The Tiger's Nest Monastery high above Paro, Bhutan. Bhutan shows how small island-like states can succeed in influencing global policies and dynamics.
Arctic Adventures photo

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Explaining conflicts and cooperation among islands:

Towards a unified framework

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to provide an overview of island cooperation, collaboration, and conflict from a global perspective. The discussion starts by looking at the scope of potential interactions between island jurisdictions (both as independent states and subnational island jurisdictions) around the world, in particular their similarities and differences — which might hint

at the major factors that underpin the specific conflicts and areas of cooperation among islands, and between islands and mainland powers. Next, the chapter will introduce the theoretical framework of cooperation and conflict in the literature, which mainly includes realism and liberalism. Based on the discussion, the chapter will explore if, and in what ways, island interaction might be either similar or different from that which takes place among other forms of political jurisdictions. The chapter concludes by way of a two-dimensional island-centric typology, which can incorporate the unique interactions involving islands into a unified framework.

INTRODUCTION

Islands have long been a major source of territorial disputes and geopolitical conflict among nations. The Issue Correlates of War Project has identified more than 800 territorial disputes since 1816 (Frederick et al., 2017). Generally speaking, territories which are often associated with natural resources, religious sites, or historical homeland claims often induce more disputes and conflicts when compared to others. Although it is widely perceived that these disputes and conflicts could easily escalate into larger scale military wars, in reality the issue is far more complicated. While some of these nations remain hostile and antagonistic towards one another, most remain tolerant or even cooperative. While nations remain keen to claim power and control over islands in order to secure their interests and maximize their power, increasing economic interdependence and the growing importance of international institutions has helped to mediate or resolve nation-to-nation conflicts over islands. Using the lens of international relations theories, one can better understand how territorial disputes and conflicts are understood through the larger dimensions of conflict and cooperation, and approaches ranging from negotiation and compromise to aggression and war.

INCREASING ECONOMIC interdependence and the growing importance of international institutions has helped to mediate or resolve nation-to-nation conflicts over islands.

The study of islands is intricately tied with economic development, as well as openness and connectivity among nations across the world. Their influence goes well beyond their land area, population size, and resource abundance, including how they affect the structure and dynamics of the international system. This explains why Vasquez (2009) takes the position that disputes regarding territory are often the most conflict-prone and fatal, including escalating into inter-state wars. Nonetheless, Owsiak (2012) suggests that the resolution of territorial disputes and stable borders are also linked to the more rapid bilateral trade flows and much higher likelihood of joint democratization (though it is less clear if the relationship is endogenous). The emergence of territorial disputes across the world reflects the fundamental fact that

contexts and conditions matter a lot when analysing the controversial issue of islands among nation states, and it is simplistic to view state relations as a binary of either conflict or cooperation. As is the case with much recent research by Hassner (2007), Nagy (2013), and Fang and Li (2020), we believe that a single international relations framework oversimplifies the matter and cannot sufficiently account for the unique dynamics and tensions that emerge from territorial disputes across many islands (Yu & Li, 2020). Taking this position, and recognizing the multifaceted and complex nature of islands, this chapter will develop such a framework by employing and integrating different international relations schools of thought. We start by first reviewing several of the mainstream international relations frameworks so as to better understand the various perspectives on conflict and cooperation among states. A series of representative cases involving island disputes and conflicts around the world is then presented to illustrate the specific circumstances that lead to conflict and cooperation. We then conclude by presenting a new analytical framework for the incorporation of islands into traditional theoretical perspectives on cooperation and conflict that are informed by the two fundamental concepts of realism and liberalism.

RELATIVE SIGNIFICANCE OF ISLANDS

In order to place the subject of islands in the framework of international relations, we first have to understand how islands are differentiated from other entities. Generally speaking, 'islands' are referring to the presumed features of islands or islanders (see the chapter by Kelman in this volume). Nonetheless, as the attributes of islandness are diverse and might not be applicable to all types of islands (Grydehøj, 2020a), the concept of 'islandness' is employed here to study the physical properties and social characteristics of islands as an intervening variable to understand them (Ma, 2020). According to Baldacchino (2006), much of island studies focuses on the composition of islandness, as well as its impact on natural ecology, human behavior, political economy, social culture, tourism development, and other dimensions, which are all embedded in the discussion in the following sections. All of these aspects are believed to be shaping and influencing the unique features of islands around the world. After all, 'islandness' is a highly complicated concept, which is also because islands are sometimes open or insular to the larger world. This line of thought is crucial in relation to the focus of this chapter, which is the conflict and cooperation across islands. On one hand, some islands prefer to become more interconnected and interdependent to facilitate economic and diplomatic linkages. On the other hand, some islands would rather be more autonomous and independent given the divergence of values and interests.

