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Altering Capabilities or Imposing Costs? Intervention Strategy and Civil War Outcomes

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How do military interventions affect the outcome of civil wars? The diversity of military interventions makes it difficult to answer this question; their variation means that they do not affect civil wars in a straightforward way. In particular, strategy and timing play a pivotal role in determining the effect of an intervention. Thus, I isolate three intervention strategies: indirect (bolstering the capabilities of the supported side), direct-conventional (degrading the capabilities of the opposition), and direct-unconventional (imposing costs on the opposition). I evaluate the impact of these strategies on the outcome of civil wars using a dataset of all civil wars from 1944 to 2007. My analysis reveals that the efficacy of intervention strategies varies over time. Third-party support for rebel organizations is most effective during a critical window early in a civil war. In contrast, direct military assistance for the government increases the odds of a government victory *only* once a civil war becomes protracted. It also reduces the odds of a negotiated outcome to the conflict, whereas indirect support for the government proves most effective early in the war. This work demonstrates that pooling all interventions together risks overlooking important differences in their effects on civil wars. It also carries with it important implications for states considering interventions in civil wars.

The debate over US involvement in the ongoing Syrian civil war provides a microcosm of arguments about the effect of military interventions on civil wars. In May 2014, President Obama announced a plan to provide indirect aid to rebels in Syria—arms transfers, training, and logistical support. In September 2014, President Obama initiated the direct use of force through a bombing campaign in order to degrade factions opposed to the Free Syrian Army.[1] Nevertheless, advocates of US intervention, such as Senator John McCain, have called for US involvement in Syria since the outset of the civil war in 2011, and have argued that the failure to intervene earlier in the conflict has made US options "worse now than before."[2] Similarly, former US ambassador to Syria Robert S. Ford argues that the US lacks "good choices on Syria anymore. . .more hesitation and unwillingness to commit to enabling the moderate opposition fighters to fight more effectively. . .simply hasten the day when American forces will have to intervene against Al Qaeda in Syria."[3] These criticisms center on two claims: *first*, that the overall timing of interventions is critical to their success, and *second*, that the efficacy of a particular intervention strategy varies depending on when it occurs—for example, that arming the rebels may have been effective in the early days of the conflict, but as the conflict endures, the direct use of force will become the only viable strategy of intervention.

To address these related concerns, I begin by delineating three types of intervention strategies: bolstering the capabilities of the supported side, degrading the capabilities of the targeted side, and imposing costs on the targeted side in order to compel a change in behavior. From this initial typology, I develop a theory to account for how both the nature of an intervention and its timing influence the outcome of a civil war. For instance, an intervention in support of the rebels aimed at degrading the capabilities of the government may be particularly effective at increasing the rebels' odds of victory when it occurs early in the war—before the government can fully mobilize its forces. However, as the war continues, both sides will likely become entrenched. This will, in turn, reduce the impact of the intervention. Conversely, an intervention that bolsters the capabilities of the rebels may increase the chances of a rebel victory, regardless of when it occurs, by helping the rebels narrow the gap between their capabilities and those of the government.

To test these claims, we need to distinguish between intervention strategies. Pooling strategies together risks masking considerable heterogeneity in their effects. Therefore, I develop a tripartite division of military interventions that corresponds to the three strategies identified above. First, indirect interventions increase the capabilities of the external actor's favored side through the provision of arms, training, and logistical support.[4] Second, direct-conventional interventions aim to degrade the capabilities of the opponent, and reduce the probability that they will achieve a military victory, by using the military forces of the third party to defeat enemy forces,

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[1]Craig Whitlock, "U.S. military leaders: Strikes in Syria are just the start of a prolonged campaign," *Washington Post*, September 23, 2014.

[2]"McCain on President's Commitment to Increase U.S. Support in Syria," Press Release, May 28, 2014.

[3]Michael R. Gordon, "Former Ambassador to Syria Urges Increasing Arms Supply to Moderate Rebels," *New York Times*, June 10, 2014.

[4]As will be discussed below, Regan (2002) also distinguishes between indirect and direct interventions.

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as well as to take and hold territory. Third, direct-unconventional interventions increase the costs of further fighting by targeting civilians and civilian areas. I collect original data to differentiate between third-party interventions based on which of these strategies they employ.

Several key findings follow from this analysis. First, there is a critical window within the first two to three years of a civil war in which indirect and direct-conventional support for rebel organizations is most likely to succeed. After this window, indirect support for rebels continues to increase the odds of a negotiated settlement, but direct-conventional support ceases to affect the outcome of the conflict. Second, direct-conventional support for governments only increases the odds of a government victory once a civil war becomes protracted. At this point, it also significantly reduces the odds of a negotiated settlement. Finally, the analysis indicates that interventions that impose costs—on either the rebels or the government—by targeting civilians have no significant effect on conflict outcomes.

I proceed by briefly reviewing the existing literature on the effect of military interventions in civil wars. I then introduce my own theoretical framework that seeks to clarify the different mechanisms through which interventions impact the duration and outcome of a civil war. I test these hypotheses on newly collected data on civilian targeting in third-party military interventions, and conclude by discussing the implications of this analysis for future research and ongoing policy debates.

Military Interventions into Civil Wars

Some previous studies argue that military interventions tend to prolong conflicts rather than bring them to a quick close (Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000; Regan 2000, 2002; Cunningham 2010). Nevertheless, Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom (2004) find that military interventions have a mixed effect: interventions on behalf of rebel groups decrease the duration of a conflict, but interventions in support of the government do not affect the duration of conflicts. In contrast, Regan and Aydin (2006, 747) find that military interventions have no effect whatsoever on the length of civil wars.

When lumped together, it may seem that military interventions do not affect the duration of conflicts because their primary purpose is to help the supported side win. For example, they may prolong conflicts in cases where their beneficiary was losing the war prior to the arrival of third-party support. Thus, Gent (2008, 721) argues that the contradictory findings about the effect of military interventions on conflict duration result from a selection process. Interventions on behalf of a government only occur in the most challenging cases, making the baseline probability of government victory much lower when such interventions occur. In contrast, Sullivan and Karreth (2015, 273) argue that pro-government interventions are only likely to lead to government victory when rebels are strong enough to employ conventional tactics, whereas pro-rebel interventions consistently increase the odds of rebel victory. Balch-Lindsay, Enterline, and Joyce (2008, 356–57) argue that third-party interventions significantly reduce the time before a civil war ends in military victory for the supported side—whether the rebels *or* the government. They also find that interventions in support of either side delay negotiated settlements. Similarly, Mason, Weingarten, and Fett (1999, 264) argue that interventions decrease the probability of a negotiated settlement, though settlements become more likely once a conflict becomes protracted. This mirrors Zartman's (1993) logic that negotiated outcomes are most likely once a "hurting stalemate" has occurred between combatants.

These studies enhance our understanding of the effects of military interventions on civil wars. But they suffer from a significant shortcoming. They do not fully account for the distinct mechanisms through which interventions influence the behavior of the combatants. These analyses conflate distinct theoretical mechanisms by arguing that an intervention will increase the capabilities of one side in the conflict *and* impose costs on the opposing side. Yet these distinct mechanisms imply very different dynamics.[5] By treating all interventions as like events, previous studies mask important heterogeneity in the causal mechanisms that interventions engender, and, consequently, their ultimate effect.

