

Politically Motivated Opposition to War¹

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Ever since Thucydides suggested that the Athenian expedition to conquer Sicily in 415 BC was driven in part by Alcibiades' attempt to use a foreign victory to promote his own political fortunes (Thucydides 1996:Book VI), observers have noted attempts by political elites to bolster their domestic positions through adventurous foreign policies and wars. Shakespeare suggested to statesmen that "Be it thy course to busy giddy minds/With foreign quarrels," and Bodin argued that "the best way of preserving a state, and guaranteeing it against sedition, rebellion, and civil war is to . . . find an enemy against whom [the subjects] can make common cause" (cited in Levy 1989). The tendency for foreign crises and wars to generate "rally-'round-the-flag" effects that increase popular support for political leaders is often explained in terms of the "in-group/out-group"(or "conflict-cohesion") hypothesis (Coser 1956). Conflict with an out-group increases the cohesion of the in-group and support for the group leader. Anticipating this, leaders beset by domestic problems may be tempted to engage in hostile action against an external adversary.

The "diversionary theory of war" is now a major research program in the field, and a good example of how a combination of statistical, formal-theoretic, and case study research can contribute significantly to the cumulation of knowledge. The theory posits strategic behavior by the governing elite and a nearly automatic surge of popular enthusiasm and support, but gives little, if any, attention to the role of organized political opposition to the government.² In focusing on the political incentives of the government and neglecting those of the opposition, scholars have missed an important implication of diversionary theory. Just as political leaders sometimes use military force to advance their domestic interests, the domestic opposition sometimes actively opposes war and tries to prevent the government from initiating it because the opposition expects to suffer politically from the government's diplomatic or military success.

Many liberal opponents of British imperialism in the late nineteenth century believed that imperial victories were really defeats because they reinforced the power of the aristocracy and weakened forces that supported social reform. Richard Cobden, reflecting this view, proclaimed: "Let John Bull have a great military triumph, and we shall have to take off our hats as we pass the Horse Guards for the rest of our lives" (quoted in Snyder 1991:184). The idea that military victories can be defeats in disguise is reflected in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's (1974:272) statement that "governments need victories and the people need defeats."

In the July 1914 crisis, Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza initially opposed a war against Serbia because he feared that in the context of an ongoing struggle for

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²Some have recognized the utility of scapegoating as an instrument of intra-elite competition (Lebow 1981) or as a means to unify the elite internally (Levy and Vakili 1992).

power with Austria within the Dual Monarchy, a war against Serbia would lead to the further centralization of power in Vienna. He feared that the political influence of the Magyars would be further weakened by the territorial annexations that would invariably follow from a victorious war and that would bring additional Slavs into the empire. Tisza also worried that the incorporation of the new territories might give added impetus to the “trialist” proposal of incorporating the Southern Slavs as a third ruling group, further marginalizing the Magyars. Significantly, Tisza agreed to support war only after the Austrians agreed to a declaration that they would seek no territorial annexations (Albertini 1980:13, 175).

We are not suggesting that all opposition to war is politically motivated. Groups may oppose war because they believe that war would be unnecessary or counter-productive, immoral or unjust, harmful to national security or domestic liberties, or too costly in human and economic terms. We focus on partisan political interest because it has been neglected in the literature and because recent treatments (Schultz 1998, 2001) focus on opposition to wars that are expected to be unsuccessful and unpopular, not those expected to be successful and popular. We demonstrate that if opposition leaders fear that a military victory might strengthen the elite in power and weaken their own position, and if they believe that they have a good chance of preventing the government from going to war, they might actively oppose war.

Although there is a substantial literature on political oppositions in American politics and comparative politics (Dahl 1966, 1973; McLennan 1973), it gives little, if any, attention to the role of oppositions in foreign policy. International relations scholars have only recently begun to examine the role and impact of oppositions. Joe Hagan (1987, 1993, 2004) defines and categorizes different types of oppositions and explores the nature of oppositions in different types of regimes, but he is less interested in the question of the strategic calculus of opposition groups in decisions for war and peace. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman (1990) look at the impact of the opposition in the adversary’s regime on crisis bargaining, but treat the opposition as a nonstrategic actor who attempts to exploit popular dissatisfaction with war. James Fearon (1994) incorporates domestic factors into a model of crisis bargaining, but in the form of audience costs, not as a formal opposition that behaves strategically, and Kurt Gaubatz (1997) focuses on the conditions under which domestic actors have incentives to share power. Kenneth Schultz’s (1998, 2001) signaling model of the impact of democratic institutions on crisis bargaining is the most relevant for our question of the strategic calculus of politically motivated opposition to war.

We begin with some preliminary conceptual issues, and then turn to Schultz’s model of oppositions, governments, and foreign adversaries. We then explore the cost-benefit calculus of oppositions and identify the conditions under which they are likely to oppose war, giving some attention to the implications of these dynamics for interactions with adversaries.

Preliminary Conceptual Considerations

We define political opposition as a group or collection of groups that often engages in the activity of opposing the government’s policies or leadership or the state’s political system. We distinguish the opposition-as-group from the activity of opposing the government’s policies, which is one of many choices open to an opposition group at a particular time. We also distinguish the opposition’s preferences over outcomes from the strategies they adopt to advance their interests. Oppositions may prefer the status quo to war, but conclude that a strategy of opposing war is too risky politically.

Opposition groups can be organized around a political party, factions within a party, pressure groups, ethnic or religious groups, or federal or sectional divisions

(Hagan 1993:78–89). The opposition is often not monolithic but may include a number of different groups, each with its own grievances and with divergent interests and policy preferences. In order to influence decisions regarding war and peace, however, these groups usually have to form a coalition, and for simplicity we often speak of a single opposition.³

Oppositions have a wide range of goals, which include changing government policies, removing the current government from power, changing the structure of power within the current political system, and overturning the political system and its associated social and economic structure (Hagan 1993:Ch. 3). The first two are nonstructural oppositions, the third is limited structural opposition (or political reformism), and the fourth is a major structural opposition (Dahl 1966:342, 1973).

