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Jumping into the Fray: Alliances, Power, Institutions, and the Timing of Conflict Expansion

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Our paper examines the question of when conflicts expand and what leads particular states to join more quickly than others. Using factors highlighted in the conflict expansion and joining literatures, we derive hypotheses about how these factors make resolve in the face of credible threats more likely and how this either increases or decreases the time to conflict expansion. We also generate expectations about when specific states are likely to join a conflict. We test our expectations using a dataset of the initial belligerents of militarized disputes and all potential joiner states. The results of our analyses suggest that conflict expansion is more often because of initiators’ resolve rather than miscalculation since observable signals of likely expansion, such as alliances and power, decrease the time to expansion. Our findings have important implications for research on alliance reliability, balancing and bandwagoning, and various proposed causes of the democratic peace.

KEYWORDS alliances, conflict expansion, institutions, joining

Why do some states join an ongoing dispute immediately while others wait months or even years to join? Related is the question of why some conflicts

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expand while others never do. Understanding whether a conflict expands and when states join an ongoing conflict has important substantive implications. For example, what if the U.S., rather than waiting three years to join World War I, had waited only three months? Or what if the NATO allies agreed to enter the Bosnian crisis in 1992 rather than 1995? Would the outcomes have been different? Would World War I have lasted four years? Would we have seen new conflicts emerge in Kosovo in 1998? We know a great deal about why states become involved in conflicts and whether states are likely to join ongoing conflicts (Altfeld and Bueno de Mesquita 1979; Siverson and Starr 1991). Conversely, we know little about what drives the decision of when to join a conflict and what conflicts are likely to quickly expand involving additional disputants (see Siverson and Starr 1991 for a notable exception).

If the timing of joining behavior affects conflict outcomes, then we need to move beyond whether states enter disputes as third parties and ask both if and when they join conflicts. What are the incentives and disincentives for states to join a continuing conflict? To answer our question, we combined three related research programs to aid our understanding of conflict expansion. Our hope is to provide a more unified model of conflict expansion that accounts for the decisions of both the initial disputants as well as potential third-party interveners. We first draw upon research focusing on conflict expansion as miscalculation. Gartner and Siverson (1996) highlight that most conflicts never expand, thus the rarity of conflict expansion is most likely due to a selection effect whereby expansion only occurs when initiators misestimate this possibility. Second, research on extended deterrence (Huth 1988; Werner 2000) suggests that conflict expansion is because of a selection effect that results from the initiator’s resolve. Thus, if we are going to understand whether and when conflicts expand we need to first consider the initial dyadic dispute.

After addressing when a conflict is likely to expand, we then move to the potential joiner level to address the question of when specific states are likely to join a given conflict. We therefore draw on a third literature that focuses on if and when particular states are likely to join. We use the concept of decision latitude (Siverson and Starr 1991) to model when individual states are likely to join. Following this framework, we argue that the specific point in time at which a state joins a conflict is dependent upon its ability to join and on the likelihood of influencing the outcome of the conflict. While some states have little choice in joining, we expect that many potential joiner states decide based on the costs and benefits of joining at any given time. The costs and benefits are about the material advantages they can bring to each and how important the potential joiner views the conflict. Therefore, the characteristics of the joining state relative to each disputant are critical in predicting when joining occurs. Most research examines joiner and disputant characteristics independently and not relative to one another.

To model both whether and when a particular dispute is likely to expand and subsequently who joins and when, we use a two-stage model
to account for the initial disputant and the third-party level. The results of our analyses suggest that conflict expansion is more often because of initiators’ resolve rather than miscalculation. Our findings have important implications for research on alliance reliability, balancing and bandwagoning, and various proposed causes of the democratic peace.

EXISTING LITERATURE

To understand the timing of conflict expansion and if and when states join conflicts, we use three prominent explanations of conflict expansion. Each offers differing but related casual mechanisms as to why conflicts expand. While all three rely on an expected utility framework, they each examine conflict expansion from different perspectives. The predator-prey model suggests that war expansion is because of miscalculations by the initiator (Gartner and Siverson 1996; see also Smith 1996). Gartner and Siverson argue that war expansion is due to an overestimation of the initiator’s likelihood of victory and an under estimation of the likelihood the target will receive help in the form of an ally. More importantly, they argue that this explains why most conflicts are dyadic in nature. The extended deterrence literature suggests that initiators attack despite the presence of an ally or protégé that is likely to aid the target (Huth 1988; Werner 2000).

Finally, a third body of literature focuses on those likely to join an ongoing conflict. Notable among this body of research is Siverson and Starr’s (1991) work on opportunity and willingness. They focus on the role of alliances, geographical proximity, and what they term a potential joiner’s “decision latitude.” Decision latitude refers to the idea that not all states join wars in the same manner. For example, more powerful states have more decision latitude over whether to join while weaker bordering states have little decision latitude over whether to join a conflict. By combining these three theories, we develop a more complete model of conflict expansion.

