

## *Conflict Hot Spots: Emergence, Causes and Consequences*

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Ashgate (Surrey, 2010), ix + 149 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-7546-7937-0

Alex Braithwaite's volume, which focuses on the role of geography on the probability of conflict occurrence, is a welcome addition to the literature on international conflict. The primary motivation for the author's study is the expectation that the heterogeneity of this likelihood leads to the emergence of hot spots in areas where the parameters of geographic variables are more prone to conflict. Furthermore, contagion effects, whereby areas neighbouring conflict hot spots are susceptible to experience conflict themselves, can lead to regional destabilising effects. Therefore, these conflict diffusion processes are both spatially heterogeneous – exhibiting variation in the probability of conflict occurrence – and spatially dependent with the possibility of conflict recurrence. As a result, the study contributes to various aspects of conflict processes: emergence, recurrence, diffusion, temporality, and spatiality, thus making it theoretically valuable to the study of any one of those individual characteristics.

The study can be theoretically situated within a broader movement in the literature on the quantitative study of conflict that has been gaining ground in recent years. This movement to understand the significance of geographic factors in the emergence of conflict can be subdivided into two different components. The first component is the literature that aims at explaining the relationship between the presence of natural resources and conflict occurrence. This literature has largely focused on civil war processes and political violence directed at resource predation. By highlighting economic considerations in conflict processes, the literature has analysed the former in the 'greed or grievance' dichotomy of conflict causation. The second component is the literature that focuses on the spatiality of conflict with an analytical emphasis on environmental variables. Moving beyond purely economic considerations, this literature also aims at producing predictive models that can forecast conflict occurrence on the basis of resource scarcity.

The author identifies a lacuna in the field by indicating that spatial variables are either generally neglected or not given due consideration since they are not developed as explanatory variables of conflict processes, either in terms of occurrence, clustering, or diffusion. Another major contribution of the study is the differentiation between conflict hosting – in other words, the precise location of conflict outbreak – and conflict participation, a distinction largely ignored in the relevant literature. In this way, the decision-making processes of states to participate in conflict can be further differentiated by whether it takes place on their soil or not. Furthermore, this development has implications for the study of conflict prevention processes that can achieve further nuance by scholars who incorporate the distinction into their analysis.

Methodologically, the study uses a new dataset – assembled by the author – on the location and state-venue of militarised interstate disputes to test a series of hypotheses about the randomness of the spatial distribution of international conflict. The derivation of the hypotheses is aided by the visual representation of the dataset in a Geographic Information System (GIS). Ultimately, the study tests whether conflict temporally and spatially clusters in a manner that produces conflict hot spots. The author tests a range of additional hypotheses by utilising a variety of statistical tools on cluster analysis, most prominently, logistic regression (logit) and Rare Events logistic regression (relogit) models. For example, he finds that democratic neighbourhoods are less likely to experience conflict clustering and that the number of neighbouring states has a proportional relationship to the possibility of conflict emergence. In addition, the author finds strong support for the hypothesis that proximity to conflict hotspots increases the risk of states being the targets of military action by their neighbours; this finding lends credence to the broader literature on regional conflict diffusion and the potential for international spread of internal conflict. The broader conclusion to be drawn from the study's findings is that regional instability exhibits contagion effects; therefore, perturbations to the regional distribution of power can lead to further escalation by drawing new participants into the conflict.

The volume does not directly address the history of conflict in Cyprus, but could serve to explain conflict recurrence both on the island and in the broader region. In fact, the book identifies the region around Turkey as a potential conflict hot spot. Even in the absence of a specific discussion, the reader can readily observe the applicability of the framework to Cyprus and draw some conclusions on the basis of the study's explanatory variables. At the same time, however, by looking at individual conflicts the reader can identify some drawbacks of the study. While the findings hold on a regional level – i.e. at the level of the hot spot – it is difficult to see how individual conflicts relate to one another within the same region from a causal standpoint. For example, does conflict in Cyprus tell us anything about the Arab-Israeli conflict or the Kurdish uprising in Turkey merely by the fact that they share a spatial commonality? The theoretical logic that the study advances in relation to the diffusion mechanism of international conflict does not provide an answer to such questions, other than the supposition that potential conflict initiators strategically assess the neighbourhood context of potential targets.

The author identifies a number of related issues that are raised by the study and could be the subject of further research. Foremost among those is the need to better distinguish between active participation of states in conflict hot spots and mere proximity to them. Another issue is the need to understand the determinants of state behaviour in joining conflicts. In terms of the scope of the study, the author recognises the opportunity for application of the framework to specific typologies of political violence, such as international and civil wars and transnational terrorism.

All in all, Alex Braithwaite's volume makes a notable contribution to the study of conflict. It lays out a research agenda that the author – or other scholars interested in the subject – can pursue in a particularly understudied niche of the discipline. It is recommended for anyone interested in the academic pursuit of its subject matter.

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