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 a formal model of civil war onset, rebel-sided intervention, and interstate retaliation where the domestic government, but not the rebels, are uncertain about whether a third party will intervene. The domestic government risks war with the rebels when it is uncertain about intervention, and interstate war occurs in equilibrium when the actors are willing to fight over a larger set of stakes and the rebels have low autonomy costs. The model provides an international and informational explanation for civil war; it shows that common predictors of civil war, such as intervener-rebel relations, have conditional effects on conflict onset; and it demonstrates that uncertainty over intervention can cause peace or interstate war, depending on the stakes of the war.

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1 Introduction

Why do some civil wars turn into interstate wars while others do not? In this paper I focus on retaliation against foreign states that support rebels, because domestic governments differ in how they respond to third-party interventions. During the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Iranian and Iranian-supported militia frequently targeted coalition troops. Yet the Bush administration decided not to retaliate. Other states respond more forcefully. The Soviet Union conducted cross-border shelling and a wide range of covert operations against Pakistan in response to their support for the Afghan Mujahideen. Sometimes intervention triggers interstate war. South Africa waged war against both Angola and Mozambique during the 1970s and 1980s in response to their support for the African National Congress, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths.

The variation in war expansion suggests that we need a theory of nested intra- and interstate war. The threat of intervention can cause civil war (Cetinyan 2002, Thyne 2006), but it is not clear from existing scholarship when the domestic government is willing to retaliate against external rebel supporters, thus prompting an interstate war, and how the threat of retaliation affects the decision to intervene. Most work assumes that retaliation is suboptimal (Schultz 2010, p. 285) and that governments must be pushed into retaliating (Carson 2016, pp. 111-4). These assumptions narrow the scope conditions to states who are either unwilling or unable to retaliate, which elides the possibility that states might prefer fighting an interstate war to tolerating intervention. Furthermore, existing theories of retaliation do not account for bargaining between the domestic government and opposition groups (Maoz and San-Akca 2012, pp. 722-4), so they cannot explain why these conflicts start in the first place, and why some become civil wars while others become international conflicts.

To answer these questions, I develop an asymmetric information model of civil war onset, rebel-sided intervention, and interstate retaliation that considers the actors' incentives for expanding the stakes of the war from domestic to interstate. The model has three innovations. First, I assume that the domestic government is uncertain about the third party's willingness to intervene on the side of the rebels, but the rebels are fully informed. Second, by retaliating against the third party, the domestic government can raise the stakes being fought over. Third, I loosen the common assumption that rebels always prefer external support to fighting alone. Instead, the rebels' preferences over support are endogenous to how much autonomy they lose when a third party intervenes.

Uncertainty over intervention explains why the domestic government risks war when bargaining with the rebels, and for interstate war to occur, two other factors also matter: the size of the local stakes' relative to expanding the war, and the autonomy costs the rebels incur in the event of intervention. Because the stakes are endogenous, the domestic government and the third party must both be willing to fight over the larger set of stakes that come with an interstate war. The local stakes have to be large enough for the third party to intervene, but not so large that war expansion is not worth it for the domestic government. Otherwise, the government either deters intervention, and thus the onset of civil war, or the third party deters retaliation, ensuring that it can intervene without the war expanding. Furthermore, interstate war depends on the rebels' autonomy costs for two reasons. First, when they are low, the rebels prefer external support to fighting alone. Second, low autonomy costs make guaranteed peace costlier and thus relatively less attractive, which induce the domestic government to risk war.

The model also has implications for civil wars. First, it provides a novel explanation for local-only civil war, based on uncertainty over external intervention. When rebels have high auton-

omy costs, governments risk war when they think intervention is likely, because they can extract larger concessions from the rebels. But rebels with high autonomy costs only go to war when intervention is not happening. Therefore, civil war without intervention is more likely when the rebels are vulnerable to being dominated by a third party, and not because they are too strong to want help. Second, when we account for the triadic interaction, common predictors of civil war have different effects on the probability of civil war onset. For instance, higher affinity between the third party and the rebels make internationalized civil war more likely, but interstate less likely. Lastly, uncertainty over intervention can either induce peace or cause war, depending on the stakes of the civil war. When the stakes are low and expansion promises big gains for the domestic government, uncertainty actually deters the government from risking war compared to conditions of complete information, because there is always some probability that intervention will *not* happen. When the stakes are higher, increased likelihood of intervention discourages the government from risking war.

2   Explanations for intervention and retaliation

To explain how civil wars become interstate wars, we first have to consider how the threat of intervention can affect domestic bargaining. First, potential foreign intervention by a third party can disrupt domestic bargaining (Thyne 2006, pp. 942-5) or embolden rebels (Kuperman 2008).[1] Second, interventions are not at random. 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) or support ethnic brethren (Gleditsch 2007, p. 298), and

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

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ensure access to markets (Aydin 2012). Therefore, the civil wars we observe are the result of a strategic interaction between domestic governments, rebels, and third parties.

What most studies of intervention omit, however, is an explicit theory of the rebels' calculus. This is puzzling, because intervention comes after rebellion, and we should expect opposition groups to condition decisions about fighting conditional on expectations of intervention. Third parties prefer to support strong rebels, but strong rebels prefer to go it alone because they can win on their own (Salehyan et al. 2011, p. 711). Rebels might be wary of receiving external support, because it often means giving up autonomy in return (Salehyan 2010, p. 507). If rebels have preferences and expectations over external support, both factors should affect their decision to fight, which in turn affects conflict onset and intervention. For instance, the contagion effect of civil wars depends on whether or not the rebels are secessionist or center-seeking (Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008, p. 229), which suggests that rebel preferences over intervention define what domestic bargains are possible and what the outside options are, be it civil war or some international conflict.

Even if a third party can find a willing recipient, these interventions are not without risks. Support can empower a rebel group so much so that the third party can no longer control it (Salehyan 2010, Bapat 2012). Furthermore, there are numerous ways a civil war can become an interstate conflict. There might be unintended consequences, such as refugee flows (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006, pp. 344-7), but the most severe risk for a third party is that a domestic government retaliates against it for supporting rebels. This threat could ostensibly deter intervention, if the third party is unwilling to fight an interstate war. Gartner and Siverson (1996, p. 5) argue that few interstate wars expand beyond their original participants because initiators pick targets unlikely to receive external support. Their logic suggests that the interventions we

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observe should be due to deterrence failure. A credible threat of intervention can deter governments from starting civil wars, while a credible threat of retaliation can deter intervention.

Yet we still observe both intervention and retaliation. Work on civil war intervention and escalation offers some explanations. Maoz and San-Akca (2012, pp. 720-5) argue that retaliation might deter intervention, particularly in the context of interstate rivalries. However, their theory does not specify rebel preferences over conflict expansion, so it does not distinguish between deterring intervention and deterring civil war onset. Furthermore, by having private information about the threat of retaliation, rather than the threat of intervention, the model does not explain the breakdown of domestic bargaining. As such, it is a model of interstate conflict, rather than the internationalization of civil war.

