

Threats, Promises, and Credibility in International Relations

Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham
Iowa State University
Department of Political Science
kgc@iastate.edu

Prepared for Journeys in World Politics 2008
University of Iowa
Draft: please do not cite without permission, comments welcome

Why does military conflict break out between some pairs of states and not others? In recent years, attempts to answer this question have focused most prominently on the phenomenon of the democratic peace. Empirically, we know that pairs of democracies seldom engage in large scale conflicts, even though democracies are just as war prone as non-democracies. A number of mechanisms have been advanced to explain this pattern, many of which rest on the concept of credibility.¹

Democracies are argued to be more credible bargaining partners than non-democracies for a number of reasons. These include the ability of domestic audiences to punish their leader, institutional constraints on policy change, and more open access to information about resolve and preference in democracies to name a few. Being more credible allows democracies to overcome the challenges of bargaining in an environment with low information and no authority to enforce agreements between states.

There are two significant problems with the state of existing explanations that have focused on the democracy/non-democracy distinction. First, there is substantial variation within democracies and non-democracies (Geddes 2006; Weeks 2008). Critically, this variation exists in the areas that are highlighted as the key differences between democracies and non-democracies, such as leader accountability, audience costs, and constraints on leader decision making. If these factors truly explain the “democratic peace,” then variation within democracies and within autocracies on these dimensions should be just as important as these difference between regime types.

Second, although these approaches refer to the ability of democracies to make credible commitments, “credibility” actually refers to at least two different things.

¹ Other mechanisms include democratic norms, preference similarity, and information-based arguments.

Avoiding conflict requires states to make both credible threats and credible promises. That is, to make an ex ante agreement that avoids war, states must be able to both credibly threaten to use force and credibly promise to abide by the agreement into the future. Existing approaches only look at how credibility enhancing mechanisms affect the credibility of threats, and largely ignore the necessity of credible promises to avoid conflict. This is problematic because different institutional mechanisms enhance the ability of states of make credibly threats and promises.

This paper addresses the credible promise lacuna in the study of conflict. I argue that the critical difference between making credible threats and credible promises is time. Threats are short terms commitments of the type “if you don’t withdraw your forces, I will invade.” This action is expected to take place over a very short time horizon. The credibility of the threat is questionable because the leader issuing the threat may be bluffing or her state may not have the resolve to follow through. The credibility of the threat is not in question because the issuing state might have different preferences in the future. In contrast, a promise not to renege on a deal in the future is a commitment with a longer time horizon. This is a commitment in the form “If we make this agreement to settle our dispute today, I promise not to launch a challenge over the same issue in the future to get a better deal.” The credibility of this promise is in question because it is a “time inconsistent” statement. State preferences and incentives for conflict will change overtime, and it may be in one state’s best interest to renege later on. Because the time horizon for carrying out threats and promises differs, the sources of concern about their credibility are different. Consequently, the mechanisms that help states make credible threats will not help them make credible promises not to renege. Instead, I argue that

longer term stability of constraints on decision making can help states make credible promises.

The discussion in this paper proceeds as follows. First, I explain the conflict bargaining environment, highlighting the role of threats and promises. Next, I explain why we need to think about threats and promises in crisis bargaining as theoretically and empirically distinct. Following that, I demonstrate that existing approaches have only addressed threats, and that the mechanisms advanced in these studies are unique to threat credibility. I introduce my argument about how overtime stability of domestic constraints on policy change can help states make credible promises. The hypothesis derived from this theory is tested empirically and I discuss the implications of the findings. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how accounting for the ability of states to make credible promises improves our understanding of militarized conflict in the international system.

The conflict bargaining environment

Typical models of crisis bargaining posit two states with a policy disagreement, both trying to achieve their preferred outcome (Fearon 1995). The basic sequence of events once a disagreement is identified is as follows, and draws on Powell (2006). State A demands some policy change from State B. If state B refuses, State A makes a threat to back up its demand. If state B does not believe the threat is credible, it rejects State A's demands and finds out if the threat was a bluff. This can lead to no-change if State A backs down or to conflict if state A carries out the threat. If State B believes the threat, it negotiates terms of agreement with State A, which can vary in the extent to with

B concedes. At this point, both State A and State B must promise to abide by an agreement between them. If State B believes State A's threat, but not its promise to abide by a deal in the future, State B may choose to fight anyway because it thinks it will do better now than in the future. Similarly, once State A has induced State B to negotiate with its credible threat, it must assess the credibility of a promise by State B to abide by a deal in the future. If State A thinks State B will restart the dispute and might do better in the future, it has an incentive to fight today. If neither can make a credible promise not to restart the dispute in the future when they think they can get a better deal, fighting can occur.

