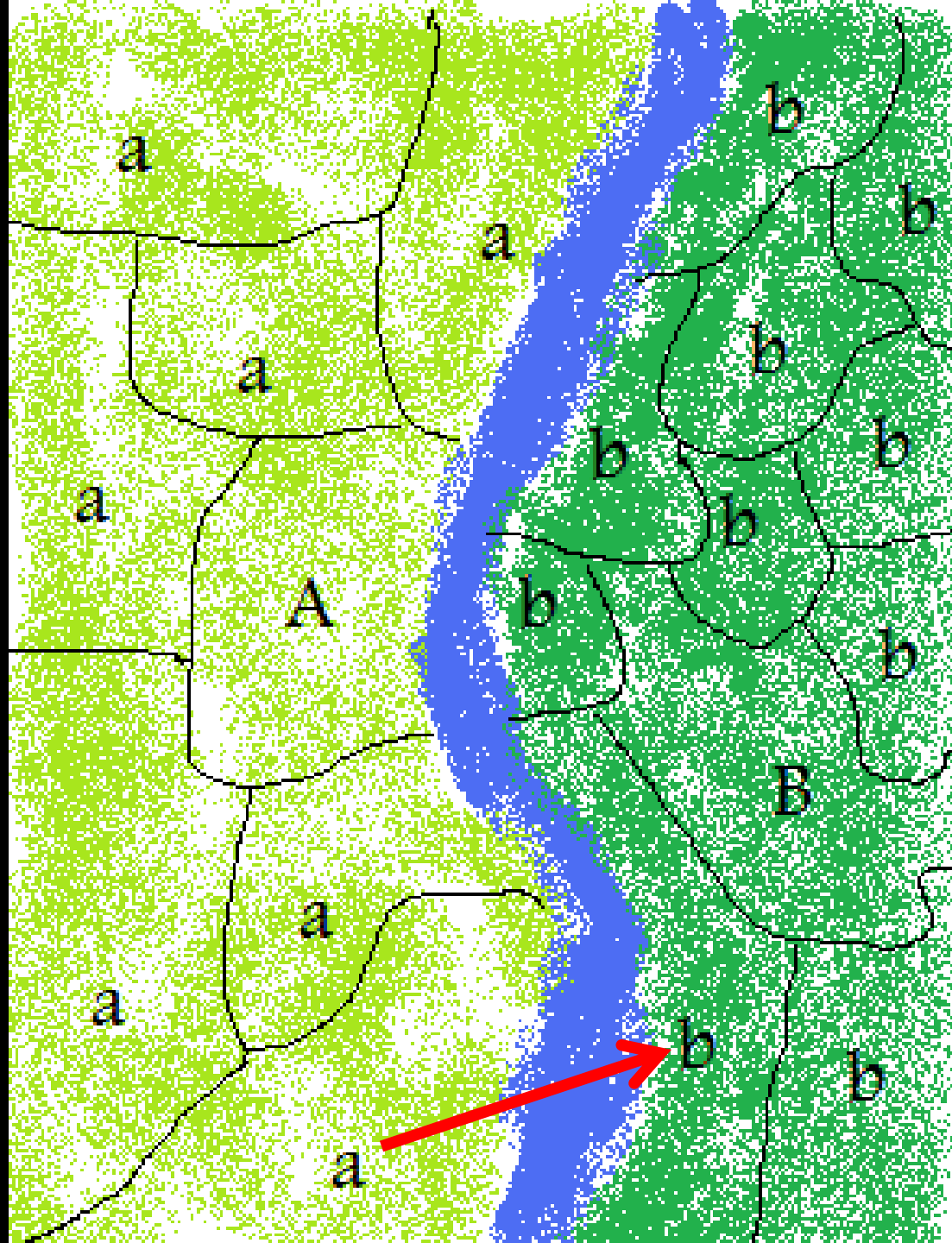
**Without  
Sovereignty**



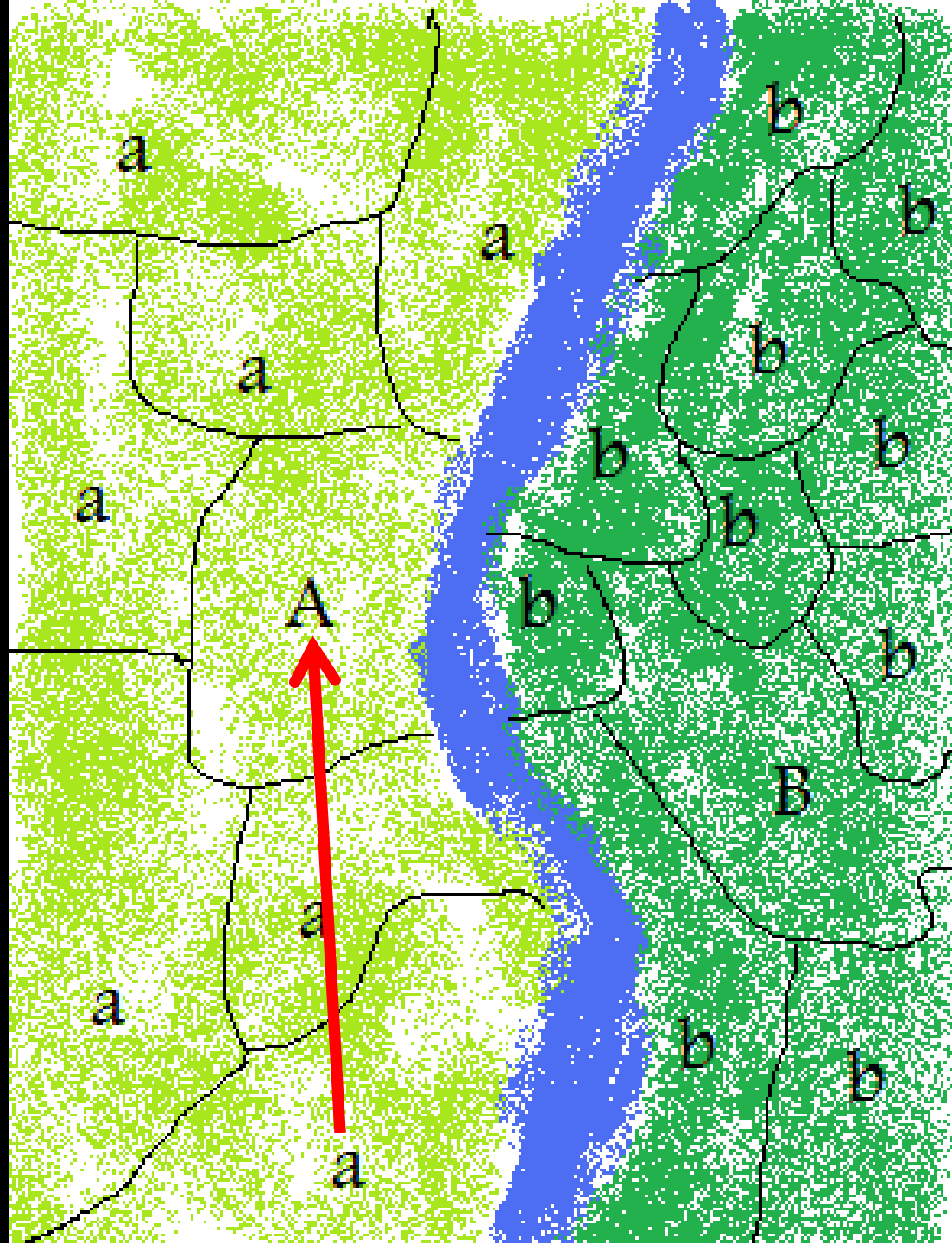
**Without  
Sovereignty  
