

**Territorial Claims and Armed Conflict between Neighbors**

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## **Territorial Claims and Armed Conflict between Neighbors**

**Abstract:** This study attempts to expand the more than four-decade-old literature on geography and armed conflict by integrating research on both borders and territorial claims. I argue that territorial claims can account for much of the varying relationship between borders and conflict, and that conflict between neighbors (over any issue) is less likely once their territorial claims are resolved. These expectations are supported by the conflict behavior of states in the Americas and Western Europe; even conflict over non-territorial issues becomes much less likely once a border is settled.

International relations scholars have long recognized a connection between borders and armed conflict. Research in the 1960s and 1970s showed that states with more borders tend to experience more conflict, and more recent work on individual borders shows that neighbors are much more conflict-prone than more distant states. Yet a nation-state's neighbors can be seen as almost constant, changing only infrequently, which makes it difficult to make a causal connection to such time-varying phenomena as militarized conflict.

This paper explores the changing relationship between borders and armed conflict, focusing on contention over the border itself. While the border itself is under contention between two neighbors, they should be likely to experience high levels of conflict, both over the border itself and over other issues. Once the border is resolved, though, conflict over any issue should be less likely. This paper uses data on territorial claims since 1816 in the Americas and Western Europe to investigate this possibility, and finds strong support for this expectation. Conflict is much more likely between neighbors than between more distant states, but territorial claims play a very important role in this conflict. Armed conflict is most likely while territorial claims are ongoing; once all territorial claims are resolved, states experience a sharp dropoff in conflict behavior.

### **Theoretical Development**

International borders have been recognized as contributing to armed conflict at least since Lewis Fry Richardson's (1960) *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels*. Scholars have emphasized the connection between geographic proximity and conflict, often focusing on the level of

international interactions (e.g., Richardson 1960; Starr and Most 1976, 1978). States are likely to interact much more with nearby states than with more distant states, along both the cooperative side of interaction (such as trade) and the conflictual side (such as armed conflict). A second explanation for a proximity-conflict relationship builds on Boulding's (1962) "loss of strength gradient," which suggests that states' effective power diminishes with distance; to Starr and Most, this suggests that more distant states should be less threatening overall, and that more proximate states should create greater risk and uncertainty (with a much higher perceived risk of being threatened or attacked by neighbors than by more distant states). These general arguments about proximity increasing interactions, risk and uncertainty, and conflict are thought to be even more relevant for states that share a border. Furthermore, there is a very real risk that events in neighboring states can diffuse across the border, which is not possible with more distant states.

Turning to empirical evidence, Richardson (1960) and Starr and Most (1976, 1978) report a strong correlation between a state's number of borders (homeland, colonial, or total) and its war involvement. More recent research has focused on the impact of individual borders and has found that borders significantly increase the outbreak of militarized disputes or wars, the escalation of disputes to war, and the diffusion of wars to new participants (e.g., Bremer 1992; Gochman and Leng 1983; Diehl 1985; Siverson and Starr 1990). Bremer (1992) went so far as to recommend contiguity as a standard control variable in the quantitative study of conflict, and many scholars treat neighbors as "politically relevant dyads" (Lemke and Reed 2001).

While the evidence supports a linkage between borders and conflict, though, there are shortcomings with this perspective, particularly concerned the relatively unchanging nature of international borders (Vasquez 1995). While the course of a border may be altered over time, states' neighbors change only rarely. This relative invariance makes it difficult to associate borders with phenomena that change much more rapidly such as international conflict (or, for that matter, international trade or cooperation).<sup>1</sup> An important answer that has been proposed is a focus on the political status of borders, specifically emphasizing territorial claims.

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<sup>1</sup> To be fair, most work on borders does not make an explicit causal argument. For example, Most and Starr (1976: 588) emphasize that borders do not necessarily *cause* either conflict or cooperation: "The argument is only meant to imply that a border creates a certain structure of risks and opportunities in which various interactions appear to be more or less likely to occur."

Studying territorial claims is part of a concern with the issues over which nation-states disagree, defined as "the stakes over which two or more parties contend" (Holsti 1991: 18) or "what states choose to fight over" (Diehl 1992: 333). Numerous issues arise between states. Luard (1986) and Holsti (1991) identified approximately forty issues that have been at stake in modern wars, ranging from territory to navigation, changing (or defending) governments, protecting nationals or commercial interests abroad, protecting ethnic or religious kinsmen, and enforcing (or revising) treaty terms. To many scholars, territory is the most salient (important) and most conflict-prone issue (Diehl 1991; Vasquez 1993; Hensel 2000). Among other things, territory often has tangible value to the participants in the form of strategic military positions or valuable economic resources, as well as intangible value in the form of historical importance to one's state or ties to one's ethnic, religious, or linguistic kinsmen. Few other issues can match this volatile combination of both tangible and intangible value, and as a result, territory has the added importance of reputational value -- whereby showing weakness over one territorial claim may be perceived as a signal of weakness over other issues (territorial or otherwise).

Research suggests that territory is the most frequent issue in interstate war and a common issue in militarized disputes, although advanced democracies are generally able to avoid fighting over territorial issues (Luard 1986; Holsti 1991; Mitchell and Prins 1999; Hensel 2000). Other research shows that disputes over territorial issues are more likely to reach high levels of escalation and to be followed by recurrent conflict between the same adversaries (Hensel 1996, 2000; Senese 1996, 2005; Senese and Vasquez 2003; Vasquez and Henehan 2001). Finally, several studies have examined interactions over territory, examining conditions under which states are able to manage their territorial issues peacefully as well as those under which states are most likely to fight (e.g., Goertz and Diehl 1990, 1992; Kacowicz 1994; Huth 1996; Hensel 2001; Huth and Allee 2002).

## **Hypotheses**

This paper attempts to integrate both borders and territorial issues in a single theoretical model of armed conflict between nation-states. This model begins with Hensel's (2001) issues approach to world politics, which suggests that foreign policy is issue-directed (state leaders

make foreign policy decisions in order to achieve their goals over specific issues) and that a variety of cooperative and conflictual foreign policy tools are available to leaders for pursuing issue-related goals. States -- at least states that experience any regular level of interaction -- are assumed to disagree over at least one contentious issue. Some issues seem unlikely to lead to militarized conflict, such as disagreements over the arrest of a foreign national, the actions of a corporation in one state that allegedly affect citizens in the other state, agricultural subsidies that allegedly give one state's farmers an unfair advantage, or trade policy. In other cases one state may seek to overthrow the other's government, or the states may disagree over territory that is believed to contain vast deposits of oil, that contains large populations of both states' ethnic or religious kinsmen, or that is viewed as an integral part of both states' history or national identity.