We need to be more precise about exactly the kinds of military strategies the opposition might want to prevent the government from undertaking and the strategies oppositions adopt to achieve their goals. Oppositions may oppose war, limited uses of force short of war, military buildups or alliance formation, or belligerent or imperial foreign policies, any of which might generate domestic political benefits for the governing elite. There is no clear pattern of preferences for these different policies, given uncertainties about the likely consequences of various strategies. If oppositions want to prevent war from occurring, they may oppose a military buildup for fear of triggering a conflict spiral that escalates to war. An alternative strategy is to support a military buildup (or military threats) in the hope that these actions would deter war. Federalists initially followed the latter strategy in the three years leading up to the War of 1812, but ultimately opposed war after a coercive strategy failed to modify British behavior (Mabe and Levy 1999).

Oppositions have several strategies or combinations of strategies at their disposal. Sometimes they adopt a sequence of strategies over time, as illustrated by the above-mentioned 1812 example. Sometimes they combine strategies. In the United States' 1990–1991 Persian Gulf War, for example, and then again in the 2003 Iraq War, many Democrats went on record opposing war but ultimately voted to give the president the authority to use military force if necessary. After a war is underway, those who opposed war often support it (but not always, as suggested by the Federalists in 1812), in part because of the political costs of doing otherwise. Oppositions can couple their support with criticisms of the government's particular conduct of the war and its failure to try hard enough to secure a negotiated settlement, as illustrated by the opposition's behavior during much of the Vietnam War and particularly the 2003 Iraq War. Such combined strategies complicate any attempt to construct and validate general theoretical propositions about the behavior of oppositions on issues of war and peace.⁴

The Opposition's Strategic Calculus

We now explore the primary factors influencing the opposition's decision regarding whether or not to support the government's threat to initiate the use of force against an external adversary. We begin by summarizing Schultz's (2001) model of the interaction among leaders, oppositions, and adversaries. It is the most rigorous and systematic treatment to date of the strategic calculus facing oppositions (see also Trager 2004) and provides a useful point of departure for our own analysis.

³How different groups that oppose war for different reasons form coalitions against war is an interesting question for future research.

⁴Still another strategy, applicable in situations where the government is considering a military buildup or the use of limited coercive force against the adversary, is for oppositions to outbid the government by calling for an escalation in the use of violence, hoping to generate their own rally effects. Outbidding strategies are common themes in the literatures on ethnic conflict and terrorism (Bloom 2004); they may also apply to relationships between states that compete for ideological legitimacy and face a common foe (Christensen 2004).

Schultz's Model of Leaders, Oppositions, and Crisis Bargaining

Schultz (1998, 2001) develops a model of crisis bargaining between a democratic initiator and an external adversary of unspecified regime type. Defining democracy in terms of public competition for office involving a legitimate opposition party, Schultz assumes that the opposition has access to the same information available to the government and that both are purely office-seeking, which creates a zero-sum competition for power between government and opposition. He also assumes that public support for the government is enhanced by successful foreign policies, including diplomatic or military victories, but diminished by foreign policy and military failures. The second point builds on substantial evidence that political leaders, and particularly democratic leaders, are likely to be removed from office after military defeats (Goemans 2000; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003).

Once a government makes a military threat in support of a demand of an external adversary, it has an incentive to bluff by exaggerating the likelihood that it will implement the threat. Whether or not the opposition supports the government depends on its expectations regarding the outcome of a war. If the opposition expects a successful and popular war, it has incentives to support the government in a crisis and thus reap some of the political benefits from any successful outcome while avoiding the costs of being on the wrong side of a foreign policy success. If the opposition expects an unsuccessful and unpopular war, however, it has incentives to go on record as opposing war in order to exploit the popular discontent that is expected to follow from a negative war outcome.

The adversary understands that the opposition has the same information as the government regarding relative military capabilities and, hence, the likely outcome of any confrontation as well as that the opposition will usually support the government if and only if it expects a positive outcome for the country. Thus the opposition's behavior sends a credible signal of the government's likely intentions. If the opposition supports the government in a crisis, it reflects expectations of a successful and popular military outcome. It also means that the country will be unified behind the war effort. Both increase the likelihood that the government will stand firm and implement the threat; in anticipation of this result the adversary is less likely to stand firm itself. If the opposition does not support the government, the adversary infers that the opposition, and hence the government, expects an unsuccessful or otherwise unpopular war that will hurt the government politically, as well as that the country will be weakened by its internal divisions, so that the government is less willing and less able to fight a war. In anticipation, the adversary is more likely to stand firm and resist the threat; the government, which understands this, refrains from threatening the adversary in the first place.

In either case, whether the opposition exerts a "confirming effect" that enhances the credibility of the government's threat where it intends to implement the threat or a "restraining effect" that provides disincentives for the government to bluff when it expects a negative outcome and active opposition at home, the opposition's behavior sends a credible signal about the government's likely behavior. This reduces the level of "private information" between initiator and external adversary and consequently reduces the probability of war (Fearon 1995). Authoritarian states, defined in part by the absence of public contestation for political office and of the free flow of information, lack the ability to send credible signals of the government's intentions. This leads to higher levels of private information and consequently to a higher probability of crisis initiation and escalation to war.

These dynamics result in a number of important hypotheses. States with democratic institutions are less likely than other states to bluff in crises, less likely to make military threats unless they are prepared to carry out those threats, and hence less likely than nondemocratic states to initiate militarized interstate disputes. Once it makes a threat, however, a democratic state is more likely to stand firm and

resort to force unless its adversary backs down. Another implication is that active opposition to war during international crises is relatively rare in democratic states. Oppositions will normally form if and only if war is likely to lead to unsuccessful or unpopular outcomes, which are precisely the conditions under which democratic governments are unlikely to initiate military threats given their understanding that their bluffs will be countered by the opposition and resisted by external adversaries.

