

# The emotive causes of recurrent international conflicts

---

William J. Long, Ph.D., J.D.

Sam Nunn School of International Affairs  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
Atlanta, GA 30332-0610  
USA  
*william.long@inta.gatech.edu*

Peter Brecke, Ph.D.

Sam Nunn School of International Affairs  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
Atlanta, GA 30332-0610  
USA  
*peter.brecke@inta.gatech.edu*

---

**ABSTRACT.** Many international conflicts are recurrent, and many of these are characterized by periods of violence, including wars, that are hard to describe as planned products of rational decision-making. Analysis of these conflicts according to rational-choice international-relations theory or constructivist approaches has been less revealing than might have been hoped. We consider the possibility that emotive causes could better explain, or at least improve the explanation of, observed patterns. We offer three emotive models of recurrent conflict and we outline a method by which the reliability of emotive explanations derived from these models could be tested prospectively.

---

War is too complex to capture whole within the framework of a single theory.<sup>1</sup> Some wars seem nearly random, while others are deeply embedded in particular histories and specific relationships. These latter wars, known as recurrent conflicts, are not well explained in standard international-relations theory.<sup>2</sup>

Recurrent conflicts occur both within and between states — and occasionally among them. Recurrent *international* conflicts have been stylized as “enduring rivalries” or “strategic rivalries”; recurrent *civil* conflicts as “protracted conflicts” or “intractable conflicts.” Failure to resolve fundamental disputes leads again and again to violence, though the disputes themselves may evolve substantially. Figure 1 depicts this pattern in a dyad.

What mechanisms maintain a conflict and predispose to periodic violence? Existing studies do not convincingly identify them.

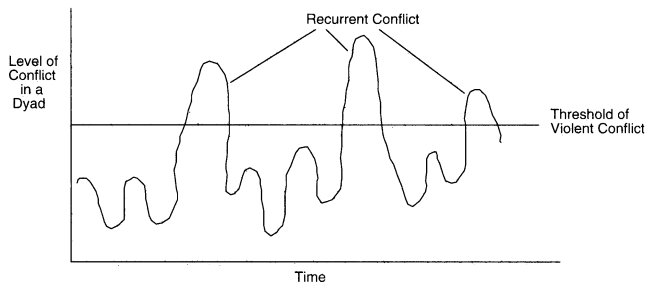
Recurrent international conflicts account for 40 to 50 percent of all state-against-state wars.<sup>3</sup> Recurrent

conflicts are not only prominent, and nearly prevalent, internationally; they also typically involve major powers in system-defining confrontations either directly or, as with the India-Pakistan and Israel-Syria dyads, indirectly.<sup>4</sup> Recurrent civil conflicts are also critically important, being the most frequent and arguably the dominant form of warfare today.<sup>5</sup> In this article, though, our focus is at the international level.

## Recurrent international conflict

Most of the literature on recurrent international conflict focuses on definitional issues, the behavioral patterns of the conflicts, or their termination. Only a few works concern themselves with the question of causation, and those that do are inductive: identifying factors that correlate with recurrent conflict but seldom weaving these factors into explicit theories of state behavior.<sup>6</sup> Douglas Stinnett and Paul Diehl’s multivariate test of potential correlates of enduring rivalries, for example, reveals several factors put forward as being

*The emotive causes of recurrent international conflicts*

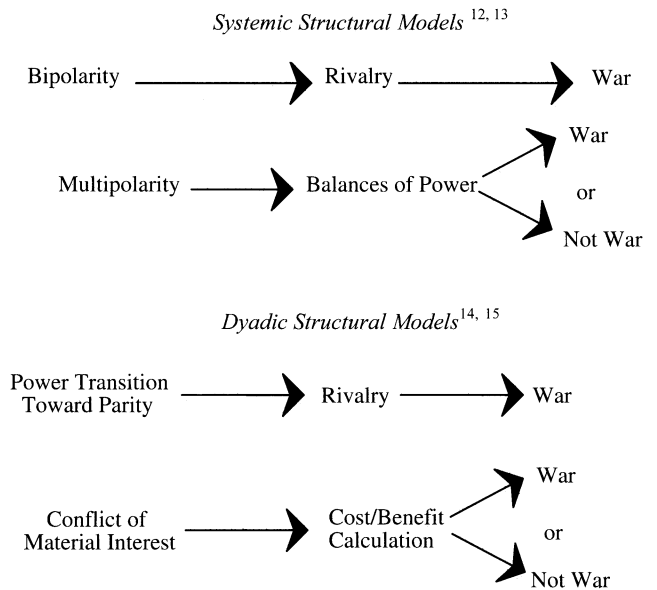


**Figure 1. Level of conflict in a dyadic relationship and emergence of a recurrent-conflict pattern.**

associated with the continuation of conflict: (1) the rival countries had major-power status; (2) an initial conflict ended in stalemate; (3) a territorial question figured in the original dispute; (4) the countries were contiguous; and (5) at least one of the countries had gained national independence up to ten years prior to the first dispute.<sup>7</sup> Although they do not offer an integrated behavioral hypothesis explaining these results, Stinnett and Diehl suggest that causes of enduring rivalries fall into two broad categories of explanation: structural and behavioral.<sup>8</sup>

Structural explanations maintain that material factors, such as the relative power position of the states involved or the issue in conflict, determine the rivalry relationship. More specifically, power parity among leading states is thought invariably to lead to conflict,<sup>9</sup> and parity in military capability or convergence towards military parity within any dyad is, supposedly, conducive to war.<sup>10</sup> Regarding clashes of material interest, scholars maintain that territorial disputes are particularly likely to recur and that states in territorial proximity are more likely to engage in war than are distant ones.<sup>11</sup> These models are represented visually in Figure 2.

