

## First Prize

### *History, Science, and the Study of Rivalry in International Relations*

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The debate regarding the use of history in International Relations (IR) is longstanding, even as the recognition (pushed by authors such as George Lawson, Hidemi Suganami, Jack Levy and others) that history is indispensable to the discipline has gained prominence in recent years. Treatments of the relationship between history and the social sciences more broadly are similarly well known. The logical, theoretical, and methodological intricacies of this connection have been dealt with in sophisticated expositions by Max Weber, Clayton Roberts, and William Sewell, to name but a few.<sup>1</sup> For most of these authors, sharp distinctions and disciplinary boundaries belie deeper ontological and epistemological affinities. As Weber explained: “The simplest historical judgement represents not only a categorially [sic] formed intellectual construct but it also does not acquire a valid content until we bring to the ‘given’ reality the whole body of

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: The Free Press, 1949); Clayton Roberts, *The Logic of Historical Explanation* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996); William Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

our ‘nomological’ empirical knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> Facts, as they say, are theory-laden. Suganami, for his part, has suggested that “the use of historical material is indispensable to the study of world politics.”<sup>3</sup> Or, as Lawson put it even more succinctly, the two approaches are necessarily “co-implicated”.<sup>4</sup> This paper engages with this literature, but also attempts to move past it by suggesting a practical research program that involves the systematic (some might even say ‘scientific’, though in the broader sense of this term offered by Patrick Jackson<sup>5</sup>) study of an empirical phenomenon that is itself fundamentally and inescapably historical.

Over the past several decades, scholars have identified the salience of international ‘rivalry’ in world politics – states engaged in recurring disputes develop distinct dyadic properties such that the behaviour and perceptions of each actor are different than what would be expected by standard rational (or realist<sup>6</sup>) models of state interaction. The notion that iterated confrontations (i.e., *history*) and the expectation of future conflict are relevant to understandings of, and explanations for, state behaviour would come as no surprise to trained historians, but was largely neglected by a generation of scientifically (in a sense narrower than Jackson’s) oriented IR scholars who approached conflict and war cross-sectionally, studying each dispute as an isolated data point to be understood on its own terms. The study of rivalry offers the potential to further leverage the particular strengths of an historical approach as it explicitly (and inescapably) incorporates a diachronic analysis of the relationship between states in world politics. Perhaps even more importantly, rivalry offers a suitable conceptual and theoretical edifice within which such an approach can itself be the primary mode of inquiry, while

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<sup>2</sup> Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Hidemi Suganami, “Narrative Explanation and International Relations,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 37: 2 (2008): p. 327.

<sup>4</sup> George Lawson, “The eternal divide?: history and international relations,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 18, 2 (2012): p. 221.

<sup>5</sup> Broadly following Weber’s definition of science as “a thoughtful ordering of empirical reality”, Jackson identifies “three constituent components of a scientific knowledge claim: it must be *systematically* related to its presuppositions; it must be capable of *public criticism* within the scientific community...and it must be intended to produce *worldly knowledge*, whatever one takes ‘the world’ to include.” Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> This is not meant as a strict conflation of the two.

subsequently allowing qualified and contextualized comparisons between cases in order to build our “nomological empirical knowledge.”

### **The use (not abuse) of history**

One of the primary criticisms historians levy at social scientists is the latter’s tendency to “bend reality in order to conform [it] to pre-existing theoretical scripts.”<sup>7</sup> Weber described this phenomenon as the “almost irresistible temptation to do violence to reality in order to prove the real validity of the construct.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the contingency and chance which historians recognize as adhering in social reality are disregarded in favour of generalizations and laws which inaccurately impute order and consistency to an inchoate world.

Charles Tilly similarly recognized this problem but suggested a way out of it: “If the evils [historians] reject are the search for universal historical laws and the forcing of historical experience into ahistorical categories, the remedy to the evils is not the abandonment of deliberate comparison, but it’s rooting in genuine historical structures and processes.”<sup>9</sup> Which is to say, chance and contingency (and the rich narrative detail by which they are typically expounded) are not to be disregarded, but rather can be incorporated within broader constructs which simultaneously provide conceptual and even theoretical regularity to complex historical events, structures, or processes.

For Weber, this type of analysis is essentially unavoidable:

In the empirical social sciences...the possibility of meaningful knowledge of what is essential for us in the infinite richness of events is bound up with the unremitting application of viewpoints of a specifically particularized

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<sup>7</sup> Lawson, “The eternal divide?” p. 211.

<sup>8</sup> Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, pp. 102-3

<sup>9</sup> Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984), p. 85.

character, which, in the last analysis, are oriented on the basis of evaluative ideas.<sup>10</sup>

Weber, of course, outlined his famous “ideal-type” approach to social analysis as a means by which to evaluate “finite segment[s] of the vast chaotic stream of events, which flows away through time.”<sup>11</sup> Ideal-types are “analytical constructs” which, though absent from empirical reality, nonetheless synthesize “a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena.”<sup>12</sup> They are tools (or a *means*) by which one can access and evaluate an obstreperous reality. “If the historian,” Weber writes,

rejects an attempt to construct such ideal types as a ‘theoretical construction’, i.e., as useless or dispensable for his concrete heuristic purposes, the inevitable consequence is either that he consciously or unconsciously uses other similar concepts without formulating them verbally and elaborating them logically or that he remains stuck in the realm of the vaguely ‘felt’.<sup>13</sup>

Making sense of the social world, which is to say the social scientific enterprise itself, relies (whether implicitly or explicitly) on some such theoretical or conceptual construction. Rather than deny this, it would seem to make sense for social scientists and historians alike to develop research programs and methodologies which acknowledge and embrace historical complexity without simultaneously surrendering to it.