As shown in Tables 7.1 and 7.2, the economic significance of islands, especially when compared to other jurisdictions in the region (as defined by the World Bank [2021]), should never be underestimated. While there is a considerable level of overlap

TABLE 7.1: **Economic Features of Islands in Asia and the Pacific, 2018**

		GDP per capita (US$)	Trade (% of GDP)	FDI inflow (% of GDP)	Resources (% of GDP)
Asia	Japan	48,766	36.82	0.50	0.03
	Singapore	59,073	326.94	24.39	0.00
	Indonesia	4,285	43.00	1.81	4.78
	Timor-Leste	848	63.01	3.06	33.55
	Brunei Darussalam	31,437	93.90	3.80	25.43
	Philippines	3,191	72.16	2.87	1.47
	Sri Lanka	3,946	53.23	1.83	0.06
	Maldives	8,033	146.24	10.81	0.00
	Bahrain	21,478	151.40	0.30	4.34
Asian islands average		*20,117*	*109.63*	*5.48*	*7.74*
Regional average (East Asia and Pacific)		*10,326*	*57.43*	*2.32*	*1.74*
Oceania	New Zealand	38,764	55.94	1.02	1.32
	Papua New Guinea	2,419	131.10	4.85	24.52
	Solomon Islands	1,483	98.40	1.79	22.08
	Vanuatu	2,862	97.90	4.15	0.54
	Fiji	4,795	–	8.47	1.47
	Tonga	4,055	98.22	3.34	0.03
	Samoa	3,749	84.51	2.04	0.27
	Nauru	8,143	105.63	0.00	0.00
	Micronesia, Fed. States	2,729	100.85	–	0.02
	Marshall Islands	3,067	125.73	4.41	0.00
	Kiribati	1,778	98.39	-0.58	0.04
	Tuvalu	3,636	–	0.70	0.00
	Palau	12,260	123.30	7.57	0.00
	Cook Islands	27,694	–	–	–
	Niue	17,032	–	–	–
Oceania islands average		*8,964*	*101.82*	*3.15*	*3.87*
Regional average (Pacific island small states)		*3,358*	–	*5.95*	*3.83*

NOTE: List of islands follows Randall (2020). Missing data are represented by "–". "Regional average" refers to the average of the corresponding region, as classified by the World Bank (The World Bank Group, 2021).
Source: World Bank World Development Indicators (The World Bank Group, n.d.).

in group membership, especially within regions, the comparison is useful in identifying the relative characteristics of the region and the islands. As is often the case with small islands, they are closely connected economically with each other and with mainland jurisdictions, with a strong and rapid exchange of goods, services, capital, and people. As Table 7.1 shows, in comparison to the average state in East Asia and the Pacific, the small islands in this region experience about twice the value of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (in constant 2010 US$) and trade as a percentage of GDP, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow as a percentage of GDP is almost 2.4 times greater on the islands in this area than the regional average. One of the most noticeable and distinguishing features of islands is the abundance of resources, in this case defined as the total natural resource rents as a share of GDP. On average, Asian islands have more than four times the share of GDP associated with resource production than is the case for all jurisdictions in East Asia and the Pacific. In fact, similar figures can also be found among islands across all of Oceania (i.e., the Pacific). Taken as a whole, the statistics in Table 7.1 suggest that islands perform consistently better than mainland jurisdictions in the importance of trade, FDI inflows, and resource production, all measured as a percentage of GDP.

If we extend this comparison to other parts of the world, a similar pattern holds. Table 7.2 (next page) shows that European islands have a consistently higher GDP per capita, trade as percentage of GDP, and FDI inflows than all jurisdictions within the European Union (EU), as one can once again see a stronger economic performance of the former than the latter. The islands of this region do substantially better than the EU average in terms of GDP per capita (1.27 times), trade in terms of percentage of GDP (1.72 times), and FDI inflow in terms of percentage of GDP (3.31 times). When a comparison is drawn between an average of African islands and the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, we can likewise see a consistently higher economic performance of islands than that which exists across the region. This is true in terms of GDP per capita (3.18 times greater), trade in terms of percentage of GDP (1.85 times greater), and FDI inflow in terms of percentage of GDP (3.41 times greater). Furthermore, when comparing islands in the Caribbean and all political jurisdictions in Latin America and the Caribbean, the former has a better performance than the latter in areas of GDP per capita (1.14 times greater), trade in terms of percentage of GDP (1.76 times greater), and FDI inflow in terms of percentage of GDP (1.43 times greater).

