

# Incident Coding Manual

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Intra-dispute Bargaining: Collecting and Coding Individual Incidents  
in the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) Data, 1816-2001

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## 1 Introduction

This incident coding manual relies heavily on the information and coding descriptions provided in the MID3 Incident Coding Manual (2000) found on the MID3 website. Information taken from the MID3 Incident Coding Manual (2000) is identified as follows for each new heading. No asterisk indicates new additions to the manual.

\* - Information relayed in these portions are taken entirely from MID3 Incident Coding Manual (2000) found on the MID3 website, with some possible formatting changes.

\*\* - Information relayed in these portions are taken at least in part from the MID3 Incident Coding Manual (2000) found on the MID3 website, with possible additions and/or changes.

Users of this manual are assumed to be familiar with the contents of Jones, Bremer, and Singer (1996) since it provides important background information about this project. Coders should be given a copy of this article to read at the beginning of their training. In addition, users should read over the Notes of MID 3 Project Meeting of August, 2000 (available on the MID3 website), especially pages 4-9 which elaborate and clarify many of the matters discussed below.

The incident coding process consists of the following steps:

1. Search sources for reports of potential incidents.
2. Identify legitimate incidents and assemble the pertinent reports.
3. **Complete and incident coding report in Filemaker for each incident.**
4. Enter incident information into the web-based central data archive.
5. File all materials related to an incident in one MID-numbered folder.

6. Identify and resolve problems and anomalies which reviews reveal.

This manual is primarily concerned with Step 3 of the process.

## 2 General Observations on Militarized Incidents

- *A militarized incident must occur among two or more interstate system members.* Therefore, actions between a system member and the forces of a non-system member are not included. But if such an act is diplomatically protested by the state within which the non-system entity resides, then a militarized incident between the two system members is said to exist.
- *Militarized actions are excluded from the incident category when they are provided for by treaty with, or occur at the invitation of, the targeted state.* In such instances, no militarized incident exists until the treaty or invitation is revoked and a militarized incident occurs, or the militarized actions by one state clearly exceed the bounds spelled out within a treaty or agreement between both parties.
- *A militarized incident is an explicit, non-routine, and governmentally authorized action.* Actions that are vague or non-specific do not qualify, and in cases of alleged or dubious actions, a militarized incident exists only when the “targeted” state responds—militarily or diplomatically—to that specific action or the action is verified by an impartial observer. In cases where violations of territory or cross-border firings occur routinely, each such incident should be coded whenever there was an authorized standing order to respond militarily to all such actions.
- *A militarized incident is an overt action taken by the official military forces or government representatives of a state (head of state, foreign minister, etc.).* When regular forces are disguised as non-regular forces, operate with or command non-regular forces, or engage in covert operations, their actions are excluded unless and until further militarized incidents involving official forces take place, or when the targeted state responds—militarily or diplomatically—to the act in question. In states where official military forces are virtually nonexistent, military actions taken by local forces qualify as government

authorized only when the local forces are directed by a representative of the central government to engage in a specific military action.

Paramilitary forces are frequently quasi-official, and the degree to which they act with government approval varies by state and over time.

Usually, further research will be required to determine if actions taken by paramilitary forces are officially sanctioned.

- *Military interactions between two states are not coded as separate militarized incidents if they are at war.* A state at war may, however, be involved in one or more incidents of military confrontation with a state that is not involved in that war.
- *Actions taken by the official forces of one state against private citizens of another state are generally not coded as militarized incidents.* Exceptions include seizures (of personnel or material) within the confines of disputed territory, attacks on international shipping, and the pursuit (by air, land, or sea) of rebel forces across international boundaries. Further, such incidents are included only when the “targeted” state militarily or diplomatically protests the action.
- *A militarized incident involving competing territorial claims must take place within the context of a well-defined geographic area.* Uncontested expansion into the territory of an independent non-system member by itself does not constitute a militarized action until there is a militarized incident by another system member in response to the initial action. However, the expansion by military force of one interstate member into claimed or contested territory of another interstate member can, by itself, constitute a militarized incident.

### **3 Using the Incident Coding Report**

The program Filemaker will be used to input and categorize all data within the database. Each incident within a particular MID will have its own incident coding report, comprised of several fields describing particular details of the incident, to be completed for each qualifying incident found. In Filemaker, switch between the Dispute-Level coding form and the Incident Data Entry Form using the drop-down menu under “Layout” in the top left corner. In addition, a summary of all the details from all the

incidents in the dispute can be found at the bottom of the Incident Data Entry Form. Incidents will be added and corrected automatically as data is entered into the form. Keep in mind that all entries and corrections are saved in real-time, so it is not possible to return to a previously-saved version of the file. Redoing entries or corrections must be done manually, so carefully follow the instructions below concerning how to complete each field in the report.