In this basic model, the credibility of both threats and promises influence the incentives that states have for fighting. A credible threat alone is not enough to deter conflict because states care about the future and have reason to question whether a deal today will hold into the future.

What are the differences between threats and promises?

At first glance, the primary difference between threats and promises are that threats are negative and promises are positive. One then could easily think of a threat as just a promise to do something negative. Schelling (1960) allows that threats and promises are different in the sense that "a promise is costly when it succeeds, and a threat is costly when it fails" (Schelling 1960, 177). But in acknowledging that they are both elements of a bargaining game, he argues that it is "probably best to consider [them] to be names for different aspects of the same tactic of selective and conditional self-commitment" (134).

Klein and O'Flaherty (1993) demonstrate that threats and promises are in fact different because of the role that time plays in each. They characterize a promise as a “time-inconsistent plan.” This is true for both the promise in conflict bargaining not to renege and for more general cooperative promises such as those made in alliances or environmental cooperation. The literature on cooperation has focused more clearly on this issue of a time-inconsistent plan with the knowledge that joint gains require states not to cheat to get a better payoff to the detriment of their partners. Whether we are talking about mutually beneficial cooperation or the promise not to attack in the future, time is central because all actors know that their own (and their partner's/opponent's) preferences can and likely will change. This is not a central part of threat making. Either the state issuing the threat is bluffing or not, or they have resolve to carry through on the threat or not, but time inconsistency does not play a role in determining the incentives for acting to carry out the threat.

How states make credible threats

The existing literature has identified a number of mechanisms that enhance the credibility of states. And although many of these studies purport to examine threats and promises or “commitments” more generally, they focus almost exclusively on mechanisms that enhance the ability of state to make credible threats.² Primary among these are audience costs (Fearon 1994, 1997; Smith 1998; Baum 2004; Clare 2007;

² These works cite the need for credibility in “international commitments” (Leeds 1999; Tomz 2007) with reference to “empty commitment[s]” (Tomz 2007), or to “signal intentions to other states” (Fearon 1994). Others address the credibility of “concessions” (Powell 2006), “communications” (Smith 1998), or the ability of states to “convey preferences credibly” (Weeks 2008). Even more generally, Smith (1998) asks “When statements are non-binding, why should others believe them?” (Smith 1998).

Tomz 2007; Weeks 2008) and domestic constraints on decision making (Leeds 1999; Prins 2003; Partell and Palmer 1999). Both of these factors create credibility of threats because they alter the costs of making a threat in the short term. Proponents of the audience costs mechanism argue that leaders can make more credible threats when their constituency is likely to hold them accountable for both backing down from a threat and failing in foreign policy. This creates incentive for leaders not to bluff and not to make threats when they are not fairly certain that they can achieve their goals.

Others argue that the existence of domestic constraints on policy change generate credibility for threats by making it more costly for leaders to issue threats and conflict. Overcoming the initial hurdles to pursue a militant policy costs leaders some resources and potentially political capital. Moreover, in these cases, the state reveals a high level of resolve by overcoming challenges to the policy early on. However, other have suggested that the existence of domestic constraints alone does not necessarily enhance credibility (Clark 2000). Unless there is internal disagreement over the policy, it is not costly for leaders to issue threats. It is the constraints on decision making today that imposes costs on leaders. This again relates to the short term follow through on a threat, not the long term credibility of a promise. As I will argue below, in order for domestic constraints to enhance credibility of promises about future behavior, they must appear likely to constrain leaders in the future.

Before explaining how domestic constraints can enhance the credibility of promises not to renege, two other credibility mechanisms warrant attention. These are states tying their own hands through delegation and issue linkage. Both of these mechanisms allow states to make credible promises when time inconsistency is the

source of credibility concerns. States can overcome credible commitment problems by taking the future decision out of their hands. This has been done in international finance by creating central banks (Broz 1998) and pegging currency (Giavazzi and Pagano 1988; Canavan and Tommasi 1997). States can also link multiple issues together to generate costs for defection in the future (Martin 1993). These mechanisms are typically advanced to explain cooperation as opposed to conflict because many states have been unwilling to substantially tie their hand through issue linkage or to delegate control over foreign policy to an international organization.