Lawson and Hobson’s ‘historicist historical sociology’ is a movement in this direction:

...historicist historical sociology seeks out general patterns of causation and development...it also places emphasis on historical discontinuities and rejects transhistoricism. In short, this approach recognizes the role of accident, contingency, agency, contextuality and particularity alongside that played by structure and continuity.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> George Lawson and John Hobson, “What is history in international relations?” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 37, 2 (2008): p. 429.

So too is Bennett and George's 'typological theory':

We conclude that typological theories constitute a theoretical middle ground between parsimonious general theories and rich explanations based on scientific sequences of causal mechanisms in individual cases.<sup>15</sup>

Suganami, in stressing the potential for narrative explanations in IR, suggests that

...inasmuch as human acts, whether of individual persons or of collectivities, are themselves 'outcomes', explaining them would require us to refer to the relevant mechanisms, chance coincidences, and acts of others.<sup>16</sup>

In each instance, the authors recognize the need for a balanced approach that makes comparison across space and time possible while not distorting or perverting the particular constellation of facts, forces, and pressures that exist in concrete historical formulations.

Practically, this kind of analysis has much to offer. Free of rigid methodological and epistemological restraints, the space for scholars to make reasonable assessments of, and suggest tentative explanations for, social phenomena is greatly expanded. As Tilly further observed:

We must make sure that the classical logic of comparison, which guides a search for concomitant variation, fits our aims like a sweatshirt and not like a straightjacket; it should make the exercise more effective, rather than making it impossible. No one should take the rules to require a search for the perfect pair of structures or processes: exquisitely matched on every variable except the purported cause and the supposed effect.<sup>17</sup>

Rejecting the "perfect pair of structures or processes", in other words, need not mean the abandonment of any and all efforts at systematic, ordered, and logical exposition or

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew Bennett and Alexander George, "Case Studies and Process Tracing in History and Political Science: Similar Strokes for Different Foci," In Elman and Elman (eds.), *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> Suganami, "Narrative Explanation and International Relations," p. 336.

<sup>17</sup> Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, p. 80.

method. By remaining cognizant of the necessary qualifications and limitations related to causal or even exploratory explanation, one can nonetheless offer useful and cumulative comparative investigations of historical processes and empirical phenomena.

Indeed, Lawson further suggests that “it is only through comparative analysis in which processes are traced, patterns deduced and taxonomies constructed that knowledge is seen to accumulate.” The study of history is fundamental to this exercise:

...historical sciences knot together initial causes, environmental niches, local conditions and nonlinear interactions into ‘impressionistic pictures’ which identify trends and connect chains of contingencies both logically and consistently. These ‘plotlines’, in turn, act as a means for generating scholarly debate about contextually oriented interpretations. The result is a search for ‘non-linear confluence’ and ‘plausible causal assertions’, understood as the ways in which historical events and processes conjoin in order to produce particular causal chains within bounded social domains.<sup>18</sup>

Again, the contingent is recognized, not denied, but nonetheless analyzed in such a way as to develop contextualized explanations comparable across similarly “bounded social domains.” Historians correctly take issue with the use of “isomorphic trans-historical categories” in the study of conflict, and world politics more generally; but they overstate this criticism when such categories are intended to be ideal-type constructs or “impressionistic pictures” within which historical detail is to be included and examined.

With respect to international rivalry, historians would likely bristle at the idea that the relationship between say, the Soviet Union and the United States, is to be compared to that between India and Pakistan, or Iran and Saudi Arabia. Though not historians per se, Michael Burawoy and William Sewell criticized Theda Skocpol along these lines for purportedly “freezing history” in her comparative analysis of social revolutions occurring at different stages in time.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, Sewell contended that Skocpol’s use of the ‘comparative method’ amounted to “cutting up the congealed block of historical time into artificially interchangeable units.”<sup>20</sup> He took exception to the idea that

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<sup>18</sup> Lawson, “The eternal divide?” p. 215.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Burawoy, “Two methods in search of science: Skocpol versus Trotsky,” *Theory and Society*, 18 (1989): pp. 759-805; William Sewell, “Historical events as transformations of structures: Inventing revolution at the Bastille,” *Theory and Society* 25, 6 (1996): pp. 841-881.

<sup>20</sup> Sewell, “Historical events as transformations of structures,” p. 258.

social revolutions could be considered independently of historical time, absent the particular conjunctures of antecedent 'events'.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, the criticism is overstated, as Skocpol points out in her cutting rejoinder, which is worth quoting at length:

Sewell seems to imagine that given historical times and places are either inherently comparable, or inherently incomparable. But it all depends on the questions an investigator is asking in a given study. And there is no reason why an investigator has to make mechanical decisions even within one study. Cases can be treated as comparable for some investigative purposes, while their uniqueness, or interconnections, can be acknowledged for other investigative purposes. That is the great advantage of in-depth comparative studies of a manageable number of cases.<sup>22</sup>

Once again, the emphasis is placed on the utility and practicality of systematic comparison, not to do violence to history, but to order it in an intelligible way.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, comparisons of international rivalries across time need not take the form of an "isomorphic transhistorical" or "ahistorical" category in which the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union is graphed onto and conflated with that between India and Pakistan, etc. It would be difficult to suggest, given the separation in historical time, that such relationships would be 'the same' in any precise way. The particular actors engaged in rivalry, similarly, would not be expected to act, perceive, and move in exactly the same way (particularly if the comparison is between say, 18<sup>th</sup> century nation-states engaged in rivalry on one hand and more contemporary 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century states on the other, but also if one compares contemporary rivalries with more similar-

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<sup>21</sup> More specifically, according to Sewell, the effect of antecedent revolutions cannot be 'controlled' for; "[a]fter all", he writes, "the leadership of the Bolshevik party self-consciously patterned its own revolutionary efforts on what it regarded as the lessons of the French revolution, and the Chinese Communists not only modeled themselves explicitly on the Bolsheviks but received direct aid from them."