The obvious limitation of this approach is that structure alone is not a sufficient explanation for human action. It is not that material conditions of power and territory play no part in causation but that their role must be *in interaction with* human motives, perceptions, and responses to these material conditions.<sup>16</sup> Material disputes may or may not be settled short of war. Likewise, power transitions have been violent, as in the series of wars between Germany and France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *and* they have been peaceful: witness Great Britain's acquiescence to American power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



**Figure 2. Systemic and dyadic structural models.**

Behavioral explanations focus on the action of potential rivals during their early confrontations and argue that initial behavior will establish a course of action for future relations. In moving beyond this useful generalization, however, existing behavioral explanations contribute less than first appears. Essentially, behavioral theories maintain that military force begets military force, that is, “relations between two adversaries will become more conflictual as they accumulate a longer history of militarized conflict.”<sup>17</sup> This is no doubt true, but it is dangerously close to a tautology. Moreover, it does not answer the question of *why* war begets war. That is, what motivation drives the cycle of violence? Although often couched in emotive language, recurrent conflict is explained by “behaviorists” as simply the rational choice of actors based on the expected utility of future conflict, albeit a calculation performed in a historical context.<sup>18</sup> This rational-behavior model is represented in Figure 3.

Structural explanation and existing behavioral explanations are incomplete and their predictive powers are weak because they fail to address root causation and the motivation for recurrent conflict. This project, we believe, may strengthen or eclipse existing realist explanations (be they structural or dyadic) and behavioral explanations that are implicitly or explicitly founded on conventional notions of rationality. What

is missing from existing explanations of recurrent international conflict is its essential, but ignored, emotive dimension. This is not surprising, as almost all social-scientific accounts of the causes of war lack a sense of agents' motivation, "of how and why particular persons commit violent acts."<sup>20</sup>

Today, to the extent it is noted at all in standard formal explanations for the outbreak of war, emotion is either dismissed as a pathologically irrational factor or noted as a potentially important variable that is simply inestimable. Michael Howard, for example, in his essay on the causes of war admits, "[C]onflicts may indeed be fuelled by social or psychological drives we do not fully understand[.]"<sup>21</sup> But Howard, like almost all others, having set emotion aside as incomprehensible, is perfectly comfortable treating the initiation of war solely as "a deliberate and carefully considered act [arising] from conflicting claims, or interests, or ideologies, or perceptions," despite the obvious importance of emotive factors in claims, in interests, in ideologies, and in perceptions.<sup>22</sup>

In social theory of the rational-choice variety the consideration of emotion is clearly unconventional. Accordingly, we will first define "emotion" and offer an explanation of its function *in* rationality. We will then deduce three models conceptualizing emotion as an explanatory factor for recurrent conflict and, in conclusion, suggest ways that hypotheses derived from these models might be explored empirically.

## Emotion and rationality

The exclusion of emotive forces is not unique to the "scientific" study of war.<sup>23</sup> Emotion has faded in social-scientific theory generally, even theory dealing squarely with the mobilization of collective action — ironically so, because the word "emotion" stems from the Latin verb *motere*, "to move."

Emotion is neglected largely because of the meta-theoretical assumptions underlying most social theory: rational choice or, more recently, constructivist characterizations of human thought and action. Rationality has come to mean the conscious, goal-oriented, reasoned process by which an individual, expressing and thus also revealing his or her preferences, chooses a utility-maximizing action from among an array of alternative actions.<sup>24</sup> Deciding to go to war or not to go to war is a rational choice for decision-makers under

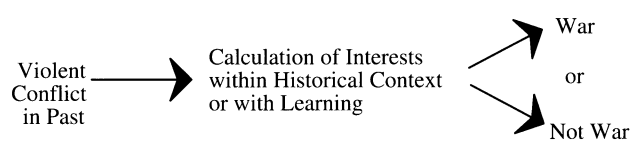


Figure 3. The rational-behavior model.<sup>19</sup>

certain conditions. Bruce Buena de Mesquita explains that "[t]he selection of war or peace is a choice that is initiated by individual leaders who must accept responsibility for their decisions . . . Their choices depend on their estimation of costs and benefits."<sup>25</sup> Emotion is treated as irrational and, therefore, exogenous to decision-making and action.

Some theorists modify a few of these assumptions. The best-known examples are models of "bounded" rationality and theories of heuristics recognizing limits on human information-processing capabilities.<sup>26</sup> A few cognitive theoreticians have considered a role for emotion in decision-making and some organization theory and agent-level theories allow for the incorporation of emotional variables, but the role of emotion is rarely developed in their models.<sup>27</sup> Most either ignore it or see its role as secondary or marginal — and its formal consideration as counterproductive.<sup>28</sup> Thus, for most theorists, assumptions about rationality are accepted as an accurate depiction of decision-making or as a useful heuristic that successfully establishes correspondence with observable phenomena.<sup>29</sup>

Social constructivism also does not reach the actual, *intra*-subjective reality of the human mind. Social constructivism explains phenomena by reference to social interactions rather than anything innate to human beings. Strict constructivism would maintain that society and societal phenomena can be understood solely as *inter*-subjective reality; that is, the product of social interaction. Thus, emotion and behavior associated with it, like war itself, are social constructs, infinitely labile, learned, and reinforced through social discourse.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike rational choice, our models integrate emotion and reasoning in their explanations for the causes of recurrent conflict *and* in their definition of rationality. Unlike constructivism, we do not view emotion as exclusively the product of social interaction.

To appreciate why emotive-based theory is needed, it is critical to understand what emotion is and how it actually operates as part of human decision-making and

action. *Emotion is a disposition to action.*<sup>31</sup> It has a dual nature: part biological and universal and part sociologically and culturally specific. Emotion is bioregulatory in the sense that it enhances anticipation of and response to archetypal situations encountered in the environment. External social stimuli do not create emotion *per se*; rather, they stimulate central neuro-physiological processes leading to emotive expression and emotive modulation.

