Classical Statements on Geopolitics and the Aftermath of War

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The relationship among geopolitical position, political legitimacy, and internal conflict has been rejuvenated as a topic of theoretical interest. This revival of interest has, to a degree, borrowed from earlier theories, but the implications of these earlier theories have not been fully explored. In this article the classical geopolitical statements of Herbert Spencer and Max Weber are modeled to highlight their continued relevance to sociological theories that address the relationship between geopolitics and internal societal processes.

Introduction

The aftermath of a war is very much related to the larger geopolitical context within which conflict occurs, the internal structures of the societies involved, and the level of success or failure in war. Although the importance of geographical factors in planning and conducting war was formally codified into the science of geopolitics by Sir Halford MacKinder in 1904 (Bierstedt 1974, p. 53), the first glimmerings of a sociology of geopolitics and war may have appeared in the work of Iban Khaldun, a fourteenth century Arab precursor of modern sociology (Issawi 1950; Chambliss 1954).

In *Prolegomena*, Khaldun (1395) analyzes the relations between nomadic tribes and city states. Khaldun argues that the mobilization for war of one population against another is related to the attractiveness of the latter's resources, the attractiveness often being heightened by a history of economic transactions with this population. Such mobilization is possible when power can be consolidated and concentrated and when large numbers of individuals are free from economic activity and can thereby form an army. Mobilization for war is also related to the level of solidarity among members of a mobilizing population and the level of legitimation of political elites, which, in turn, are a result of effective socialization into consensual moral codes. Under these conditions—legitimated concentrations of power and large armies, backed by consensus over moral codes and high solidarity—a population's mobilization for external conflict is likely to produce success

in war with another population, especially if the latter is less well mobilized because of low solidarity, low legitimacy for political elites, and low levels of concentrated power.

Like most simplified cyclical theories of history (e.g., Spengler 1926; Toynbee 1934–1954), Khaldun's analysis of the relations between comparatively small city states seems provincial, but he does emphasize the importance of time span as a critical consideration in assessing the aftermath of war. Surprisingly, only relatively recently have sociologists returned to some of the considerations, especially the recognition that inequality and internal conflict are intimately connected to geopolitical processes (e.g., Skocpol 1979; Collins 1981, 1986; Tilly 1981, 1990; Chirot 1986; Volti 1992).

For example, Theda Skocpol's (1979) study of the effects of losing a war on the revolutionary potential of a society is perhaps the best-known illustration of this renewed interest in the relationship between the aftermath of war and the internal structure of a society. Randall Collins's (1981, 1986) early predictions on the decline of the Soviet empire emphasize the connection among controlling territories, internal threats, and mounting logistical loads. Daniel Chirot's (1986, pp. 40–49) analysis of how the conquest of territories and internal stratification and politics of privilege are delicately related is yet another example of theorizing on the effects of war and conquest on internal system processes. And Rudi Volti's (1992) examination of how internal threats, state power, acquisition of military technologies, and patterns of war are interconnected is still another illustration of analysis that examines the relation among inequality, internal conflict, and geopolitics.

These studies signal a renewed interest in processes that a number of early macrolevel theorists once considered central to understanding the dynamics of society. For external conflicts, conquest, and territorial acquisition are connected to political legitimacy, inequalities, and internal conflicts in highly dynamic ways which are frequently unleashed in the aftermath of war.

