

Civil War and the Onset of Militarized Interstate Disputes: Comparing Allied and Non-Allied Countries

How do civil wars impact militarized inter-state dispute initiations (MIDs) and does this relationship vary between allied and non-allied states? This article offers a new perspective on the link between domestic and international conflict and provides the first theoretical and empirical analysis of the differences in the relationship between civil wars and MID initiations for allied and non-allied states. In line with previous studies, I find that civil war in either the initiator or the target state makes the onset of MIDs more likely for both allied and non-allied dyads, regardless of the alliance type. In addition, non-allied dyads initiate MIDs at a statistically significantly higher rate than allied dyads, with or without civil wars. However, I also find surprising and perhaps counterintuitive result that the relationship between the civil war in initiator and target state flips for a specific type of alliances: alliances that are highly institutionalized and alliances involving specific mediation/arbitration measures. The coefficient for civil war in the state that is the target of MID is statistically significantly different and stronger for allied than for non-allied dyads. In other words, when there is a civil war in the state that is a target of MID, common alliance ties make the dispute initiation *more, not less likely*. This is surprising because we would expect the specific provisions contained in these alliances to contribute towards making conflict less likely. This finding potentially supports the theoretical argument advanced by Ronald Krebs, who argues that membership in multilateral and institutionalized alliances may intensify conflict between smaller members because the major power member of the alliance guarantees their external security, thus allowing them to focus on their preexisting disputes and creating a perverse incentive for conflict.¹

In this article, I first discuss the existing literature linking civil and international conflict. I then put forward the theoretical utility of distinguishing between allied and non-allied dyads, focusing on some of the ways in which common alliance ties may modify the link between civil and international conflict. I conclude by providing tentative

¹ Ronald R. Krebs, “Perverse Institutionalism: NATO and the Greco-Turkish Conflict,”

empirical results between civil war and the initiation of MIDs, dividing the sample into allied and non-allied dyads. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first work that explicitly addresses how common alliance ties may impact the relationship between civil war and MID initiation.

Existing Literature Linking Domestic and International Conflict

Scholars have discussed many possible causal mechanisms that link domestic political instability in the form of civil war and the initiation of militarized interstate disputes. The existing research in international relations (IR) has predominantly focused on two causal pathways linking civil and international conflict: *opportunistic attacks* and *diversionary wars*. Other scholars have recently offered a novel discussion of how specific issues over which civil war is fought may provide incentives for external actors to intervene, thus internationalizing a domestic conflict.

Diversionary War Arguments

At its core, diversionary war arguments posit that leaders initiate the use of force abroad to deflect attention from domestic issues.² According to these arguments, the loss of domestic societal support as a result of economic or other problems incentivizes leaders to use force externally to unite the country against a common foe and prolong their tenure. The underling logic is that initiating conflict with some “out-group” may increase cohesion within the “in-group” and that leaders exploit this to bolster domestic support. As the level of external threat increases, the public downplays the importance of domestic problems and becomes more likely to support the regime in office. Diversionary war theories attribute dispute or conflict initiation to the country experiencing domestic instability. While intra-state conflict may be one domestic issue, diversionary war arguments also focus on other domestic problems that may result in the loss of support for the regime in power (e.g., strikes, riots, low approval rating, etc.). As a result, I review different variants of the diversionary war theory.

Qualitative, state-specific studies have arguably found the strongest evidence for diversionary war theory. For example, James and Oneal found that U.S. presidents did

² Jack Levy. “The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique.” In *Handbook of War Studies*, edited by Manus I. Midlarsky (New York: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

tend to engage in diversionary wars.³ Morgan and Bickers reconceptualize the diversionary war theory and argue that only certain domestic problems, “those associated with a loss of support for the political leadership from within the groups constituting the ruling coalition,” will lead to diversionary behavior.⁴ They analyze the behavior of U.S. presidents from 1953 to 1976 and find that they have been more prone to behave aggressively in foreign policy when faced with a loss of partisan support, thus finding empirical support for their argument. Focusing on the Argentine junta’s decision to launch the invasion of the Falkland Islands, Amy Oakes finds mixed evidence for diversionary theory of war and argues that the combination of low extractive capacity and high domestic unrest compelled Argentine leaders to initiate the invasion.⁵

Scholars have also analyzed regime-specific arguments in light of diversionary war theory. Analyzing the initiation of force by the challenging states in 180 crises, Christopher Gelpi argues that leaders have three strategies when faced with domestic unrest: (1) grant the demands of dissatisfied groups; (2) repress the dissatisfied groups by force; (3) divert the public’s attention by using force externally.⁶ He finds empirical support that democratic leaders respond to domestic unrest by using force internationally, while authoritarian leaders repress domestic unrest.⁷ Leeds and Davis’ cross-national study examines the theories linking domestic political vulnerability to international disputes, focusing on the relationship between economic decline, the electoral cycle, and measures of aggressive international action for 18 advanced industrialized democracies from 1952 to 1988. They find no consistent support for a relationship between constraining domestic political conditions and international behavior partially because other countries place fewer international demands on politically vulnerable

³ Patrick James and John R. Oneal, “The Influence of Domestic and International Politics on the President’s Use of Force,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35, issue 2 (June 1, 1991): 307-332.

⁴ T. Clifton Morgan and Kenneth N. Bickers, “Domestic Discontent and the External Use of Force,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36, no.1 (March, 1992): 34.