(Chaos)**



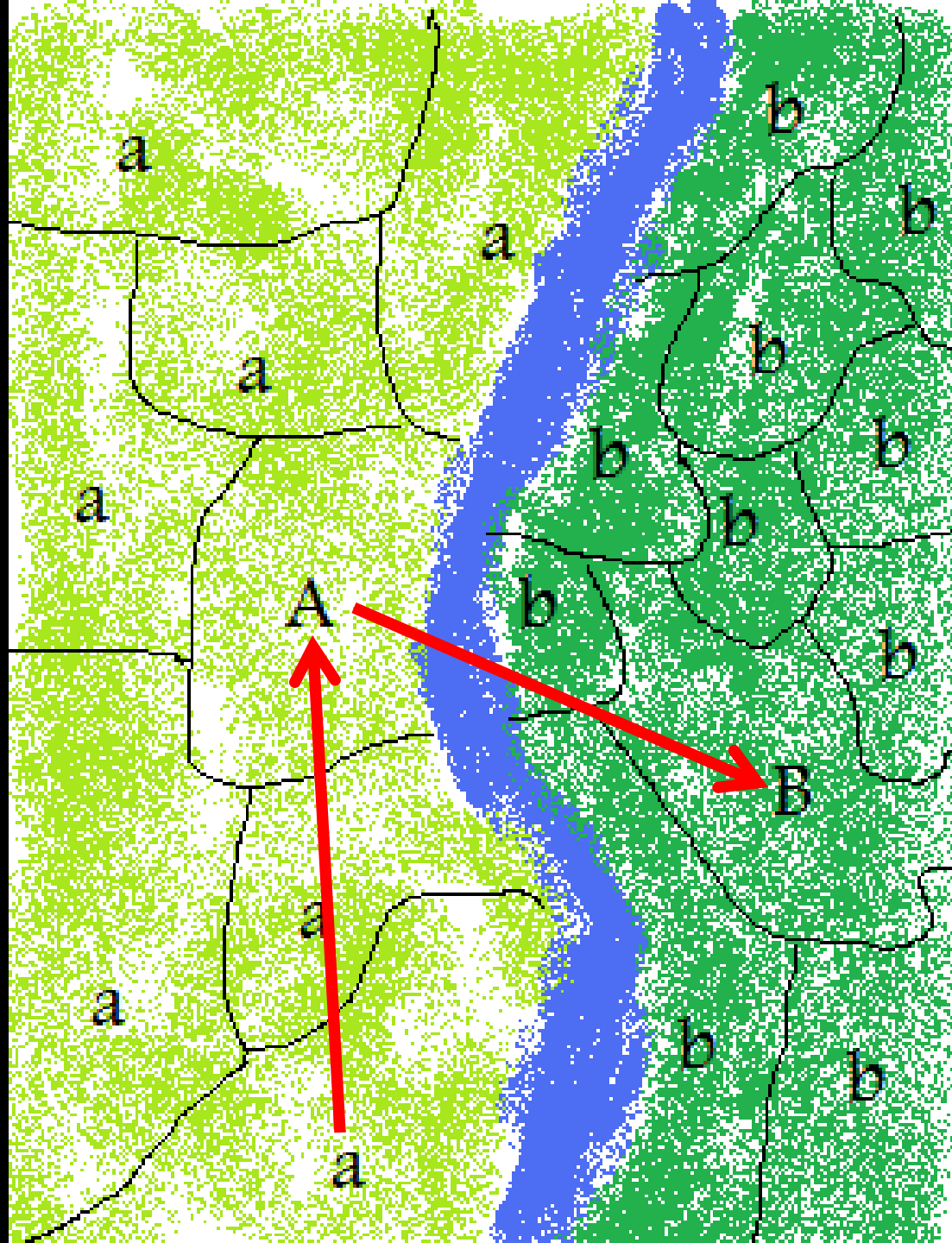
**Without  
Sovereignty**



**With  
Sovereignty**