Distinguishing Mechanisms: Altering the Balance Versus Imposing Costs

The predominant framework used to theorize the effect of military interventions is an expected utility calculation on the part of the combatants. Regan (2000, 73), for example, argues that interventions affect both the costs and benefits that the combatants face from continued conflict. Similarly, Balch-Lindsay, Enterline, and Joyce (2008, 349) argue that an intervention in favor of the rebels increases the costs to the government and enhances the capabilities of rebel forces. This makes rebels more likely to achieve a military victory. These arguments are plausible, but they conflate two distinct mechanisms through which interventions might affect conflict outcomes: first, shifting the balance of capabilities between combatants, and second, increasing the costliness of continued fighting.

The balance of capabilities significantly affects the course a conflict will take. All else being equal, the stronger side in a conflict has a greater probability of winning. Moreover, sudden shifts in the balance of capabilities, such as those that result from an intervention, increase the odds of a negotiated settlement. They lead one actor to suddenly find itself at a disadvantage and thus more inclined to sue for peace. Thus, the balance of capabilities in a conflict matters a great deal. External actors may seek to shift this balance in a more favorable direction for the side that they support. However, not all attempts to shift the balance of capabilities in a conflict are alike. Third parties may alter the balance of capabilities by *increasing* the capabilities of the supported ally through the provision of resources, arms, and training. Or they may seek to *degrade* the capabilities of the opposing side through a direct use of force that not only weakens that side, but also directly prevents it from achieving its battlefield objectives (Snyder 1959; Pape 1996).

In addition to altering the balance of resources, third-party interventions can also affect the outcome of a conflict by imposing costs on one of the belligerents. This strategy is of considerable importance in the context of civil wars. Butler and Gates (2009, 330), for example, argue that the link between relative capabilities and war outcomes has only limited applicability to the study of civil wars, given the prevalence of asymmetric forms of conflict

[5] A single military intervention may be capable of *both* imposing costs on the adversary *and* increasing the resources of the allied side. However, I argue that these represent distinct theoretical mechanisms, and in practice interventions correspond primarily to one or the other.

(see also Fearon 2004). Recent US experiences in asymmetric warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan exemplify the point that strategy matters, not just resources, as depending on the strategy, the weaker side may prevail (Arreguin-Toft 2001; Lyall and Wilson 2009). Combatant strategies also significantly affect the duration of interstate conflicts, even controlling for relative capabilities (Bennett and Stam 1996). Thus, an exclusive focus on the balance of capabilities risks overlooking a third mechanism through which interventions can affect conflict outcomes: the imposition of costs. This contrast mirrors Schelling's (1966, 2–3) classic distinction between brute force and coercive strategies, where the former rests upon the conventional notion of defeating an enemy militarily whereas the latter relies on inflicting pain on an enemy, or threatening to do so, in order to compel a change in behavior (see also Bennett and Stam 1996; Pape 1996; Arreguin-Toft 2001; Sullivan 2007).[6]

Thus, military interventions may have radically different implications for a conflict: bolstering the capabilities of the supported side, degrading the capabilities of the opposing side, or undermining the will of the opposing side to continue fighting. Failing to address these different implications risks overlooking considerable variation in the effect of military interventions on civil wars. This potentially aggregates possibly discrepant findings. Therefore, I argue that military interventions in civil wars affect the timing and outcome of a conflict through "Type B" mechanisms. This means that military interventions, broadly defined, operate through multiple mechanisms, some of which produce opposite effects (Elster 1998, 46). As a result, the observed effect of *all* military interventions on civil war outcomes is difficult to determine, because in some instances, interventions may accelerate the timing of a negotiated settlement. Yet in other instances, interventions may display the opposite effect, delaying negotiations and prolonging the fighting. Moreover, even if two mechanisms produce a similar result, the magnitude of that effect may differ considerably, making reliable inferences about *the* effect of military interventions extremely difficult.

Therefore, I ground the following analysis of military interventions in a consideration of the specific causal mechanisms—pathways through which interventions influence the calculations of the combatants to continue fighting or sue for peace—that different interventions engender. Failing to do so runs the risk of committing type II errors. For instance, we might conclude that military interventions do not impact the likelihood of a government victory, when, in fact, a particular type of intervention may strongly impact the likelihood of a government victory. This error potentially arises because the latter finding may be obscured by the null or opposite effect of a different type of intervention. After first identifying what each of these theoretical mechanisms is, the most straightforward empirical approach to adopt is to employ more nuanced data on interventions. More nuanced data is capable of distinguishing between types of interventions that primarily affect conflict dynamics through each of the respective mechanisms (Humphreys 2005). The following section introduces three types of interventions that correspond to the three mechanisms discussed above.

[6]I use the term direct-unconventional strategy here only for the sake of parsimony. This discussion deals with a particular form of coercive strategy, compellence, which is aimed at threatening an enemy to persuade it to alter its behavior (Schelling 1966).

Linking Causal Mechanisms, Intervention Strategies, and Civil War Outcomes

I follow Regan (2000, 9) by conceptualizing military interventions as *convention breaking* and *authority-targeted* military activities of foreign governments in the domestic matters of another state. From this initial definition, I develop a tripartite division of military interventions that corresponds to the three causal mechanisms identified in the previous section: increasing the capabilities of the supported side, degrading the capabilities of the opposition, and imposing costs on the opposition. Indirect interventions—those that involve the provision of arms, training, and logistical support—primarily increase the capabilities of the external actor's favored side. Interventions that pursue conventional denial and brute force strategies—defeating enemy forces, and seizing and holding territory—primarily degrade the capabilities of the opponent, and reduce the probability that they will achieve a military victory (Snyder 1959; Schelling 1966). Finally, interventions that target civilians and civilian areas primarily increase the costs of further fighting, rather than altering the balance of capabilities in a conflict. This typology of interventions is depicted in Table 1.[7]

Increasing the Ally's Capabilities: Indirect Military Interventions

Indirect military interventions are relatively common in civil wars, and cover a range of activities by third parties, including supplying combatants with arms, training, intelligence, and logistical support aimed at bolstering the capabilities of the supported side. American arms transfers and training of Mujahidin rebels in Afghanistan, Chinese arms transfers to and training of Cambodian rebels in the late 1970s, and Pakistani support for rebels in Kashmir are clear examples of this type of intervention. Such interventions provide potentially critical support in a conflict, boosting the capabilities of the supported side in order to increase its ability to continue fighting.