How do domestic constraints enhance the credibility of promises?

States are typically unable to overcome the credibility problem associated with time-inconsistency though tying their hands. Yet, states must be able to make these promises not to renege credible or we should observe more conflict than we do. In order to make a credible promise not to renege, states need to show that either their preferences will not change in the future (which is not possible) or that there will be predictable costs for renegeing in the future that offset any incentives to renege.

The central issue, once again, is time. For a threat to be credible there must be some costs associated with bluffing or failure when it is made. Because a promise is about future behavior, the costs for renegeing have to be future costs. So, one way that domestic politics can enhance the credibility of state promises is to include predictable and stable constraints on policy change that are likely to continue over the long term. If the future costs associated with policy change can be estimated now, states can credibly promise not to change course or renege later on even though their preferences may have

changed. This, of course, does not prohibit renegeing, but makes it less likely than if there were no constraints on policy change in the future.

A short hypothetical example will help illustrate the difference between the role of current and future costs from domestic constraints. A dispute arises between State A and State B wherein State A issues a threat. In order to make this threat, the leader of State A has overcome some resistance in the legislature controlled by the opposition party. Issuing the threat to State B entailed some costs of overcoming domestic opposition. This enhanced the credibility of the threat issued by State A by signaling resolve to follow through, and thus, State B believes the threat is credible. Thus far, a domestic constraint had enhanced State A's ability to make a credible threat. But say, for example, that divided government is quite unusual in State A. Typically, one party has control of all parts of government and can pursue its policies with ease. Knowing this fact, State B has little reason to believe that State A will be constrained in such a manner in the future. The costs from domestic constraints born by the leader of State A to make the threat are unlikely to exist in the future if another leader of State A wants to challenge State B again. Thus, when State B is concerned about the long-term, as opposed to short-term, behavior of State A, the domestic constraint that exists today in State A does not make its promises credible.

Accounting for the differences in timing related to threats and promises, we see that the sources of credibility problems differ substantially between the two. Credible threats require signals of resolve and capability in the short term. Credible promises not to renege require constraints on future behavior over a longer time period. Because of this, the same mechanisms that create state credibility in making threats do not

simultaneously enhance the credibility of state promises. Specifically, domestic constraints on policy change today will not make a state's promise not to renege in the future credible. However, if the state has predictable and consistent constraints, this will enhance the credibility of promises about the future. Avoiding conflict today requires both credible threats and promises. Our predictions about which states are likely to engage in militarized conflict need to account for the credibility of promises. Following from my theory about the stability of domestic constraints, I can offer a new hypothesis to this end.

H1: Controlling for the credibility of threats, the greater the stability of domestic constraints in the dyad over time, the less likely conflict will be.

Preliminary empirical analysis

The goal of this paper is to show how both credible threats and credible promises matter in international crisis bargaining, and that the mechanisms that generate credibility work differently in these areas. This section presents an initial empirical test of this argument as well as some thoughts on further testing.

To test my hypothesis about the effect of the stability of constraints, I examine dyadic conflict behavior of states in the international system. My theory suggests that the stability of a state's domestic constraints will affect their ability to make credible promises about the future. This will decrease the chance they end up in conflict. To test this, I examine the effect of the stability of constraints on the initiation of a Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID).³ States will be more likely to initiate a MID against

³ This data comes from the MID 3.0 dataset.

a target that is unable to credibly promise not to renege on a potential settlement. The universe of cases is all politically relevant directed dyads in the international system since 1945.⁴ I use only politically relevant dyads to prevent inflating the zeros in the dependent variable by included dyads with no contact. Using directed dyad data, I can identify which state initiated the MID and which state was the target.⁵ The dependent variable is the initiation of a MID in a directed-dyad year.

To test the argument presented here, I need to measure the consistency or stability of domestic constraints. To begin, I identify domestic constraints as veto points in government where policy change can be stopped. Veto points are actors in government that can hold up policy change through a unilateral veto. This measure, from the Database of Political Institutions (Keefer 2005), includes both institutional veto points (such as a separate executive and legislative body) and partisan veto points (parties in government).⁶ The greater the number of veto points, the greater the constraints on policy change. To capture constraints in the past, I measure of the average number of veto points over the previous five and ten years (two variables). This constraint variable will also be included in the model because the instability of constraints must be assessed in conjunction with some knowledge of whether there are substantial constraints to speak of.

