

## Some factors affecting independence movements: an overview

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Conflict between occupiers and occupied has regularly occurred over the course of history when occupiers have infringed upon a community's rights to independence and self-determination. Historically, the list of independence movements in occupied or disputed territories is long. It includes the Indian Independence Movement, the Irish Nationalist Movement, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Kashmiri separatist conflict. One common factor seen on both sides of all such conflicts is the presence of leaders who act as primary motivators and decisionmakers. This article studies how differences in the nature and outcomes of conflict situations might be related to differences in the leadership element on both sides of a conflict. More specifically, this article discusses two questions. First, how is the nature of an independence movement affected by its leaders' opportunity costs and, second, how is the nature of an independence movement affected by the degree of aggressiveness shown by occupation leaders?

It will be seen that the opportunity cost of independence movement leaders and the aggressiveness of the occupiers affect the nature of a self-determination movement. Other factors are concurrently important as well. They include the characteristics of the population residing in the occupied region, the nature of punishment that is being meted out to protestors, and occupiers' costs of punishing protestors. In the following section, I describe the elements of an analytical model that may be used to understand how these factors affect an independence movement.

### An economic view of independence movements

Decisionmaking processes of independence movement and occupation leaders can be captured in a two-stage game-theoretic model.<sup>1</sup> The game is played between two players, a leader of an independence movement and an occupier. Both attempt to maximize their payoffs (described later) by strategically choosing their actions. In the first stage of the game, the occupier chooses to deploy a certain level of armed force in the occupied region. In the second stage, after observing the level of this deployment of armed force, the independence movement leader chooses a certain level of insurgent activity (or insurgent effort).<sup>2</sup> The occupier deploys forces beforehand, of course expecting resistance and realizing that his forces need to be in place to deter and combat insurgents.

The insurgents resist occupation, even after observing that an occupational force has been deployed to deter them.<sup>3</sup>

The players' actions affect their payoffs in various ways. First, their decisions determine the number of people in the occupied territory who participate in the independence movement. This is to be expected because people deciding to join an independence movement would take into account the level of deployment (and policing) by the occupier. It is assumed that a greater level of policing will discourage participation in the movement, other things remaining the same. The activity level of the movement leader affects the level of mass participation in the movement. More active leadership inspires more people to join, everything else remaining the same. How many people end up joining depends on the combined effect of the strategies of both the movement leader and the occupier.

Before proceeding, let me make an important observation whose implications will be fully apparent later on when the findings of the model are discussed. The strategies the occupier and movement leaders choose may be either *strategic complements* to or *strategic substitutes* for each other, and it will be seen later that whether they are complements or substitutes has important consequences. Game theorists denote players' strategies as complements if an enhanced level of action by one player brings about an enhanced level of action by the other. For strategic substitutability, an enhanced level of action by one player leads to a cutback in the action of the other.

Second, players' decisions lead to consequences for themselves. For example, a movement leader's insurgent activities would lead the occupier to punish her. The extent of the punishment depends not only on the level of insurgent activity chosen, but also on the level of deployment by the occupier. This is because normally a greater level of insurgency would carry a greater mandated punishment level, but the extent to which any punishment can be enforced depends on the level of force the occupier has at hand to enforce the punishment.

Third, punishing protestors is not costless for the occupier. The enforcement cost involved with punishing includes, but is not limited to, the cost of maintaining and provisioning an army. Additionally, significant costs of international sanctions and condemnation might accrue to the occupier. The role of such international pressure might significantly affect the actions of the occupier, as will be seen later. It is reasonable to assume that these costs would increase as the occupier inflicts increased punishment on protestors.

Finally, there is an opportunity cost (described below) for the movement leader. This opportunity cost increases as the leader becomes more active. Usually, economists use the concept of opportunity cost to measure the value of something that must be given up in order to get something else. In the present context, the term is used rather broadly. No doubt, a leader of an independence movement gives up many professional and financial opportunities which she could otherwise have received. The value of these foregone opportunities would

**Result 1: If certain conditions are met then a movement leader with higher opportunity costs will be more active than one with lower opportunity costs. She will also be able to lead an independence movement with greater mass participation.**

figure in her opportunity cost. However, in our particular context, I would like to extend the definition of opportunity cost to include other non-economic costs the leader might have, like psychological, moral, familial, and social costs. Given this broad definition of opportunity cost, it is not difficult to imagine that

different leaders would have different opportunity costs. For example, in the case of the Indian independence struggle, the non-violent moral values of Gandhi and the social background of Nehru (hence their opportunity costs of leading the independence movement) were quite different from those of many other leaders of the Congress Party.<sup>4</sup>

This discussion suggests the following payoffs.