Whatever the issues under contention between them, states need to choose appropriate techniques to manage or settle their issues, which could range from bilateral negotiations to seeking the binding or non-binding assistance of third parties or pursuing militarized conflict. The present study focuses on the decision to use militarized conflict to achieve issue-related goals, but future work could also benefit from consideration of other techniques. An earlier paper (Hensel 2001) emphasized the salience of the specific issue under contention as a primary influence on the management of territorial issues, along with other factors related to the countries themselves (particularly their relative capabilities and joint democracy) and their previous interaction over this issue. This general approach will be used in the present study as well, with several limitations. While that approach was useful for dealing with a single issue type, which allows the systematic measurement of salience and the examination of previous interaction over the specific issue in question, there are important limitations in a general study of interaction over a wide variety of possible issues. When the specific issues under contention are not known, it is difficult to measure either issue salience or past interaction over the current issue(s).

Despite these limitations, though, systematic research is still possible. Although I make no claim to predict which specific issues will be at stake between two states at any time, the salience of these issues can be estimated in a crude fashion by proximity. Research on borders suggests that state leaders are likely to see another state's actions as more relevant and more threatening when the other state is closer -- particularly if the two states share a border. When

the other's actions are seen as more relevant and more threatening, this can be seen as roughly suggesting that issues involving that state are more salient to leaders than issues involving more distant states, thus producing a higher willingness for conflict.<sup>2</sup> For example, issues of migration or refugees could conceivably arise between any two states in the world, as one state is flooded with a large number of immigrants or refugees from the other; issues involving the makeup of governments or support for rebels could also arise between either nearby or distant states. All else being equal, though, migration/refugee or government/rebel issues would seem to be more salient to leaders, because of the higher volume of potential refugees that could cross a border (or navigate a relatively short stretch of open seas) and the greater potential threat to leaders from a neighbor's effort to overthrow the regime than from a more distant state. Indeed, contiguity is sometimes used to help measure the salience of territorial issues; Hensel (2001), for example, considers a contiguous territory to be more salient to state leaders than one that is more distant.

Considering salience in this way combines with previous work on issues to suggest that whatever the specific issues at stake, neighbors should be more likely than more distant states to manage their issues with armed conflict. One caveat concerns the distinction between homeland and colonial borders. State leaders should be more concerned with the security of their homeland territory than with the security of any given colony or dependency, suggesting that issues involving their homeland borders should generally be considered more salient than issues along their colonies' borders; Hensel (2001) considers claims over homeland territory to be more salient to leaders than claims to colonial territory. On average, then, we should expect conflict to be less likely across colonial borders than across homeland borders, although either type of border should increase the likelihood of conflict relative to states with no borders of either type.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Neighboring states should also have a greater opportunity for conflict than more distant potential adversaries, although the opportunity for conflict is not a central focus of this study.

<sup>3</sup> Starr and Most (1976, 1978) suggest the opposite, finding stronger correlations between conflict and colonial borders than homeland borders. Yet their analysis only addresses aggregated patterns (based on the total borders of each type). When we realize how large the numbers are -- Great Britain had more than 60 colonial borders in their study -- it becomes apparent that even a weak effect of individual borders can appear much stronger by aggregating dozens of borders together. I believe that all else being equal, a given issue is likely to be more salient when it concerns one's homeland territory rather than a colonial possession.

*Hypothesis 1: Armed conflict is more likely between neighboring states than between more distant states, particularly when they share a homeland rather than colonial border.*

While Hypothesis 1 did not specify the issues at stake between two states, past research suggests that territorial issues are more conflict-prone than other issues. Research on territory has not directly examined the way that territorial claims affect other interactions between two states, though. If territory is as salient and dangerous an issue as scholars suggest, then it is possible that contention over this issue should also affect other issues between the same states, particularly to the extent that these other issues relate to the territorial issue. For example, problems concerning migration or fishing rights along disputed borders would seem to be more salient (and more conflictual) than similar problems in a different context. Even problems over seemingly unrelated issues -- such as trade policy or support for rebels -- would seem to take on added importance when the opponent is also involved in a territorial claim at the same time.

This possibility suggests a partial explanation for some of the variation in conflict behavior that relatively unchanging borders can not explain. Even if neighbors are more likely to engage in conflict overall, as suggested by Hypothesis 1, they may be much more likely to do so while they are involved in territorial claims than after their border has been settled. That is, even though they continue to share a border (and thus most issues between them take on greater salience than similar issues with other states), they would be much less likely to choose militarized techniques to manage their issues once their border is accepted by both sides.

Vasquez (1993: 147) makes this point clearly: "So long as there is a struggle over contiguous territory, then world politics is a struggle for power, but once boundaries are settled, world politics has other characteristics. Conflict and disagreement are still present, but violence is less likely and power transitions no longer war producing." Similarly, he argues (Vasquez 1993: 152), "for most neighbors, once territorial issues are resolved, peaceful relations eventually ensue. They learn to live with each other." Gibler (1996, 1997, Gibler and Vasquez 1998) investigates this possibility by studying territorial settlement alliances (alliances with explicit territorial provisions, either transferring territory or recognizing the territorial status quo), finding that armed conflict is less likely after such alliance treaties. These findings are instructive,

although there are only 27 such alliances since 1816, and it is not clear how many of these ended active territorial claims rather than simply formalizing an already accepted status quo.

The second hypothesis concerns the impact of territorial claims on conflict. Beyond the well-known research on conflict over territory itself, territorial claims may alter the entire relationship between the claimants, increasing the risk of conflict while they are underway -- and potentially offering a basis for better cooperation once they are resolved. Hypothesis 2 addresses changes in conflict behavior both during and after territorial claims; comparing these two periods essentially allows the analysis to control for the impact of proximity and interactions by limiting analysis to a set of cases that clearly have frequent interactions with each other. Evidence that these states are especially conflict-prone while their claims are underway and then become much less conflict-prone after they are resolved would be consistent with this paper's suggestion that the territorial claim is a central influence on conflict behavior, while the absence of such evidence would indicate that proximity and/or interactions are likely more responsible.