Other theories focus on secrecy as the mechanism of escalation. Carson argues that the ability to intervene covertly allows states to manage unintended escalation (Carson 2016, pp. 111-4). Retaliation happens because of overt intervention, when the intervener is not interested in managing escalation. But because his theory seeks to explain variation in secrecy, rather than retaliation, it is not clear how a target state can deter intervention in the first place.[2] Overt intervention, and thus a risk of escalation, is most likely in the context of "low technological sophistication, local conflicts with no or one-sided outside interest, and if intervening powers are domestically insulated and lack alliance considerations" (Carson 2016, p. 115). None of these factors can be influenced by the target state within the scope of the theory, so it only explains cases where the domestic government is restrained from retaliating, except when subjected to domestic political pressures. Similarly, Schultz (2010, p. 284) shows how rival states' ability to

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[2]Carson suggests that leaders "may feel trapped into escalating their involvement in a particular conflict to avoid damaging their reputation for support of partners and allies" (Carson 2016, p. 113).

intervene in civil wars covertly can cause war expansion because they cannot credibly commit not to intervene against each other. However, the model assumes that expansion is suboptimal (Schultz 2010, p. 285). While this assumption helps explain how secrecy fuels conflict expansion, it does not explain cases where expansion of a conflict can be beneficial for some or all involved parties.

To understand why actors choose conflict escalation and expansion, we have to think of domestic conflicts nested inside an international context. Models of intervention and civil war onset both imply that war is driven by a third party's or the rebels' wish to remake political order, and we should also consider what war expansion entails for the domestic government. Conflicts between three actors mean different stakes (Gartner and Siverson 1996, Werner 2000), depending on the level of conflict and participation. With civil wars, retaliation can mean increasing the stakes of a conflict. Rather than fighting for the status quo against the rebels and an intervener, the government forces the third party's territory or resources into the conflict by launching an interstate war. Without accounting for the domestic government's preferences over varying stakes, we cannot explain the variation in the internationalization of civil war, because the threat of retaliation conditions the decisions of both rebels and third parties.

We have two parts of the explanation for why some civil wars become interstate wars. First, we have to consider the rebels' preferences, because they affect domestic bargaining and determine when fighting starts. Second, we have to consider the domestic government's preferences for war expansion, and how the threat of retaliation affects the rebels' and the intervener's subsequent decisions.

3 Modeling onset, intervention, and retaliation

In this section I describe a finite game of civil war onset, intervention, and war expansion in Country A with three actors: the domestic government D, a dissatisfied group R, and a third-party state T that may support R. First, I assume that the domestic government is uncertain about the third party's cost of intervening, but the rebels are fully informed. Second, the actors can fight over two sets of stakes; either they fight 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). $\pi \in (0,1)$ captures the value of country A, and I normalize the total stakes to 1, so T controls $1 - \pi$.[3] D effectively decides which set of stakes is 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, I assume that intervention increases the likelihood of rebel victory, but it also imposes some costs in the form of a loss of autonomy.

The game starts with nature drawing T's type, defined by its cost of intervening in a civil war in country A ($c_T > 0$). These costs can represent arms or troops sent across the border. I assume that D does not know c_T, so it does not know whether T will intervene.[4] I also assume that $T's$ type is uniformly distributed. The model will work for other distributions as well, as long as there is a non-trivial probability of low- and high-cost types.

D is the only actor uncertain about the intervener's type.[5] I make this assumption because

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[3]An alternative choice would be to give each country their own parameter for their worth, but this make the model more complicated than it needs to be.

[4]It might be quite costly for T to intervene because of internal problems unknown to other actors. In those settings, T has an incentive to keep this information private, since it might reveal weakness if intervention costs are high, which implies that a lower-cost T might lack a cheap or credible way to separate itself from a high-cost T.

[5]This assumption is different from the private information posited by Thyne, who argues that governments should be better informed than opposition groups "because interstate relations happen almost exclusively between the governments of states due to internationally recognized norms of sovereignty" (Thyne 2006, p. 942). Since my model focuses on rebel-sided interventions, the rebels should be better informed than the target.

Figure 1: Domestic bargaining, intervention, and expansion
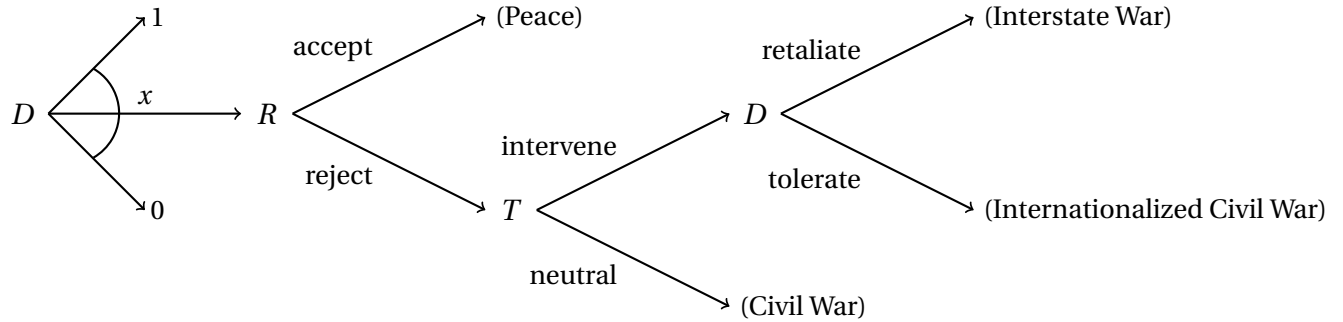
opposition groups often communicate with third parties before the start of a civil war. They might ask for help, and a third party might offer support in exchange for influence in a new regime. For instance, the Palestine Liberation Organization had extensive political and military connections with other Arab countries before the start of the First Intifada. While rebels might not be perfectly informed about the intervener's war costs, they are typically better informed than the domestic government.

Once nature draws T's type, D makes some take-it-or-leave-it offer, $x \in [0,1]$, to R. The offer can be a power-sharing agreement or part of the territory of Country A. Because the two actors are only bargaining over the local stakes, R gets $x\pi$ and D gets $(1-x)\pi$ in the event of a peaceful settlement.[6] π represents how much country A is worth, and it varies depending on several factors. The American Civil War was valuable particularly to Great Britain because of its dependence on cotton industry in the South, which raised the prospects of intervention (Poast 2015). Other times, military concerns determine the value of a civil war. Pakistan intervened in Afghanistan because a friendly regime in Kabul would give it strategic depth in the conflict with

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[6]An alternative modeling choice would be to allow D to make an offer to T as well, in the hopes of buying off the third party and removing the threat of intervention. However, it is unlikely that a third party could credibly commit not to intervene once a civil war breaks out. Furthermore, it would not change why interstate war happens, because war expansion hinges on D's willingness to retaliate once intervention has already taken place.

India (Rubin 2002, pp. 247-248).