At the heart of explanations tied to the predator-prey model and the extended deterrence argument is the issue of credibility. The logic of the predator-prey model suggests that challenger states look for targets that are unlikely to have credible defenders. Thus, challengers try to find relatively isolated states that are unlikely to receive aid from third parties or do not have credible deterrent threats. If the conflict does expand, it is due to miscalculation. This suggests, as Gartner and Siverson (1996) rightly point out, a selection effect. That is, leaders choose conflicts that they do not think will expand. This highlights the fact that few conflicts expand and most are confined to the two initial disputing parties. Thus, central to the study of conflict expansion is the idea that, because most conflicts are unlikely to expand, this needs to be accounted for both theoretically and
This also raises an additional question about conflict selection and expansion: what makes some states so resolved that they are willing to attack despite the presence of a credible third-party defender?

The literature on extended deterrence highlights the role of credibility, capabilities, and interests to explain successful and unsuccessful occurrences of deterrence. Credibility is tied to power and interests. Between the challenger and defender, the party with the greater balance of capabilities and interests is likely to prevail when disputes arise. Weak challengers are unlikely to attack states with strong defenders, suggesting that deterrence works. Also, if the defender’s interests in the target state outweigh those of the challenger, deterrence is also likely to succeed and no conflict emerges. Expectations are similar when the challenger is stronger or has greater interests. Potential defenders are unlikely to join any conflict given a lack of interest or when they are disadvantaged in terms of power relations with the challenger. Again, this highlights why most disputes are two-party affairs.

While these literatures help explain why the majority of disputes involve only two parties, how do they apply to conflict expansion? One explanation is miscalculation. The challenger either did not anticipate any state coming to the aid of the target or miscalculated that a potential defender was bluffing in its threat to do so. This was the expectation of Hitler about the possibility of the British and French entering a war over Danzig and Poland (Taylor 1961). Hitler expected that the British and French could gain concessions from Poland, given both the past experience with Czechoslovakia as well as bargaining and negotiations with the two countries up to three days before the invasion of Poland. However, during those last three days, even Hitler started anticipating that a conflict on the continent was likely to expand.

The other explanation of conflict expansion is tied to resolve and the status quo. States may sometimes enter conflicts they expect will expand because they believe the status quo is no longer tenable. States are so unhappy with the status quo that conflict is the only alternative, regardless of the possibility of facing additional adversaries. Thus, even if states are materially disadvantaged, they would rather fight than maintain the status quo. Japan’s decision to attack the U.S. during the Sino-Japanese War highlights this explanation (Chan 2003; Russett 1969). The U.S. had credibly communicated its desire both to prevent attacks against colonial interests in Southeast Asia and for Japan to end the conflict in China. For Japan, however, ending the war in Manchuria was not an option. The Japanese chose to face an additional adversary because all other options were less desirable. The U.S. threat was indeed credible, but, despite this credible threat, Japanese interests overrode any deterrent

1According to the MID data, slightly over 15% of conflicts expand beyond the initial disputants.
possibility. These two explanations—miscalculation and resolve—highlight how conflicts can expand from the initial belligerent’s perspective.

The third explanation of conflict expansion is based on Siverson and Starr’s (1991) concept of “decision latitude.” While the above explanations focus on the relationship of the challenger to both the target and potential defenders, this explanation focuses almost exclusively on the potential joiner. Decision latitude conceptualizes the idea that certain states have fewer constraints when deciding to join a conflict. States with strong military capabilities and the ability to project force abroad have high decision latitude over joining a conflict regardless of its location. Conversely, weak, bordering states often have little decision latitude over joining a neighboring conflict.

Initiators account for states with low decision latitude as likely joiners. These states have little say in whether they become part of the conflict or not. This suggests that a leader is likely to be mindful of neighboring states’ responses when deciding to attack. What about states that possess high decision latitude? These are the states that are both most capable of extending credible deterrence and simultaneously creating an environment of misperception. States with high decision latitude can, and often do, credibly signal their intentions through formal agreements, with past actions, or because the issue or territory at stake is of high value. Thus conflict expansion involving these states is due to resolve because these states have greater interests, capabilities, and more formal agreements with other states. It is only in absence of formal alliance commitments, questions over the value of the target, and no clear history of commitments that make misperception possible.

One body of literature suggests that states anticipate conflict expansion but are resolved enough to initiate conflict. The other highlights expansion as part of miscalculation. Taken together they suggest that expansion is fundamentally tied to decisions made by the initial belligerents. Whether a conflict is likely to expand is largely a function of the initial conflict. This implies that studies of conflict expansion should incorporate elements of the initial disputants to capture this dynamic.

These previous works focus on whether a conflict expands rather than the timing of the expansion (again, the notable exception to this is Siverson and Starr 1991). However, the timing of expansion is crucial to how wars are fought, the magnitude of war and the costs of war. Focusing on not just whether but when wars expand should provide insight as to when each of the above causal mechanisms are at work.

Below, we address the question of when conflicts expand and what leads particular states to join more quickly than others. Using the factors already highlighted in the conflict expansion and joining literatures, we derive hypotheses about how these factors make resolve in the face of credible threats more likely and how this either increases or decreases the time to conflict expansion. We also generate expectations about when specific states are likely to join a conflict. We test our expectations using a dataset of
the initial belligerents of militarized disputes and all potential joiner states. The models should provide insight into when conflict expansion is anticipated by the belligerents, when it might be unexpected, and subsequent specific third party decisions about when to join.