Rebels typically operate at a structural disadvantage in comparison to the government (Mason, Weingarten, and Fett 1999; Fearon and Laitin 2003), which stems from a combination of factors, including an inherent lack of legitimacy, institutions, revenue-raising ability, and a lack of a standing army. This disadvantage is typically most pronounced early in a conflict, before opposition groups can generate the type of governing structures and forces needed to effectively engage in a conflict. Over time, rebels may be able to close this gap and approach parity with the government.[8] In the context of African conflicts, Herbst (2004, 361) argues that both the rebels *and* the governments are especially vulnerable early in a civil war, as they have difficulty mobilizing their forces quickly. The inability to quickly mobilize is likely widespread, as the onset of a civil war typically coincides with at least a partial breakdown in the capacity of the state, placing it in a weakened position early in a war. For example, within the first few weeks of the Libyan civil war in 2011, the rebels captured significant territory before government forces were able to mount a counterattack (Kuperman 2013, 117). Because of the structural disadvantages facing rebel

[7]Note that these strategies may vary over time, as, for instance, the US intervention in South Vietnam only becomes direct-unconventional beginning in August 1964, and prior to that it is characterized by indirect support for the government, as well as direct-conventional support.

[8]It is extremely rare that rebels will surpass the government's capabilities (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009).

Table 1. Typology of third-party military interventions

Intervention type	*Mechanism*	*Example*
Indirect	Balance of capabilities: bolster the capabilities of the supported side	Chinese arms transfers to Cambodian rebels
Direct-conventional	Balance of capabilities: degrade the capabilities of the targeted side	Libyan intervention in Uganda
Direct-unconventional	Increase the costs of conflict	US intervention in South Vietnam

groups, indirect support from third parties, particularly early in a conflict, will substantially increase the viability of a nascent rebellion by providing needed support when the rebel group is at its weakest.

H1: *Indirect intervention in support of the rebels increases the likelihood of a rebel victory. This effect will be strongest early in a civil war.*

Moreover, indirect support allows rebels to approach parity with the government, increasing the chances of a "hurting stalemate" (Zartman 1993). Once such a stalemate is achieved, the chances of negotiations increase. Similarly, Bapat (2005, 706–7) argues that governments are less likely to offer concessions early in a war, but will be more willing to do so if the rebels can survive the initial onslaught to avoid a costly protracted conflict. Thus, indirect support for the rebels in the early stages of a civil war increases the odds of a negotiated settlement. Such support signals to the government that the rebel group, owing to its enhanced capabilities, is likely to survive and continue fighting for the foreseeable future. Along the same lines, Walter (2006, 314) argues that governments want to militarily defeat weak rebels, but offer concessions to strong rebels. Yet it can be difficult to distinguish weak groups from strong groups in practice. External support in the form of arms and training provides a signal to the government that the rebel group is of the strong type, by bolstering its capabilities.[9] Therefore, indirect support for rebels not only makes them more viable, but also signals their strength to the government.

H2: *Indirect intervention in support of the rebels increases the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. This effect will be strongest early in a civil war.*

Similarly, indirect interventions in support of the government will be most effective early in the war. Early in the war, governments may be less capable of rapidly marshaling and deploying their resources to effectively fight the rebels. Indirect support, in the form of logistical aid, intelligence sharing, and providing weapons, can help the government overcome these deficiencies in the short run. As the civil war endures, such aid will become less consequential, as the government will have time to mobilize its resources. Once this has occurred, the government's material advantage over the rebels will not be significantly altered by the further provision of indirect aid.

H3: *Indirect intervention in support of the government increases the likelihood of a government victory. This effect will be strongest early in a civil war.*

[9]Note, however, that Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed (2015) argue that such an effect is likely to be limited to external support that is not fungible, such as the provision of troops or intelligence. More fungible forms of support, like money, may be diverted by rebels for non-fighting purposes and therefore might convey a more ambiguous signal to the state.

Degrading the Opposition's Capabilities: Direct-Conventional Strategies

Direct-conventional interventions alter the balance of capabilities through a distinct causal pathway: degrading the capabilities of the opposing forces. This strategy uses force to achieve conventional military objectives, namely securing territory and defeating enemy forces. Cuban involvement in Angola, French bombing of Libyan forces in Chad in 1986, and the UN offensive in Katanga province in Zaire in 1963 are all examples of direct-conventional interventions. Direct-conventional interventions aim to defeat the enemy by destroying its military, preventing it from achieving its objectives, and taking and holding territory. Thus, direct-conventional interventions affect conflict outcomes by shifting the balance of capabilities in the conflict. Unlike indirect interventions, however, they do so by diminishing the capabilities of the opposition.

Direct-conventional interventions in support of the rebels pose a significant challenge to the government by internationalizing the conflict. The government must engage not only rebel forces, but the forces of another state as well, which are likely to be better trained and equipped than rebel forces (Sullivan and Karreth 2015, 273). The timing of such interventions is critical given the relative weakness of the rebels in the early stages of the conflict. At the same time, governments are also often vulnerable in the early stages of a civil war, as they may not be able to quickly mobilize to confront the new domestic threat. Therefore, when a rebel organization receives direct support early in the war, the government confronts a heightened risk of military defeat, and the immense costs that such a defeat would entail. NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 is a case in point, as the Libyan government confronted not only an internal threat, but also an international coalition less than a month after the civil war began. Under such conditions, the government may be more amenable to offering concessions at the negotiating table to avoid a total defeat, as the Libyan regime did following NATO intervention.

H4: *Direct-conventional intervention in support of the rebels increases the likelihood of a rebel victory. This effect will be strongest early in a civil war.*

H5: *Direct-conventional intervention in support of the opposition will increase the likelihood of a negotiated settlement.*

Similarly, direct-conventional support for the government adds a new combatant that the rebel forces must confront, further stretching their capabilities. An intervention of this sort, aimed at defeating the rebels on the battlefield, is likely to be effective not only because of the additional forces that rebels must engage, but also because of the strategic interaction that it entails. Because such interventions are more costly for third parties than indirect interventions, they are most likely to occur in the most difficult cases. Most notably, they will occur when a government confronts a strong rebel group with a high

likelihood of victory (Gent 2008). Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2009, 577) argue that stronger rebel groups are more likely to fight using conventional battlefield tactics than guerrilla tactics. Thus, following Sullivan and Karreth (2015), pro-government interventions are most effective in precisely these circumstances, because the intervener's forces are more proficient at fighting rebel groups organized along conventional lines. As a result, direct-conventional interventions in support of the government are most effective when employed against strong rebel groups. However, because these interventions are most likely when the rebels are strong, it may appear as though direct-conventional interventions in support of the government exert little effect on the odds of government victory.

Timing plays a critical role in the effect of this type of intervention on the likelihood of a government victory. Interventions that occur in support of the government early in the conflict may appear to have no effect on government victory for two reasons. First, governments that require direct support early in the conflict are likely to be extremely weak. Governments that are capable of surviving beyond the initial stages of a conflict, on the other hand, are likely to be comparatively stronger. Consequently, if a government is able to survive beyond the early stages of a conflict, the effect of a direct-conventional intervention will be more apparent. Second, rebel organizations are more likely to employ guerrilla tactics when they are relatively weak. As the conflict endures, rebel groups may become stronger and employ more conventional tactics, increasing the efficacy of direct-conventional interventions for the government.

H6: *Direct-conventional intervention in support of the government will have a null effect on the likelihood of a government victory early in the conflict, but will increase the likelihood of a government victory later in the conflict.*

Additionally, by diminishing the capabilities of the rebels, and thus increasing the odds of an outright victory, direct-conventional support for the government will make the government less willing to offer concessions at the negotiating table.