T's payoff for peace is a function of what R accepts and T's affinity for R ($b \in (0,1)$). I distin-

guish between the two because third parties like some rebels more than others, and the value of

these relationships depend on factors such as ethnicity, religion, and ideology. 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 some influence T achieves with R sharing power or territory, and so the better

R does in bargaining or the more T likes R, the better off the third party is. The payoffs for peace

are:

$$
U_i(\text{Peace}) = \begin{cases} (1-x)\pi, & \text{if i} = D \\[2ex] x\pi, & \text{if i} = R \\[2ex] (1-\pi) + xb\pi, & \text{if i} = T \end{cases}
$$

If the rebels reject, a civil war starts.[7] T must then decide whether to intervene on the side of

the rebels or stay out. If T stays out, D and R continue fighting over π. D's chances of winning

are based on the two sides' military capabilities ($m_D > 0$ and $m_R > 0$), defined as $p_{CW} = \frac{m_D}{m_D + m_R}$,

with the complementary probability of rebel victory. Both sides pay some cost for fighting that

is unique to each of them ($c_D > 0$ and $c_R > 0$). T's payoff depends on R's probability of winning

and T's affinity for the rebels, but it pays no costs. In the event of a local-only civil war, the

actors' payoffs are:

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[7]I assume that fighting starts immediately, and there is no endogenous arming in the model. While arming can affect the outcome and duration of conflict, I treat the military strengths of the actors as exogenous, because the primary focus of the model is to explain when we interstate war occurs as opposed to internationalized civil war or simply civil war. While existing models of asymmetric information with endogenous military strength change the relationships between the parameters, arming does not change why fighting breaks out. See: Slantchev (2005).

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

If T intervenes, the level of intervention is a portion ($w \in (0,1)$) of its military capabilities m_T. For instance, geography or other factors might put constraints on how much T can intervene in a given conflict. Following intervention, D must fight both R and T in its territory, reducing its chances of victory, such that $p_{ICW} = \frac{m_D}{m_D + m_R + wm_T}$. R is aided in its civil war effort commensurately, but T gains influence over the rebels when it intervenes, resulting in R losing autonomy ($a > 0$). Autonomy costs vary across conflicts. 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 numerous examples of groups losing autonomy, see: Salehyan (2010, p. 501)). A group's level of institutionalization or the degree of local support affect its autonomy costs, and the extent of these costs depends on the affinity between the two actors, so R pays $\frac{a}{b}$ when intervention happens. For instance, when rebels and interveners share the same ideology or policy preferences, the latter is less likely to dominate the former in the event of military victory. While intervention improves R's chances of winning, T must pay intervention costs (c_T), and its utility of victory is still a product of its affinity for the rebels. Once intervention has taken place, D must decide whether to retaliate against T. If it does not retaliate, the conflict continues as an internationalized civil war, and we get the following payoffs:

$$
U_i(\text{Internationalized Civil War}) =
\begin{cases}
(p_{ICW})\pi - c_D, & \text{if i} = D \\[2ex]
(1 - p_{ICW})\pi - c_R - \frac{a}{b}, & \text{if i} = R \\[2ex]
(1 - \pi) + (1 - p_{ICW})b\pi - c_T, & \text{if i} = T
\end{cases}
$$

If D chooses to retaliate, the conflict expands, either into the third-party territory or some other object of interest, such as a client state of T. In effect, D raises the stakes of the fighting to include what T otherwise controls $(1 - \pi)$, so that all the actors are fighting over the total stakes. D's payoff is potentially greater since victory means defeating both adversaries. However, fighting two wars at once comes with an additional escalation cost $(e_D > 0)$. T might have particularly strong defensive structures or the ability to wage guerrilla warfare against D's troops. Furthermore, because the conflict is now an interstate war, all of T's resources are mobilized, so the domestic government must fight against the full military strength of the intervener, with $p_{IW} = \frac{m_D}{m_D + m_R + m_T}$.

War expansion affects the other two actors differently. For the rebels, interstate war is beneficial when compared to fighting an internationalized civil war. It does not pay any additional costs of fighting, because it is still fighting in Country A, and whatever escalatory capabilities D has, those costs are borne by T. Furthermore, R gets the full military support of T. Thus, R may or may not prefer fighting alone to receiving support (with or without retaliation), but they always prefer an interstate war to fighting an internationalized civil war. For the third party, however, expansion may or may not be beneficial. T must pay some escalatory costs $(e_T > 0)$ on top of the intervention costs, which represent what destruction the domestic government can cause in the intervener's territory or against its interests. For instance, D might be able to

use proxy forces, such as rebel groups in T's territory. I assume that D is fully informed about T's escalation costs.

T might also benefit from fighting an interstate war rather than fighting an internationalized civil war. In addition to mobilizing its entire military against D, when T is fighting over the entire set of stakes, its utility for the local stakes is no longer moderated by the influence it would have in the event of rebel victory. This shift captures the changing nature of the conflict. By going from an internationalized civil war to an interstate war, the two states become the dominant actors, as T is no longer reliant on its relationship with R to make gains in Country A. We therefore get the following payoffs for the actors in the event of an interstate war:

$$U_i(\text{Interstate War}) = \begin{cases} p_{IW} - c_D - e_D, & \text{if i} = D \\[2ex] (1 - p_{IW}) - c_R - \frac{a}{b}, & \text{if i} = R \\[2ex] (1 - p_{IW}) - c_T - e_T, & \text{if i} = T \end{cases}$$

4   Analysis

In this section I analyze the formal model to explain when and why civil wars become interstate wars (proofs in the appendix).[8] I focus on two key parameters: the relative size of the local stakes (π), and the rebels' autonomy costs (a). Each of the four decisions of the model can be expressed in terms of these parameters, which tell a concise story of civil war expansion.

I start the discussion with some noteworthy features of the model. Because D does not know T's costs of intervention, but R is fully informed, private information plays two important

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[8]I solve the model by differentiating between conditions of credible and non-credible threats of retaliation because that decision determines the outcomes available to T when deciding whether to intervene and what offers are made to R in equilibrium.

roles. First, it provides a mechanism for the breakdown of domestic bargaining. As I discuss in the appendix, interstate war, but no other types of war, occur in equilibrium under complete information. The reason why bargaining breaks down is straightforward: for some low levels of π, D is simply undeterrable and prefers fighting an interstate war to any deal R would accept. However, because the complete information model does not produce any other types of war, it cannot explain why some civil wars become interstate wars while others do not.

Second, private information structures domestic bargaining phase. While D does not know T's (continuous) type, it does know what R will accept with or without intervention. Therefore it only makes one of two offers in equilibrium: a large offer that buys off R for every type T, and a smaller offer that buys off R for some but not all types T. The latter is a risky move, as it carries some probability of war, but also means giving up less of the domestic pie.

The offers made in equilibrium are equivalent to what the rebels would get in the event of fighting, and they depend on whether D prefers interstate war to tolerating intervention. If so ($\pi \leq \pi_D$), the threat of retaliation is credible, and D either offers what the rebels would get in a civil war ($x_{CW} = 1 - p_{CW} - \frac{c_R}{\pi}$) or fighting an interstate war ($x_{IW} = \frac{(1 - p_{IW}) - \frac{a}{b} - c_R}{\pi}$). When D prefers tolerating intervention ($\pi > \pi_D$), either x_{CW} is offered or what the rebels would get fighting an internationalized civil war internationalized civil war ($x_{ICW} = \frac{b\pi - b\pi p_{ICW} - a - bc_R}{b\pi}$). Therefore, there are a total of three offers made across the equilibria. Because the rebels' preferences over whether to receive external support or not is endogenous to their autonomy costs, the relative size of the offers made vary.