Emotion precedes and colors, and it also follows and is colored by, cognition. Emotion and cognition evolved together and function together, and neither can be understood without understanding the other. When emotion is elicited by cognition,<sup>32</sup> behavioral and physiological responses shape, first, an appraisal and, then, a plan.<sup>33, 34, 35</sup> Emotion animates and informs our reasoning, and even motivates it. Our reasoning, in turn, refines, strategizes, and sometimes vetoes emotive input. Emotion has important and indisputably cognitive functions related to attention, perception, planning, memory, and so forth.<sup>36</sup> Current neuroscientific research suggests that emotion, in the right measure, facilitates, and indeed may be necessary for, rational decision-making, assigning priorities to sensory data and sustaining attention,<sup>37</sup> identifying problems and preferences and creating meaning,<sup>38</sup> motivating, directing, and accelerating strategic reasoning, and helping to store and retrieve memories.<sup>39, 40</sup> Emotion “provide[s] the ‘go,’ ‘stop,’ and ‘turn’ signals needed for much decision making and planning.”<sup>41</sup> In ways thus far only partially understood, it animates and helps coordinate problem-solving techniques and their application.<sup>42, 43</sup> With analysis of emotion set aside, *action* becomes a territory marked for misinterpretation.

We argue that emotion is not reducible to a social-cultural construct, as constructivism assumes. To treat emotion as a construct is not to gain a link between social structure and social actor but to *lose* one — indeed, to lose exactly the one that *has* been lost in structural explanations of recurrent conflict.<sup>44</sup> Our emotion is *provoked* by social-cultural circumstances and in part *expressed*, verbally or otherwise, according to social-cultural conventions. But in between provocation and expression is nothing but brain and body. Emotion is a relatively short-lived positive or negative appraisal that has neurological, chemical, and cognitive elements.<sup>45</sup> Although the human mind is capable of recognizing and describing subtle emotional states that

reflect one’s particular society and culture, so-called basic emotions may be universal: fear, sadness, anger, and joy.

Social scientists have largely ignored brain research, and, in doing so, the role of emotion in decision-making and action. Rather than take the brain as science knows it, social theorists, whether rationalistic or constructivistic, treat the mind as a blank slate, either in the sense of a passive recipient of social and cultural determinants or as a universally logical calculator waiting to apply the same “rational” means to any data. In reality, the brain interacts with its environment in constructing emotion and social action, and the brain itself is embedded with problem-solving mechanisms, not all of which are universally logical, but all of which rely extensively on emotion when making decisions.<sup>46</sup>

Ignoring emotive factors and our best available understanding of the mind impedes our understanding of social action. Integrating emotion and reasoning permits us to see patterns of social action that otherwise we would ignore. In this instance, it vivifies and modifies our understanding of recurrent conflict.<sup>47</sup>

### Three emotive models of recurrent conflict

The foregoing insights, augmented by a range of inductive studies, suggest three explanatory models of recurrent conflict.

#### *Model one: Frustration-anger-aggression*

In part, the finding of a link between stalemated outcomes and recurrent conflict is consistent with the longstanding “frustration-aggression” hypothesis, which is derived from the observation that individuals often become aggressive when they are unable to reach a desired goal.<sup>48</sup> In the initial formulation of this hypothesis, frustration was not conceived of as an emotional reaction, but as a “rational,” *i.e.*, reasoned, reaction to an external impediment to expected goal attainment. In essence the theory argues that the thwarting of an objective interest, in particular an interest in territory, will lead to an instrumental form of aggression to reassert a claim or goal and for self-enhancement or self-defense.

Although it does not fit the dominant rationalistic framework, the frustration-aggression hypothesis also can be viewed as less instrumental and more emotional in its motivation. In this formulation, the aggression is

considered the product of anger or other form of emotional arousal directed toward the injury of the target, rather than just the dispassionate, purposeful pursuit of a material goal. Frustration, “that exasperating experience of being foiled, thwarted, blocked, or baffled in our best efforts to find satisfaction,” gives rise to anger.<sup>49</sup> Anger is defined as an “emotional state that consists of feelings of irritation, annoyance, fury, or rage and heightened activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system.”<sup>50</sup> It is important to distinguish between the internal experience of anger and external expression of anger. The expression of anger through verbal or physical outburst or aggression is the behavioral component of an internal process.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the expression of anger is dependent on a cognitive element: there is evidence that the perception of frustration as intentionally caused by another increases the intensity of an aggressive response.<sup>52</sup>

In this formulation, it is the negative affect generated by the frustration, rather than the frustration itself that creates the motivation for aggression.<sup>53</sup> The anger is a product of frustration over goal attainment and is often coupled with a sense of threat to one’s esteem or identity. Becoming angry and aggressive may serve several functions in addition to goal attainment: warding off anxiety, communicating displeasure, restoring self-esteem, and protecting identity — all of which may be more deeply rational than is generally understood.<sup>54</sup>

The impact of anger (and the other emotions discussed in subsequent models) applies to both individuals and groups, although the role of emotion may differ depending on scale.<sup>55</sup> When discussing an emotion as a collective attribute, it can be usefully conceptualized as an “emotional climate,”<sup>56</sup> meaning sets of emotions shared by groups of individuals implicated in common social structures and processes — a policy-making elite, for example. An emotional climate helps to define and maintain a coherent political and social identity for a group; it differentiates members from non-members; and it forms a basis for collective behavior. Emotional climates lead groups to appreciate the shared fortunes of their members and compel them to respond to changes in their operational context.<sup>57</sup>

Although emotional climates are shared, individual participation in them is differentiated and unequal. This should not be surprising, as groups also differ in the roles individuals play within them. “An emotional

climate is not a blanket which equally covers each member of the group associated with it,” says J. M. Barbalet.<sup>58</sup> “Each group member will contribute differently in the formulation of the climate and will experience it in terms of their particular place in the group.”<sup>59</sup> When we investigate individual cases, we will determine whether an operative group is a small policy-making elite, an element of the wider state and society, or both, and whether the distinction is related to regime type, to the applicable emotive model, or both.