H7: *Direct-conventional intervention in support of the government decreases the likelihood of a negotiated settlement.*

Imposing Costs on the Opposition: Direct-Unconventional Strategies

Direct-unconventional interventions are not aimed at undermining the *capacity* of the target to fight, but rather its *will* to fight by making continued conflict too costly to pursue (Arreguin-Toft 2001, 101). Unconventional strategies do not increase the odds of one side or the other winning a military victory, but rather seek to increase the likelihood of a negotiated settlement by compelling one side to back down. Coercion of this sort takes the form of targeting civilians and civilian areas in order to weaken the resolve of the enemy. Prominent examples of military interventions employing this strategy are the US bombing campaign in Vietnam, and the Soviet Union's "scorched earth" strategy in Afghanistan, especially after 1982.[10]

While the direct-unconventional strategies in conflict aim to raise the costs of resistance to compel the target to accede to one's demands, there is significant debate as to their effect in practice.[11] Lyall (2009, 349) finds that Russian shelling of Chechen villages reduced the number of insurgent attacks. In contrast, Bennett and Stam (1996, 241) argue that unconventional strategies produce longer interstate conflicts, as they rely on the threat of escalating future costs. Along the same lines, Fortna (2015, 539–42) finds that rebels that engage in the intentional targeting of civilians may be able to survive longer, yet they are less likely to achieve a victory or negotiated settlement. Pape (1996, 316) argues that aerial bombing of civilians is counterproductive in war, as it hardens the resolve of the targeted population, thus increasing the duration of a conflict. Similarly, Kalyvas (2006, 151) argues that indiscriminate violence against civilians in civil war is counterproductive, as it leads the population to reject the side carrying out such a strategy (see also Kocher, Pepinsky, and Kalyvas 2011). Moreover, Toft and Zhukov (2012, 795) find that such strategies, when employed against insurgent groups, actually increase the number of insurgent counterattacks. Machain (2015) also finds that nonselective bombing campaigns, which include the targeting of civilians, tend to endure longer than more selective campaigns.[12] In the context of third-party interventions in civil wars, I expect that interventions that target civilians will have no effect on the outcome of the conflict, as the increased costs of fighting will be offset by the strengthened resolve of the targeted side.[13]

H8: *Direct-unconventional intervention in support of either the rebels or the government will not significantly affect the outcome of the conflict.*

Research Design

To examine the effect of military interventions on civil war outcomes, I rely on Regan's (2002) civil conflict intervention data, which cover the period 1944–2007 and include all civil wars with at least 200 fatalities.[14] The unit of analysis in this dataset is the conflict-month, such that there may be more than one conflict occurring in a state at a given time. This dataset suits my needs for two reasons. First, its lower casualty threshold helps test my specific hypotheses. Some interventions may cause a civil war to end earlier than it otherwise would, preventing it from reaching the 1,000 battle deaths required for inclusion in other datasets. Second, Regan's data include a comprehensive listing of all military interventions, as well as an

[10]Third parties do not only apply unconventional strategies against rebels in civil wars. Mozambique's support for Rhodesian guerrillas and targeting of civilians along the border in the late 1970s, and the reciprocal shelling of border villages by India and Pakistan across multiple conflicts, are all examples of unconventional interventions in support of the rebels rather than the government.

[11]Shelton, Stojek, and Sullivan (2013) provide a good overview of this debate.

[12]Note, however, that Machain's (2015) definition of nonselective bombing includes the targeting of civilians, as well as a number of other targets.

[13]A rival explanation for this null effect draws on the logic of selection bias. Unconventional strategies are most likely to be employed when an actor is especially weak and close to defeat. Any effect unconventional strategies have is masked by the high likelihood of the perpetrator's defeat. See Downes (2006) on civilian targeting in interstate wars; Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay (2004) on a government's decision to target civilians in a civil war; and Wood (2010) on rebel targeting of civilians.

[14]Regan's data end in 1999. Therefore, I extend the data to 2007, using the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch et al. 2002) to update all civil wars that were ongoing in December 1999, and include all civil wars that began between 2000 and 2007. I rely on the *UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014* to determine whether the 200 battle-death threshold arises in each conflict.

initial coding of whether an intervention involves the direct use of force by a third party.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of this study is the time until a particular conflict outcome is reached. I consider three possible outcomes: military victory by the government, military victory by the rebels, and a negotiated settlement. In order to operationalize this variable, I rely on Gent's (2008) coding of these conflict outcomes for the civil wars compiled by Regan (2000).[15] This coding produces a total of 53 government victories, 28 rebel victories, and 47 negotiated settlements.

Military Interventions

To operationalize intervention strategies, I begin with Regan's (2002) dataset, which codes whether in each conflict-month an intervention in support of either the rebels or the government occurs. Regan codes instances of both direct and indirect interventions in a particular conflict-month. Indirect interventions for either the government or rebels consist of providing equipment, military aid, intelligence and advisors, or even air support so long as third-party forces do not engage in hostilities (Regan 2002, 65).[16]

Regan also records 283 instances of the direct use of force by a third party in a conflict. In order to distinguish between direct interventions that impose costs versus those that alter the balance of capabilities, I build on definitions developed in previous studies. Direct-conventional interventions are defined as those interventions that employ military force in order to destroy the opposition's military forces, or seize, but not destroy, territory of value. Direct-unconventional interventions are defined as those interventions that use military force to intentionally target civilians or civilian areas and infrastructure, or engage in guerrilla warfare.[17] To code an intervention's strategy, I rely on a number of sources: military histories provided by Dupuy and Dupuy (1993) and Clodfelter (2002), as well as news reports from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Reuters News*, and *BBC World Monitoring*.[18] I record 176 instances of direct-conventional interventions, 82 in support of the government and 94 in support of the opposition. In contrast, I record 107 instances of direct-unconventional interventions, 56 in support of the government and 51 in support of the rebels.

Additionally, the effect of an intervention is likely to decline over time. Therefore, I follow Regan and Aydin (2006) and Gent (2008) by applying a decay function to the intervention variables that indicates not only whether an intervention of a particular sort has occurred, but also a declining impact over time.[19] The decay function used for each of the intervention variables is equal to 0.9^t, where t is the number of months since an intervention of that particular type has occurred.[20]

Control Variables

In addition to the strategy an intervention employs, past studies have found that opposing interventions—interventions that counter a previous intervention—prolong civil wars (Regan 2002; Aydin and Regan 2011). For example, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan may be designed to impose substantial costs on the Mujahidin, but a countervailing intervention by the US on their behalf may negate that effect, thus prolonging the conflict. To control for this strategic dynamic, I include a variable that is coded 1 if an intervention supports the opposite side in the conflict from the previous intervention. For example, if the rebels receive an intervention, the next intervention will be coded as an opposing intervention if it supports the government.[21]

I include a number of additional controls to account for other possible explanations of civil war duration and outcome. Previous studies have suggested that particularly intense conflicts may increase the likelihood of a negotiated settlement (Zartman 1993; Walter 2002), so I include the number of battle deaths per month (Regan 2002). I also control for whether the conflict is fought along ethnic or ideological lines, as rebels may be less likely to achieve a victory in ideological conflicts (DeRouen and Sobek 2004). Moreover, stronger rebels will be more likely to achieve a military victory than will weaker rebel groups. Therefore, I include the logged ratio of the size of the government's military forces to the size of the opposition forces (Gent 2008).[22] Similarly, I control for the number of rebel organizations in a war, as more rebel groups may make a negotiated settlement less likely, by including a count of the number of conflict dyads in a conflict year as indicated by the UCDP Dyadic Dataset (Harbom, Melander, and Wallensteen 2008). In addition, I include a measure of mountainous terrain to capture the potential viability of rebel organizations in a conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Finally, I include a dummy variable for the Cold War, as well as the combined Polity score for the state's government (Marshall and Jaggers 2002).