Schultz's (2001) model has been very influential, but it is based on some simplifying assumptions that significantly limit its range of applicability. We are particularly concerned about the assumptions that the opposition cannot prevent war; that the government benefits from war only through successful outcomes benefiting the country as a whole, and that there are no private goods available to the government independent of the collective goods of the country; that the government and the opposition appeal to the same bloc of votes; and that the government and the opposition have access to the same information.⁵

In the following discussion we show how the relaxation of these assumptions leads to a different strategic calculus for the opposition with different implications for bargaining with adversaries. This is primarily a hypothesis-generating exercise illustrated with a variety of historical examples from different periods. We recognize that our hypotheses must ultimately be tested against the evidence and against Schultz's hypotheses, but space does not allow that here.

The opposition's decision on whether or not to actively oppose war depends on a fairly straightforward cost-benefit calculus, though one that is fraught with considerable risks and uncertainties. The ultimate criterion is whether the expected utility of opposing war is greater than the expected utility of supporting the government and the war effort. The expected utility of a war-opposing strategy is a function of the expected probability of successfully blocking war, the expected benefits of that outcome, and the expected costs of a failed effort to block war. The expected utility of a strategy of supporting the government is a function of the likely outcome of the war and the public's response to it, the effect of the war on the internal balance of power between government and opposition, and the opposition's expectations regarding what the government intends to do with its enhanced power.

This framework is very general and can be applied to oppositions in nearly any type of regime, including authoritarian regimes (Schapiro 1972; Kinzo 1988), but perhaps excluding strong dictatorships. The framework has the advantage of generality, though we recognize that the costs and benefits of different strategies and the feasibility of blocking war vary across different types of political systems. A more nuanced understanding of these variations will require a more precise specification of the parameters of each type of political system, but we save that for another time. We begin with the government's potential political gains from war.

Calculations of Gains and Losses from War

There are several types of political gains that the government might reap from war. First, if the state wins the war and if the country benefits from war, the government will earn more credit than the opposition will, even if the opposition supports the war from the outset. These are the types of gains that Schultz (2001) incorporates into his model and that lead him to argue that the opposition nearly always supports a war that it expects to be successful and popular. Similarly, expectations of an

⁵Another issue is the conceptualization of successful and unsuccessful outcomes. Outcomes that are successful in terms of military victory may not necessarily be politically beneficial if they involve large numbers of casualties as Mueller (1973) demonstrates in his studies of public support for the president during the American wars in Korea and Vietnam. We thank John Vasquez for emphasizing this point.

unsuccessful and unpopular war usually lead the opposition to go on record opposing war in order to exploit the anticipated popular discontent with the war.⁶

A second kind of gain for the government derives from rally-'round-the-flag effects, from a systematic tendency for publics in both democratic and nondemocratic states to respond to a foreign policy crisis or war by rallying around the political leadership (Mueller 1973; Kernell 1978; Levy 1989). Rally effects pose a potential problem for Schultz's (2001) analysis. If war always generates rally effects and if oppositions always support the government, then the opposition's behavior would not convey useful information to the adversary because it would not discriminate between those situations in which the government is likely to implement its threat and those in which it is bluffing.

Schultz (2001:72) acknowledges this argument but points to evidence that rally effects tend to be temporary and that their magnitude and duration are reduced if the opposition does not support the government (Brody and Shapiro 1989). This reinforces our argument. If the popularity of war depends on the opposition's behavior and if active opposition to war can reduce the magnitude of the government's political gain from waging war, the opposition may have an incentive to oppose a war that it expects to be popular, not just one that it expects to be unpopular.

Schultz (2001) also argues that political leaders are concerned with their domestic support levels well after the war and not with any temporary wartime rally effects. It may be true that rally effects tend to be temporary on average, but it is also true that the time horizons of political leaders are notoriously short, particularly for democratic regimes where leaders stay in power on average half as long as in nondemocratic regimes (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). While there is reason to believe political leaders understand that foreign policy crises almost always generate rally effects, it is less clear whether leaders understand that rally effects tend to be short-lived on average and whether they base their behavior on such short-term rally effects or on their long-term expectations regarding the public's response to war. These are all empirical questions, but we have little evidence as to whether political leaders anticipate rally effects or how long such effects will last, what leaders' own time horizons are, how much influence they give to rally effects in their decisions for war or peace, and how opposition leaders react.

Whatever the magnitude and duration of rally effects, and whatever incentives they create for governments and oppositions, there are other domestic consequences of war that are more permanent and that result in potentially farreaching and long-lasting political gains to the government in power. These include the increase in extractive capacity that the state needs to compete militarily and the actions that the government can take deliberately to weaken the opposition and solidify its own hold on power, such as the suppression of dissent. Moreover, even if rally effects are temporary, political leaders can take advantage of the temporary windows of opportunity they generate to adopt policies or institute structural reforms that have significant long-term consequences for the domestic balance of power but that the government might not have been able to implement in the absence of war.

The government's ability to take such actions depends in part on the institutional structure of the state and the prevailing political culture and norms governing government-opposition relations. The exploitation of rally effects and the opposition's fears of such exploitation are undoubtedly much greater in nondemocratic states, where there are fewer guarantees of minority rights. Such fears may even be present in democratic states, especially in newly established democracies, where a

⁶These patterns are consistent with the argument made by Vasquez (1985) that successful wars benefit hardliners whereas unsuccessful wars benefit accommodationists.

culture of trust between competing parties and factions is often slow to emerge (Snyder 2000) and where political leaders sometimes use war to rationalize the imposition of a “state of emergency,” even to the point of suspending or delaying elections that might threaten their hold on power (Keen 2000).

