RESEARCH SUMMARY

Responses to Territorial Revision

Historical Lessons

ANDREW STRAVERS, EMILY ELLINGER, GREGORY WEIDER FAUERBACH, CLARE PORTER

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This report asks, "What factors drive third-party state decisions after territorial revision?" It uses quantitative and historical analysis to identify some of these broad factors to understand what the likely third-party calculations will be after potential future territorial revisions.

APPROACH

To assess what drives third-party state decisionmaking, we first conducted a quantitative analysis to determine the frequency of territorial takeover attempts and their success. We then selected and reviewed five historical examples of territorial revisionism to derive lessons about possible geopolitical reactions.

CONCLUSIONS

- *Territorial revision is a rare event, and successful conquest is even rarer.* Since World War II, there have only been 70 conquest attempts, of which 29 resulted in the conqueror holding the conquered territory ten years later.
- *Revision attempts tend to raise regional state threat perception.* Spillover effects—in this case, the possibility of continued territorial seizure by the successful conqueror—drove behavior to guard against further attempts at territorial revision.
- *States consider a conqueror's adherence to international norms when deciding their response to a territorial revision.* Third-party countries take a revisionist's failure to abide by these norms—especially in its treatment of "conquered" populations—as an indicator of the continuing threat a conqueror poses and its possibly broader territorial ambitions.
- *Strong international institutions facilitate reactions to revisionism.* Institutions serve as fora to discuss and decide on collective policy responses to territorial-revision attempts. They also provide potential conquerors incentives to follow the international order's norms, rules, and procedures.
- *Economic links play an important role both during and after revisionism attempts.* States' economic considerations play a vital role in determining their alignment decisions. Third-party countries' attempts to both avoid economic pain and seek economic benefits were found in the case studies.

continued

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Revisionism attempts anywhere in the world would prompt a complicated set of calculations from regional actors. A key role for the DAF is to provide continued involvement from U.S. forces by having necessary regional access and offering credible plans and strategies to protect regional states from further revisionism attempts.
- Concurrently, there is a need to invest in a better understanding of partner and ally interests in response to a successful takeover attempt. This is to determine which activities allies and partners view as signaling the credibility of the United States' commitment to their security interests following territorial takeover. These activities include facilitating partner military modernization, arms acquisition, and tightened security partnerships with states whose threat perceptions are raised in the aftermath of a takeover.
- Advanced and active engagement in international institutions can facilitate coalition-building in the event of a takeover attempt. Conversely, failure to adhere to established norms can weaken institutions. Efforts to enforce and frame norms can drive threat perceptions and resistance to revisionism and harsh treatment of acquired populations. Such activities as International Military Education and Training and hosting liaison officers can assist in instilling such norms across partnerships.

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