All of these comparisons suggest the folly of thinking of islands as vulnerable, marginalized economic entities within the larger global economy. Nonetheless, a lingering question is how to facilitate more networks and closer partnerships across nations when conflict and cooperation among states with regard to islands seems to be occurring at the same time. This requires one to unfold the larger dynamics of the global political economy, so as to better understand the possibilities of the future development of island economies.

TABLE 7.2: Economic Features of Islands in Europe, Africa, and Latin America/the Caribbean, 2018

		GDP per capita (US$)	Trade (% of GDP)	FDI inflow (% of GDP)	Resources (% of GDP)
Europe	Cyprus	31,507	145.34	20.86	0.01
	Iceland	51,593	92.02	-2.42	0.00
	United Kingdom	43,324	62.62	2.84	0.66
	Ireland	76,663	211.51	17.60	0.13
	Malta	28,758	268.77	32.53	0.00
European islands average		*46,369*	*156.05*	*14.28*	*0.16*
Regional average (European Union)		*36,608*	*90.95*	*-0.42*	*0.20*
Africa	Cabo Verde	3,740	117.27	5.49	0.38
	Madagascar	490	62.50	4.42	6.09
	Seychelles	14,417	182.35	19.40	0.09
	Mauritius	10,577	95.11	2.62	0.00
	Comoros	1,403	43.09	0.58	1.39
	São Tomé and Príncipe	1,297	–	5.61	1.90
African islands average		*5,321*	*100.07*	*6.35*	*1.64*
Regional average (Sub-Saharan Africa)		*1,675*	*54.00*	*1.86*	*10.33*
Caribbean	Cuba	6,817	27.09	–	0.68
	Haiti	730	75.55	1.09	0.68
	Dominican Republic	7,698	52.06	3.21	1.45
	Jamaica	4,855	89.03	4.93	1.32
	Bahamas, The	27,261	77.35	3.96	0.01
	St. Kitts and Nevis	16,943	116.66	9.26	0.00
	Antigua and Barbuda	15,135	90.20	8.39	0.00
	St. Vincent and the Grenadines	6,853	85.20	13.56	0.02
	St. Lucia	9,237	–	1.94	0.01
	Grenada	9,092	111.00	13.16	0.00
	Barbados	16,137	80.99	4.75	0.07
	Trinidad and Tobago	15,161	–	-2.95	10.61
	Dominica	6,694	109.88	2.41	0.03
Caribbean islands average		*10,970*	*83.19*	*5.31*	*1.15*
Regional average (Latin America and Caribbean)		*9,588*	*47.26*	*3.70*	*4.43*

NOTE: List of islands follows Randall (2020). Observations refer to 2018, and the most recent data are used in case of missing data. "–" indicates missing data. "Regional average" refers to the average of the corresponding region, as classified by the World Bank (The World Bank Group, 2021). Source: Data from the World Bank World Development Indicators (The World Bank Group, n.d.).

CONFLICT AND COOPERATION BETWEEN STATES

Although islands are on average smaller than mainland political jurisdictions in terms of share of land area and world population, based on the analysis of economic capacity articulated above it is clear that their significance is far more substantial. The same goes for their geopolitical roles. This section begins with an overview of international conflict, one of the most important aspects of international interactions, with intrastate cooperation being a related and significant dimension. The emergence of international conflict can be attributed primarily to the differences of interests among states. One of the most long-standing and central puzzles in the field is why wars recur throughout the centuries, despite the fact that wars are so costly and risky. It is even more difficult to understand how what one might assume are careful and rational actors are inclined to make such decisions for their states. To these decision-makers, the anticipated gains from a war in terms of power, territory, resources, and glory must far exceed the anticipated costs, including potential damage to property and loss of life. Without this prerequisite understanding, there can indeed be no lasting peace (Braumoeller, 2019; Jackson & Morelli, 2011; Vasquez, 1993). Therefore, many international relations scholars are interested in exploring why rational states, who one might expect should prefer a bargained solution over violent conflict, instead opt for war (Fearon, 1995; Goemans & Fey, 2009). In other words, these scholars analyze the factors that hinder or prevent states from arriving at an outcome preferable to war. Arriving at this understanding is important, because scholars can then better disentangle the dynamics and complexities of conflicts and cooperation among states in the contemporary world.

