Intervention, War Expansion, and the International Sources of Civil War*

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Abstract

Why do some civil wars turn into interstate wars? I analyze an asymmetric information model of civil war onset, rebel-sided intervention, and interstate retaliation with endogenous stakes. Interstate war occurs when rebels believe the threat of intervention will compel the government to acquiesce, the third party believes the government will tolerate an intervention, but they both underestimate the government's resolve. The model also has implications for civil wars. Retaliation can deter intervention and rebellion, but intervention can either deter rebellion or compel the government into giving up power, depending on whether the rebels are susceptible to foreign influence.

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1 Introduction

Why do some civil wars turn into interstate wars, while others remain localized? Foreign states intervene on the side of rebels in roughly 45% of civil wars (Pettersson 2011), yet only some governments retaliate. South Africa fought both Angola and Mozambique during the 1970s and 1980s in response to their support for the African National Congress rebels. Egypt, military superiority notwithstanding, tolerated Sudanese support for the terrorist group al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, which killed hundreds of Egyptian police and soldiers from 1992 to 1998. Both these militarily superior states faced foreign intervention, yet one retaliated while the other did not. Why?

I argue that war expansion depends on uncertainty over whether the domestic government is willing to fight, which can encourage costly fighting at any distribution of power (Powell 1999, ch. 2). Rebels fighting based on expectations of external support (Cetinyan 2002, Thyne 2006, Kuperman 2008, Cunningham 2016, e.g.), and intervention increases the risk of interstate war (Gleditsch et al. 2008). Expectations over retaliation should therefore affect both intervention and rebellion. However, theories of retaliation focus on interstate relations (Schultz 2010, Maoz and San-Akca 2012, e.g.), even though both the rebels and the third party are facing the same strategic problem: they do not know the domestic government's resolve for fighting. A theory linking civil and interstate war can then explain why two uninformed actors decide to risk war, and when these decisions result in interstate war.

The basis for a unified theory of civil and interstate war is the link between domestic and international stakes. Civil wars are nested within an international context, and conflicts that involve multiple actors can have varying stakes depending on who is fighting (Gartner and Siver-

son 1996, Werner 2000). War expansion into the third party's territory means fighting over a larger pie, at a higher cost, so the domestic government might prefer an interstate war over a local conflict. The varying stakes of these conflicts link the decisions to rebel, intervene, and retaliate together.

My model of civil war onset, rebel-sided intervention, and interstate retaliation has four key features. First, the domestic government has private information about its subjective costs for fighting, or resolve, which implies that its willingness to fight a civil war and an interstate war are correlated. Second, the domestic government can raise the stakes being fought over by retaliating and expanding the war. Third, if there is intervention but not retaliation, the rebels pay some autonomy costs while the third party gains some influence if the rebels win. Fourth, if retaliation does occur, the three actors fight an all-against-all war over the entire set of stakes.

In equilibrium, civil wars expand when rebels and third parties underestimate the government's resolve. Rebels challenge the government because they believe the threat of intervention will compel the government to give up power, and the third party intervenes once fighting starts because it believes the government will tolerate an intervention. Two factors condition the information problem. First, the size of the local stakes relative to the international stakes determines the risk of intervention and retaliation. When the local stakes are sufficiently large, the domestic government has little to gain from expansion, but the third party has much to gain from intervening. However, larger local stakes make it less likely that the domestic government will acquiesce in the first place. Second, the rebels lose autonomy when receiving external support, so they must weigh the risk of rejection by the government against the costs of third-party intervention.

My theory explains a number of important historical cases that do not fit existing theories of

intra- or interstate war. One reason why Egypt did not retaliate against Sudan is that it had little to gain from war expansion. Egypt had a substantially larger economy, so the costs of escalation outweighed the benefits. Conversely, South Africa failed to deter Angola and Mozambique from supporting the ANC and the latter failed to deter retaliation because the transnational conflict between African nationalism and white supremacy meant each side had something to gain from an expanded war.

The model also has implications for civil wars. Some rebels challenge because intervention will happen, but others are deterred from rebelling because external support is too costly. Relatedly, some civil wars do not occur because the threat of intervention compels the domestic government to concede, so incredible threats of retaliation can explain both governments giving up power and internationalized civil wars. Predicting the onset of civil war therefore requires accounting for this triadic interaction.

2 Explanations for intervention and retaliation

In this section I show how onset, intervention, and retaliation are interdependent. Rebellion depends on potential intervention, and intervention depends on the threat of retaliation. The strategic problem facing both the rebels and the third party is that they do not know whether the domestic government will fight or not.

Rebels fight or not in the shadow of intervention. Rebel-sided intervention can embolden rebels (Thyne 2006, Kuperman 2008), while government support deters rebellion (Cunningham 2016).[1] Furthermore, the risk of rebellion depends on how rebel and third-party preferences

[1] Cetinyan (2002, pp. 647-8) shows that under complete information, the threat of intervention does not affect the likelihood of rebellion, only the demands made in equilibrium.

interact. While third parties prefer to support strong rebels (Salehyan et al. 2011, p. 711), some groups are wary of receiving support, because it means giving up autonomy (Salehyan 2010, p. 507).

The third party's decision to support the rebels depends on the potential benefits and risks of intervention. States intervene in civil wars to affect the outcome (Regan 1996), defeat rivals (Findley and Teo 2006, Maoz and San-Akca 2012), promote their ideology (Choi 2013, pp. 128-9), support co-ethnics (Gleditsch 2007, p. 298), and ensure access to markets (Aydin 2012). But these interventions are not without risks. Support can embolden rebels and cause the third party to lose control (Salehyan 2010, Bapat 2012), or cause refugee flows (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006, pp. 344-7). The most severe risk, however, is that the domestic government retaliates against the intervener. Such a threat can deter intervention, which affects which civil wars we observe. For example, few interstate wars expand beyond their original participants because initiators pick targets unlikely to receive external support (Gartner and Siverson 1996, p. 5) . If we apply this logic to civil wars, we should expect that intervention can encourage rebellion, while the threat of retaliation can deter intervention.