The emotive variant of the frustration-aggression hypothesis might account for the apparently “irrational” pursuit of conflict strategies following severe military defeats. What would account for Egypt’s last war with Israel, for example, when the outcome of earlier conflicts had been defeat or stalemate? With the Arab states left in a weaker power position, would not a reasoned calculation have counseled against initiation of yet another conflict?

#### *Model two: Unacknowledged shame and rage*

Certain events trigger an emotionally driven set of decisions and actions that perpetuate war. Specifically, unexpected military defeat, loss of territory, or hostile occupation of territory, followed by the psychological absorption of such a calamity by a collective body, can trigger a shame-rage-aggression sequence. The result is an almost unquenchable thirst for vengeance — the compelling desire to get even, right a wrong, or avenge an injury.<sup>60</sup>

Conflict begins when one or both sides feel alienation from each other and the social bond between them is strained or broken. The rupture occurs after one or both suffer a “narcissistic” injury to its group identity, such as a loss of territory, and collective shame is evoked. Loss or occupation of territory may threaten national identity, which typically “is formed around an exclusive attachment to, and control of, specific pieces of territory. Territory becomes part of the definition of the national ‘self,’ and simultaneously by means of exclusive attachment and control it defines the ‘other.’”<sup>61</sup>

In this model, *shame is not acknowledged*. The failure to address it is critically important because, as Thomas Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger have argued, denied or “bypassed” shame leads directly to anger<sup>62</sup> projected outward onto a rejecting or disapproving other so as to right the self.<sup>63</sup> This form of anger, in turn, often leads to aggression. Psychological theory,

## *The emotive causes of recurrent international conflicts*

clinical observation, and empirical evidence all broadly support the plausibility of this shame-to-anger-to-aggression linkage.<sup>64</sup>

Shame is a very powerful emotion that involves a negative evaluation of the global self, of one's *identity*. Anger provides some temporary relief from this debilitating emotion by mobilizing the self and avoiding feelings of condemnation.<sup>65</sup>

The threat to identity is the bridge between the individual emotional experience and the social group experience and action. Identity is an integrated sense of oneself that is confirmed by one's interpersonal, social, and cultural environment.<sup>66</sup> Stuart Hall refers to identity as a meeting point, or point of "suture," between individual subjects with unconscious psychological processes and social and cultural processes.<sup>67</sup> William Bloom makes this point in his book-length treatment of the link between individual mental processes and those of nation states:

If a mass of people exist whose individual constituents share the same national identification, then it can, with a clear methodological base, be stated that this mass may act as one unit in situations which affect the shared identity. They may act together to make new identifications, or they may act together to enhance and protect identifications already made. Identification theory, therefore, provides a theoretical tool which can explicate the relationship between individual action and the aggregate and thus investigate at the psychological level of analysis mass national mobilization.<sup>68</sup>

Several other contemporary theorists view the stress of protracted conflict as giving rise to a change in the collective identity, spawning a "conflictive ethos,"<sup>69</sup> a term similar in meaning to "emotional climate" discussed above or what some have called "public mood."<sup>70</sup>

Shame is distinct from other emotions in that it is a particularly social one, involving, simultaneously, the self and the other. In shame, one feels a threat to one's image coming from another person.<sup>71</sup> Shame, like its obverse pride (feelings of interdependence and attachment), is a signal of the state of a relationship. Shame is an intense and automatic sign that a relationship is threatened or damaged (alienation), whereas pride signals that a relationship is strong and secure (affinity). The monitoring of the social bond through feelings of pride and shame is almost continuous, yet almost never

acknowledged. The context for shame is a message received involving "separation (or the threat of separation) and injury to the self: insult, rejection, rebuff, disapproval, unrequited love, betrayal, unresponsiveness, disrespect, and the like."<sup>72</sup> When shame goes unacknowledged another person becomes identified with the hurt leading to further withdrawal, recrimination, and threat. Rage and vengeful violence are the ultimate forms of protection from shame,<sup>73</sup> the antidote to feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, and loss.<sup>74</sup>

Shame has biological, social, and cultural components. It is a basic emotion that is part of humans' genetic inheritance. It arises in social exchange, in self-consciousness, *i.e.*, seeing one's self from the viewpoint of the other. Shame is culturally determined in the situations that trigger the emotion and the labeling and expression of shameful emotions.

Not all forms of shame lead to antisocial behavior. There are forms of shame which prevent violence, drawing people together into social conformity when openly acknowledged and respectfully managed. In such cases the feeling of alienation can be repaired and restoration of the social bond is possible. Shame leads to violence only when it is unacknowledged and communication is disrespectful, thereby compounding injury.

Further, the shame-anger-aggression emotional sequence is recursive, as one subsequently feels ashamed of one's anger, generating resentment and hatred because the shame driving the loop is outside awareness. In these instances violence can become compulsive. Nations locked in this spiral will have extraordinary difficulty de-escalating or resolving conflicts of interest, not because of the content of the issue, but because of the emotional milieu in which conflicts of interests occur.