### 3.1 Naming

(IncidNum / StateNme / ccode)

Filemaker provides an easy way to organize incidents within a dispute. Each general MID coding form is already entered into the database. For each of these forms, select the Incident Data Entry Form from the “Layout” box in the top left corner to find the incident coding form. The MID number (DispNum) will be located in the top left corner of the Incident Data Entry Form. Be sure the incident form corresponds to the correct MID number. Name the incident number in the “Incid\_Num” field temporally within the dispute by giving it a number (1, 2, 3, etc). The incident number will become important particularly when completely the fields referencing “Connectedness.”

Enter the country code for the state according to those listed as part of the Correlates of War (COW) Project found here: <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/datasets.htm> (select “COW Country Codes”). Filemaker will automatically populate the StateNme field with the appropriate state name.

### 3.2 Incident Date\*\*

(StDay, StMon, StYear, EndDay, EndMon, EndYear)

The Incident Date fields specify the year, month, and day upon which the incident began and ended. *The year and month of the Start Date and End Date must be identified*, and it is highly desirable to know the beginning and ending days as well. If the beginning day and/or ending day cannot be determined, then enter a value of “-9” to indicate it is missing, and ultimately it will be assumed that the incident could have started or ended any time during the relevant year or month. Though some ambiguity is

inevitable (especially with respect to precise days), every effort should still be made to accurately day-date the start and end dates of the incident. Our objective is to measure them as precisely as possible. Hence, more information is better than none at all.

Incidents are assumed to last one day unless there is information to the contrary. However, a similar action in a similar place within 3 days of the original action will be considered a continuation of the original action, not a new action. Similar actions in similar places that occur more than 3 days later should be coded as new incidents. Similar actions are identified by the “Action” field, and similar places relate to the “incid\_location” field.

### **3.3 Actor(s) and Target\*\***

(InSideA / SideA) Each actor and target is distinguished by a binary measure in the “InSideA” field, “0” for the Target and “1” for the Actor(s) in the incident. A second field, “SideA,” is included to enter the actor(s) and target of the MID as a whole, as listed in the Dispute-level data.

The actor (or actors) is defined as the state(s) that undertook the qualifying action. Joint actions (i.e., those undertaken by more than one actor against the same target) must be clearly and officially coordinated. If this is not true, then the action(s) should be considered separate incidents. The target is defined as the state against which the qualifying action was taken. An incident must have one and only one target, and, if an action is directed at two or more states, then two or more incidents must be coded.

### **3.4 Location Description\*\***

Providing the incident location presents a more in-depth picture of how more complex disputes progress as the locations of the militarized actions move across territory with each incident. Providing as much data as possible is useful to track territorial movements between incidents in a dispute. To meet this end, the incident coding report includes three pieces of information that increase in specificity according to the below descriptions. Complete all three portions as thoroughly as possible given available information on the incident. If no location data is present for a particular portion, enter “Not available.”

1. General area (dmg.incid\_gen\_location)—In general, enter the land, national airspace, or body of water in which the incident is taking place. Examples may include countries, provinces, seas, oceans, gulfs, national borders, general natural landscapes (i.e., Gobi Desert, Andes Mountains), etc.
2. Specific location (incid\_location / dmg.incid\_location)—Assumed to be within the general area described above, enter the specific city, island, specific landmark (i.e., El Cndor) etc. For instances such as border regions and bodies of water in which no city or island can be specified, nearby landmarks and cities may be used as a reference point (i.e., approximately 40 miles east of Hong Kong, 20 miles south of El Cndor, 30 miles west of the Israeli-Pakistani border).
3. Actual location (incid\_measuringpoint / dmg.incid\_measuringpoint)—Enter here any additional data that could provide an even more specific, fine-grained description of the incident’s location. Examples may include districts within a city, global coordinates, city landmarks, villages, etc.

In addition, three rules should be observed in completing this part of the report:

1. Proper geographical names should match those found in Merriam Webster’s Geographical Dictionary (3rd edition, 2007) with respect to identity and spelling. A slightly less comprehensive but more portable version of this exists, i.e., Merriam Webster’s Pocket Geographical Dictionary (1999). The ultimate authority for geographical names will be The Columbia Gazetteer, a mammoth three-volume compilation found in most libraries.
2. The text describing the specific and actual locations must be clearly and concisely specified.
3. Enter all state names used in these three fields according the standard COW state abbreviations found here:  
<http://www.correlatesofwar.org/datasets.htm> (select COW Country Codes).