We still observe both intervention and retaliation, so the question is why we observe two-sided deterrence failure. Maoz and San-Akca (2012, p. 724) argue that retaliation happens when both states are dissatisfied, so the third party thinks it might as well support the rebels if an interstate conflict coming. However, their theory does not specify rebel preferences over conflict expansion, so it does not distinguish between deterring intervention and deterring civil war onset. As such, it is a model of interstate conflict, rather than civil war expansion. Similarly, Schultz (2010, p. 286) argues that retaliation occurs because domestic governments cannot perfectly observe whether third parties support rebels, so sometimes third parties "cheat," hoping

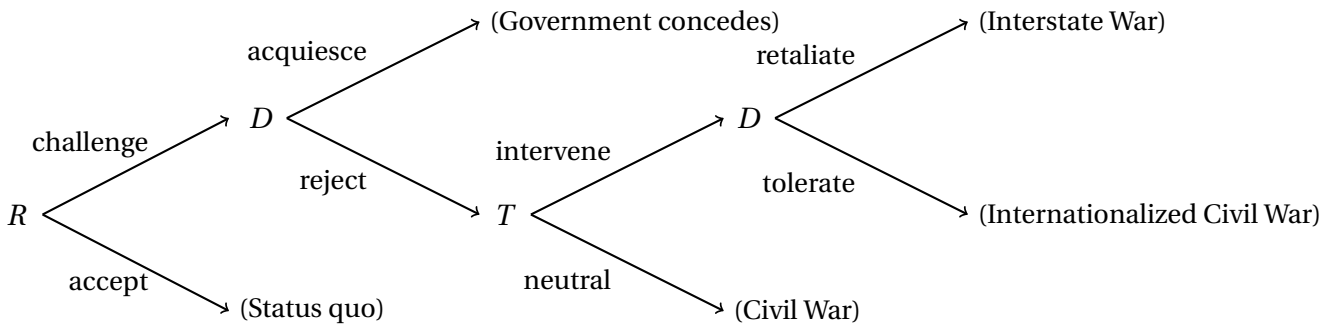
to go undetected, and sometimes this results in retaliation. But the model cannot explain why civil conflicts start (Schultz 2010, p. 296).

To explain war expansion, we have to consider domestic conflicts nested inside an international context. Models of onset and intervention imply that war is driven by a third party's or the rebels' wish to remake political order, so we should consider what war expansion entails for the domestic government. Conflicts between three actors imply different stakes (Gartner and Siverson 1996, Werner 2000). With civil wars, retaliation means increasing the stakes of a conflict. Rather than fighting for the status quo, the government forces the third party's territory or resources into the conflict by launching an interstate war. War expansion thus increases the domestic government's potential gains from fighting. In the next section I formalize this insight and explain why civil wars sometimes turn into interstate wars.

3 Modeling onset, intervention, and retaliation

In this section I specify a game of civil war onset, intervention, and war expansion with three actors: domestic government D and opposition group R in Country A, and third-party state T that may support R. First, I assume D has private information about its resolve, which means that its willingness to fight an interstate war is correlated with its willingness to fight a civil war. I define resolve as the government's ability to endure fighting and suffer loses while staying in power. Governments vary in how much they internalize the costs of war. Some can insulate themselves from the destruction accompanying wars by moving fighting away from government resources, while others can insulate themselves from the political costs of losses by appealing to nationalism or clamping down on opposition groups. Second, the actors can fight

Figure 1: The sequence of the game after Nature draws D's type.



over a local set of stakes, or they fight over the local stakes plus an international set of stakes (combined, I refer to them as the total stakes). The local stakes ($\pi \in (0,1)$) entail control over Country A, and I normalize the total stakes to 1, so $1-\pi$ are the international stakes, which entail control over T's territory. D decides which stakes are being fought over by either retaliating against T, which prompts an interstate war, or tolerating intervention, which keeps the fighting contained to its own territory. Third, if D does not retaliate, R pays autonomy cost (a) while T gains influence if R wins. Fourth, if D retaliates, the three actors engage in a war of all-against-all where everyone fights alone for the total stakes (Gallop 2017, cf.).

The game starts with nature drawing D's type, defined by its resolve ($c_D \in (0, \overline{c}_D]$), where higher values mean war is costlier for D. D's type is private information, so R and T do not know if D is of a type that will acquiesce to a challenge, fight but tolerate an intervention, or fight and retaliate. D has an incentive to keep this information private so as to deter domestic challenges and foreign intervention. For instance, D might have private information that the military is in disarray or the security forces have become factionalized. If that was common knowledge, it could encourage intervention and invite a challenge from the opposition. To streamline the analysis, I also assume that D's type is uniformly distributed.

Once nature draws D's type, R challenges D for the local stakes (π) or accepts the status quo. I assume the stakes are indivisible, such as control over the central government, because the model is meant to explain why war breaks out and then expands, rather than how the threats of intervention and retaliation shape the size of demands.[2] However, to ensure that war does not happen under complete information, I assume that R is not dissatisfied, so it strictly prefers the status quo to fighting.

The value of the local stakes depends on several factors. The American Civil War was valuable to Great Britain because of its dependence on Southern cotton. Intervention would increase the chances of rebel victory, and assure continued British access to American cotton (Poast 2015). Other times, military concerns determine the value of a civil war. Pakistan intervened in Afghanistan in the 1980s because a friendly regime in Kabul would give it strategic depth in the conflict with India (Rubin 2002a, pp. 247-248). If R opts for the status quo, T keeps its territory $(1-\pi)$,[3] so we get the following payoffs:

$$U_i(\text{Status quo}) = \begin{cases} \pi, & \text{if i} = D \\ 0, & \text{if i} = R \\ 1-\pi, & \text{if i} = T \end{cases}$$

If the rebels challenge, D fights or acquiesces, where the latter yields π to R. If D acquiesces, R assumes power in Country A, but T's payoff remains the same:

[2] Existing crisis models use this simplifying assumption to explain the onset of war (Fearon 1997, Schultz 2001, Sartori 2002, Kurizaki 2007, Slantchev 2011, e.g.), in contrast to models that explain how challengers alter their demands when faced with (uncertain) third-party support for the target (Werner 2000, Yuen 2009, e.g.).