*The movement leader's payoff*

- ▶ is positively influenced by the number of people that participate in the independence movement;
- ▶ is negatively influenced by the opportunity cost she has to bear; and
- ▶ is negatively affected by the amount of punishment directly inflicted by the occupier.

*The occupier's payoff*

- ▶ is positively influenced by the number of people that he manages to discourage from participating in the independence movement; and
- ▶ is negatively influenced by the enforcement cost he has to bear in order to punish the protestors.

Through the strategic choice of their actions, players attempt to maximize their payoffs. While it is true that the framework discussed above does not capture the entire revolutionary process from beginning to end (culminating perhaps in the achievement of independence), it does capture a snapshot that is fairly descriptive of day-to-day decisionmaking processes of revolutionary leaders and occupiers. The following section discusses some results provided by the model.

**How the movement leader's opportunity costs matter**

The analytical framework described in the previous section provides interesting insights into how opportunity costs of a leader affect the nature of independence movements. In this section, I summarize two of these insights.

*Result 1: If all five of the conditions enumerated below are met then a movement leader with higher opportunity costs will be more active than one with lower opportunity costs. She will also be able to lead an independence movement with greater mass participation by the citizens. The conditions are:*<sup>5</sup>

- ▶ the enforcement costs of the occupier fall steeply if he cuts the punishment level of the protestors;
- ▶ a leader with higher opportunity cost is less willing to take advantage of any reductions that might be made in the size of the occupational force by the occupier, compared to a leader with lower opportunity costs;
- ▶ concessions by the occupier lead to greater activity by leaders, but the increase in activity is lower for leaders with high opportunity costs, compared to those with low ones;
- ▶ citizens begin joining the movement when the occupier reduces the level of his security forces and the leader becomes more active; and
- ▶ if the leader increases her activity in a climate where the occupier reduces his troops, the utility arising from the extra followers she wins to the movement outweighs the negative effect of the extra punishment she suffers by being more active.

This result carries interesting implications. It says that a leader like Gandhi, who has greater opportunity costs of leading the movement (perhaps due the moral framework under which he operates), will be able to lead a more successful movement than a leader with fewer such costs. However, for that to happen, the occupier's benefit of reducing his troop levels and allowing a leader like Gandhi greater freedom must also be very high (perhaps due to a lessening of pressure by the international community). Finally, if Gandhi decides to be more active, his utility from winning more converts to his cause must outweigh the increase in punishment he suffers as a result of this increase in his activity. Also note that in an environment where the occupier is reducing his enforcement level, it is easier for the movement leader to win converts to the cause of independence.

There are two main factors behind this result. First, the enforcement costs of the occupier decrease at a higher rate as compared to the rate at which converts are won to the cause of independence. That is, the occupier's benefit from his cost saving outweighs his loss due to the growth of the independence movement. Second, given the high opportunity costs of the leader, her behavior is also more moderate, compared to a leader with lower opportunity costs. Consideration of these factors makes it clear to the occupier that a troop reduction would save a lot on the enforcement cost front while the high opportunity-cost leader would not escalate the conflict too much. This leads to a reduction in the occupational force which the movement leader is able to take advantage of, increase her activities somewhat, and win converts to her cause.<sup>6</sup>

**Result 2: If certain conditions are met then – as compared with a leader with lower opportunity costs – a movement leader with higher costs will only be able to lead an independence movement with reduced mass participation. But even to lead a comparatively small movement, the high cost leader will have to be more active than the low cost one.**

This result suggests an important lesson for the international community that might have a role to play in the resolution of ongoing conflicts in occupied or disputed regions. The international community might want to make the costs of punishing moderate leaders (having high opportunity costs) very high for the occupying powers, perhaps through international sanctions. The role

played by the enforcement costs of the occupier seems significant. But the moderate attitude of the movement leader is also important. Leaders of the Congress-led Indian independence movement, like Gandhi and Nehru, had great international stature, and the cost of punishing them harshly was very high for the British. Further, Gandhi had a moderate attitude, stemming from his moral values. He feared violence might result if the conflict got out of control. In fact, he cancelled the non-cooperation movement when it resulted in violence, even when it seemed to be succeeding against the British. The combination of the costs of the British in repressing Gandhi, along with Gandhi's moderate attitude, enabled him to lead a successful movement.<sup>7</sup> It must be stressed that both the enforcement cost factor and the moderation factor are important in reaching this particular outcome. As mentioned, the international community might have an important role to play in affecting the occupier's enforcement costs.