⁵ Amy Oakes, “Diversionary War and Argentina’s Invasion of the Falkland Islands,” *Security Studies* 15, no.3 (July-September 2006): 431-463.

⁶ Christopher Gelpi, “Democratic Diversions: Governmental Structure and the Externalization of Domestic Conflict,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no.2 (April, 1997): 256.

⁷ *Ibid*: 255-282.

leaders.⁸ Building on the research of Leeds and Davis, Ross A. Miller uses three indicators of domestic unrest (changing levels of economic growth, domestic protest, and rebellion) and also finds little to no empirical support for their relationship to dispute escalation, for both democratic and autocratic regimes.⁹ Focusing more closely on the organizational incentives faced by different institutional actors, Dassel and Reinhardt have argued that domestic strife will lead to external aggression only when it threatens the organizational interests of the military.¹⁰

As this brief discussion illustrates, evidence for diversionary war theory is much stronger in single-case, qualitative studies, as opposed to large, cross-national quantitative studies.

Opportunistic War Arguments

Contrary to diversionary war theory, the opportunistic war arguments posit that the state contending with domestic unrest becomes the victim of attack by an outside, opportunistic state. Already weakened as a result of domestic conflict, these states become tempting targets of external, opportunistic challengers. More certain of victory, external actors may provide direct military and economic assistance to the rebel groups fighting the government or join the conflict directly on the side of the rebels in order to advance their interests.

External actors may be motivated by a number of instrumental factors, such as desire for economic gain, territorial irredentism, or the advancement of other military/strategic interests. In a qualitative study of revolutions, Stephen Walt finds that revolutionary states become involved in wars with their neighbors because revolutions often modify the threat calculation for both the revolutionary state and other countries.¹¹ Stephen Saideman applies Walt's balance-of-threat theory and offers an additional way in which states can balance threats: "supporting efforts, particularly those of secessionist

⁸ Brett Ashley Leeds and David R. Davis, "Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no.6 (December 1997): 814-834.

⁹ Ross A. Miller, "Regime Type, Strategic Interaction, and the Diversionary Use of Force," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43, no.3 (June 1999): 388-402.

¹⁰ Kurt Dassel and Eric Reinhardt, "Domestic Strife and the Initiation of Violence at Home and Abroad," *American Journal of Political Science* 43, no.1 (January, 1999): 56-85.

¹¹ Stephen Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

movements, to weaken one's adversary by promoting its dissolution."¹² As a result of supporting secessionist movements, states improve their security by assisting efforts that ultimately reduce the aggregate power of their adversaries through prolonging the conflict.

In other cases, domestic conflict pitting the government against rebels can invite external participation if outside state has feelings of solidarity with embattled ethnic kin and desires to come to their assistance. This is another causal logic that focuses on opportunities for intervention resulting from ethnic solidarity between the intervener and the rebels fighting the government.¹³

Notwithstanding these arguments, in a direct rebuttal of the victimization/opportunism thesis, Peter Trumbore finds that "external actors are much more likely to use higher levels of force against states that aren't struggling with ethnic rebellion than ones that are, directly contradicting the victimization thesis so prevalent in the literature on the international dimensions of ethnic conflict."¹⁴ As a way of explaining this seemingly counterintuitive finding, Trumbore argues that states dealing with insurgency are already weakened and that external actors need only issue threats or provide assistance to rebels in order to achieve their goals.

Civil War-Specific Arguments

Neither diversionary nor opportunistic arguments focus on the specific issues over which civil war is fought. Rather, these arguments simply posit that domestic political and economic disturbances, civil war being one of them, provide incentives for states to either initiate the use of force (i.e., diversion) or to be victims of force (i.e., opportunism). Other scholars, however, have more specifically examined the relationship between issues surrounding civil war and inter-state conflicts and militarized disputes.

For example, Gleditsch et al. demonstrate that civil wars increase the risk of militarized conflict between states and that this increase in the risk of interstate conflict

¹² Stephen M. Saideman. *The Ties That Divide: Ethnic Politics, Foreign Policy, and International Conflict*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 18.

¹³ For a great discussion of this argument, see David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ Peter F. Trumbore, "Victims or Aggressors? Ethno-Political Rebellion and Use of Force in Militarized Interstate Disputes," *International Studies Quarterly* 47, issue 2 (June 2003): 197.

“is driven by states’ efforts to affect the outcome of the civil war and, to a lesser extent, unintended spillovers from those efforts.”¹⁵ They find little evidence that the increased risk of interstate conflict results from opportunistic attacks or diversion. Linking civil to international conflict through specific mechanisms, Boaz Atzili identifies two ways in which civil conflict could lead to international conflict.¹⁶ The first involves refugee flows and cross-border insurgency, while the second involves countries intervening to protect their ethnic brethren across the border. Focusing on the spread of refugees, Salehyan and Gleditsch find that refugee flows and population movements more broadly are an additional mechanism by which conflict spreads across regions.¹⁷ The specific causal mechanisms they discuss are the spread of rebel social networks, the facilitation of the transnational spread of arms, combatants, and ideologies, and the altering of the ethnic composition of the state.