THE TEMPORAL EXPANSION OF CONFLICT

The majority of conflicts include only two disputants. This is likely because, as Gartner and Siverson (1996) illustrate, disputants take into account the likelihood that the target will receive help from an ally. We divide the conflicts that expand into two groups, those in which expansion was expected and those in which it was not. In the former cases, expansion is anticipated but the initiator attacks despite the presence of an alliance or other ties (Huth 1988; Werner 2000). Similarly, states with low “decision latitude,” such as weak states that border a dispute, are likely to join an ongoing conflict making expansion expected (Siverson and Starr 1991). In other cases, expansion occurs despite initial disputants’ expectations that it will not. These cases are characterized by an overestimation of the initiator’s probability of victory and an underestimation of the probability that the target will receive an ally’s help. Unexpected expansion might also occur when a state with high “decision latitude,” such as a powerful state, joins a conflict.

The expectation that a third state will join a conflict has important implications for the timing of conflict expansion. More specifically, states that are expected to join a conflict should join more quickly than those who do so unexpectedly. Conversely, when initiators misestimate that another state will not aid their target, conflict expansion will occur later than when expansion was expected. We therefore focus on the factors that lead to the expectation that a state will join a conflict when explaining temporal conflict expansion. Specifically, we examine the roles of geographic proximity, alliances, institutional similarity, and power in explaining the timing of conflict expansion. Our first hypotheses focus on the perception of possible conflict expansion from the initiator’s standpoint. We expect conflicts to expand quickly when expansion is expected. The second hypotheses focus on the decision to join from the potential joiner’s perspective. These hypotheses allow us to understand which states are likely to join an ongoing conflict quickly.

Geographic Proximity

Geographic proximity to a conflict has a strong impact on if and when an outside state joins an ongoing conflict (Altfeld and Bueno de Mesquita 1979; Siverson and Starr 1991). Geographic proximity provides both the opportunity and the willingness that are jointly necessary conditions for joining to occur (Starr 2005). Proximate states are more likely to possess the capabilities
necessary to take a certain course of action, yielding a greater “opportunity” for involvement than in the cases of distant states. While earlier works highlighted the “opportunity” part of the framework, more recent work examines factors that increase a state’s willingness to join a conflict (Werner and Lemke 1996, 1997; Kim 1991). Willingness refers to “the choice (and process of choice) that is related to the selection of some behavioral option from the range of choices” (Most and Starr 1989, 23). It entails the potential joiner’s preference for involvement as an additional disputant, including political risks and dispute salience. If policy makers do not have a strong preference for certain outcomes in the dispute in question, then they will not allocate the state’s limited resources (Powell 1993; Palmer 1990; Clark 2001). Only willing joiners concerned with affecting the dispute outcome will join a conflict. Proximity to a conflict not only creates the opportunity to act but also generates willingness to do so, as proximate states are more likely to have a stake in the conflict’s outcome than distant states.

Initiators will account for the states that border their target, expecting that targets with many bordering states are more likely to receive aid. A state that initiates a conflict despite probable aid from a neighboring state represents one with high resolve, as it is willing to risk fighting multiple states. Distant states joining a conflict represent a miscalculation about likely expansion on the part of the initiator. We therefore expect that conflicts with many bordering states spread quickly. This leads to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1A: The more states bordering initial disputants, the more quickly the conflict will expand.

Geographic circumstances will also impact the decision of potential joiners. Geographically proximate states have less decision latitude than distant ones, as bordering states may feel forced to intervene quickly to reduce the risk of spill over effects (Siverson and Starr 1991). We should expect contiguous states to join conflicts more quickly than distant states. We therefore expect to find that:

Hypothesis 1B: Potential joiners that border an ongoing dispute will join more quickly than those that do not border the conflict.

Alliances

Alliances are a formal way for a potential joiner to exhibit affinity for another state. The presence of an alliance allows initiators to form expectations

\[\text{We use the term outcome rather than winning because it is not clear that states always join disputes in hopes of one side achieving victory over the other. It may also be the case that third parties join to manage the conflict or bring an end to hostilities regardless of the winner.}\]
about the likelihood that other states will aid the target. Initiators can expect that targets with allies are more likely to receive aid. Therefore, states that attack targets with many allies are likely to expect the conflict to expand and possess enough resolve to overcome this challenge.

However, it is not just the presence of an alliance but the type of alliance that is important to the spread of conflict. Alliances specify the courses of action signatories are expected to take under various circumstances. For example, defensive alliances require that signatories aid an ally that is attacked, whereas neutrality agreements only require that signatories remain neutral. Kadera (1998) finds that neutrality agreements act as barriers to war expansion while defensive alliances serve as a transmission mechanism for the spread of conflict. Initiators can expect that targets with defensive alliances will get the aid of their allies. The presence of alliances generates more rapid conflict expansion than in the cases of unallied disputants. This leads to our second hypothesis that:

Hypothesis 2A: The more defensive alliances each disputant has, the more quickly the conflict will expand.

