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Explaining East Africa's interstate wars, 1977-2000: towards a typological theory?

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation tested the causal relevance of the 'democratic peace thesis', 'economic interdependence', and the 'hegemonic stability theory' to cases of interstate conflict in East Africa: the Ogaden War, 1977-1978; the Uganda-Tanzania War, 1978-1979; and the Eritrea-Ethiopia War, 1998-2000. Quantitative economic and military data as well as archival materials, journal articles, and contemporaneous sources on political history were utilised along with interviews with former mediators, government officials and experts on the societies and economies of East Africa in the making of these determinations and reaching of the respective conclusions.

Findings indicate that the democratic peace thesis has an imperfect causal relevance with the interstate conflicts that took place between 1977 and 1997. Two of the three cases (Somalia and Uganda) appear to be consistent with the literature which indicate a greater probability of power loss for an authoritarian regime upon losing a war. The dissertation therefore closed a gap by indicating and then clarifying issues within the present literature on the democratic peace thesis; before these, it was not cognizant of the role of what we term here as the institutional legitimacy-information asymmetry problem across regimes in leading up to an outbreak of conflict.

With regards to the economic interdependence thesis, the dissertation also found causal validity. Overall, the share of Ethiopia in Somalia's exports was insignificant, at less than 0.018% (the high mark reached in 1975) at any given point. This thus demonstrates a lack of opportunity cost for Somalia in initiating a war with Ethiopia. As this case demonstrates, while Somalia was an exporting nation prior to the war, these exports were declining in the years leading up to the war and they had already had a minimal share within its total GDP. Similarly, we find that trade between Tanzania and Uganda started to increase gradually soon after independence but subsequently declined after the Idi Amin coup of 1971. Tanzanian people also showed a higher preference for Western and Tanzanian-made products first over East African ones, showing that the literature needs to be cognizant of populations as both a political audience (as is done in the democratic peace thesis) as well as consumers whose procurement choices determine the level of interdependence, or lack thereof. Finally, we noted that Eritrea's new currency, the Nakfa, made trade with Ethiopia virtually impossible; it also made the border, hitherto managed and handled at the level of the local governments, salient as free movement of goods was now made a matter of dispute. The diversion of exports away from Massawa and Assab to Djibouti further made retaliation against Eritrea less costly for Ethiopia. The pre-war years also coincided with diversification of Eritrean export markets, but overall decline in their aggregate values, further eliminating any opportunity cost for disrupting the status quo.

A test of the hegemonic stability theory found it to be congruent with the cases as well. Overall, the findings would appear to be consistent with the hypothesis; the comparative lowness of the Kenyan military budget compared with growths in those of belligerent states in the region appear to have been

correlated with interstate conflict outbreaks. This also explains Kenya's lack of capacity to mitigate conflicts even after they had broken out. Because of Kenya's proactiveness, however, the US did limit its arms supplies to Somalia, as these could hypothetically have been redirected towards Kenya, against whom Somalia had irredentist claims over the Northern Frontier District. Finding all three theories to be causally relevant, the dissertation thereafter proposes a typological theory by sequencing all variables accordingly to account for the region's interstate wars.

KEYWORDS: Africa; Democratic peace thesis; Economic interdependence; Errol A. Henderson; Ethiopia-Eritrea War; Hegemonic stability thesis; Interstate war; Ogaden War; Uganda-Tanzania War

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