<sup>22</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press), p. 329.

<sup>23</sup> The point here is *methodological*; while Skocpol's work on revolutions has been widely criticized on empirical grounds (and rightly so), her more narrow point with respect to the comparative method should not be discounted (one must not, to put it more colloquially, "throw the baby out with the bath water").

constituent units). Finally, the particular manifestation of such rivalries and the attendant outcomes of behaviour (whether war, conflict, or even eventually peace) would be necessarily different (in their particular detail) among cases. An approach that recognizes as much would allow, therefore, the drastic differences in leadership personality and psychology, bureaucratic organization, domestic politics, underlying economic conditions, ethnic compositions, ideological dimensions etc. (i.e., those factors so often overlooked by statist approaches to IR) to be included rather than ignored.

I now turn to a brief overview of the study of rivalry in IR. Understanding the development of this subfield helps illuminate its potential for a more ambitious historical approach to the study of an important international political phenomena (of particular relevance to conflict and war).

### **On Rivalry**

The concept of rivalry is an old one in the study of international relations. Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* – widely considered one of the foundational texts of both historiography and political science (though historians and political scientists, to be sure, emphasize different portions and promote divergent interpretations of it) – is, at its core, a work about rivalry. The city-states of Athens and Sparta, dominant within the nascent international system of Ancient Greece, fought for 27 years – a time span held together not simply by the continuity of combat but, more importantly, by the *identity* of the two primary antagonists. That is to say, disparate battles over particular issues were subsumed under the broader umbrella of conflict between the two rivals. While many scholars have attempted to reduce the war to a single definitive cause or underlying issue (economic interests, political prestige, power transition, ideology, culture etc.), the fact remains that all such factors operated/existed, in greater or lesser relative combination, *within the rivalrous relationship itself*.

Largely justifying Thucydides' contention that his work would be of value for some (or indeed all) time to come, prominent political rivalries have subsequently punctuated the world historical landscape – from Rome-Carthage to Austria-Prussia to US-USSR. Today, some of the most pressing potential flash points of world politics are



constituted by ongoing international rivalries, such as India-Pakistan, China-Taiwan, Israel-Palestine, and the two Koreas (among others).

One of the first and most important contributions of contemporary rivalry research was the finding that conflict and war occur disproportionately between rivals. Gary Goertz and Paul Diehl, for example, found that “of militarized disputes, 45% occur in...rivalries, and over half of the wars [in the international system] take place between...rivals.”<sup>24</sup> The quantitative work of Goertz and Diehl on the war-proneness of rivalries offered prima facie evidence that the study of rivalry is pertinent for scholars of conflict and war.

Also important, as William Thompson has observed, is the finding that “[c]onfrontations between rivals...work differently than confrontations between nonrivals.”<sup>25</sup> John Vasquez, for instance, suggests that repeated confrontations can reinforce hostility and cause a negative spiral in which states become increasingly antagonistic vis à vis one another: “As conflict recurs, contenders become more concerned with hurting or denying their competitor than with their own immediate satisfaction, and with this, hostility deepens and goes beyond that associated with normal conflict.”<sup>26</sup> Essentially, Vasquez is highlighting the fact that prior hostility alters how states perceive each other; in situations where there has been a significant level of prior conflict “there is...a tendency for all issues (and the specific stakes that compose them) to become linked into one grand issue – us versus them.”<sup>27</sup> Once this “actor dimension” (or “negative-affect calculus”) has become operative, states will abandon a conventional cost-benefit analysis of conflict (a “stake dimension”) and engage in confrontation primarily out of hostility toward their rival; it is this hostility, and not “the intrinsic value of the stakes” which ultimately “determines [their] issue position.”<sup>28</sup> This helps explain

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<sup>24</sup> Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, “The initiation and termination of enduring rivalries: the impact of political shocks,” *American Journal of Political Science* 39, 1 (February 1995): p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> William Thompson, “Principal rivalries,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39, 2 (1995): p. 215.

<sup>26</sup> John A. Vasquez, “Distinguishing rivals that go to war from those that do not: a quantitative comparative case study of the two paths to war,” *International Studies Quarterly* 40, 4 (1996): p. 532.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 532.

<sup>28</sup> John Vasquez and Christopher Leskiw, “The Origins and War Proneness of Interstate Rivalries,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, 1 (2001): pp. 295-316.

behaviour that seems, in isolation, to be counterproductive. It also helps explain why seemingly limited or minor disputes can result in significant escalation and/or conflict. States engaged in rivalry may allocate strategic value to a particular issue or stake to a degree far greater than would be the case in an isolated or non-rivalry confrontation.

