

Masters of Misdirection: Diversionary Conflict and Contested Institutions

Robert Markie

Truman State University

Abstract:

As rivalries and domestic turmoil have both been found to lead to more conflict prone states, understanding what the likely domestic and foreign policy options available to other state leaders (as well as the likelihood of each choice being selected) can enable decision makers to avoid or initiate early in conflict to mitigate the damage done by wars. During times of severe domestic turmoil, leaders are faced with a limited number of options to ensure their survival; one of which includes attempting to distract the masses away from problems at home by creating a larger threat to the country from an outside source by engaging in a militarized interstate dispute. This study finds empirical support for the finding that although traditional conflict variables prove effective at examining violent conflict, contested institutions and violent strife prove to be better indicators for lower level disputes.

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

Militarized interstate conflicts are costly, in terms of both human and monetary capital, and often lead to a restructuring of the international system. By creating generalizations about the conditions that lead to militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) and war, we can hopefully help create a more detailed advisory picture for decision makers. As rivalries and domestic turmoil have both been found to lead to more conflict prone states, understanding what the likely domestic and foreign policy options available to other decision makers (as well as the likelihood of each choice being selected) can enable decision makers to avoid or initiate early in conflict to mitigate the damage done by wars. Diversionary conflict theories represent a much-neglected topic of research within war and peace studies, but could perhaps be one of the most important to delve deeper into. During times of severe domestic turmoil, leaders are faced with a limited number of options to ensure their survival; one of which includes attempting to distract the masses away from problems at home by creating a larger threat to the country at home from an outside source by engaging in a militarized interstate dispute. Current research regarding conflict onset conditions has indicated that states under contested institutions and rivalry conditions can increase the potential for diversion, but the two have never been combined. Additionally, the vast majority of the aggregate literature on diversionary theories concerns only the actual use of force as a diversionary measure. But do leaders try to divert without committing to high cost full-scale violent conflicts, possibly resorting instead to demonstrations or threats of force as a mechanism of misdirection? This study hopes to solve these gaps in the relevant literature on perhaps the most wasteful form of conflict possible.

This study hopes to lend support to the idea that leaders in rivalry dyads and with domestic contested institutions and violent strife are the most likely to initiate in an external conflict for political survival. This paper opens with a broad discussion of the previous literature on conflict onset, concluding with a more focused look at diversionary theory research. Following the literature review is a brief discussion of the methodological aspects of the study including the

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

theoretical model proposed and operationalization of its variables. A section discussing the results and analysis of the models follows, and I conclude with a critical assessment of the models used and projections for future research.

Pervious Conflict Research

Over the past 15 years political scientists have seen an explosion in research on interstate conflict, branching down a number of distinct avenues; while some focused their efforts towards factors that lead up to interstate war and the decision to initiate, along the lines of this study, others have specialized in determining what factors lead states to join current ongoing conflict, and still others have focused on what factors determine conflict duration and outcomes. However, there historically has been a lack of a cohesive guiding conceptual framework in how researchers theoretically model interstate disputes, without which the ability to create a cumulative image of the political universe using extant research is heavily hindered (Bremer 1995).

Much of the early research on interstate conflict focused on the use of the “mental model,” under which conflicts of interests between states inevitably arise out of the constellation of political, economic, military, social, and geographic conditions (often referred to as “contextual factors” as they typically remain relatively static) that exist at a given point in time, which powerfully constrain leaders in their decision making (Bremer 1995). While most of these conflicts of interests between states are resolved via peaceful means of negotiation, a small minority of these issues are so highly salient that at least one side feels compelled to use force to bring about a favorable outcome; this militarization of conflict is operationally known within conflict research as MIDs (Militarized Interstate Disputes). These can be related as the threat, display, or use of force by one state against another. While some conflicts, once militarized, lead to settlements and negotiations, a continually smaller minority of these MIDs are met with counteraction, met with counter-counter

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

action, and so forth, continuing down a path of escalation leading ultimately to the threshold of all out interstate war. Beyond this threshold (typically operationalized as at least 1000 battle related fatalities), new dynamic forces come into play which make the underlying conflict more difficult to resolve; stances and ideologies may harden or be broken down as leaders attempt to justify their actions in absolute principles and secondary issues stemming from conflict. All interstate conflicts and wars eventually come to some end, leading to a shift in the contextual factors at the systemic, dyadic (between the pairs of states), and monadic (domestic) levels that led to the initial conflict of interests, setting the scene for future interstate conflicts (Bremer 1995).

However, one of the limits with this model is that it fails to truly understand interstate conflicts and crisis behavior as a process, during which the contextual factors can and do shift and are not as static as the mental model assumes, failing to accounting for each actors actions and subsequent consequences of said actions that shift the course on the path to war (Bremer 1995). A more recent solution, projected by Stuart Bremer’s Process Model of conflict, retains the contextual political, economic, social, and geographic conditions and the basic skeletonized timeline of dispute escalation from conflicting interest to MIDs to war, but notes that these contextual factors can shift from environmental shocks resulting from the conflict process itself as a disruptive event in the state system (Bremer 1995).

Figure 1: The Process Model of Interstate Conflict

Conflict of Interest or Dispute	□	Occurrence of Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID)
--	---	---

□	Contextual Political, Economic, Social, and Geographic Conditions Affecting All Stages				□	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic Factors • National Attributes • Dyadic Relationships • Historical Experiences 					
Outcomes and Effects of Interstate War	□	Evolution of Interstate War	□	Occurrence of Interstate War	□	Evolution of MID

(Bremer 1995)

Following this Process Model of understanding disputes, research has accordingly been specialized down to understanding how the interaction of these contextual factors and conditions during times of crises, and how they lead toward decisions to either initiate (or continue or escalate) the use of violence or seek negotiation via other peaceful options, or succession all together (Bremer 1995). For the remainder of this review, I focus my discussion more towards conditions linked specifically with conflict onset and initiation, although a number of these conditions have been linked to other stages of the conflict process as well.