[3] I assume that T has no interest in who controls Country A, absent any intervention. While third parties often have preferences over who governs another country, only external support yields influence over a new government in this model so I can focus on the direct costs and benefits of fighting. As I show in the appendix, giving T some interests in Country A's politics absent intervention does not change why T intervenes.

$$U_i(\text{Government concedes}) = \begin{cases} 0, & \text{if i} = D \\ \pi, & \text{if i} = R \\ 1-\pi, & \text{if i} = T \end{cases}$$

If D rejects, a civil war starts. T then decides whether to support the rebels or stay out. If T stays out, D and R fight over π. D's chances of winning depend on military capabilities ($m_D > 0$ and $m_R > 0$), such that $p_D^{CW} = \frac{m_D}{m_D+m_R}$, with the complementary probability of rebel victory. Both sides pay some cost for fighting ($c_i > 0$). Without intervention, T simply keeps its own holdings. Payoffs for civil war are:

$$U_i(\text{Civil War}) = \begin{cases} p_D^{CW}\pi - c_D, & \text{if i} = D \\ (1-p_D^{CW})\pi - c_R, & \text{if i} = R \\ 1-\pi, & \text{if i} = T \end{cases}$$

If T intervenes, it provides support s as a portion of its military capabilities ($m_T > s > 0$). For instance, geography might put constraints on how much T can intervene in a given conflict. Following intervention, D fights a stronger R, such that $p_D^{ICW} = \frac{m_D}{m_D+m_R+s}$, but R loses some autonomy if it wins ($a > 0$). R's level of institutionalization or local support affect its autonomy costs, because T can impose its policy preferences after a rebel victory because it has governing expertise or the ability to withhold resources necessary to run the new government. Variation in client-patron relationships during fighting shows how groups differ in their ability to resist foreign influence. UNITA in Angola retained its organizational structure despite significant support from South Africa (Minter 1994, p. 31), while the Pakistani military dictated

which Afghan rebels group received support in the fight against the Soviet Union (for examples of groups losing autonomy, see: Salehyan (2010, p. 501)).

For T, intervention is costly, but also promises influence over the rebels, so its payoff from an internationalized civil war is a function of its affinity (b) for R. For instance, the Soviet Union supported various socialist movements, including the South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) fighting for Namibian independence from South Africa. We can think of b as representing the degree to which they share political preferences.[4] Once intervention occurs, D decides whether to tolerate intervention or retaliate. If it tolerates intervention, we get the following payoffs:

$$U_i(\text{Internationalized Civil War}) = \begin{cases} p_D^{ICW}\pi - c_D, & \text{if i} = D \\ (1 - p_D^{ICW})(\pi - a) - c_R, & \text{if i} = R \\ (1-\pi) + (1 - p_D^{ICW})\pi b - c_T, & \text{if i} = T \end{cases}$$

If D retaliates, the conflict expands, either into the third-party territory or some other object of interest, such as a client state of T. In 1996, Rwanda invaded Zaire to root out rebels, and the resulting war led to the Zairian government's collapse. By starting an interstate war, D raises the stakes of fighting to include what T otherwise controls $(1-\pi)$, so everyone fights for the total stakes. I assume retaliation triggers an all-against-all war because to do otherwise would require additional assumptions about how R and T would divide up the full territory after a coalition victory, which is not directly relevant to the research question. Assuming a three-sided war keeps the analysis simple while ensuring that relative power is taken into account.[5]

[4] For simplicity's sake, I assume that R's autonomy costs are not a function of b, but as I show in the appendix, doing so does not change the results.

[5] The most straightforward assumption for a post-war division of the goods would be by the balance of power,

In an interstate war, D wins with probability $p_D^{IW} = \frac{m_D}{m_D+m_R+m_T}$, R wins with probability $p_R^{IW} = \frac{m_R R}{m_D+m_R+m_T}$, and T wins with complementary probability $1 - p_D^{IW} - p_R^{IW}$. Interstate war is more destructive than a local conflict, so each actors' war costs are amplified by a common escalation term ($e > 1$). War expansion affects R and T differently. R is weaker without external support, but retains full autonomy. Retaliation mobilizes T's entire military and, because the war is now all-against-all, T's payoff no longer depends on its affinity for R. Interstate war payoffs are:

$$U_i(\text{Interstate War}) = \begin{cases} p_D^{IW} - (e \times c_D), & \text{if i} = D \\ p_R^{IW} - (e \times c_R), & \text{if i} = R \\ (1 - p_D^{IW} - p_R^{IW}) - (e \times c_T), & \text{if i} = T \end{cases}$$

I have presented a model of one informed party actor facing multiple uninformed actors. As such, it bears resemblance to several models of crisis bargaining and extended deterrence, but differs in key ways. Models with third parties tend to focus on the crisis at hand (Schultz 1998, Wolford 2014, Ramsay 2004, e.g.), with the assumption that the stakes are fixed. Wolford (2020) includes an uninformed third party whose only stake in the crisis is information about the informed actor's future behavior. However, third parties care about the civil war today *and* the risk of interstate war tomorrow.

The model incorporates some features of extended deterrence, but private information plays a different role. Unlike Smith (1996), the third party supports the challenger/attacker in my model, because I seek to explain how retaliation can deter civil war onset and intervention, not only how intervention deters onset. Both Werner (2000) and Yuen (2009) assume the challenger

but without returns to scale or other club goods, this would yield the same expected utilities as in an all-against-all contest.

is uncertain whether the target will receive support. Because the challenger receives support in my model, however, I assume both the challenger and the third party are uncertain about the target's resolve.

I also simplify the onset of war. My model abstracts away from varying demands (Werner 2000, e.g.), because it would not affect T's decision to intervene other than change posterior beliefs about D's type. Relatedly, I simplify the onset of war so the challenger (R) cannot back down once a challenge has been issued, unlike many crisis bargaining models (Slantchev 2011, e.g.). Doing otherwise would merely add another layer of screening, without changing why R challenges. Furthermore, I assume away the efficacy of threats in domestic crises. D either fights or acquiesces in order to isolate the relationship between the threat of retaliation and intervention.

Unlike many models of intervention that allow a third party to conduct unbiased intervention or choose a side (Gent 2008, Favretto 2009, Kydd and Straus 2013, Spaniel 2018, e.g.), I restrict mine to rebel-sided intervention. Whereas these models focus on perverse incentives of peacemaking, my model seeks to explain when and why actors fight over control of the state(s). As for allowing third parties to choose sides, rebels could under some circumstances retaliate against external government supporters, but retaliation by rebels would imply a different mechanism of war expansion, focused on when groups are constrained by international borders.