Much early debate focused on different approaches to classifying and operationalizing rivalry. While Diehl, Goertz and others utilized a 'dispute density' approach for the classification of rivalry (in which dyads with X amount of militarized interstate disputes in X amount of years qualify as rivals<sup>29</sup>), William Thompson (and his colleagues) introduced a classification system based on decision-maker perceptions. To qualify as a rivalry, three criteria must be met: states must regard each other as a) competitors, b) the source of actual or latent threats that pose some possibility of becoming militarized, and c) as enemies.<sup>30</sup> This perceptual approach – while more work-intensive for coding purposes – has a natural affinity with qualitative methods and historical research. In the end, competing approaches to operationalization have less to do with fundamental theoretical differences than with the methodological and practical choices of particular scholars. Indeed, the existence of multiple rivalry 'lists' has helped individual research projects by allowing findings to be compared and cross-checked against alternative populations of cases.<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately, I believe qualitative and historical approaches can make a significant contribution to the study of rivalry not only in terms of a more nuanced, fine-grained or alternative definition/classification of the concept, but also substantively in terms of helping to explain the impact of rivalry in causal/explanatory terms. Significantly, this possibility is predicated on (and is symbiotic with) earlier quantitative work. Unlike past instances of narrative diplomatic history, the scientific study of rivalry has narrowed and

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<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that significant revisions to this classification system were made in Klein, Goertz, and Diehl (2006) in which the interrelation of disputes/issues supercedes temporal considerations, tempering some of the rigidity of the earlier definition and adding a measure of historical nuance. See James Klein, Gary Goertz, and Paul Diehl, "The New Rivalry Dataset: Procedures and Patterns," *Journal of Peace Research* 43, 3 (2006): pp. 331-348.

<sup>30</sup> Michael P. Colaresi, Karen Rasler, and William R. Thompson, *Strategic Rivalries in World Politics: Position, Space, and Conflict Escalation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 25

<sup>31</sup> For a recent attempt to clarify rivalry conceptualization see David R. Dreyer, "Unifying Conceptualizations of Interstate Rivalry: A Min-Max Approach," *Cooperation and Conflict* 49, 4 (2014): pp. 501-518.

specified the concept such that it can be studied (both in itself and in relation to other international and domestic political phenomena) systematically and comparatively, allowing for the potential cumulation of knowledge within the research program. In other words, we now have the *parameters* in which to explore – in a fashion suitable for capturing historical complexity – the *dynamics* of the rivalry process. In so doing, the long standing and intuitive understanding of rivalry that adhered in diplomatic history is given new-found theoretical purchase. Taking the rivalry relationship – or context – as not merely the aggregate outcome of particular disputes, issues, or points of contention (that is, as *description* or a static category) but instead as a *dynamic influence* on the constitution, process, and processes of those instances themselves is the crux of this advance.

As a tentative ‘cross-cultural’ communication<sup>32</sup> between quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, the study of rivalry presents significant potentialities. Comparative case study analysis and within-case process-tracing can engage the rich historical detail and specific causal mechanisms that underlie the statistical relationships and correlations observed by quantitative research. The internal dynamics of rivalries (how they begin, endure, end) can be unpacked in greater detail using methods designed to examine such processes. Meanwhile, quantitative approaches can be used to test, confirm and/or generalize the processes so identified as well as to generate new puzzles and problems that can be similarly examined qualitatively. Both approaches can do what they do best (e.g. effect estimation vs. outcome explanation) while remaining united by a shared theoretical conceptualization of, and substantive focus on, rivalry (i.e. persistent interstate conflict and/or hostility) in the international system.

In some instances, scholars may employ a multi-method research design in an effort to leverage both approaches. For example Valeriano uses a structured and focused case study of the US-Iraq rivalry as a means to illustrate the mechanisms at work in his

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<sup>32</sup> The term, and the analogy, is from Gary Goertz and James Mahoney, “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research,” *Political Analysis* 14 (2006): pp. 227-249.

broader steps-to-rivalry theory of rivalry onset.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Findley et al. supplement their statistical analysis with a brief plausibility-probing case discussion of the India-Pakistan rivalry to illuminate potential causal mechanisms underlying the observed relationship between rivalry and terrorism.<sup>34</sup> In a primarily qualitative study, Christopher Darnton uses controlled comparison and primary historical sources in Latin American rivalries to process-trace the oft-proffered proposition that a 'common foe' can induce rivalry rapprochement (or termination).<sup>35</sup> His thesis is articulated in terms of sufficient conditions: an alternative mission and resource constraints curtail state agencies which otherwise work to maintain rivalry for their own parochial interests. While other 'paths to peace' are possible (that is, Darnton does not seek to specify necessary conditions), the conjunction of these two factors is sufficient for rapprochement. DiCicco, for his part, uses historical evidence to highlight a turning point in American perceptions of the Soviet threat during the final stages of the Cold War. His analysis underscores the ability of qualitative research to serve as "fruitful means of understanding the micro-foundations of rivalry."<sup>36</sup> Michael Colaresi, in a similar engagement with domestic-level rivalry dynamics, employs a "dual quantitative-qualitative approach to probe the explanatory power of dynamic two-level [domestic and international] pressures." Colaresi's justification for this approach nicely summarizes the productive synergy between qualitative and quantitative methods emphasized here:

By analyzing the historical record of specific pairs of states, I can track distinct policies, events, and motivations. Complementarily, I also create approximate measures...of dynamic two-level pressures in a much wider array of cases to cross-validate whether the case study findings are peculiar to just a few rivalries. Therefore, the following case studies and statistical analysis serve to reinforce each other. The case studies...allow the reader to

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<sup>33</sup> Brandon Valeriano, *Becoming Rivals: The Process of Interstate Rivalry Development* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Michael G. Findley, James Piazza, and Joseph Young, "Games rivals play: terrorism in international rivalries," *The Journal of Politics* 74, 1 (2012): pp. 235-248. For a primarily quantitative investigation of the link between rivalry and terrorism see Justin Conrad, "Interstate Rivalry and Terrorism: An Unprobed Link," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, 4 (2011): pp. 529-555.