Conflict onset research arguably accounts for the largest area of research conducted by international conflict scientists, and is usually conducted from three levels of analysis; the systemic (global) level, the dyadic level, and the state/domestic level, although for a number of reasons the majority of conflict onset research focuses on the dyadic level of analysis, emphasizing the political interactions between two states, the initiator and its target. When looking at the extant research from afar, a number of dyadic factors appear to be key to explaining conflict onset; distance and geographic/territory factors, power (economic and military forms), trade levels, regime type, alliance portfolios, and history of prior conflicts (Levy 2012).

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

The most important factor in dyadic conflicts is distance, as distance dictates opportunity. States that border each other are much more likely to fight than states that are farther away for a number of reasons, but mainly due to limitations in states' abilities to project their power (display force or go to war), as well as the degree of interaction between the two; for example, Nicaragua is much less likely to go to war with Ghana than Guatemala, as they likely don't interact as much with Ghana and thus are less likely to have disagreements, and are more limited in their available tools of coercion (militarization), due to the extensive natural barriers between the two (Hensel 2012). As such, research often focuses around "politically relevant dyads," which reduces research populations and samples down to contiguous states and major powers, which possess the military capabilities to project force globally and are more involved in system level politics. Furthermore, territoriality issues also play a factor when assessing geographic factors that lead to war, as states that frequently fight over highly salient territoriality issues are more likely to go to war than states that don't, which helps explain peaceful interactions of contiguous states, such as the United States and Canada (Hensel 2012).

Power plays an additional factor in states' decisions to go to war, and is historically the most researched, and a number of theories exist that are rooted in the state, dyadic, and systemic levels. Balance of power theorists propose the idea that national security is enhanced (and peace is most likely) when military capabilities are distributed such that no one state has enough power to dominate the rest; thus, an imbalance or preponderance of power between states is most likely to lead to conflict, as one side sees that it can clearly win in an interstate war and chooses to initiate (Geller 2012). However, power parity theories counter that as one side of the dyad would have most of the power, they can already coerce or bully the weaker state into accepting the status quo set by the stronger power, leading to peace, while a balance of power within a dyad would be more dangerous as each side thinks it can win in a fair fight, and receive considerably more support than balance of power theories (Geller 2012). Power is

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

measured a number of ways with a number of different outcomes; while some of the previous research focuses solely on military capabilities and military expenditures, more liberal theories have focused on economic power, emphasizing GDP/GNP growth rates and the ability to extract resources, with the more recent research focusing on combining the realist conceptions of military power with that of the liberal tradition, often using the Combined Index of National Capabilities (CINC) score compiled by the Correlates of War dataset, combining the factors of total and urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, and military expenditures and personnel (Bennett & Stam 2000).

However, states can also build up their power levels by joining in alliances. While much of the research on the effect of alliances is still unclear, the research does indicate that allies rarely fight each other. A noteworthy and promising area of study is in alliance portfolios, with early results pointing to similar alliance portfolios (shared allies) leads towards peace due to third party mitigation outlets and third party interests in retaining peace (Kang 2012).

Besides domestic economic capabilities, international economic interdependence has been shown to be an important liberal connection between states and conflict (or lack thereof). Research has generally shown that increased economic interdependence between states leads to a more peaceful systemic and dyadic environment, due to the increased economic costs of going to war, as well as the increased outlets for communication and regular diplomatic interactions (Russett & Oneal 2001).

Regime type is an incredibly strong factor when regarding conflict onset and initiation, and no study on interstate disputes would be complete without acknowledging democratic peace, or the absence of interstate wars between democratic states, the reduced chances for democratic states to engage in militarized disputes among themselves, and the unlikely escalation of democratic militarized

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

disputes to high levels of violence. Along with the bargaining model of war taking a rationalist approach, democratic peace receives an institutional argument, emphasizing domestic institutions, audience costs, and commitment problems as the key to the conflict process (Bremer 1995, Mitchell 2012). The systemic level of analysis finds a more normative rooted argument, focusing on the shared norms of the international democratic community, such as third-party conflict management, respect for human rights, cooperation through international organizations, and territorial integrity (Mitchell 2012). However, Rudy & Quackenbush (2009) find that there is no monadic peace, meaning that democracies themselves aren't more peaceful than autocracies, finding that democracies not only fight non-democracies with considerable regularity, but also are also more likely to initiate disputes against non-democracies than autocracies are.

As evident in the process model, the history of past conflicts directly affects the contextual factors that lead to future wars, especially for rival states. Rivalries are considerably important when engaging in conflict research, as they account for approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of MIDs, and are more likely to escalate to all out war, as 80% of interstate wars take place between rivalry contexts (Diehl & Goertz 2012). Rivalries also affect domestic dynamics, with previous research indicating that bureaucratic policies harden over time in a rivalry, making rivalry behavior (such as arms races) hard to dislodge due to "bureaucratic inertia." Additionally, public opinion plays a considerable role in supporting rivalry continuation, as it makes leaders stay the course when the populace views rivals in enemy terms in order to retain power and popular support (Diehl & Goertz 2012).