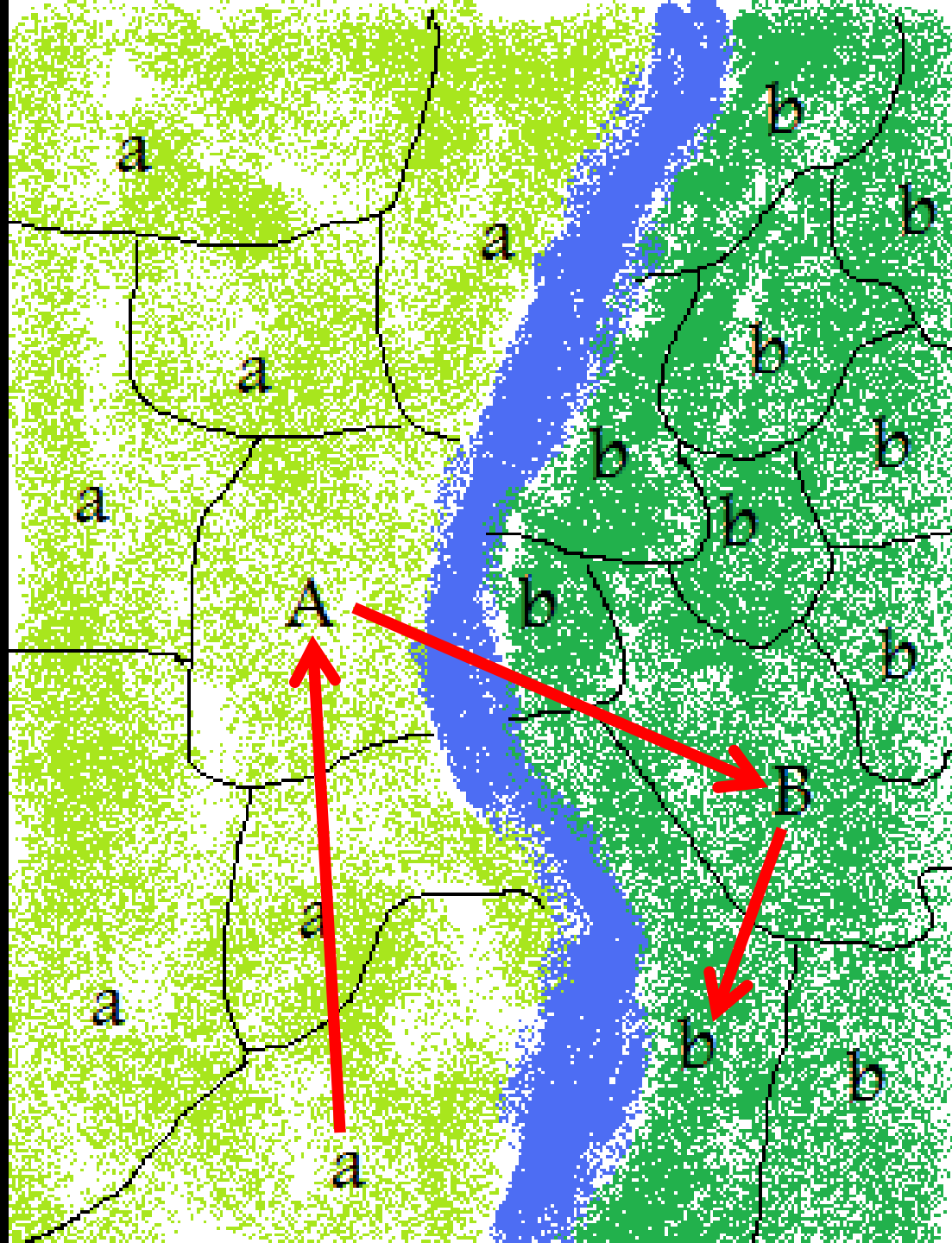


With  
Sovereignty





With  
Sovereignty



# Treaty of Westphalia

- Signed in 1648
- Ended the Thirty Years' War
- Established the principle of sovereignty
  - Sometimes called *Westphalian* sovereignty