This emotional model is quite different than the structural approach because it maintains that conflicts of material or ideological interests do not necessarily lead to violence, but can be handled through peaceful negotiations. In almost all instances a compromise solution is possible if the dispute does not acquire a shame-anger emotional valence.<sup>75</sup> Violence erupts not so much from the clash of interest or system structure but when the unseen emotional bonds between the parties are broken and one or both are under the sway of unacknowledged alienation and shame. This model views social action as a product of both cognitive and emotional attunement or alienation between persons or

between groups.<sup>76</sup> To focus exclusively on the material interest in dispute or the structural conditions is to miss the damage and threat to the relationship that is central to the dispute. Curiously, contemporary international relations theory does not examine *the relationship* as a variable.<sup>77</sup>

### *Model three: Fear and perceived threat*

Generally, the causes-of-war literature maintains that as one country in a dyad linked in a historical relationship converges toward military parity with the other, the onset of war becomes more likely.<sup>78</sup> Stinnett and Diehl identify this phenomenon in the context of recurrent conflict.<sup>79</sup> What is the dynamic that links converging power ratios with conflict? The prevailing understanding is that aggression (including warfare) can be a rational choice based on the calculation of risk posed by a physical threat or a threat to one's power status. Michael Howard offers a clear example of this argument: "The conflicts between states which have usually led to war have normally arisen, not from any irrational and emotive drives, but from an almost superabundance of analytic rationality . . . [that] enables them to assess the implications that any event taking place anywhere in the world, however remote, may have for their own capacity, immediately to exert influence, ultimately perhaps to survive."<sup>80</sup> In short, states fight because they can discern threats before they become immediate, and that changes in power balances alert them to hostile intentions to their interests or their status.<sup>81</sup>

This analysis is close to the mark in one sense but also flawed by its failure to discern the emotive dimension of rationality. While cognitive factors, such as the perception of a change in power relations, are crucially important in complex decision-making processes, they do not, alone, explain the link to aggression and conflict. Aggression and war also involves the elicitation of strong activating emotions or motivations that exist to promote particular behaviors in matters concerning rights and resources.<sup>82</sup>

The emotion that is either ignored or misunderstood in the prevailing approach is fear and, as discussed below, it is particularly useful in understanding the motivation of the powerful. Because fear and its role in decision-making are left out, the explanation is not only incomplete; it also paints a misleading picture of how decisions are actually made. Fear, like other emotions, is

designed to facilitate or inhibit certain behavior patterns whether or not an individual or collective is consciously aware of the operation of the emotion. Fear and other emotions also are "typically accompanied by cognitive representations of the emotional situation, its rationale and meaning, and the cultural mechanisms that facilitate its expression."<sup>83</sup>

Fear is provoked by a sensory excitation or a discrepancy in the pattern of socio-structural circumstances known to a subject.<sup>84</sup> It has environmental triggers, some innate but many others learned. That is, fear often is the result of a trigger associated with a previously experienced stimulus rather than a one preset during evolutionary adaptation.<sup>85</sup> The change in the environment that triggers fear is not, therefore, a hostile act or threat *per se* but only a novel event that one has learned to associate with threat, nor does the environmental trigger lead directly to aggression. Rather, an environmental change such as a perceived alteration in power status triggers the emotion, fear, that engages attention and disposes the subject to look for, and often find, threats, just as it biases how one perceives another in present and future interactions<sup>86</sup> and how one might calculate a response to some subsequent stimulus. The distinction is subtle, but important. Contrary to our usual supposition, *we do not fear because we are threatened, we feel threatened because we fear.*<sup>87</sup> The object of fear is not retrospective (the change in power balance); it is prospective: the imagined possibility of harm or injury resulting from a changing power balance. Fear forces attention on this environmental change, among innumerable other environmental changes, that animates appraisal and inferences of threat and that informs preference formation and action, including the possibility of aggression.

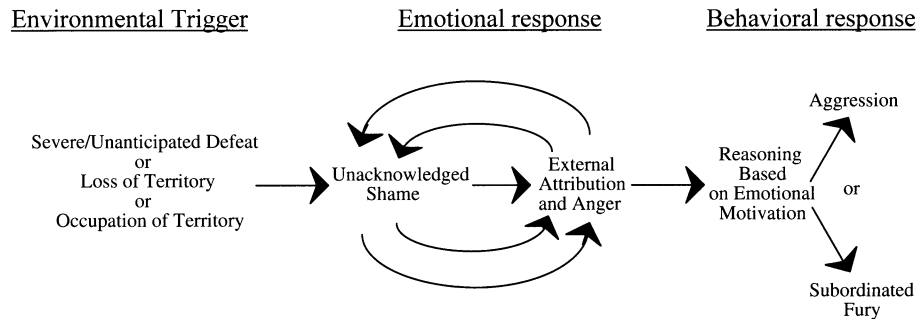
The behavioral options readied by fear include fight, flight or supplication, or in the more variegated responses of humans, containment through institutional adaptation. Fear usually leads to action executed with reason, to offset its cause. Fear does not inevitably lead to aggression or paralysis; however, it can lead to innovation. As Barbalet notes, "A number of epoch defining socio-political changes are marked by institutional developments effected by elite groups subject to climates of fear."<sup>88</sup> Think for a moment of what the Cold War era meant for institutional adaptations in American foreign policy or institutional and policy

## *The emotive causes of recurrent international conflicts*

### *Frustration–anger–aggression model*

<u>Environmental trigger</u>	<u>Emotional response</u>	<u>Behavioral response</u>
Impeded attainment of a goal	Anger	Aggression

### *Shame–anger–aggression model*



### *Fear-and-perceived-threat model*

<u>Environmental Trigger</u>	<u>Emotional response</u>	<u>Behavioral response</u>
Negative change in dyadic military power balance	Fear and perception of threat	Aggression

**Figure 4. Visual depiction of three emotional models.**

changes wrought by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001.

Importantly, fear is not merely an emotion for those in a subordinate or weak position. A relative rather than an absolute power imbalance can trigger fear. Therefore, fear can afflict the powerful and those in superordinate positions.<sup>89</sup> Whether powerful or weak, fear functions as a signal indicating the possibility of danger arising from power relations in which the subject is implicated.<sup>90</sup> The emotional models of recurrent conflict are depicted schematically in Figure 4.

### Testing the emotive models

At one level, shame, anger, and fear are intra-psycho phenomena in individuals and groups, and they often occur in large part outside conscious awareness. Needless to say, in this study, emotion cannot be measured

directly nor can actors authentically report on it through surveys or interviews.<sup>91</sup>

We will address those challenges by comparing observable state behavior against hypotheses derived from the models. If we find that many historical cases closely correspond to the outcomes predicted by these hypotheses, then we have preliminary evidence for the validity of the models. We would then analyze qualitative comparative case studies so as better to understand *how* the mechanisms or processes stipulated in our models operate in practice.