4 Analysis

In this section I show how the model explains civil war, internationalized civil war, and interstate war. I analyze two Perfect Bayesian Equilibria (PBE) where civil war occurs in one, and

internationalized civil war and interstate war occur in the other. Civil wars expand into interstate wars when: 1) R thinks D will acquiesce because of the threat of intervention, and 2) T thinks D will tolerate intervention despite rejecting R's' challenge.

To explain why interstate war happens, I start by describing D's strategies, because they condition the decisions of the uninformed parties. Next I describe equilibria in terms of R's' and T's strategies and beliefs about D's type. Interstate war can only occur if T intervenes, so I first describe the PBE where T is deterred from intervening, but R nonetheless challenges D. This equilibrium shows how a third party can shape the risk of war, even when intervention does not happen. I then describe the PBE where R challenges D and T intervenes.

4.1 The domestic government's strategies

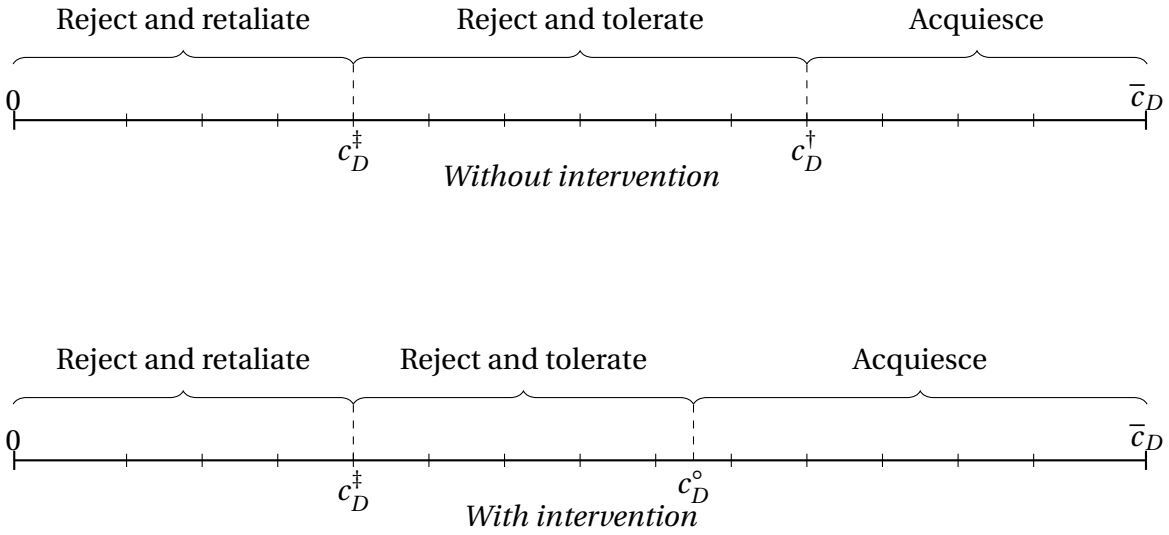
Private information about D's resolve causes war in this model, because R and T do not know D's type, and this uncertainty looms over their decisions to challenge and intervene, respectively. However, R and T know that D's type is continuously distributed c and that D plays cut-point strategies that change depending on whether T intervenes. D's types can fall into three intervals: Low-cost types that reject a challenge and retaliate against T, middle types that reject a challenge but tolerate intervention, and high-cost types that acquiesce to a challenge and tolerate intervention.

D is indifferent between tolerating intervention and retaliating at

$$c_D^{\ddagger} = \frac{p_D^{IW} - p_D^{ICW}\pi}{e-1}, \tag{1}$$

so the risk of interstate war goes up as escalation costs go down. Whether D acquiesces, de-

Figure 2: The domestic government's cutpoint strategies.



pends on intervention. If T stays out, D is indifferent between acquiescing and civil war at $c_D^{\dagger} = p_D^{CW}\pi$. The cutpoint shows that D is more likely to fight the more painful it is to concede. If T will intervene, D is indifferent between tolerating an internationalized civil war or acquiescing at $c_D^{\circ} = p_D^{ICW}\pi$. These two last cut-points show that the range of high-cost types D differ depending on whether T intervenes.

4.2 Equilibria

I start by describing a PBE where T is deterred from intervening, but R nonetheless challenges D. I then contrast this civil war-only PBE with another PBE where T intervenes, and retaliation happens with some probability. These equilibria account for all outcomes of the model, and explain how the decisions to challenge and intervene interact in the shadow of retaliation.

If T will not intervene, T observes a rejection and believes D is a type that will retaliate with probability

$$\Pr(\text{retaliate} \mid \text{reject, stay out}) = \frac{c_D^{\ddagger}}{c_D^{\dagger}} = \frac{p_D^{IW} - p_D^{ICW}\pi}{(1-e)(p_D^{CW}\pi)}, \tag{2}$$

and D is a type that will tolerate intervention with probability

$$\Pr(\text{tolerate} \mid \text{reject, stay out}) = \frac{c_D^{\dagger} - c_D^{\ddagger}}{c_D^{\dagger}} = 1 + \frac{p_D^{IW} - p_D^{ICW}\pi}{(1-e)(p_D^{CW}\pi)}. \tag{3}$$

Both outcomes occur with positive probability when D has much to gain from war expansion ($\pi < \pi^{IW}$) but escalation costs are sufficiently large ($e > e_{CW}$). Given these beliefs, T stays out when its affinity for R is too small and it has too much to loses in an interstate war ($b < b^{\dagger}$ and $\pi < \pi_T^{\dagger}$). Deterring intervention therefore hinges on factors outside of the domestic government's control, like the relationship between a third party and the opposition.

Without the prospects of external support, a challenge means D fights with probability $\frac{c_D^{\dagger}}{\overline{c}_D}$ and acquiesces with probability $\frac{\overline{c}_D - c_D^{\dagger}}{\overline{c}_D}$. R risks a civil war when fighting is not too costly ($c_R < c^{\dagger}$) and is sufficiently optimistic D will acquiesce ($\overline{c}_D > \overline{c}_D^{CW}$). Otherwise, a challenge is too risky and war too costly.