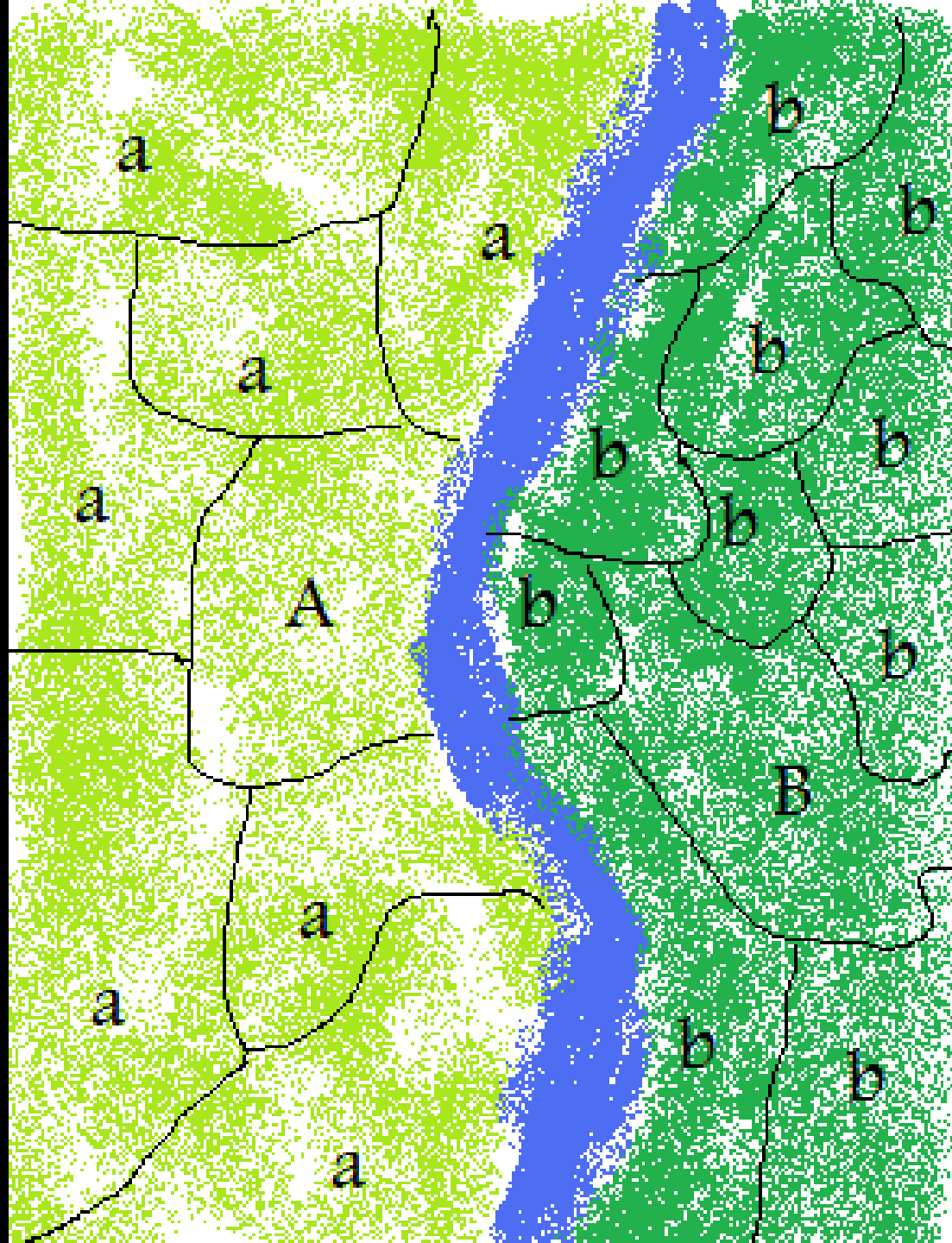
# Treaty of Westphalia

- Made Katy Perry really angry 369 years later



# What is sovereignty?

- Definition: the monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a territory
- Dispute resolution between two sub-state actors occurs through the sovereign states
- Sovereigns are expected to ensure their sub-state actors do not use force against foreign actors



# What is sovereignty?

- Definition: the monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a territory
- Sovereign states control their own domestic affairs
  - But states violate this occasionally

# What is sovereignty?

- Definition: the monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a territory
- Sovereign states control their own domestic affairs
  - But states violate this occasionally
    - U.S. incursion into Pakistan to kill Bin Laden
    - U.S. in Libya
    - Russia protecting South Ossetia from Georgia

# What is sovereignty?

- Definition: the monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a territory
- Sovereign states control their own domestic affairs
  - But states violate this occasionally. Why?
    - Strong actors can get away with it
    - Why is there no punishment



# Agenda

- Sovereignty
- Anarchy
- Proximate vs. Underlying Causes
- The Strategic World

Who is sovereign over the  
sovereign?