Diversionsary Conflict Theories

While many of these variables do typically remain relatively static over time, recent research has shown that a number of more dynamic domestic factors can also play an important role in conflict onset, specifically regarding domestic breakdown. Following Robert Putnam's 2-Level Game Theory, decisions made by state leaders

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

regarding international relations can often be best understood when examining the internal domestic political environment, and vice versa, as the conditions and actors at each level (political parties domestically and allied-state leaders, for example) directly and indirectly affect political decisions at both levels. Much of the research under this approach has been focused on diversionary conflict theories, which focuses on explaining the decision-making behavior of leaders under conditions of severe domestic turmoil. During times of severe domestic turmoil and strife, leaders have a number of options available to them to cope with the situation; they can choose to encapsulate the conflict by repressing the populous in hopes of retaining power, or they can peacefully leave under leave office, although this is seldom a feasible option, as we assume leaders are self interested and seek to remain in power (Mansfield & Snyder 1995, Dassel 1998, Dassel & Reinhardt 1999, Davies 2002).

However, diversionary theories suggest a third option available to leaders during times of crises at home; by choosing to externalize the conflict via engaging in interstate war, leaders can hope to divert attention away from domestic problems and utilize the “rally around the flag” effect we often see during the early stages of war. The availability of these options is dependent on a number of domestic factors however, namely the form of domestic strife and regime turbulence. Dassel & Reinhardt (1999) and Davies (2002) find that violent forms of domestic strife provide better conditions for externalization via war (as further repression would likely lead to revolution), while nonviolent domestic strife favors encapsulating the conflict via repression tactics. Additionally, Dassel & Reinhardt (1999) focus on contested institutions as a separate specific condition of domestic strife. Contested institutions can be thought of as the opposite of regime consolidation, or “when consequential groups refuse to play by, and advocate opposing, sets of rules” (60). Under this theory, Dassel & Reinhardt (1999) argue that conventional diversionary theories are flawed in that they rely on the assumption that the military can be ordered to fight a war by politicians. However, within states that are experiencing severe domestic strife,

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

the military (along with all other political actors) becomes a relatively autonomous actor, and will only initiate conflict if it believes the domestic strife will affect its interests or survival. Because political groups are necessarily deprived of the normal “rules of the game” under contested institutions and losses of legitimacy, political groups will necessarily try to encroach on the military’s monopoly on force as a coercive tool, which directly threatens its interests of organizational survivability and monopoly on violence. This pressures the military to use force either at home (encapsulation) or abroad (externalization), depending on the type of strife experienced (nonviolent and violent, respectively) (Dassel 1998). Contested institutions have been found to increase the predicted chance that general violence will occur in the next year by as much as 23.8%, and increasing the probability of international violence by as much as 30.7% (Mansfield & Snyder 1995).

Regime type has been found to act as an intervening variable, affecting a number of other variables. Davies (2002) finds that autocracies are more likely to initiate interstate conflict as a diversionary measure when pressured with domestic violent strife (46% increase in initiation probability), with democratizing regimes second most likely (23% increase), and full democracies dampening the effect of violent strife with a 16% increase in initiation probability. However, Davies (2002) surprisingly finds that joint democracy was not significant after introducing contested institutions; it seems that when controlling for domestic instability within states, being democratic does not seem to be relevant. Mitchell & Prins (2004) also find that regime type matters with respect to rivalry dynamics, as rivalry conditions can uniquely affect the target possibilities for leaders hoping to externalize domestic conflicts, as the public typically already views the rival state in enemy terms. While their research is new and requires more support, Mitchell & Prins (2004) find empirical support that although democratic leaders have the greatest incentives to divert (as they can be more easily removed from power than their autocratic counterparts), they have fewer opportunities to do so due to the transparency of their regimes.

However, research combining diversionary theories and rivalry scenarios are fairly new and have ignored the possible effects contested institutions can have on amplifying decaying domestic conditions. This study hopes to contribute to the literature by helping to fill the gaps left by previous researchers by examining how rivalries and contested regimes interact with decision makers when choosing to use diversionary tactics during times of domestic strife.

Theory and Methodology

On Contested Institutions and the Use of Force

In any country, the military exerts tremendous influence over decision to use force, particularly when it advocates against aggression. This tendency is true even for states with high levels of civilian control, such as the United States and inter-war 20th century France (Betts 1991, Petraeus 1989, Bell 1997). When the agent of aggression argues against action, civilian leaders will almost always yield.

This trend only increases during times of severe domestic strife, as state leaders need at minimum for the military to remain neutral to conflict at home in order to remain in power. Widespread public opposition to rulers, losses of regime legitimacy, large-scale strikes, riots, and rebellions frequently lead to coups (Thompson 1973, Finer 1975, Nordlinger 1977). Consequently, if the military doesn't want to use force, leaders will be forced to obey. Thus, severe domestic strife gives the military an inordinate amount of power for the decisions to use force. To paraphrase Dassel & Reinhardt (1999), "whatever control the political leadership might have over the military dissolves with the leadership's control over its citizens." (62)

However, conditions of contested institutions uniquely threaten the military's organizational interests and survival, motivating it to use force for domestic ends. Dassel and Reinhardt

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

define contested institutions as the opposite of regime consolidation; institutions are contested when political groups refuse to play by, and advocate opposing, the rules of the game.

Contested institutions increase the military's willingness to use force for 2 main reasons. First, institutional contestation deprives all political groups and organizations (including the military) of the "legal" procedural means for achieving its ends (in essence, the "rules of the game"). Under normal operating conditions, governmental structure provides universally recognized outlets and rules and procedures for dispute resolution. Under contested institutions however, groups do not agree on which rules are authoritative. Instead, groups resort to their organizational nature to resolve their disputes; students demonstrate, workers strike, mobs riot, the wealthy bribe, and the military coup (Huntington, 1968). Deprived of the procedural rules of the game, the military has few alternatives but to use the tool of coercion it was designed to use- absolute violence (Dassel & Reinhardt 1999, 61).