In this article we propose to go back to early, classic statements on these dynamics to determine what conceptual leads they provide to this renewed interest in geopolitics and internal system dynamics. In particular, we will focus on the sociologists who analyzed geopolitical conflict and its effects on internal system processes: namely Herbert Spencer ([1874–1896] 1898) and Max Weber ([1922] 1968). If we are willing to generalize from the ideas of these early sociological masters, the seminal nature of their theories becomes evident, as does their utility for contemporary analysis of war and its aftermath.
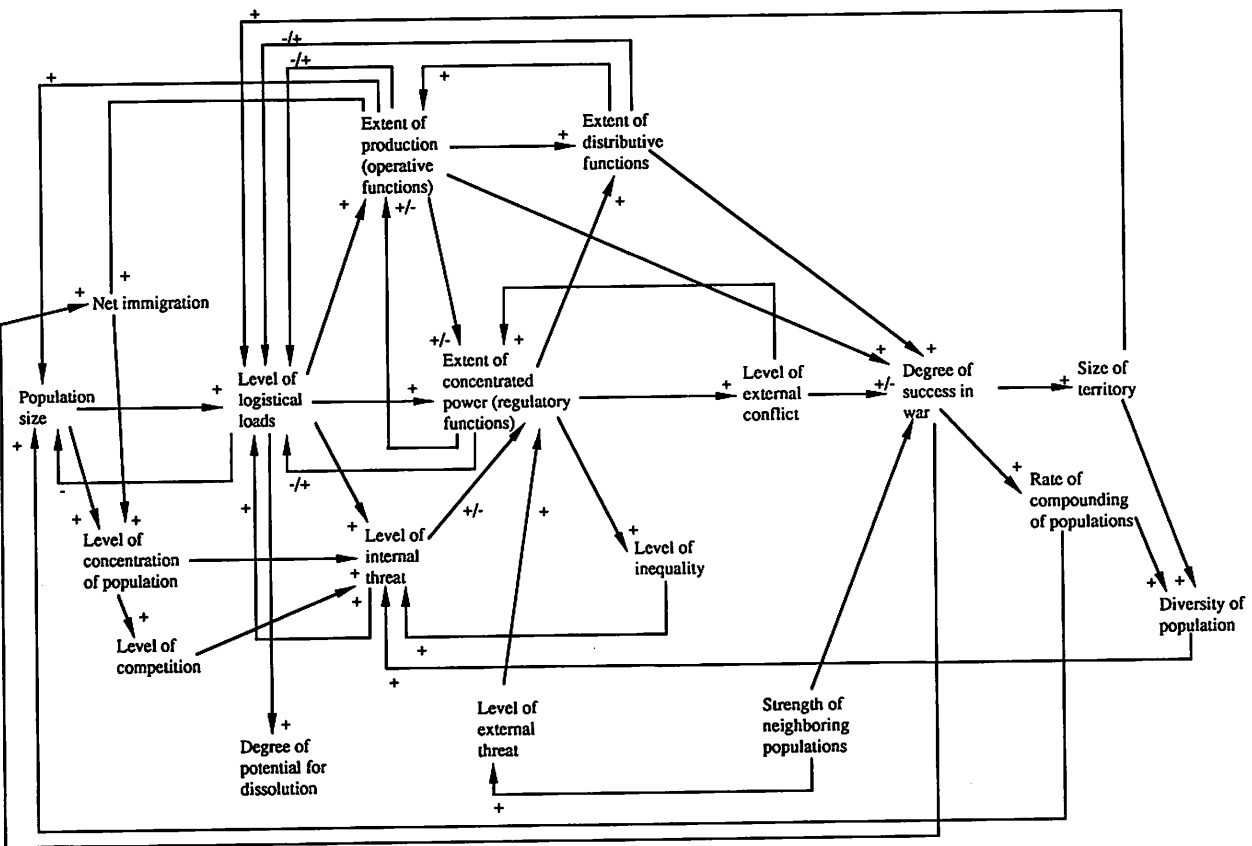
Fig. 1. Spencer's model of geopolitics.

Herbert Spencer's Theory of Geopolitics and the Aftermath of War

In Figure 1, Spencer's theory of geopolitics is modeled. This model does not represent all of Spencer's theory of human organization (see Turner 1985 for a review of the more general theory); rather, only that portion of Spencer's work pertaining to geopolitics is delineated (Spencer [1874–1896] 1898).

Social processes flow over time, intersect, and react back on themselves. The model shown in Figure 1 is designed to capture these features of the social universe. The juxtaposition of the variables and the causal arrows connecting them denote the causal processes over time that connect these variables. Time flows from left to right, and then back again via reverse causal paths. The signs indicate the nature of the causal relation (+ = positive; − = negative; + / − = positively curvilinear, or a relationship that is initially positive but turns negative; and − / + = negatively curvilinear, or a relation that is initially negative but turns positive). Reverse causal chains (i.e., those going from right to left) are particularly important because social forces are recursive, feeding back upon themselves, and they affect the values and causal effects among the variables. Models presented in this way may seem complex, but they enable us to visualize causal processes in their most robust form.

As the model portrays, growth in the size of a population initiates a series of processes that influence the mobilization of power, the level of conflict, the extent of territory, and the diversity of subpopulations within this territory. The central force initiating this series of processes is the logistical loads created by a larger population. If these loads become too great, the population "dissolves." For Spencer, then, logistical loads generate selection pressure to create structures that can produce ("operative functions") and distribute ("distributive functions") sufficient quantities of goods and services to support the growing population and that can coordinate and control this population ("regulatory functions"). Spencer's arguments always involve reverse causal effects; hence, the development of operative, regulatory, and distributive structures initially reduces logistical loads, which in turn allows the population to grow further. At some point in these cycles, the high levels of differentiation of operative, distributive, and regulatory structures increase logistical loads and the potential for dissolution.

