

Kristian Gleditsch, "Transnational Dimensions of Civil War." April 26, 2005.

In his April 26, 2005 talk at Mershon, Kristian Gleditsch examined how interactions between states influence the risk of conflict within states. He said that past research on conflict has tended to draw a sharp distinction between interstate conflict between states and civil war, or intrastate conflict within states. The two types of conflict have generally been treated as mutually exclusive phenomena and studied in very different ways. But treating civil war as fully domestic events confined to the country where the conflict takes place is problematic, Gleditsch argued, as participants and processes outside the boundaries of the nation state may influence the risk of civil war.

Gleditsch said that it is typical for civil wars to exhibit transnational dimensions. The actors themselves may be transnational, for example (e.g., Albanian insurgents), or states might intervene and provide support to competing factions, as Rwanda has done in the Congolese civil war. Further, conflicts in another state can create externalities that can arouse conflict in neighboring states. And the anticipation of support from outside groups can influence domestic mobilization as well (e.g., the mobilization of Croats in the former Yugoslavia). Gleditsch claimed, therefore, that transnational dependence and interactions clearly influence the risk of civil conflict. However, he also said that transnational dependence is most likely not system wide; rather, it is a regional dynamic. A civil war in Rwanda, for example, is most likely not going to affect the likelihood of conflict in Sri Lanka, but could affect the likelihood of conflict in the Congo.

Gleditsch identified three types of transnational linkages that may affect the risk that a country will experience a civil war *ex ante*: the character of political institutions in

neighboring countries; the willingness of states to seek support from members of similar ethnic groups in adjacent states; and the level of economic interdependence: if it is low, conflict is less costly to neighboring actors.

Gleditsch said that the political context prevailing in a region contains information about the incentives for violent conflict in adjacent states as well as the prospects for leaders to become involved. The more political leaders in a region are constrained (i.e., the more democratic the state), the stronger the expected barriers against involvement in wars in neighboring states. Conversely, he said a more autocratic region has leaders who face few formal constraints on intervention, thus the region has a higher risk of political conflicts escalating to violence. For example, he said that an autocratic ruler such as Robert Mugabe faces few effective barriers on providing support to Joseph Kabila in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, despite widespread domestic opposition to involvement in the war.

Gleditsch said that many civil wars involve ethnic groups who try to attain autonomy or secede from existing states. External interventions in such conflicts, he noted, are typically motivated by states seeking to support members of the same ethnic. Similarly, ethnic kin and diasporas in other states have often played an important role in mobilizing and financing insurgencies. Gleditsch has thus found that a higher number of ethnic groups crossing state boundaries increases a country's risk of civil conflict. In Macedonia, for example, the armed Albanian uprising in 2001 appeared to be an extension of the prior KLA mobilization in Kosovo.

Gleditsch also noted that the extent of economic integration between neighboring states also influences the risk of civil war. Extant research in the international conflict literature suggests that higher economic interdependence between states decreases the likelihood of an interstate war between them. Finding that regions with relatively high levels of economic integration have fewer cases of civil conflict, Gleditsch said that interdependence has a similarly limiting effect on conflict within states.

Gleditsch concluded that most research on civil wars has focused exclusively on attributes of states and treated civil wars in one state as independent of conflicts in other states. He, however, hypothesized that certain transnational linkages hypothesized to make civil wars more likely, and found evidence that transnational linkages between states and regional factors strongly influence the risk of civil conflict. In short, models of civil war that include transnational factors provide more valid explanations for civil war than are models with purely domestic covariates.