Based on this conception of domestic constraints, I create a variable that measures the instability of domestic constraints overtime. Here I make the assumption

⁴ Political relevance is from (Maoz and Russett 1993) and is defined as dyads that are contiguous and all dyads that include one great power. I set the contiguity option at level three.

⁵ Joiners dyad that include entrants into the MID after its start are not included. Initiators are Side A states. I use directed dyad instead of non-directed dyads because my theory is about the characteristics of a potential target.

⁶ This variable is *CHECKS* in the Database of Political Institutions.

that states will look at the past constraints on their bargaining partner to assess the likelihood that they will be constrained into the future. To do this, I create a measure that captures average changes in domestic constraints over prior five and ten year periods for the target state. Changes in domestic constraints are the percents of veto points that drop from government each year. This average change variable measures the relative instability of these veto point constraints, allowing for different base-level of constraints. Sources of change in domestic constraints are likely to vary from country to country. Possible reasons include new elections, institutional reform, government collapse, or civil conflict to name a few.

Because the observable outcome here is MID initiation, rather than credibility of promises, I include a series of controls for other factors associated with the outbreak of conflict between states. First, I include a measure of joint democracy because empirically, we know democracies are less likely to fight one another. Moreover, this distinction between democracy and non-democracy has been a driving force in the literature. I also control for current constraints of both the initiating and target state using the Polity executive constraints variable. This will help control for the ability of both states to make credible threats.

I also include a measure of whether a particular dispute is over territory as this has been found to be a robust indicator of when disputes will escalate to war (Senese 2005). Other controls include dummies for geographic contiguity, rivalry between dyad members, a formal defense pact, major power status, the alliance portfolio similarity of the dyad, and the share of capabilities of the target state. The data sources and coding

rules are in the appendix. Each of these factors has been show empirically to be related to the onset of conflict between states.

I employ a rare events logistic model because MID initiation is rare (King and Zeng 2001a, 2001b). The results of a series of models are reported in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

Models 1 though 4 present four variants on the analysis. The first set of models used MID initiation as the dependent variable. Models 1 and 2 examine the effects of average instability of domestic constraints over five and ten year periods, respectively. The second set of models (3 and 4) use a more restrictive measure for MID initiation which includes only those MIDs where the initiator engaged in a display or use of force or war over the course of the dispute. Models 3 and 4 examine this over five and ten years, respectively.

My key independent variable (instability of domestic constraints in the past) performs as expected. This variable (both the five year and ten year versions) returns a significant and positive coefficient. This holds for both MID initiation and MID initiation limited to shows of force, use of force, and war. States with inconsistent domestic constraints will have difficulty making credible promises about how constrained they might be in the future. Predictable domestic constraints on policy change are the most likely source of credibility for states as they try to make promises

not to renege in the future. This suggests that credible promises matter if we assume that leaders utilize observations about the past to make predictions about future behavior and constraints on that behavior.⁷

A secondary source of support for the argument is provided by the coefficient on past domestic constraints. In all of the models, higher levels of domestic constraint are associated with a lower change of being a MID target. States with a higher level of domestic constraints on average are likely to be more credible in their promises about the future than those with limited constraints on policy change.

A number of other variables achieve statistical significance in the models, typically in the expected direction. Disagreement over territory are likely to lead to a MID, as are ongoing rivalries. When it achieves statistical significance, being part of a joint democratic dyad decreases the likelihood of a MID. The greater the share of capabilities by the potential target in a dyad, the less likely they are to be the target of a MID. Dyads with two major powers and those with great similarity of preference (based on their S score) were less likely to have a MID.

The existence of a defense pact between dyad members returned a significant and positive coefficient in models three and four. This is surprising since these states have formalized their commitment to defend on another. However, recent work by Leeds and Savun (2007) suggest that alliance partners are more likely to abrogated when it has become beneficial to do so in the future. The coefficient on the current executive constraints for the target state is significant and positive in one model. This, again, is counter intuitive since domestic constraints should bolster the credibility of the state in

⁷ Others suggest this to be the case as well, see especially (Walter 2006) , who argues that potential rebels look to the past to predict the behavior of states in the future.

making threats. But perhaps this is only an advantage for the initiating state. The coefficient on constraints of the initiating state bare this out as they are negative and significant in two of the four models. This indicates that initiators that can make credible threats are less likely to engage in a MID. Contiguity did not return any significant results, however, this variation may already be picked up by the fact that only politically relevant dyads are in the sample and that designation relies on contiguity.