From a potential joiner’s perspective, alliances increase a state’s willingness to join a conflict. Alliances should increase the likelihood a state joins an ongoing conflict by influencing its utility for joining (Altfeld and Bueno de Mesquita 1979; Siverson and Starr 1991; Morrow 2000; Siverson and King 1980). Because alliances represent costly commitments to cooperate in security and military affairs (Russett and Starr 1981; Levy 1982), alliances provide incentives for an outsider to join a dispute (Gibler 2000; Morrow 1994; Smith 1996). Allies join conflicts both to protect alliance partners and ensure their future credibility (Levy 1982). The same logic in terms of alliance type applies to potential joiners, as those tied to a conflict through a defense pact are obligated to act should their ally be attacked. The obligations of a neutrality agreement require no such action. The transmission mechanism of an alliance leads allies to act more quickly than non-allies. We therefore expect:

Hypothesis 2B: States allied to one of the disputants through a defensive alliance will join an ongoing conflict more quickly than states with a neutrality agreement.

Joint Democracy

Joint democracy between the third party and each disputant also affects conflict expansion (Hammarström and Heldt 2002). Werner and Lemke (1997) show that, in addition to geographic and alliance considerations, a third party’s institutional similarities with the disputants have important implications for the
expansion of conflict. Institutional similarity impacts conflict expansion in two ways. The first is on the side of the initiator. Gartner and Siverson (1996) suggest there is a selection effect from democratic initiator’s strategic choice of targets. They suggest that democracies win the conflicts they fight because they choose conflicts in which third-party intervention is unlikely. Because democracies are more selective in choosing conflicts we expect that:

Hypothesis 3A: Conflicts involving democratic initiators should be less likely to expand.

The second impact of institutional similarity involves conflict expansion on the target side. If democracies are more likely to form alliances with one another (Siverson and Emmons 1991), then democracies should be more likely to honor their alliance commitments. A psychological dimension also exists (Hermann and Kegley 1995), as the similarity of domestic institutions affects foreign policy decisions by psychological and interest-based means (Werner and Lemke 1996, 1997). Lake (1992) also suggests that one possible explanation as to why democracies win the majority of wars they fight is that democratic states form coalitions against other, nondemocratic states.

Hypothesis 3B: Conflicts involving democratic targets expand more quickly than those involving nondemocratic targets.

Furthermore, institutional similarity may also impact the role that geographic proximity and alliances play in conflict expansion. Democratic states that are distant or unallied have greater decision latitude than proximate allies and are therefore more likely to wait to join. We should therefore expect to find that:

Hypothesis 3C: The more democratic states that either border a disputant or are allied to one of the disputants, the more quickly the conflict will expand.

Finally, we anticipate that democratic potential joiners will join a conflict involving a democratic disputant more quickly than those not involving either a democratic initiator or target. This expectation, like our expectation that conflicts involving democratic targets expand quickly, is related to the high rate at which democracies honor alliance commitments (Hermann and Kegley 1995) and the psychological impact of joint democracy on foreign policy decisions (Werner and Lemke 1996, 1997).

Hypothesis 3D: Democratic potential joiners will join conflicts more quickly if one of the disputants is also democratic.
Power

The realist tradition highlights how power and the relative strength of each side of a conflict can expand a dispute. Initiators can account for powerful states that may join the target and expand the dispute. Power is at the same time associated with both increased opportunity and increased commitments. Major powers that are distant or unallied have high decision latitude and are therefore more likely to wait to join. However, bordering major powers, or major powers with defensive alliance commitments, are more likely to join a conflict. We therefore expect to find that:

Hypothesis 4A: Major powers that border a disputant or are allied to one of the disputants will join an ongoing conflict more quickly than less powerful states.

More importantly, however, whether states are likely to join is based on providing a material advantage to the disputant. We anticipate that states are more likely to join conflicts when they can provide a material advantage. Conversely, states are less likely to join a conflict when their material contribution is unlikely to alter the outcome or perhaps even be at a disadvantage. Werner and Lemke (1997) show that power asymmetries between the disputants impact third-party decisions to join a conflict. Powerful states also have more decision latitude. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4B: More powerful states will join an ongoing conflict more quickly than less powerful states.

We argue that conflict expansion is best examined by accounting for both whether and when a dispute is likely to expand and subsequently when individual states are likely to join. We suggest that whether a dispute expands originates not just from the relationship between the initial disputants but also the relationship between the third party and the disputants. We expect to find conflict expansion is anticipated when the relationship the disputants and third parties is characterized by defensive alliances, institutional similarity, and geographic proximity. When these factors are present then outside states will quickly join conflicts. Conversely, weak, nonaligned states that are geographically distant and institutionally dissimilar will allow more time to pass before joining a conflict, if they do so at all.

DATA AND ESTIMATION

To test expectations about both when conflicts are likely to expand and when states are likely to join, we create a data of initial dyadic Militarized
Interstate Dispute (MID) dyads from 1816–1992 (Maoz 2005). We examine MID expansion and joining rather than only wars because doing so would bias our results. Many disputes expand before becoming wars, given that common definitions of war are tied to the 1000 battle-death threshold. This means that, if we only examined wars, conflicts that might expand would be excluded if they do not cross this threshold. By focusing on wars we would be excluding conflicts between democracies given that these conflicts do not reach the 1000 battle-death threshold. Also by focusing only on wars the implications of our results about conflict expansion and state-joining behavior would be limited at best.

However, one problem with most work on joining behavior is that it fails to account for the fact that decisions over joining are based in part on decisions of the initial disputants. By modeling only the decision to join, these studies are biased in that they assume that the decision to join is independent of the decisions over the conflict itself. This creates a sample selection problem in that not all conflicts are likely to be joined and some are likely to be joined more quickly than others. Given that our theoretical expectations account for the possibility that some conflicts are more likely to expand, we must address this problem methodologically as well.