Of critical importance in this dynamic situation is the level of "internal threat" created by mounting logistical loads as these are aggravated by growing inequality. These increased logistical loads lead to the concentration of power, which escalates the level of inequality, internal threat, and

logistical loads. Indeed, Spencer argued that centers of political authority often manufacture internal threats in order to legitimate their consolidation of power. Power also becomes concentrated under conditions of external threat; and centers of power often manufacture such threats, much as they do internal threats, to justify further regulation and control of internal system affairs.

These internal processes, Spencer implicitly argued, are important elements of geopolitical dynamics. Concentrated power per se, but especially under conditions of either external or internal threat, or both, will often lead to conflict with neighboring populations. The likelihood of success in such conflicts will be an inverse function of the military strength of neighboring populations and a positive function of the productive and distributive capacities of the population in question. The aftermath of success in war, Spencer argued, has some ironical consequences: (1) As territories increase in size, logistical problems of control, communication, transportation, and administration escalate; (2) as the span of territory increases, especially as the result of annexation ("compounding" in Spencer's terms) of conquered populations, the diversity of the population increases and poses increased internal threat, which in turn escalates logistical loads; (3) compounding of populations per se increases population size, which, regardless of internal threats, increases logistical loads; and (4) population growth through compounding tends to concentrate in urban centers an increased proportion of the total population (as a result of migration), which then creates a new source of internal threat, and hence escalated logistical loads.

These cycles, as they increase logistical loads, lead to ever greater concentrations of power; and as power is concentrated, it is often used to initiate further external conflict, thereby escalating even more those cycles that increase logistical loads. At some point, these loads become too great, and the empire implodes or dissolves from (a) internal conflict, (b) overextension beyond the productive, administrative, and distributive capacities, (c) confrontation with a powerful enemy, or (d) some combination of (a), (b), (c). Indeed, once this process of collapse begins on one front, the other logistical loads are typically activated and accelerate dissolution.

Thus, Spencer's model emphasizes that war creates a series of conditions in its aftermath that can sustain concentrated power. These conditions revolve around logistical loads stemming from increased population size, escalated inequality, more ethnic diversity, larger territories, extended lines of distribution, and expanded production. Moreover, war-making societies get locked into cycles of concentrating ever more power to cope with these logistical loads; and often the outcome of these cycles escalates many of the

logistical loads. At some point this cycle causes the empire of a war-making population to implode. Societal collapse thus occurs as a result of too much concentrated power and the logistical problems that such power creates for maintaining a viable society.

The aftermath of war, then, is connected with the extent to which a society demobilizes, deconcentrates power, reduces inequalities, defuses the resentments of conquered peoples, and minimizes the costs of holding annexed territories. In Spencer's view it is difficult to demobilize after war, thereby setting into motion the cycles that lead to collapse. Yet, if a society can successfully demobilize and manage logistical loads without concentrating more power, then it becomes considerably more viable. Spencer implies that a society's capacity to demobilize and manage the increased logistical load is influenced by the forces that pushed it to concentrate power and to initiate war. If the management of internal threats stemming from inequalities was the prime mover, then demobilization will prove difficult, and in fact it may be necessary to continue manufacturing enemies (both internal and external) to justify high concentrations of coercive power. If, on the other hand, real (as opposed to manufactured) external threats caused mobilization and if internal logistical loads and threats were not excessive before the war, then it is likely that demobilization can occur, and that thereby it will be possible to avoid the cycles revolving around concentrating power, renewed war-making, increased inequality, and mounting logistical loads.

Weber's Theory of Geopolitics and the Aftermath of War

Max Weber's ideas on geopolitics appear in his discussion of political communities and domination (Weber [1922] 1968, pp. 901–955), in which the distinctions among class, status group, and party are outlined. As a result, the theory of geopolitics is often overlooked or underemphasized. In Figure 2, an analytical model of Weber's geopolitical theory is shown.

Like Spencer, Weber views the dynamics of internal stratification and power as intimately connected to the activities of a society vis-à-vis other societies, but his analysis is more focused on the issue of legitimacy of political authority. But if the focus is shifted to external geopolitical processes, then the analysis of internal stratification processes and outcomes of war can be viewed differently.