What is the effect of instability of domestic constraints?

The results reports here offer some preliminary support for my argument. Even when controlling for factors that should increase the credibility of threats (joint democracy and the current constraints on the executive in each state), states that have had less consistent domestic constraints are more like to be the targets of MIDs. This holds even when we account for the similarity of preferences between states, rivalry among them, territorial issues, power status, capabilities and contiguity. A higher degree of domestic constraints in the past also appears significant here. In three of the four models, higher average level of domestic constraints in the past correlate with a lower likelihood of being the target of a MID.

Moreover, examining the substantive effect of past domestic constraints, we find that it is the second strongest predictor of change in the probability of being a MID target. The baseline probability that a state will be the target of a MID in a dyad in a specific year is, or course, quite low. Increasing the instability of domestic constraints from its minimum value to maximum value leads to a 0.42% increase. Compared with the percent change predicted when we go from a mixed or non-democratic dyad to a

joint democracy (a .003% decrease), the stability of domestic constraints overtime appears to have a quite substantial effect.⁸

What this suggests is that the ability of states to make credible promises does affect the likelihood that they will be involved in conflict. The ability of a state to threaten credibly to use force does not necessarily mean that they can avoid conflict with other states.

Conclusions and future directions

This paper represent an attempt to address the multiple credibility problems associated with conflict bargaining. The credibility of states in international politics cannot be thought of a single factor, but instead should be examined with respect to what action by the state needs to be seen as credible. To avoid conflict in crisis situations, states must be able to make credible threats and credible promises. Moreover, our thinking about the mechanisms that generate credibility for states in international politics must account for this difference. Thus far, existing studies of credibility have dealt almost exclusively with how states can make credible threats.

The key difference between threats and promises is the time horizon related to each. Threats are statements about what will happen in the short term. Promises not to renege on a settlement that ends the dispute are statements about what will not happen in the future. Because the time horizon related to the implementation or honoring of threats and promises varies, the sources of credibility problems are different for each. States have trouble making credible threats because they have incentives to bluff and

⁸ Predicted probabilities are calculated using CLARIFY and are based on Model 4. (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001).

demonstrating resolve can be difficult. States have difficulty making credible promises not to renege because they cannot guarantee their behavior in the future when their preferences may have changed (i.e. the time inconsistency problem), or when the current leaders are no longer in power.

Since the sources of credibility problems are different for threats and promises, we cannot assume that factors that enhance the credibility of threats will also bolster the credibility of state promises about not renegeing in the future. Specifically, I argue that domestic constraints on policy change, which have been shown to enhance the credibility of states' threats will only enhance the credibility of states' promises if opponents expect them to continue into the future.

I have offered some preliminary support for this theory of how states can make their promises credible. States with consistent constraints on policy change appear able to overcome credibility concerns about their behavior in the future. Yet there are some important limitations to this preliminary empirical study. As a field, we have had a limited understanding of the constraints on leaders and policy in non-democracies and this has generally led to the simplifying assumption that there are none. Common measures of constraints, for example, such as the ones used here, code non-democracies as only having only one veto point. The recent work by Weeks and Geddes suggests that there are systematic and perhaps predictable differences in how leaders interact with their support base in non-democracies. Differences in the stability of constraints on non-democratic leaders should affect their ability to make credible promises, but this variation is not picked up in the analysis here.

A second limitation is the difficulty of distinguishing independent effects of credible threats and credible promises. This analysis examines conflict as an indicator that a credible promise could not be made, whether or not a credible threat could be. I argue that even when threats are believed, targets of threats may choose to fight because of a lack of credible promises. The analysis as it stands cannot tell us whether a lack of credibility in the threat or the promise led to conflict, even if it demonstrates a correlation between a factor that I argue enhances the credibility of promises and the outbreak of conflict.

Despite these limitations, this project has the potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of why military disputes break out between some pairs of states and not others. Additionally, while the analysis here has focused exclusively on inter-state conflict, the underlying mechanisms should apply to civil wars as well, the most prominent type of conflict for the last sixty years. The literature on the outbreak of civil war tends to focus on structural features of states, such as level of development, ethnic fractionalization, natural resource wealth, and so on. However, there is typically some process of bargaining between states and potential rebels prior to the outbreak of conflict. That process resembles in many ways the bargaining environment described here as each side tries to assess the credibility of threats and promises of the other.