<sup>35</sup> Christopher Darnton, *Rivalry and Alliance Politics in Cold War Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan DiCicco, "Fear, Loathing, and Cracks in Reagan's Mirror Images: Able Archer 83 and an American First Step toward Rapprochement in the Cold War," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, 3 (2011): p. 272.

directly compare the dynamic two-level pressure prognostications with historical events.<sup>37</sup>

As these studies indicate, the range of methodological tools available to rivalry researchers is wide. Additional examples include the use of content-analysis by Akcinaroglu et al.<sup>38</sup> or Thies'<sup>39</sup> innovative use of simultaneous equation estimation for modelling the social construction in Latin America of rivalry roles and a regional 'Lockean culture of anarchy' (following Wendt 1999).

Like Thies, Valeriano couches his work in an explicitly constructivist framework highlighting, in my opinion, another vital 'bridge-building' potentiality in the study of rivalry. Given its focus on conflict, hostility, and war, and even more specifically on territorial and/or economic conflict/competition, or 'spatial' and 'positional' motivations, much rivalry research places emphasis on material factors. Yet while tangible considerations (particularly territory) are undoubtedly essential to all facets (onset, duration, termination) of rivalry, the manner in which such factors relate to the rivalry behaviour of particular actors (states or state leaders, domestic actors, publics etc.) is inevitably perceptual and ideational.<sup>40</sup> As Valeriano notes:

Rivalry is a situation that begins through stimuli and events that are specific to the process. Rivalries do not develop in a vacuum; the situation requires that attention be paid to the nuances particular to the history and culture of the states engaged in the situation. Past studies of rivalry routinely fail to

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<sup>37</sup> Michael P. Colaresi, *Scare Tactics: The Politics of International Rivalry* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Seden Akcinaroglu, Jonathan DiCicco and Elizabeth Radziszewski, "Avalanches and Olive Branches: A Multimethod Analysis of Disasters and Peacemaking in Interstate Rivalries," *Political Research Quarterly* 64, 2 (2011): pp. 260-275.

<sup>39</sup> Cameron Thies, "The Construction of a Latin American Interstate Rivalry Culture," *International Interactions* 34, 3 (2008): pp. 231-257.

<sup>40</sup> Of course, the recognition that both material and ideational factors are important does not answer the question as to which, in the last instance, is relatively more so or indeed is decisive – this continues to be a theoretical consideration that will separate scholars in to more or less opposing camps. Nonetheless, to the extent that the very existence of rivalry occurs at the interstice of the material and the ideational (i.e. it is an identifiable attitude which exists in relation to a set of tangible circumstances) the research area is well-suited as terrain both for continuing such debates but also, perhaps more productively, exploring potential complimentaries for the purpose of explaining empirical phenomenon.

engage history and culture in explaining why states commit to long-term animosity...History, culture, and tradition do matter for rivalry onset.<sup>41</sup>

This commitment to non-material considerations is present if implicit in earlier rivalry work – recall Vasquez’s ‘actor dimension’ or Maoz and Mor’s ‘psychological manifestations of enmity’ as constitutive components of rivalry.<sup>42</sup> Consider also Thompson’s third criterion, which specifies that states must regard each other as ‘enemies’ (a classification that is clearly *not* reducible to material factors, as evidenced by the inclusion of a separate criterion that mandates they be ‘competitors’ – roughly comparable in power, resources, position – as well). Indeed, one of the more persuasive elements of the rivalry approach as a whole is its ability to take account of clear *deviations* from conventional rational behaviour. If a conventional rational actor maximizes gain, “states engaged in rivalry are much more willing to go out of their way to deny a benefit to an enemy even if that means they harm their own security or personal well-being.”<sup>43</sup> The ‘gain’, in this scenario, may be an intangible, psychological one, not measurable by conventional metrics and therefore inaccessible to typical rationalist accounts.

This does not, of course, suggest that rivals are “irrational”; instead, it indicates the extent to which rivalry may alter preference structures such that inflicting harm on an enemy is desired above material gain or security. If a long-standing criticism of so-called “thin” rationalism is its inability to account for the preferences of actors (see Fearon and Wendt<sup>44</sup>), rivalry offers a potential means by which to do so. Repeated and compounded hostility, along with the prospect of future conflict, may mean that preferences in rivalry are appreciably different than what they are outside of it. Perhaps the most extreme constructivist position in this regard was suggested by Ted Hopf in his discussion of the “logic of habit” (that is, reflexive and unthinking behaviour):

Evidence that the logic of habit underpins an enduring rivalry begins with an enduring pattern of hostile interactions not accompanied by a reflective calculation of the costs and benefits of the relationship or reference to some

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<sup>41</sup> Valeriano, *Becoming Rivals*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>42</sup> Zeev Maoz and Ben D. Mor, *Bound By Struggle: The Strategic Evolution of Enduring International Rivalries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Valeriano, *Becoming Rivals*, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> James Fearon and Alexander Wendt, “Rationalism v. Constructivism: A skeptical view,” in Carlsnaes, Risse and Simmons (eds.), *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), pp. 52-72.

norm specifying what actions are appropriate in such a relationship. Instead, we should see automatic responses to the action of a rival.<sup>45</sup>

While an intriguing hypothesis, I remain skeptical that behaviour with respect to matters as vital and important as war, defense, and security unfold as the result of an un-thinking, un-reflective process. Nonetheless, to the extent that Hopf's account emphasizes certain 'structural' imperatives of rivalry he likely touches on some important elements of rivalry dynamics. Actors may behave according to what they believe is appropriate given their 'role' in the 'institutional structure' of rivalry.