Consider the behavior of the Republicans during the United States’ “Quasi-War” crisis with France in 1798. President Adams and the Federalists pushed for war, but Republicans opposed war. They feared that it would be popular and that it would provide the Federalists the opportunity to curtail public dissent and, in particular, impair their ability to return to political power (DeConde 1966:68). Similarly, the Federalists opposed war in 1812 in part because they feared that the Republican government would use the opportunity of war to further weaken the Federalists. While there are other possible explanations for Federalist opposition to war in 1812—based on commercial, military, ideational, and sectional interests—partisan political interests dominated (Mabe and Levy 1999). In addition, there is ample evidence that the Federalists’ opposition was based on the fears of the consequences of a popular war rather than the hope of exploiting an unpopular war. They had been consistent in their opposition to war, even in 1808, when “America was almost unanimous [in support of war]” (Adams 1896, quoted in Trager 2004).

The idea that war generates long-lasting institutional changes is central to the literature on the rise of the modern state, which suggests that war and the rapidly changing technology of war in early modern Europe led to the increasing centralization of power in the state in order to create the military strength that was necessary to ensure survival against external enemies (Roberts 1955; Tilly 1975). This involved an increase in both the institutional autonomy and extractive capacity of the state through increased taxation. Huntington (1966:122–123), for example, argues that “the prevalence of war directly promoted political modernization. Competition forced the monarchs to build their military strength. The creation of military strength required national unity, the suppression of regional and religious dissidents, the expansion of armies and bureaucracies, and a major increase in state revenues.”

Many of these same themes appear in the more general literature on state-building and nation-building (Rasler and Thompson 1989), although there is considerable debate as to how closely the patterns identified in Europe are replicated in the Middle East (Barnett 1992; Heydemann 2000), Africa (Herbst 2003), Latin America (Centeno 2002), or elsewhere. The extent to which war leads to an increase in states’ institutional strength and tax revenues and to a shift in the relative power of different actors in society—an important but neglected question (but see some interesting hints in Kiser, Drass, and Brustein 1995)—appears to revolve around whether there are groups that anticipate the negative implications of war for their interests and that attempt to block war where that is a realistic strategy.

One example (from a later period) of the use of the cover of war to enact far-reaching structural change comes from the Dutch Republic in negotiations over the termination of the First Anglo–Dutch Naval War in 1652–1654. Holland accepted England’s demands that the United Provinces agree never to appoint a Prince of Orange as stadtholder (captain-general). Holland agreed to this “Act of Exclusion” only over considerable opposition from the other Dutch provinces, which charged that the Dutch leadership under DeWitt had actually proposed the act itself as a means of limiting the power of the Orangists, who were the primary domestic rival of the commercial oligarchy that ruled the Netherlands since replacing the Orangists in 1648. In fact, there is some evidence of collusion between DeWitt and Cromwell of England to exploit the state of war to institutionalize a significant structural change in the Dutch political system (Rowen 1978:Chs. 10–11; Israel 1995:722–726).

Another common consequence of war or intense international rivalry, familiar to American observers of the “imperial presidency,” is a shift in power away from the

legislative branch toward the executive. One can even find cases in which executives anticipate this consequence and initiate a war in part to help bring it about and where parliaments understand what is at stake and try to block war in order to prevent a shift in power to the executive. In England in 1670, Charles II chose to ally with Louis XIV against the Dutch instead of with the Dutch against the rising French military threat. Jones (1996:15, 179) reflects the consensus among historians in arguing that Charles' primary objective was "to use a victorious war and the French alliance to obtain substantially greater power and authority for the Crown." Members of Parliament understood these dynamics and successfully used their budgetary power to force Charles to end the war against the Dutch in order to prevent a further augmentation of executive power (Lee 1965; Jones 1996).

Another potential source of gains for the government centers on the territorial acquisitions that often follow from a victorious war. In addition to enhancing the power, the resources, and the prestige of the state, new territories often lead to a shift in domestic political power through the incorporation of new peoples or economic resources that benefit one electoral bloc, ethnic group, or region more than others. Under some conditions, the opposition may be tempted to oppose war in an attempt to forestall such a shift in power. One motivation for the Federalists' active opposition to the War of 1812 was the fear that if the United States succeeded in its war objectives and seized Canada or Florida, the incorporation of the new territories into the country would dilute Federalist strength because the new citizens would be most likely to vote Republican (Hickey 1989:161).

Four decades later, many Whigs opposed a war with Mexico despite their expectations of it being a popular war. While some of the Whig opposition was based on the belief that the war was immoral and unjust, much of it was driven by partisan politics and the fear that a successful war would strengthen the Democrats. Northern Whigs feared that the war would bring new territories into the union, that those territories would be slave states, and that the result would be a shift in power away from abolitionists. In addition, both Northern and Southern Whigs feared that the war and subsequent territorial annexations would tear the party apart by raising the issue of slavery, which divided the party and threatened to make it impossible to find a presidential nominee that would appeal to both factions. They hoped that by blocking a war with Mexico they could maintain the unity of the party before presidential elections in 1848. They also campaigned for a "no more territory" strategy, which failed to pass Congress (Schroeder 1973).⁷

These examples of opposition to wars that are expected to be popular run contrary to Schultz's (2001) argument that oppositions normally arise in democratic states only when war is expected to be unpopular. It suggests that the behavior of the opposition does not necessarily convey useful information to the adversary about the likely intentions of the government.

The Expected Probability of Blocking War

If the opposition prefers the status quo to war, its assessment of the probability that it can block war if it attempts to do so is critical. A key assumption in Schultz's (2001) model is that the opposition cannot stop the government from going to war. If the opposition expects that war will be successful and popular and if it cannot prevent the government from implementing its threat and going to war, then it has no political incentive to oppose war because it would suffer a greater political loss by opposing a popular war than by jumping on the bandwagon to support it. But if there is a chance that active opposition might prevent the government from going

⁷The "no more territory" slogan is reminiscent of the "no territorial annexations" demand that Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza made of his Austrian partners in the July 1914 crisis.

to war, then the opposition may be tempted to adopt such a strategy in the hope of denying the government the gains that would follow from a successful war.

