

Strategic Choice Approach

- Realist, liberal, and constructivist theories are general theories international politics.
- Strategic choice approach is not a theory with pre-specified actors, goals, etc.
- The strategic choice approach is a method of analyzing strategic decision-making.

Strategic Choice Approach

- What is strategy?
- The interaction between two or more actors, when each is trying to maximize its own gains.
- The strategies chosen, and outcomes obtained, depend on choices of others.
- Uses game theory to analyze interactions (more next week).
- Zero-sum games: one player's gain is another player's loss (e.g. warfare).
- Positive-sum gains: both players can benefit (e.g. trade talks).

Actors & Environments

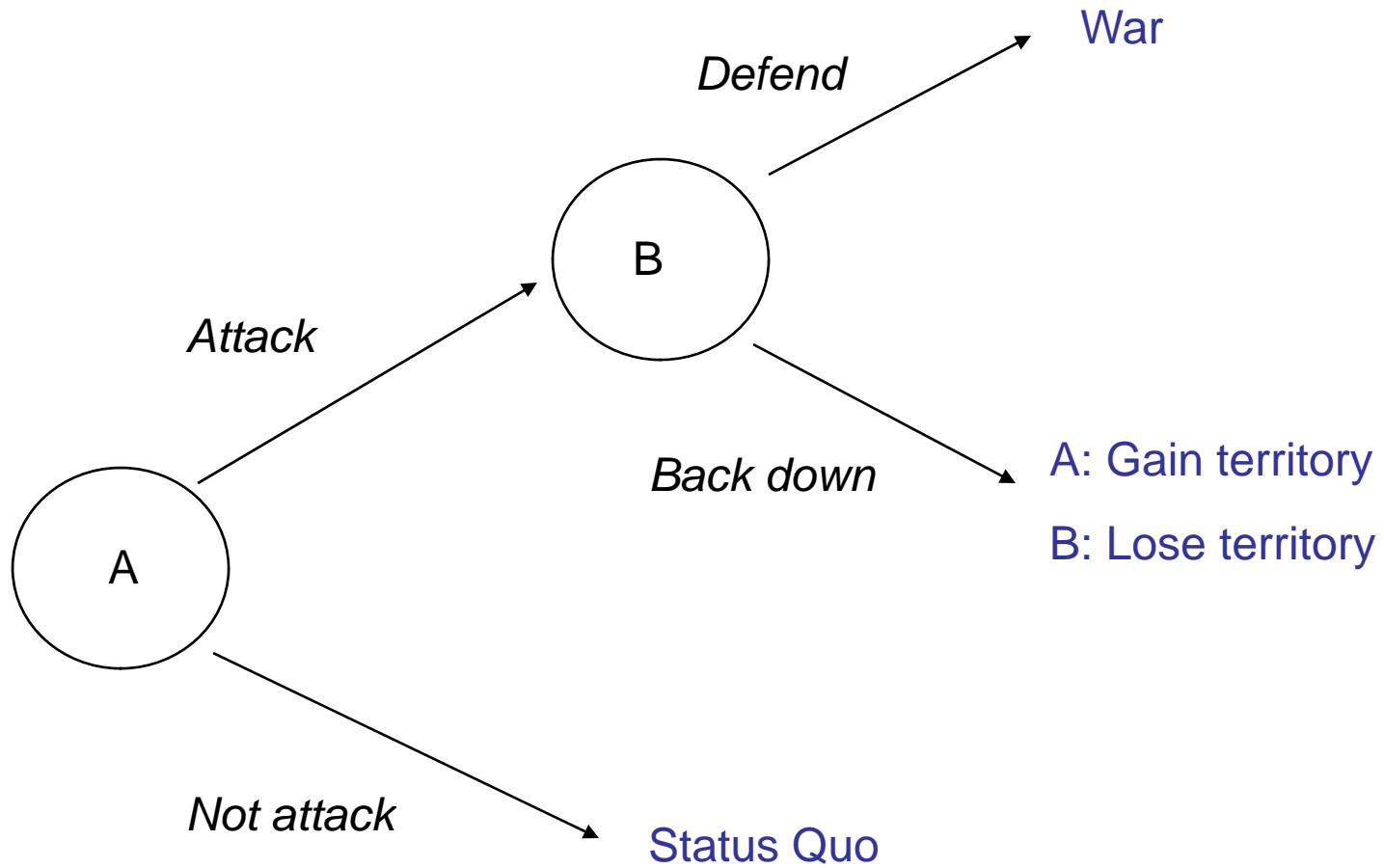
- Actors: Depends on the problem.
 - May be states as a whole, leaders of countries, lobbyists, legislatures, etc.
- Actors have preferences over outcomes.
 - Prefer fighting to backing down (or vice-versa)
 - Prefer trade protection to market competition.
- Actors have beliefs about the preferences of others.

Actors & Environments

- Environments: Provides the structure of the “game”.
- Specifies the actions that can be chosen.
 - E.g. attack or back down
 - Attack, sanction, back down.
- Specifies the information available about the actions of others.
 - What do other actors choose?