Alliances, Civil War, and Interstate Militarized Disputes

The existing scholarship has identified a number of causal pathways by which domestic conflict or instability can provoke inter-state militarized disputes. There is considerable empirical support for arguments that link civil war or rebellion to international conflict. As a theoretical matter, and to clarify further discussion, we can identify six distinct causal logics by which civil war in a given state may become internationalized and lead to militarized inter-state disputes involving external states:

(1) State engaged in civil conflict initiates MID against external state because the latter provides assistance to rebels, either direct or indirect. Direct support involves the provision of economic and military assistance, while indirect support ranges from allowing the arms to flow through its territory or allowing rebels to cross the border and use its territory as sanctuary. For example, Salehyan has argued that national boundaries increase the cost of counterinsurgency for the government because they allow

¹⁵ Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, Idean Salehyan, and Kenneth Schultz, “Fighting at Home, Fighting Abroad: How Civil Wars Lead to International Disputes,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no.4 (2008): 479-506.

¹⁶ Boaz Atzili, “When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors: Fixed Borders, State Weakness, and International Conflict,” *International Security* 31, no.3 (2007): 139-173.

¹⁷ Idean Salehyan and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Refugees and the Spread of Civil War,” *International Organization* 60, issue 2 (April, 2006): 335-366.

transnational rebels to use sanctuaries in other states, therefore making it more difficult to defeat them.¹⁸ While the government may pursue rebels across state boundaries (e.g., Cambodian attack on Khmer Rouge positions in Thailand or Nicaraguan Sandinista's regime attack on the Contras in Honduras), these actions raise the cost of conflict because the host government reciprocates the attack. Sometimes, the host government may be too weak to prevent rebels from using its territory as sanctuary, while in other cases it is actively encouraging and assisting them (e.g., Honduras and Contras in the Nicaraguan civil war). (2) State contending with civil conflict becomes target of MID by external state because the latter intervenes directly to support rebels, either because it has common ethnic/religious ties or because it offers rebels support in the hope that future rebel-constituted government will be friendlier and/or offer specific concessions.

(3) State contending with civil conflict is significantly weakened and external state intervenes to satisfy some long-standing claim, irrespective of rebels fighting the government. This is essentially the opportunism war argument. (4) State contending with civil conflict initiates MID against external state because it wants to galvanize support for the regime (i.e., diversionary war argument). (5) States engage in MIDs because of externalization and spillovers from civil conflict, rather than any deliberate government policy (e.g., cross-border pursuits of rebels, refugee flows, etc.) In these cases, borders are usually extremely porous and governments are unable to contain conflict spillover. (6) Civil war in a given state causes two external states to engage in direct fighting because they support opposite sides in the conflict. This was the case during the North Yemeni civil war from 1962 until 1970, during which Egypt and Saudi Arabia engaged in limited direct fighting because they supported opposing sides.

While the causal logics linking civil to inter-state conflict are theoretically persuasive and logically consistent, we still lack an understanding if this nexus between civil war and inter-state conflict varies for allied compared to non-allied states. Almost all quantitative studies of conflict use alliance as a control variable and find that common alliance membership generally reduces the likelihood of militarized dispute initiation.¹⁹

¹⁸ Idean Salehyan, "Transnational Rebels: Neighboring States as Sanctuary for Rebel Groups," *World Politics* 59, Number 2 (January 2007): 217-242.

¹⁹ For example, see Stuart A. Bremer, "Dangerous Dyads: Conditions Affecting the Likelihood of Interstate War, 1816-1965," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36, no.2 (June, 1992): 309-341;

In addition, scholars have found that specific alliance provisions, such as commitment to resolve disputes peacefully or information provision about military capabilities, contribute to a decrease in militarized dispute initiation between allied states.²⁰ Disaggregating data into different historical periods, Leeds and Mattes find that alliances formed in the 1885-1944 period bear no relationship to dispute involvement between allied members, while alliances formed in the 1945-1991 period have a lower likelihood of intra-allied conflict.²¹ Others, however, argue that membership in a common alliance can sometimes intensify conflict among member states, by changing incentives faced by small and less powerful members of the alliance.²² Once the great powers in the alliance provide for the security of small states, these minor powers are free to pursue preexisting disputes against other alliance members

All of this, however, tells us very little about the similarities and differences in the conflict patterns between allied and non-allied states when faced with violent domestic political context. The existence of wars and militarized disputes between countries that have formal commitments may at first seem counterintuitive and empirically puzzling. After all, alliances are generally formed either to address members' external and internal threats or to manage relations between allied states, whatever they may be. As most alliances are public documents, they also represent costly signal of states' intentions that is observed by other members of the international system. This makes the occurrence of serious conflict even more puzzling: why would a state sign a formal commitment with another state and then proceed to use force against it, despite the potential reputational and other costs? Put differently, what motivates a state to use force against its ally?

Bruce Russett, John R. Oneal, and David R. Davis, "The Third Leg of the Kantian Tripod for Peace: International Organizations and Militarized Disputes, 1950-1985," *International Organization* 52, Issue 3 (Summer 1998): 441-467; Paul Huth, *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998)

²⁰ See Andrew G. Long, Timothy Nordstrom, and Kyeonghi Baek, "Allying for Peace: Treaty Obligations and Conflict Between Allies," *The Journal of Politics* 69, no.4 (November 2007): 1103-1117; et al.; David H. Bearce, Kristen M. Flanagan, and Katherine M. Floros, "Alliances, Internal Information, and Military Conflict Among Member-States," *International Organization* 60, no.3 (Summer 2006): 595-625.

²¹ Brett Ashley Leeds and Michaela Mattes, "Alliance Politics During the Cold War: Aberration, New World Order, or the Continuation of History?" *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 24 (2007): 183-199.