The second result portrays a very different situation, and it is interesting to note the factors that lead to these differences.

*Result 2: If all four of the conditions listed below are met then – as compared with a leader with lower opportunity costs – a movement leader with higher costs will only be able to lead an independence movement with reduced mass participation. But even to lead a comparatively small movement, the high cost leader will have to be more active than the low cost one.* The conditions are:

- ▶ a higher degree of enforcement by the occupier deters mass participation in the movement so much that the leader has to maintain a high level of activity in order to gain even a few followers;
- ▶ in a climate where the occupier is increasing the level of enforcement (troop levels), the only way for the leader to maintain the movement, even to some degree, is by being very active;
- ▶ the high opportunity cost movement leaders are themselves more reactive

to increased force levels by the occupier, compared to low opportunity cost leaders; and

- ▶ ultimately, the occupier is able to discourage many people from joining the movement by increasing his forces. But some parts of the population remain susceptible to revolutionary propaganda even in face of this increase in force by the occupier (though the leader has to be very active to recruit them).

This movement is very different from the one described in Result 1. Here, the occupier realizes that converting the occupied territory into a garrison state will discourage many people from participating in the independence movement; he therefore adopts a stricter position. Under the circumstances, the movement leader has to raise her activity level a lot just to maintain the movement at a minimal level.

Why is there such a difference between the two results? Why does the occupier accommodate the high-cost leader in the first case, and not in the second? One difference might be the social background in which the independence movements operate, and the way in which citizens react to actions of occupiers and leaders. The model provides a significant clue in this regard. In the first case, it is seen that even when the occupier stands down his troops, the leader needs to increase her effort level in order to recruit more followers. But in the second case, if the occupier were to stand down (hypothetically), there would be an increase in the number of protestors, even if the movement leader were to cut back her effort level. The effort level of the leader and the troop cutback by the occupier are *strategic complements* in the first scenario. In the second scenario, they are *strategic substitutes*. This suggests a fundamental difference in the behavior of the citizens in the two cases. In the first, the citizens might be less prone to rebel against the occupier. In the second, they might be more prone to rebel, and would do so given the chance. Thus, the occupier has to guard against their rebellious nature by maintaining a large garrison. Only an increase in strictness would dissuade many people from joining the independence movement. One could hypothesize that the first scenario is likely to arise more in countries that have a long history of occupation, perhaps like the British colonies in the early twentieth century, where most citizens are used to the idea of being occupied. The general public in these nations would require a lot of exhortation by movement leaders to join nationalistic movements. In contrast, with newly occupied nations, where the sense of independence is still strong, rebellion might break out if there is not a high level of deterrence.

It is also interesting that in the second scenario, the occupier is even stricter when faced with a high opportunity cost leader than with a low opportunity cost leader. This is because the occupier realizes that in this case a high cost leader is quite reactive to increased strictness. In the real world, one might expect these

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high opportunity cost leaders to be students and intellectuals (rather than career politicians), who under normal circumstances are not very prone to insurgent activities. One might expect this group to be driven by emotions to a great extent, and hence more reactive in the face of oppression

(as opposed to career politicians). These leaders might lead low-key movements, using extreme measures to recruit support for their movement.<sup>8, 9</sup>

### How the occupier's aggressiveness matters

In this section, I discuss how an occupier's relative aggressiveness or pacifism affects an independence movement. Historically, some leaders (or governments) in charge of occupying forces have displayed hawkish tendencies, while others have been dovish. For example, when compared to Labor governments, Likud governments in Israel usually adopt more hawkish postures in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. For the present purpose, one can think of a more aggressive occupier as one who, for the same amount of incendiary activity by protestors, inflicts a greater amount of punishment than a pacifist occupier.

Having a more aggressive occupier in control does not guarantee, *per se*, a low-key independence movement. In fact, under certain circumstances a more aggressive occupier faces a larger and more successful resistance than a pacifist occupier. Consider two additional results.