Prior studies, such as Werner and Lemke (1997), employ the dispute triad to address questions of joining. While this is an improvement over earlier research it still does not address the selection problems that might be twofold. First, most disputes do not expand, meaning that not accounting in some way for disputes that are unlikely to ever expand will bias the results downward. Second, do the disputes that do expand do so because of expectations by the initial belligerents that they will expand, or do they do so because of miscalculation? To account for both how quickly any given dispute is likely to expand and then account for how quickly any given state is likely to join, we test the above hypotheses by creating two interdependent datasets, and modeling both the initial conflict expansion phase as well as the individual joining stage.

The first part of our data is a set of all initial dyadic Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) dyads from 1816–1992 (Maoz 2005). We employ the dyadic form of the MID data because we are interested in the relationship between the initial disputants (a relationship that is dyadic in nature), the probability of a given conflict expanding, and third-party potential joiners. Furthermore, we exclude both World Wars from the analysis since the many simultaneously occurring disputes may make it difficult to untangle or isolate casual mechanisms.

Because our hypotheses explain how quickly a conflict will expand and when states will join a conflict, we employ hazard analysis. The dependent
variables measure the time until a conflict expands and then when a state joins an initial participating state in a MID. Using hazard analysis offers several advantages over other estimation techniques. Hazard analysis appropriately deals with censored cases, those in which the dispute continued after the time period of our data, and more importantly, cases in which a state does not join the dispute. The exclusion of censored cases can produce large biases (Allison 1984; Beck 1996). Existing research in conflict expansion reveals this shortcoming, including Siverson and Starr (1991). They employed a Poisson estimation technique to analyze the factors correlated with when states join ongoing conflicts. Their outcome variable is the number of days that elapsed between the start of the war and the time other nations join the war. This measure poses problems since the number of days is censored for any case that continues beyond our observation period. By offering a more appropriate estimation technique, we eliminate such biases.

As noted above, our existing theoretical framework suggests that whether a given state is likely to join a conflict is dependent on the probability that the conflict is likely to expand in the first place. Therefore we recognize that there is a selection effect in predicting whether a state is likely to join a conflict. Because initiators are cognizant of the probability of a conflict expanding, we need to account for this when modeling conflict expansion.

To capture this selection process, we use a two-stage model. As noted above the first model is a dyadic model of conflict expansion. This model accounts for the relationships between the initial disputants (e.g., relative power, contiguity, joint democracy) as well as each disputant’s overall relationships with other states in the international system (e.g., number of defense pacts, number of boarding major powers). The dependent variable in this model is time until conflict expansion with conflict expansion denoted by when the first state joins the conflict.

From this model, we generate a predicted hazard rate of conflict expansion for each dyadic dispute and include this in the second model. The second-stage model examines the specific relationships between each potential joiner in the international system and the initial disputants. The dependent variable is time until each state joins the dispute. However, because the predicted hazard rate is an estimate, we need to account for any uncertainty introduced by this estimate in the model. Therefore, we employ a bootstrap sampling technique, where we estimate the models using a random sampling procedure 1000. We employ a semi-parametric Cox proportional hazard model for both models. This is more flexible than a parametric model, as it makes fewer assumptions about the shape of the baseline hazard rate.

Explanatory Variables

Because alliances, institutions, power, and geography play important roles in both the initial probability that a dispute expands as well as which states
join and when, we create a series of variables to account for these both in
the dyadic dispute model as well as the potential joining equation. Below
we discuss each of the variables, first discussing those that are related to the
initial dispute and then those that account for potential joiner-belligerent
relationships. We also differentiate between the initiator and the target in
the analysis. We do this both for practical reasons as well as theoretical rea-
sons. For practical reasons, we need to distinguish the initial belligerents on
some dimension. Alternative ways to distinguish the initial disputants could
have been power or possibly revisionist state. We felt that this was the most
appropriate way to distinguish the initial disputant because we anticipate
initiators to be making calculations about whether the conflict is likely to
expand. While we are aware of the criticisms associated with the MID initiation
coding, any problems in the coding between initiator and target should work
against our expectations.

**ALLIANCES**

An alliance between the joiner and a disputant is one factor frequently identi-
ified as central to understanding the diffusion of war (Altfeld and Bueno de
Mesquita 1979; Siverson and King 1980; Siverson and Starr 1991; Morrow
2000). Since these agreements specify the rights and obligations of alliance
members and generate mutual expectations, we argue allies are likely to
quickly join—and research suggests that alliances do provide incentives for an
outsider to join a dispute (Gibler 2000; Morrow 1994; Smith 1996). Information
on defense pacts, neutrality agreements, and ententes is based on the Gibler
and Sarkees alliance data (2004). We create three groups of measures to
account for the impact of alliances on which conflicts expand and who joins.

- Number of Defense Pacts with Target/Initiator, Number of Neutrality Pacts with
  Target/Initiator, and Number of Ententes of with Target/Initiator. These are count
  measures of the number of alliances each initial disputant has by alliance type.

- Alliance Similarity. We include a measure of alliance portfolio similarity
  of the initial disputants, based on a score (Signorino and Ritter 1999). We do
  this because states that share similar alliance portfolios are likely to engage
  in shorter disputes, which should make expansion less likely (Bueno de
  Mesquita et al. 2004).