Take, for instance, the Siachen glacier dispute between India and Pakistan. Conflict over the glacier is puzzling from a rational-material point of view because there are no strategic, resource, or tactical benefits from occupying the frozen mountainous terrain. Nonetheless, violence between the two rivals continues (although more soldiers die from the harsh conditions than they do enemy bullets). Interestingly, as Ashutosh Misra observes "[r]etired military officials would say that Siachen has no strategic significance *but serving officials are hesitant to say that on record.*"<sup>46</sup> In other words, one's role as a military official mandates obstinacy with respect to Siachen, thereby maintaining a level of hostility within the rivalry over and above what one would expect given the tangible benefits of actually occupying and controlling the glacier. For analysts on the outside, otherwise puzzling behaviour can be understood by appreciating the distorting effects of rivalry.

As this brief overview has shown, the study of rivalry in international relations has come full circle. While reference to 'rivalry' abounded in classical texts on international diplomacy and world history, the scientific study of war emphasized independent observations, leading to predominately cross-sectional, ahistorical analysis. As always, increased rigor and scientific specification in the study of complex social phenomenon necessitated abstraction from certain processes and dynamics; the resulting analysis (for example the research program associated with the Correlates of War project)

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<sup>45</sup> Ted Hopf, "The Logic of Habit in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 16, 4 (2010): pp. 539-561.

<sup>46</sup> Ashutosh Misra, *India-Pakistan: Coming to Terms* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010): p. 134, emphasis added.

provided methodological sophistication, developing generalizable and cumulative knowledge about important aspects of war and conflict. Yet scholars increasingly recognized that treating wars as independent observations missed crucial dynamics of the war process itself. Many observed, for example, that the same two states fought each other repeatedly, suggesting that wars and conflicts were related over time. This intuitive insight, inherent in the rich description of the classical tradition, was re-introduced into the scientific study of war by the concept of 'rivalry', which shifted the focus of inquiry from war itself to the *context* (or relationship – usually dyadic) in which war occurred. Much initial work remained quantitative, highlighting general patterns, trends, and probabilities relating to rivalries across the international system. With the steady growth of rivalry as a research program, myriad alternative approaches have subsequently emerged, linking qualitative, historical, and interpretive methods to the study of rivalry. In many ways, rivalry as a concept is perfectly suited to act as bridge between different (and potentially complementary) research methodologies. Moving forward, scholars should continue to leverage these possibilities, using a shared conceptual and/or theoretical framework and empirical focus to bring together diverse research strategies under a single umbrella. Given the continued prominence of rivalry in the international system, such a focus will ensure that one of the most pressing problems of international security is understood from all available angles.

### **International Rivalry and Civil Conflict Intervention**

In lieu of a conclusion, I offer in this final section an outline of a research program that attempts to take advantage of the historical possibilities inherent in the study of rivalry. While the above summary of rivalry research underscores the increasing use of qualitative and historical approaches for the understanding of rivalry dynamics, the focus of such efforts nonetheless remains on leveraging historical analysis for the purpose of generalizing about the concept itself (its beginning, its evolution, its end, etc.). A more explicitly historical approach would foreground the particularities, contingencies and circumstances of the individual cases being examined, not merely for subsuming them into an overarching conceptual category, but in order to understand the interrelation between such conjunctures and the historical structure of the rivalry relationship itself. To use Lawson's terms, it would explore the "bounded social domain" of rivalry,



searching for “the ways in which historical events and processes conjoin in order to produce particular causal chains.”<sup>47</sup> The particular events and processes of individual rivalries are likely to be quite different; yet as a conceptual category long-standing enmity between two nation-states evidently bounds a significant phenomenon, as shown by the quantitative work cited above which demonstrates the prima-facie relevance of rivalry for peace and war in the international system. Taking rivalry as an edifice within which particular constellations of processes and events occur can help capture contingency while nonetheless providing a basis for careful comparison (across rivalries) and the consequent cumulation of, even if modest and circumscribed, knowledge.

As mentioned, rivalry behaviour is generally considered anomalous in the context of conventional rationalist approaches to IR. This makes it a particularly intriguing area for research. As Richard Lebow has suggested, the research process

...begins with the identification of an important question or puzzle. These arise when we encounter behavior at odds with our expectations. Expectations are always theory-driven; they are based on underlying beliefs about how the world works...When we observe a business leader buy dear and sell cheap, or a state attack a more powerful neighbor, we consider the behavior anomalous because it appears to violate well-established principles of economics and international relations...To make ‘sense’ of seemingly anomalous behavior, that is, to square it with accepted principles without relaxing the assumption of rationality, we look for other considerations specific to the situation that may have dictated choice and ultimately be reconciled with the principles.<sup>48</sup>

In this sense, looking to those “other considerations specific to the situation” may help reveal the particular conjunctures and processes that lead rivals to behave the way they do. From a policy perspective, moreover, the recognition that rivalry works differently is

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<sup>47</sup> Lawson, “The eternal divide?” p. 215.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Lebow, “Social Science and History: Ranchers versus Farmers?” in Elman and Elman (eds.), *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 117-18.

doubly important given the aforementioned prevalence of rivalry in the international system.

