What We Know About Escalation to War

POSC 3610 – International Conflict

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Goal for Today

Highlight why disputes, once initiated, escalate to war and why selection matters.

A Buried Lede

We've spent much effort looking at the correlates of war by reference to MID onset.

- Understandable: war is a rare event. MIDs are more common.
- However, war is ultimately what we want to explain.

Importantly, the same factors that coincide with MID onset need not coincide with MID escalation.

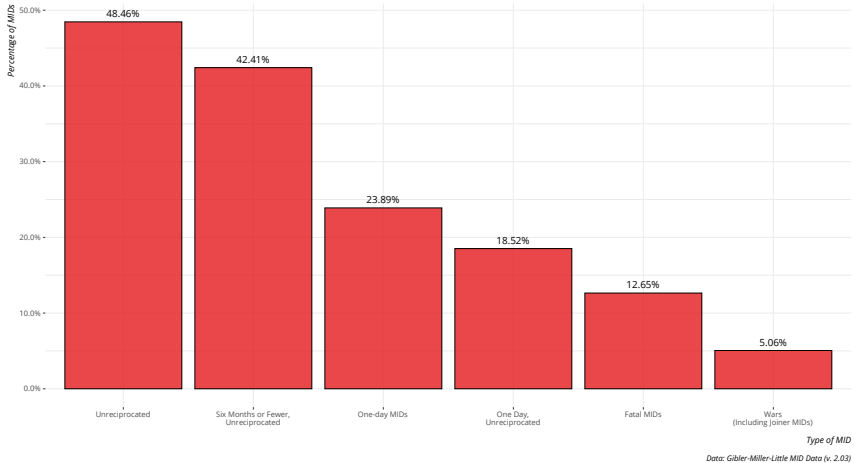
A Typology of Escalation

MIDs of interest cluster into different patterns.

- One-day/single-incident/unreciprocated MIDs that never escalate.
- Crises that become wars (e.g. July Crisis)
- Crises resolved short of war (e.g. Agadir Crisis, Trent Affair, Cuban Missile Crisis)
- Fatal MIDs short of war (e.g. Kargil War, Falkland War, Operation Just Cause)

Crises Get Our Attention but They're Fortunately Uncommon

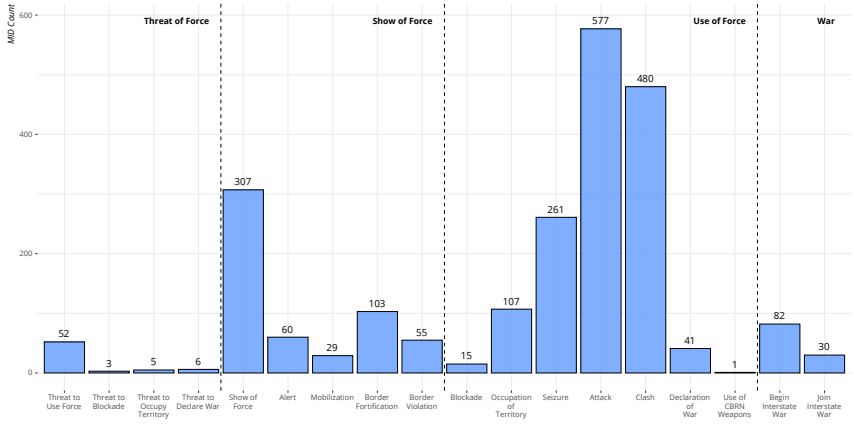
In fact, almost half of all MIDs are unreciprocated and last less than six months, a coding quirk to pick up "six-month count" "continuous action" MIDs.



Data: Gibler-Miller-Little MID Data (v. 2.03)

Number of MIDs by Highest Action Observed at Dispute-Level

Most common hiacts: Attack (n: 577), Clash (n: 480), Show of Force (n: 307), Seizure (n: 265)



Data: Gibler-Miller-Little MID Data (v. 2.03), 1816-2010.

Note: MID#1109 is unique for being the only dispute in the data for which the highest action was the use of CBRN weapons. Other CBRN weapon uses (e.g. World War II, Iran-Iraq War) happen during war itself, a higher hostility level.

How Do We Explain Escalation?

We generally focus on two things:

1. Contextual factors
2. Strategic interaction between states

Contextual Factors

Contextual influences on dispute escalation stay close to the “dangerous dyads” framework.

- Relative Power
- System polarity
- Alliances
- Contiguity
- Arms races
- Joint democracy
- Issue type

The Problem of Selection

However, what's true for dispute onset may not be true for dispute escalation.