***Hypothesis 2:** Armed conflict is much more likely between states that disagree over territorial sovereignty than between other states, but these states become much less conflictual after their territorial claims end.*

Although conflict may be much more likely while territorial claims are ongoing than after they have ended, how claims end may have an important impact. A variety of research suggests that how two nation-states resolve their differences affects the likelihood of renewed conflict afterward. Although this research focuses almost exclusively on the aftermath of militarized disputes or wars between states, the general principle seems likely to apply to the settlement of territorial claims as well, and this may help explain some of the variance in conflict behavior after the end of territorial claims.

Research on recurrent conflict generally argues that the settlement of one conflict makes the outbreak of another conflict between the same adversaries either more or less likely. Maoz (1984: 228-229), for example, begins with the assumption that armed conflict occurs because the two sides disagree over the status quo and at least one seeks to change it. He then suggests that

how a conflict is terminated affects subsequent relations between the adversaries: "The outcomes of disputes reflect to a large extent the degree to which the objectives of each party have been satisfied," whether by a victory that allows the winner to impose its preferred settlement unilaterally, a compromise that settles the issue through bilateral agreement, or a stalemate that fails to resolve the issue to either side's satisfaction. Such studies have generally found evidence that conflict outcomes affect post-conflict stability (Maoz 1984; Hensel 1994, 1999; Werner 1999; Fortna 2003; Senese and Quackenbush 2003). Settlements where both sides agree to a compromise often appear to reduce the likelihood of renewed conflict. Settlements where one side decisively defeats the other in battle also seem to reduce the likelihood of conflict in the immediate aftermath, although this may be at least partly because of the need to rearm and prepare for a future challenge.

It appears reasonable to apply a similar perspectives to territorial issues. Indeed, the ending of territorial claims -- where the issue under contention is resolved through imposed settlements, negotiated compromises, or other techniques -- might fit the general theoretical story better than the outcomes of militarized conflict, which may end the fighting without resolving the underlying issue. With respect to borders, Vasquez (1993: 147) suggests that "there is a curvilinear relationship between the use of war to establish a border and the recurrence of disputes, with settlement by the two extremes of overwhelming victory and diplomatic accommodation both associated with peace, but the use of force short of overwhelming victory associated with recurring disputes." He later expands on this point, arguing (1993: 149, 151) that "settling territorial disputes non-violently should lead to a long-term peaceful relationship" and that "How neighboring states deal with their concerns shapes the relationship they will have and helps construct the world in which they live." Once states manage their fundamental questions of territorial sovereignty, then, they should be able to address the other issues between them in a more constructive way. This discussion suggests the third hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 3:*** *Armed conflict is less likely after territorial claims that are resolved through either peaceful (bilateral or third party) or violent techniques than after territorial claims that are resolved in other ways (e.g., dropped by one of the claimants).*

## **Research Design**

The hypotheses will be evaluated using logistic regression (logit) analysis. These analyses cover the period from 1816-2001, which is the length of time that is covered by the needed data sets. Although some of these data sets are available for the entire world, the territorial claims data set is still being collected and is not complete for every region. This data set currently covers the Western Hemisphere and Western Europe (including Scandinavia), so the analyses are limited to these regions.

### **Dependent Variable**

The primary dependent variable to be examined in these analyses is the outbreak of a militarized interstate dispute, as collected in version 3 of the Correlates of War (COW) project's Militarized Interstate Dispute data set (Ghosn et al. 2004). Militarized interstate disputes are conflicts between nation-states that involve the explicit threat, display, or use of military force. Conceptually, this is an important phenomenon, because such a militarized dispute is necessary for large-scale violence or war; not all militarized disputes escalate to produce numerous fatalities, but these disputes represent an important deviation from everyday international relations where war is a very real possibility.

### **Independent Variables**

Two particular aspects of borders are needed to test Hypothesis 1: the identification of all borders, and the distinction between homeland and colonial borders; the needed information is taken from the Correlates of War (COW) project's Direct Contiguity and Colonial Contiguity data sets (Gochman 1991). Following typical international conflict research, "borders" are measured by both land borders (where the two states' territories directly adjoin each other) and sea borders (where their territories are separated by less than 400 miles of open sea, which would mean that their 200-mile exclusive economic zones directly adjoin each other). Homeland borders are those that separate two independent states' homelands, while colonial borders have a

colony or dependent possession on at least one side.<sup>4</sup>

Testing Hypothesis 2 involves territorial claims, as measured by the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) project's Territorial Claims data set (Hensel 2001). Briefly, there are three requirements for a territorial claim to exist between two nation-states: there must be explicit statements demanding permanent sovereignty over territory, these statements must be made by official government representatives who are authorized to make foreign policy, and the statements must address a specific piece of territory. Table 1 lists all claims in the Western Hemisphere and Western Europe that meet this definition; research on the remainder of the world is currently underway, and the Middle East will be done within the next few months.

[Table 1 about here]

The impact of territorial claims is measured by several dummy variables. One indicates whether at least one territorial claim is currently underway between the states; the other indicates whether at least one claim has already occurred between them but all such claims have ended. Hypothesis 3 will be tested with two dummy variables indicating how the claim ended. Corresponding to work on decisive conflict outcomes, one variable will indicate whether the last claim between two states ended through organized violence, which could mean either that the claim ended immediately after a military victory or that a military victory led to the imposition of an agreement that confirmed the outcome. Corresponding to work on negotiated compromises, a second variable will indicate whether the last claim between two states ended peacefully through either a bilateral agreement or a third party decision that both sides accepted (including cases that ended through plebiscites in the claimed territory). The referent category that will be left out of analysis for comparison includes all other claim settlements, which generally means that the claim ended without any military victory or peaceful agreement; examples include claims that were dropped unilaterally or that are no longer relevant (e.g., because an island disappeared beneath the sea or because the claimed territory was transferred to a third state).