²² Ronald Krebs, "Perverse Institutionalism: NATO and the Greco-Turkish Conflict."

The first step in answering this question is to establish a basic but nonetheless useful point. The fighting between allies, just like fighting between non-allied states, results from some underlying dispute or disagreement that exists between them. A mix of common and conflicting interests characterizes relations between all states, even those in the most cohesive alliances. At any point in their relationship, countries in general and allies in particular may have a plethora of issues over which they disagree. Put differently, alliance generally does not imply harmonious relationship between states. The disagreements that exist between allies may sometimes result in fighting, joint alliance membership notwithstanding. Of course, alliances do not cover all the issues over which states could disagree and new issues may arise after the alliance is formed that can cause disagreement and conflict where there wasn't one before. For example, at the time NATO was formed, the United States and Turkey could not foresee that they would come dangerously close to fighting each other over a disagreement about the political solution to the Syrian conflict.

A closer examination of the dyads' that form alliances reveals that they usually contain elements that are most highly correlated with conflict. For example, majority of alliances are formed between states that are geographically contiguous or in which at least one alliance member is a major power.²³ Research in IR has clearly shown that geographic contiguity and major power status, among other things, are factors most highly correlated with the existence of militarized disputes and wars.²⁴ In addition, major wars and militarized disputes with high casualties are a relatively rare occurrence. Most countries, including allies, are at peace most of the time.

While it may be true that, on average, common alliance membership and specific alliance provisions reduce intra-allied conflict, what happens when members are faced with domestic rebellion that profoundly alters the incentives faced by relevant actors? In the event of internal conflict, external states, either allied or non-allied, could theoretically choose from seven distinct strategic options: (1) Intervene directly to

²³ I will have specific numbers on this.

²⁴ For more on this, see Senese, Paul D. and John A. Vasquez. "A Unified Explanation of Territorial Conflict: Testing the Impact of Sampling Bias, 1919-1992." *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.47/issue 2 (2003): 275-298.; Vasquez, John. *The War Puzzle Revisited*. (Cambridge University Press: 2009.); Huth, Paul K. *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

support the government; (2) Intervene directly to support rebels; (3) Provide explicit economic or military assistance to the government, without overt intervention; (4) Provide explicit economic or military assistance to rebels, without overt intervention; (5) Provide indirect assistance to the government (e.g., sanctuary, transit for weapons, etc.); (6) Provide indirect assistance to rebels; (7) Do nothing. Of course, the external state could also opt for a combination of any of these policies. The intervention itself, therefore, can be either to support the incumbent government, oppose it by providing assistance to rebels, or remain neutral. These policies also carry different costs for the intervening government. As Gleditsch has argued, “direct intervention in conflicts in other states, especially on the side of the rebels, constitutes a serious violation of that state’s sovereignty and often entails significant costs to the intervening state.”²⁵

How do common alliance ties affect the strategic choices that external states face? Theoretically, membership in a common alliance could make it more likely that the state intervenes directly on behalf of the government because it wants to preserve the alliance and defeat rebels, who may be interested in realigning the government with other states. Indeed, domestic revolutions often change states’ foreign policy in fundamental ways and increase overall uncertainty in the political system. For example, the Soviet Communist revolution dramatically reoriented Moscow’s foreign policy, leading the Soviet Union to abandon World War I efforts and opt for a separate armistice with Germany. Iran’s revolution in 1979 was a pivotal event in the Middle Eastern politics, leading Tehran to abandon all existing alliances and reorient its foreign policy away from the United States. The underlying theoretical point is that internal political unrests are more likely to get allies involved by the simple fact that allies are more invested in each other’s political situation.

Allies could also intervene directly against the incumbent government with which they share alliance ties if they are unhappy with the regime and rebel victory promises stronger alliance ties in the future. In this case, the external state is unhappy with its ally’s government and exploits domestic unrest to change the regime and install a more favorable group. For example, following the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in 1979,

²⁵ Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Transnational Dimensions of Civil War,” *Journal of Peace Research* 44, no.3 (2007): 296.

the United States and Honduras- Nicaragua's formal Rio Pact allies- have actively supported the internal opposition to the regime (i.e., the Contras), with the latter even engaged in limited direct fighting. In addition, amidst a Costa Rican civil war in 1948, Costa Rica and Nicaragua- formal allies- engaged in a series of militarized disputes because the former accused the latter of allowing Costa Rican exiles to operate from Nicaraguan territory with impunity. To further illustrate this, it is useful to make a theoretical distinction between inter-state alliances and inter-regime alliances. When two countries sign an alliance, country A may commit to defend the territorial integrity of country B. At the same time, however, it does not mean that country A is committed to defending the regime of country B. As a result, the relationship between two regimes may deteriorate and, while they still remain formally allied, one country could actively work to undermine its ally's regime. Indeed, this was the case with many U.S. interventions in Central America throughout the Cold War. In addition, the contemporary alliance between China and North Korea is a good empirical illustration of this. While China would most likely defend the North Korean state against any external attack, whether it would intervene to support Kim Jong Un's regime against domestic insurrection is an entirely different matter. Indeed, it is not implausible that in case of a civil war in North Korea, Beijing may intervene overtly to support the opposition, in the hope that new leadership may be more pro-China.²⁶ Thus, while the inter-state alliance remains solid, inter-regime alliance may be more fragile.