Second, regime contestation encourages civilian groups to encroach on the military's goals and interests (the monopoly of violence). Without the mutually recognized outlets and procedures for dispute resolution, groups will naturally attempt to acquire their own extra-institutional means of coercion. Although riots, strikes, and corruption can be effective, brute force and violence acts as a trump card. Given that the military's core interests include organizational survival and maintaining a monopoly on force, any attempt by civilian groups to acquire force necessarily threatens its organizational survival. Civilian groups may try to dissolve this monopoly on force via a variety of means; they may try to influence the decision making structure of the officer's corps by promoting officers based on political loyalty, or insert their own civilian commissars into the hierarchy. Groups may also try to weaken military unity by seeking to gain the loyalty of factions within the organization based on ethnicity, race, religion, or social class. Additionally, groups may attempt to directly break the monopoly on

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

force by forming state or provincial militias and guerilla armies, or by direct targeting of the high command by jailing and executing high ranking officers and officials who counter their interests. Any of these actions provide a real civilian threat to military survival, necessarily making the military more willing to use violent force.

For the military to *not* use force, a four core conditions must be met. First, there can exist no hardline faction within the military hierarchy willing to defy the high command and use force domestically on its own. Second, each civilian group must decide that its not in its common interest to ally with the military (or the hardline faction mentioned) behind a common goal of domestic repression. However, such hardline factions almost always exist, and at least one civilian group usually shares a common interest in targeting a domestic group to resolve a dispute in its favor.

Third, all civilian groups must forgo any effort to acquire the trump card of violence as a method of coercion, as any such effort would directly threaten the military's core organizational interests. Fourth, even if all parties prefer to "cooperate" in such a prisoner's dilemma and keep the military out of any intergroup disputes, each must trust that the other groups won't defect. Under contested regimes and severe strife conditions however, such trust is almost always absent, giving way to immense suspicion and paranoia.

Yet even under strife conditions the military is unlikely to agree to externalize any domestic conflict in line with the interests of state leaders, especially given that the military has real intelligence of any actual threat of a given target state and would be the organization that suffers the most losses from engaging in an armed interstate conflict. However, here it is argued that contested institutions create a situation in which the military's only tool to ensure survival and goal obtainment is violence. As Dassel (1998) notes, under nonviolent strife conditions, the military and state leaders have more of an incentive to engage in repressive tactics and encapsulate the conflict, as they have little to lose by engaging in such behaviors.

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

However, under conditions of violent strife (which typically coincide with the severe conditions of contested institutions), the military and state leaders have an incentive to externalize the conflicts at home, engaging in a diversionary interstate dispute to create a “rally around the flag” effect to obtain the goal of institutional and organizational survival. This is because the alternative, engaging in a civil war with regime opposition groups will likely be highly costly for the military, especially given that the diversity and stratification of society is likely mirrored within the military as well, likely resulting in its fractionalization and loss of unity. Furthermore, the military is designed and equipped to fight foreign opponents, not engaging in domestic disputes.

When combining the factors of severe violent contested institutions with the presence of a current active rival state, military leaders should possess and even greater incentive to externalize the conflict for two reasons. First, because rival states are already viewed in enemy terms by the civilian population and tensions are already high, convincing the population that the rival state presents a real substantial threat should be considerably easier than for non-rival targets, especially given that the military enjoys a significant propaganda advantage, even in states with a free press and media outlets (Snyder & Ballentine 1996). Second, and perhaps most important, contested institutions provide an actual strategic incentive to engage in interstate conflict, as domestic dissension gives aid and comfort to the enemy, and provides a national security crisis and a weakened target for any state wishing to attack (especially the state’s active rivals).

This study focuses explicitly on directed enduring rivalry dyad years as its unit of analysis, in contrast with more traditional approaches studying all politically relevant dyad years. Due to limitations in the available data, I include 55 rivalry dyads active in the years 1949-1982, listed on page 19. Since rivalry dyads account for as much as 75% of all conflicts, with over 40% of those conflicts

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

occurring under enduring circumstances and with recurrent conflicts four times more likely in enduring rivalries than isolated conflicts, this shift in the unit of analysis hopes to exclude that error term of other non-rival terms that would confound results, as well as controlling for contiguity. While this change narrows the population and basis for making generalizations, it should also hopefully produce stronger results, increasing the certainty of what generalizations we can make about rivalries and diversionary theories. (Diehl & Goertz 2000) As such, the initial hypothesis for this study is as follows:

H1: If a state is undergoing violent domestic strife and contested institutions under rivalry conditions, it will be more likely to initiate diversionary conflict.

Additionally, rational decision-making should lead decision makers to divert with lower level MIDs avoiding violent confrontations whenever possible to prevent worsening an already volatile political climate. This leads us to the second hypothesis for this study:

H2: Lower level MIDs (display or threat of force) will be more common than VMIDs (use of force, interstate war).