Analyses of territorial claims will control for the salience of the claimed territory, as past

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<sup>4</sup> When states share multiple types of borders, homeland borders take precedence over colonial borders; states are only coded as sharing a colonial border if they do not also share a homeland border. Similarly, land borders are considered to take precedence over sea borders, so states are only coded as sharing a sea border if they do not also share a land border.

research (e.g. Hensel 2001) suggests that armed conflict is much more likely over highly salient territory than over territory with less value. The ICOW project has created a measure of salience that incorporates six attributes that increase the value of territory, with each contributing one point to the salience index for each claimant that qualifies (thus producing a scale from 0-12). The six indicators are measures of whether the claimed territory is known or believed to contain valuable economic resources, a strategic location, ethnic or religious ties to one or both claimants, and a permanent population, as well as whether the territory is claimed as the actor's homeland or as a dependency and whether it is located on the mainland or offshore (Hensel 2001; Hensel and Mitchell 2006).

The analyses also include the impact of democracy and relative capabilities, several control variables that are commonly included in quantitative analyses of conflict (e.g., Bremer 1992; Hensel 2001). Armed conflict is considered much less likely between two democracies, and much more likely between relatively evenly matched states. Joint democracy is measured here by the Polity 4 index of institutionalized democracy; a given pair of states is considered jointly democratic when both states receive scores of at least six out of a possible ten on this index, and nondemocratic when at least one of the two states does not. Finally, two states' relative capabilities are measured using the COW project's National Material Capabilities data set, which calculates a Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) score that indicates each state's share of world power averaged across six indicators: military personnel, military expenditures, iron/steel production, energy consumption, total population, and urban population. The specific measure used here indicates the percentage of the two states' total capabilities held by the stronger side, which can range from .50 (exact equality) to 1.0 (the stronger state has all of the capabilities).

### **Empirical Analyses**

Hypothesis 1 suggested that armed conflict is more likely between states that share a border, particularly for homeland rather than colonial borders. Hypothesis 2 further suggested that conflict should be much more likely between states that are involved in a territorial claim, particularly when the claim is ongoing. Table 2 examines the relationship between borders,

territorial claims, and conflict using logistic regression (logit) analysis. Each observation in this table is a single year when both states were independent, and the table uses their border and territorial claims (if any) to predict conflict involvement while controlling for the impact of democracy and relative capabilities.

[Table 2 about here]

In order to avoid distorting the results by including cases with little interaction and little chance of conflict, Table 2 uses two different sets of cases. Model I includes all pairs of states that have either homeland or colonial territory in the two regions being studied (i.e., all combinations of states with either homelands or colonies in the Western Hemisphere, and all combinations of such states in Western Europe). This excludes extraregional cases like Bolivia and Burundi or Belgium and Bangladesh, which seem to have little relevance for a study of conflict, while comparing bordering states against comparable non-bordering states in the same regions.<sup>5</sup> Model II limits the analysis to all pairs of states in these regions that share a land border, which clearly have enough interaction that conflict is plausible.

We begin by examining Model I, which -- by including both bordering and non-bordering pairs of states -- is the only model that can evaluate the hypotheses about borders. The model as a whole is statistically significant ( $X^2 = 1612.05$ , 6 d.f.,  $p < .001$ ), and both control variables produce statistically significant results in the expected direction. The results support both expectations about borders. States that are contiguous are significantly more likely ( $p < .001$ ) to engage in armed conflict in any given year than are more distant states,<sup>6</sup> and states that are only contiguous by colonial borders are significantly less likely ( $p < .01$ ) to engage in armed conflict than are those that share a homeland border.

Beyond statistical significance, though, it is important to evaluate the substantive

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<sup>5</sup> This is comparable to the problem of "relevant dyads," where scholars eliminate cases that are unlikely to have sufficient opportunity and/or willingness for conflict to justify their inclusion in analysis (e.g., Lemke and Reed 2001). Using relevant dyads (traditionally defined as dyads that share a border or include at least one major power) would not be appropriate here, though, because of the need to compare bordering states to comparable states that do not share a border.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the effects of land and sea borders are very similar. Although the effects of both types of borders are combined in Table 2, running the same model with separate variables for contiguity by land and by sea leads to the same basic conclusion. Both types of contiguity significantly increase the probability of armed conflict in any given year ( $p < .001$ ).

significance of the model in real-world terms. Logistic regression allows calculation of the marginal effects of each variable, or its impact on the predicted probability of the dependent variable while holding the remaining variables at constant values. The model in Table 2 thus predicts a probability of .004 that militarized conflict will break out between two non-contiguous states in any given year, or quite a small chance of conflict. Two states that share at least one colonial border (i.e., a border that separates a colony from either the other state's homeland or colony) have roughly double the predicted probability at .009 in a given year, while two states that share a border between their respective homeland territories have roughly triple the probability at .012 per year. These results strongly support Hypothesis 1.

Turning to the impact of territorial claims, the results in Table 2 also support Hypothesis 2. In Model I, the variables indicating whether a given observation occurs while a claim is ongoing or whether the states have already ended their last claim are both highly significant ( $p < .001$ ) and in the expected direction; the referent category against which these variables is compared is all states that had never engaged in a territorial claim at the time of observation. The effect for ongoing territorial claims is stronger than for times after claims, which supports the expectation that states experiencing territorial claims will experience their highest levels of conflict while the claims are ongoing. This effect is further illustrated by the predicted probabilities of conflict. States that have never been involved in territorial claims have a low probability (.012) of conflict in any given year (assuming a non-colonial border, which is the modal category of claim participants); this probability increases to .089 while at least one claim is ongoing, then declines to .043 after their last claim has ended -- much higher than for states that have never been in a territorial claim, but also less than half as likely as the rate of conflict between the same states while their claims were ongoing.

As noted earlier, there is some risk that the results are distorted by including cases with virtually no chance of conflict under any circumstances. If this is the case, then the apparent effect of territorial claims on conflict would be inflated by a comparison with states that lacked opportunity and/or willingness. Model II addresses this possibility by limiting analysis to states with a land border, which have a plausible risk of armed conflict. The effect of ongoing territorial claims on conflict remains strongly positive, consistent with Hypothesis 2. The effect

of ending territorial claims is insignificant in the analysis, which is also consistent with Hypothesis 2 because this shows a substantial difference from the significant increase in conflict for the same countries while their claims are ongoing; the predicted probabilities reveal that there is virtually no difference in conflict patterns between neighbors that have never had territorial claims (.023 probability in any given year) and those that have ended their last claims (.027). It thus appears that the overall results are not distorted by the initial case selection.