Weber argued that political legitimacy is an inverse function of the degree of inequality, especially if inequalities produce charismatic leaders who call into question the legitimacy of political authority and mobilize opposition to such authority. Like Spencer, Weber recognized that external threat and competition with other societies are important forces; and, for
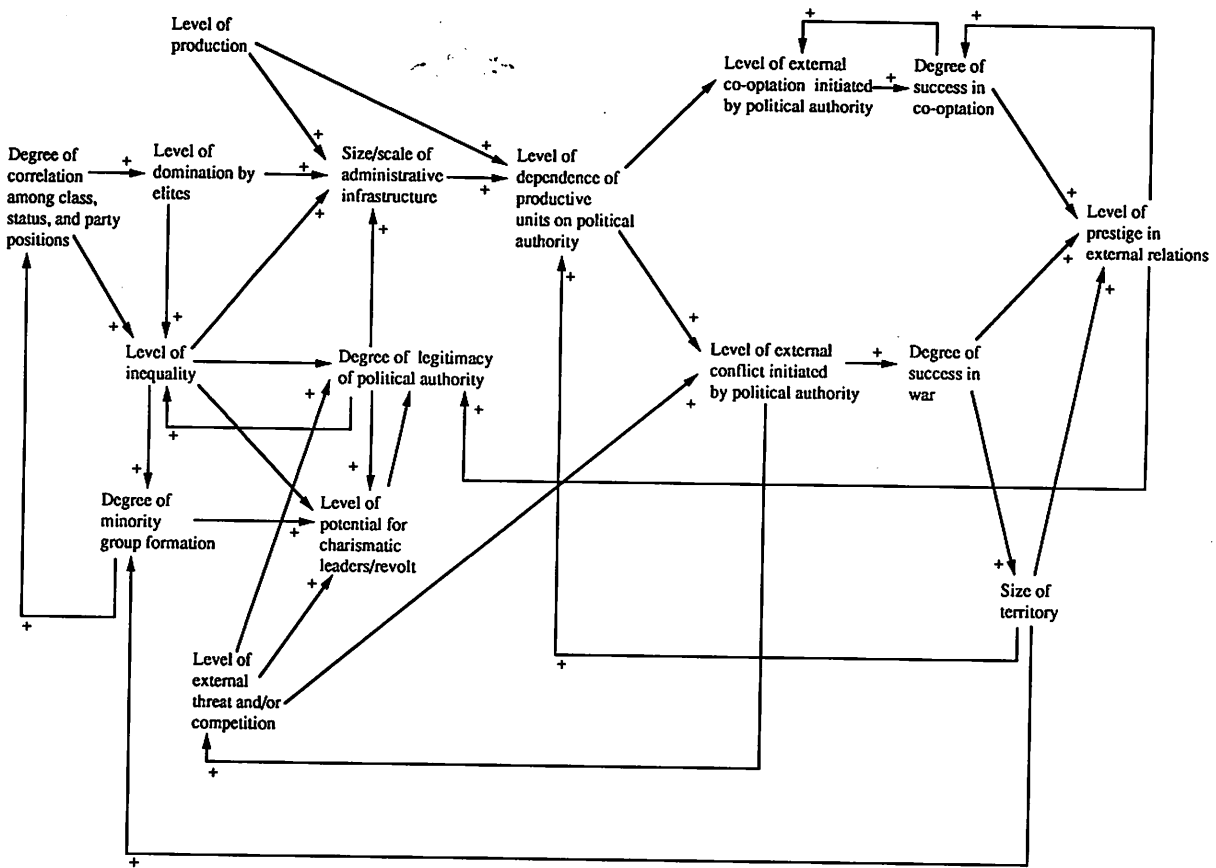
Fig. 2. Weber's model of geopolitics.

Weber, these forces have the contradictory consequences of directly legitimating the activities of a political authority that attempts to reduce internal and external threats, while they indirectly undermine such authority by creating conditions favoring the emergence of charismatic leaders and opposition. In particular, systems experiencing high levels of external threat, as well as high levels of inequality and minority group formation, will evidence the most potential for internal collapse of political authority.