Furthermore, this study also accounts for the realist variables of power (via capabilities ratios) and alliance portfolios (via Tau-B and S-Scores), as well as accounting for the effects of regime type on diversionary decision-making, following the extant research. (Dassel & Reinhardt 1999, Davies 2002, Mansfield & Snyder 1995, Mitchell & Prins 2004) In following with the previous research on balance of power theories, alliance portfolios and regime type, hypotheses for these variables are accordingly as follows:

H3: Dyads with closer capabilities ratios will be more likely to engage in violent conflict

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

H4: *Dyads with similar alliance portfolios will be less likely to engage in violent conflict.*

H5: *Autocratic states will be more likely to engage in violent conflict than democratic states.*

Finally, extant conflict research often includes a systemic power variable, depicting membership under either major or minor power status, and although rivalry dyads have been known to demonstrate atypical behavior with regard to Balance of Power theory (Deihl & Goertz 2012), a sixth and final hypothesis follows:

H6: *Conflict will more likely occur in dyads with different systemic power statuses.*

During the data collection process, the sample collected was constrained due to the limited data available on violent and non-violent strife from the *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators III*. Consequently, the sample used included all enduring rivals from Scott Bennett's rivalry data for years 1949-1982 (Bennett 2012). The majority of the data on the dependent and independent variables was collected using the Expected Utility Generator (EUGene) program, available courtesy of Bennett and Stam (2000)(ICPSR 2012).

Operationalizing the Variables

Conflict Initiation:

Interstate conflict for this study is regarded as MIDs (Militarized Interstate Disputes) with hostility levels of 4 or 5, indicating the explicit use of force against another state and all out interstate war (use of force with at least 1000 battle related deaths), respectively. Only states that initiate, display, or present a threat of violence on day 1 and their targets are counted for this variable, and states that join after the conflict has begun are not counted as being involved in the conflict, as the decisions to join a conflict are

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

inherently different from decisions to initiate. I include 3 different levels of analysis of MID initiation, and 3 corresponding models, all measuring initiation as a dichotomous variable, coded 1 for initiation and 0 otherwise. This measure is then multiplied by the hostility level, providing an indicator of the level of conflict initiated on day 1 of the dispute. Model 1 will focus on general MIDs, both violent and nonviolent (levels 2-5). Model 2 will focus solely on VMIDs (levels 4 and 5- use of force and interstate war), and Model 3 will focus solely on lower level MIDs (levels 2 and 3- threat and display of force).

Main Explanatory Variables: Domestic Strife and Contested Institutions

Domestic strife can be broken down into two subtypes; violent strife, involving riots and armed attacks, and nonviolent strife, including instances of protest demonstrations and political strikes. Virtually all diversionary arguments focus on domestic strife as a motivating factor that points leaders towards consolidating their positions at home to retain power and control by engaging in aggression abroad, with violent strife being positively correlated with the initiation of international violence and nonviolent strife being correlated with encapsulation of conflict and the use of repression tactics. As this study focuses solely on leaders' decisions to divert and externalize conflict in an interstate dispute, I exclude measures of nonviolent strife due to findings in the extant research (Dassel 1998, Dassel & Reinhardt 1999, Davies 2002). Violent domestic strife data is operationalized as an aggregate yearly count (divided by 1000) of riots and armed attacks. This indicator is collected from Dassel and Reinhardt's 1999 dataset, coded using the *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators III, 1948-1982* (Dassel and Reinhardt 1999, ICPSR 2012).

Contested Institutions, on the other hand, can be defined as the opposite of consolidated institution; when consequential groups refuse to play by, and advocate opposing, sets of rules concerning governing of the state. Data for this variable was collected following Dassel & Reinhardt (1999) from the Polity IV dataset, highlighting a

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

set of cases of “major abrupt polity changes,” which are substantial changes in “the basic political arrangements by which autonomous, national political communities govern their affairs” completed in the last 10 years or less ($t-10$) (65). Modifications to the major abrupt polity changes cases include removing polity change solely arising from birth of a new nation (decolonization), imposed solely by foreign institutions (e.g. Italy 1943), and consensual polity change (1946 France, USSR in 1953). This variable is coded dichotomously, as 1 for the presence of contested institutions and 0 for otherwise. An additional measure of contested institutions is provided as a moving average over the past 5 years ($t-5$), to provide a more accurate measure of contested institutions across time. Both measures of contested institutions are collected from the original Dassel & Reinhardt (1999) dataset.

Other Important Controls

As stated above, previous findings have found support for regime-specific results regarding decisions under contested institutions, and thus regime type must be controlled for. Regime Type for this study is defined as being either democratic or autocratic, and is measured from the polity2 measure from the Polity IV data in EUGene, calculated by subtracting the democratic scores from the autocratic scores (each ranging from 0-10), creating an autoc-democ measure ranging from -10 (extreme autocracy) to 10 (extreme democracy) (Bennett & Stam 2000.) Although previous studies have focused on including alternative measures of contested institutions (Dassel & Reinhardt 1999, Davies 2002), such as recent regime change (democratization/autocratization) or regime turbulence in the past 10 years, the similarity between these measures and the nature of the operational definition of contested institutions (as a condition that likely precedes such events), I remove these measures to prevent multicollinearity with the primary independent variable, contested institutions. Additionally, when analyzing their results, both Dassel & Reinhardt (1999, 78) and Davies (2002, 686) found that contested institutions provided more explanatory power

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

than their regime change/turbulence measures, leading them to reject them in their final models.

A measure of relative state power within the dyad is also included in this study in the form of the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) scores, operationalized as relative capabilities that are available to both the initiator and target state from the Correlates of War dataset in the EUGene program, with scores ranging from 0-1. These scores are then manipulated to create a joint-power measure to assess dyadic level characteristics as a power ratio ($cap1/(cap1+cap2)$). (2011)

Alliance portfolios are also included in this design as a measure of similarity between two states' "portfolios" of alliance commitments, using indicators of systemic polarity, state utility, and state risk propensity, as outlined by Bueno de Mesquita. Both regional Tau-B and S-scores will be used to calculate alliance portfolios, with scores ranging from -1 to 1 (Bennett and Stam 2000).