Figure 2: The equilibrium space and possible types of war.
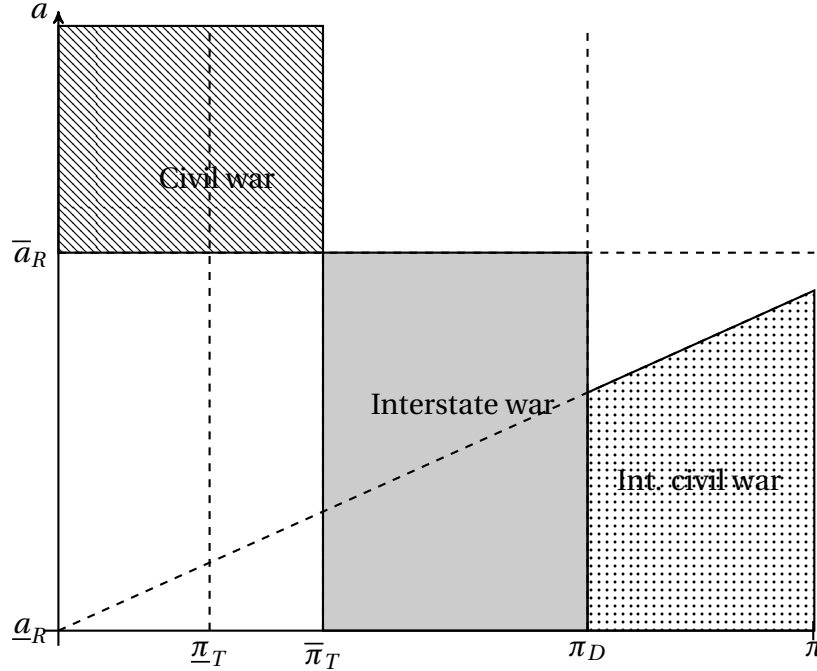
4.1 Equilibria

The model produces four Perfect Bayesian Equilibria (PBE) with a probability of war: one for interstate war, one for internationalized civil war, and two for local-only civil war. I define them along two dimensions: the relative size of the local stakes (π), and the rebels' autonomy costs in the event of intervention (a).

Figure 2 shows the types of war that can occur in equilibrium by these two parameters (the white spaces indicate when the actors do not fight).[9] When π is relatively low ($\pi \leq \pi_D$), D is willing to retaliate, because the raised stakes make up for the additional costs of fighting an interstate war. But as π increases, retaliation becomes less and less desirable to D, because there is less to gain by expanding the war. When $\pi > \pi_D$, D is not willing to fight an interstate

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[9]Regarding notations, overline indicates a cut-point where the actors are fighting over the total stakes, while underline indicates a cut-point where they are fighting over the local stakes. However, this does not imply that the cut-points for the former are necessarily higher than the latter cut-points.

war because of the added escalation costs and because T mobilizes its entire force and thus reduces D's chances of winning the war. For T, the opposite holds, as π must be sufficiently large for intervention to be worth it ($\pi \geq \overline{\pi}_T$ if $\pi \leq \pi_D$, or $\pi \geq \underline{\pi}_T$ if $\pi > \pi_D$). When π is too small, then T would rather sit out the conflict than pay the costs of fighting.

However, the value of π is not sufficient for explaining which type of conflict occurs in equilibrium. As Figure 2 shows, the size of the rebels' autonomy costs determines whether the conflict stays local or not. When a is sufficiently low ($a \leq \overline{a}_R$ and $a \leq \underline{a}_R$ for $\pi \leq \pi_D$ and $\pi > \pi_D$, respectively), R prefers assistance to fighting alone, and so they only reject a low offer from D when intervention is coming. But as a increases, R prefers fighting alone. If so, it only rejects a low offer from D when intervention is not coming, resulting in a local-only civil war.

Whether D risks war or not depends on the size of a, but the specific cut-points for risking war differ across the four equilibria. In general, D's incentives to risk war follow R's preferences for support. When $\pi \leq \pi_D$ and $a \leq \overline{a}_R$, $\overline{a}_D$ is also an upper bound of a, and when the rebels have high autonomy costs ($a > \overline{a}_R$), then $\overline{a}_D^{\dagger}$ is a lower bound of a.

Proposition 1 *The following sets of strategies are each part of a Perfect Bayesian Equilibrium:*

- *When $\overline{\pi}_T \leq \pi \leq \pi_D$ and $a \leq min(\overline{a}_R, \overline{a}_D)$, D offers x_{CW}, R accepts if $x \geq x_{IW}$ and otherwise rejects, T intervenes, and D retaliates (interstate war equilibrium)*

- *When $\pi > max(\pi_D, \underline{\pi}_T)$ and $a \leq min(\underline{a}_R, \underline{a}_D)$, D offers x_{CW}, R accepts if $x \geq x_{ICW}$ and otherwise rejects, T intervenes, and D tolerates intervention (internationalized civil war equilibrium)*

- *When $\pi < min(\pi_D, \overline{\pi}_T)$ and $a > max(\overline{a}_R, \overline{a}_D^{\dagger})$, D offers x_{IW}, R accepts if $x \geq x_{CW}$ and otherwise rejects, T does not intervene, and D otherwise retaliates (civil war equilibrium)*

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- *When $\pi_D < \pi < \underline{\pi}_T$ and $a > max(\underline{a}_R, \underline{a}_D^\dagger)$, D offers x_{ICW}, R accepts if $x \geq x_{CW}$ and otherwise rejects, T does not intervene, and D otherwise tolerates intervention (civil war equilibrium)*

Proposition 1 shows what types of war happen for which parameter values of π and a. These are unique PBE, but they are not the model's only equilibria. As I discuss in the appendix, other PBE exist, all ending in peace. Some exist because D is unwilling to risk war, while others exist because T's and R's incentives for fighting do not align.

4.2 Explaining war expansion

The interstate war equilibrium exists for an intermediary range of π. The upper bound of π, $\pi_D = \frac{p_{IW} - e_D}{p_{ICW}}$, is defined by D's willingness to retaliate. In other words, the local stakes have to be small enough for the raised stakes $(1-\pi)$ to make D's increased costs of fighting worthwhile. The lower bound, $\overline{\pi}_T = \frac{p_{IW} + c_T + e_T}{1 + b(p_{CW} - 1)}$, is defined by T's willingness to intervene, despite intervention starting an interstate war. This constraint shows how the third party must weigh keeping what it already controls against the potential gains of defeating another country with the help of rebels. If $\overline{\pi}_T \leq \pi \leq \pi_D$, both actors are willing to fight over the larger stakes.