The decisive dynamic in this volatile mix of internal forces revolves around a set of geopolitical processes. The critical question is, Can political authority generate and sustain prestige in the external system of societies? According to Weber, there are two avenues for maintaining prestige: (1) war and conquest; and (2) economic and political co-optation. The former is more likely to occur when economic/productive units are dependent upon political authority—for example, for their charter, market privileges, and resources—whereas economic and political co-optation is more likely to occur when the productive sectors are independent of political authority and need such authority only to pave the way administratively and economically for access to foreign markets and resources. In either case, co-optation and conflict bring prestige to political authority when successful; conversely, a crisis of legitimacy will emerge when such efforts are unsuccessful.

This potential for crisis pushes political authority toward face-saving efforts to garner prestige. If there is high internal threat and a potential for revolt led by chrismatic leaders, successful external conflict can be used to regain prestige and to mitigate internal sources of strain. But if such efforts are unsuccessful, then the loss of prestige rapidly delegitimates political authority in concert with those internal forces producing charismatic leaders. Hence, revolt and revolution are, as Skocpol (1979) emphasized, the frequent aftermath of failed military adventurism. Co-optation involves a less volatile process because political authority is not so obviously and directly in a win or lose situation, as is the case when war is initiated. When co-optive efforts succeed (i.e., productive units are successful in external relations and the government facilitates this process), prestige is forthcoming and this prestige legitimates political authority while encouraging further efforts at co-optation. Japan is perhaps the best current example, as was the United States the best example forty years ago. When prestige is lost, this loss works against political legitimacy but less dramatically than when a war is lost.

Much like Spencer, Weber implies that military success expands territories and increases ethnic diversity in ways that escalate inequality and promote the emergence of charismatic leaders. In addition to this source of

internal strain, the more successful a political community is in conquering its neighbors, the greater is the external threat from those neighbors who confront such expansionism, with the result that the potential for losing a war increases, especially as internal inequalities and ethnic diversity promote dissent and conflict. Thus, Weber's model adds some crucial refinements to Spencer's model. The most important of these refinements is the emphasis on the legitimacy of political authority, which is in a precarious state for managing internal tension and conflict simultaneously with external geopolitical activities.

The Legacy of Early Theorists

For both Spencer and Weber the aftermath of a war is related to the conditions that generated the war and to the subsequent success of the war. Several of these conditions are crucial. First, the level of inequality and the internal threat prior to the outbreak of war circumscribe what can occur in the aftermath of war. Second, the level of legitimacy of political elites and the degree of consensus over moral codes before a war influence the aftermath of the war. Third, the level of logistical loads for production, distribution, and social control before the war affects the course of events in the aftermath. As a general rule, (1) the greater the levels of inequality, internal threat, and logistical loads, and (2) the less the levels of political legitimacy and consensus over moral codes, the more likely will the aftermath of war involve continued concentrations of power and sustained efforts to identify enemies to maintain this power. But, as a corollary, the more a society sustains concentrations of power as a means to conquer enemies both within and outside its borders, and thereby maintain legitimacy and consensus over moral codes, the more likely will the level of logistical loads increase, the degree of consensus over moral codes decay, and the level of political legitimacy decline. Hence, the more vulnerable the society will be to collapse from some combination of internal conflict, overextension beyond the capacity for control of territories, lack of social solidarity, and loss of legitimacy for political elites.

Turning to the relation between success in war and the aftermath, several generalizations emerge from these early theories. The loss of war delegitimizes political authority; and if war has been used to sustain a precarious legitimacy under conditions of inequality, internal threat, and declining consensus over moral codes, then substantial reorganization of a society ensues. Yet much like the aftermath of internal revolutions, which, as Skocpol (1979) argues, may in fact be the result of rapid delegitimation, the loss of war usually produces a new form of concentrated power to cope with the lack of consensus over moral codes, the low levels of legitimacy for

political elites, and the unleashing of ethnic and/or class conflict. If the loss of war involves imposition of the winner's political system on a society, then these dynamics are transferred to the winning society, which henceforth must deal with a lack of consensus over moral codes (at a minimum, between itself and its victims), with increased inequality and ethnic diversity, with decreased legitimacy within conquered and annexed territories, and with mounting logistical loads over coordination, control, production, and distribution of the larger and more diverse population in a greater territorial expanse.