Furthermore, an additional measure of state power at the systemic level is provided. This measure is included as a simple dichotomous variable, with major powers coded as 1, minor powers coded as 0 from the Correlates of War Dataset within the EUGene program (Dassel & Reinhardt 1999, 59; Bennett & Stam 2000).

The initial model detailed above is to be analyzed via logit regression and is represented below:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Conflict} = & \alpha + \beta \text{ Contested Institutions} \\ & + \beta \text{ violent strife} \\ & + \beta \text{ contested institutions} * \text{violent strife} \\ & + \beta \text{ Regime Type} + \beta \text{ Capability Ratio} \\ & + \beta \text{ Alliance portfolio} \\ & + \beta (\text{Major Power Status}) \end{aligned}$$

Results and Analysis

Model 1 focuses on the initiation of MIDs of any hostility level, including the threat, display, or violent use of force up to and including an interstate war (1000 or more battle related fatalities); with in the selection of enduring rivalries, of the total 1144 cases of rival dyad years, 17.5% of those cases included a general MID, with 107 missing cases.

Model 1: General MID Initiation

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Beta Estimate</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Contested Institutions (<i>t</i> -5) (Initiator)	.037	0.946

Violent Strife (Initiator)	-1.290	0.020*
Contested Institutions*Violent Strife (Initiator)	25.796	0.039*
Regime type (Initiator)	-0.008	0.037*
Regime type (Target)	0.040	0.000**
Joint Power	0.586	0.036*
Tau-B (global)	-0.989	0.000**
Major Power Status (Initiator)	-0.579	0.003**
Major Power Status (Target)	1.453	0.000**
(GMID=.00)	0.202	0.248

(* = Significant beyond $p = .05$. ** = Significant beyond $p = .01$)

After running the logit regression for Model 1, a number of interesting things become clear; while the combined factor of contested institutions and violent strife is shown to have a positive significant correlation at the .05 level, violent strife alone in the initiating state has a highly significant negative correlation with the initiation of MIDs at all levels, while contested institutions alone has a highly insignificant (although negative) correlation. This finds support for the claim that contested institutions combined with violent strife leads to an increased probability of externalization, while contested institutions and violent strife remain necessary but

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

not sufficient conditions for diversionary conflicts. (Note: due to the inclusion of the interaction variable of combined contested institutions and domestic strife as well as the individual respective variables, there are likely mathematical factors that are skewing both the p -values and coefficient directions in ways that require further mathematical and methodological examination)

Additionally, Major Power status is found to be negatively correlated with MID initiation, although target states have a positive relationship; this finding would lead us to believe that although initiators are more likely to be minor powers, their targets are more likely to be major powers. While these results don't necessarily fit within the main line extant literature of balance of power conflict behavior, given that the population of this study is restricted to rival dyads, this finding of states "targeting up" is congruent with the findings of Diehl & Goertz (2012), although the joint power variable for Model 1 remains insignificant but positively correlated with dispute initiation.

Furthermore, regime type plays an interesting role, indicating that initiator states are more likely to be autocratic (given the negative correlation) while their targets are more likely to be democratic (given the positive correlation), with both findings significant at the .05 p -value level. This confirms my fifth hypothesis that autocratic states are more likely to divert than their democratic counterparts, as well as supporting the widely accepted democratic peace argument. Findings regarding alliance portfolios additionally support the fourth hypothesis, indicating a highly significant negative relationship between alliance portfolio similarities between the target and initiator states.

Model 2 narrows down the selected cases to 13.9% of the 1024 cases available, accounting only for cases of VMIDs, with dispute levels 4 and 5 (violent use of force, interstate war). While Contested Institutions remains positive and insignificant, many variables become insignificant with this Model; the interaction effect

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

of combined Contested Institutions, violent strife, and initiator regime type all become insignificant (although violent strife lies just beyond the .05 p -value threshold).

Model 2: VMID Initiation

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Beta Estimate</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Contested Institutions (t -5) (Initiator)	0.271	0.610
Violent Strife (Initiator)	-1.115	0.063
Contested Institutions*Violent Strife (Initiator)	7.717	0.424
Regime Type (Initiator)	-0.010	0.323
Regime Type (Target)	0.033	0.000**
Joint Power	0.652	0.022*
Tau-B (global)	-1.045	0.000**
Major Power Status (Initiator)	-0.657	0.001**
Major Power Status (Target)	0.939	0.003**
(VMID=.00)	0.526	0.003**

(* = Significant beyond $p = .05$. ** = Significant beyond $p = .01$)

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

However, target regime type, alliance portfolios, and major/minor power status all remain significant and retain their correlational direction, and joint power ratios becomes of added significance positive correlation in Model 2, indicating an increased occurrence of initiation when states have a preponderance of power within the dyad.

Model 3 focuses on lower level disputes, measuring the occurrence of the threat or display of force, but not its violent use (hostility levels 2 and 3, respectively). Although I rationally hypothesized that state leaders should initiate conflict at lower levels more often than at higher levels of hostility to avoid the high costs of violent conflict, Model 3 only accounts for 37 of the 1037 available cases, or just 3.6%, as compared to the 13.9% of VMIDs; this leads me to reject my second hypothesis that state leaders should initiate conflict at lower levels more often than at higher levels. This could be due to the fact that the Correlates of War dispute data accounts for the highest level of hostilities displayed in a MID, and although state leaders might initially divert at lower hostility levels, the counter escalation and counter-counter escalation we often see in the evolution of MIDs under Bremer's (1995) Process Model of War leads these disputes to evolve into a more hostile conflict than state leaders were initially hoping.