The first step in this process is to hypothesize combinations of *observable* and *measurable* variables (and values for those variables) that, together, correspond with one of the emotive models. Consider the following three illustrations:

- 1) Frustration–anger–aggression may be operating when (a) a previously defeated party launches



## *The emotive causes of recurrent international conflicts*

a second attack, (b) even though its earlier defeat was not entirely unexpected given its relative power position, and (c) an attacker's power position has not markedly improved since the time of an initial conflict.

- 2) Shame–anger–aggression may be operating when (a) the outcome of a previous conflict involved a country losing territory as the result of a defeat in the war, or (b) the country was occupied as a result of defeat in the war, or (c) the country was defeated in a war and the outcome was a surprise, and (d) a country initiates a second conflict (e) irrespective of its power position *vis-à-vis* its adversary.
- 3) Fear–threat perception–aggression may be operating when (a) a victor in an earlier conflict, (b) that was initiated by a losing party, (c) observes a change in relative power that favors the defeated rival and thus launches a pre-emptive attack on its former attacker.

To formulate these and other hypotheses that could correspond to one of our models (or be satisfactorily explained using conventional notions of rationality) we would need to assign values to six variables listed in Figure 5.

These six variables and their possible values would yield as many as 144 combinations. Values would be determined at the beginning of each violent conflict exhibited in the studied rivalries. Each possible combination would then be examined and classified as presumptively rational, plausibly consistent with one of the emotive models, or indeterminate.

Having classified each combination as rational, emotive, or indeterminate, we would then examine data sets<sup>93</sup> pertaining to actual historical rivalries and their associated conflicts for evidence of emotive, rational, or indeterminant combinations. A preponderance of emotive combinations would be *prima facie* evidence that the models held explanatory power for recurrent international conflicts.

### Conclusion

Our focus here has been on suggesting a way to strengthen existing explanations for recurrent international conflict. Our models, however, may be equally or more probative of recurrent intrastate conflict such as intractable civil wars or enduring ethnic conflict. A further study will examine intrastate conflict to determine the reach and robustness of emotive explana-

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Values</u>
1) What was the outcome for the initiator of this conflict in the previous conflict?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• loss</li> <li>• stalemate</li> <li>• victory</li> </ul>
2) Was the outcome of the previous conflict a surprise for the initiator? (That is, did the putatively more powerful country win?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no</li> <li>• yes</li> </ul>
3) What is the power ratio of the conflictive dyad? <sup>92</sup> (initiator, A; rival, B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A:B &gt; 1</li> <li>• A:B = 1</li> <li>• A:B &lt; 1</li> </ul>
4) What is the trend in the power of the initiator relative to its rival?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gaining power</li> <li>• steady</li> <li>• losing power</li> </ul>
5) Did the initiator of this conflict initiate the previous conflict?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• yes</li> <li>• no</li> </ul>
6) Did the loser of the previous conflict suffer a loss of territory or occupation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• yes</li> <li>• no</li> </ul>

**Figure 5. Relevant variables and values.**

tions of recurrent conflict. Our hope is that large-scale empirical investigations, such as we have outlined here, and the comparative case studies flowing from them, will contribute to our theoretical understanding of — and improve our management of — recurrent conflicts.

### References

1. Jack S. Levy, "The Causes of War: A Review of Theories and Evidence," in Philip E. Tetlock, et al., eds., *Behavior, Society and Nuclear War*, vol. one (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 209–333.
2. Bruce Bueno De Mesquita, *The War Trap* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Eric Gartzke and Michael W. Simon, "'Hot Hand': A Critical Analysis of Enduring Rivalries," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 61, no. 3, August 1999, pp. 777–98.
3. Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, "Enduring Rivalries: Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Patterns," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, 1993, pp. 145–171; Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, "The Empirical Importance of Enduring Rivalries," *International Interactions*, vol. 18, 1992, pp. 151–63; Frank W. Wayman and Daniel W. Jones, "Evolution of Conflict in Enduring Rivalries," paper presented at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, March 19–23, Vancouver Canada, 1991.
4. Charles S. Gochman and Zeev Maoz, "Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816–1976," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 28, no. 4, December 1984, pp. 585–615.
5. William J. Long and Peter Brecke, *War and Reconciliation: Reason and Emotion in Conflict Resolution*