[15]For civil wars that terminate after 1999, I rely on the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset (Kreutz 2010) to code the outcome.

[16]To account for military interventions that occur after 1999, I rely on Regan and Meachum (2014), who collect data on military interventions using the same definition employed in this article for the period 1957–2007, during periods of political instability, including civil wars.

[17]Stam (1996, 85) operationalizes punishment strategies as those in which civilians were the principal target, or the state pursued a Maoist guerrilla strategy (see also Bennett and Stam 1996; Sullivan 2007). Similarly, Arreguin-Toft (2001) distinguishes conventional warfare from barbarism based upon whether the state indiscriminately targets civilians, or continues high collateral damage bombing campaigns after damage assessments call into question their necessity (43).

[18]Given the ambiguity in some cases of direct interventions, where possible, I referred to the coding decisions of previous data collection efforts. This is not possible in many instances, as interventions in civil wars fall beyond the scope of many prior studies. For example, Sullivan (2007) examines only major power interventions, and Bennett and Stam (1996) consider strategies in interstate wars, several of which are also recorded as interventions into civil wars. As a robustness check, instances in which my own coding decisions differed from previous coding decisions, though few in number, or where there was a conflict between previous codings, were flagged. Applying the alternate coding in these instances does not alter the results presented below.

[19]This decay function is distinct from the proportional hazards assumption in Cox models, which assumes that an intervention will have the same effect regardless of when it occurs.

[20]As a robustness check, I have tried a number of different formulations of this function ranging from $0.3t$ to $0.9t$. None of the alternate specifications significantly alter the results presented below.

[21]When multiple interventions occur on opposite sides in the same month, they are also coded as opposing.

[22]Each of these three variables is updated for the years 2000–2007. I rely on battle-death data from *UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014* to code conflict intensity, data from Wucherpfennig et al. (2012) to code whether a conflict is ethnic in nature, and military personnel data from the National Material Capabilities dataset (v.4.0) (Singer 1987) and rebel size data from the Non-State Actor Dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009) to code relative rebel strength.

Analysis

To evaluate the effect of intervention strategy on civil wars, I employ a competing risks hazard model (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004), which models the effect of military interventions on the time until a civil war terminates, when the conflict in question can terminate in more than one possible fashion. Table 2 presents the results of this model.[23]

Table 2 provides significant support for the hypotheses regarding the effect of indirect interventions. The sign of the coefficient for indirect interventions in support of the rebels is positive and significant for the timing of rebel victories. This indicates that when rebel capabilities are bolstered with indirect support, they are more than four times as likely to achieve a military victory. Moreover, the results indicate that this effect occurs regardless of when during the war rebels receive indirect support, in partial contrast with H1.[24] In contrast, and consistent with H2, proportional hazards tests indicate that the effect of indirect support for rebels on the odds of a negotiated settlement vary over the course of the civil war. To assess how the timing of indirect aid to rebels affects the odds of a negotiated settlement, I follow the procedure set out by Licht (2011), and plot the combined coefficient, which shows how the effect of this type of intervention varies depending on *when* it occurs during the civil war.[25] Figure 1 shows that the effect of indirect aid to rebels on the likelihood of a negotiated settlement varies over time. Bolstering the capabilities of rebels *early* in the conflict dramatically boosts the likelihood of a negotiated settlement, providing support for H2. However, this effect loses statistical significance after 44 months—noted by the gray line—indicating that indirect support for rebels after approximately 3.5 years will have no significant effect on the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. Thus, indirect support for rebels is most effective early in the conflict.

Finally, indirect support for the government has no significant effect on the odds of the government achieving a victory or a settlement. However, subsequent analyses using a matching strategy, discussed below, find that such interventions do increase the likelihood of a government victory and negotiated settlement when they occur early in a conflict, consistent with the expectations of H3.

Direct-conventional interventions in support of the rebels increase the odds of a rebel victory by degrading the government's strength. However, as expected by H4, and similar to the effect of indirect aid on the timing of a negotiated settlement, this effect varies over time. Figure 2 plots this effect. Again, there is a critical window early in the conflict in which direct-conventional support for rebels increases the odds of a rebel victory. However, after 25 months, this effect loses statistical significance. This highlights the degree to which the timing of a particular intervention strategy is critical. Direct-conventional support for rebels early in the conflict significantly increases their chances of victory, whereas the same strategy, taking place in the fourth year of a civil war, for example, would have no significant effect on the outcome of the conflict. NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 is a case in point, as NATO commenced a direct-conventional intervention in support of the rebels in the second month of the war, and the rebels were able to achieve a quick victory.

Moreover, while direct-conventional interventions in support of the rebels increase their chances of victory, such interventions have no significant effect on the timing of negotiated settlements, in contrast to the

Table 2. Competing risks model of civil war outcome

	Government victory	*Rebel victory*	*Negotiated settlement*
Indirect rebel	**−0.463**	**1.645***	**7.428****
	(0.578)	(0.783)	(2.400)
Indirect rebel X Ln(time)	–	–	−1.615*
			(0.629)
Indirect govt	0.468	0.979	0.019
	(0.423)	(0.769)	(0.905)
Direct-conventional rebel	0.671	6.476***	0.503
	(1.058)	(1.461)	(0.775)
Direct-conventional rebel X Ln(time)	–	−1.337**	–
		(0.496)	
Direct-conventional govt.	−22.349*	1.552	7.462*
	(9.310)	(1.207)	(3.200)
Direct-conventional govt. X Ln(time)	5.401**	–	−4.489**
	(1.870)		(1.589)
Direct-unconventional rebel	0.103	0.105	−1.889
	(1.641)	(1.176)	(1.266)
Direct-unconventional govt.	0.246	−0.759	–
	(0.952)	(2.068)	
Opposing	−3.245	−9.671***	−2.376
	(1.993)	(2.195)	(2.252)
Relative rebel Capabilities	0.005	0.408*	0.991***
	(0.088)	(0.174)	(0.256)
Intensity	0.048***	0.070***	−0.046
	(0.014)	(0.021)	(0.032)
Mountains	−0.111	−0.004	1.019*
	(0.161)	(0.229)	(0.514)
Ethnic conflict	−0.160	−3.420**	3.147
	(0.363)	(1.234)	(2.447)
Cold War	1.276**	−0.433	−1.369***
	(0.490)	(0.536)	(0.356)
Democracy	−0.014	−0.044	0.248**
	(0.027)	(0.047)	(0.090)
Number of dyads	−0.640	0.032	−0.734*
	(0.419)	(0.216)	(0.331)
Opposing X Ln(time)	0.963†	2.347***	0.693
	(0.531)	(0.503)	(0.525)
Relative rebel capabilities X Ln(time)	–	–	−0.147*
			(0.070)
Mountains X Ln(time)	–	–	−0.297*
			(0.124)
Ethnic conflict X Ln(time)	–	0.859*	−0.751
		(0.346)	(0.550)
Democracy X Ln(time)	–	–	−0.046*
			(0.020)
N(conflicts)	154	154	154
N(months at risk)	12,764	12,764	12,764

Coefficient estimates are reported with robust standard errors, clustered by conflict, in parentheses. †significant at the .1 level, *.05 level, **.01 level, ***.001 level.