# Violations of Domestic Political Order

- A man kills his neighbor
- A bank robber steals thousands of dollars
- The party last night got a little too crazy

# Violations of Domestic Political Order

- A man kills his neighbor
  - The police come and take care of it
- A bank robber steals thousands of dollars
  - The police come and take care of it
- The party last night got a little too crazy
  - The police come and take care of it

# When Things Aren't So Great

- A drug dealer kills a rival drug dealer
- A mafia boss assassinates a rival mafia boss

# When Things Aren't So Great

- A drug dealer kills a rival drug dealer
  - Local police is too weak to do anything
- A mafia boss assassinates a rival mafia boss
  - Local police is too weak to do anything

# Violations of Sovereignty

- In theory, sovereign states control their own domestic affairs
- But states sometimes encroach on other states' rights
  - Why doesn't the police come and arrest them?

# Violations of Sovereignty

- Life in international relations is closer to the mafia world
- World police is either non-existent or weak (the United Nations)



# Anarchy

- Definition: The lack of political authority

# Anarchy

- Definition: The lack of political authority
- In international relations, no one is sovereign over the sovereign

# Anarchy

- Anarchy is a world of “self-help”

# Anarchy

- Anarchy is a world of “self-help”
  - Have a problem? Either go solve it on your own or convince your friend to help you
  - No government to come and rescue you

# Anarchy

- Anarchy is a world of “self-help”
  - Have a problem? Either go solve it on your own or convince your friend to help you
  - No government to come and rescue you
- Anarchy is *not* chaos

# Anarchy

- Anarchy is a world of “self-help”
  - Have a problem? Either go solve it on your own or convince your friend to help you
  - No government to come and rescue you
- Anarchy is *not* chaos
  - Most states are not fighting each other

# Anarchy

- Anarchy is a world of “self-help”
  - Have a problem? Either go solve it on your own or convince your friend to help you
  - No government to come and rescue you
- Anarchy is *not* chaos
  - Most states are not fighting each other
  - Anarchy permits chaos...or order...or anything in between

# IR's Challenge

- If anything can happen, how do we predict or explain outcomes?
  - Anarchy is a trivial explanation
  - We need more precise predictions and explanations



# Agenda

- Sovereignty
- Anarchy
- Proximate vs. Underlying Causes
- The Strategic World

How do we want to explain history  
and predict the future?

# Two Types of Explanations

- Proximate cause: why did this happen the way it happened?

# Two Types of Explanations

- Proximate cause: why did this happen the way it happened?
- Underlying cause: why was this asking to happen?

# Two Types of Explanations

- Proximate cause: why did this happen the way it happened?
- Underlying cause: why was this asking to happen?
- We value underlying causes more
  - Proximate causes give us silly policy recommendations
  - Underlying causes tell us how to fix things

# Examples: Dead Driver

## **Proximate Cause**

- The driver died because he flew through the front windshield of his vehicle.

# Examples: Dead Driver

## **Proximate Cause**

- The driver died because he flew through the front windshield of his vehicle.

## **Underlying Cause**

- The driver died because he was not wearing his seatbelt.

# Examples: Dead Driver

## Proximate Cause

- The driver died because he flew through the front windshield of his vehicle.

## Underlying Cause

- The driver died because he was not wearing his seatbelt.

## What have we learned?

- Don't fly through the windshield of your vehicle.  
Don't get into car accidents.



# Examples: Dead Driver

## Proximate Cause

- The driver died because he flew through the front windshield of his vehicle.

## What have we learned?

- Don't fly through the windshield of your vehicle.  
Don't get into car accidents.  
Don't break a fall with your face.

## Underlying Cause

- The driver died because he was not wearing his seatbelt.

## What have we learned?

- Wear your seatbelt.

# Examples: World War I

## **Proximate Cause**

- Franz Ferdinand was assassinated.

# Franz Ferdinand





Archduke Franz Ferdinand



# Examples: World War I

## **Proximate Cause**

- Franz Ferdinand was assassinated.