Model 3: Lower-Level MID Initiation

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Beta Estimate</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Contested Institutions (<i>t</i> -5) (Initiator)	-0.276	0.767
Violent Strife (Initiator)	-0.934	0.343
Contested Institutions*Violent Strife (Initiator)	27.464	0.016*

Regime Type (Initiator)	0.001	0.956
Regime Type (Target)	0.025	0.135
Joint Power	-0.189	0.710
Tau-B (global)	0.406	0.187
Major Power Status (Initiator)	0.198	0.584
Major Power Status (Target)	1.293	0.011*
(LMID=.00)	2.516	0.000**

(* = Significant beyond $p = .05$. ** = Significant beyond $p = .01$)

Model 3 provides an additional surprising finding that appears unique to lower level disputes; the combined interaction effects of Contested Institutions and violent strife becomes highly significant with a positive correlation to low level dispute initiation in Model 3, explaining the significance in Model 1 (General MIDs) and the lack of significance in Model 2 (VMIDs only). Contested institutions and violent strife alone prove again to be necessary but not sufficient conditions for initiating interstate conflicts at low levels, with negative correlation coefficients but remaining highly insignificant. Regime type also becomes highly insignificant for both initiator target states, as well as alliance portfolios and major power status for initiators (although major power status remains significant and positive for targets).

Pulling the Models Together

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

The findings of this study provide a very interesting picture of diversionary conflict and contested institutions, with a few new findings. First, and likely most important, is the finding that contested institutions combined with violent domestic strife are the only significant factors in determining the propensity for lower level conflict; while the majority of the literature on diversionary studies has focused on explaining the instance of VMIDs and higher hostility levels, the results from this study suggest that the presence of the conditions of contested institutions and violent strife matter only to lower level conflicts, and not so much for more hostile disputes. It is important to keep in mind that although the typical controls regarding conflict initiation become insignificant in Model 3, these are factors typically related to the onset or initiation of high levels of violence, not the lower levels targeted specifically by Model 3.

The findings from Model 3 provide support for the theory that contested institutions are better at explaining the occurrence of lower level disputes, a gap that other variables traditionally associated with conflict initiation prove insufficient. However, from the first two models, it is clear that under rivalry conditions, autocratic states that are minor powers within the international system are more likely to attack democratic major powers, even under conditions of clear power preponderance, finding support for the extant literature on violent MID initiation.

Furthermore, the question arises of whether or not Dassel & Reinhardt's (1999) measure of Contested Institutions is an accurate measure of a decline in regime legitimacy, which is the core element of their theory. As Gilley (2006) notes, legitimacy is more tied with the qualitative "treatment" of a regime by its citizens, both attitudinal and behavioral, rather than by claims of rulers or determinations by outsiders (48). However, no real "true" quantitative time-series measure of legitimacy across the international system exists at this time and the majority of such research has been focused on case study analysis, likely due to the fact that the academic and real-world

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

political use has been considerably normative in its study as well as a lack of general consensus over how to operationally define legitimacy, resulting in a lack of cumulative findings and results on the topic.

Final Thoughts

Wars are unpopular for a reason; they come at a high cost to the populous of the state involved. The diversionary conflicts discussed above are among the most unreasonable use of violence imaginable, with real costs and sacrifices paid for the political security of a likely unpopular and unjust leadership and military. Any discussion of the atrocities of war should be magnified by the inclusion of these preventable and useless conflicts. If there ever was a topic in conflict research worthy of the devotion of time and energy to research, the title belongs to diversionary conflicts. Conflict and peace research can help decision makers better understand not only their actions, but also the actions of their peers within the international system, hopefully generating more peaceful negotiations and settlements, keeping the costs of human life and communal infrastructure in tact by shortening conflicts or avoiding them all together.

This study provides insight into an area of conflict research that is currently under researched, and presents support for some new findings within the focus of contested institutions and regime legitimacy on conflict behavior. While the traditional variables regarding conflict initiation and onset apply well to violent interstate conflicts, they are insufficient descriptors of state actions at lower levels. When we consider the bigger picture presented by Bremer's (1995) process model of conflict, this helps provide insight into how higher level disputes may begin before the escalate into the violent disputes we more often study, especially for states undergoing violent strife and severe legitimacy losses.

However, this model is limited in a number of ways, namely by its selected population and unit of analysis, as well as the date

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

ranges selected for data collection. Primarily, this model is limited to the cases within the years of 1949-82 due to the limited data available from the *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators III*, and future research should attempt to find or code datasets with a broader date range for collection of domestic strife data. Additionally, the findings of this study are limited to the population of enduring rival dyads; further research should aim at comparing these rivalry specific findings to an additional model containing all politically relevant dyads under contested institutions and violent domestic strife for further comparison and analysis. Furthermore, as mentioned above, further research should focus on creating a multidimensional measure of legitimacy corresponding to how a regime is “treated” by its citizens, ala Gilley (2006) in order to more accurately measure the source of the problems behind Contested Institutions and diversionary conflicts.