Proposition 1 *When $\pi < min(\pi^{IW}, \pi_T^{\dagger})$, $e > e_{CW}$, $\overline{c}_D > \overline{c}_D^{CW}$, $c_R < c^{\dagger}$, and $b < b^{\dagger}$ there exists a Perfect Bayesian Equilibrium in which:*

- *R challenges.*
- *D rejects and retaliates when $c_D < c_D^{\ddagger}$, rejects and tolerates when $c_D^{\ddagger} \leq c_D < c_D^{\dagger}$ and accepts when $c_D \geq c_D^{\dagger}$.*
- *If D rejects, T believes $c_D \sim U(0, c_D^{\dagger}]$ and stays out; otherwise T believes $c_D \sim U(c_D^{\dagger}, \overline{c}_D]$*

Proposition 1 shows that uncertainty over the government's resolve can cause the onset of a civil war, but the presence of a third party and potential retaliation determine the conditions under which civil war occurs. The threat of retaliation deters intervention and shapes what kinds of rebels take up arms. For instance, the equilibrium has no constraints on the rebels' autonomy costs. Rebels that would otherwise avoid a challenge because they cannot withstand external domination, might risk civil war if there are no willing interveners. Under these circumstances, a credible threat from D can deter intervention, but encourage rebellion.

For interstate war to occur in equilibrium, T has to intervene. I identify a PBE where T intervenes following a challenge, where there is some probability of D retaliating. Following a rejection, T believes D is a type that will retaliate with probability

$$\Pr(\text{retaliation} \mid \text{intervene, reject}) = \frac{c_D^{\ddagger}}{c_D^{\circ}} = \frac{p_D^{ICW}\pi - p_D^{IW}}{(1-e)(p_D^{ICW}\pi)}, \tag{4}$$

and D is a type that will tolerate intervention with probability

$$\Pr(\text{tolerate} \mid \text{intervene, reject}) = \frac{c_D^{\circ} - c_D^{\ddagger}}{c_D^{\circ}} = \frac{p_D^{IW} - (e\pi p_D^{ICW})}{(1-e)(p_D^{ICW}\pi)}. \tag{5}$$

When the local stakes are sufficiently small ($\pi < \pi^{IW}$) but the escalation costs are sufficiently high ($e > e_{IW}$), T intervenes when it believes D probably will tolerate intervention despite rejecting a challenge from R. But because there is some chance of retaliation and intervention is costly regardless, T only intervenes when it likes R enough ($b > b^{\circ}$) and the costs of fighting are sufficiently low ($c_T < c_T^{\circ}$). Additionally, the escalation costs have to be sufficiently high ($e > e_T^{\circ}$) for T not to be undeterrable. As such, intervention, and thus interstate war, only happens when D is sufficiently likely to tolerate intervention *and* the third party and the rebels are sufficiently

aligned politically.

With external support coming, R must choose between the status quo and challenging. The former yields zero, while the latter can result in interstate war (Pr(IW) = $\frac{c_D^{\ddagger}}{\overline{c}_D}$), internationalized civil war (Pr(ICW) = $\frac{c_D^{\circ}-c_D^{\ddagger}}{\overline{c}_D}$), or D giving up power (Pr(Acquiesce) = $\frac{\overline{c}_D-c_D^{\circ}}{\overline{c}_D}$). Since D giving up power is R's best outcome, R challenges when it is sufficiently optimistic that the threat of intervention will compel D to acquiesce ($\overline{c}_D > \max\{\overline{c}_D^{IW}, \overline{c}_D^{\circ}\}$)) and fighting is cheap ($c_R^{\circ} > c_R$). This equilibrium provides an informational and international explanation for civil war (and expansion) that hinges on the preferences of another state.

Proposition 2 *When $\pi < \pi^{IW}$, $e > \max\{e_{IW}, e_T^{\circ}\}$, $\overline{c}_D > \max\{\overline{c}_D^{IW}, \overline{c}_D^{\circ}\})$, $c_R^{\circ} > c_R$, $b > b^{\circ}$, and $c_T < c_T^{\circ}$, there exists a Perfect Bayesian Equilibrium in which:*

- *R challenges.*
- *D rejects and retaliates when $c_D < c_D^{\ddagger}$, rejects and tolerates when $c_D^{\ddagger} \leq c_D < c_D^{\circ}$ and accepts when $c_D \geq c_D^{\circ}$.*
- *If D fights, T believes $c_D \sim U(0, c_D^{\circ}]$ and intervenes; otherwise T believes $c_D \sim U(c_D^{\circ}, \overline{c}_D]$.*

Proposition 2 shows why interstate war can happen in equilibrium, despite the costs of war expansion. D retaliates when it has enough to gain from expanding the conflict, but deterrence nevertheless fails because the benefits of influencing a new rebel government outweigh the risks of T losing its holdings. Whether this deterrence failure encourages to R to challenge or not, depends on several factors, which I discuss below.

4.3 Comparative statics

So far I have focused on *why* war occurs, but not when different types of war are more or less likely. Taking comparative statics on the probability of war (D rejecting a challenge) and the equilibrium constraints on R's and T's strategies produces several implications. Without intervention, the probability of civil war is

$$\Pr(\text{civil war} \mid \text{no intervention}) = \frac{c_D^{\dagger}}{\overline{c}_D} = \frac{p_D^{CW}\pi}{\overline{c}_D}, \tag{6}$$

and with intervention, the probability of internationalized civil or interstate war is

$$\Pr(\text{civil war} \mid \text{intervention}) = \frac{c_D^{\circ}}{\overline{c}_D} = \frac{p_D^{ICW}\pi}{\overline{c}_D}. \tag{7}$$

These probabilities differ in one regard. Because intervention shifts the balance of power away from D ($p_D^{CW} > p_D^{ICW}$), the probability of D rejecting a challenge is strictly smaller with intervention than without. In other words, external rebel support has a pacifying effect on domestic conflicts, all else being equal, by compelling some types D into acquiescing who would otherwise reject a challenge and fight a civil war.