Table 3 reexamines the impact of ending claims by limiting the analysis to dyads that engaged in at least one territorial claim. This ensures the most relevant comparison by excluding states that never engaged in claims, allowing us to make an even more convincing case for the ending of claims as an influence on conflict behavior. Both models are statistically significant overall ( $p < .001$ ), and the two control variables both have statistically significant effects in the expected direction.

[Table 3 about here]

One difference from Table 2 is that borders no longer have a systematic impact on conflict behavior; the contiguity variable is not significant in Model I ( $p < .20$ ), and the colonial borders variable is not significant in either Model I ( $p < .74$ ) or Model II ( $p < .92$ ). This is not especially surprising, though, as every case in this table had both the opportunity and willingness for armed conflict due to their involvement in territorial claims. Consistent with past research, the salience of the claimed territory significantly increases the probability of conflict ( $p < .001$ ) in both models.<sup>7</sup>

With respect to the ending of claims, the general dummy variable for post-claim observations is statistically significant in Model II ( $p < .03$ ) but not Model I ( $p < .15$ ). The individual dummies for claim ending by peaceful and violent techniques are both significant ( $p < .001$ ) in Model I, although only the peaceful ending dummy ( $p < .09$ ) reaches even borderline significance in Model II ( $p < .22$  for the violent ending dummy). Because these variables are

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<sup>7</sup> For observations after claims have ended, salience is measured as the highest salience of the claim while it was ongoing, to determine whether the impact of the settlement is overcome by claim salience. An interaction effect was also tested, to consider the possibility of different effects of salience during and after claims; this interaction term never approached statistical significance, and a test of nested models indicated that including it did not improve model fit.

related to each other -- the peaceful and violent ending dummies are essentially subsets of the post-claim dummy -- their effects are best evaluated jointly; this group of three variables significantly improves model fit ( $p < .001$ ) in a comparison of nested models. In Model I (for all dyads in each region), the predicted probability of conflict decreases from .073 during the claim to .028 after peaceful claim endings, .026 after violent endings, and .059 after other less definitive endings. In Model II (for states sharing land borders), the probability of conflict decreases from .070 to .023 following a peaceful ending, .024 following a violent ending, and .038 after other endings. These results are clearly consistent with both Hypothesis 2's expectation that conflict will be less likely after a claim has ended and Hypothesis 3's expectation that the post-claim reduction will be influenced by the way in which the last claim ended.

Finally, it is worth considering the issues over which states fight after their territorial claims are ended. Of the 86 pairs of states that share a land border and engaged in at least one territorial claim, 34 (39.5%) became involved in a total of 103 militarized disputes after the end of their claim(s). Most common were disputes that involved either efforts by one state to overthrow the other's regime, to end its neighbor's support for such efforts, or to pursue rebels across the border. Also common were disputes involving the spillover of domestic or interstate conflict across borders, typically as one side targets a neighbor's citizens or companies (whether because it believes that the neighbor supports its opponent, to attract attention to its cause, or as collateral damage). A few involved questions of river navigation, fishing rights, cross-border surveillance (violations of airspace or territorial waters), or minority rights. Finally, some disputes involved distant issues unrelated to the border, such as the Munich Crisis that involved France and Germany but concerned Czechoslovakia. Neighbors clearly have many reasons to fight after resolving their territorial issues, although the likelihood of conflict is much lower in any given year after borders are settled.

## **Discussion**

This study has been a preliminary effort to investigate the relationship between borders and armed conflict, emphasizing the role of contention over the border itself. Hypothesis 1 suggested that armed conflict should be more likely between neighbors than between more

distant states, particularly across borders that separate homeland territory rather than colonies. Hypothesis 2 suggested that armed conflict should be more likely between states that are involved in territorial claims, particularly while the claims are ongoing. Finally, Hypothesis 3 suggested that how a territorial claim ends should affect the prospects for armed conflict in its aftermath.

All three hypotheses received substantial empirical support. Borders are indeed closely associated with armed conflict, as suspected by Richardson over four decades ago, but bordering states' conflict behavior changes substantially over time. Colonial borders increase the risk of conflict compared to non-bordering states, and homeland borders increase this risk even further. Armed conflict is also much more likely while a territorial claim is ongoing, but this increase largely disappears after two states' final territorial claim is resolved -- particularly when the claim ends through either a negotiated or violent outcome.

These findings are consistent with past research on both borders and territorial issues, and offer a new twist on conflict management or settlement -- complementing work on conflict outcomes with similar findings focused on the settlement of territorial issues. These findings also suggest general insights into international borders. Other papers at this conference cover topics that range from migration to economic integration, from cross-border crime to cultural assimilation, and from health policy to environmental challenges. Each subject has caused serious disagreements between local or national officials across borders, and some have led to armed conflict. While armed conflict is always possible, though, this study's findings suggest that the risk is greatly reduced once territorial claims are resolved. While the U.S. and Mexico may disagree over everything from trucking regulations to immigration and the flow of the Rio Grande, and Ecuador may still disagree with Peru over various issues, the fact that their territorial claims have ended suggests that there is little chance of these disagreements erupting into armed conflict.

Finally, this paper has left plenty of room for future research. For example, while this study has examined the outbreak of militarized disputes, it has not considered the severity or escalation of the disputes that occur; past research on borders, territorial issues, or both suggests a likely connection (e.g., Diehl 1985; Hensel 1996; Senese 2005). Nor has this study examined

other techniques for issue management; future studies could extend this basic approach to consider such activities as third party mediation of issues or submission of issues to binding arbitration or adjudication. This study's analysis of how claims end has also focused only on the ending of the last claim between two states; many adversaries have multiple claims at the same time, and future work could benefit from examining how the ending of one such claim can affect the management of the others. Much more could also be done to distinguish the variety of non-territorial issues under contention; issues are central to this paper's theoretical model, but the needed data are not yet available.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, this paper represents an important start, and it can be hoped that future work will be able to go even further.

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<sup>8</sup> Beyond the territorial claims data used in the present paper, the ICOW project is currently collecting data on cross-border river claims and maritime claims. Future plans also include the possible collection of additional issue types, in order to allow a more complete comparison of the management of contentious issues between states.