This begs an important question: Why does common alliance membership matter? The existence of a formal agreement makes fighting between allies different from fighting between non-allied states. All militarized disputes and wars between states carry certain risks and opportunities for participants, regardless of whether they are allied or not. Defeat may mean loss of territory, resources, political independence, or even elimination from the state system. Victory may entail acquisition of more territory, resources, or at the extreme global domination. Notwithstanding these similarities, conflict between states with formal agreements carries implications that are absent in non-allied fighting.

²⁶ I acknowledge that the likelihood of this happening is extremely low. This example is only meant to illustrate the broader theoretical point.

For example, the obvious difference is that allies risk rupturing the relationship and destroying the alliance if conflict or disagreements escalate to a certain level, something not present in the relationship between non-allied states. The possibility of destroying the alliance or, worse, leading the partner to defect to a hostile state is a cost exclusive to the conflict between allied states. This is especially so if alliance members have alternative options for alignment or if they are strong enough to provide for their own security. A dispute that escalates to war and large-scale fighting that involves significant casualties will certainly break the alliance, as evidenced by the war between Austria and Prussia in 1866 or Italy and Albania in 1939. Therefore, in addition to the costs and risks of fighting, states fighting their allies also have to include the very real possibility of losing the alliance partner. Assuming that the state values the ally for *some* reason (why would it sign the alliance otherwise?), the costs of war are higher than they otherwise would be because of the risk of losing the ally. This risk may be even bigger in large, multilateral alliances in which the fighting may be bilateral, but it risks alienating other alliance partners. For example, Albania decided to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and realign itself more closely with China following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The loss of Albania was an additional cost that Soviets bore in addition to the material cost of fighting against another ally, Czechoslovakia.

In addition, fighting one's ally carries reputational costs that are absent in fighting between non-allied states. When other states observe conflict between alliance members, they may infer that those states are unreliable partners, thus diminishing their utility as allies. Indeed, if state A uses force against a state to whom it is formally allied, how can it credibly commit peaceful relations to other states or other alliance partners? This logic is nicely summarized by Michaela Mattes and Greg Vonnahme, "Attacking another state or aiding an aggressor are already likely to be viewed negatively by the international community but doing so in disregard of an existing formal international commitment increases the chance that sanctions are imposed."²⁷ Not all of the implications, however, are necessarily negative. For example, by acting aggressively against one's ally, a country signals its willingness to accept higher costs, which in turn can improve its

²⁷ Michaela Mattes and Greg Vonnahme, "Contracting for Peace: Do Nonaggression Pacts Reduce Conflict?" *The Journal of Politics* 72, no.4 (2010): 930.

perception of resolve among other states. The reputational implication of fighting is the second important difference in the fighting between allied and non-allied states.

I follow Leeds et al. and define alliances as “written agreements, signed by official representatives of at least two independent states, that include promises to aid a partner in the event of military conflict, to remain neutral in the event of conflict, to refrain from military conflict with one another, or to consult/cooperate in the event of international crises that create a potential for military conflict.”²⁸ This definition includes any formal agreement between at least two states and encompasses defense pacts, offense pacts, neutrality pacts, and consultation pacts. As Leeds and Savun argue, there are conceptual problems with including non-aggression pacts in the definition of alliances, “because pure non-aggression pacts require no active coordination, their formation and termination are governed by different processes.”²⁹ In addition, non-aggression pacts also include countries that are likely to fight each other (why would they otherwise sign a non-aggression pact?).³⁰ As a result of this, I exclude exclusively non-aggression pacts from the analysis.

Research Design

For all of the tests that I conduct, the unit of analysis is directed dyad-year, with each dyad appearing twice in the sample. I’ve restricted the sample to politically relevant dyad years, to include territorially contiguous states, allied states, or dyads in which at least one member is a major power, as defined by the Correlates of War (COW) data set. The analysis spans the 1816-2010 period and the binary dependent variable is the onset of MID in which at least one side uses force (i.e., MIDs of level 4 or 5). All of the models are pooled logit models and robustness checks have been performed using year fixed effects. As this study analyzes MID onsets, the dependent variable is 1 only for cases in which state A initiates a new MID against state B, or vice versa. The key independent variable is the occurrence of civil war in either the initiator or the target. The alliance data

²⁸ Leeds, Brett Ashley et al. (2002).

²⁹ Leeds and Savun (2007): 125.

³⁰ For more on non-aggression pacts, see Michaela Mattes and Greg Vonnahme, “Contracting for Peace: Do Non-Aggression Pacts Reduce Conflict,” *The Journal of Politics*, vol.72/no.4 (2010): 925-938; Yonatan Lupu, Paul Poast, “Team of Former Rivals: A Multilateral Theory of Non-Aggression Pacts,” *Journal of Peace Research*, vol.53/issue 3 (2016): 344-358.

came from Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP data set).³¹ The MID data and the civil war data came from the Correlates of War (COW) data set.³² I also ran a robustness check using Uppsala civil war data from 1946-2010 and the results are broadly consistent.

Because the alliance data is yearly, I studied every case to make sure that the MID happened *after* the alliance was formed and *after* civil war onset. The latter was done for non-allied dyads as well to remove cases in which MID happened before the official onset of civil war. Fortunately, there is data on the specific date of the MID as well as the data on the specific temporal range for the alliance. Within alliances, I compare institutionalized alliances to ones that are not. It is hypothesized that heavily institutionalized alliances may be more prone to managing conflicts between allied dyads, especially if it emanates from internal instability.