In important other ways, however, the bargaining environment in the intra-state context is different. In particular, states face generally uninstitutionalized bargaining partners, which can make determining the constraints on decision making more difficult. In this way, then, the perceived instability of constraints may have a greater impact in the civil war context because states have less information to make reliable assessments of the

stability of constraints, and consequently the credibility of promises by the non-state actor. In future work, I will extend this argument and examine more fully how this dynamic affects the outbreak of civil war.

References

- Baum, Matthew A. 2004. "Going Private: Public Opinion, Presidential Rhetoric, and the Domestic Politics of Audience Costs in U.S. Foreign Policy Crises." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48(5):603-631.
- Broz, J. Lawrence. 1998. "The Origins of Central Banking: Solutions to the Free-Rider Problem." *International Organization* 52(2):231-268.
- Canavan, C., and M. Tommasi. 1997. "On the credibility of alternative exchange rate regimes ." *Journal of Development Economics* 54(1):101-122.
- Clare, Joe. 2007. "Domestic Audiences and Strategic Interests." *The Journal of Politics* 69(3):732-745.
- Clark, David H. 2000. "Agreeing to Disagree: Domestic Institutional Congruence and U. S. Dispute Behavior." *Political Research Quarterly* 53(2):375-400.
- Diehl, Paul F., and Gary Goertz. 2000. *War and Peace in International Rivalry*. University of Michigan Press.
- Fearon, James D. 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49(3):379-414.
- Fearon, James D. 1994. "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes." *The American Political Science Review* 88(3):577-592.
- Fearon, James D. 1997. "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41(1):68-90.
- Geddes, Barbara. 2006. "Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?." *Working paper*.
- Giavazzi, F., and M. Pagano. 1988. "The advantage of tying one's hands: EMS discipline and central bank credibility." *European Economic Review* 32:1055-75.
- Gibler, Douglas M., and Meredith Sarkees. 2002. "Coding Manual for v3.0 of the Correlates of War Formal Interstate Alliance Data set, 1816-2000."
- Jagers, Keith, and Ted Robert Gurr. 1995. "Tracking Democracy's Third Wave with the Polity III Data." *Journal of Peace Research* 32(4):469-482.
- Jones, Daniel M., Stuart Bremer, and J. David Singer. 1996. "Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816-1992: Rationale, Coding Rules, and Empirical Patterns." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 15(2):163-213.

- Keefer, Philip. 2005. "Database of Political Institutions: Changes and Variable Definitions." *Development Research Group, World Bank*.
- King, Gary, and Langche Zeng. 2001a. "Explaining Rare Events in International Relations." *International Organization* 55(3).
- King, Gary, and Langche Zeng. 2001b. "Logistic Regression in Rare Events Data." *Political Analysis* 9(2):137-163.
- Klein, Daniel B., and Brendan O'Flaherty. 1993. "A Game-Theoretic Rendering of Promises and Threats." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 21:295-314.
- Leeds, Brett Ashley. 1999. "Domestic Political Institutions, Credible Commitments, and International Cooperation." *American Journal of Political Science* 43(4):979-1002.
- Leeds, Brett Ashley, and Burcu Savun. 2007. "Terminating Alliances: Why Do States Abrogate Agreements?." *The Journal of Politics* 69(4):1118-1132.
- Maoz, Zeev, and Bruce Russett. 1993. "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986." *The American Political Science Review* 87(3):624-638.
- Martin, Lisa L. 1993. "Credibility, Costs, and Institutions: Cooperation on Economic Sanctions." *World Politics* 45(3):406-432.
- Partell, Peter J., and Glenn Palmer. 1999. "Audience Costs and Interstate Crises: An Empirical Assessment of Fearon's Model of Dispute Outcomes." *International Studies Quarterly* 43(2):389-405.
- Powell, Robert. 2006. "War as a Commitment Problem." *International Organization* 60(01):169-203.
- Prins, Brandon C. . 2003. "Institutional Instability and the Credibility of Audience Costs: Political Participation and Interstate Crisis Bargaining, 1816-1992." *Journal of Peace Research* 40(1):67-84.
- Schelling, Thomas C. 1960. *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Senese, Paul D. 2005. "Territory, Contiguity, and International Conflict: Assessing a New Joint Explanation." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(4):769-779.
- Signorino, Curtis S., and Jeffrey M. Ritter. 1999. "Tau-b or Not Tau-b: Measuring the Similarity of Foreign Policy Positions." *International Studies Quarterly* 43(1):115-144.
- Singer, J. David, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey. 1972. "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965." In *Peace, War and Numbers*, ed. Bruce Russett. Beverly Hills: Sage.