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**Table 1: ICOW Territorial Claims in the Americas and Western Europe, 1816-2001**

| Claim                                | Participants     | Dates <sup>9</sup> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| <b>North America</b>                 |                  |                    |
| Passamaquoddy Bay                    | USA - UK         | 1816 - 1817        |
| St. Croix - St. John Rivers          | USA - UK         | 1816 - 1842        |
| Machias Seal Island                  | USA - Canada     | 1971 -             |
| 49th Parallel                        | USA - UK         | 1816 - 1818        |
| Oregon Country                       | USA - UK         | 1816 - 1846        |
| & San Juan Islands                   | USA - Spain      | 1816 - 1821        |
|                                      | Spain - UK       | 1816 - 1821        |
|                                      | USA - UK         | 1846 - 1872        |
| Alaska                               | Russia - UK      | 1821 - 1867        |
|                                      | USA - Russia     | 1822 - 1867        |
|                                      | UK - USA         | 1872 - 1903        |
| Wrangel Island                       | Canada - USA     | 1922 - 1924        |
|                                      | Canada - Russia  | 1922 - 1924        |
| Labrador                             | Canada - UK      | 1920 - 1927        |
| Florida                              | USA - Spain      | 1816 - 1821        |
| Texas                                | USA - Spain      | 1816 - 1821        |
|                                      | USA - Mexico     | 1831 - 1848        |
| Mesilla Valley                       | USA - Mexico     | 1850 - 1854        |
| Morteritos & Sabinos                 | Mexico - USA     | 1884 - 1884        |
| Río Grande Bancos                    | Mexico - USA     | 1884 - 1972        |
| El Chamizal                          | Mexico - USA     | 1895 - 1963        |
| California - New Mexico              | USA - Mexico     | 1835 - 1848        |
| Fort Ross                            | Spain - Russia   | 1816 - 1821        |
|                                      | Mexico - Russia  | 1831 - 1841        |
| Baja California - Sonora             | USA - Mexico     | 1847 - 1865        |
| Ellesmere Island                     | Canada - USA     | 1922 - 1926        |
| Sverdrup Islands                     | Canada - Norway  | 1922 - 1930        |
| Hans Island                          | Canada - Denmark | 1971 -             |
| Eastern Greenland                    | Norway - Denmark | 1921 - 1933        |
| <b>Central America and Caribbean</b> |                  |                    |
| Cuba                                 | USA - Spain      | 1848 - 1898        |
| Isla de Pinos                        | USA - Cuba       | 1909 - 1925        |
| Guantánamo Bay                       | Cuba - USA       | 1960 -             |
| Navassa Island                       | Haiti - USA      | 1859 - 1914, 1935- |

<sup>9</sup> Claim dates are constrained by membership in the COW international system, limiting these claims to interactions between sovereign states. Claims can not begin until both states qualify for system membership, and claims are considered to end with the loss of system membership.

|                                  |                         |                        |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Môle St. Nicholas                | USA - Haiti             | 1889 - 1915            |
| Samaná Bay                       | USA - Dom. Rep.         | 1894 - 1904            |
| Virgin Islands                   | USA - Denmark           | 1865 - 1917            |
| Río Massacre                     | Haiti - Dom. Rep.       | 1894 - 1915            |
|                                  | Haiti - Dom. Rep.       | 1934 - 1935            |
| Quita Sueño-Roncador-Serrana     | Colombia - USA          | 1890 - 1972            |
|                                  | Nicaragua - USA         | 1900 - 1928            |
|                                  | Nicaragua - Colombia    | 1900 - 1928, 1979 -    |
|                                  | Honduras - USA          | 1899 - 1928            |
|                                  | Honduras - Colombia     | 1899 - 1928            |
| Serranilla Bank & Bajo Nuevo     | Honduras - Colombia     | 1982 - 1986            |
| San Andrés y Providencia         | Nicaragua - Colombia    | 1900 - 1930, 1979 -    |
| Clipperton Island                | France - Mexico         | 1897 - 1934            |
| Río Hondo                        | Mexico - UK             | 1831 - 1897            |
| Chiapas                          | Guatemala - Mexico      | 1868 - 1882            |
| Belize                           | Guatemala - UK          | 1868 - 1981            |
|                                  | Guatemala - Belize      | 1981 -                 |
| Ranguana & Sapodilla (Zapotillo) | Guatemala - UK          | 1981 - 1981            |
|                                  | Guatemala - Belize      | 1981 -                 |
|                                  | Honduras - UK           | 1981 - 1981            |
|                                  | Honduras - Belize       | 1981 -                 |
|                                  | Honduras - Guatemala    | 1981 -                 |
| Mosquito Coast                   | Colombia - UK           | 1831 - 1860            |
|                                  | Colombia - Nicaragua    | 1900 - 1928            |
| Río Motagua                      | Honduras - Guatemala    | 1899 - 1933            |
| Cordillera Monte Cristo          | Guatemala - El Salvador | 1935 - 1938            |
| Bolsones                         | El Salvador - Honduras  | 1899 - 1992            |
| Gulf of Fonseca Islands          | El Salvador - Honduras  | 1899 - 1992            |
| & Conejo Island                  | El Salvador - Honduras  | 2000 -                 |
| Teotecacinte                     | Nicaragua - Honduras    | 1900 - 1906, 1912-1961 |
| Cayo Sur - Media Luna            | Nicaragua - Honduras    | 1998 -                 |
| Swan Islands                     | Honduras - USA          | 1921 - 1972            |
| Mangles (Corn) Islands           | Colombia - Nicaragua    | 1906 - 1928            |
|                                  | Nicaragua - USA         | 1965 - 1971            |
| Nicaragua Canal                  | USA - Nicaragua         | 1900 - 1916            |
| Río Sixaola y Río Coto           | Costa Rica - Panama     | 1920 - 1941            |
| Juradó                           | Panama - Colombia       | 1920 - 1938            |
| Canal Zone                       | USA - Colombia          | 1901 - 1903            |
|                                  | Colombia - USA          | 1903 - 1922            |
|                                  | Panama - USA            | 1923 - 1979            |
| <b>South America</b>             |                         |                        |
| Goajirá-Guainía                  | Venezuela - Colombia    | 1841 - 1922            |