The assumption that under certain conditions it is possible for the opposition to prevent the government from going to war is central to our analysis. The feasibility of such a strategy varies with different institutional structures in different political systems, but it can occur in democratic as well as nondemocratic political systems. In the United States, Republican opposition to war against France in 1798 deterred President Adams from submitting his penned declaration of war to Congress, because he feared that the opposition was sufficiently strong to ensure that the motion for war would fail (DeConde 1966:68). We noted earlier that Hungarian Premier Tisza succeeded in temporarily blocking a decision for war against Serbia until he could be assured that the war would not bring additional Slavic territories into the Dual Monarchy.

The probability that the opposition can block war if it attempts to do so depends on a number of factors, including the institutional structure of the political system, the nature of sectional or ethnic cleavages, and, in democratic states, the distribution of voter preferences. Space constraints preclude a full analysis here, but let us suggest some tentative hypotheses.

In terms of institutional structure, the extreme end of the spectrum is represented by eighteenth-century Poland, where the Sejm (Polish parliament) was governed by the “*Liberum veto*,” which gave each member of the Sejm a veto over any particular policy decision, including a decision for war (Davies 1982:345). Leaving this rather idiosyncratic case aside, we would expect oppositions to war to be most powerful in federal systems consisting of two or more units, whether defined on the basis of territory or ethnic/religious identity (the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, for example). The fear that war might lead to a shift in the internal balance of power—whether by enhancing the power of the dominant group as a result of the centralization of power in the state or by shifting the economic or demographic balance as a result of incorporating new territories—may lead one unit to oppose war and the other to hold back or compromise, either because it needs the military or economic strength of the other to prevail in war or because it highly values the maintenance of the federal system. To say that oppositions are most powerful in such systems does not necessarily mean that they are most likely to arise, because their very power may deter the leading faction from taking actions that would be likely to provoke such opposition.

We would also expect that the ability of an opposition to block war might be high in any coalition government composed of autonomous actors that cannot make government policy and commit state resources without the concurrence of other units (Hagan 1993; Hermann 2001). In coalition parliamentary governments, and especially where the coalition is fragile, parliamentary executives must worry that defiance of the opposition runs the risk of a loss of support that could bring down the government and force a risky election, or that coalition partners might use their leverage to link support for war to other policy issues (Auerswald 1999:477–478).

Opposition to war is less likely to arise in majority parliamentary governments, where the majority presumably shares similar preferences as the prime minister they selected. The prime minister’s position is more secure, and the majority party faces substantial risks of losing its majority status if it brings down the government and forces new elections. Opposition to war is even less likely to succeed in blocking it in strong presidential systems (the French Fifth Republic, for example), where the executive has greater autonomy from the legislature in the conduct of military operations and where the executive is not held accountable until the next election. As David Auerswald (1999:479) argues, “executives in these governments have almost unlimited discretion to become involved in and conduct military operations.”

Weak presidential systems (the United States, for example) provide somewhat greater opportunities for successful oppositions given the lesser autonomy of the

executive, but much depends on the distribution of voter preferences and the extent of sectional or ethnic cleavages. If the distribution of voter preferences is essentially unimodal and there are no significant sectional or ethnic cleavages, both the party in power and the opposition aim their policies at the median voter (Downs 1957:121–122). This creates few incentives for the opposition to oppose a war that it expects to be popular.

The assumption that the government and opposition compete for a homogeneous bloc of votes may not be valid in a multiparty system where the distribution of voter preferences tends to be polymodal (Downs 1957:121–122) or in a two-party system with sharp cleavages along sectional or ethnic lines. The party in power and the opposition both have incentives to advocate policies that appeal to their respective political constituencies and to differentiate themselves on key issues. In such systems, the opposition may have incentives to oppose a war that it expects will be popular with the electorate as a whole but unpopular with its constituents. These incentives may be reinforced if differentiation along ethnic or sectional lines facilitates the government's ability to discriminate against these groups and if the opposition fears that the government will use its increased legitimacy from a successful war to further weaken them.

The existence of sectional cleavages in the United States was an important factor contributing to the rise of substantial political opposition against the Quasi-War with France in 1798 and against the War of 1812. In the latter, Federalists opposed a war they expected would be popular with the electorate as a whole because they believed it would be unpopular with their constituents who were concentrated in New England. These considerations lead Robert Trager (2004) to conclude that the Federalists opposed war because they knew that “if they did not differentiate themselves on this issue dimension, they would have no chance of influence in national politics.”

Informational Asymmetries

Our analysis thus far is based on the assumption that the opposition has access to the same information as the government in democratic systems. This assumption is critical for Schultz's (2001) model of crisis bargaining. If oppositions did not have access to the same information, external adversaries could not assume that the behavior of the opposition conveyed any useful information about the likely intentions of the government. Different behavior might simply reflect different expectations based on different information.

Information that shapes estimates about the likely outcome of war is particularly important, because it influences estimates of the public's likely response to the war, the likely gains and losses from war, and the likelihood that active opposition would succeed in blocking war. Such information includes calculations of the dyadic balance of power between the state and the adversary, new military technologies and how they might impact the conduct of war, and the likely resolve of the adversary. It also includes the government's war aims and military strategy, which can have a significant impact on the outcome of the war.

It is undoubtedly true that oppositions have access to more information in democratic systems than they do in nondemocratic systems, but that access may not be adequate to guarantee that their assessments of the likely outcome and popularity of the war will approximate those of the government. The opposition's lack of access to classified information, along with the government's incentives to withhold or distort information, may lead to a significant gap between the information base and expectations of the government and of the opposition.