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

Works Cited:

- Bell, P.M.H. 1997. *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*. 2nd ed. New York: Longman.
- Bennett, Scott D. 2012. "Coding Notes for Interstate/Enduring Data." Accessed November 27, 2012.
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/dsb10/datasets.htm>
- Bennett, D. Scott, and Stam, Allan. 2000. "EUGene: A Conceptual Manual." *International Interactions*, Vol. 26: 179-204.
Website: <http://eugenesoftware.org>.
- Betts, Richard K. 1991. *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dassel, Kurt. 1998. "Civilians, Soldiers, and Strife: Domestic Sources of International Aggression." *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Summer 1998): 107-140.
- Dassel, Kurt & Reinhardt, Eric. 1999. "Domestic Strife and the Initiation of Violence at Home and Abroad." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (January 1999): 56-85
- Davies, Graeme. 2002. "Domestic Strife and the Initiation of International Conflicts: A Directed Dyad Analysis, 1950-1982." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 46, No. 5 (October 2002): 672-692.
- Diehl, Paul F., and Goertz, Gary. 2012. "The Rivalry Process: How Rivalries Are Sustained and Terminated." In *What Do We Know About War*, ed. John A. Vasquez. Lanham, MD: Rowmand & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

- Filson, Darren, and Werner, Suzanne. 2002. "A Bargaining Model of War and Peace: Anticipating the Onset, Duration, and Outcome of War." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (October 2002): 819-837. JSTOR Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3088436>
- Finer, Samuel E. 1975. *The Man on Horseback*. Baltimore: Penguin.
- Geller, Daniel S. 2000. "Material Capabilities: Power and International Conflict." In *What Do We Know About War*, ed. John A. Vasquez. Lanham, MD: Rowmand & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Gilley, Bruce. 2006. "Determinants of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries." *International Political Science Review*, Vol 27, No. 1 (January 2006): 47-71
- Hensel, Paul R. 2012. "Territory: Geography, Contentious Issues, and World Politics." In *What Do We Know About War*, ed. John A. Vasquez. Lanham, MD: Rowmand & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). 2012. *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators III, 1948-1982*. Website: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/index.jsp>
- Kang, Choong-Nam. 2012. "Alliance: Path to Peace or Path to War?" In *What Do We Know About War*, ed. John A. Vasquez. Lanham, MD: Rowmand & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

- Levy, Jack S. 2012. "The 'Paths-to-War' Concept." In *What Do We Know About War*, ed. John A. Vasquez. Lanham, MD: Rowmand & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Mansfield, Edward D., and Snyder, Jack. 1995. "Democratization and the Danger of War." *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995): 5-38
- Mitchell, Sara McLaughlin. 2012. "Norms and the Democratic Peace." In *What Do We Know About War*, ed. John A. Vasquez. Lanham, MD: Rowmand & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Nordlinger, Eric A. 1977. *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Petraeus, David H. 1989. "Military Influence and the Post-Vietnam Use of Force." *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Summer 1989): 489-505.
- Quackenbush, Stephen L., and Rudy, Michael. 2009. "Evaluating the Monadic Peace." *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. Vol. 26, No. 3: 268-285
- Thompson, William R. 1973. *The Grievances of Military Coup-Makers*. Beverly Hills: Sage

Active Rival Dyad Sample (1948-1982)

1	US	Russia	1946-1992
2	US	China	1946-1992
3	US	Ecuador	1952-1992
4	US	Cuba	1959-1992
5	US	Peru	1955-1992
6	US	North Korea	1950-1992
7	UK	USSR	1946-1992
8	UK	Germany	1900-1955
9	UK	Japan	1932-1952
10	UK	Iraq	1958-1992
11	USSR	JAPAN	1895-1992
12	USSR	NORWAY	1956-1992
13	USSR	IRAN	1908-1992
14	ISRAEL	EGYPT	1948-1979
15	ISRAEL	SYRIA	1948-1988
16	ISRAEL	JORDAN	1948-1988
17	ISRAEL	IRAQ	1967-1992
18	ISRAEL	LEBANON	1965-1992
19	ISRAEL	SAUDI ARABIA	1957-1992
20	CHINA	JAPAN	1874-1957
21	CHINA	TAIWAN	1949-1988
22	CHINA	INDIA	1950-1988
23	CHINA	SOUTH KOREA(ROK)	1950-1992
24	IRAN	IRAQ	1953-1988
25	INDIA	PAKISTAN	1947-1988
26	INDIA	NEPAL	1950-1992
27	USSR	GERMANY	1908-1970

Critique: A Worldwide Student Journal of Politics

28	GREECE	TURKEY	1958-1988
29	GREECE	BULGARIA	1913-1954
30	ECUADOR	PERU	1891-1988
31	ARGENTINA	CHILE	1873-1984
32	HONDURAS	NICARAGUA	1907-1962
33	IRAQ	KUWAIT	1961-1992
34	TURKEY	CYPRUS	1965-1992
35	SYRIA	JORDAN	1949-1992
36	SOUTH KOREA(ROK)	NORTH KOREA(PRK)	1949-1988
37	SOUTH KOREA (ROK)	JAPAN	1953-1992
38	AFGHANISTAN	PAKISTAN	1949-1988
39	CAMBODIA	THAILAND	1953-1988
40	LAOS	NORTH VIETNAM	1958-1975
41	LAOS	THAILAND	1960-1992
42	THAILAND	NORTH VIETNAM	1960-1992
43	ZAMBIA	ZIMBABWE	1966-1979
44	ZAMBIA	SOUTH AFRICA	1968-1992
45	ZAIRE	CONGO	1963-1992
46	UGANDA	KENYA	1965-1992
47	ETHIOPIA	SUDAN	1967-1992
48	ETHIOPIA	SOMALIA	1960-1988
49	MOROCCO	ALGERIA	1962-1992
50	MOROCCO	SPAIN	1957-1992
51	ITALY	GERMANY	1914-1956
52	ITALY	YUGOSLAVIA	1923-1956
53	BELGIUM	GERMANY	1914-1954
54	SERBIA	BULGARIA	1913-1956
55	FRANCE	PRUSSIA	1905-1955