War Scenario

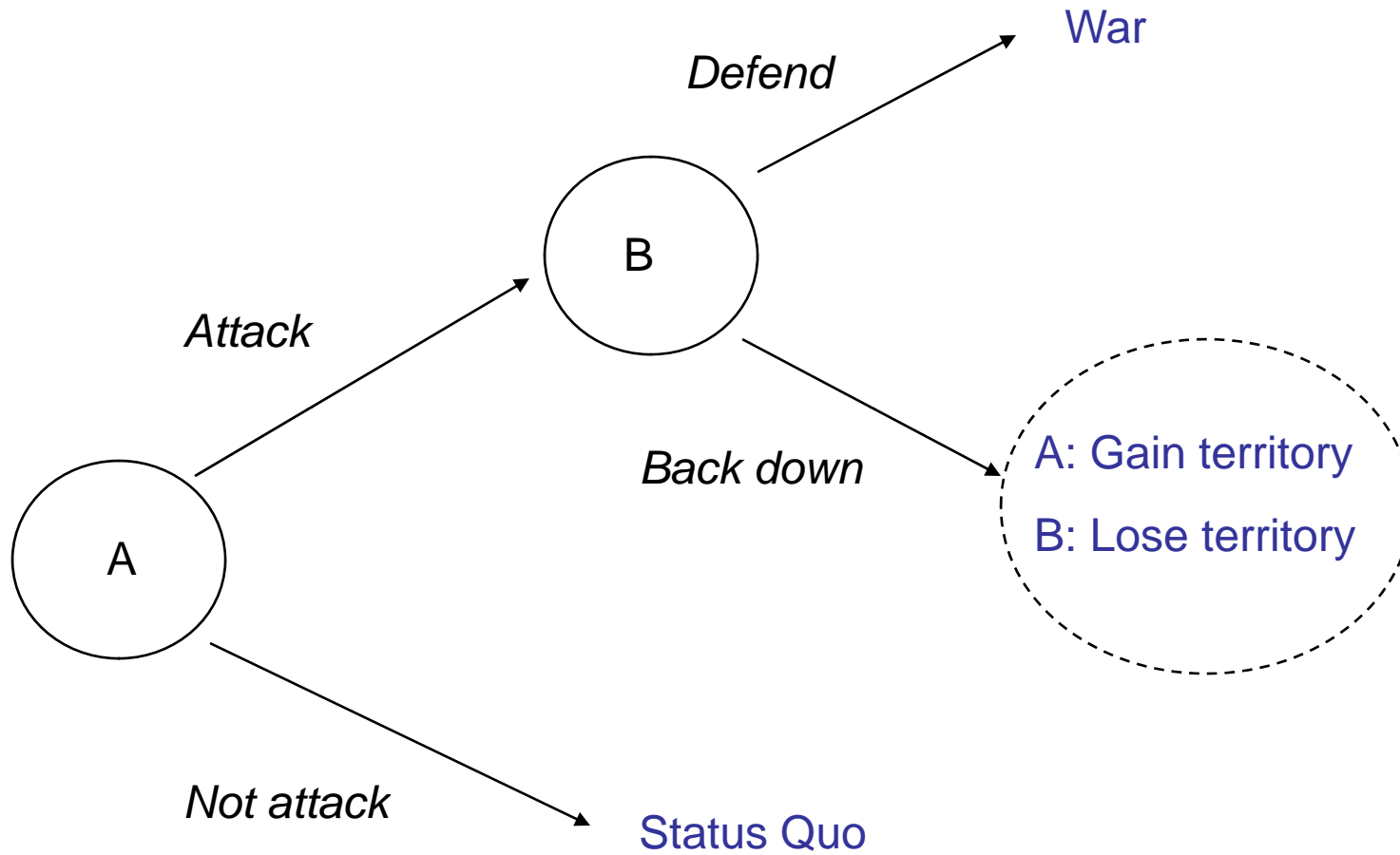
- State A wants a piece of territory controlled by state B.
- State A can attack or not attack.
- If state A attacks, state B can back down, giving up the territory.
- Otherwise, state B can defend the territory leading to war.
- War is costly, outcome is uncertain, but victor wins all of the other's territory.



Scenario 1 preferences:

A: Gain territory > Status Quo > War

B: Status Quo > Lose territory > War

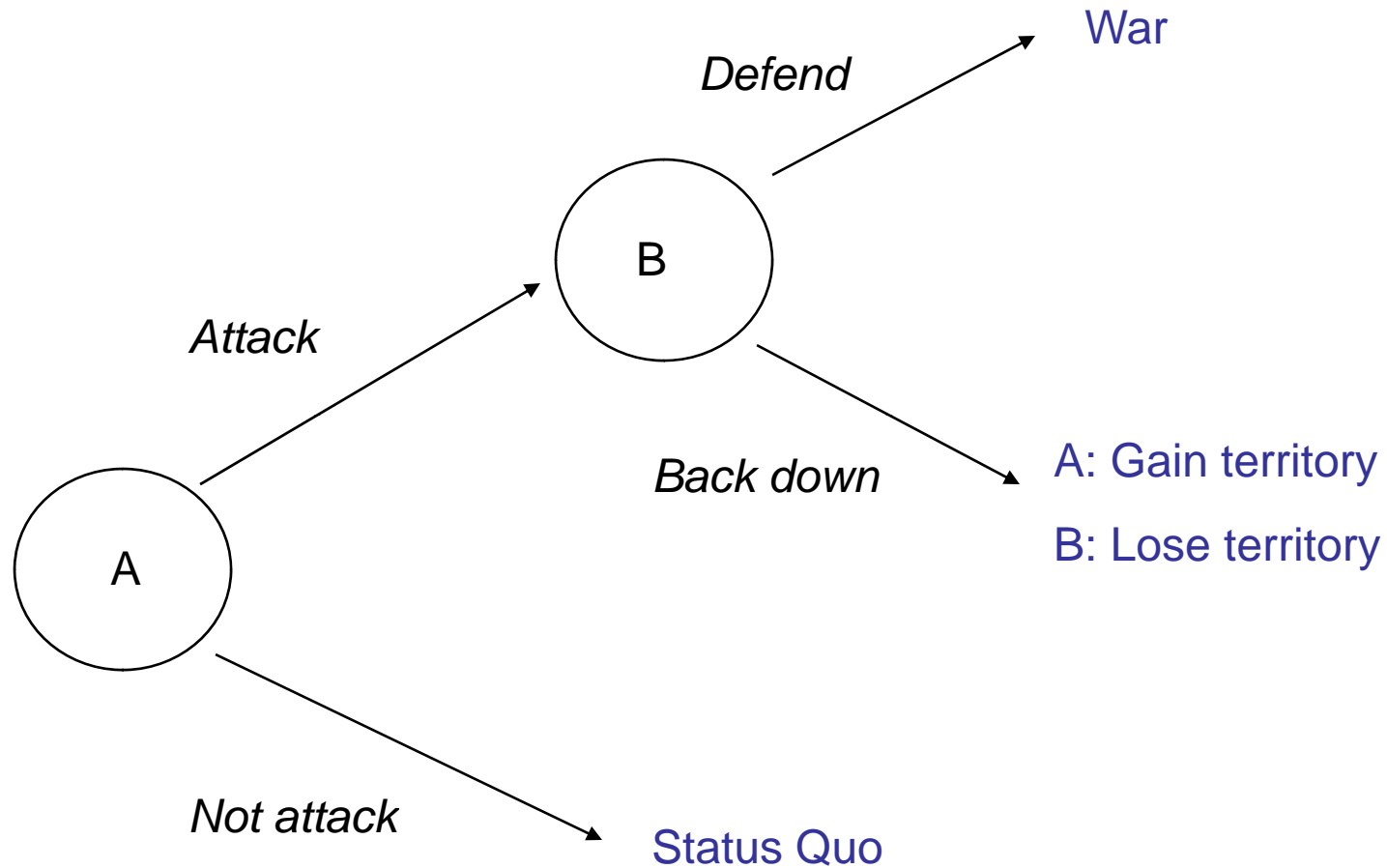


Scenario 1 preferences:

A: Gain territory > Status Quo > War

B: Status Quo > Lose territory > War

Change in Preferences

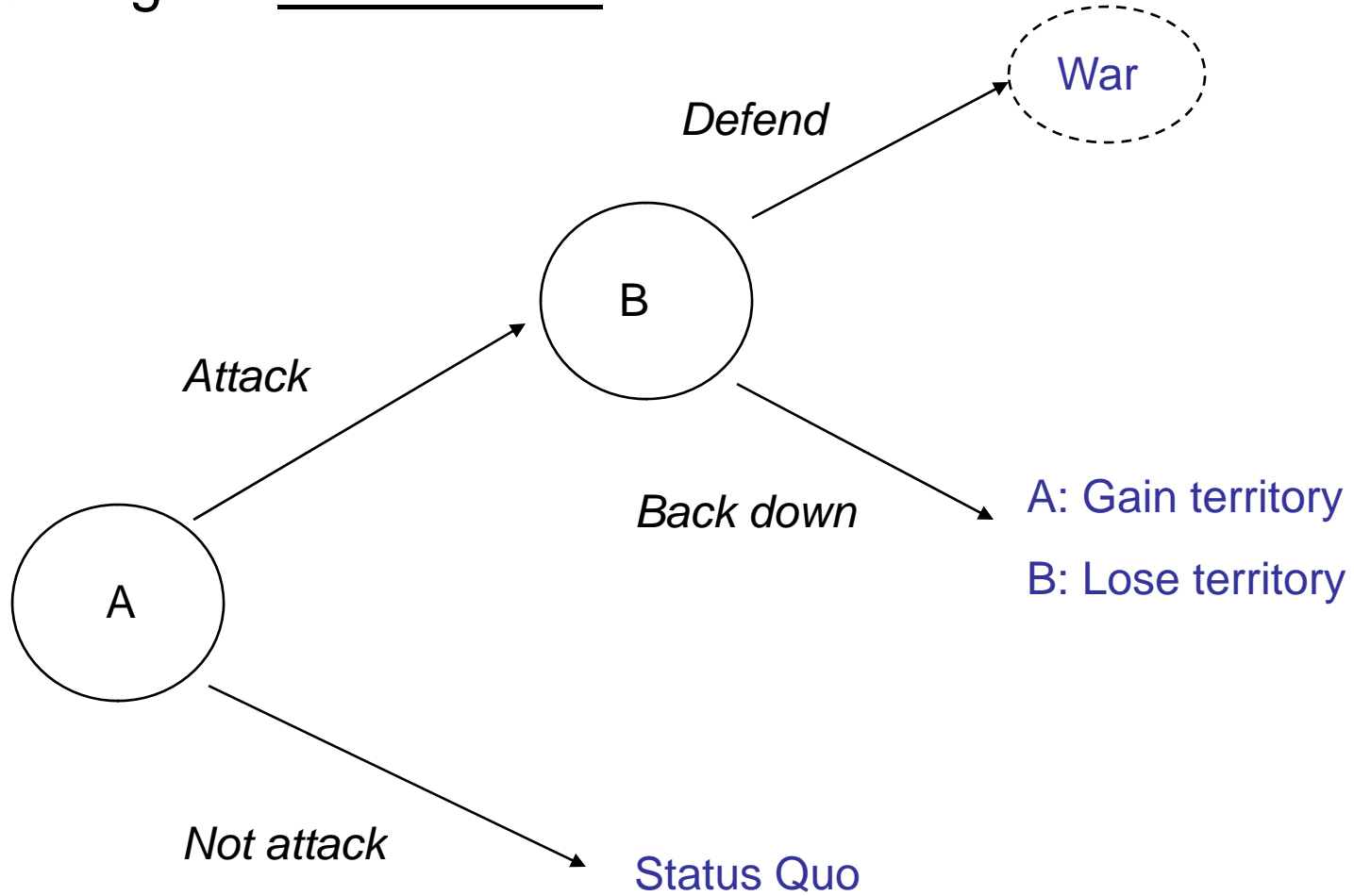


Scenario 2 preferences:

A: Gain territory > War > Status Quo

B: Status Quo > War > Lose territory

Change in Preferences

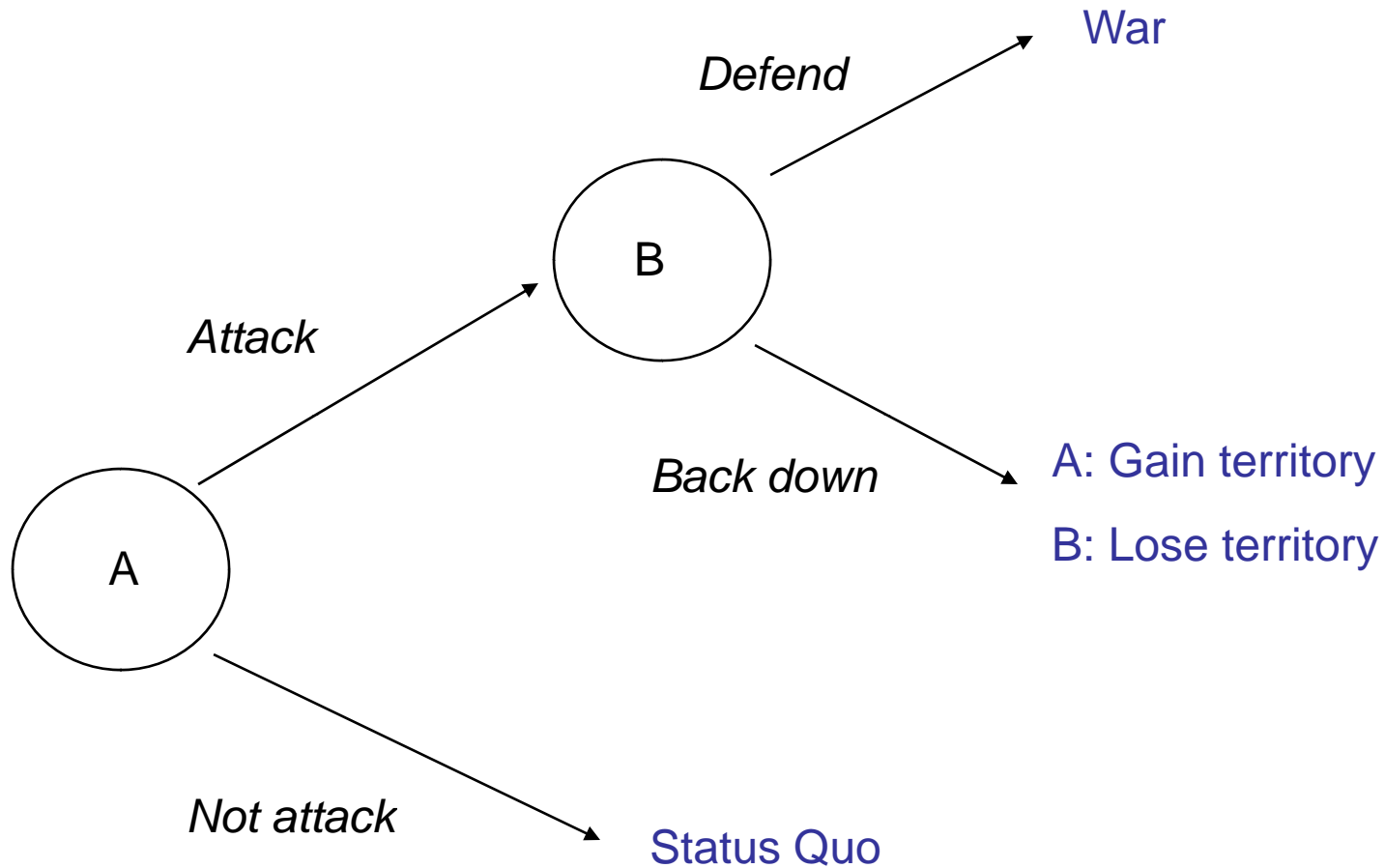


Scenario 2 preferences:

A: Gain territory > War > Status Quo

B: Status Quo > War > Lose territory

Change in Beliefs

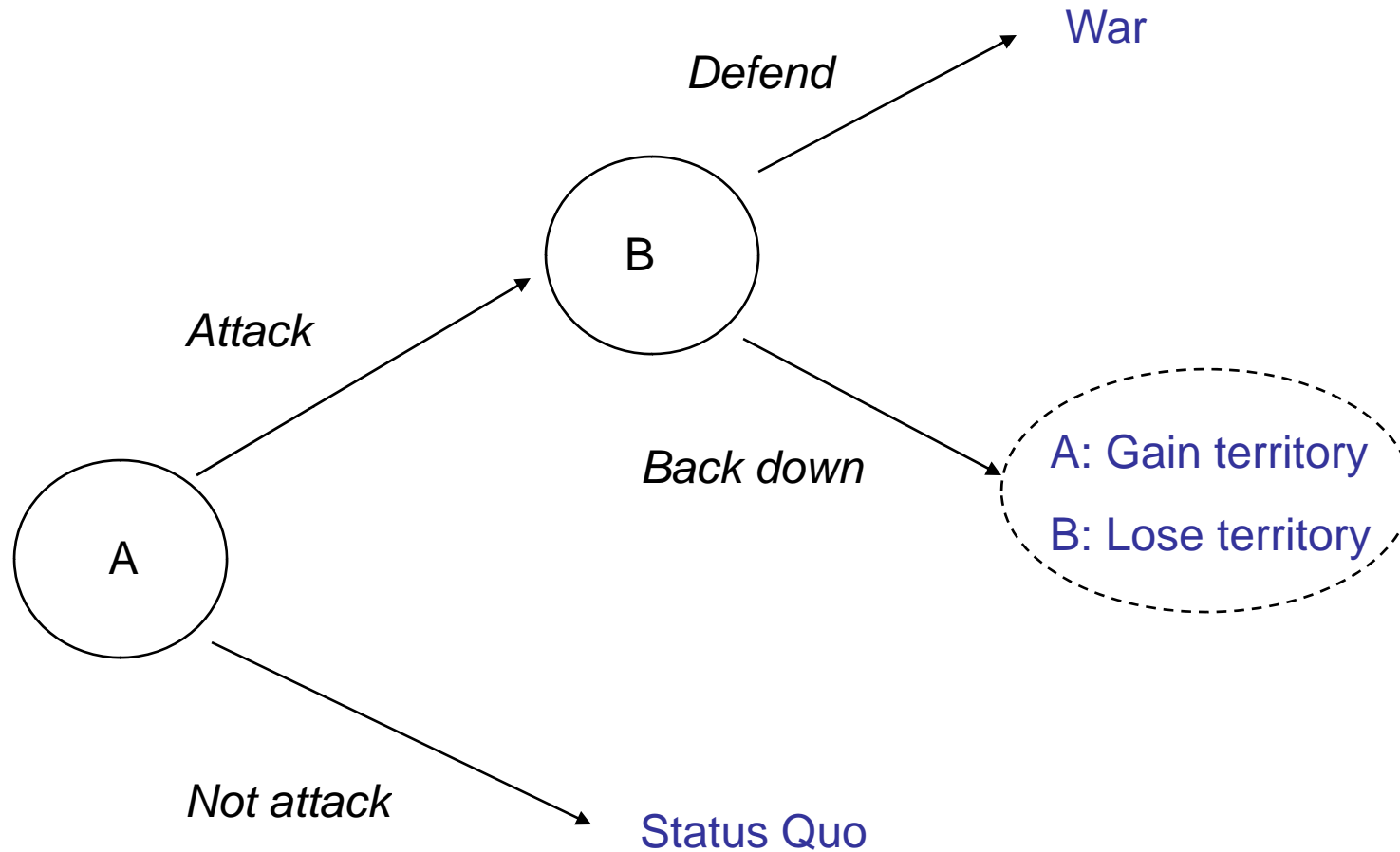


Scenario 1 preferences:

A: Gain territory > Status Quo > War

A believes that B: Status Quo > Lose territory > War

Change in Beliefs

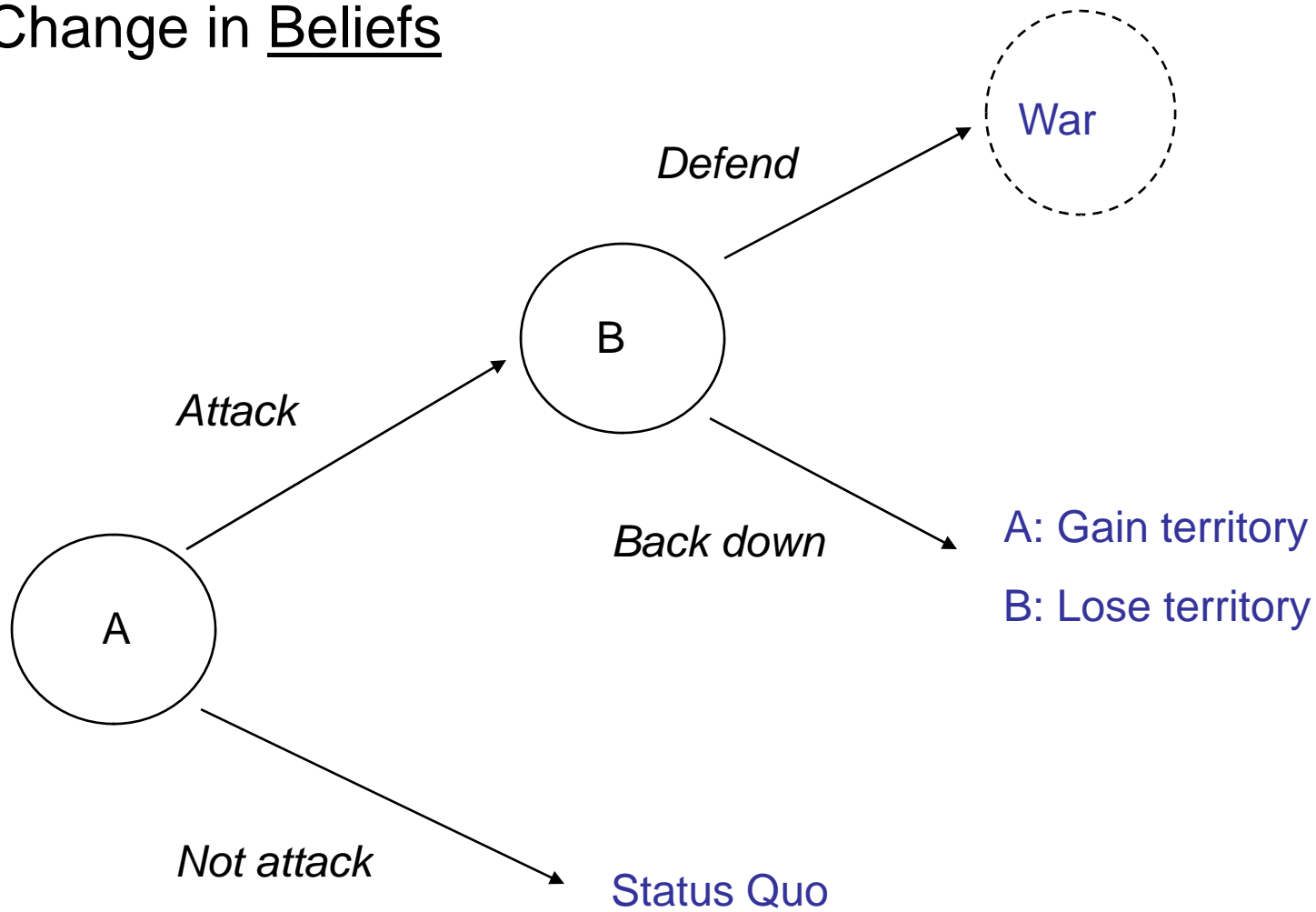


Scenario 1 preferences:

A: Gain territory > Status Quo > War

A believes that B: Status Quo > Lose territory > War

Change in Beliefs



BUT, beliefs can be wrong:

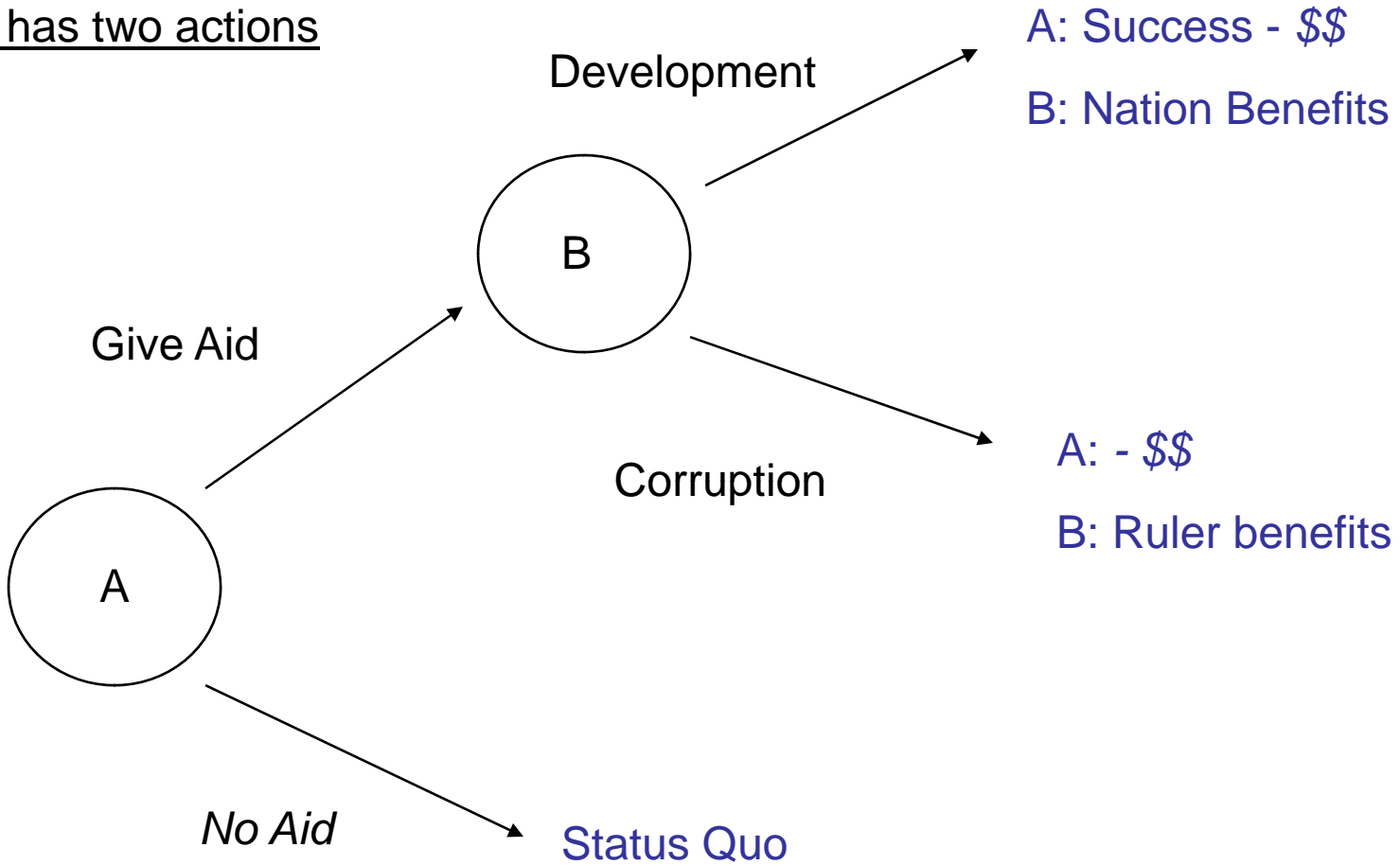
A: Gain territory > Status Quo > War

In actuality B: Status Quo > War > Lose territory

Aid Scenario

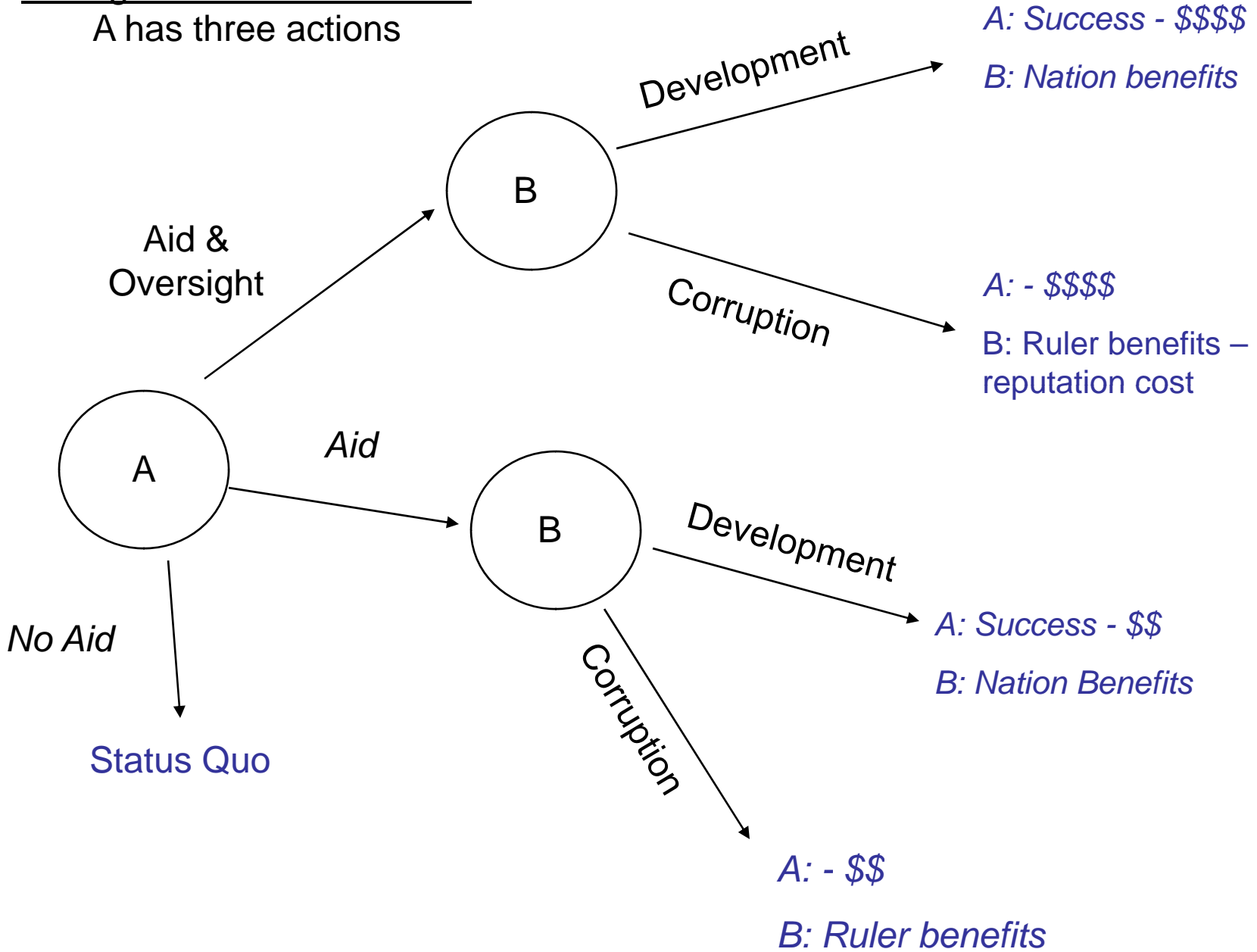
- Some government (A) is deciding to give foreign aid to the leader (B) of a developing country.
- B can use the aid for national development, or personal enrichment (corruption).
- A wants to fund successful a successful program, but aid costs \$
- A can also devote additional resources (\$) towards program oversight.
- If corrupt leader is caught, faces reputation costs; will not get aid in the future.

A has two actions



Change in the Environment:

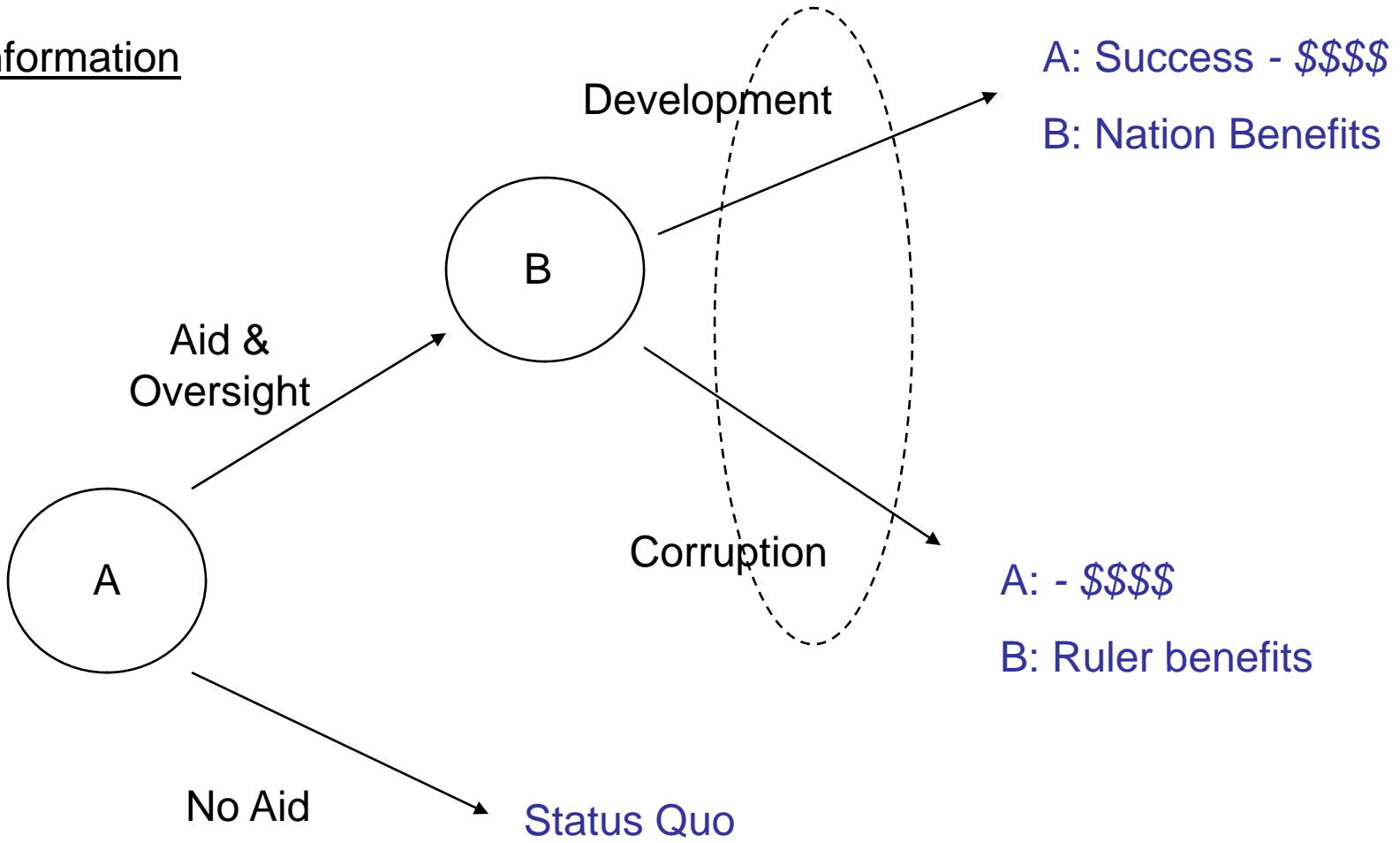
A has three actions



What if oversight doesn't always
catch crooks?

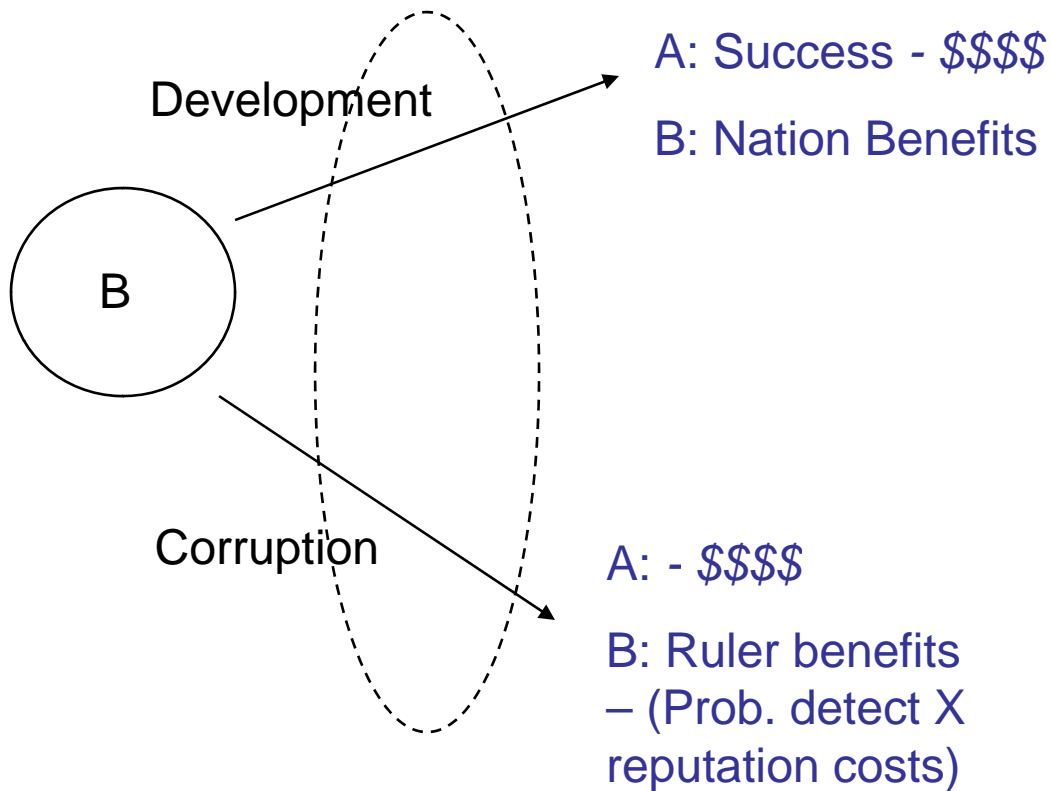
Information

Information



Dotted line indicates uncertainty

Information



Detection

If detected: ruler benefits – reputation costs.

If not detected: ruler benefits.

Then, can assign probability of detection. E.g. 25 % chance of detection.

Aggregation

- Strategic choice approach simplifies a complex environment.
- ‘Actors’ are often complex combinations of individuals, organizations, institutions.
- Sometimes we can ignore ‘internal’ politics; sometimes aggregation issues are important.

Aggregation