## The emotive causes of recurrent international conflicts

- (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 5–6, with data available at [www.inta.gatech.edu/peterpss99\\_paper.html](http://www.inta.gatech.edu/peterpss99_paper.html); Ted Robert Gurr, “Ethnic Warfare on the Wane,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2000, pp. 52–64.
6. Douglas M. Stinnett and Paul F. Diehl, “The Path(s) to Rivalry: Behavioral and Structural Explanations of Rivalry Development,” *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 63, no. 3, August 2001, pp. 717–740.
  7. *Ibid.*
  8. *Ibid.*
  9. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).
  10. David S. Geller and J. David Singer, *Nations at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 95.
  11. John Vasquez, *The War Puzzle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
  12. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.
  13. Karl von Clausewitz, *War, Politics, and Power* (Chicago: Gateway, 1962).
  14. A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke, eds., *Parity and War: Evaluations and Extensions of the War Ledger* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).
  15. John Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*.
  16. Thomas J. Scheff, *Bloody Revenge: Emotion, Nationalism, and War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 94.
  17. Douglas M. Stinnett and Paul F. Diehl, “The Path(s) to Rivalry,” p. 719, citing Paul R. Hensel, *The Evolution of Interstate Rivalry*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana, 1996.
  18. *Ibid.*
  19. Douglas M. Stinnett and Paul F. Diehl, “The Path(s) to Rivalry”; Janice Gross Stein, “Image, Identity, and the Resolution of Violent Conflict,” in *Turbulent Peace*, pp. 189–208.
  20. Thomas J. Scheff and Suzanne M. Retzinger, *Emotions and Violence: Shame and Rage in Destructive Conflicts* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1991), p. xvii.
  21. Michael Howard, “The Causes of War,” in *Turbulent Peace*, Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, eds. (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), pp. 29–38, at 32.
  22. *Ibid.*
  23. Neta C. Crawford, “The Passion of World Politics,” *International Security*, vol. 24, 2000, pp. 116–56.
  24. Kirsten Renwick Monroe and Kristen Hill Maher, “Psychology and the Rational Actor Theory,” *Political Psychology*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1995, pp. 1–21.
  25. Bruce Bueno De Mesquita, *The War Trap*, p. 5.
  26. Herbert Simon, “Rational Choice and the Structure of the Environment,” *Psychology Review*, vol. 63, 1956, pp. 129–138; Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, “Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases,” *Science*, vol. 185, September 1974, pp. 1124–1131.
  27. Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 1999); John Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Rebecca Hersman, *Friend and Foes: How Congress and the President Really Make Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2000).
  28. See Arthur Lupin, Mathew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin, eds., *Elements of Reason: Cognition Choice and the Bounds of Rationality* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); George E. Marcus, W. Russell Neuman and Michael McKuen, eds., *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta, eds., *Passionate Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
  29. See Milton Friedman, “The Methodology of Positive Economics,” in Milton Friedman, ed., *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).
  30. J. M. Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure: A Macrosociological Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 22–23.
  31. Richard D. Lane, Lynn Nadal, John B. Allen, and Alfred W. Kasniak, “The Study of Emotion from the Perspective of Cognitive Neuroscience,” in Richard D. Lane and Lynn Nadel, eds., *Cognitive Neuroscience of Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 3–11.
  32. Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, p. 285.
  33. Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 127.
  34. Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, p. 285.
  35. Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 47. Gerald L. Clore and Andrew Ortony, “Cognition in Emotion: Always, Sometimes, or Never?” in Richard D. Lane and Lynn Nadel, eds., *Cognitive Neuroscience of Emotion*, pp. 24–61.
  36. Richard D. Lane, Lynn Nadel, John B. Allen and Alfred W. Kasniak, “The Study of Emotion from the Perspective of Cognitive Neuroscience,” pp. 3–11.
  37. See Karen Mogg and Brendan P. Bradley, “Selective Attention and Anxiety: A Cognitive-Motivational Perspective,” in Tim Dalgleish and M. Power, eds., *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion* (New York: Wiley, 1999); P. M. Niedenthal and M. B. Setterlund, “Emotional Congruence in Perception,” *Personality and Social Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1994, pp. 401–411; C. S. Kitayama, “Impairment of Perception by Positive and Negative Affect,” *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 5, 1991, pp.

## The emotive causes of recurrent international conflicts

- 255–274; Richard S. Lazarus, *Emotion and Adaptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
38. Robert Zajonc, “Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inferences”; Daniel Tranel, Antoine Bechara, and Antonio Damasio, “Decision Making and the Somatic Marker Hypothesis,” in Michael S. Garraniga, ed., *The New Cognitive Neurosciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 1047–1061.
39. William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt, 1890); Sven Christianson, ed., *The Handbook of Emotional Memory: Research and Theory* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992). See also, J. L. McGaugh, L. Cahill, and B. Roozendaal, “Involvement of the Amygdala in Memory Storage: Interaction with Other Brain Systems,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, vol. 93, 1996, pp. 13508–13514; U. Neisser, E. Winograd, E. Bergman, A. Shrieber, S. Palmer, and M. S. Wilson, “Remembering the Earthquake: Direct Experience versus Hearing the News,” *Memory*, vol. 4, 1996, pp. 337–357; G. Stratton, “Retroactive Hyperamnesia and other Emotional Effects on Memory,” *Psychological Review*, vol. 26, 1991, pp. 474–486; J. N. Bohannon, “Flashbulb Memories of the Space Shuttle Disaster: A Tale of Two Theories,” *Cognition*, vol. 29, 1988, pp. 179–196.
40. Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’s Error* (New York: Putnam, 1994); *The Feeling of What Happens*.
41. Daniel Tranel, Antoine Bechara, and Antonio Damasio, “Decision Making and the Somatic Marker Hypothesis,” in Michael S. Garraniga, ed., *The New Cognitive Neurosciences*, pp. 1047–1061, at p. 1049.
42. John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, “The Psychological Foundations of Culture,” in J. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby, eds., *The Adapted Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 99.
43. Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, pp. 37, 70.
44. Paul Poder Pederson, “Review of J.M. Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory and Social Structure—A Macro-Sociological Approach*,” in *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2000, pp. 281–84, at p. 282.
45. Paul Ekman, “An Argument for Basic Emotions,” *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 6, 1992, pp. 172–175; Robert Plutchick, *Emotion: A Psychoevolutionary Synthesis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980). See also, David Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), p. 5.
46. J. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby, eds., *The Adapted Mind*.
47. Thomas J. Scheff, “Presidential Address: A Vision of Sociology,” *Sociological Perspectives*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 529–36.
48. J. Dollard, L. Doob, N. Miller, O. Mower, and R. Sears, *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1939).
49. Stephen A. Diamond, *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 25.
50. C. Spielberger, E. Johnson, S. Russell, R. Crane, G. Jacobs, and T. Worden, “The Experience and Expression of Anger: Construction and Validation of an Anger Expression Scale,” in M. A. Chesney and R. G. Rosenman, eds., *Anger and Hostility in Cardiovascular and Behavioral Disorders* (New York: Hemisphere, 1985), pp. 5–30, at p. 28.
51. *Ibid*; Bruce Sharkin, “The Measurement and Treatment of Client Anger in Counseling,” *Journal of Counseling and Development*, vol. 66, April 1988, pp. 361–65 at p. 361.
52. J. R. Averill, *Anger and Aggression: An Essay on Emotion* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1982).
53. See Leonard Berkowitz, “Aggression, Psychology of,” *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict*, vol. one (New York: Academy Press, 1999), pp. 35–45.
54. Michael H. Kernis, Bruce D. Grannemann, and Lynda C. Barklay, “Stability and Level of Self-Esteem as Predictors of Anger Arousal and Hostility,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 56, no. 6, 1989, pp. 1013–1022.
55. William J. Long and Peter Brecke, *War and Reconciliation: Reason and Emotion in Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003) pp. 136–38.
56. Joseph De Rivera, “Emotional Climate: Social Structure and Emotional Dynamics,” in *International Review of Studies on Emotion*, vol. II, K.T. Strongman, ed. (New York: John Wiley, 1992), pp. 199–218.
57. J. M. Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory and Social Structure—A Macro-Sociological Approach*, pp. 159, 164.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Robert E. Harkavy, “Defeat, National Humiliation, and the Revenge Motif in International Politics,” *International Politics*, vol. 37, no. 3, September 2000, pp. 345–68, at p. 345.
61. Cameron G. Thies, “Territorial Nationalism in Spatial Rivalries: An Institutional Account of the Argentine-Chilean Rivalry,” *International Interactions*, vol. 27, 2001, pp. 399–431, at p. 411; John Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*.
62. Thomas J. Scheff and Suzanne M. Retzinger, *Emotions and Violence: Shame and Rage in Destructive Conflicts*; C. Spielberger, E. Johnson, S. Russell, R. Crane, G. Jacobs, and T. Worden, “The Experience and Expression of Anger: Construction and Validation of an Anger Expression Scale,” p. 28.
63. Thomas J. Scheff and Suzanne M. Retzinger, *Emotions and Violence: Shame and Rage in Destructive Conflicts*; Thomas J. Scheff, *Bloody Revenge: Emotion, Nationalism and War*.
64. June Price Tangney, Patricia Wagner, Carey Fletcher, and Richard Gramzow, “Shamed into Anger? The Relation of Shame and Guilt to Anger and Self-Reported Aggression,”

