

Why Wars Happen

Political Science

The rationalist explanations, and what they have in common.

Rationalist explanations.

Explanations

Private information and incentives to misrepresent

Commitment problems — promises are not credible

Issue indivisibility — cannot be split

Domestic incentives of leaders

Miscalculation of relative strength

Implication

Any bargain both prefer to war exists in principle

The obstacle is credibly reaching it

Third parties can help by verifying

Shifting power makes commitment hardest

Educational reference. Commitment problems explain preventive war: a rising power cannot credibly promise future restraint.