- Singer, J. David, and Melvin Small. 1982. *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars, 1816-1980*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Smith, Alastair. 1998. "International Crises and Domestic Politics." *The American Political Science Review* 92(3):623-638.
- Tomz, Michael. 2007. "Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach." *International Organization* 61(4):821-40.
- Tomz, Michael, Jason Wittenberg, and Gary King. 2001. "CLARIFY: Software for Interpreting and Presenting Statistical Results. Version 2.0 ." Available at: <http://gking.harvard.edu>.
- Walter, Barbara F. 2006. "Information, Uncertainty and the Decision to Secede." *International Organization* 60(1):105-135.
- Weeks, Jessica L. 2008. "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve." *International Organization* 62(01):35-64.

Data Appendix

Variable	Source	Original citation	Coding rules
MID data	EUGene	(Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996)	MID initiation is <i>CWINIT</i> . Higher for MID is coded as 1 if the highest level of hostility for the initiator (<i>CWHOST</i>) is 3, 4 or 5
Past instability of target domestic constraints	Database of Political Institutions	(Keefer 2005)	Rolling average (5 or 10 years) of the percent of veto points that drop from government each year (original variable <i>CHECKS</i>)
Past Average domestic constraints	Database of Political Institutions	(Keefer 2005)	Rolling average (5 or 10 years) of the number of veto points in government (original variable <i>STABS</i>)
Territorial issue	EUGene	(Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996)	Dummy for revision issue
Contiguity dummy	EUGene	(Singer and Small 1982)	Dummy for land contiguity or separation by small body of water
Joint democracy	EUGene	(Jaggers and Gurr 1995)	Both states in dyad have a Polity score above 5
Major-major	EUGene	(Singer and Small 1982)	Both states in dyad are major powers
Defense pact	EUGene	(Gibler and Sarkees 2002)	Dyad has an alliance that includes a defense pact
Weighted S score	EUGene	(Signorino and Ritter 1999)	Calculated score of similarity of state in global system using alliance portfolios
Rival dummy	Diehl and Goertz Rivalry Data	(Diehl and Goertz 2000)	Dyad is considered to be in a rivalry
Target capability share	EUGene	(Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972)	Target's percent of capabilities of the total percent held by dyad members
Target and initiator current executive constraint	EUGene	(Jaggers and Gurr 1995)	Ordinal measure of constraints on executive

Table 1. Rare events logit in MID initiation

Variable	MID initiation				Higher force-level MID initiation			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Five year period	Std.err.	Ten year period	Std.err.	Five year period	Std.err.	Ten year period	Std.err.
Past instability of target domestic constraints	4.72**	1.29	2.81*	1.59	6.89**	1.24	4.72**	1.06
Past Average domestic constraints	-0.20*	0.12	-0.22	0.16	-0.19*	0.11	-0.32**	0.14
Territorial issue	1.78**	0.74	2.11**	0.78	1.78**	0.67	1.85**	0.65
Contiguity dummy	0.33	0.37	0.08	0.39	0.31	0.37	-0.08	0.40
Joint democracy	0.68	0.63	0.80	0.69	-0.93**	0.46	-0.97*	0.52
Major-major	-2.14**	0.94	-2.25**	0.95	-0.14	0.99	-0.16	1.05
Defense pact	0.38	0.51	0.06	0.45	1.37**	0.55	1.11**	0.52
Weighted S score	-1.43**	0.58	-1.27**	0.63	-1.00*	0.52	-0.88*	0.53
Rival dummy	13.10**	1.04	13.13**	1.34	12.90**	1.21	12.19**	1.21
Target capability share	-2.48**	0.61	-2.81**	0.67	-1.54**	0.43	-1.53**	0.42
Target current executive constraint	0.17	0.12	0.26*	0.14	0.12	0.09	0.26**	0.11
Initiator current executive constraint	-0.16	0.10	-0.13	0.10	-0.17**	0.08	-0.19**	0.09
Constnt	-8.87**	1.37	-9.21**	1.57	-9.81**	1.47	-9.15**	1.47
Number of obs	44151		35883		44151		35883	

*statistically significant at the 0.1 level, **statistically significant at the 0.05 level