Lemma 4.1 *The probability of D rejecting a challenge from R is strictly smaller when T will intervene than when it will stay out.*

The local stakes play a key role in the probability of war, and the kind of war that occurs in equilibrium. Equations 6 and 7 show that the probabilities of war are increasing in π, regardless of intervention. The more valuable it is to stay in power, the less likely the government is to give up power. However, increased local stakes make D less likely to retaliate, because there is less to

gain from defeating T. The local stakes thus shape T's and R's decisions in two ways; they affect the probabilities of acquiescence and retaliation, while also affecting the potential benefits of winning the civil war.

The larger the local stakes are relative to T's holdings, the more likely intervention is. The reason why is straightforward: the larger π is, the more T has to gain by supporting R, and the less likely D is to retaliate. Increases in π increase the likelihood of internationalized civil war relative to interstate war. One example is the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Intervention on the side of the Kabul government made rebel-sided intervention more attractive to third parties such as the United States. Similarly, the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq post-2003 bolstered the Iraqi government's military strength, but also made the conflict attractive to Iran, because rebel victory meant taking Baghdad and defeating a superpower. While the United States possessed the capabilities to retaliate, the Bush and Obama administrations concluded that the costs of escalation outweighed the benefits (Filkins 2013).

Result 4.2 *Increased local stakes relative to the international stakes makes intervention more likely and retaliation less likely.*

The local stakes play a less straightforward role in R's decision to challenge. If T will not intervene, R is strictly less likely to challenge the higher π is, because D is more likely to reject. If T will intervene, however, the relationship is concave. When π is small, R becomes more likely to challenge as π increases, because the benefits of winning the local stakes outweigh the likelihood of war. But when the local stakes are particularly high, increased local stakes deter R from challenging because the relative gains of fighting over larger stakes diminish. We should therefore not expect to see wars of any kind when the local stakes are either very small or very

large.

Result 4.3 *Rebellion is most likely when the local stakes and the international stakes are of similar size.*

These results imply that interstate war is uniquely likely when π is in an intermediary range. Under such conditions, T and D have enough to gain from fighting, while R can challenge with some probability of T coercing D into acquiescence.

One implication of these results is that the distribution of benefits in a region affect a country's risk of war. A consistent finding in the literature on civil wars is that the risk of civil war is negatively associated with gross domestic product (Hegre and Sambanis 2006, p. 513). However, economic growth may or may not make a country more at risk of civil war. If a poor country's economy starts growing, it becomes an increasingly attractive target to its neighbors. But in a richer country, the government is less likely to give up power, and the rebels have less to gain from a potential interstate war. A correlation between poverty and civil war could be obscuring a process where poorer countries experience steeper and more heterogenous growth than richer countries, which in turn encourages intervention and rebellion in the former but not the latter. Predicting war without accounting for these factors may produce biased estimates.

The threat of intervention can be a double-edged sword for the rebels. It can force D into giving up power, but it can also result in loss of autonomy if the challenge fails. Comparative statics show that R's autonomy costs play a crucial role in determining whether and what kind of war occurs in equilibrium. Autonomy costs do not factor into R's decision-making when T stays out, but they affect the conditions under which the second PBE exists. The higher the autonomy costs are, the less likely R is to challenge.

Result 4.4 *When the rebels' autonomy costs are sufficiently high, the threat of intervention deters civil war.*

We should therefore expect to see opposition groups with high autonomy costs rebel less frequently than those with low costs, all else being equal.

Result 4.5 *The probability of civil war is strictly decreasing in the rebels' autonomy costs.*

Conversely, we should see more civil wars with intervention than without when the opposition has small autonomy costs, because those groups are more likely to challenge. Groups like the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Palestine Liberation Organization have certain characteristics that prevent them from being dominated by external supporters. They comprise of both political and military wings and often enjoy strong local support, so they should be more likely to rebel because the benefits of third-party intervention outweigh the costs. Autonomy costs can also help explain why secessionist groups are more likely to rebel than other groups (Cederman et al. 2010, p. 105). These ethnic groups have the internal cohesion and institutions to withstand pressure from a third party.

Result 4.6 *If civil war occurs, intervention is more likely the smaller the rebels' autonomy costs are.*

Since autonomy costs only affect R's decision to challenge, and only when T will intervene, we should also expect more civil wars expand into interstate wars when a is low.

Result 4.7 *If civil war occurs, war expansion is more likely the smaller the rebels' autonomy costs are.*

Autonomy costs and war expansion can interact in unexpected ways. The threat of retaliation can encourage some high autonomy-cost groups to rebel. When autonomy costs are high, R is more likely challenge to D when T will not intervene than when it will. If D's ability to deter intervention is negatively correlated with R's cohesion (i.e. rebels are more likely to be factionalized in the face of a strong government), Result 4.4 can account for the empirical finding that internal division within groups increase the risk of civil war (Cunningham 2013). As groups become more divided, they are less able to withstand pressure from a third party, especially if one or more factions have ties with a third party. A stronger government thus deters intervention, but in doing so risks a challenge from rebels that would otherwise be deterred by intervention.

Escalation costs play a less straightforward role in R's decision to challenge and T's decision to intervene. With intervention, costly interstate war makes R more likely to challenge when R is sufficiently weak but T offers substantial support. Higher escalation costs thus deter retaliation but not challenge when R is more likely to win an internationalized civil war. But escalation costs may or may not make intervention more likely, depending on whether they lower the risk of retaliation more than raise T's costs of fighting an interstate war. Higher escalation costs deter intervention when R is strong and affinity is low, because T has little to gain from either outcome. As such, T is concerned with both the potential actions of D and whether R can exploit a larger conflict.

Result 4.8 *Increased escalation costs make third parties less likely to intervene when the rebels are strong.*

The balance of power affects the actors' willingness to risk war. The stronger R is, the more likely it is to challenge D, but strong rebels can sometimes deter intervention. If R and D are

both too strong, T would rather stay out than risk losing everything in an interstate war. This result provides an alternative explanation for the empirical finding that moderately strong rebels are most likely to receive external support (Salehyan et al. 2011, pp. 726-727). The rebels are sensitive to autonomy costs, but I assume that cost is separate from their ability to fight. Instead, stronger rebels do not receive external support because the third party does not want to risk losing territory, and weak rebels do not fight, even when intervention is coming, because they are likely to lose.