- States select into disputes looking down the proverbial game tree.

We would need to better model the **selection effects** in the disputes we do observe.

- We usually do this with a Heckman (1976) model.

The Canonical Case of Selection

Heckman's motivating example was women in the labor force.

- Preliminary finding: more women are in the labor force, working longer hours, and getting higher wages.
- Marital status (divorced) and education are thought to explain this.

The issue: we only have wage data on women in the labor force.

- Married women work when the market wage *y* is greater than non-market wage (y^*).
- We only have wage data when $y > y^*$.
- Women's labor force participation data suffered from selection bias.

Two-stage selection modeling gives greater confidence to our covariates of women's wages in the labor force.

Reed's (2000) Design

DVs:

- onset of a MID, escalation of MID to war

IVs:

- Power parity (i.e. weaker state's CINC/stronger state's CINC)
- Satisfaction with the status quo (i.e. alliance similarity w/ the US)
- Joint democracy (both states >=6 on Polity 2 score)
- Alliance (both states share a defense pact)
- Economic interdependence (volume of dyadic trade/country GDP [weak-link])
- Economic growth (rate of growth over three years of less-developed state)

Reed's (2000) Design

Important methodological notes:

- Model includes peace years/splines for temporal auto-correlation
- *Unit of analysis*: politically relevant dyad-years
- *Temporal domain*: 1950-1985
- *Statistical method*: Heckman selection model
    - This will model selection into MID and then escalation to war simultaneously.

TABLE 1 **A Unified Model of Onset and Escalation**

Variable	$\hat{\beta}$ (S.E.)	$\hat{\beta}$ (S.E.)	$\hat{\beta}$ (S.E.)	ΔPr
Onset α	−0.486 (0.033)‡		−0.484 (0.032)‡	—
Power Parity	0.353 (0.083)‡		0.356 (0.090)‡	+0.13
Joint Democracy	−0.611 (0.066)‡		−0.611 (0.066)‡	−0.18
Joint Satisfaction	−0.166 (0.065)‡		−0.165 (0.066)‡	−0.06
Alliance	0.040 (0.052)		0.042 (0.054)	—
Development	−0.010 (0.005)†		−0.010 (0.005)†	−0.15
Interdependence	−1.472 (3.420)		−1.432 (4.368)	—
Escalation α		−0.543 (0.056)‡	0.648 (0.096)‡	—
Power Parity		−0.086 (0.218)	−0.333 (0.189)†	−0.05
Joint Democracy		−1.279 (0.440)‡	−0.305 (0.342)	—
Joint Satisfaction		−0.582 (0.316)‡	−0.051 (0.303)	—
Alliance		−0.864 (0.166)‡	−0.637 (0.153)‡	−0.08
Development		0.057 (0.012)‡	0.048 (0.009)‡	+0.21
Interdependence		−34.504 (28.944)	−3.887 (14.829)	—
ρ Selection Effect			−0.772 (0.053)‡	
Log-Likelihood	−2810.693	−436.185	−3194.134	
Sample Size	20990	947	20990	

Note: Statistically significant parameter estimates are denoted by † ($p \leq .05$) and ‡ ($p \leq .01$).

What Do We Know About Dispute Onset?

Reed's simple model of MID onset has the following findings:

- Dyads with near equally powerful states are more likely to have MIDs.
- Joint democracies have fewer MIDs than jointly autocratic states (or mixed dyads).
- States satisfied with the U.S.-led status quo are less likely to have MIDs.
- Shared defense pacts have no effect on MID onset.
- Jointly developed states are less likely to have MIDs.
- Economic interdependence has no discernible effect.

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What Do We Know About Dispute Escalation?

Reed's simple model of MID escalation suggests:

- Power parity may lead to more MIDs but seems to have no effect on escalation.
- MIDs involving two democracies are *much* less likely to end up in war.
- MIDs involving two satisfied states are also much less likely to escalate.
- Economic interdependence seems to have a small *positive* effect on escalation.

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What Do We Know About Dispute Escalation?

Implications of Reed's (2000) unified model:

- Power parity leads to MIDs, but MIDs between equals are less likely to lead to war.
- *Joint democracy leads to fewer MIDs, not necessarily fewer wars.*
  - Would be consistent with Senese's (1997) finding.
- Likewise: satisfied states have fewer MIDs, not necessarily fewer wars.
- Allies still have disputes, just unlikely to escalate to war.

Conclusion

It's important to separate correlates of dispute onset from dispute escalation.

- Factors that promote MID onset need not promote war onset.
- This can have important implications for scholarship like democratic peace.

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