*Result 3: If all four of the conditions listed below obtain then as compared with a pacifist occupier, an aggressive one will face an independence movement with greater activity by the leader, and with more mass support for her. The conditions are:*

- ▶ the aggressive occupier saves substantially on enforcement costs by cutting back troop levels. In fact, given his proclivity for punishing more, these costs will be comparatively higher for a more aggressive occupier, other things remaining the same. So if cutbacks occur, his savings are substantial;
- ▶ when faced with a more aggressive occupier, the movement leader is more wary of increasing her activity level too much, other things being the same;
- ▶ concessions by an aggressive occupier lead to greater activity by the movement leader. But this increase in activity is lower than what the

increase would be if the same concessions were made by a pacifist occupier; and

- ▶ if the movement leader increases her activity in a climate where the occupier reduces his troops, the utility arising from the extra followers she wins to the movement outweighs the negative effect of the extra punishment she suffers by being more active.

More aggressive occupiers, given their predisposition to be harsh, have higher enforcement costs. As mentioned, these costs may arise out of the high level of international pressure and sanctions that a hawkish occupier would face, e.g., due to his intolerance, as compared with a dovish occupier. This intolerance (and the high enforcement costs arising due to it) may make it impracticable for an aggressive occupier to maintain a garrison state. He needs to cut back forces to save on enforcement costs (this lends credibility that he will not be too harsh and wins him some respite from international sanctions, for example). The movement leader is able to use this cutback to raise the level of her activities and gather a mass following. But given the tough attitude of the occupier, the leader will not increase her activities beyond a certain point.

This result suggests that it might be possible for international sanctions to restrain a hawkish occupier. The international community can adopt a carrot and stick approach whereby too much aggressiveness by an occupier is punished and his concessions are rewarded. This will lead to concessions by the occupier. While these concessions will help the independence movement organize itself and be more active, the tough reputation of the occupier (and the fact that he actually does punish more than a pacifist) will prevent a huge revolutionary outburst.<sup>10</sup>

The next result presents a different outcome that might arise, under different circumstances, for an aggressive occupier being in control.

*Result 4: If all four of the conditions listed below are met then – as compared with a pacifist occupier – an aggressive one will face an independence movement with greater activity by the leader. However, in this case, there will be less mass support for the leader. The conditions are:*

**Result 4: If certain conditions are met then – as compared with a pacifist occupier – an aggressive one will face an independence movement with greater activity by the leader. However, in this case, there will be less mass support for the leader.**

- ▶ the enforcement costs should not be too high for the aggressive occupier. In this case, the aggressive occupier will raise his troop levels;
- ▶ when faced with a more aggressive occupier, the movement leader is more

reactive than she would be to a pacifist occupier, other things being the same;

- ▶ when the occupier increases troop levels, the only way for the movement leader to maintain the movement is by being very active; and
- ▶ ultimately, the occupier is able to discourage many people from joining the movement by increasing his forces. But some parts of the population remain susceptible to revolutionary propaganda even in face of this increase in force by the occupier (though the leader has to be very active to recruit them).

Here, it is not very costly for the occupier to increase the level of his troops, and he also realizes that converting the occupied territory into a garrison state will discourage many people from participating in the independence movement. Thus, he adopts a stricter policy, much more than a pacifist occupier would. This policy is completely in keeping with his natural aggressive nature. Under the circumstances, the movement leader has to raise her activity level a lot just to maintain the independence movement at a minimal level. In this case the leader also realizes that when facing a more aggressive foe, she must also be quick to respond to his aggressiveness in order to carry forward her movement.

For results 3 and 4, the effect of the occupier's aggressiveness has different outcomes for the independence movement. The main differences may stem from the way the public reacts to the players' strategies, the costs of enforcement for the occupier, and how reactive movement leaders are to an aggressive occupier versus a pacifist occupier. As far as the reactions of the citizens are concerned, in the first case (result 3) they might be less prone to rebel against the occupier. In the second case (result 4) they might be more likely to rebel. This conclusion is drawn because in the first case it is observed that the effort level of the leader and the troop cutback by the occupier are *strategic complements*, and in the second case they are *strategic substitutes*. In the second case, the occupier's strictness may be able to stop many people from joining the movement and his enforcement costs are also not too high. This may cause him to give full vent to his aggressiveness. The leader has to be very active to keep the movement alive.