Conflict

An understanding of the motivations of those states that prefer conflict rather than cooperation may be explained by the conceptual frameworks of *structural realism* (James, 1995; Waltz, 2000), *the security dilemma* (Jervis, 1978), and *rationalist explanations of war* (Fearon, 1995). All of these frameworks suggest that individuals are by default aggressive and selfish, meaning that their principal focus is on gaining power and security within the self-help anarchical international system (Havercroft & Prichard, 2017). As such, they are less willing to cultivate trust and confidence with one another, hindering the possibility of initiating mutually beneficial and peaceful cooperation with other states.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE motivations of those states that prefer conflict rather than cooperation may be explained by the conceptual frameworks of *structural realism, the security dilemma*, and *rationalist explanations of war.*

Maximization of power and security (Structural realism)

According to structural realists such as James (1995) and Waltz (2000), structure causes conflict in international relations. They believe that the international system is anarchical, meaning that there is an absence of a higher authority above states. The key units are independent and undifferentiated states who seek their own survival under a self-help system. In order to achieve security, states must maximize their power by all means possible (Buzan et al., 1993). In this framework, power is interpreted as a zero-sum game, where an increase in one actor's power automatically leads to a decrease in another actor's power. States aim to maximize relative rather than absolute power gains (Snidal, 1991). The constant and intense struggle for power among states means that conflict is somehow unavoidable. Under the offensive version of structural realism, there is a belief that the most effective way to be secure is to maximize power through domination and hegemony, where initiating war is one of the most prominent ways to achieve security. States should aim for hegemony wherever possible, which leads to a highly competitive international system (Snyder, 2002). Even when states are not attempting to heighten their own power, they cannot trust that other states are also behaving passively. States always safeguard and strengthen their own interests by seeking further control despite no observable threats.

IN A STRUCTURAL REALISM framework, power is interpreted as a zero-sum game, where an increase in one actor's power automatically leads to a decrease in another actor's power.

Lack of mutual trust and confidence (The security dilemma)

Also associated with the realist tradition, the security dilemma has long been employed to illustrate the hindrances that different states would encounter when attempting to attain peace and cooperation (Jervis, 1978). Whenever there are policies or initiatives that a state pursues to enhance its own security, such as building up arms, committing to the use of weapons, or forming alliances, these reduce its adversary's security. This often happens when states are uncertain or distrustful of their adversaries' underlying intentions. Any security-seeking action put forward by a state may be perceived by another state as something threatening, which might in turn be perceived as aggressive by the former state. This induces a spiraling effect of action, such that states can ensure survival in an anarchic environment (Booth & Wheeler, 2007).

Egoism and self-interest (Rationalist explanations of war)

According to Fearon (1995), there are several standard rationalist explanations of war. First, under the anarchic international system, there is an absence of a supranational authority which otherwise may have been able to coerce, punish, or penalize state

violence. This makes states more likely to turn to war to resolve conflicts. In particular, strong states are more inclined to employ military means to force weaker or more vulnerable states to capitulate. Moreover, some nations think that the expected benefits of initiating wars outweigh expected costs. War is a rational option when the expected outcomes of war are perceived as being beneficial for both states. Furthermore, states will sometimes engage in preventative war. This usually occurs when a state is declining in power, while another state is surging in power. These commitment problems can be linked to the large shifts in the future distribution of power. An example would be the Peloponnesian War when Sparta feared the surging power of Athens. The changes in relative power over time affects the bargaining power of states. Since a declining power may anticipate an attack from a surging power in the near future, it may prefer to rationally initiate a preventive war, rather than being forced to make concessions by bargaining later on.

Nevertheless, Fearon (1995) argued that none of these explanations adequately address why states do not negotiate a settlement that would be superior to the costs and risks associated with fighting for all parties. He suggested three alternatives which may better explain the puzzle from a rationalist lens. First, the absence of negotiation may be due to the fact that there is an absence of complete information about relative capabilities or resolve, or there is an incentive to misrepresent information about state power so as to attain a better deal. Since states are egoistic, as suggested by Wendt (1992), they often attain benefits by bluffing in a world full of uncertainties (Mercer, 1995). Since stronger or more resolved states tend to dominate at the bargaining table, they tend to misrepresent their information and position in order to make the informational problem even more challenging. Moreover, commitment problems may hinder the emergence of a settlement that would lead both parties to prefer war. This may exist in situations wherein states would have incentives to renege on the terms of non-binding agreements. Furthermore, there is no consensus due to issue indivisibilities, meaning that some issues in dispute by nature do not allow for compromise across an array of components or issues.

