



# *Escalatory Effects of Domestic Politics in International Crises*

**Kiyotaka Yasui**

PhD Candidate  
Graduate School of Political Science  
Waseda University  
email: [kiyo-y@suou.waseda.jp](mailto:kiyo-y@suou.waseda.jp)

GLOPE II Symposium  
23-Jan-2009




# Outline

1. Research Question
2. My argument
3. Conventional Literature: Review & Critique
4. Mechanisms of My Argument
5. Case Study: Persian Gulf Crisis (1990-91)
6. Conclusion & Implication




# Research Question

- Why do state leaders take actions that increase the likelihood of war in international crises?
  - When and why do state leaders rationally decide to wage war on their own?
- 



# My Argument

- In international crises, leaders take more steps due to the need to increase domestic support than what are necessary from crisis bargaining at the international level
  - This increases the probability of war
- 

# Conventional Literature: Review

- Leaders in democracies can meet their demand with public threats to use military force
  - Audience costs (e.g., Fearon 1994, 1997; Tomz 2007)
    - Political price by withdrawing from issued threats
    - Official statements or remarks by presidents
  - Domestic oppositions (Schultz 1998, 2001)
    - Additional credibility by the support for governments' threats



# Conventional Literature: Problems

- Gaps between theory and real world
  - Leaders often escalate a risk of war on their own by additional measures such as military actions
  - Oppositions
    - CANNOT have complete information about governments (e.g., resolve for war/ war planning)
    - CAN change their stance

# Mechanisms (1/3)

- Leaders need to shore up the domestic support for their crisis policy
  - Political survival (Bueno des Mesquita 2003)
  - Credibility of threats (e.g., Schultz 1998, 2001)
- To generate the domestic support, leaders need to signal its firm resolve to *domestic* audiences
  - Asymmetric information in domestic politics
  - Voters value leaders' competence (Smith 1998)


# Mechanisms (2/3)

- Possible measures for leaders
  - Military actions
    - Troop mobilization
    - Deployments to the potential zone of operations
  - Stressing higher levels of the danger of crises (Reiter and Stam 2002)





# Mechanisms (3/3)

- Effects of increases in the level of support
    - Decrease in domestic political costs in case of war
    - Facilitating actual use of force by additional measures
  - As a result, leaders may become “locked in” war
- 

# Persian Gulf Crisis, 1990-91: Question

- Conventional literature (Fearon 1992, 1994, 1997)
  - Bush was able to show his firm resolve by public statements
  - Aug 5, 1990: “This will not stand”
- Prediction of my argument
  - The U.S. government not only issue public threats but also other measures for domestic support

# The Gulf Crisis: Domestic Support

- The U.S. government understood the need and dynamic nature of domestic support
  - Bush said in his diary on Sep 11, 1990:
    - “I am pleased with the amount of support that I’m getting, but I know it can change” (Bush and Scowcroft 1998, 370)
  - Baker said:
    - “Realistically, we couldn’t have used force in the face of explicit congressional disapproval” (Baker 1995, 337)

# The Gulf Crisis: Costs of War

- The government also realized the domestic political cost of unsupported war
  - Baker believed that:
    - “[S]ending hundreds of thousands of soldiers into battle, with the possibility of significant casualties, but *without* legislative imprimatur, could well prove to be a Pyrrhic victory” (Baker 1995, p.334; emphasis in original)

# The Gulf Crisis: Approval Ratings of Bush (Gallup)



# The Gulf Crisis: Early in August 1990

- Aug 8, 1990
  - Bush announced the deployments of troops to Saudi Arabia
- The level of domestic support
  - Before (1990 Aug 3-4): 52%
  - After (1990 Aug 9-10): 77%
- Bush said:
  - As I prepared my speech, I tightened up the language to strengthen the similarity I saw between the Persian Gulf and the situation in the Rhineland in the 1930s, when Hitler simply defied the Treaty of Versailles and marched in (Bush and Scowcroft 1998, 370)

# The Gulf Crisis: End of November 1990

- Nov 29, 1990: UN Resolution 678
  - Authorizing using force against Iraq
  - Setting January 15 withdrawal deadline
- The level of domestic support
  - Before (Nov 15-18): 54%
  - After (Dec 6-7): 60%
- Why UN?
  - “our diplomatic offensive at the United Nations was a critical component in winning over reluctant Congress” (Baker 1995, 332)

# The Gulf Crisis: Mid-January 1991

- Jan 12, 1991: Congress approves using force
- The level of domestic support
  - Before (Jan 11-13): 62%
  - After (Jan 16): 81%
- Baker said:
  - “All that remained, regrettably, was for us to wield it” (Baker 1995, 344)





# Conclusion

- Actions by leaders to increase domestic support for them paradoxically limit their policy options
- As leaders exhaust peaceful/non-military measures, they are consequently impelled to use military force



# Implication

- Within-state mechanism of war outbreak
  - Independently of crisis bargaining at the international level
- Need to modify conventional models
  - Rethinking about monadic effects of domestic politics in crises
  - Stepping back from bilateral models