### 3.5 Military Fatalities of Actor(s) and Target\*\*

(Fatality / Fatalpre)

Two fields of the incident coding report are devoted to indicating the fatalities, if any, suffered by the military personnel of the actor(s) or target in the incident. In the “Fatalities” field, each actor specified in the Actor(s) field will have Select the appropriate grouping from the drop-down menu from one of the fatalities groupings listed below.

- Missing—no mention of military fatalities at all in the pertinent report(s).
- None—the incident reports specifically state that no military fatalities occurred.
- 1-25—the reported military fatalities were between 1 and 25.
- 26-100—the reported military fatalities were between 26 and 100.
- 101-250—the reported military fatalities were between 101 and 250.
- 251-500—the reported military fatalities were between 251 and 500.
- 501-999—the reported military fatalities were between 501 and 999.
- >999—the reported military fatalities were 1,000 or more.

In addition, a second field (FatalPre) is provided for entering the precise number, if indeed an exact value can be determined from the relevant reports.

Several problems may be encountered in coding fatalities. (1) A report may specify “casualties” rather than fatalities. Since “casualties” include both dead and wounded personnel, this number is typically much larger than fatalities. A casualty figure is not directly relevant to the assessment of fatalities. (2) A report may specify the number of fatalities over a period of time (e.g., “the last three days”) rather than a point in time (e.g., “yesterday”). Usually an incident fatality assessment will be based on several reports rather than a single report, and differences in partially overlapping accounts will need to be reconciled before the incident is coded. (3) Sources may differ about the number of fatalities.

These differences must be reconciled before the incident can be coded, and such a reconciliation should be based on the following rules: (a) later

reports are generally more accurate than earlier reports, and (b) reports from “independent” sources (i.e., those not directly connected to the governments involved in the incident) are generally more reliable than government sources. There is some inherent uncertainty in incident fatalities, which is one of the reasons why we code ranges of fatalities.

### **3.6 Civilian Fatalities of Actor(s) and Target**

(dmg.civilian / dmg.civilianpre) Much like military fatalities above, the report also devotes attention to civilian fatalities incurred by the actor(s) and target in each incident, if any. Civilian fatalities follow a similar coding precision level, available via a drop-down menu under the “dmg.civilian” field. Select the appropriate grouping from the following list.

- Missing—no mention of military fatalities at all in the pertinent report(s).
- None—the incident reports specifically state that no military fatalities occurred.
- 1-25—the reported military fatalities were between 1 and 25.
- 26-100—the reported military fatalities were between 26 and 100.
- 101-250—the reported military fatalities were between 101 and 250.
- 251-500—the reported military fatalities were between 251 and 500.
- 501-999—the reported military fatalities were between 501 and 999.
- >999—the reported military fatalities were 1,000 or more.

In addition, a second field (dmg.civilianpre) is provided for entering the precise number, if indeed an exact value can be determined from the relevant reports.

### **3.7 Types of Civilian Fatalities**

(dmg.civiliantype / dmg.civiliangroup) Substantively, we can infer different information from civilian fatalities than from military fatalities, so two fields address additional variables to establish more detailed parameters for these inferences. For example, military fatalities are assumed to be targeted, meaning that the fatalities were the focus of some action by the opposing side. Civilian fatalities may be either targeted or collateral in

nature. Select the appropriate type from the drop-down menu in the “dmg.civiliantype” field according to the descriptions below.

- Targeted - Civilian fatalities were the target of the action. Source accounts should explicitly describe the civilian fatalities as the focus of the action. Contextual clues may also provide information. If the action was targeting a civilian unit, such as a village or commercial center, with no military presence to account for the attack, the fatalities are likely targeted.
- Collateral - Civilian fatalities are an incidental result of another action. Source accounts should describe the action in terms of its target on the military, with civilian fatalities being an aside to the focus of the action. It is important to note that these codes do not categorize the intent of the actor. Especially in circumstances where both a civilian and military presence suffered casualties from the action, it is difficult to determine whether the actor intended civilian casualties. Instead, these codes seek to isolate instances where civilians were explicitly targeted. If no explicit or clear evidence can be found, either from directly-stated accounts or contextual information on the incident, and both military and civilian fatalities occurred, assume the civilian fatalities are collateral.
- In addition, another field (“dmg.civiliangroup”) seeks to specify the nominal identities of the civilian fatalities to depict more accurately the nature of the incident. For this purpose, fill in the most accurate description from the source accounts as to who were the civilian fatalities. Some options may include unofficial combatants (i.e., mercenaries, terrorists, militia, revolutionaries, etc.), refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants, media representatives, or simply local civilians. Be as specific and concise and possible, listing as many groups of civilians as can be verified by the source accounts.

