

Political Science 972: International Conflict
Discussion Questions for Week 4
Qualitative Theories of War I

1. Consider the following questions with respect to Blainey
 - What is *Blainey's* theory, as opposed to all of the other theories that Blainey discusses? Does Blainey make this theory explicit, or is it purely implicit?
 - Which of Blainey's chapter is the [strongest][weakest] with respect to the overall importance of the theory, use and relevance of evidence, and so forth.
 - Is Blainey missing any important theories? Are any of these theories "straw-men"?
 - Which of Blainey's theory are [most][least] relevant to understanding conflict in the post-Cold-War period?

2. Blainey's final chapter on the flaws of various qualitative theories is one of the "classic" short articles on causes of war: one sees it re-printed in anthologies. What accounts for the prevalence of all of these theories despite the evidence against them? Are is Blainey wrong: do the theories (or at least some of them) have more validity than he gives them credit for.

3. Blainey discusses a fairly informal rendition of "balance of power" compared to those developed by some of the later realists. We're going to be doing more with this in a couple of weeks, but let's start with the basic question: in the context of these theories, what is "power" and to what extent can it be "balanced". Is this anything more than a widely-used metaphor? If "balance of power" is so ambiguous, why do people talk about it so much (or did I just answer my own question...)

More generally, to what extent is Blainey relying on a solely on a realist view of international politics, and to what extent does he also incorporate other theoretical approaches?

4. Evaluate the "Manchester thesis" Why did it prove to be so incorrect at the time? Might it be correct now, in the 21st century, even though it wasn't at the beginning of the 20th. How does the Manchester thesis compare with contemporary "liberal peace" theorists, notably Thomas Friedman? How does the Manchester thesis compare with the democratic peace thesis (which is a large collection of literature, so the more general question is what is the extent of the overlap between the two?)

5. With respect to Blainey's "Dreams and Delusions" discussion (chapter 3): To what extent are the psychological and institutional factors affecting the decision to go to war distinct from the factors affecting political decision-making in general? To what extent has this changed with democratization? With increased global communications and the near-instant availability of information?

6. In chapter 5, Blainey argues that weakened, "death watch" states attract international conflict. Has the contemporary phenomenon of "failed states," the fear of becoming involved in a military quagmire, and the delegitimation of territorial war (Mueller, Kaysen, etc) significantly changed the relevance of this effect?

7. With respect to Blainey's "War chests" discussion (chapter 3): To what extent is this a pre-industrial theory and to what extent can it be generalized to an "opportunities and capabilities" model that could be applied pretty much to any conflict (classical and industrial)? How does one

reconcile this with “Hollandization”—states choosing to become wealthy by avoiding warfare even in the presence of powerful neighbors?

8. On nuclear weapons:

- a. To what extent has the existence of nuclear weapons distorted the character of international conflict during the past 55 years?
- b. [closely related] Are (were) the superpowers "super" because they have tens of thousands of nuclear weapons, or would a post-WWII world without nuclear weapons have looked much the same. (This is, obviously, a counter-factual, so keep in mind the constraints on using counter-factual arguments)
- c. Are nuclear weapons just one of an eventual family of politically-potent “weapons of mass destruction”, or are they unique? Why or why not?

9. In the category of “things to keep you awake at night”, Blainey makes a very convincing case that due to 50 years of major power peace, that European leaders were blinded by implications of new military technologies. Is the same thing happening today, not necessarily in Europe but, for example, between the US and China?

10. To fully understand war, even in the context of Blainey, do we need another book titled “Causes of Peace”? To what extent are Blainey’s theory of war initiation relevant to war avoidance (states settle a militarized dispute without resorting to war) and war termination (states end an on-going war). If these are different processes, how and why are they different.

In particular, if wars occur because both sides think they can win, what are the factors that cause wars to continue once it is clear that those initial assumptions were incorrect? If war is simply a means of figuring out who is stronger, why do wars continue after this is clear (or, alternatively, is it never clear: is the issue not just which side is stronger, but how much stronger?)