Cooperation

Despite all of the forces that might lead to conflict, there are also incentives for states to seek cooperation. The two main frameworks to better understand cooperation are liberalism (Dorussen & Ward, 2010; Oneal et al., 1996) and neo-institutionalism (Keohane, 2011; Stein, 2008). Both of these suggest that individuals are by default capable of resisting aggression and violence. Nonetheless, cooperation among states is only possible when anarchical conditions are minimized, which requires various international institutions to balance and facilitate the relationships. These institutions play important roles in formulating rules and norms that bound the behaviour of individual states, and promote interdependence and integration among states.

Common gains (Liberalism)

According to liberalists such as Oneal et al. (1996), international trade is often viewed as a means to contribute to world peace and prevent war. State leaders are less willing to damage their well-established trade relations and the economic benefits that accrue from trade by engaging in aggressive war and military conflict with their trading partners (McDonald, 2004; Tanious, 2019). Therefore, given the current and expected gains from trade, countries would prefer to gain by trade rather than gaining by war (Martin et al., 2010). Trade can also help to cultivate better mutual understanding between societies and individuals, which in turn reduces mistrust or misunderstanding and leads to more peaceful relations among states (Dorussen & Ward, 2010). Given that states seek to maximize absolute welfare, maintaining strong trade relations should be seen as rational behaviour by states. States with recurrent and extensive trade ties are strongly incentivized to sustain or even deepen their peaceful relations (Simpson, 2019). Therefore, Copeland (1996) has argued that there is reason for optimism as long as such high levels of interdependence can be maintained.

TRADE CAN ALSO HELP TO cultivate better mutual understanding between societies and individuals, which in turn reduces mistrust or misunderstanding and leads to more peaceful relations among states.

Common security (Neo-liberal institutionalism)

Neo-liberal institutionalists such as Keohane (2011) and Stein (2008) accept that states must pursue their interests under the conditions of anarchy. They counter the realist assumption that international cooperation could only occur under hegemony by suggesting that, even in an anarchic world, the prospect of cooperation is not a zero-sum game. Instead, complex interdependence is manifested across various dimensions like the economy and the environment, meaning that states are striving to attain mutual goals and interests (Genest, 2004). Mutual interests pave the way for cooperation as states seek to maximize absolute gains.

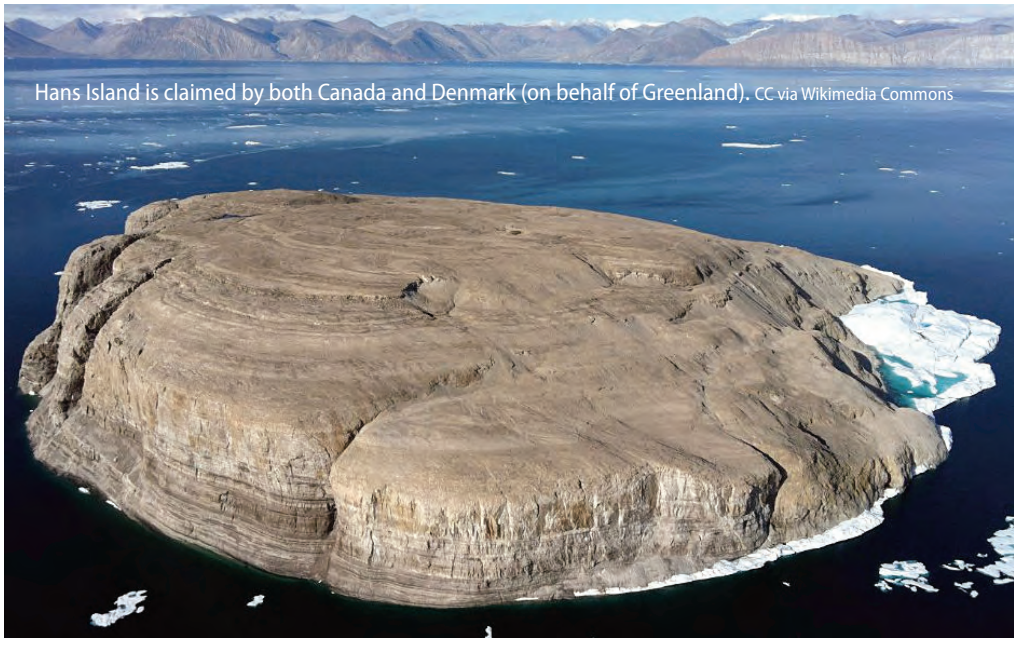
It is widely understood that even during conditions of cooperation, states may cheat or free-ride, and it can be costly to cooperate. These challenges are greater when there is no overarching enforcer. Therefore, states have constructed a series of international institutions or regimes throughout the decades to maintain world peace and order (e.g., the United Nations), advocate for free trade (e.g., World Trade Organization), stabilize the global economy (e.g., the International Monetary Fund), and alleviate global poverty (e.g., the World Bank). All of these help states overcome collective action problems, advocate for global welfare, and cultivate a wide range of shared values and norms, which in turn facilitate cooperation.