However, for interstate war to occur, the rebels must also be willing to fight an international war, and the domestic government must risk war. The interaction of endogenous rebel preferences and private information explains why. When $\pi \leq \pi_D$, D makes one of two offers in equilibrium: it can offer x_{IW}, which equals what R would get for fighting an interstate war; or it can offer x_{CW}, which is the equivalent of what R gets fighting a local-only civil war. When the rebels' payoff for interstate war is larger than the payoff for fighting a local-only civil war ($x_{IW} \geq x_{CW}$, which can be rewritten as $a \leq b((1 - p_{IW}) - \pi(1 - p_{CW})) = \overline{a}_R$), R prefers external

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Figure 3: The equilibrium space with $\overline{a}_D$ as the upper bound of R's autonomy costs (a) for D risking interstate war.
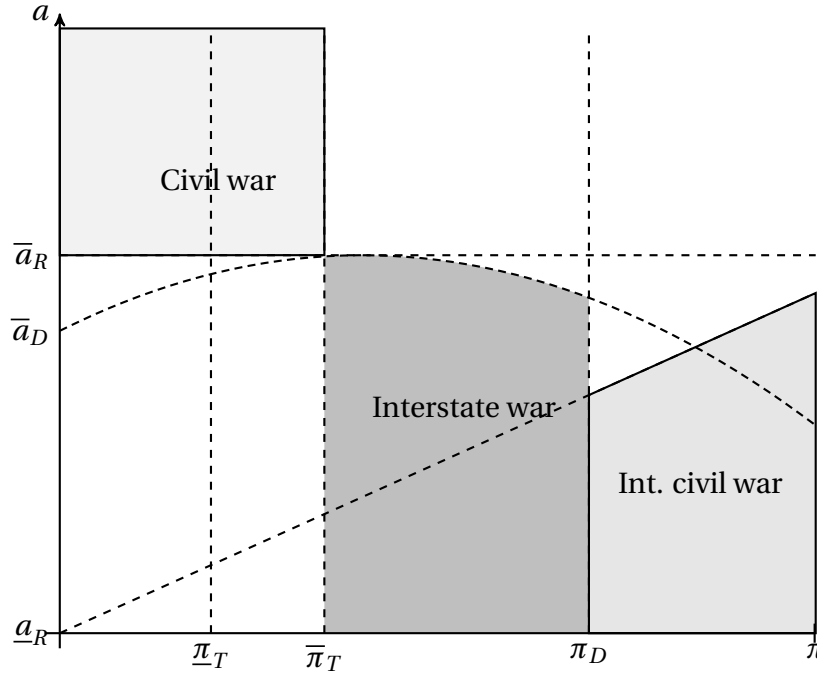
assistance to fighting alone. An offer x_{IW} guarantees peace, because it is the best R can get, while x_{CW} comes with a probability of interstate war. D makes this risky offer when $a \leq \overline{a}_D$, as shown in Figure 3. The reasoning is straightforward: as the rebels' autonomy costs decrease, so does D's utility for making a large offer. It can no longer leverage R's vulnerability to external domination to get a better deal domestically. So for decreasing values of a, the rebels become increasingly willing to accept assistance, and the domestic government becomes increasingly willing to risk interstate war.

While D's willingness to risk interstate war is decreasing in a, it can be increasing or decreasing in π. As Figure 3 shows, $\overline{a}_D$ is a concave function of π, which implies that for particularly low values of π, D prefers intervention to non-intervention. But as the local stakes increase, at ϕ_1, D's willingness to risk war decreases in π. When π is particularly low, the gains from expanding

are so large that D is unwilling to offer anything that R will accept. Despite this, D never knowingly provokes war in this model. As discussed above, under complete information, there exists an SPE where D knowingly starts an interstate war. With uncertainty over T's intervention costs, however, D never makes an offer it knows R will reject. The reason is straightforward. While D might, under some circumstances, prefer an interstate war to x_{CW} or x_{IW}, it cannot guarantee T intervening. There will always be some probability T will sit out the conflict, and D prefers having R accept x_{CW} to fighting a civil war because fighting is costly, so it will never offer less than x_{CW}. Therefore, when the local stakes are particularly low, an otherwise undeterrable domestic government is deterred from trying to start an interstate war because the third party might *not* intervene.

Result 4.1 *When war expansion increases the stakes sufficiently, uncertainty over intervention can induce peace.*

When $\pi > \pi_D$, there exists an internationalized civil war PBE. T intervenes when $\pi \geq \frac{c_T}{bp_{CW} - bp_{ICW}} = \underline{\pi}_T$. As such, the equilibrium exists for sufficiently large local stakes, because it simultaneously makes intervention attractive to T and expansion unattractive to D. For fighting to break out, R has to prefer assistance to fighting alone ($a \leq b\pi(p_{CW} - p_{ICW}) = \underline{a}_R$), and D has to risk internationalized civil war by offering x_{CW}, which it does when $a \leq \underline{a}_D$.

The interstate war and internationalized civil war equilibria cannot exist simultaneously. Internationalized civil war occurs for higher values of π than interstate war, which implies that when the local stakes of a potential conflict increase (decrease), they make internationalized civil war more (less) likely while making interstate war less (more) likely.[10]

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[10] Note that these are relative changes in likelihood. The likelihood of interstate war is not strictly decreasing in

Result 4.2 *Increases in the relative size of the local stakes make internationalized civil war more likely relative to interstate war, and vice-versa.*

The separation of the two PBE suggest that exogenous shocks to the relative size of the local stakes increase the risk of intervention while decreasing the risk of retaliation. One example of this could be the discovery of oil reserves in *D*'s territory. While such a discovery would not impact the distribution of power immediately, it would affect the distribution of benefits between the two states.[11] *D* would then be less willing to fight an interstate war than before because the local stakes have become relatively more valuable, but this change would also make *T* more willing to intervene as it has more resources to gain.

4.3 Extension: Free-for-all

A necessary condition for the interstate war PBE to exist is that the rebels' and the third party's incentives are sufficiently aligned. In the above model, the incentives for *R* and *T* to fight are interdependent because in the event of an interstate war, they fight in a coalition together against *D*. An alternative assumption could be that instead of fighting together, an interstate war becomes a free-for-all, where all three fight alone for their share of the larger stakes. Instead of fighting over the political order of one country, the actors are now remaking the political order of both countries. We can think of this reordering as warring parties carving out territory. With this change, however, interstate war cannot happen in equilibrium, because the size of π

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the size of π because at some point the stakes are so low that *T* would never intervene (lower bound of π), and therefore *R* would never reject a low offer. Similarly, *D*'s decision to risk interstate or internationalized civil war is a concave function of π.

[11]Bell and Wolford (2015) show that oil discoveries have a lagged effect on the balance of power between political actors, and such future power shifts can cause the onset of war.

is never high enough to satisfy the third party while also low enough to make the rebels fight.[12]

Put differently, interstate war is too costly for the third party, while fighting a civil war is not expensive enough for the rebels to want to fight for the larger stakes.

Result 4.3 *When the rebels and the third party do not fight in a coalition together, interstate war does not happen in equilibrium because the rebels' ($\pi \leq \pi_R^*$) and the third party's threshold ($\pi \geq \pi_T^*$) for fighting cannot be met simultaneously ($\pi_R^* > \pi_T^*$).*

4.4   Explaining civil war

The model also has implications for civil wars. There exists two PBE where uncertainty over rebel-sided intervention causes local-only civil war, and these cannot exist simultaneously with the interstate or internationalized civil war PBE. To understand why, we have to consider how uncertainty over intervention interacts with the rebels' endogenous preferences over external support.[13] While R cannot directly prevent T from intervening, R's preferences determine the relative size of D's offers in equilibrium. When $a > \overline{a}_R$ (and $\pi \leq \pi_D$), R prefers fighting alone to fighting alongside T. x_{CW} is the safe offer that buys off R for every type T, while x_{IW} is the smaller, risky offer. Rebels with high autonomy costs will accept x_{IW} if intervention is coming, thus avoiding an interstate war, but reject the same offer if intervention is not coming, prompting a local-only civil war. The model therefore offers an international and informational explanation for civil war.

