Transcending the Security Dilemma in International Relations

International relations are characterized by a complexity of strategic interactions between global actors that are traditionally motivated to enhance their own security. Much of these interactions are responses to the security dilemma: the notion that increasing a state's security causes other states to increase their own, which in turn decreases the security of the first (Jervis 2008, 347). This paradox creates the necessity for actors to make certain sacrifices to cooperate in order to produce outcomes of relative security and stability. Yet the inherent desire to dominate the political arena causes cheating, bargaining, and collaborating that hinders cooperation. The costs, rewards, and interests of strategic interactions are best simplified into the configuration of the Chicken game theory. This theory explains cooperating and defecting strategies of contemporary international relations more clearly than the Prisoner's Dilemma theory.

The Chicken game theory is modeled on the driving competition played by teenagers in the 1950s. As two drivers speed towards each other, the first driver to turn off the road is the "chicken" and subsequent loser of the game. In such a situation, the players lack a dominant strategy; their only strategic option is to attempt to do the opposite of what they presume their opponent will do. In the Chicken model, the notion of cooperating is equated to swerving off the road while defecting is equated to continuing straight toward the opposing car. For each player, the choice to defect while the other cooperates is the best possible decision. This implies that the actor who defects wins the game while the cooperating actor swerves off the road and loses the game. This preference is a result of distrust in one's opponent's cooperation, desire to maintain the upper hand, and iteration: the likelihood that there will be repeated interactions between the two actors. The second best outcome for either player would be mutual cooperation to prevent the dangers and costs of defecting. The second worst outcome would be to cooperate and lose the game while one's opponent defects and wins. The worst outcome would be mutual defection, which would result in a head-on collision and extreme damage for both sides (Frieden, Lake, and Schultz 2010, 77-78). The Prisoner's Dilemma, another common game theory, is modeled on a situation in which two accomplices in a crime are under interrogation. They are each faced with the choice to defect and betray their accomplice, or to cooperate and remain silent. The essential difference between the Chicken theory and the Prisoner's Dilemma is the worst possible outcome. In contrast to the Chicken theory, the worst outcome in the Prisoner's Dilemma is a "sucker's payoff" situation, where one actor cooperates while their opponent defects (Saideman 2010, Lecture).

The current peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority provide an explicit example of the Chicken theory in modern international relations. These actors have been engaging in a new round of peace negotiations since September 2, 2010 under the primary facilitation of the United States. Both actors ultimately wish to maintain the sovereignty and security of their own nations. The Palestinians want a national state for themselves and the Israelis wants to ensure the security of their own state. Both actors have agreed to peace negotiations because they see the possibility of attaining these desired outcomes through cooperation. Yet due to the disbelief in the other's commitment to cooperation, the most preferred option for each actor is to defect before its opponent. For Israel, this situation would occur if it withdrew from peace negotiations, retained possession over all its land, and gained an extent of power over the Palestinians before they withdrew first. This would also benefit Israel's domestic interests by satisfying the religious party of the government coalition. The Palestinians would also ideally favor a withdrawal from peace negotiations to secure their political position. This action would generate more support from

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Iran and other representative bodies of the Palestinian people, and most likely result in the use of more coercive means to obtain their state. The second best option for each actor would be mutual cooperation: remaining in peace negotiations. While these negotiations can satisfy the interests of both actors, they require each to sacrifice some aspect of their ultimate security. Netanyahu describes the risk he is taking in cooperating: "We left Lebanon, and we got terror. We left Gaza, and we got terror once again. We want to ensure that territory we'll concede will not be turned into a third Iranian-sponsored terror enclave […]" (Wildman 2010). Similarly, President Abbas is sacrificing the support of Iran and other important political bodies as well as the coercive power to ensure that all his terms are realized. The second worst situation for both players would be if each cooperates while their opponent defects; this would occur if one continued to be open to negotiations while the other renounced their participation. Mutual defection would be the worst situation for both the Palestinians and the Israelis because it would likely result in a war or another Intifada.