Two of the most common forms of misrepresentation of information by governments are their exaggeration of the likelihood that a limited use of force will be sufficient to coerce the adversary into backing down and their underestimation of

both the likelihood that more extensive military actions will be necessary and that the conflict will escalate in intensity or scope. If the opposition believes that the limited use of force will be sufficient to achieve policy goals and if the opposition prefers limited action to the status quo but prefers the status quo to an expanded military action, then the distorted information would increase the probability that the opposition would support military action. If the opposition supports war based on incomplete or distorted information relative to that held by the government, then the opposition's behavior does not convey useful information to the adversary. Conversely, if oppositions believe that governments occasionally mislead them about the likely costs of war and probability of victory, oppositions may sometimes oppose wars that the government accurately expects to win with low costs, in which case opposition to the war effort is not an informative signal about the government's resolve for war.

Consider the Israeli decision for war in Lebanon in 1982. The Israeli government wanted a large-scale invasion of Lebanon, one that would capture parts of Beirut and cut the Beirut-Damascus Highway with the aim of expelling Syrian and Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) forces from Lebanon. That plan was firmly blocked by Labor party leaders, who gave qualified support to an alternative plan for a more limited military operation twenty-five miles into Lebanon.⁸ The Likud government, which had deceived the Labor opposition about its intentions in order to win support for a more limited incursion (Feldman and Rechnitz-Kijner 1984; Inbar 1991:124), escalated the war four days later by sending Israeli Defense Forces across the initial twenty-five-mile limit and toward Beirut and its main road link to Damascus. The Labor party eventually came out against the larger war; indeed, it is quite unlikely that Labor would have supported even a limited military operation into Lebanon if it had known that the government planned all along to escalate the war.

Many have argued that the Bush administration deceived the American public and the Democratic opposition regarding the likelihood that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) prior to the 2003 war (Clarke 2004; Kaufman 2004; Woodward 2004) and that this information played a critical role in inducing many members of Congress to support the war. Whatever the source of the exaggeration of the threat from Iraq,⁹ it is true many Democrats (and some Republicans) subsequently stated quite unambiguously (admittedly, in a highly charged political atmosphere) that if had they known Iraq did not possess WMD, they would not have supported the war. Whether a more substantial Democratic opposition to war would have altered the Bush administration's policies, if only in the direction of making a greater effort to ensure the support of its allies or the United Nations, remains open to question.

Even if we leave aside the question of deception by the government, we should note that having access to the same information does not imply identical interpretations of that information. There is substantial evidence to suggest that people with different worldviews and different policy agendas will interpret the same information in different ways, given the cognitive and affective biases that shape information processing (Jervis 1976). The greater the divergence in the beliefs of the government and the opposition, the more likely they are to interpret the same information differently. Thus it is not surprising that Democrats and Republicans had different interpretations of information released during US government

⁸Labor leaders, in this case, were motivated primarily by national interest considerations rather than by partisan politics (Yaniv 1987:120).

⁹The deception hypothesis fails to acknowledge that the strategic deception of others is often difficult to distinguish from self-deception driven by motivated biases (Jervis 1976; Levy 2003). It is possible that strong preferences for war led Bush (and many others) to interpret inherently ambiguous information in a way that supported his preexisting policy preferences.

hearings on the September 11 intelligence failures, differences we suspect would remain even if one could distinguish genuine interpretations from strategic rhetoric in public statements.

Another example of divergent expectations (though not from a democracy) comes from France on the eve of the Revolutionary War in 1792. Several different factions each supported war as a means of bolstering its own domestic political support, but based its support on sharply different assumptions about the military outcome of the war and its likely political consequences. The radical Brissotins believed that war would be successful and that “war was a means to destroy the counterrevolution, liberalize the regime, increase national power, and secure [their] own faction’s future” (Ross 1969:40–41). They believed that war would be successful; profitable for the businessmen, merchants, and financiers who supported their cause; force Louis XVI to appoint a Brissotin ministry; and win them further popular support. They also believed that war would lead the king to take drastic action against the domestic enemies of the revolution and thereby discredit the king and possibly lead the Assembly to depose him. These assumptions and expectations led to appealing to the king for a hardline strategy that they believed would result in a Franco–Austrian war. The Brissotins could not alone force the resolution through the Assembly and were joined by the generals Lafayette and Narbonne and their conservative supporters. The Lafayetteists supported a limited war against the Rhineland princes with the intention of then turning the troops against domestic radicals. This would restore royal authority and leave Lafayette and Narbonne the powers behind the throne.

Louis supported the resolution and the bellicose policy it represented because he saw war as the best means of restoring his political power in France, but he based his position on very different assumptions. Louis supported war not because he expected that he would benefit from a victorious war, but rather because he expected that he would benefit from defeat at the hands of the European coalition that would form against him. The French people would then turn to the crown, which would save France from invasion and in the process gain complete restoration of royal authority. He supported the resolution, but then secretly informed Leopold that he wanted the Elector to reject his demands (Ross 1969:41). Ironically, even without full information the Brissotins had correctly calculated the king’s short-term intentions though not his larger strategy.

The leading opponent of the war, and too isolated to block it, was Robespierre, who had still different expectations. He believed that the war would be long and costly. He thought that it would benefit army officers, speculators, the court, and the nobility; lead to a military dictatorship; and set back the cause of revolution (Ross 1969:43; Blanning 1986:113).

Partisan Interests and National Interests

Thus far in the discussion we have assumed, along with Schultz (2001), that oppositions are purely office-seeking and that there is a zero-sum competition between the government and opposition for political power. While this assumption is useful for constructing parsimonious models of the behavior of governments and oppositions it can be quite misleading. Most oppositions, at least “nonstructural” oppositions, that aim to gain power within an existing political system, are guided by considerations of the national interest as well as by partisan political interests, though how groups balance these often divergent goals varies considerably. Generally, however, the greater the external threat to the country, the greater the weight given to national interest considerations and the lower the weight given to calculations of relative political gains and losses. In addition, the greater the external threat, the greater the popular support for the war is and the greater the political costs of opposing the war.