## Conclusion

This article is able to suggest some explanations as to why some independence movements are able to achieve mass participation by the citizenry while others are restricted to a much narrower support base. It also sheds light on how active leaders with different opportunity costs need to be to lead viable independence movements. The findings demonstrate that the outcomes are affected by the crucial interplay between personal characteristics of the leaders of the movement, the personal characteristics of the occupier, the proclivity of the citizens, and the

cost structure of the players.

This article leaves at least two questions unanswered. First, it does not analyze which type of independence movement (among those characterized in the article) would be most successful in achieving the ultimate, long-run goal of independence. The game-theoretic model discussed here provides a short-term snapshot of an independence movement. More research is needed to establish whether the short-term recipe for success also leads to long-term success. Second, the model does not consider qualitative aspect of insurgent activity. One of the most important qualitative aspects of insurgent effort is whether it is violent or non-violent, and this element might greatly impact the nature of an independence movement. Further research might incorporate this qualitative aspect.

The results described here are theoretical in nature. Like other scholars, I have used game-theoretic models to seek answers to questions in the area of conflict. However, the ultimate reality check of these theoretical findings lies in their empirical validation. Future research should attempt to perform this validation.

## Notes

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1. Game theory has been used by many researchers to study conflict situations. For examples, see Garfinkel and Skaperdas (1996); Grossman (1991); Hirshleifer (1989); Roemer (1985); and Skaperdas (1992).

2. Insurgent activity may include methods like propaganda, building of resistance networks, or even direct attacks on occupiers.

3. For a technical description and analysis of the model see Gupta (2006). Interested readers are welcome to contact me for a copy of this paper.

4. For instance, Gandhi called off the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22) when it got out of hand and led to violence. For him, the moral costs of bloodshed were too great. So he suspended the movement, even at the cost of the freedom struggle losing its momentum. In the case of Nehru, he belonged to the Anglicized upper classes. Schooled at Harrow, the famous British public school, and admitted to the Bar in London, he had strong social ties with the British elites. These ties were affected as

he became more involved in the freedom struggle.

5. These conditions do not depend on each other for their occurrence. This is also true of the conditions that will be stated for the other results that follow later in this article.

6. As low opportunity-cost movement leaders have a proclivity toward the escalation of their activities, the occupier would fear a natural escalation of the conflict while dealing with them. Thus, even with high enforcement costs, they might maintain a large occupational force rather than reducing troop levels and facing a huge escalation of conflict.

7. Scholars of Indian history might argue that the British were, in fact, quite severe with both Gandhi and Nehru, as evinced by the time they spent in jail. However, there seems to be a difference in the British treatment of leaders with lower stature. Leaders like Lokmanya Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, as well as leaders of the Bengal Revolutionary Movement (1907-1930) seem to have been much more harshly treated by the British. They were sentenced to longer prison terms in penal colonies (Tilak and some leaders of the Bengal Revolutionary Movement) or were subjected to stringent police action (Rai died from injuries sustained from police beatings). For accounts of the Indian independence movement see Harris (1991) and Sharma (2005).

8. Future research in this area might try to investigate the possibility of classifying real-world independence movements into the two categories outlined here.

9. There is a lingering question as to why large-scale successful movements led by leaders like Gandhi (who have high moral costs of protest) are less common historically than those led by more militant leaders. A recent paper by two behavioral economists suggests that when economic choices are strategic complements, a minority of “irrational” individuals may sway a majority of “rational” individuals and cause outcomes at odds with predictions of traditional models built on economists’ rationality assumption (Camerer and Fehr, 2006). My (rational) model predicts that when occupier and movement leader follow complementary strategies, leaders like Gandhi would come forward to lead viable independence movements when faced by “rational” occupiers (who would be somewhat accommodating to such leaders, under certain circumstances). However, resorting to the logic of Camerer and Fehr, if high opportunity cost leaders like Gandhi were to face “irrational” rivals, who would be aggressive (and not accommodating, as predicted by the rational model), then they would be unable to lead viable movement, especially in the case of strategic complementarity. This line of thought might be worth exploring further and may enable us to ascribe a reason why independence movements along the lines of the Gandhian movement are historically rare.

10. Some similarity may be observed in this outcome and the unilateral withdrawal offer made in 2005 by the then Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon, who was considered by many to be one of the toughest among all Israeli prime ministers.

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