For example, international interventions into many if not most parts of the world must consider the interests of local states engaged in one rivalry or another. As the US and its allies discovered with regards to Afghanistan, regional preferences related to rivalry can have a negative impact on international interests. Surely, for instance, it would have been relevant for policymakers to know that Pakistan might value harming (or gaining regional influence at the expense of) India over and above regional economic cooperation or security stability in Afghanistan. Even an awareness of the long standing enmity between India and Pakistan clearly did not prevent many from believing that Islamabad could be induced into cooperation by 'carrots' (whether direct and indirect aid or the prospect of economic opportunity) believed to be appealing to the conventionally-rational actor. Instead of dismissing Pakistani behaviour as 'paranoid' or 'irrational', one might have anticipated their intransigence vis à vis Indian interests in Afghanistan through an application of the rivalry framework.<sup>49</sup>

In this instance, rivalry may help to explain a single case which, as Jack Levy points out, is generally an undervalued but legitimate use of theory in political science.<sup>50</sup> It also points toward potential future research as to the connections between international interventions and international rivalries. Particularly in areas as volatile as the Middle East, in which myriad international rivalries continue to fester, such considerations are of significant interest to policymakers (consider, for example, the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry with respect to the current Syrian conflict). As Christopher Darnton observes: "With the post-Cold War rise of new security threats, including transnational Islamist terrorism, whether international cooperation against these threats might mitigate existing international rivalries, particularly in the Islamic world, or whether rivalries will undermine counterterrorism coalitions is a vital but unanswered question."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See John Mitton, "The India-Pakistan Rivalry and Failure in Afghanistan," *International Journal* 69, 3 (2014): pp. 353-376.

<sup>50</sup> Jack Levy, "Explaining Events and Developing Theories: History, Political Science, and the Analysis of International Relations," in Elman and Elman (eds.) *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> Darnton, *Rivalry and Alliance Politics in Cold War Latin America*, p. 5.

Further, the India-Pakistan example with respect to Afghanistan highlights the relevance of rivalry for civil conflicts more broadly. Scholars have examined the effects of international intervention on the duration, severity and/or intractability of civil war,<sup>52</sup> but have generally not incorporated considerations of the attributes, interests, or strategies of the interveners themselves.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, a small but growing literature examines the “neighbourhood effects” of civil wars, highlighting the phenomenon of civil conflicts spreading across borders, in some cases generating conflict between the state experiencing unrest and one or more of its neighbours (Lake and Rothchild 1998; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006; Furlong et al. 2006; Gleditsch 2007; Gleditsch et al. 2008; Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008)<sup>54</sup>; yet largely ignored is the impact civil wars may have on international relationships *not* involving the civil conflict country. This is an important oversight. As Jacob Kathman observes, “civil wars are international events”, and as such have major ramifications for neighbouring nations.<sup>55</sup> The destabilizing effects of civil war reach out into the broader region, shifting power balances and presenting new opportunities and challenges to proximate states. For international rivals – constantly

<sup>52</sup> See Patrick Regan, “Third-party interventions and the duration of intrastate conflicts,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46: 1 (2002): pp. 55-73; Lindsay Heger and Idean Salehyan, “Ruthless rulers: coalition size and the severity of civil conflict,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51, 2 (2007): pp. 385-403; David Cunningham, “Blocking resolution: how external states can prolong civil war,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47, 2 (2010): pp. 115-127.

<sup>53</sup> For exceptions see David Carment, Patrick James and Zeynep Taydas, *Who Intervenes? Ethnic Conflict and Interstate Crisis* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006); Michael Findley and Tse Kwang Teo, “Rethinking third-party interventions into civil wars: An actor-centric approach,” *Journal of Politics*, 68, 4 (2006): pp. 828-837; Stephen Gent, “Strange bedfellows: the strategic dynamics of major power military interventions,” *Journal of Politics* 69, 4 (2007): pp. 1089-1102.

<sup>54</sup> David Lake and Donald Rothchild, *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Idean Salehyan and Kristian Gleditsch, “Refugees and the spread of civil war,” *International Organization* 60, 2 (2006): pp. 335-366; Kathryn Furlong, Nils Petter Gleditsch and Havard Hegre, “Geographic opportunity and neomalthusian willingness: Boundaries, shared rivers, and conflict,” *International Interactions* 32, 1 (2006): pp. 79-108; Kristian Gleditsch, “Transnational dimensions of civil war,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 44, 3 (2007): pp. 293-309; Kristian Gleditsch, Idean Salehyan and Kenneth Schultz, “Fighting at home, fighting abroad: How civil wars lead to international disputes,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, 4 (2008): pp. 479-506; Halvard Buhaug and Kristian Gleditsch, “Contagion or confusion? Why conflicts cluster in space,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, 2 (2008): pp. 215-233.

<sup>55</sup> Jacob Kathman, “Civil war diffusion and regional motivations for intervention,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, 6 (2011): p. 848.

perched at the precipice of potential conflict – any such alterations have important ramifications for rivalry dynamics. The dynamics of civil conflicts, in turn, will be appreciably altered in the event of rivalry intervention.