Even if the opposition anticipates an unsuccessful war and tries to stop it, once a war is underway, the opposition often supports the war to fulfill its role as “the loyal opposition,” present a unified domestic front, and maximize coercive pressure on the adversary so as to force the earliest possible end to the war on the best possible terms. It also hopes to avoid the political costs that would be incurred by failing to give patriotic support to the country and to the troops in the field.

The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon provides a good example of the complexity of the opposition’s calculations. After supporting a limited military operation in Lebanon and then recognizing that they had been deceived by a government that had concealed its intentions to quickly escalate the war, Israeli Labor leaders were torn between their longstanding opposition to a major military operation and their patriotic duty to serve as a loyal opposition and support the war effort. They were also concerned about the potential political consequences of criticizing the government during wartime. They did not voice their objections and, in fact, voted nearly unanimously against a “no confidence” referendum called in the Knesset. Moreover, even after a small minority of some of the more dovish Labor leaders (for example, Gur and Peres) began to voice their opposition in late June, other Labor leaders refused to follow. Rabin, who had opposed a large-scale invasion from the beginning, even visited Sharon during the siege of Beirut. It was not until July when the Israeli defense forces were clearly bogged down in central Lebanon and after public opinion had begun to turn against the war, that Rabin reluctantly came out in opposition (Feldman and Rechnitz-Kijner 1984:43; Yaniv 1987:123–125; Inbar 1991:120).

The Labor opposition’s decision to turn against the war had important consequences for negotiations with the adversary over the termination of the war and its terms. Israeli leaders had hoped to use the threat of a renewed war to compel the Syrians and the PLO to evacuate Lebanon. Realizing that the public and the main opposition party strongly opposed resuming the use of force, the Syrians and the PLO refused to leave. The presence of strong domestic political opposition in Israel undermined the credibility of Israeli threats to use force and thereby precluded the Israelis from forcing the Syrians from Lebanon (Feldman and Rechnitz-Kijner 1984). This example is a nice illustration of the effects of Schultz’s (2001) “restraining effect.”

Oppositions can affect military strategy, military effectiveness, and the conduct of the war as well as its outbreak and termination. While the Likud government got the war it wanted in Lebanon, the Labor opposition forced the government to begin the military operation on a more limited scale in order to conceal the deception and to minimize the domestic costs from it. This precluded an early attack on Syrian forces. Some have argued that a substantial early attack was an essential prerequisite for the success of a major incursion and that the domestically induced failure to conduct such an operation contributed to a more costly war (Feldman and Rechnitz-Kijner 1984:66).

Oppositions sometimes continue their initial opposition to war by obstructing, or at least not fully supporting, the government’s ability to mobilize personnel and financial support for the war. In the War of 1812, for example, the Federalist opposition contributed to American manpower shortages and adversely affected military strategy. The army failed to meet its recruiting quotas in the New England states where opposition to the war was most widespread (Hickey 1989:243). This contributed to Madison’s decision to abandon his initial plan to attack Montreal from the Northeast and, instead, to attack through Niagara (Stagg 1983:264).

Federalist opposition in the War of 1812 also undermined the government’s ability to raise money to fight the war. The national government could not hire enough tax collectors to collect taxes in the Northeast, given the unpopularity of the war in that region and the Federalist encouragement of resistance. In addition, Northeastern banks declined to lend money to the national government and

pressured other banks to adopt the same practice. Finally, when Republicans proposed (after their years of earlier opposition) to create a national bank in order to help deal with the country's dire financial situation midway into the war, the Federalists (whose predecessors had earlier championed the idea of national bank) opposed the idea in order to obstruct the war effort (Stagg 1983:375–377, 447).

Different patterns emerge for “structural oppositions” that aim not only to change the policies of the government and replace the particular regime in power, but also to transform the political system itself. Structural oppositions are much more likely than nonstructural oppositions to view the competition between government and opposition in strictly zero-sum terms and less likely to support the government's belligerent policies if they expect the outcome to be a diplomatic or military success.

Differences between structural and nonstructural oppositions are greater if they both perceive that the war is likely to lead to diplomatic and, particularly, military defeat. Major structural oppositions may actually support a war they expect might lead to defeat in the hope that the defeat would lead to the overthrow of the existing system and its structures of power. This was the point of Solzhenitsyn's (1974:272) statement that “governments need victories and the people need defeats.” Nonstructural oppositions face a more complex set of calculations. If they expect a major defeat, nonstructural opposition groups will oppose the war in the hope of blocking a war that would be bad for the country, but then give patriotic support to the war effort once a war is underway. If they expect that military action will lead to a limited defeat, nonstructural oppositions might go on record opposing war but make no serious effort to block it, in the hope of benefiting from the leaderships' misfortunes after an unsuccessful war.

Oppositions, like governments, are often uncertain about the likely outcomes of war. Insofar as oppositions expect defeats, there is also uncertainty as to whether that defeat will benefit the forces of revolution or the forces of counterrevolution. Many of the intellectual leaders on the left at the beginning of the twentieth century accepted Engels's view of the coming of a second Thirty Years War of unprecedented scope and intensity but of unpredictable consequences. Jaures, for example, recognized that the war might very well serve the cause of revolution and lead to a social democratic Europe, but he also recognized that it could lead to a long period of “crises of counterrevolution, . . . of exasperated nationalism, of stifling dictatorship, of monstrous militarism, of a long chain of retrograde violence and of base hatreds, reprisals, and servitudes.” Faced with this uncertainty, Jaures was loath to “take this barbarous gamble” and leave the emancipation of the workers to a “murderous toss of the dice” (cited in Goldberg 1968:432; Mayer 1977:215).

