

Day 2- April 4, 2006

Attachments to Land and Interstate Conflict - Jenna Jordan, Ph.D Candidate, University of Chicago

Jordan's talk looked at when states give up their territory and the role of political discourse in affecting those decisions. The potential use of her research effort is that it can inform projections of where existing conflicts over land might end up and therefore affect policy. At a more fundamental level, her research can provide a theoretical understanding of the bases for land attachment. To develop this project, she is conducting an ongoing literature review to assess empirical trends in territorial disputes in the modern era. Most territorial changes have been the result of war but there is a need to explore why some changes of borders result in violence, and why others do not.

Based on the review of historical data since 1815, she surmises that the degree of violence associate with territorial change has to do with the type of attachment that the group has to the land. Jordan outlined three variables that affect the decision on whether or not a state gives up territory, and if that exchange is violent or non-violent.

The first variable is symbolic or strategic attachment to the land. If the land has some symbolic meaning, entities are less likely to give up territory than if there is no symbolic meaning. Attachment to land can also be strategically-based (access to commerce, water, and other needed resources). The type of attachment is reflected in political discourse. This discourse can be from the elites or the masses, but whatever discourse is most dominant will affect the decision to give up land. The second variable is the exclusivity of boundaries. A good example of this is the case of Jerusalem, where rights to a certain territory come into question. These arguments of "rights" often serve as origins for international disputes. The third variable is national identity. Discourse involving identity questions can be a good way to sustain efforts to keep a territory. If a group identity is partly derived from boundaries, this land can be a way to sustain solidarity among a group. In this regard, border configuration is important, as well as how those decisions are made.

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Jordan hypothesizes that if there is exclusivity of boundaries and there is symbolic attachment to that land, a state will not give up territory and cession is not likely. This type of dispute is the most violent and most likely to result in military conflict. If there is exclusivity of boundaries and the land is strategic, states will fight over the territory until it is cost prohibitive (ranked second in violence level). If there isn't exclusivity of boundaries and the land attachment is strategic in nature, states may fight over territory, but cession is possible (third in violence level). Lastly, if the land is symbolic but there is not exclusivity in boundaries, cession is most likely (fourth in violence level).