## **Underlying Cause**

- Military technology gave states a huge first strike advantage.

# Examples: World War I

## Proximate Cause

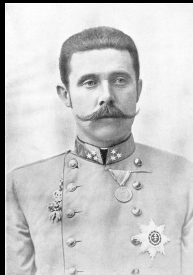
- Franz Ferdinand was assassinated.

## Underlying Cause

- Military technology gave states a huge first strike advantage.

## What have we learned?

- Don't let men with funny mustaches be assassinated.



# Examples: World War I

## Proximate Cause

- Franz Ferdinand was assassinated.

## Underlying Cause

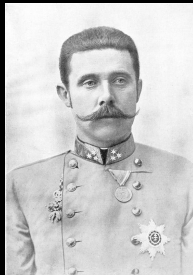
- Military technology gave states a huge first strike advantage.

## What have we learned?

- Don't let men with funny mustaches be assassinated.

## What have we learned?

- First strike advantages cause war.





# Examples: World War II

## **Proximate Cause**

- Hitler was a bad person.

# Examples: World War II

## Proximate Cause

- Hitler was a bad person.

## Underlying Cause

- Reparations from WWI bankrupted Germany, allowing domestic institutions to fail.

# Examples: World War II

## Proximate Cause

- Hitler was a bad person.

## Underlying Cause

- Reparations from WWI bankrupted Germany, allowing domestic institutions to fail.

## What have we learned?

- Let all aspiring Austrian artists into art school.

# Examples: World War II

## **Proximate Cause**

- Hitler was a bad person.

## **Underlying Cause**

- Reparations from WWI bankrupted Germany, allowing domestic institutions to fail.

## **What have we learned?**

- Let all aspiring Austrian artists into art school.

## **What have we learned?**

- Be magnanimous in victory.

# The Lesson

- Proximate causes are funny
- Discovering underlying causes allows us to connect dissimilar situations and make sensible recommendations about today's world

# The Lesson

- Proximate causes are funny
- Discovering underlying causes allows us to connect dissimilar situations and make sensible recommendations about today's world
  - The process of discovery is hard

# Agenda

- Sovereignty
- Anarchy
- Proximate vs. Underlying Causes
- The Strategic World

# The Problem

- The international realm is anarchic. *Anything* can happen. So how do we narrow our expectations?



# The Problem

- The international realm is anarchic. *Anything* can happen. So how do we narrow our expectations?
- Solution: Analyze actors' abilities and desires to find plausible outcomes

# The Strategic World

- There are about 200 states in the world
- How State 1 acts affects State 2's outcomes
- How State 2 acts affects State 1's outcomes
- How State 1 acts affects State 3's outcomes
- Etc.

# The Strategic World

- There are about 200 states in the world
- How State 1 acts affects State 2's outcomes
- How State 2 acts affects State 1's outcomes
- How State 1 acts affects State 3's outcomes
- Etc.
- Therefore, states are strategically interdependent

# The Strategic World

- States know they are strategically interdependent
  - Think about the intelligence budget of the United States alone. If the U.S. didn't care about strategic interdependence, why would they spend that much money?

# The Strategic World

- States know they are strategically interdependent
  - Think about the intelligence budget of the United States alone. If the U.S. didn't care about strategic interdependence, why would they spend that much money?
- If only there were a scientific way to study strategic interdependence...

# Why We Formalize Arguments

- It's easy to get lost in the complex incentives that states face
- Building models of state behavior helps us keep things tractable
- Goal: Map assumptions to logically valid conclusions

# Our Recipe

1. Create some assumptions
2. Do some (light) math
3. Reach logically valid conclusions

# Some Pitfalls

- If our assumptions are silly, our conclusions might also be silly
  - But they will be logically valid silliness!
  - Our results are only as good as our assumptions
- If our assumptions are too open, we won't be able to do the math
  - Therefore, we won't be able to reach any conclusions at all



# Thinking about Models

- Models are not reality—and intentionally so
- Don't say: "This model is bad because it doesn't exactly match the real world"
- Say: "I don't think this model captures important strategic dynamics that could fundamentally alter our conclusions"