[23]I test each of the variables for violations of the proportional hazards assumption (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004). Variables that violate this assumption are interacted with logged time, and are reported accordingly in Table 2.

[24]Matching results, however, indicate that this effect varies over time. See the Robustness Checks section and the Appendix for details.

[25]The combined coefficient is equal to $b_1 + b_2 * ln(time)$, where b_1 is the coefficient for indirect interventions in support of the rebels, and b_2 is the coefficient for the interaction of indirect interventions in support of rebels and logged time. Confidence intervals are generated by simulating 10,000 draws from a multivariate normal distribution.

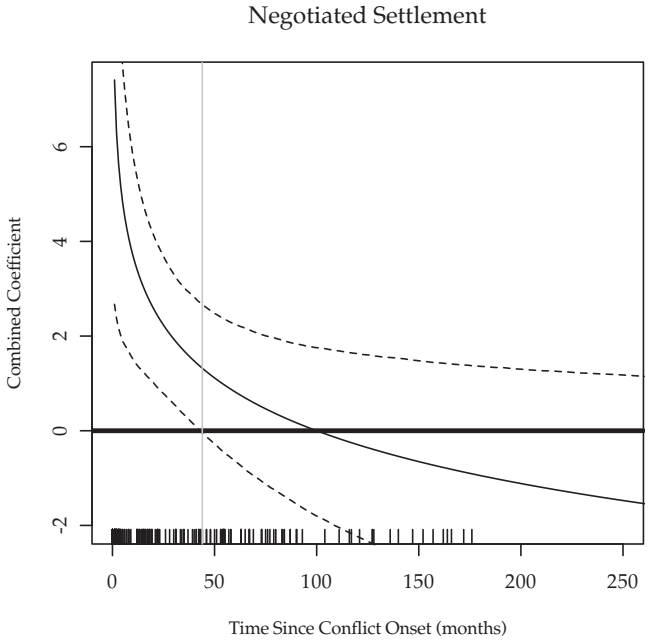

Figure 1. The time-varying effect of indirect interventions in support of the rebels on the hazard of negotiated settlement. Dotted lines represent 95 percent confidence bands. The gray line denotes 44 months. The tick marks denote the timing of indirect interventions in support of the rebels

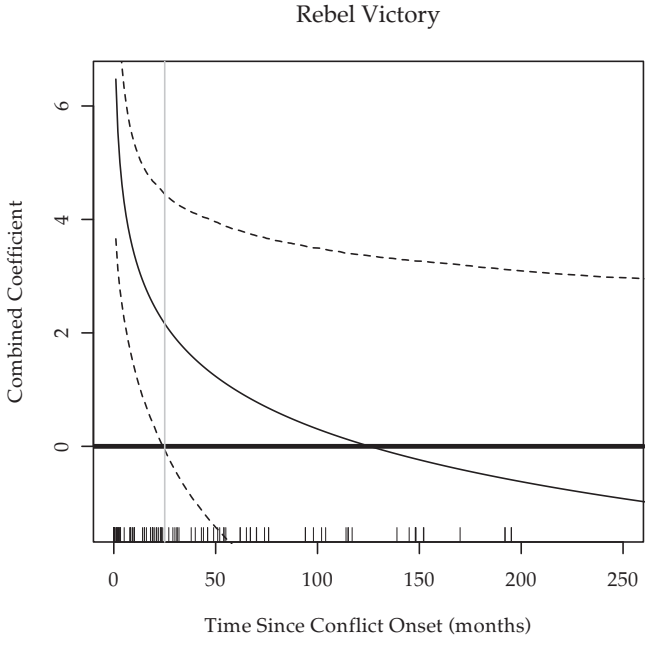

Figure 2. The time-varying effect of direct-conventional interventions in support of the rebels on the hazard of rebel victory. Dotted lines represent 95 percent confidence bands. The gray line denotes 25 months. The tick marks denote the timing of direct-conventional interventions in support of the rebels

expectation of H5. Thus, somewhat surprisingly, interventions that degrade the capabilities of the government do not make concessions on the part of the government more likely. This outcome may reflect the government's belief that direct support will be relatively short-lived, providing an incentive for the government to eschew concessions with the expectation that its capabilities will rebound when third-party support for the rebels is withdrawn.

These findings point to the importance of grounding the study of military interventions in a careful consideration of causal mechanisms, as there are considerable differences in the effects of interventions that attempt to shift the balance of capabilities in favor of the rebels. Indirect support for rebels increases the odds of a negotiated settlement when it occurs within the first three years of a war, whereas direct-conventional support fails to produce a negotiated settlement, regardless of when such an intervention occurs. Failing to differentiate between these causal mechanisms would overlook substantial variation in the effect of interventions on conflict outcomes.

Direct-conventional interventions in support of the government also have a significant impact on conflict outcomes. However, the effects of these interventions on the likelihood of a government victory and negotiated settlement vary considerably depending on their timing. Figures 3(a) and (b) plot the effect of direct-conventional support for governments on the likelihood of government victory and negotiated settlement, respectively.

Figure 3(a) indicates that direct-conventional support for governments makes a government victory less likely when it occurs in the first ten months of a conflict. After ten months, however, direct-conventional support for the government loses statistical significance until the conflict has become protracted, gaining significance at 111 months. Once a government survives the initial phase of the civil war, direct-conventional support increases the odds that the government will be able to militarily defeat the rebels. The initial negative effect is consistent with the selection expectation of H6 in that governments that require direct military support in confronting the rebels early in a civil war are likely to be especially weak, masking the effect of direct-conventional support on the timing of a government victory. Governments that are capable of surviving until the conflict becomes protracted are likely much stronger. Thus, once a conflict becomes protracted, interventions that degrade the capabilities of rebel organizations will increase the odds of a government victory by shifting the balance of capabilities decisively in the government's favor.

Conversely, direct-conventional interventions in support of the government make a negotiated outcome to the conflict less likely (Figure 3(b)).[26] During the first 18 months of a conflict, interventions that shift the balance of capabilities by degrading the capabilities of a rebel group have no effect on the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. However, after 18 months, this type of intervention significantly reduces the likelihood that the civil war will end in a negotiated settlement. As anticipated by H7, this suggests that when interventions degrade the capabilities of rebel organizations, the government will be less likely to offer concessions at the negotiating table as the balance of capabilities shifts in its favor. Moreover, the substantive effect of this type of intervention increases

[26]This effect achieves statistical significance at the 95% level in the first month of a civil war, but loses significance in the second month. Given the width of the confidence interval at one month (1.1, 13.7), and the fact that only the first month is significant, this result is quite tenuous, and thus not depicted with a gray line.