When $a > \overline{a}_R$, higher autonomy costs also make D more likely to risk civil war, because it increases the utility of R accepting x_{IW}, and thus risking rejection. Uncertain third-party in-

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[12]As I show in the proofs, once military power no longer accumulates, the rebels' preference for fighting an interstate war is constrained for values of π.

[13]I focus here on the PBE where $\pi \leq \pi_D$, but another PBE exists for $\pi > \pi_D$, which is governed by similar logic.

tervention makes civil war more likely in countries where rebel groups are vulnerable to being dominated by external supporters because rebels are skeptical of outside help and this incentivizes the government to low-ball them during bargaining. This equilibrium might explain why some poorly organized or supported opposition groups start fighting.

5   Empirical implications

The model shows that the onset of civil war is contingent on expectations about intervention and retaliation, because the breakdown of domestic bargaining depends on what happens after the fighting begins. In this section I focus on two decisions to predict the onset of civil war (with or without subsequent intervention and retaliation): D's decision to risk war with a low offer; T's decision to intervene or not, because R rejects or accepts based on its knowledge of T's type.[14] These decisions are interdependent and produce some unexpected results, because D's willingness to risk war is a non-linear function of T's probability of intervening. To estimate the probability of war, I therefore calculate the comparative statics of the probabilities of D making a low offer and R rejecting one.

The relative size of the local stakes plays an important part in predicting the onset of conflict, but it is not a consistent predictor. The risk of intervention is strictly increasing in π, because the larger the domestic prize, the more attractive intervention becomes for T. When the rebels prefer assistance to fighting alone, the likelihood of interstate or internationalized civil war is increasing in π when a is sufficiently low ($a \leq \overline{a}_R$ if $\pi \leq \pi_D$, and otherwise $a \leq \underline{a}_R$).[15] How-

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[14]Because intervention and retaliation follow the onset of a civil war, when I refer to the probability of war, I mean the likelihood of civil war breaking out following a low offer from the domestic government, regardless of what happens afterwards.

[15]By assumption, $\overline{a}_R > \underline{a}_R$, so the constraint for the risk of war increasing in π is stricter for higher values of π.

ever, D's willingness to risk war is a non-monotonic function of π. It is increasing in π (or the likelihood of intervention) until inflection-point ϕ_k, when risking war is decreasing in π. When $\pi \leq \pi_D$, the intuition is as follows: for lower values of π, D has much to gain from war expansion. Because increased local stakes make intervention increasingly attractive to T, D is increasingly willing to risk interstate war up until a certain point π_1. After that, interstate war is no longer preferable to a peaceful bargain. When $\pi > \pi_D$, D still increasingly risks war for lower values of π, but for slightly different reasons. Increases in π make the risky offer increasingly attractive, but at ϕ_2, the risk of intervention is so high that D becomes less risk-seeking. These results imply that at some range of π, both actors increasingly want war.

Result 5.1 *Domestic governments are more willing to risk interstate or internationalized civil war when the local stakes are low than when they are high.*

Corollary 5.2 *For certain values of the local stakes, both the domestic government and the third party are increasingly willing to fight a war.*

Past these inflection points, D's and T's incentives diverge, changing the conditional probabilities of interstate war and internationalized civil war. As D becomes deterrable after ϕ_k, increases in π makes it less likely to risk war with a low offer because it makes intervention more likely.

Corollary 5.3 *When the stakes of a potential civil war are sufficiently high, $\pi > \phi_k$, increases in the local stakes make intervention more likely, but the outbreak of civil war less likely.*

The size of a affects D's decision to risk war and the role of π. For instance, when $a > \overline{a}_R$,

D's willingness to risk civil war is strictly increasing in π, or the likelihood of intervention.[16] Because *R* will accept a low offer x_{IW} if *T* will intervene, the shadow of intervention prompts *D* to risk war and forces *R* to accept a lesser offer than what it would get if *T* was not present.

Result 5.4 *When the rebels' autonomy costs are high, the threat of intervention enables the domestic government to extract a better deal from the rebels than if intervention was not possible, but it creates a risk of war.*

Given a risky offer made by *D*, the risk of civil war is decreasing in π when the rebels have high autonomy costs, but increasing in π when the rebels have low autonomy costs. This result implies that *R*'s and *T*'s incentives to fight a civil war align when there is lots to be gained by the third party and little to be paid by the rebels. When high-autonomy cost rebels fight, they do so because the stakes of the conflict are negligible to a third party.

As Figure 4 shows, π is not a consistent predictor of what type of conflict ensues either. When *D*'s escalation costs are sufficiently low or *T*'s costs of intervening are sufficiently high, π is a non-linear predictor of civil war onset. Specifically, when $\pi_D < \pi < \underline{\pi}_T$, *D* is willing to fight an internationalized war, but *T* is not. What we can say is that *a* is a consistent predictor of whether local-only civil war or an international (with or without retaliation) conflict breaks out. When $a \leq \overline{a}_R$, *D*'s willingness to risk interstate war is decreasing in *a*, and when $a \leq \underline{a}_R$, *D*'s willingness to risk internationalized civil war is decreasing in *a*. Above these cut-points, *D*'s willingness to risk civil war is increasing in *a*.

Result 5.5 *Countries with high-autonomy cost rebels are more likely to experience civil wars without intervention than countries with low-autonomy cost rebels.*

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[16]In the fourth PBE discussed in the appendix, when $\pi > \pi_D$ and $a > \underline{a}_R$, *D*'s willingness to risk war can be increasing or decreasing in π.

Figure 4: The equilibrium space and possible types of war when D's escalation costs (e_D) are sufficiently low or T's intervention costs (c_T) are sufficiently high.
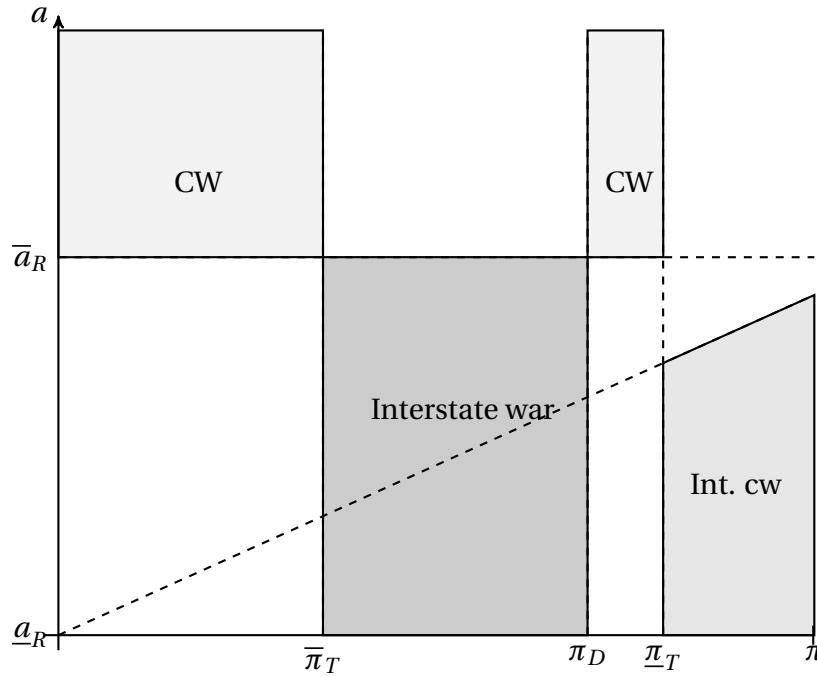
Other parameters affect the decision to intervene. Contrary to existing studies (e.g. Gleditsch 2007, p. 298), the relationship between the rebels and the third party is not a consistent predictor of intervention. When $\pi \leq \pi_D$, stronger affinity makes interstate war less likely, but civil war more likely (Figure 5). The intuition is as follows: the less the third party likes the rebels, the larger the marginal benefit of fighting over a large set of stakes than staying out and holding some influence in the event of a rebel victory. Therefore, stronger affinity makes the third party less likely to intervene.[17] One way of interpreting this result is that the domestic government's ability to raise the stakes drives a wedge between the rebels and the third party by putting the latter's territory at risk. The expectations are reversed when $\pi > \pi_D$. Greater affinity makes internationalized civil war more likely, but civil war less likely. Because fighting is exclusively in

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[17]When $a > \overline{a}_R$, stronger affinity makes civil war more likely, because they prefer fighting alone.