|                             |                         |                        |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Los Monjes                  | Colombia - Venezuela    | 1951 -                 |
| Oriente-Aguarico            | Ecuador - Colombia      | 1854 - 1919            |
| Loreto                      | Peru - Colombia         | 1839 - 1922            |
| & Leticia                   | Peru - Colombia         | 1932 - 1935            |
| Apaporis                    | Brazil - Colombia       | 1831 - 1928            |
| Aves (Bird) Island          | Venezuela - Netherlands | 1854 - 1866            |
| Essequibo                   | Venezuela - UK          | 1841 - 1899, 1951-1966 |
|                             | Venezuela - Guyana      | 1966 -                 |
| Patos Island                | Venezuela - UK          | 1859 - 1942            |
| Amazonas                    | Venezuela - Brazil      | 1841 - 1928            |
| Los Roques                  | Netherlands - Venezuela | 1850 - 1856            |
| Corentyn/New River Triangle | Netherlands - UK        | 1816 - 1966            |
|                             | Netherlands - Guyana    | 1966 - 1975            |
|                             | Suriname - Guyana       | 1975 -                 |
| Pirara                      | Brazil - UK             | 1838 - 1926            |
| Maroni                      | Netherlands - France    | 1849 - 1975            |
|                             | Suriname - France       | 1975 -                 |
| Tumuc-Humac                 | Brazil - Netherlands    | 1852 - 1906            |
| Amapá                       | Portugal - France       | 1816 - 1822            |
|                             | France - Brazil         | 1826 - 1900            |
| Oriente-Mainas              | Ecuador - Peru          | 1854 - 1945            |
| & Cordillera del Cóndor     | Ecuador - Peru          | 1947 - 1998            |
| Galápagos Islands           | USA - Ecuador           | 1854 - 1855, 1892-1906 |
| Amazonas-Caquetá            | Ecuador - Brazil        | 1854 - 1904            |
| & Amazonas-Iça              | Brazil - Ecuador        | 1904 - 1922            |
| Chincha Islands             | Spain - Peru            | 1864 - 1866            |
| Acre                        | Peru - Brazil           | 1839 - 1909            |
|                             | Peru - Bolivia          | 1848 - 1912            |
|                             | Brazil - Bolivia        | 1848 - 1909            |
| Apa                         | Paraguay - Brazil       | 1846 - 1874            |
| & Río Paraguay Islands      | Paraguay - Brazil       | 1874 - 1929            |
| Misiones                    | Argentina - Brazil      | 1841 - 1895            |
| Yaguarón                    | Uruguay - Brazil        | 1882 -                 |
| Trindade Island             | Brazil - UK             | 1826 - 1896            |
| Chaco Boreal                | Bolivia - Paraguay      | 1878 - 1938            |
| Antofagasta                 | Chile - Bolivia         | 1848 - 1884            |
| & Tacna-Arica               | Bolivia - Chile         | 1884 -                 |
|                             | Chile - Peru            | 1879 - 1884            |
|                             | Peru - Chile            | 1884 - 1929            |
|                             | Bolivia - Peru          | 1883 - 1936            |
| Puna de Atacama             | Argentina - Bolivia     | 1848 - 1941            |
| & Los Andes                 | Chile - Argentina       | 1896 - 1904            |
| Chaco Central               | Argentina - Paraguay    | 1846 - 1878            |

|                                     |                         |                        |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Patagonia                           | Chile - Argentina       | 1841 - 1903            |
| Beagle Channel                      | Argentina - Chile       | 1904 - 1985            |
| Palena/Continental Glaciers         | Chile - Argentina       | 1903 - 1998            |
| Río de La Plata                     | Argentina - Uruguay     | 1882 - 1973            |
| Falkland (Malvinas) Islands         | Argentina - UK          | 1841 -                 |
| <b>Northern and Western Europe</b>  |                         |                        |
| Northern Ireland                    | Ireland – UK            | 1922 - 1999            |
| Treaty Ports                        | Ireland - UK            | 1927 - 1938            |
| Ecehos & Minquiers                  | France - UK             | 1886 – 1953            |
| Gibraltar                           | Spain – UK              | 1816 -                 |
| Limburg & Zeeland Flanders          | Netherlands – Belgium   | 1830 – 1839            |
|                                     | Belgium - Netherlands   | 1918 – 1920            |
| Baarle Enclaves                     | Netherlands - Belgium   | 1922 - 1940, 1945–59   |
| Elten & Tudderren                   | W.Germany - Netherlands | 1955 – 1963            |
| Belgium                             | France - Belgium        | 1866 - 1867            |
| Neutral Moresnet (Altenberg)        | Germany – Belgium       | 1841 – 1919            |
| Eupen & Malmédy                     | Belgium - Germany       | 1917 – 1919            |
|                                     | Germany – Belgium       | 1919 – 1940            |
| Luxembourg                          | Netherlands - Belgium   | 1830 - 1839            |
|                                     | France – Netherlands    | 1866 – 1867            |
| Vallée des Dappes                   | France - Switzerland    | 1816 - 1862            |
| Alsace-Lorraine (Elsass-Lothringen) | Prussia - France        | 1870 – 1871            |
|                                     | France – Germany        | 1871 – 1919            |
| Prussian Rheinprovinz               | France - Prussia        | 1849 - 1871            |
| Bavarian Palatinate (Pfalz)         | France - Bavaria        | 1849 - 1871            |
| Rheinhessen                         | France - Hesse GD       | 1849 - 1871            |
| Saar (Sarre)                        | France - Germany        | 1917 - 1920            |
|                                     | Germany - France        | 1920 – 1935            |
|                                     | W.Germany - France      | 1955 – 1957            |
| Jussy                               | Switzerland - Sardinia  | 1816 - 1816            |
| Savoy & Nice                        | France – Italy          | 1848 – 1860            |
|                                     | Italy - France          | 1938 - 1943            |
| Upper Savoy (Chablais-Faucigny)     | Switzerland - Italy     | 1859 - 1860            |
|                                     | Switzerland - France    | 1860 - 1860            |
| Corsica                             | Italy - France          | 1938 - 1943            |
| Val d'Aosta-Briga-Tenda             | France - Italy          | 1945 - 1947            |
| Neuchâtel                           | Switzerland - Prussia   | 1848 - 1857            |
| Kulmbach-Gersfeld-Orb               | Prussia - Bavaria       | 1866 - 1866            |
| Badenese Corridor                   | Bavaria - Baden         | 1816 - 1832            |
| & Gernersheim Frontage              | Bavaria - Baden         | 1838 - 1840, 1870-1870 |
| Salzburg                            | Austria - Bavaria       | 1816 - 1816            |
| Leipzig-Bautzen                     | Prussia - Saxony        | 1866 - 1866            |