- Defense with Target/Initiator, Neutrality with Target/Initiator, and Entente
  of with Target/Initiator. These are dichotomous measures of the presence of
each alliance type between a potential joiner and a disputant. The omitted
category for comparison is no alliance.

**DEMOCRACY**

As noted above, ample evidence shows that democratic states act differently
toward one another than they do toward other regimes. Information about
whether or not a state is democratic is based on the Polity index (Marshall and Jaggers 2002).

Democracy, Democratic Target/Initiator. These measures account for whether the potential joiner, the initiator or the target is democratic. Each is coded 1 if the state in question scores greater than 6 on the combined Polity index scale and 0 otherwise.

Joint Democracy. This is a dichotomous measure coded 1 if both the original disputants are democracies and zero otherwise. We account for joint democracy because we anticipate that these should be unlikely to expand since democracies are more selective in conflict choice and since democratic disputes are rather short reducing joining opportunities (Bueno de Mesquita, Koch and Siverson 2004).

Number of Contiguous Democracies–Target/Initiator. This is a count measure of the number of democracies that border the target or the initiator.

Number of Defense Pacts w/ Democracies–Target/Initiator. This is a count measure of the number of democracies that have a defense pact with the target or the initiator. Because democratic states are more reliable allies, we expect the effect of defensive pacts on when states join should be magnified.

Democracy w/ Target/Initiator. These variables measure whether the potential joining state and each side of the dispute form a democratic dyad. Each is coded 1 if the potential joining state and each disputant’s respective scores greater than 6 on the combined Polity index scale and 0 otherwise.

**POWER**

We anticipate that states are more likely to join conflicts in which they can provide a material advantage. Specifically, we anticipate the relative power of the disputants is likely to affect whether a state joins the initiator or target of a given dispute. The more powerful a potential joiner is overall and in comparison to the disputants, the greater its ability to influence outcomes. Information on state capabilities is based on the Correlates of War CINC score (Singer et al. 1972).

Capabilities, Capabilities Initiator/Target. This is a measure of the overall power of the potential joiner, target or initiator.

Capability Ratio. This measures the balance of power between the initial disputants (Bennett 1997). We expect that the more powerful the initiator is to the target, the less likely the conflict is to expand.

Number of Contiguous Major Powers–Initiator/Target. This is a count measure of the number of major powers that border the target or the initiator. We anticipate that geographically close major powers are more likely to intervene and do so more quickly than distant states.

Number of Defense Pacts w/ Major Power–Initiator/Target. This is a count measure of the number of major powers that have a defense pact with the target or the initiator. We anticipate that because major powers
have greater interests and capabilities, the effect of defensive pacts on when states join should be magnified.

Capabilities w/ Target/Initiator. These variables measure the power relations between the potential joiner and the initiator and target states.

**Geographic Proximity**

Proximity to a conflict also affects if and when a conflict expands and the states that join. The closer a state is to either of the disputants, the greater the likelihood of joining either because of interests or because it is easier to affect the outcome (Boulding 1963). We therefore measure the potential joiner state’s distance from the disputing states using the Correlates of War Direct Contiguity measure (Stinnett et al. 2002).

Contiguity. This measures the distance between the initial disputants. Smaller values represent closer distances.

Number of Contiguous States–Initiator/Target. These are count measures of the number of bordering states with the target or the initiator.\(^4\) We expect the more bordering states, the more quickly the conflict should expand because more states should have an interest or be able to influence the outcome.

Contiguity w/ Target/Initiator. This measures distances between the potential joiner and the disputants. The further away the potential joiner, the longer it will take for the state to join.

Finally, we account for the relationships that the potential joiners have with other states outside of the initial belligerents. Rather than trying to create a matrix of n by n that would encompass all states relations with one another, we instead employ Maoz and his coauthors’ (Maoz et al. 2007) measure of shared enmity called *Shared Enmity with Target/Initiator*. The measures account for whether the enemy of my enemy is my friend. We include whether the potential joiner and the initiator or target have shared enemies. We expect that shared enmity should have a positive effect on the time until joining.

**RESULTS**

The first analysis examines which conflicts are likely to expand. Table 1 displays the hazard results of conflict expansion focusing on the initial disputants and their relations with states in the system. The dependent variable is time until conflict expansion.

Focusing on the relations between the two belligerents, if either belligerent is democratic then the conflict will take longer to expand, if it does at

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\(^4\)We code contiguous as either bordering or separated by no more than 150 miles of water.
all. However, the joint democracy measure is not significant. The more powerful the target, regardless of relative power, the less likely the conflict will expand. The more similar their alliance portfolio, the longer it will take if the conflict expands.

In terms of the initiator, only the number of ententes and neutrality agreements are significant, with more neutrality agreements increasing the time until the conflict is likely to expand. Ententes appear to decrease the time until expansion.

In terms of the target, the number of defense pacts, the number of contiguous major powers and the number of defense pacts with major powers all increase the likelihood of conflict expansion, which is what we expected. Interestingly, the number of ententes and the number of defense pacts with democracies increase the time until a state joins. Finally, the measure of bordering states for initiators and targets are not significant.