Descriptive Statistics

To fully understand the conditions under which formally allied countries engage in MIDs, I collected narratives of every MID between formally allied states.³³ There are 324 unique instances in which formally allied countries initiated MIDs that reached the level of use of force, from 1816-2010. Out of this total, there are 120 instances (37%) of MID force initiations during civil war in either the initiator or the target. Out of 120, 18 are instances in which *both* the initiator and the target were involved in a civil war at the time of the MID initiations. For non-allied dyads, there are 598 instances of MID force initiations during civil war in either the initiator or the target. Out of this 598, 82 are instances in which both the initiator and the target were involved in a civil war.

Not all MIDs between states, however, are nefarious in nature. For example, following a coup d'état in 1964, France intervened in Gabon to restore the legitimate government, in accordance with Article III of the defense pact between the two countries.

³¹ Leeds, Brett Ashley, Jeffrey M. Ritter, Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, and Andrew G. Long. 2002. Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944. *International Interactions* 28: 237-260.

³² Zeev Maoz, Paul L. Johnson, Jasper Kaplan, Fiona Ogunkoya, and Aaron Shreve 2018. The Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) Dataset Version 3.0: Logic, Characteristics, and Comparisons to Alternative Datasets, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

³³ To ensure consistency in narratives, I relied on a single source that describes each MID. The source is Douglas M. Gibler. *International Conflicts, 1816-2010: Militarized Interstate Dispute Narratives*, Volume I and II (Rowman & Littlefield, MD: 2018).

In addition, the U.S. threatened intervention in Haiti in 1994 to restore the government led by Aristide, who was overthrown in a coup d'état in 1993. COW data set classifies these as inter-state disputes when, in fact, they were interventions to support the allied regime and did not threaten countries' territorial integrity. In other cases, MIDs were more nefarious in nature, such as Honduran and U.S. attempts to overthrow the democratically elected and formally allied Sandinista government in Nicaragua. While Honduras and the U.S. never had territorial ambitions vis-à-vis Nicaragua, their efforts were aimed at undermining the regime.

After carefully studying each of the cases, I divide them into three categories: pro-allied intervention, anti-allied intervention, and neutral fighting. To qualify as a pro-ally intervention, there has to be evidence that the MID resulted from a direct military intervention on behalf of the government that is fighting internal opposition *or* that the intervention was conducted to support/restore the previous government that was violently overthrown in a coup d'état or other forms of internal political instability. To qualify as an anti-ally intervention, there has to be evidence that the MID resulted from *direct* financial or military support for rebels fighting the existing legitimate allied government *or* from a direct conflict between allies over policy/territorial disagreements *or* because one ally has territorial or other aspirations against its ally. Fighting can range from limited MIDs over policy disagreements to all-out attacks and territorial annexations. I code as neutral all of the fishing/border disputes and other cases in which fighting is contained and relatively minor.

Table 1 classifies each of the 324 cases across two dimensions: 1.) Alliance ties, ranging from a formal defense pact to a neutrality/non-aggression pact; 2.) Pro/anti/neutral intervention. Each cell in the table shows the number of cases that fit in each of the categories. For example, there were 16 MIDs in which one ally intervened to support the other allied regime (e.g., France in Gabon, the U.S. in Haiti). As we can see, most of the inter-allied MIDs consisted of “neutral” fighting, which is classified as border/fishing disputes and other relatively minor and contained fighting. The large number of minor MIDs somewhat undermines the large-N studies of the relationship between war and other variables that rely on the MIDs data set.³⁴ Indeed, one of the goals

³⁴ This is through no fault of the MID data set itself.

of this paper is to further unpack this relationship and get a better understanding of the kind of fighting states are engaged in. Perhaps most interesting is the 53 anti-allied interventions in defensive and offensive alliances. This is a relatively big number and it includes cases in which one ally directly attacked the territorial integrity or political independence of its fellow allied state.

| | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Alliance ties | Defensive/Offensive Alliance | Neutrality/Non-Aggression Pacts | Consultation Pacts |
| Pro-Allied Intervention | 16 | | |
| Anti-Allied Intervention | 53 | 6 | 3 |
| Neutral Fighting | 191 | 29 | 7 |

Empirical Analysis

The existing scholarship has already established a strong and positive relationship between civil war occurrence and MID initiation.³⁵ However, no study has compared whether the effect varies for allied and non-allied states. Table 2 presents a simple cross-tabulation, comparing the frequency of MID initiations for allied and non-allied states.

Table 2
MID Initiations between Allied and Non-allied States
In Politically Relevant Dyad Years, 1816-2010.

| | Allied States | % | Non Allied States | % |
|--------------|---------------|-----------|-------------------|------|
| MID Onset | 324 | 0.4 | 1,569 | 0.8 |
| No Mid Onset | 91,086 | 99.6 | 184,676 | 99.2 |
| Chi-Squared | | 165.92*** | | |

³⁵ See especially Gleditsch et al (2008).