|                                   |                          |             |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Hohenzollern                      | Württemberg - Prussia    | 1870 - 1870 |
| Homburg-Upper Hesse               | Prussia - HesseDarmstadt | 1866 - 1866 |
| Heligoland                        | Prussia - UK             | 1884 - 1890 |
| Schleswig-Holstein                | Prussia – Denmark        | 1864 – 1864 |
|                                   | Prussia – Austria        | 1864 – 1866 |
|                                   | Denmark - Germany        | 1919 - 1920 |
| German Reunification              | W.Germany – E.Germany    | 1955 – 1972 |
| West Berlin                       | USSR - USA               | 1948 – 1971 |
|                                   | E.Germany – W.Germany    | 1958 – 1972 |
| Lombardy-Venetia                  | Italy – Austria-Hungary  | 1848 – 1866 |
| Papal States                      | Piedmont - Papal States  | 1858 - 1860 |
| Modena                            | Piedmont - Modena        | 1848 - 1860 |
| Parma                             | Piedmont - Parma         | 1848 - 1860 |
| Trentino-Alto Adige (South Tyrol) | Italy – Austria-Hungary  | 1866 – 1919 |
| Graham Island                     | Two Sicilies - UK        | 1831 - 1831 |
| Finnmark / Varangerfjord          | Russia - Sweden          | 1851 - 1855 |
| Spitsbergen (Svalbard)            | Russia – Norway          | 1945 - 1947 |
| Aaland Islands                    | Sweden – Russia          | 1854 - 1856 |
|                                   | Sweden – Finland         | 1918 – 1921 |
| Finland                           | Sweden - Finland         | 1854 - 1856 |
| Karelia & Petsamo                 | Finland – Russia         | 1917 – 1920 |
|                                   | Russia – Finland         | 1938 – 1940 |
|                                   | Finland - Russia         | 1941 - 1944 |
|                                   | Russia - Finland         | 1944 - 1944 |

**Table 2: Borders, Territorial Claims, and the Outbreak of Militarized Conflict**

|                                     | Model I:<br>All dyads<br>in region | Model II:<br>Land<br>borders only |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Variable                            | Coefficient<br>(Robust S.E.)       | Coefficient<br>(Robust S.E.)      |
| Constant                            | - 4.94 (0.19)***                   | - 2.46 (0.26)***                  |
| <i>Impact of Territorial Claims</i> |                                    |                                   |
| Ongoing territorial claim           | 2.11 (0.11)***                     | 1.25 (0.13)***                    |
| Post-claim                          | 1.34 (0.13)***                     | 0.15 (0.16)                       |
| <i>Impact of Borders</i>            |                                    |                                   |
| Contiguous (land or sea)            | 1.12 (0.12)***                     | ---                               |
| Colonial border only                | - 0.28(0.10)***                    | - 0.15(0.14)                      |
| <i>Control Variables</i>            |                                    |                                   |
| Joint democracy                     | - 0.81 (0.11)***                   | - 0.58 (0.15)***                  |
| Stronger side's capabilities        | - 0.75 (0.23)***                   | - 1.60 (0.32)***                  |
| N:                                  | 80,138                             | 11,376                            |
| LL:                                 | - 4065.45                          | - 1795.61                         |
| X <sup>2</sup> :                    | 1612.05                            | 200.30                            |
| Prob.:                              | p<.001 (6 d.f.)                    | p<.001 (5 d.f.)                   |

\*\*\* p < .01; \*\* p < .05; \* p < .10

**Predicted Probability of Conflict:**

*Impact of Borders (for states with no territorial claims):*

|                        |      |     |
|------------------------|------|-----|
| Non-contiguous:        | .004 | --- |
| Contiguous (colonial): | .009 | --- |
| Contiguous (homeland): | .012 | --- |

*Impact of Territorial Claims (for states with noncolonial borders):*

|                                |      |      |
|--------------------------------|------|------|
| No previous territorial claim: | .012 | .023 |
| During territorial claim:      | .089 | .076 |
| After claim ends:              | .043 | .027 |

**Table 3: Militarized Conflict during and after Territorial Claims**

|                                     | Model I:<br>All dyads<br>in region | Model II:<br>Land<br>borders only |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Variable                            | Coefficient<br>(Robust S.E.)       | Coefficient<br>(Robust S.E.)      |
| Constant                            | - 1.72 (0.32)***                   | - 2.10 (0.38)***                  |
| <i>Impact of Territorial Claims</i> |                                    |                                   |
| Claim salience                      | 0.11 (0.02)***                     | 0.12 (0.02)***                    |
| Post-claim                          | - 0.22 (0.15)                      | - 0.65 (0.29)**                   |
| Peaceful settlement                 | - 0.79 (0.18)***                   | - 0.52 (0.30)*                    |
| Violent ending                      | - 0.85 (0.27)***                   | - 0.46 (0.37)                     |
| <i>Impact of Borders</i>            |                                    |                                   |
| Contiguous (land or sea)            | 0.20 (0.15)                        | ---                               |
| Colonial border only                | 0.04 (0.13)                        | 0.02 (0.17)                       |
| <i>Control Variables</i>            |                                    |                                   |
| Joint democracy                     | - 0.81 (0.14)***                   | - 0.56 (0.17)***                  |
| Stronger side's capabilities        | - 2.11 (0.32)***                   | - 1.68 (0.37)***                  |
| N:                                  | 11,045                             | 7713                              |
| LL:                                 | - 2054.67                          | - 1402.94                         |
| X <sup>2</sup> :                    | 248.06                             | 154.25                            |
| Prob.:                              | p<.001 (8 d.f.)                    | p<.001 (7 d.f.)                   |
| *** p < .01; ** p < .05; * p < .10  |                                    |                                   |

**Predicted Probability of Conflict:**

*Impact of Territorial Claims (for states with noncolonial borders):*

|                                    |      |      |
|------------------------------------|------|------|
| During claim:                      | .073 | .070 |
| After claim (peaceful settlement): | .028 | .023 |
| After claim (violent ending):      | .026 | .024 |
| After claim (other ending):        | .059 | .038 |