Table 2 shows the results of the hazard analysis of whether a state joined the dispute, focusing on the relationship between the third party and each disputant. We present confidence intervals rather than standard errors given the boot strapped estimation. Variables with a confidence interval that crosses zero are not significant predictors of joining; we bold significant predictors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Democratic Target</td>
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<td>.013</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Capabilities Initiator</td>
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<td>Capabilities Target</td>
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</table>

$\chi^2=74.64$; Log Likelihood $=−1055.85$; n (observations)=1,766; Robust Standard Errors.

One tailed tests: * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, ***$p<.001$. 
The first thing to note is that, as expected, the predicted hazard of conflict is significant and positive, which helps to account for the relationship between the initial disputants and conflict expansion. The results suggest that potential joiners with a defense pact with the target or the initiator have an increased hazard of joining. However, neither specific ententes nor neutrality agreements affect the hazard of joining. In terms of power, more powerful states are likely to join more quickly and states that are more powerful than the target will join more quickly, which is consistent with the idea that states will join when they can bring material benefits to the ally and aid in the outcome.

Interestingly, only one of the democracy measures is significant. If the potential joining state and target are both democracies, more time will elapse before a state joins a conflict, suggesting that democracies do not aid democratic targets. The contiguity measures suggest that the further away either disputant is from the potential joiner, the longer it will take a state to join. Finally, states with shared enmity to either side have an increased hazard of joining, suggesting that states do survey the larger landscape of relations between states before joining.

One additional question is whether conflict joining generally occurs early after a dispute begins or later in the dispute. One advantage of survival analysis is we answer this question empirically using a different specification. To answer this question we estimated the same models using a Weibull model. The Weibull allows us to directly model duration dependence which in this case is joining more or less likely to occur as the conflict continues.
While not shown the log of the duration parameter is negative and significant indicating that expansion and joining behavior usually occurs early in a conflict and not later.5

Tables 1 and 2 only examined how quickly the conflict expanded but did not examine on which side the conflict expanded or which side a given state joined. Table 3 presents the results of how quickly a conflict expands on the initiator side. Regime type of the initial disputants does not affect conflict expansion on the initiator side. However, power relations do. The greater the capabilities of the initiators, the more quickly states will join that side. Conversely, the more powerful the target or the more powerful the initiator is to the target, the longer it will be until the conflict expands on the initiator side.

Of the alliance measures, only ententes with the initiator have any statistical affect on whether a state joins the initiator. Contiguous democracies

5Because the parameter estimates of the Weibull model are almost identical to those of the Cox model we show only Cox results. Results are available from the authors.
and democracies that have defense pacts with the initiator will join the initiator more quickly. Interestingly, a higher number of contiguous major powers that have defense pacts with the target increases the hazard of joining the initiator.

Table 4 examines which states are likely to join the initiator quickly. The first thing to note is that the predicted hazard is not significant. This suggests that joining the initiator is not tied to the probability that the dyadic conflict will expand. States with any type of alliance with the initiator will join the conflict more quickly than unaligned states. States with a defense alliance with the target also have an increased hazard of joining the initiator. If the target and the potential joiner are both democratic then the potential joiner will take longer than average to join. The further away a state is from either the initiator or the target, the longer it will take to join the initiator. Finally, states that have shared enmity with the initiator have a higher hazard of joining the initiator.

Table 5 presents the results of how quickly a conflict expands on the target side. The hazard of a conflict expanding on the target side decreases if either disputant is democratic. Also, the more states that are contiguous with the initiator, the longer it will take for the conflict to expand on the target side. The more defense pacts a target has, the more quickly the conflict will expand on the target side. The more contiguous major powers to the target, the more quickly the conflict will expand. The more defense pacts with major powers that a target has, the less time a conflict goes on before the
Table 5 presents the hazard results of states that are likely to join the target. The predicted hazard is positive and significant, suggesting a relationship between the initial dyadic dispute and who joins. As expected, defensive alliances with the target increase the hazard of a state joining the target. State commitments to targets appear to be upheld. Power relations with the initiator and target also increase the hazard of joining the target. Also, the more powerful the potential joiner, the less time a conflict goes on before they join the target. This suggests that powerful states or states with greater decision latitude, both in absolute and relative terms, are more likely to join quickly. Joint democracy between the potential joiner and target decreases the hazard of joining as does shared enmity with the initiator. However, shared enmity with the target increases the hazard of joining. Finally, the further away a state is, the less likely it is to quickly joining a conflict.

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$\chi^2=119.28; \text{Log Likelihood} = -558.35; n_{(\text{observations})}=1,766; \text{Robust Standard Errors.}$

One tailed tests: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. 
DISCUSSION

While the results confirmed most of our hypotheses, they did not conform to all of our expectations. Hypothesis 1a and 1b tested expectations about the connection between bordering states and how quickly conflicts expand. While the results show that potential joiners that are closer to the disputants joined more quickly, the greater the number of border states, the more slowly a conflict expands. This might be due to buck-passing, as the greater the number of potential interveners, the less willing any one state is to intervene.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b specify our expectations about the role of alliances and conflict expansion. In the expansion stage, only the number of target defensive alliances was significant. This is consistent with the resolve argument. The greater the number of defensive alliances a state has, the more likely an initiator should expect conflict expansion. At the joining level, defensive alliances increased the hazard for joining both initiators and targets, while all alliance types increased the hazard of a state joining the initiator.

