Research Statement
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My principal research agenda is the scientific study on the role of diplomacy in international disputes. I have three other loosely interrelated research projects on (2) Audience Costs, (2) Formal Models of Crisis Bargaining, and (3) East Asian Security. Below, I describe published and ongoing research as well as the future direction of my scholarship for each of these projects.

1. Diplomacy
Diplomacy is a primary form of politics among nations and offers a set of institutions and norms for conflict prevention and resolution. The study of IR, however, has largely remained silent on issues of diplomacy. To fill this gap, I have a series of projects to develop and test theories that identify several specific mechanisms of diplomacy and explain when and why each mechanism facilitates (or hinders) conflict resolution short of war. My long-term goal is to bring “diplomacy” back into the mainstream IR literature, by establishing the study of diplomacy as a full-blown social scientific literature comparable to the literature on deterrence, alliance, terrorism, etc.

In papers [1] through [3], I identify distinctive classes of diplomatic mechanisms at work in international conflict by analyzing game-theoretic models. Paper [1] examines how diplomatic sanctions can make (pre-crisis) diplomatic communication credible, and how credible communication influences the risk of crisis escalation. My model describes how two processes of diplomacy—communication and representation—bind together to form diplomatic institutions as equilibria. Statistical estimation of the “equilibria” via nonparametric methods shows that the risk of war decreases if a reliable diplomatic channel exists in an European dyad during 1816-1914.

In [2], I present a game-theoretic model of diplomatic negotiation which is at the core of diplomacy but how it works is less obvious. Bargainers engage both in negotiation and coercion, where bargainers take turns deciding whether to continue diplomacy or opt out to resort to military coercion. The equilibria show that countries with “weaker” bargaining power have an incentive to opt out from diplomacy to send costly signals through military coercion to gamble for a greater bargain, because military coercion carries more information than diplomatic bargaining does.

In [3] I look into how diplomacy manipulates the strategic environment to facilitate conflict resolution by altering the incentive structure in crises. The model examines when/if secrecy—one specific empirical case of diplomatic manipulation—in a crisis changes state leaders’ incentives so that they can achieve a peaceful settlement that would otherwise not be available. The equilibria show that, under broad conditions, private diplomacy can produce more efficient “solutions” than can coercive contests in a public crisis.

In [4], we introduce a new dataset on annual bilateral diplomatic representation among European states in the 19th century and America’s bilateral relations in the 20th century to explore when and why states establish and terminate diplomatic relations with other states. A series of Markov probit estimation reveals that while the effect of trade and military conflict is consistent between the American and European systems, political and strategic affinity negatively impacts only on American diplomatic relations in the 20th century. In particular, strategic interests sharply shape the American decision to deploy its diplomatic missions if the recipient country is nondemocratic. Currently, we are expanding the databases to include the entire dyads between the COW’s system members for 1816-2015.

Paper [5] builds on my work on “structural estimation” of audience costs (i.e., [6]) to test my “efficient secrecy” mechanism with observational data on international conflict.

The integrating part of my research on diplomacy is a book manuscript, entitled When Diplomacy Works. This eight-chapter book presents the first comprehensive theory of diplomacy in international disputes. Based on research papers mentioned above, the book develops an analytical approach to natural history of diplomatic mechanisms.

2. Audience Costs

Since the end of the Cold War, scholars have sought to explain how domestic politics shape international outcomes. Of recent prominence, the “audience cost” model has proven successful in explaining behavior and outcomes in a wide range of issues in international relations. While influential, the very existence of audience costs is only assumed since scholars have considered direct and unbiased observation of the costs as beyond reach due to selection bias in strategic interactions. Since audience costs are increasingly more likely to be unobservable as the costs become large. This led numerous studies to turn to survey experiments to demonstrate the existence of audience costs.

In [6], we utilize a “structural estimation” approach to measure audience costs that are both incurred and not incurred the leaders in reality. Our paper presents the first observational study to successfully estimate the existence and magnitude of audience costs using observational data of international crises. Our estimation also presents the first direct evidence for James Fearon’s (1994, APSR) conjecture that democratic leaders on average incur higher audience costs than nondemocratic leaders as well as for Jessica Weeks’ (2014 APSR) claims of autocratic audience costs.