Figure 5: *T*'s affinity (*b*) for *R* as a predictor of war, conditional on a low offer, depends on the size of the local stakes (π) and *R*'s autonomy costs (*a*).
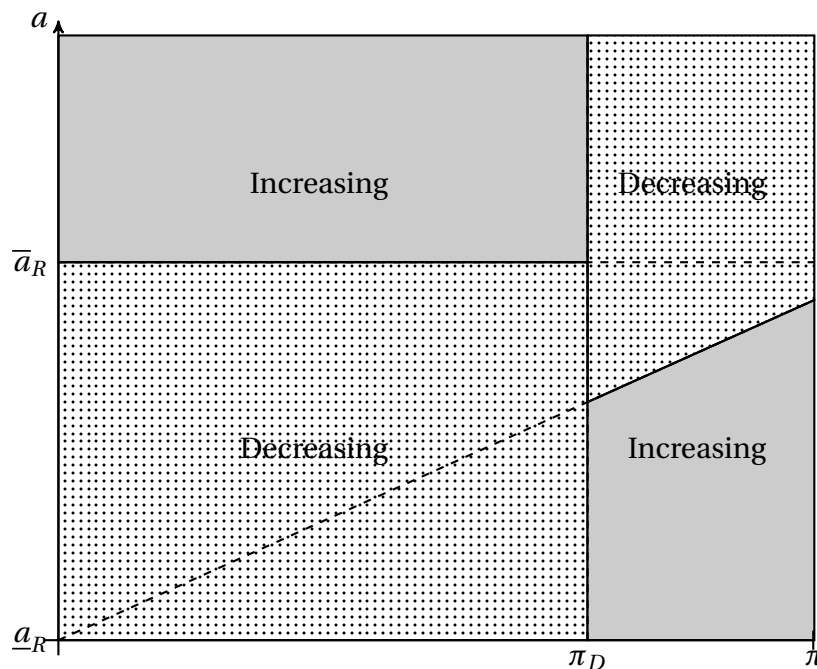
Country A's territory, *T* only cares about whether *R* wins the local conflict. Therefore, the third party's and rebels' goals align as affinity increases. However, when the autonomy costs are high, their goals diverge.

Result 5.6 *If a civil war breaks out, higher affinity between a third party and rebels makes internationalized civil war more likely, but interstate less likely.*

The distribution of power is important for predicting the onset of war, because it determines the likelihood of winning. For *T*, the willingness to intervene is strictly increasing in the probability of *D* winning in a civil war against *R*. However, it is strictly decreasing in the probability of *D* winning either an internationalized civil war or an interstate war. The role of the third party in tipping the distribution of power is key to understanding these results. If the rebels are too weak, sitting out the conflict becomes untenable. But the third party also wants to win, because

otherwise intervening is potentially disastrous.

Looking at the role of rebel strength, I find some surprising results. When $\pi > \pi_D$, weaker (stronger) rebels make intervention makes T more (less) likely to intervene, because the third party wants rebel victory, but is better off sitting out the conflict if the rebels can win on their own. When $a > \underline{a}_R$, R does not want external support, and only fights when intervention is not coming. Therefore, internationalized civil war is more likely when the rebels are militarily weak but have low autonomy costs, and civil war is more likely when the rebels are strong but have high autonomy costs. Intuitively, these results show that the supply-and-demand dynamic of rebel support depends both on what the rebels need and what they want.

When $\pi \leq \pi_D$, T has to weigh fighting an interstate war, with everything on the line, against sitting out the conflict and hoping for the best. Stronger rebels make intervention more (less) likely, but only for lower (higher) values of π or b. If either are sufficiently high ($b > \frac{(m_D + m_R)^2}{\pi(m_D + m_R + m_T)^2}$), then T becomes less willing to intervene as the rebels grow stronger. If the value of rebel victory in a civil war is sufficiently high, then T would rather R fight alone than intervene in a costly war with D. But when the value of a civil war victory is relatively low, then T wants to intervene on the side of increasingly strong rebels because it raises the likelihood of winning an interstate war. We therefore see interstate war is increasingly likely when the rebels are strong and not easily dominated by the third party ($a > \overline{a}_R$), but they do not have too strong an affinity (b) for each other.

These predictions have implications for existing research. For instance, Salehyan et al. (2011, p. 711) argue that medium-strength rebels are more likely to get external support. By incorporating the threat of retaliation, I show that third parties do not strictly prefer supporting stronger rebels. They want to help rebels, but only if necessary. Furthermore, by endogenizing rebel pref-

erences in the model, I show how varying stakes affect the alignment of rebel and third-party preferences, which helps predict both the onset of civil war and intervention.

The results also imply selection bias in our observational data. Civil war might not break out because the opposition has no interest in picking up arms, or because the government has successfully deterred a third party from intervening and the opposition prefers fighting an interstate war to fighting over the local stakes. Similarly, civil war might break out, but without intervention, for at least two reasons: the third party might simply not have an interest in the conflict; or the rebels prefer fighting on their own and the third party is successfully deterred from intervening. Thus, modeling dyadic relations alone does not capture the strategic interaction.

6   Cases of war expansion

I now turn to cases of expansion and non-expansion to illustrate what this strategic interaction looks like in practice. The relative size of the local stakes (π) plays a crucial part in determining the actors' preferences, and in particular when we get interstate war and when the domestic government tolerates intervention. During the American Civil War, Great Britain considered intervening on the side of the Confederacy. It was militarily stronger than the United States, particularly with its large navy, but it remained neutral in large part because intervention would have prompted an interstate war.[18] While the British government was ultimately willing to go to war with the United States, they recognized that Canada was particularly vulnerable to a U.S. invasion and that escalation would entail war at sea, potentially even against British colonies

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[18]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).

(Bourne 1961, pp. 621-8). My model suggests that we have to consider what it already controlled and whether it was willing to risk it $(1 - \pi)$. In this particular case, the United States did not threaten Britain's home territory, but because it could raise the stakes of the conflict, it deterred intervention.