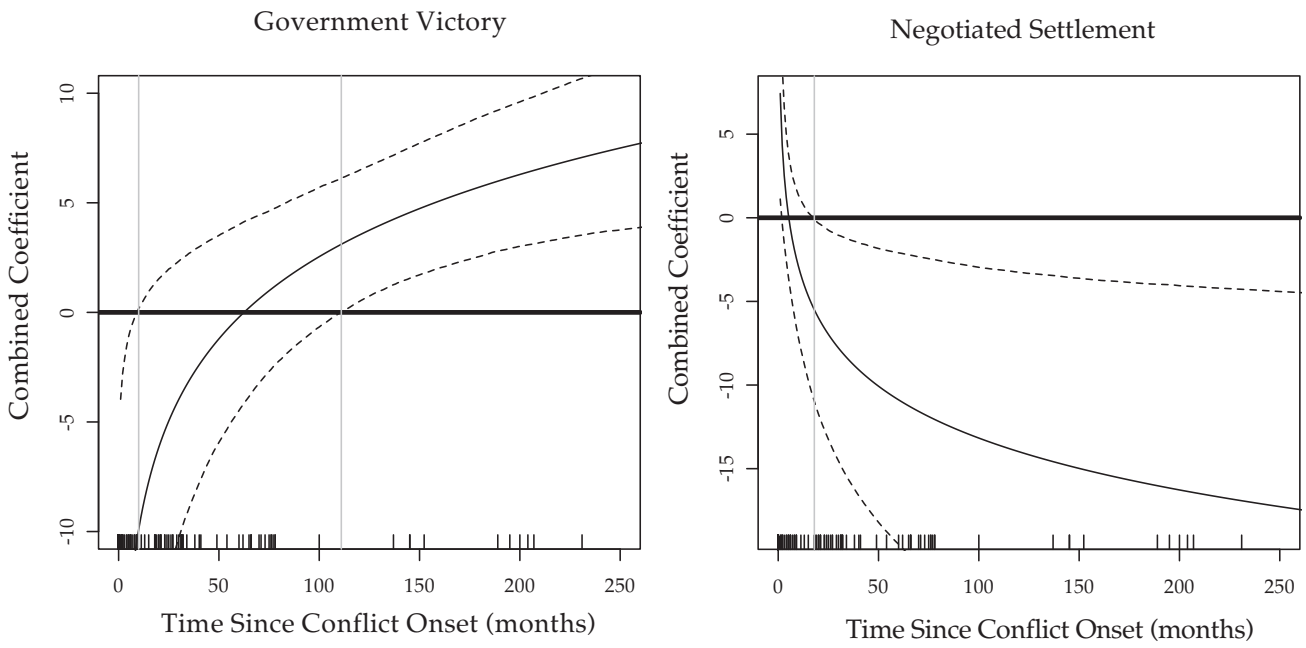

Figure 3. The time-varying effect of direct-conventional interventions in support of the government on the hazard of government victory **(A)** and negotiated settlement **(B)**. Dotted lines represent 95 percent confidence bands. The gray lines denote 10 and 111 months **(A)** and 18 months **(B)**. The tick marks denote the timing of direct-conventional interventions in support of the government

over time. This aligns with the previous finding regarding government victory, as direct-conventional support increases the odds of a government victory, making the government less willing to negotiate.

Finally, Table 2 indicates that direct-unconventional interventions have no significant effect on the timing of civil war outcomes.[27] As expected in H8, direct-unconventional strategies do not significantly affect the timing of negotiated settlements, because although they may increase the costs of further fighting, they may also trigger a backlash, making a negotiated outcome less likely. Direct-unconventional interventions also exert no significant effect on the timing of military victory for either the government or the rebels, because coercive strategies rely on increasing the costs of war, which does not directly alter the likelihood that either side will prevail militarily.

Finally, the results presented in Table 2 largely confirm previous findings in the literature with respect to the effect of the control variables. Consistent with Regan (2002), I find that opposing interventions prolong civil wars, making each of the outcomes less likely to occur, though this effect does diminish over the course of a civil war, as indicated by the positive and statistically significant interaction with time. Moreover, stronger rebels increase the likelihood that a civil war ends in both a rebel victory and a negotiated settlement. Higher levels of conflict intensity increase the likelihood of a civil war ending in either a government victory or a rebel victory. Conversely, civil wars fought along ethnic lines are less likely to result in a victory for the rebels than are ideological conflicts. Similarly, mountainous terrain is found to marginally increase the likelihood of a civil war ending in a negotiated settlement early in a conflict; however, after approximately a year and a half, this effect reverses and decreases the likelihood of a negotiated settlement.

Robustness Checks

As a robustness check, I employ a matching analysis in order to empirically account for the possibility of nonrandom assignment of different types of interventions into civil wars (Ho et al. 2007, 2011).[28] Given the time-varying nature of these data, I follow the procedure developed by Gilligan and Sergenti (2007) to avoid introducing post-treatment bias in the matching analysis by taking a "snapshot" of all time-varying variables in the conflict-month in which an intervention occurs. I then use those fixed values to identify suitable matches with conflict-months that do not experience the corresponding form of intervention. In addition, I also include the duration of the conflict up to the month of an intervention as an additional confounder to account for the nonrandom timing of interventions.[29] As Gilligan and Sergenti (2007, 105) note, this approach allows for the relevant counterfactual to be addressed: how would the duration and outcome of the civil war be different if an intervention had not occurred?

The results obtained using matched data for each type of intervention largely confirm the results obtained from the full data sample. Direct-unconventional interventions in support of either the rebels or the government fail to significantly impact the outcome of the war. Similarly, the matching results indicate that direct-conventional support has the same effect reported above—interventions in support of the

[27]The variable for direct-unconventional interventions in support of the government is excluded from the negotiated settlement outcome, as there is only one conflict ending in a negotiated settlement that experienced such an intervention. Including the variable in this path results in almost perfect prediction against a settlement outcome, producing a model with nonsensical results.

[28]I also consider a two-stage approach. See the Appendix for further details.

[29]See the Appendix for a more detailed discussion of this procedure, balance statistics, and results.

rebels increase the odds of rebel victory when they occur early in the war, whereas interventions in support of the government make negotiated settlements less likely over time, and only increase the odds of a government victory once a conflict has become protracted. The latter result is somewhat surprising, as it indicates that the initial negative effect of direct-conventional support for the government on the likelihood of government victory is not an artifact of such interventions occurring in the most difficult cases. Rather, this may stem from the fact that rebel groups are more likely to employ guerrilla tactics early in a war when they are weakest, mitigating the effect of direct support for the government. Moreover, this counterintuitive result may also stem from an unintended consequence of the direct involvement of an outside power in support of the government early in a conflict. Such support may trigger a greater backlash against the regime on the part of the population by making it appear as though the regime is protected and sponsored by a foreign power, thus reducing its legitimacy in the eyes of the local population and driving support toward the rebels (see also Sullivan and Karreth 2015, 273). This dynamic appears consistent with the current situation in Syria in which Iranian support for the Syrian government may have further alienated the Sunni population, pushing them toward the rebels. Though speculative, the feedback dynamic between foreign involvement and domestic support merits further study in future research.