The current situation depicts precisely what the Chicken framework predicts. As Netanyahu allowed the moratorium on settlement construction in the West Bank to expire this past week, one can argue that, to some extent, he indirectly defected from the peace negotiations. Although Israel did not withdraw completely from the negotiations, its permission to grant new construction on settlement lands is seen as uncompromising and threatening to the Palestinian Authority. While Israel expresses continued hopes that the Palestinian Authority will continue to negotiate despite this incident, the Palestinian Authority clearly stipulated from the beginning that a precondition for negotiations was the moratorium. In response to Israel's divergence from this term, Abbas will be meeting with the Arab League to discuss whether it is now in the Palestinian interest to cooperate or defect (Bronner and Landler 2010). In this situation, it is evident why the Chicken framework is more applicable than the Prisoner's Dilemma. If the Palestinian Authority chooses to continue to negotiate in a sucker's payoff situation, it will gain a positive public image and international support in the event of a subsequent conflict. Clearly, this is a more promising situation than if it were to defect and confront inevitable conflict. Yet in the Prisoner's Dilemma, continued cooperation would result in the most detrimental situation for the Palestinian Authority.

The negotiations between Iran and the United States over nuclear weapons also fall into the Chicken framework. The United States acts as the primary imposer of the United Nations Security Council's newest round of sanctions. In response to these new sanctions, Iran barred two highly experienced inspectors from the country and continued to refuse to disclose any information related to potential nuclear programs. In John Mearsheimer's essay "Anarchy and the Struggle for Power" he provides an explanation of the United States and Iran's interests and political motivations. He labels the United States as the only "regional hegemony" in modern history and describes its nature as such. He explains that great powers are constantly trying to gain power over rivals in pursuit of regional hegemony because this is the only true state of security. He explains that regional hegemons are only endangered by the threat of other potential regional hegemons and they are motivated to reduce the rival threat's power (Mearsheimer 2008, 66-67). Mearsheimer's explanation coupled with the continued threat of a rival's defection results in this very tense relationship between the United States and Iran and creates the preference for defection. The best political maneuver for the United States would be to attack Iran and destroy its nuclear capabilities while it is under sanctions. Such an action would yield the United States an "offensive advantage", as Robert Jervis depicts in his article "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma". He describes that, in this condition, it is easier to attack and destroy an opponent's army or land than to defend one's own. States confronting opponents with nuclear capabilities are always faced with an offensive advantage characterized by deterrence (Jervis 2008, 351). The most advantageous tactic for Iran would be to continue its nuclear program despite United Nation's Security Council sanctions imposed by the United States. This would be a cheating mechanism aimed at securing Iran's dominancy in the conflict. The next best option for both actors would be mutual cooperation. This situation would imply the United States' imposition of sanctions, Iran's submission to these sanctions, and Iran's halting of nuclear activity as a result of these sanctions. The second worse situation for the United States would be if Iran continued to advance its nuclear program despite sanctions. A similar sucker's payoff condition would occur for Iran if it submitted to sanctions and halted its nuclear programs, yet the United States attacked anyways. The most destructive outcome would result from Iran defecting from sanctions and the United States responding with an attack.

Similar to the current Israeli- Palestinian situation, it appears as though one actor has already defected and the world is waiting for the second actor's reaction. President Obama explains that Iran's uncooperative response to the

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newest round of sanctions demonstrates its continued " 'effort to expand its nuclear program and move closer to a nuclear weapons capability' " (Sanger and Broad 2010). The United States must now decide whether to continue to cooperate by again imposing rounds of sanctions or to respond militantly, as it did in Iraq in 2003. The costs of each outcome clearly depict the applicability of the Chicken framework to this conflict more than the Prisoner's Dilemma. If the United States responded with an attack, the conflict would most likely eventually escalate into a nuclear confrontation or, at best, a devastating ground war that will resemble the 2003 war in Iraq. But if the United States were to respond by continuing to impose sanctions, it would retain the support of the UNSC and other global powers. Thus, in the event that Iran was successful in its pursuit to create nuclear weapons, the United States could retain its deterrence power with the combination of its own weapons and those of the other supporting global powers. In the Prisoner's Dilemma, the situation of mutual nuclear devastation would have to be considered less costly than the situation where one actor cooperates: a clearly illogical concept.

While the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over peace negotiations and the Iran-United States conflict over nuclear activity are not representative of all current international relations, they are two very significant contemporary issues. The outcome of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations will affect Israel's relationship with many other Arab countries and the Palestinian's relationship with much of the democratic world. Whether Iran becomes a nuclear power will affect the United States' global position and the entire international balance of power. Observing these conflicts within the Chicken theory framework helps explain actors' strategic interactions in the absence of a dominant strategy. In both situations, the prisoner's dilemma would not apply since the outcome of mutual destruction would be much worse than an outcome where one actor defects while the other cooperates. In these two examples, this preference can be explained by the relative gain of international support in the event of a one actor's cooperation in the face of its opponent's defection. The Chicken game theory is not only applicable to the strategies of current global actors, but it can be used as a perennial explanatory framework for all strategic interactions between any two actors.

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