Escalation costs also help explain war expansion. During the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Iran armed and trained Shiite militias. Both the Bush and Obama administrations considered retaliating at several points, but always decided against striking Iran directly, because of the escalation costs Iran could impose.[19] The restraining effect of escalation costs become apparent when we compare the Iraq case to the situation the United States found itself during the Vietnam War. There, the United States was also fighting a counter-insurgency, with insurgent forces using both Laos and Cambodia as sanctuaries from which they launched attacks. While President Richard Nixon was hesitant about expanding the conflict, several rebel offensives starting in February 1969 prompted Nixon to approve a military response against Cambodia, including extensive bombing campaigns and an invasion.[20] One explanation for the difference in these two cases, and supported by the model, is that Cambodia, unlike Iran, did not have the ability to impose significant escalation costs on the United States if it retaliated.[21]

In some cases, both the relative size of the local stakes and escalation costs play a significant role in the expansion of civil war. Similar to the United States in Iraq, South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s enjoyed military superiority relative to its neighbors, while fighting a rebellion. Its response to other African countries' support for the African National Congress (ANC),

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[19]For an account of the the Bush administration's deliberations see: (Filkins 2013).

[20]For details on Johnson's decision-making, see Herring (2002, ch. 6). For discussions of Nixon's change of course, starting with the "Madman theory," see: Dallek (2007, pp. 104-109).

[21]Isaacs et al. (1987, p. 89) suggest that the Cambodian King did not have extensive control of the country's territory and could not evict the communist forces.

however, was drastically different. South Africa engaged in a wide range of military operations against Angola and Mozambique, to compel them to stop supporting the ANC. It did so because the rise of African nationalism threatened the apartheid government, so it had much to gain from stemming the revolutionary tide in Southern Africa. Furthermore, South Africa retaliated against the two countries because it could delegate fighting to groups like UNITA and RENAMO, so its escalation costs were moderated. Other countries supported the ANC too, but the white nationalist government saw Angola and Mozambique as good targets to coerce other states too, including members of the British Commonwealth, without additional risks (Minter 1994, pp. 117-120).

Sometimes a country at war experiences significant changes in intervention or retaliation. If such shifts are due to exogenous shocks, we can use them to evaluate the model.[22] This is useful for parameters such as π that are not easily compared across different conflicts. Temporal variation, if exogenous, allows us to partition one conflict into multiple cases to be compared. The Afghan Civil War, which started in 1978 as a peasant rebellion (Gibbs 1986), suffered at least one major shock: the Soviet invasion in December 1979.[23] Before the invasion, various neighbors, including Pakistan and Iran, supported the rebels, but there is little evidence of the Kabul

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[22]Spaniel and Poznansky (2018) show how one can leverage exogenous shocks to parameters in a single case to evaluate a formal model.

[23]Soviet documents indicate that the decision to invade was quick and cloaked in secrecy. For details, see: "Alexander Lyakhovskiy's Account of the Decision of the CC CPSU Decision to Send Troops to Afghanistan," December, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, A. A. Lyakhovskiy's "Plamya Afgana" (The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan) (Moscow, 1995), p. 109-112. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115531. On U.S. expectations and surprise, see Coll (2004, pp. 44-50). Evidence suggest that political developments in Kabul triggered the hasty invasion. The Politburo decided to remove Afghan President Hafizulla Amin because he weakened the central government through extensive purges, and Soviet leaders feared he was turning to the West. See: "Personal memorandum Andropov to Brezhnev," December 01, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, APRF, from notes taken by A. F. Dobrynin and provided to Norwegian Nobel Institute; provided to CWIHP by Odd Arne Westad, Director of Research, Nobel Institute; trans. for CWIHP by Daniel Rozas. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113254.

government conducting retaliation against them. Following the Soviet invasion, we would expect to see less intervention, if the distribution of power is a key determinant, and retaliation if intervention happened. Instead, the invasion prompted the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia to form an intervention coalition that resulted in billions of dollars in arms and money flooding into the conflict over the next decade or so, despite concerns about Soviet retaliation against Pakistan.[24] Furthermore, there was only limited retaliation, which included the shelling of Pakistani border posts and covert operations inside Pakistan.[25]

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. With the Soviets in charge, intervention became more attractive to third parties, despite increased escalation costs from Soviet military attacks against Pakistan. Furthermore, this increase in π commensurately reduced the benefit reduced the benefit of defeating the interveners, especially Pakistan. This shows that government-sided intervention can actually encourage rebellion and rebel-sided intervention, while reducing the risk of war expansion.

These contrasting cases illustrate the utility of the theory. The relative size of the local stakes and the escalation costs associated with retaliation provide a more intuitive explanation for war

[24]Despite initial concerns about the Mujahideen's chances of winning, the Reagan administration eventually decided to escalate its involvement in the conflict. Primary documents from the period suggest that the White House increasingly came to see the Kremlin as weak on Afghanistan and concerned about the war's effect on efforts to renew detente. 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.

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

expansion than the military balance of power between the actors. We should understand the decision to expand a conflict as weighing the potential benefits against the potential costs, and these parameters are not strictly defined by the characteristics of the civil war.

7 Conclusion

This paper presented an asymmetric information model of civil war onset, intervention, and retaliation with varying stakes for fighting to explain why some civil wars expand while others do not. I focused on uncertainty about the third party's costs of intervention in order to isolate an international cause of civil war onset and expansion. Furthermore, I linked domestic and international conflict by allowing the domestic government to raise the stakes of fighting through retaliation, and I allowed the rebels to hold varying preferences over external support.

Some of the key results are:

- Interstate war occurs when the local stakes are moderately high and the rebels' autonomy costs are low.

- For interstate war to occur, the rebels' and the third party's incentives to fight have to be sufficiently aligned.

- Higher local stakes make internationalized civil war more likely relative to interstate war, and vice-versa.

- Civil wars without intervention are most likely in countries where the rebels have high autonomy costs.

This nested model of conflict helps explain several cases of expansion and non-expansion,

and how the costs and benefits of war expansion affect decision-making. Furthermore, if we extend the logic of the model, we can see how exogenous shocks to a domestic conflict can have unanticipated effects. By raising the local stakes in Afghanistan, the 1979 Soviet invasion both made rebel-sided intervention more appealing and the threat of retaliation less credible. Today, we observe a similar dynamic in Syria, where regime supporters, such as Russia and Iran, have encouraged external support for rebels.

Empirical work suggests that treating interstate and intrastate wars separately is analytically problematic (Cunningham and Lemke 2013, p. 617), and my model provides a link between the two. For instance, my model offers an international and information explanation for local-only civil war. Furthermore, it shows how uncertainty can work in unexpected ways. When war expansion is highly attractive, uncertainty actually induces peace when it otherwise would not under complete information, because there is always some positive possibility that the third party will not intervene.

Another insight provided by the model is that there is no consistent relationship between many common predictors of civil war and the onset of fighting. I show that the effect of rebel-intervener ties on the probability of war depends on the stakes and the rebels' autonomy costs. These results imply that there is selection bias in the observational data we use, and failing to account for the strategic interaction may lead to biased estimates when predicting conflict outcomes.

Future research should focus on the specific characteristics of expansion. I assumed that escalation means interstate war, but retaliation might be of less severity. Variation in expansion should affect outcomes of interest, such as duration. Sudden expansion might have different effects on civil war termination than gradual escalation, but the choices of intervention strategy

and retaliation can interact in ways not captured by my model. The civil wars in Afghanistan and Syria show how strategies change over time, in response to both changes on the ground and external factors.

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