



David and Goliath

Power Politics and Military Conflict in the Backyards of Major States

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Abstract

The dissertation assesses the causes of peace and armed conflict between major powers and nearby states with inferior military capabilities. Although such conflicts have decisively shaped modern history, existing research has not explained why such unequal neighbors often self-select into war. This is puzzling since doing so threatens the weak neighbor's survival and diverts the powerful neighbor's attention and resources away from seemingly more important issues. I show that such conflict recurs in situations where leaders on both sides find assertive and militarized policies to be the best means of securing their own political survival. As the sociopolitical and strategic affairs of neighboring states are strongly interlinked, specific shifts in either side's domestic and external power politics can inadvertently threaten assets relevant to leadership survival on the other side. I identify three such shifts as the root causes of military conflict between unequal neighbors: 1) rising antagonistic demands by either neighbor's power base; 2) strong neighbor security crises, provided the weak neighbor's elite perceives the strong neighbor as hostile; 3) increasing weak neighbor alignment with major external states, provided the big neighbor's elite perceives either of these states as hostile. I demonstrate the theory's explanatory power relative to liberal and realist models using a nested multi-method research design. This includes a large-n, high-reliability test using logistic regressions on conflict onsets for all unequal neighbor dyad-years between 1816 and 1989. I also perform in-depth, high-validity tests using process-tracing on conflict variation between Austria-Hungary and Serbia (1878–1914) and between Ukraine and Russia (1992–2014). Data stem from primary sources of leadership deliberation and original policy documents and interviews conducted in Russia and Ukraine. The dissertation contributes to our understanding of security dilemmas in alliance politics, determinants of extended deterrence, political survival and elite perceptions in international security, and the determinants of Russo-Western security relations.

Jury: Ulrich Krotz (Supervisor, EUI), Jeffrey T. Checkel, (EUI), Roy Allison (Oxford University), Carlo Masala (Bundeswehr University Munich).

Bio

Jonas is a political scientist from Germany. He is a DAAD/AICGS Research Fellow for Transatlantic Security Cooperation at the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies (Johns Hopkins University) in Washington DC and Doctoral Researcher at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. Jonas specializes in the foreign and security policies of European countries, with a particular focus on Russia as well as on the EU, NATO, and its member states. Thematically, he focuses on international security cooperation, EU integration, deterrence, and the causes of armed conflict. In his dissertation, he assesses the causes of peace and armed conflict between major powers and nearby states with inferior military capabilities. A College of Europe graduate, he was an Alfa Fellow and Visiting Researcher at the Moscow Higher School of Economics. He taught and did fieldwork in Germany, Italy, Ukraine, and Russia. Jonas' academic publications include an article in the *European Journal of International Security* and book chapters for Springer and Columbia University Press. Jonas also contributed analyses and policy advice in German, Russian, and English, including to the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, the Oxford University Changing Character of War Centre, Politico Europe, The National Interest, the EUIdeas blog, EUObserver, and EurActiv.