Winning a war can have diverse outcomes, depending on the domestic and geopolitical conditions that caused the war and the amount of territorial expansion and annexation after the war. If success in war is gained by political elites who have sought to sustain a shaky state of legitimacy, deflect attention from inequalities and internal threats, and overcome low levels of consensus over moral codes and correspondingly low levels of social solidarity, then the effects of success in overcoming these problems will be temporary as the glow of victory recedes. If territory is taken and new populations are annexed, the increased logistical loads will begin to reduce the masking effects of victory; and if political elites recognize this danger and continue to find enemies, these logistical loads will mount, or alternatively, a war will be lost, which in turn will rapidly destabilize the society. In contrast, if war occurs under conditions of high political legitimacy, high consensus over moral codes, and hence high social solidarity, moderate inequality, and low internal threats, then neither loss nor success will dramatically undermine the stability of the society. And if under these internal conditions, war is defensive and in response to the aggression of another society, then political legitimacy, consensus over moral codes, and social solidarity will increase, and the internal threats stemming from moderate or even increased inequality will decrease.

When territories are expanded and new populations are annexed as an outcome of war, new strains are placed upon a society. The strains revolving around increased logistical loads, ethnic diversity, inequality, and internal threats that come with conquest will be much more severe for a society in which war was used to shore up disintegrative strains, but they will become evident for even well-integrated and stable populations that embark on a path of war and conquest.

Conclusion

These early theories suggest useful leads for assessing the impact of the aftermath of war on the internal stability and viability of a society. Well-integrated societies, whether they win or lose, are better able to withstand

the pressures that war places on the organization of a population, but if cycles revolving around increased logistical loads from territorial expansion, escalated inequality, mounting internal threat, and ever more concentrated power to deal with these strains are initiated, these cycles will work to destabilize the society in the long run. Poorly integrated societies that exhibit precarious legitimacy for elites, high levels of inequality and internal threat, and low consensus over moral codes will be even more rapidly destabilized if they lose a war or if they embark on territorial expansion.

A cursory glance at geopolitical history since World War II reveals that these classic statements still have considerable explanatory power. The continued relevance of Spencer's and Weber's ideas is illustrated in the following statements.

In the United States over the last fifty years, there have been four major war mobilizations: World War II, the Cold War, Korea, and Vietnam, plus a dramatic transformation of the society's position in the world economic system. Because political legitimacy was high, and internal threats low (even with various societywide social movements) when these wars were entered into, the varying outcomes have not greatly affected internal stability, although the Vietnam conflict could potentially have destabilized the society if it had been pursued much longer. Moreover, the reduced dominance of the United States vis-à-vis Japan and Germany has not greatly affected levels of political legitimacy or internal threat. In contrast, the Soviet Union has collapsed with the loss of the Cold War and the war in Afghanistan, because the logistical loads of sustaining an empire coercively under conditions of low legitimacy and high internal threat provided no cushion to the Soviet leadership when geopolitical reversals occurred. This shift in the balance of powers has greatly enhanced the position of China, which, despite continued internal threats, is more stable today than at any time over the last three decades. For now, China's geopolitical and economic position in the world system is greatly enhanced as the Soviet threat has declined, as the United States withdraws major installations from China's sphere of influence (in Korea and the Philippines, for example), as the West prepares for China's takeover of Hong Kong, and as China's markets are courted by all Western economic powers. The suddenly enhanced prestige of China in the world arena, coupled with the reduced logistical loads of sustaining massive coercive capacity in all of its extensive border, enables the current leadership to sustain legitimacy, even given the internal threats arising from the pressure from liberalization of the economy, longstanding regional–ethnic tensions, newly awakened internal voices for democracy, and external ideological fervor in the West over human rights.

In other regions of the world, the dynamics examined by Spencer and

Weber can also be seen to operate. The war-making efforts of Iraq enabled the political leadership to sustain itself and increase its legitimacy during its war with Iran, even with severe regional ethnic internal threats. But the loss of a war to the Western powers reduced political prestige and escalated internal threats, which, despite media reportage to the contrary, are increasing logistical loads under conditions of low legitimacy to the point that changes in political leadership can be expected. In contrast Iran, which lost prestige in the war with Iraq and as a result saw an increase in internal threats ("quietly" repressed for lack of Western media coverage) that could have undermined the viability of the theocracy, is now in a more stable position because of its enhanced prestige vis-à-vis Iraq and its role as leader of the Arab resistance to Western powers in the region.

Thus, war and its aftermath can still be examined usefully with theoretical ideas from sociology's formative stage. Indeed, with presentation of Spencer's and Weber's theories in more modern terms, their ideas can still inform more recent theoretical efforts and future theorizing on the effects of war on a society.

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