## The emotive causes of recurrent international conflicts

*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 62, no. 4, 1992, pp. 669–75.

65. H. B. Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (New York: International University Press, 1971).

66. Glen Chafetz, Benjamin Frankel, and Michael Spirtas, “Tracing the Influence of Identity,” in Glen Chafetz and Michael Spirtas, eds., *The Origins of National Interest*, (London: Frank Cass, 1999), p. viii; Erik Erikson, “The Problem of Ego Identity,” in Maurice R. Stein, Arthur J. Vidich, and David M. White, eds., *Identity and Anxiety* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960), p. 30.

67. Stuart Hall, “Who Needs Identity?,” in S. Hall and P. du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), p. 1–17.

68. William Bloom, *Personal Identity and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 53.

69. Daniel Bar-Tal, “From Intractable Conflict Through Conflict Resolution: Psychological Analysis,” *Political Psychology*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2000, pp. 351–365; Karen Lundwall, *Psychological Aspects of Collective Violence and Reconciliation: A Survey of Current Research* (Uppsala: Report of the Center for Multi-ethnic Research, 2001).

70. Arthur Lupia, Mathew D. McCubbins, and Samuel Popkin, eds., *Elements of Reason*, p. 131.

71. Thomas J. Scheff, “Shame and Conformity: The Deference Emotion System,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 53, 1988, pp. 395–406, at p. 398.

72. Thomas J. Scheff, “Shame and Conformity,” p. 399; Silvan Tompkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness, vol. II, The Negative Affects* (New York: Springer Publications, 1963), p. 56.

73. See J. R. Averill, *Anger and Aggression: An Essay on Emotion*.

74. Vamik Volkan, *The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: From Clinical Practice to International Relationships* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1988).

75. E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (New York: Anchor, 1967).

76. Scheff and Retzinger, p. 36.

77. Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962).

78. Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, “Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946–1986,”

*American Political Science Review*, vol. 87, 1993, pp. 624–38; Daniel S. Geller and J. David Singer, *Nations at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

79. Stinnett and Diehl.

80. Michael Howard, “The Causes of War,” in *Turbulent Peace*, p. 33.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–35

82. Caroline D. Blanchard and Robert J. Blanchard, “Emotions as Mediators and Modulators of Violence: Some Reflections on the Seville Statement on Violence,” *Social Research*, vol. 67, no. 3, Fall 2000.

83. Caroline D. Blanchard and Robert J. Blanchard, “Emotions as Mediators and Modulators of Violence: Some Reflections on the Seville Statement on Violence,” p. 7.

84. See Paul Poder Pederson, “Review of J. M. Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory and Social Structure—A Macro-Sociological Approach*,” p. 282; D.O. Hebb, “On the Nature of Fear,(?)” *Psychological Review*, vol. 53, no. 5, pp. 259–76.

85. Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (New York: Harcourt, Inc. 2003), p. 146.

86. Edward J. Lawler and Shane R. Thye, “Bringing Emotion into Social Exchange Theory,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 25, 1999, pp. 217–244.

87. J. M. Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory and Social Structure—A Macro-Sociological Approach*, p. 155.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

89. *Ibid.*

90. Helena Flam, “Fear, Loyalty, and Greedy Organizations,” in *Emotions in Organizations*, Stephen Fineman, ed. (London: Sage, 1993), pp. 58–75, at p. 59.

91. William Raft Wilson, “Feeling More Than We Can Know: Exposure Effects Without Learning,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 37, no. 6, 1979, pp. 811–21.

92. Power data, *Correlates of War II, Index of National Capabilities*, Version 3.0.

93. Scott Bennett, enduring rivalries data set, <http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/d/s/dsb10/data.html>; Goertz and Diehl, enduring rivalries data set, <http://www.pol.uiuc.edu/faculty/Diehl/diehl3lnk.htm>; Colaresi and Thompson, strategic rivalries data set, 2001.