APPLICATIONS OF REALISM AND LIBERALISM IN UNDERSTANDING ISLAND CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

Throughout the centuries, a series of scholarly arguments and explanations have emerged from realism and liberalism to account for the maintenance of peace and resolution of conflicts. Understanding territorial disputes between and among islands is no exception. Nonetheless, the following case studies go further by offering a series of contexts and conditions that help to better understand the underlying mechanisms of the conceptual frameworks summarized above. In some examples, one explanatory framework may dominate, while in other situations, conflict and cooperation, as represented by realism and liberalism, may coexist.

Hans Island

Hans Island is a 1.3 km^2 rock islet in the Arctic with no inhabitants or resources. Nonetheless, it holds strategic transportation importance given its location in the Kennedy Channel separating Ellesmere Island (Canada) from Greenland (an autonomous territory of Denmark) (McRae, 2007). As is the case in the East China Sea, the area surrounding Hans Island is also assumed to be rich in fossil fuel reserves. Canada has assumed ownership of the island through the title of acquisition of the territory based on the British Adjacent Territories Order of 1880, while Denmark bases its claim to the island in part on the belief that it was named after a Greenlandic explorer, Hans Hendrik (Stevenson, 2007). Throughout the 20th century, both Canada and Denmark have taken turns in "conquering" the island with troops and have raised their respective



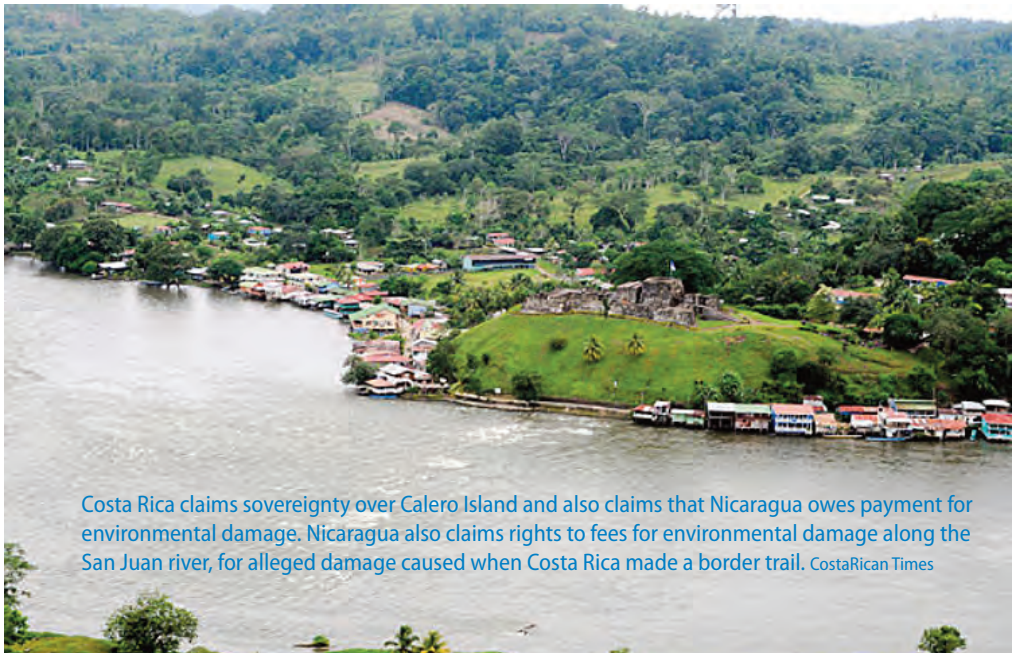
Hans Island is claimed by both Canada and Denmark (on behalf of Greenland). CC via Wikimedia Commons

national flags. Nonetheless, disputes over border demarcation have been recently resolved via bilateral agreements using a cooperative approach (Global Affairs Canada, 2018), and there has yet to be any military encounters on the island (Stevenson, 2007).