*** Significant at 1 percent.

As Table 2 shows, while overall MID initiation rate is low for both allied and non-allied states, non-allied states initiate MIDs at twice the rate of allied states (0.8% compared to 0.4%). The difference is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Table 2 compares MID initiations between allied and non-allied states, limiting the sample to cases in which either side A (i.e., the initiator) or side B (i.e., the target) experience civil war at the time of the MID onset. The results are similar to Table 3 and non-allied states initiate MIDs at almost twice the rate of allied states and the difference is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 3
Civil Wars and MID Initiations between Allied and Non-allied States
In Politically Relevant Dyad Years, 1816-2010.

| | Allied States | % | Non Allied States | % |
|--------------|---------------|----------|-------------------|------|
| MID Onset | 120 | 0.8 | 598 | 1.6 |
| No Mid Onset | 14,454 | 99.2 | 36,435 | 98.4 |
| Chi-Squared | | 37.81*** | | |

*** Significant at 1 percent.

The results from the two tables demonstrate that common alliance ties reduce the frequency of MID onsets for allied states, in both the full sample and the sample limited to civil war occurrences. However, does the relationship change when we conduct multivariate analysis and control for a number of factors associated with conflict?

In addition to the two independent variables (i.e., civil war in initiator and target), I include a number of control variables. *Territorial contiguity* is a dummy variable, indicating whether the two states were sharing a land border or being separated by no more than 400 miles of water. *Capabilities ratio* is the log of the ratio of the stronger

state's capabilities over the weaker state's. *Major power* is a dummy variable and it has a value of 1 if either member of the dyad was considered a major power. *Joint Democracy* is 1 if the dyad is jointly democratic. *Cold War* is 1 if the relevant years are 1948-1989, generally considered the beginning and the end of the Cold War. *Foreign Policy Similarity* is indicated by the S-score in three different computational measures: global weighted score using all states (*S_weighted_global*), score between initiator and system leader using countries in the relevant region (*S_leader1*), and the score between target and system leader using countries in the relevant region (*S_leader2*). To control for time dependence, I include the number of years since the last MID in the dyad, entered in linear form and as a cubic spline.³⁶ I also plan to add variables that predict civil war and one variable to indicate the degree of dyadic economic interdependence. I lag the values of the civil war variable by one year, for both initiator and target states.

The first model (Table 4) is a logit model comparing the MID onset between non-allied and allied dyads. To ease the interpretation of the coefficients, I report the marginal change in the probability of a MID onset for each variable, holding all other variables at their means. As is clear, the marginal change in civil war in initiator state is positive and statistically significant for both non-allied and allied dyads. Civil war in target state is only significant for non-allied dyads. The baseline predicted probability of MID onset for non-allied dyads is 0.36%, holding all variables at their means. The same value for allied dyads is 0.07%. For non-allied dyads, the effect of civil war in initiator or target raises the predicted probability of MID onset by about 83% over the baseline predicted probability. For allied dyads, the presence of civil war in initiator increases the predicted probability of MID onset by about 128% over the baseline predicted probability, a substantively significant effect.

One of the goals of this article is to compare whether the key independent variables of interest operate differently among allied and non-allied states. For this, I conducted a Wald test for the equivalence of civil war coefficients in initiator and target. In both cases, I fail to reject the null hypothesis that the coefficients are different at conventional significance levels ($\chi^2=1.98$, $p=0.16$ for civil war in initiator; $\chi^2=0.34$, $p=0.56$ for civil war in target).

³⁶ Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998. I do not report these results.

Table 4
Logit Model of MID Onset, 1816-2010.

| VARIABLES | (1) Non-allied dyads | (2) Allied dyads |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Civil War in Initiator | 0.003*** (0.0005) | 0.0009*** (0.0003) |
| Civil War in Target | 0.003*** (0.0006) | 0.0004 (0.0002) |
| Ln (Capability Ratio) | -0.0009*** (0.00008) | -0.0001*** (0.00004) |
| Major Power | 0.002*** (0.0003) | 0.0006*** (0.0002) |
| Joint Democracy | -0.002*** (0.0005) | -0.0008*** (0.0002) |
| Contiguity | -0.001*** (0.00009) | -0.0005*** (0.043) |
| Cold War | 0.002*** (0.0004) | 0.635*** (0.00007) |
| S- global score | -0.001*** (0.0004) | -0.0005** (0.0002) |
| S- initiator score | -0.001 (0.0007) | 0.0011*** (0.0004) |
| S- target score | 0.002** (0.196) | -0.0007 (0.0004) |
| Predicted probability at mean | 0.0036*** (0.0002) | 0.0007*** (0.0001) |
| N | 93,021 | 45,690 |

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Time dependence variables were included in

the estimation of the models but are not reported in the table.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$

The second model (Table 5) compares the MID onset between non-allied dyads and allied dyads that have some institutional elements. The ATOP data set classifies these alliances into three ordinal categories, from lowest to highest level of institutionalization. The first category provides for regular meetings of governmental officials to manage the agreement, the lowest level of institutionalization. The second category is alliances that create a named organization with regularly scheduled meetings (e.g., an interstate commission for cooperation). Finally, alliances that include a stand-alone organization with a permanent bureaucracy (e.g., NATO) represent the highest level of institutionalization. Alliances with some level of institutionalization should be particularly equipped at ameliorating the conflict between members for all the reasons argued by neoliberal institutionalists (e.g., issue linkage, forum for meetings, exchanging of private information, etc.) (*I will develop this point more*).