Of the four hypotheses tied to democracy and regime similarity, only one of them was fully confirmed while another was partially confirmed. Conflicts involving democratic initiators expand more slowly than conflicts involving nondemocratic initiators. But conflicts involving democratic targets take longer than expected to expand.
Similarly, when examining expansion on the initiator side, the more democracies bordering the initiator and the more defense pacts an initiator has with democracies, the more quickly the conflict expands. However, the opposite is true for democracy and targets: the more democratic defense pacts a target has, the slower expansion is. More interesting is that across all the models, if a target and potential joiner are jointly democratic, the hazard of joining decreases for that state, which contradicts hypothesis 3D.

Finally, hypotheses 4A and 4B were generally confirmed. The more bordering major powers around a target, the more quickly the conflict will expand, which is expected. The more defensive alliances with major powers, the more quickly the conflict will expand. This is also consistent with the resolve argument. We expect that bordering major powers and major powers that are allied with the target should be credible in their threats, meaning that conflict expansion should be expected. In terms of who joins, powerful states join quickly, and the greater the capability of the joiner in comparison to the target and the initiator, the more likely that state will join.

It also appears that in addition to relationships that states have with one another, indirect relationships are also important to conflict expansion. The enmity measures were significant in all of the models. The only insignificant measure was the enmity with the target in the initiator conflict expansion model. Overall, the results suggest that states do account for the relationships that states have with other parties when deciding if and when to intervene.

Finally, the predicted hazard was significant in two of the three models. We view this as an indication that a third party’s decision to join a conflict is affected by the initiator’s choice of target. That is to say, conflict expansion is not necessarily unexpected, but is often anticipated by initiators. Perhaps the most surprising finding is that if unexpected joining occurs at all, it takes place on the side of the initiator. States may initiate disputes that they think they can fight on their own, but other states may unexpectedly come to their aid.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Our findings have several important implications for the existing theories and approaches to conflict expansion. By unifying the literatures with implications for the timing of joining behavior, we are able to assess how conflict expansion is related to the initiator’s decisions to fight or not. Our findings offer support for the extended deterrence literature and the work that examines the actors that are likely to join. Alliance type and power relations have a significant effect on when states are likely to join a
dispute. Like Werner and Lemke (1997), we find power considerations and alliances are important predictors of joining behavior. The results imply that timely conflict expansion, more often than not, is expected by initiators and is not the result of miscalculation, as Gartner and Siverson argue (1996). Alliances and power, both of which are visible signals of likely expansion, decrease the time to conflict expansion. It is unlikely that initiators do not account for these factors in estimating if their target will get aid. Rather, it seems that states are so resolved that they attack despite a credible threat that the conflict will expand. This finding is in line with previous findings on the relationship between alliances and conflict expansion (Altfeld and Bueno de Mesquita 1979; Siverson and King 1980; Siverson and Starr 1991; Morrow 2000).

Our findings also have implications for the literature on democratic coalition formation (Lake 1992). Conflicts that involve democracies take much more time to expand, regardless of whether it is the initiator or the joiner that is democratic. This finding supports Gartner and Siverson’s (1996) suggestion that democracies win the conflicts they fight because they choose conflicts in which third-party intervention is unlikely. Conversely, the finding on democracies contradicts much of the existing literature on conflict expansion (Werner and Lemke 1996, 1997; Hammarström and Heldt 2002; Heldt and Hammarström 2002).

An additional interesting finding involves the role bordering states play in conflict expansion. We find that the more states that border a conflict, the more time it takes for the conflict to expand. This contradicts much of the literature on the role of geographic proximity and conflict expansion (Siverson and Starr 1991). This is likely not because bordering states wish to see the conflict continue, but rather that collective action problems arise when many states share the same policy views (Gent 2007).

Also consistent with much of the existing research is our finding that power matters (Werner and Lemke 1996). We find that power magnifies the effects of treaties, such that powerful allies join an ongoing conflict more quickly than weak allies. We also find that strong states generally join conflicts more quickly than do weak ones and that the stronger a potential joiner is relative to each of the disputants, the more quickly it will join.

Our model also accounts for endogeneity between the onset of conflict and the decision by actors to join a dispute. By building a model of conflict expansion and joining we can be confident that we have alleviated some of the selection problems associated with prior work such as the assumption that each conflict has the same probability of expanding. We also make an effort to account for the strategic environment in which states act (Croco and Teo 2005; Findley and Teo 2006). Future research should work to further incorporate how the joining decisions of other states impacts conflict expansion.
However, even our model falls short of fully capturing the dynamics between conflict onset, expansion, and who joins between multiple states over multiple iterations. Specifically, our model does not capture disputes that begin among multiple parties and, as mentioned before, does not capture decisions to aid other states short of military interventions such as boycotting a belligerent or giving greater access to resources which may substitute for directly participating.

Finally, this paper highlights the need to further investigate not only who joins but whether and how quickly a given conflict is likely to expand if at all. Does miscalculation or resolve hasten the onset of conflict expansion? Under what conditions do these mechanisms work and how can we best model these?

REFERENCES


### APPENDIX: SUMMARY STATISTICS

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<th>N</th>
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<th>SD</th>
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<th>Max.</th>
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