According to a liberalism approach, democratic states should prefer to avoid the initiation of any war which might threaten long-term stability and prosperity for all parties (Ray, 1998). After all, both Canada and Denmark are constitutional monarchies with parliamentary democracies and are highly supportive of peacekeeping around the world. There is also a normative imperative for them to resolve differences through non-violent means. More pragmatically, both countries are trying to maintain and strengthen a mutually beneficial trade relationship, as well as international cooperation in various research and development initiatives, including in higher education as well as in science and technology. The vested interests held by both nations helps avoid conflicts due to the substantial and recurrent economic gains that are at stake (Stevenson, 2007). Meanwhile, many interest groups are involved across these well-established and intimate networks and ties, which help impose constraints on the actual decisions and behaviours of the national leaders (Grady, 1978). Even if there may be an underlying desire to initiate war, these impulses are controlled because of the fear of public pressure. States that find themselves in situations such as this will remain cautious and careful, especially balancing and coordinating competing interests, when they are dealing with territorial disputes (Jönsson, 2014).

Calero Island

Located in the delta at the mouth of the San Juan and Colorado Rivers separating Nicaragua and Costa Rica, ownership of Calero Island has been disputed between the two countries for two centuries. Internationally, most nations have viewed Calero Island to be part of Costa Rica. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) once provisionally ruled that both countries should refrain from maintaining civilians, security forces, or police on the island (Bons, 2015). Unlike the case presented above, in this situation both countries have low levels of bilateral trade and investment, meaning that the potential economic disruptions would be limited under the dispute. This also implies that the earlier approach of analysing the dispute through economic liberalism is not as useful in this context. The involvement of the ICJ highlights the importance of international institutions in influencing the preferences and actions of states in the unavoidable anarchic world environment (Kolb, 2013). According to liberal institutionalism, the promotion of institutionalization is crucial for preventing states from engaging in disputes, and advancing collective interest, which in turn promotes international stability (Grieco, 1988). It is always tempting for both sides to adopt a more aggressive stance, which could potentially escalate into armed conflict and lead to a breakdown in their diplomatic relations. Nonetheless, international institutions are



Costa Rica claims sovereignty over Calero Island and also claims that Nicaragua owes payment for environmental damage. Nicaragua also claims rights to fees for environmental damage along the San Juan river, for alleged damage caused when Costa Rica made a border trail. CostaRican Times

essential in facilitating both parties to negotiate and compromise for the sake of attaining a diplomatic outcome. With the involvement of the ICJ, despite the anarchic world environment, it becomes possible for such external organisations to formulate an objective decision that both parties are required to follow, which might be more likely to avoid further disputes and conflicts than if they attempted to settle these issues surrounding Calero Island between themselves.

Islands and the Belt and Road Initiative

As a result of their small size, specialization, and location in strategic waterways, foreign linkages have always been critical for the sustainability of many islands (Dornan & Pryke, 2017; Ferdinand et al., 2020; Karlsson, 2009). Despite their resilience, there is also a need for islands to seek out and maintain economic and political relationships with large states (Armstrong & Read, 2000; Campling, 2006; Grydehøj, 2020b). Given the resources associated with a typical small island state, its relationship with large states is likely to be asymmetrical (Wivel & Oest, 2010). However, this does not mean that the relationship is necessarily one of domination or exploitation. Cooperation is actually very common in such asymmetric relationships, with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) being a recent prime example. According to Kwong and Wong (2020), the Faroe Islands and Greenland, both self-governing island territories of Denmark, have demonstrated different degrees of readiness to cooperate with China under the BRI framework. Following the traditions of realist theories, it is argued that the difference might be attributable to the economic and diplomatic interests enjoyed by hegemons in

the island entities. From this perspective, it may not be surprising that the likelihood of cooperation is greatest where islands are not heavily influenced by a major power, or where an island can leverage itself strategically between different powers.

According to Beck (2020), although many small Pacific island countries describe themselves as large ocean states due to their large Exclusive Economic Zones and historic connections to the sea, attempts made by various regional organizations to develop regional synergies through political and economic cooperation are not substantial and prominent enough to place them in a more symmetrical relationship with larger states. Many of the exchanges and partnerships still take place in a fragmented and piecemeal manner, often leading to a disarticulated and incoherent system. The ideal of regionalism is often greater than the outcomes. This hinders the potential of international cooperation that might otherwise be associated with these islands (Jumeau, 2013).