5 War expansion vignettes

I now turn to cases of expansion and non-expansion to illustrate what this strategic interaction looks like in practice. Opposition groups rebel and third parties intervene when they are optimistic about the domestic government's resolve for fighting. Low autonomy costs and high affinity make rebellion and intervention more likely, but the more the domestic government has to gain from defeating the third party, the more likely retaliation is. Since interstate war only occurs following intervention, I focus primarily on the decisions to intervene and retaliate. These vignettes are empirical existence proofs meant to demonstrate the empirical relevance of the model (Goertz 2017, p. 178), and I focus on *how* a set of variables affect an outcome rather than *whether* they do (Goemans and Spaniel 2016). The model is useful for understanding these cases because the structure of the interaction and the actors' payoffs resemble the dilemmas faced by the decision-makers in these conflicts. The relative size of the local stakes (π) plays a crucial part in determining the actors' preferences, as do the third party's affinity for the rebels and escalation costs.

5.1 The American Civil War

When the local stakes are relatively low, the third party believes retaliation is likely, because the domestic government would rather expand the conflict than tolerate intervention. During the American Civil War, Great Britain considered intervening on the side of the Confederacy, but it remained neutral in large part because intervention could have triggered an interstate war. In fall 1861, Prime Minister Palmerston declared that British policy should be to “keep quite clear of the conflict" to avoid war (Carroll 2012, p. 94). The so-called Trent Affair in 1861, when the two countries came close to war over a naval dispute, illustrates British thinking about the costs of intervening.

Britain traded with both sides, and its North American territory was at risk. Canada was particularly vulnerable to a U.S. invasion because of the long border, superior American resources and a weak Canadian militia (Bourne 1961, pp. 609-611). The British thought war against the United States would be won at sea, because Britain enjoyed naval superiority, but even at sea, the war could endanger British colonies (Bourne 1961, pp. 621-8). While the British government was willing to go to war over the Trent Affair (Bourne 1961, p. 629), the United States both initiated and defused the crisis. British concerns over losing its territories ($1-\pi$), and its hesitance in escalating the crisis, suggests Great Britain would be less willing to risk retaliation by intervening in the local conflict. In this particular case, retaliation also entailed opportunity costs. The ongoing Taiping Rebellion threatened British access to Chinese markets (Platt 2012, p. 233), and if it were bogged down in an American war, the British ability to intervene in China would be diminished.

After the naval dispute was resolved, the British government remained apprehensive. Even

as the conflict intensified in 1862 and the United States suffered significant losses, the British maintained neutrality. It wanted to end a destructive war before it spread, rather than come to the defense of slavery (Jones 2010, p. 185). British Foreign Secretary John Russell hoped to facilitate mediation. However, the Lincoln administration did not distinguish between mediation and recognition of the Confederacy (Jones 2010, ch. 6). It took a hardline stance on any British involvement, seemingly meant to deter intervention.[6] Thus, the British government kept waiting for developments on the ground to force the parties to the bargaining table, but the Confederacy never strung together the enough victories to justify its claim to independence (Jones 2010, p. 219).

The American case therefore suggests that the threat of retaliation affects decisions to intervene through a combination of political variables and the balance of power, as Results 4.2 and 4.8 predict. Because of the risk of interstate war and the limited benefits of rebel victory, the British government was only willing to intervene directly if the rebels were successful enough on the battlefield, but that moment never came.

5.2 The Afghan Civil War

When the local stakes are particularly high, a third party can intervene unmolested, even when the domestic government (and its partners) enjoy military supremacy. The Afghan Civil War attracted outside attention early on, but it only experienced extensive intervention on the side of the rebels after the Soviet invasion of December 1979. In the early 1980s, the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia formed an intervention coalition, and over the next decade provided

[6] Poast (2015) argues that the Lincoln administration was so worried about British involvement that it escalated the war early on to signal U.S. resolve. Later, in the summer of 1962, Secretary of State William H. Seward threatened to break off diplomatic relations with Great Britain if it became involved in the war (Jones 2010, p. 160).

billions of dollars in arms and money to the Mujahideen. They did so despite fears that the Soviet occupying power (functionally the domestic government) would retaliate against Pakistan (the nearest third party).[7]

There are three reasons why these coalition partners were not deterred from intervening. First, the United States and Saudi Arabia provided the funds, while Pakistan provided territorial access, so the coalition lowered the countries' costs of intervening. Second, and more importantly, the Soviet occupation made Afghanistan an attractive target, because rebel victory meant inflicting a defeat on a superpower rival–despite the Afghan Mujahideen given a slim chance of winning.[8]. Lastly, after Ronald Reagan took office, there were also increased doubts about Soviet resolve. The Soviet Union signaled early on, in public and private, it was willing to negotiate a withdrawal.[9] The Reagan administration came to see the Kremlin as weak on Afghanistan and concerned about the war's effect on renewing detente.[10]

Their expectations bore out. The Kabul government and the Soviet occupying force only conducted sporadic retaliation against Pakistan, restricted to shelling border stations and various covert operations inside Pakistan.[11] The lack of retaliation encouraged escalation of sup-

[7]A CIA intelligence assessment from July 1982 stated that Pakistan would not be able to withstand large Soviet military operations, and unless it was given more U.S. support, it might have to make concessions to Moscow. See: ""An Intelligence Assessment, July 1982," 1982. "Pakistan: Tough Choices on Afghanistan," NESA 82-10366. Central Intelligence Agency Electronic Reading Room. http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000534961.pdf.

[8]National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski warned President Carter that the rebels were badly organized and unlikely to win against Soviet forces. See: "Reflections on Soviet intervention in Afghanistan," Memo to President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 26, 1979.

[9]See: Cordovez and Harrison (1995, p. 63) and Telegram, Secretary of State to American embassy in Moscow, October 1981, folder "Afghanistan (07/14/1981-12/26/1981)," box 34, Executive Secretariat, National Security Council: Country File, Ronald Reagan Library.

[10]See: Memo, C. Hill to Robert C. McFarlane, November 29, 1983, folder "Soviet Project," RAC box 14, Donald Fortier Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library; Memo, Herbert E. Meyer to William J. Casey, June 21, 1984, folder "Soviet Union - US Policy Toward the Soviet Policy," RAC box 15, Donald Fortier Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library.