### 3.8 Incident Type

(Action / HostLev)

The “Action” field is used to specify the highest, or most militant action that was undertaken in the incident. These are divided into five increasing degrees of hostility—1) No militarized action, 2) Threats of force, 3)

Displays of force, 4) Uses of force, and 5) War. Select the appropriate degree from the drop-down menu in the “HostLev” field. To select “War,” the action must regard a formal declaration of war as cited in the source accounts. Below are descriptions of threats of force, displays of forces, and uses of force, along with codes and coding rules within each category. Select the appropriate code from the drop-down menu provided for the “Action” field.

### **3.9 Threats of Force\***

The coding of threats of force can be particularly difficult because threats are often transmitted in ambiguous diplomatic language, making them hard to identify and interpret. Diplomats often refer to the extreme, dire, serious, or dangerous consequences of an act without necessarily conveying that a threat to use force exists. However, all threats are contingent upon some condition, and a state making a threat of force must communicate its intention to use force against another state (or other states) if the other state(s) acts, fails to act, or does not refrain from acting in a specified manner. In addition, there must be evidence that the threat was received by the targeted state or it is reasonable that the threat was/would have been received for the incident to be included. Finally, for an incident to be coded as a threat of force, one of six different types of action described below must be stated or clearly implied within the communicated threat. Once the threat is coded and selected from the drop-down menu.

- Threat to use force: The threat by one state to use its regular armed forces to fire upon the armed forces or violate the territory of another state.
- Threat to blockade: The threat by one state to use its regular armed forces to seal off the territory of another state to prevent partial or complete entry or exit.
- Threat to occupy territory: The threat by one state to use military force to occupy all or part of another state’s territory without the state’s permission.
- Threat to declare war: The threat by one state to issue an official declaration of war against another state.

- Threat to use CBR weapons: The threat by one state to use chemical, bacteriological, and/or radiological weapons against the territory or forces of another state.
- Threat to join ongoing war: The threat by one state to join the opposing side of an inter-, extra-, or intra-state war in which another state is currently involved.

### 3.10 Displays of Force\*

Displays of force are in some ways easier to code than threats of forces since actions are less ambiguous than words and such events tend to be more accurately recorded by reporters and historians. However, the target of a display of force is not always clearly defined and must sometimes be inferred from contextual factors. And observers are not always unanimous about who is the primary target of a display of force. If no target can be reliably assessed for non-routine shows of force, alerts, or mobilizations, the incident should be coded with the coder's best guess as to the target of the display of force and a note added describing the ambiguity. The six types of displays of force are listed and described below.

- Show of force: A public demonstration by a state of its military forces intended to intimidate another state but not involving actual combat operations. Examples include non-routine maneuvers and military exercises, naval patrols immediately outside the territorial waters of another state, and the intentional violation of another state's territorial waters or air space.
- Alert: An increase in the military readiness of a state's regular armed forces.
- Nuclear alert: An increase in the military readiness of a state's nuclear forces.
- Mobilization: The activation by a state of all or part of its previously inactive (reserve) forces.
- Border fortification: An explicit attempt to publicly demonstrate control over a border area through the construction or non-routine reinforcement of military outposts in or near the border area.

- **Border violation:** A crossing of a territorial land boundary for a period of less than 24 hours by military forces of one state without any significant damage to the territory or population of the violated state. Since no military force is actually used within this incident type, and no long-term occupation of territory takes place, this type of military action is considered more of a display than a use of force.

### 3.11 Uses of Force\*\*

Nine incident types described below are considered uses of force. With the exception of the declaration of war, each entails an active military operation by one or more states. The other eight incident types involve the active participation of the military forces of one state against the military forces of another state and/or the intentional infliction of significant damage to, or possession of, the territory, citizens, or goods of another state.

- **Blockade:** The use of military forces by one state to partially or completely seal off the territory of another state to prevent the entry or exit of goods or personnel. Stopping or inspecting ships or vehicles or the confiscation of goods in transit is evidence of the erection of a blockade. A formal declaration is not required.
- **Occupation of territory:** The use of military force by one state to occupy all or part of another state's territory for a period of at least 24 hours (occupations lasting less than 24 hours are usually considered border violations). In addition, a border violation differs from an occupation of territory in that the latter usually entails other actions, such as the establishment of military bases or the assumption of governmental functions in the occupied area, that indicate that the occupation is intended to be long-term. The immediate occupation during a post-war period by a victorious side's army is not coded as an incident unless provisions of a relevant treaty or agreement are violated by the occupying forces or further militarized incidents are undertaken by the state being occupied.
- **Seizure:** The capture by one state of another state's material goods or personnel. A distinction is made between official and non-official goods and personnel. Official material goods of another state include such things as its armaments, military equipment, financial assets, and

government papers or documents. A state's official personnel are members of its armed forces and its government officials. The holding of official goods or personnel for a period of at least 24 hours is considered a seizure. Non-official personnel of a state are its citizens, and non-official material goods are the property of those citizens. For the capture of non-official goods or personnel to qualify as a seizure, it must be militarily or diplomatically protested by the affected state. Again, the period of detention or confiscation must be at least 24 hours in order for the incident to be considered a seizure.