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A UNIFIED FRAMEWORK OF ISLAND COOPERATION AND CONFLICT

The emerging literature on small states suggests that these jurisdictions have attained a disproportionately high level of democracy and regime stability (Baldacchino, 2012; Corbett & Veenendaal, 2016; Veenendaal, 2020). As an example using a metaphorical island, Theys and Rietig (2020) focus on Bhutan, a small, landlocked, developing country geographically situated between India and China; the two most populous countries in the world. Despite the close proximity of these major state actors, Bhutan has been able to exert substantial global influence and internal well-being, especially on the issue of measures of happiness and sustainability governance. Bhutan succeeded in putting the concept of happiness on the global agenda when the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) unanimously adopted *Resolution 65/309*, calling for a holistic development approach aimed at promoting sustainable happiness and well-being (Theys & Rietig, 2020). While such an achievement might be dismissed as symbolic, this case does contradict traditional international theories, which tend to regard small states as being synonymous with high vulnerability and limited capacity to effect change on the world stage (Keohane, 1969). Despite the structural vulnerabilities associated with Bhutan, such as a disadvantaged geographical location and limited material resources, their goals and strategic approach to governance and international issues are critical to understanding their approach in this context (Theys & Rietig, 2020). The case of Bhutan shows how small island-like states can succeed in influencing global policies and dynamics.

THE CASE OF BHUTAN SHOWS how small island-like states can succeed in influencing global policies and dynamics.

The same argument can be applied to islands, arguably with a greater theoretical impetus, given some of the unique characteristics of islands as compared to continental small states. It should be noted that the concept of an island-centric governance model is by no means a novel contribution (Overton et al., 2018; Prinsen & Blaise, 2017). Instead, the framework suggested (see Table 7.3) has several features distinguishing it from other classifications: (i) it explicitly focuses on the international relations dimensions of islands; (ii) it allows for the possibility that islands can be either an "actor" or a "subject" in international conflict/cooperation; and (iii) it connects island-specific discussions with the "mainstream" international relations studies, thus providing a "unifying framework".

Drawing on some of the foregoing discussion, a two-dimensional island-centric typology can be suggested to incorporate the unique interactions involving islands (see Table 7.3). Islands can feature in international politics in two forms: as points of contention (i.e., islands themselves as the subject of sovereignty disputes) or as participants (i.e., islands as a party in international relations). The second dimension is about whether one or both of the parties involved is an island. Within this framework, 'island-specific conflicts' refer to disputes involving at least one island over issues involving island sovereignty. An example might be the dispute over the Diaoyu Islands (an archipelago) between Japan (itself also an island archipelago) and China. Alternatively, if two non-islands lay their claim over an island entity, it would be better regarded as a "traditional" territorial dispute. Third, other non-sovereignty-related issues involving an island might refer to general concerns affecting islands (e.g., global warming) which create conditions for cooperation as well as conflict. Finally, the residual category in the bottom-right hand corner of Table 7.3 comprises other issues between non-island countries and is not part of the scope of this chapter.

TABLE 7.3: A Preliminary Framework of Island-Centric Cooperation and Conflict

	Island as a Participant (at least one party is an island)	**Between Two Non-Islands**
Sovereignty disputes involving islands	Island-specific conflicts	"Traditional" territorial disputes
Other issues	Cooperation/conflicts	X (out of scope)

Two-dimensional island-centric typology classifying conflicts and cooperation between and regarding islands.
Source: Author (M. Y. H. Wong).

Such a framework implies that, first, islands might behave differently in international interactions and, second, territorial disputes over islands (instead of over mainland areas) might have different dynamics. Both of these premises are highly plausible given the specific and often unique attributes of islands as discussed above. The same holds true for cooperation, as issues faced by islands are likely to be more similar than those faced by non-island countries.

Although this framework presents only a rudimentary typology of classifying conflicts and cooperation between islands, the important point here is that it theorizes how we can explicitly include islands in the study of international relations, which typically do not feature islands. The framework also distinguishes between how islands are involved in current debates, either as a participant or as a subject. For any researcher of international relations, for instance, territorial disputes over an island might carry different implications than one involving a mainland jurisdiction. Such a framework uniquely bridges the discussion among scholars of Island Studies, those who are focused on sovereignty disputes over islands, and other international relations researchers in general. Future studies might further build on the classification to highlight the unique dynamics of island-centric interactions.

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