[11]Early discussions of cross-border intimidation can be found in: "An Intelligence Assessment, July 1982," 1982. "Pakistan: Tough Choices on Afghanistan," NESA 82-10366. Central Intelligence Agency Electronic Reading Room. http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000534961.pdf; "Special National Intelligence Assessment, 14 August 1984," 1982. "Soviet Policy Toward the

port for the Mujahideen. During the 1980s, the United States expanded its goals in the conflict,[12] drastically increased aid to the Mujahideen,[13] and even supplied advanced weaponry, such as Stinger antiaircraft missiles, in the fight against the Soviet forces (Kuperman 1999, Lundberg 2009).

Why was a stronger domestic government unable to deter intervention? My model suggests that the Soviet invasion increased the local stakes relative to the international stakes, in line with Result 4.2. With the Soviets in charge, intervention became more attractive to third parties, despite increased escalation costs due to the Soviet military presence. Concurrently, the increased local stakes meant the Soviet occupying power had less to gain from defeating Pakistan than Kabul had prior to the invasion. This case shows that increases in the local stakes can encourage rebel-sided intervention, while reducing the risk of war expansion.

5.3 Wars in Southern Africa

The model predicts that interstate war occurs when the local and international stakes are relatively equal. The wars in Southern Africa show how transnational competition leads to war expansion because both sides had enough to gain in an interstate war. In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, Angola and Mozambique supported the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia, which

United States in 1984," SNIE 11-9-84. Central Intelligence Agency Electronic Reading Room. https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000518055.pdf. On Afghan and Soviet covert operations and support for Pakistani rebels, see: (Andrew and Mitrokhin 2005, pp. 355-67).

[12] For the public pronouncement of the shift, see: Ronald Reagan, "Address at Commencement Exercises at Eureka College, Eureka, Illinois," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 9 May 1982, https://www.reaganfoundation.org/media/128700/eureka.pdf (accessed October 30, 2019). For the classified policy, see: National Security Decision Directive 166, March 27, 1985, http://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-166.pdf.

[13] In 1980, the United States provided $ 30 million in aid to the Mujahideen. By 1989, aid had increased to $ 700 million, before tapering off until all aid ended in 1991 (Coll 2004, Rubin 2002b, Crile 2003).

was under de facto South African rule. Angola and Mozambique gained their independence in 1975, and the new regimes represented the rise of African nationalism and liberation, and South Africa was a threat to these new governments. It had already intervened on the losing side in Angola's war of independence and subsequent civil war in 1975-1976, so majority rule in South Africa and liberation of Namibia would eliminate an existential threat against the new states.

The threat of retaliation loomed over Angola and Mozambique. After losing in Angola, South Africa built up its military capabilities (Minter 1994, p. 38). Despite being militarily disadvantaged, the Angolan and Mozambican governments thought any retaliation would be limited to cross-border operations, and both governments deemed these risks acceptable in the pursuit of African liberation (Minter 1994, pp. 27-28). They limited their rebel support at first so as not to provoke South Africa too much, and Mozambique only gave practical support to the rebels in Zimbabwe. However, both SWAPO and the ANC had bases in Angola, and the latter also depended on clandestine networks passing through Mozambique (Minter 1994, p. 39).

South Africa did not tolerate intervention, nor did it limit its retaliation to small incursions. It conducted a wide range of military operations against Angola and Mozambique, including invading Angola on several occasions. South Africa also supported Angolan and Mozambican rebel groups UNITA and RENAMO, which kept the civil wars in those countries running for years. Political developments on the subcontinent explain South Africa's strong response. In 1980, six neighboring states, including Angola and Mozambique, coordinated diplomatic policy on liberation in the region,[14] and Robert Mugabe's ascent to power in Zimbabwe meant South Africa' "protective shield of friendly states" had disappeared (Minter 1994, p. 38). African nationalism threatened the apartheid regime's survival, so it had much to gain from stemming

[14] For a broader discussion of the regional line-up against South Africa, see: (Minter 1994, pp. 117-120).

the revolutionary tide in Southern Africa by expanding its local conflict.

The model helps explain why the newly formed states intervened against South Africa, and why South Africa retaliated. The ideological nature of the interstate conflict meant both sides had much to gain from defeating the other, suggesting moderately sized local stakes (π). While the likelihood of retaliation was non-trivial, Angola and Mozambique had much to gain from helping the rebels to victory and they had strong affinity (b) for the liberation movements in South Africa and Namibia. The combination of ideologically aligned rebels fighting over moderately sized stakes meant intervention was worth the risk of retaliation.

6 Conclusion

In this paper I have presented a model of civil war onset, rebel-sided intervention, and interstate retaliation. The model explains when and why civil wars expand into interstate wars. Civil wars start and third parties intervene when the rebels are optimistic about the domestic government backing down from a challenge, external support is cheap, and the third party has high affinity for the rebels. Whether the domestic government retaliates, depends on the relative size of the local stakes. The more the government has to gain from war expansion, the more likely it is to retaliate. However, intervention is less likely the smaller the local stakes are, so interstate war is most likely when both sides have something to gain. The model thus helps us understand several cases of (potential) war expansion better than when focusing on the balance of power exclusively. It shows of the threat of retaliation can deter third parties, and also why some strong governments forego retaliation.

The model has implications for civil wars. It shows how the threat of retaliation can deter

intervention, which can deter rebellion. But intervention has varying effects on the chances of war. When the rebels are vulnerable to external influence, the threat of intervention deters rebellion. But if the rebels want help, intervention compels some domestic governments to acquiesce. These results show that making predictions about the onset of civil wars necessitate accounting for the threat of retaliation, as well as the preferences of the rebels and the third party. Models of civil war duration include international factors or third-party goals on the RHS (Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000, Cunningham 2010, e.g.), but as I have shown, intervention depends on relative stakes between the two states, which in turn can affect duration through retaliation. Likewise, the characteristics of a rebel group shapes its willingness to fight. Fragmented groups are more likely to fight (Cunningham 2013, e.g.), but that pattern might be the result of domestic governments successfully deterring intervention and thus encouraging some groups to rebel, rather than strategic problems with multiple factions. Models of rebellion should therefore account for potential intervention, particularly when predictors are potentially spurious to interstate relationships.

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