Unlike Table 4, the results are reported as coefficients. There are several notable results that stand out in this table. First, the relative importance of the civil war variable flips for institutionalized allied dyads. The civil war in target state becomes a much stronger predictor of MID onset for institutionalized allied dyads and the civil war in initiator state loses its statistical significance. Civil war in target state is statistically significantly different for institutionalized allied dyads compared to non-allied dyads, and the Wald test for the equality of coefficients rejects the null hypothesis of the equality of coefficients at the 0.01 level ($\chi^2=9.85$, $p=0.0017$). To make sure the effect is not driven by alliances with low levels of institutionalization, I also run the model comparing non-allied dyads and allied dyads with the highest level of institutionalization (i.e., those establishing stand-alone organizations with permanent bureaucracy). The results do not change significantly.³⁷

³⁷ The results are available upon request.

Table 5
Logit Model of MID Onset for Non-Allied Dyads and
Institutionalized Allied Dyads, 1816-2001.

| VARIABLES | (1) Non-allied dyads | (2) Institutionalized allied dyads |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Civil War in Initiator | 0.600*** (0.091) | 0.396 (0.232) |
| Civil War in Target | 0.496*** (0.096) | 1.21*** (0.207) |
| Ln (Capability Ratio) | -0.290*** (0.024) | -0.207*** (0.063) |
| Major Power | 0.334*** (0.109) | 0.367 (0.246) |
| Joint Democracy | -0.442*** (0.150) | -0.548** (0.270) |
| Contiguity | -0.321*** (0.019) | -0.750*** (0.048) |
| Cold War | 0.429*** (0.095) | 0.261*** (0.172) |
| S- global score | -0.484*** (0.116) | -0.290 (0.290) |
| S- initiator score | -0.451** (0.195) | 1.56*** (0.545) |
| S- target score | 0.580** (0.195) | -0.666 (0.613) |
| Constant | -0.693*** (0.171) | -1.37*** (0.374) |

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Time dependence variables were included in the estimation of the models but are not reported in the table.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$

Table 6 compares non-allied dyads with alliances that commit the members to mediation, arbitration, or some other formal means of settling conflicts that emerge among the parties. Similar to institutionalized alliances, agreements that contain formal means of settling conflicts should be more equipped to address any disagreements between members, especially in face of domestic political instability. Similar to Table 4, the relative importance of the civil war variable flips for allied dyads with mediation/arbitration measures. The civil war in target state becomes a much stronger predictor of MID onset for allied dyads with mediation/arbitration measures. Civil war in target state is statistically significantly different for allied dyads with mediation/arbitration measures compared to non-allied dyads, and the Wald test for the equality of coefficients rejects the null hypothesis of the equality of coefficients at the 0.01 level ($\chi^2=13.20$, $p=0.0003$). The same relationship exists when we compare non-allied dyads to alliances that have been ratified as opposed to formed through an executive agreement.³⁸ Because ratification requires legislative approval, we would expect alliances that are ratified to signal a higher level of commitment compared to those that are signed through executive agreement.

³⁸ Results available, but not reported.

Table 6
Logit Model of MID Onset for Non-Allied Dyads and
Allied Dyads with arbitration/mediation measures, 1816-2001.

| VARIABLES | (1) Non-allied dyads | (2) Allied dyads with arbitration/mediation |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Civil War in Initiator | 0.600*** (0.091) | 0.497** (0.233) |
| Civil War in Target | 0.496*** (0.096) | 1.36*** (0.217) |
| Ln (Capability Ratio) | -0.290*** (0.024) | -0.183*** (0.062) |
| Major Power | 0.334*** (0.109) | 0.583** (0.271) |
| Joint Democracy | -0.442*** (0.150) | -0.782** (0.324) |
| Contiguity | -0.321*** (0.019) | -0.705*** (0.049) |
| Cold War | 0.429*** (0.095) | 0.506*** (0.192) |
| S- global score | -0.484*** (0.116) | -0.313 (0.304) |
| S- initiator score | -0.451** (0.195) | 1.48** (0.545) |
| S- target score | 0.580** (0.195) | -0.931 (0.724) |
| Constant | -0.693*** | -1.54*** |

| | | |
|---|---------|---------|
| | (0.171) | (0.409) |
| N | 93,021 | 48,082 |

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Time dependence variables were included in the estimation of the models but are not reported in the table.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$

Discussion

The quantitative tests support elements of my hypotheses. Civil war in initiator or target makes the onset of MIDs more likely for both allied and non-allied dyads, regardless of alliance type. Non-allied dyads initiate MIDs at a statistically significantly higher rate than allied dyads, with or without civil wars. I also find surprising and perhaps counterintuitive result that the relationship between the civil war in initiator and target state flips for institutionalized allied dyads and alliances involving specific mediation/arbitration measures. For these alliances, the civil war in the target state is a stronger predictor of MID onset than civil war in the initiator state. The relationship is reverse for non-allied dyads. One of the possible explanations is that allies are initiating MIDs at a much higher rate when the other alliance member is involved in civil war because they are trying to affect the outcome of the civil war or benefit from, while civil war in initiator is a stronger predictor of MID onset for non-allied dyads due to diversionary motives or the fact that a neighboring, non-allied country is providing support for rebels and they are resisting this militarily. The coefficient for civil war in target state is statistically significantly different *and* stronger for allied than for non-allied dyads. This is surprising because we would expect the specific provisions contained in these alliances to contribute towards peaceful resolutions of disputes. This potentially supports Krebs' argument that membership in multilateral alliances may intensify conflict for smaller powers because their external security is guaranteed by the major power member of the alliance. Multilateral alliances also tend to be heavily institutionalized. I intend to more fully test this proposition in future versions.

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