The debate over audience costs has moved on to the issue of their mechanisms. In [7], we build on [6] to present observational evidence that the informational effect of audience costs is at work in international conflict as predicted by theoretical models. We show that the amount of information transmitted via signaling (i.e., the amount of belief-updating) increases in the size of audience costs. This result allows us to distinguish among two competing hypotheses on informational effects of democracy—Bueno de Mesquita’s transparency hypothesis and Fearon’s learning argument, while Schultz (1999, IO) distinguished between the institutional and information hypotheses. We find that democracy improves both transparency and learning effectiveness.


3. Formal Models of Crisis Bargaining

Uncertainty and information play fundamental roles in international politics. The IR literature offers two influential approaches to information failure as the cause of crisis escalation and war: the rationalist approach emphasizes incomplete information and psychologists focus on misperception. In [8], I examine the interplay between the rationalist problem of misrepresentation in sending signals and the psychologist problem of misperception in forming beliefs. The equilibrium shows that misperception generates more than pathologies in crises—i.e., misperception, under the right condition, makes signals fully informative, reduces the risk of war, and attenuates the adverse impact of incomplete information on the risk of crisis escalation and war.

In [9], I take up the issue of credibility which has occupied both practitioners’ and scholars’ concerns over foreign policy, and investigate the puzzle of why fully credible threats sometimes fail to compel the opponent to concede. Since a threat to punish for noncompliance must imply a promise not to punish for compliance, states face dual goals of communicating the credibility of threats and the credibility of assurances. The analysis establishes the conditions under which the threat credibility undermines coercive diplomacy because it forfeits assurance.


4. East Asia Security

Since I took up a position at Waseda in 2013, I have developed research interest in Japan’s defense policy and its implications for regional security in East Asia. Japan’s recent security legislation along with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s alleged ambitions to revise the constitution are considered to transform Japan’s post-war grand strategy for national security, even if it would continue to rely heavily on the American military presence on Japan’s archipelagos. The Abe government claims that the right to collective self-defense (CSD hereafter) enables Japan to adopt a new defense posture, which will strengthen the US-Japan alliance, which in turn will enhance deterrence so as to improve national security. The causal effects underlying the Abe government’s claim, however, are inconsistent with theory and evidence accumulated
by the IR scholarship.

I have launched a large project since Summer 2015 to assess the strategic consequences of collective self-defense both theoretically and empirically by extending the existing literature on alliance and deterrence. I have developed a series of game-theoretic models to investigate if/when CSD can enhance deterrence. The equilibrium analysis shows that we cannot write down a logically consistent causal mechanism through which removing institutional (or constitutional) constraints on the exercise of CSD enhances the effectiveness of direct immediate deterrence (in [10]) or strengthens the US commitment to intervention when Japan gets involved in military conflict (in [11]). However, in [12] I find that strengthening an alliance’s fighting capabilities with the more cohesiveness of military coordination can, under the right conditions, enhance the effectiveness of deterrence and the reliability of allies’ intervention commitment at the time of war. Yet, whether the investment in such an optimal cohesiveness level is feasible is yet to be explored formally. In paper [13], we claim that improving the cohesiveness of the US-Japan alliance via CSD is likely to undermine the security dilemma in East Asia.


To fully implement PM Abe’s defense policy would require the revision of Article 5 of the US-Japan alliance treaty once he succeeds in removing the constitutional constraints on the right to CSD. This change would present the IR scholarship with an opportunity to investigate the effect of institutional design on the security arrangement within the alliance framework. To anticipate this opportunity, I have analyzed the impact of asymmetric defense obligations (as in Article 5) vs symmetric obligations on international conflict behavior, using ATOP (alliance treaty obligations and provisions) dataset. The empirical evidence so far suggests that

- CSD does not improve the reliability of the US commitment to intervention at the time of war (a la Leeds 2003 IO)
- CSD does not improve the success rate of extended-immediate deterrence (a la Huth 1988 APSR)
- CSD does not protect from the risk of military challenges (with a threat) (a la Forbmann and Socher 2014 APS)
- CSD increases the risk of being targeted in a militarized dispute (if no endogeneity problem, surprising and raising a concern)
- CSD constraints a protégé from initiating a militarized dispute (opposite of the emboldenment trap)
- CSD increases the risk of being dragged into an ally’s war only during the 19th century (no entrapment risk)

In addition, Brett Ashley Leeds has shown that institutionalization of alliance through enhanced military coordination has no impact on deterrence success or alliance reliability. These empirical analyses will be presented in my second book project on Japan’s changing defense policy and its implications for East Asian security.