The use of civil conflict intervention as a means of ‘rivalry management’ is not explicitly engaged by either the civil conflict or rivalry literature, though discussions of ‘proxy wars’ are frequent in diplomatic and military histories of prominent international rivalries, e.g. the US-Soviet relationship during the Cold War. As this paper has hinted, however, it would be difficult to suggest (and difficult to entertain, from an historical perspective) that rivalry intervention into extra-dyadic civil conflicts occurred everywhere by the same process. Pakistan’s involvement in Afghanistan, for example, has both ethnic dimensions as well as bureaucratic ones, with the nation’s military quite clearly pushing continued enmity with India as a means of protecting their own parochial interests (similar to the dynamic Darnton discusses with respect to South America). Also important, however, are strategic considerations such as the constraining effects of nuclear deterrence<sup>56</sup> and the asymmetry in conventional capabilities between the two countries.<sup>57</sup> American and Soviet intervention in Angola, by contrast, was driven largely by overarching ideological considerations, as well as particular domestic political factors (in both the US and USSR) which coalesced into respective intervention policies and strategies (both of which were further complicated by significant Cuban involvement).<sup>58</sup> Syrian and Israeli intervention into Lebanon, meanwhile, was a reflection of myriad factors, including ethnic and religious affiliations, Middle East alliance politics, transnational actors, and broader strategic considerations, to name just a few.<sup>59</sup> One could go through basically all such interventions to identify more or less unique constellations of precipitating factors and forces.

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Krepon, “The stability-instability paradox, misperception, and escalation control in South Asia,” The Stimson Center, 2003, <http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/research-pdfs/ESCCONTROLCHAPTER1.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> T.V. Paul, “Causes of the India-Pakistan enduring rivalry,” in T.V. Paul (ed.) *The India-Pakistan Conflict: An Enduring Rivalry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 3-24.

<sup>58</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>59</sup> Karen Rasler, “Internationalized Civil War: A Dynamic Analysis of the Syrian Intervention in Lebanon,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 27, 3 (1983): pp. 421-456; Naomi Joy Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Yair Evron, *War and Intervention in Lebanon: Israeli-Syrian Deterrence Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 1987).

Nonetheless, we know that in broader terms the existence of rivalry does appear to influence both the decision to intervene as well as the manner and/or intensity with which such interventions occur. In her overview of civil wars since 1945, for example, Ann Hironaka observes:

...interventions are often used as a general-purpose means of prosecuting interstate conflict...indirect acts such as intervention have become a common and low-cost way of pursuing interstate rivalry.<sup>60</sup>

In some instances, rivals' interest in a particular conflict may be more closely connected to rivalry dynamics (consider US-Soviet interventions into the Third World), while in others rivalry may be an important but ancillary consideration (as appears to be the case with respect to Syria's intervention, at least initially, into Lebanon). Still further, the *type* of rivalry – whether ideological or religious or ethnic, global or regional, or 'positional' or 'spatial'<sup>61</sup> – can have significant implications for intervention dynamics. In this way, the *particular history* of the rivalry itself becomes significant (how it came to be and for what reason), shaping the manner in which rivals behave with respect to specific crises or opportunities, including civil war interventions.

Given these necessary complexities, a better approach to studying rivalry intervention into civil conflict would involve a systematic comparison of a few interventions which differ along certain key dimensions (including geography, era [though selecting rivalries from different historical epochs would likely stretch any comparison too thin], power distribution, rivalry type [positional, spatial, global, regional, ethnic, ideological etc.], capability distributions, etc.). A selection of, say, three interventions would generate six 'cases' as the process of intervention for each rival could be traced and evaluated. The particularities of these processes could be foregrounded through close historical analysis (via archival research, primary document analysis, interviews and secondary literature), while remaining conceptually linked to the

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<sup>60</sup> Ann Hironaka, *Neverending Wars: The International Community, Weak States, and the Perpetuation of Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 136.

<sup>61</sup> These last two terms belonging to Michael P. Colaresi, Karen Rasler, and William R. Thompson, *Strategic Rivalries in World Politics: Position, Space, and Conflict Escalation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

overarching rivalry relationship. Any commonalities across interventions (both within and across rivalries) could be noted and explicated, though such generalizations would be contingent and historically grounded, and not rigid ahistorical categories valid across space and time. This approach would help explore and test differing interpretations and theories regarding international intervention into civil conflicts by process tracing evidence in specific cases; it would similarly link these causal paths (and their theoretical explanations) through a shared substantive focus on rivalry, thereby augmenting, but certainly not guaranteeing, the possibility that such explanations and theories could be applicable to (or at least informative for) additional cases of rivalry intervention.

To be sure, this kind of approach is significantly ‘messier’ than many neopositivist scholars would prefer, blurring the lines between independent and intervening variables, inductive and deducting reasoning, and generally eschewing the kind of tight, parsimonious explanations that have dominated much of IR over the past several decades. Instead, it privileges labour-intensive historical analysis and contingent, close explanations of particular cases. But its ambition is simultaneously a reflection of its humility; humility as to the ability of social science to subsume a complex and chaotic reality into “pre-existing theoretical scripts”. As the importance of history for the study of IR continues to be recognized, movement in this direction is likely to grow. Equally important, however, will be a continued belief in the social scientific enterprise. Total relativity, incommensurability, and particularity is unwarranted. A practical middle ground must be occupied which leverages the complimentary “co-implications” of history and IR for the purpose of understanding general patterns and processes in international politics.