Finally, the results obtained through the use of matched data for indirect interventions differ from the full sample results. With respect to indirect support for the rebels, these differences are small. The matched results indicate that indirect support increases the likelihood of rebel victory when it occurs early in a war, similar to the effect of direct-conventional support for the rebels, whereas indirect support for the rebels increases the likelihood of a negotiated settlement regardless of when it is provided. With respect to indirect support for the government, however, the matched results differ significantly. Indirect support for the government increases the odds of both a government victory and a negotiated settlement, but only when it occurs early in a war, consistent with H3. The results with respect to indirect support for the government indicate an interesting form of bias in the unmatched results. Failing to control for nonrandom assignment indicates that indirect support for the government in a civil war has no impact on the duration or outcome of the conflict, but once this nonrandom assignment is accounted for, indirect support early in a war is found to increase the odds of both government victory and negotiated settlement. One interpretation of this result is that third parties are more likely to provide indirect support to governments in more difficult civil wars. Failing to account for this nonrandom assignment masks the true impact of indirect support for governments. Such a strategic dynamic suggests that third parties, when contemplating intervention in more difficult cases, may be inclined to support the government indirectly, avoiding the higher costs associated with direct forms of intervention.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis demonstrated that not all military interventions have the same kinds of effects on civil wars. The strategy and timing of interventions substantially shape their effects. With respect to support for rebels, interventions that occur relatively early in the conflict have the greatest impact in helping the rebels achieve a military victory. Both indirect support and direct-conventional support increase the likelihood of a rebel victory early in a war, but become less effective over time. Thus, there is a critical window relatively early in a war during which external support is most likely to help rebels defeat governments.

My results present a very different set of conclusions with respect to external support for governments. In particular, direct-conventional support for the government proves counterproductive when applied early in a war, as it reduces the likelihood that the government will achieve a victory. At best, such support has no significant effect on the odds of a government victory, at least until the war has become extremely protracted. Similarly, direct-conventional support for the government reduces the odds of a negotiated settlement by incentivizing the government to keep fighting. Taken together, these results indicate that direct-conventional support for the government leads to longer wars. Conversely, indirect support for the government increases the odds of a government victory and a negotiated settlement—when it occurs early in a war. Failing to take into account these distinct intervention strategies obscures the fact that indirect support for the government is most effective early in a war, whereas direct support only becomes effective later in the conflict.

These results suggest at least three directions for future research. First, they indicate that different intervention strategies operate through distinct mechanisms in civil wars, and that this explains why they produce different results. However, my analysis focused exclusively on the strategy of the intervener. Future research should investigate how third-party strategies interact with the strategies pursued by rebels and governments. For instance, Arreguin-Toft (2001) emphasizes the importance of analyzing the interaction of the strategies of both stronger and weaker parties in a conflict. A similar dynamic may hold for third parties as well, as the efficacy of particular third-party strategies may be contingent on the strategies of the other actors in the conflict. Moreover, the efficacy of particular intervention strategies may hinge on the organizational structure of rebel organizations, specifically, the extent to which rebel organizations are unitary or fragmented (Cunningham 2013). For instance, more fragmented groups may benefit less from interventions that degrade the government's capabilities, as their internal divisions prevent them from capitalizing on government losses.

Second, these results suggest a need to investigate the decision of third parties to employ one type of intervention strategy versus another—both across conflicts and within conflicts. For instance, existing work shows that major powers engage in more active foreign policies than minor powers, owing to their greater capabilities (Chiba, Machain, and Reed 2014). Might such differences lead major powers to view a greater number of civil wars as affecting their core national interests, and therefore lead them to favor different, perhaps more direct, intervention strategies than minor powers? Similarly, how do the strategies of prior interventions impact the strategic decisions of subsequent interveners? Prior research suggests that past interventions impact the likelihood of subsequent interventions (see, for instance, Aydin 2010). Do particular intervention strategies escalate this tendency? For instance, might indirect support for the rebels increase the likelihood of indirect support for the government, or increase the risk of a different type of support for the government? The balance statistics from the matching

analysis offer some initial evidence of such strategic interplay shaping the decision-making of third parties, but we need to better theorize and evaluate these dynamics.[30]

Third, this study adds to a growing literature on the implications of targeting civilians in conflict. That no form of unconventional intervention achieves statistical significance matters in and of itself, as it possibly indicates that such tactics are simply ineffective when carried out by third parties in civil wars. Additionally, the existence of an almost perfect negative relationship between the incidence of pro-government unconventional strategies and negotiated settlements suggests that the use of unconventional force by third parties against rebels eviscerates the chances of a negotiated settlement. However, this finding might be an artifact of a relatively small number of cases. Thus, we should investigate these results in several ways. To begin with, the impact of coercive strategies might be contingent on the political institutions and characteristics of the targeted state or rebel organization (see for instance Allen 2007). Moreover, these null results may also stem from lingering heterogeneity within the direct-unconventional category relating to the intensity of such interventions (see Allen and Vincent 2011), and the scale of civilian victimization that they entail. Scholars should look more closely at the decision process that leads a third party to engage in a coercive strategy—and the size and scope of such campaigns—to shed light on this issue.

The results of this analysis obviously help shed light on the debate over the consequences of military interventions. But it also carries with it particular salience in the context of, for example, US involvement in Syria. With respect to US policy in Syria, the results indicate that the concerns expressed by proponents of early US intervention in Syria have merit—indirect or direct support for the rebels in Syria early in the conflict may well have increased the odds of overthrowing the Syrian regime through a rebel victory. At the very least, they might have helped force a negotiated end to the conflict, but such strategies became less effective as the war endured.[31] Similarly, my results suggest that the direct support of Russia and Iran on behalf of the Syrian government is likely to prolong the conflict, by making a negotiated settlement less likely. By degrading the capabilities of rebel forces, these interventions have allowed the Syrian government to regroup, making it less willing to offer concessions at the negotiating table, due to a belief that continued fighting will produce more gains for the government. At the same time, however, my results suggest that—for the time being—these interventions are unlikely to yield an outright victory for the Syrian government.

More broadly, these results suggest that strategies adopted by policymakers when intervening in civil wars should depend on timing. The strategies that are most effective early in the conflict may prove ineffectual, or perhaps even counterproductive, later in the conflict. Similarly, some strategies, for instance direct-conventional support for a government, may not be effective until the conflict has endured for a considerable amount of time. Therefore, interveners need to align their decisions about particular strategies with the broader course of the conflict.

[30]I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this possibility.

[31]Note that efficacy only refers to whether the rebels achieve a military victory. A number of studies (for example Downes and Monten 2013) question the long-term prospects for peace and democracy following foreign-imposed regime change.

Supplementary Information

Supplemental information is available at the International Studies Quarterly data archive. See Benjamin T. Jones, "Online Appendix: Altering Capabilities or Imposing Costs?" at benjamintjones.com.

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