- **Attack:** The use of regular armed forces of a state to fire upon the armed forces, population, or territory of another state. Occasional military interventions into an ongoing civil war on behalf of insurgents may be considered this type of incident.
- **Clash:** The outbreak of sustained military hostilities between the regular armed forces of two or more states. This differs from an Attack, a unilateral action, in that a Clash is basically reciprocal in nature. The initiator (the Actor side) may or may not be clearly identified, and it will be assumed that the designation of Actor(s) and Target is arbitrary in this type of incident unless stated otherwise.
- **Declaration of war:** An official statement by one state that a state of war exists between itself and another state.
- **Tactical use of CBR weapons:** The use of chemical, bacteriological, and/or radiological weapons by one state against the territory or forces of another state.
- **Interstate war:** The outbreak of interstate war between two or more states as defined by the Correlates of War project, i.e., sustained military combat between the military forces of COW states that results in 1,000 or more combat-related deaths of official military personnel. Like the Clash incident, the initiator (the Actor side) may or may not be clearly identified in an interstate war incident, and it will be assumed that the designation of Actor(s) and Target is arbitrary in the types of incident unless state otherwise.
- **Joint interstate war:** the joining of an ongoing COW interstate war by a state in opposition to another state that is currently involved in that war.

### 3.12 Connectedness

(dmg.connected)

At the incident level, a measure of connectedness provides a way to determine whether and how incidents are related empirically within a dispute. The measure is divided into four categories: 1 = stated response, 2=militarized response, 3 = general preparedness, 4 = unrelated. Select the appropriate category from the drop-down menu in the “dmg.connected” field according to the descriptions listed below.

- A **stated response** is a militarized action which the leaders publicly announce is a response to the militarized incident(s) of another state.
- A **militarized response** is a militarized action that matches well the militarized incident(s) of the other state in the dispute but for which the leader makes no public announcement that the action is in fact a response.
- **General preparedness** are militarized actions that may provide some advantages should the conflict escalate, but the action itself is not a direct counter to the militarized incidents of the other state and for which the leader makes no public announcement of a response.
- **Unrelated** incidents are militarized actions that are not related to any previous militarized incidents in the dispute but instead represent new strands of actions within the dispute.

### 3.13 Responded Incident

(dmg.connectincid)

This field addresses which militarized incident within the dispute the action is in response to, if it is a response. List the incident according to its incident number, named per the guidelines outlined in the “Naming” portion of this manual. If the connectedness variable is scored as *unrelated*, then leave this field blank.

### 3.14 Response to Non-Militarized Actions

(dmg.connectnon)

This field addresses whether the militarized incident is a response to non-militarized actions by the other party. There are three categories:

1=response to militarized incident(s); 2=response [specific action(s)];  
3=response [general actions]; 4=response (dubious); 5=unrelated.

- A **response to militarized incident(s)** is observed when the connectedness variable has a value of 1, 2, or 3 (stated response, militarized response, or general preparedness).
- A **response to specific actions** occurs when the military action represents a clear tit-for-tat response to some non-militarized incident by the targeted party
- **Responses to general actions** occur when the military action represents a response to a degenerating environment between the states, long-past actions, and other non-specified actions by the targeted state.
- A **dubious response** is reported when the initiator of the militarized incident states that the action is a response, but it is unclear whether that initial action actually took place or the targeted country denies the action.
- An **unrelated** incident is just that—there are no specific or general actions to which the incident is a response.

### 3.15 Source Key Information\*\*

The “Source Key Information” field is designed to record up to three sources used for all the fields in coding the incident. A comprehensive list of all sources used in coding all incidents for all disputes will be kept in a database using the program “JabRef.” This program provides a source key for each source listed. Enter this source key into the “Key” column for each source, along with the relevant pages, to identify each source in the Incident Data Entry Form. This uniform system will make it very simple to refer to relevant sources as needed.

## 4 Updates

It is to be expected that additions or changes to this manual will be necessary as the incident coding progresses. Such changes will be communicated as they develop.