The Opposition's Risky Choice

An opposition (and here we exclude major structural oppositions) that prefers the status quo to war, but that expects a successful and popular war, faces a risky choice. If it is successful in its attempt to block war, it will achieve its best outcome. If it tries but fails to block war, it will get its worst outcome. The alternative strategy is to support the war, recognizing that war will probably lead to some political benefits for the government and political costs to itself, but fewer costs than from unsuccessful opposition to war. Thus, the opposition faces a gamble between a highly risky strategy of opposition to war and a more cautious strategy that is likely to lead to certain but more moderate losses. Exactly how the opposition will respond to these risks is always difficult to predict, in part because such risk calculations are extraordinarily sensitive to the oppositions' precise expectations regarding what the government will do with its gains, now and in the future, and regarding the probability that the opposition can successfully block war if it tries. Analysis is further complicated by the fact that the opposition's calculations represent the

aggregation of the expectations and calculations of several opposition leaders, each of whom has an eye on his or her domestic constituents.

While the opposition's risk calculations are extremely sensitive to contextual conditions, both within the decision-making group and in the political and diplomatic environment, it is worth noting that this situation—a choice between a certain loss and a risky gamble that provides the hope of avoiding that loss but that runs the risk of an even greater loss—is precisely the type of choice that prospect theory defines as decision making in the domain of losses and predicts risk-acceptant behavior or, at the least, greater risk-taking than predicted by a standard expected utility analysis (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Levy 1997). Any detailed analysis of oppositions' strategic calculus must be alert to this possible dynamic.

Summary and Conclusion

If political leaders sometimes go to war because they anticipate that it will bolster their domestic political support, as diversionary theory suggests, it follows that there may be a domestic opposition that expects to suffer politically from war and that may have incentives to oppose war in the hope of averting such loss. We have argued that this phenomenon of politically motivated opposition to war is pervasive across time and across different types of political systems, though with variations that need to be investigated much more fully.

There are three general sets of conditions under which oppositions oppose war for political reasons. First, if the opposition expects that war will be unsuccessful and unpopular, it will go on record opposing war in order to exploit the resulting political discontent and improve its future electoral prospects. Second, if the opposition expects that the war will be successful and popular and yield substantial gains for the government—whether through short-term rally effects, policies that weaken the opposition, or more permanent institutional changes—the opposition may choose to oppose the government in the hope of preventing war and thereby forestalling a significant political loss. Third, if the opposition anticipates that the war will be popular with the electorate as a whole but not with its own political base, the opposition may oppose war in the hope of making a political gain with its own constituents. We can observe each of these patterns in democratic states and comparable patterns in other types of political systems.

These different sets of conditions and causal logics leading to active political opposition to war have different implications for bargaining between states and external adversaries. While we have not examined these dynamics in great detail, it would be useful to summarize them, if only as possible hypotheses to be investigated.

If the opposition shares the government's belief that a war would be unsuccessful and unpopular and if it opposes war in the hope of making political gains from the government's misfortunes, then its active opposition to war undermines the credibility of the government's threat to use military force by signaling the government's expectations and revealing that the government's military threat is a bluff. Opposition to war also undermines the political unity behind the war effort because the very act of opposition, by dividing the country, further reduces both the popularity of the war and the government's capacity to fight the war effectively. This "disunity effect" is analytically distinct from signaling, but it reinforces the effects of signaling because it adds to the costs of war for the government. The rival state understands this, recognizes that it reduces the government's resolve in the crisis, and adopts a firmer stand itself. The government anticipates this response and is unlikely to initiate a threat in the first place.

If the opposition opposes war not because it expects an unsuccessful and unpopular war, but instead because it expects a successful and popular war that will lead to a substantial political gain for the government at the expense of the

opposition, and because it hopes to forestall those losses by blocking war, then the opposition's behavior does not indicate that the government lacks resolve. Quite to the contrary, since the government shares the opposition's expectation of a successful and popular war and anticipates political benefits from war, the government should have strong incentives to stand firm in a crisis.¹⁰ If the adversary understands this strategic calculus, it will be less inclined to stand firm; if the government anticipates this, its own resolve will be strengthened.¹¹

The implication of this analysis is that partisan opposition to war does not by itself convey useful information about the government's resolve in a crisis. Opposition can imply either that the government has weak resolve and is unlikely to implement its threat or that it has high resolve and is likely to implement its threat, depending on the opposition's expectations and motivations for opposing war. Opposition to war that is driven by expectations of an unsuccessful and unpopular war signals that the government is bluffing and will have weak resolve, whereas opposition to war that is driven by expectations of a successful and popular war signals that the government will be highly resolved. Thus, partisan opposition to war is informative for the adversary only if it is coupled with information about the opposition's expectations and motivations, but such information is often not available.

While we have not formally modeled the conditions under which each pattern of political opposition is likely to occur or systematically tested our propositions against the evidence, the logic of the argument is sufficiently plausible and the historical examples sufficiently numerous to make it clear that opposition to war can arise in a number of different political systems and in response to expectations of popular as well as unpopular wars. Consequently, the behavior of the opposition in crises may be less informative to adversaries than Schultz (2001) suggests, or at least informative only under a fairly narrow range of conditions.

This analysis suggests many possible avenues for future research on politically motivated opposition to war. One is to examine whether active opposition to war is, in fact, motivated by partisan political interests and not by other concerns, such as beliefs that war would be unjust or harmful to national security or economic interests or to domestic liberty. One way to rule out such alternative interpretations is to select closely connected cases that are as similar as possible in nearly all respects except for the fact that the party or group in question is in the role of the opposition in one case and of the government in another. If its stance toward war varies, then one can infer, based on the logic of John Stuart Mill's (1970[1875]) methods, that such variation can be traced to partisan politics and not to other variables (also see Lijphart 1975; Levy 2002). We follow such a design in our comparative study of

¹⁰The government's resolve may be even greater if we consider the circumstances under which it made its initial threat. If the government understands the strategic logic underlying the opposition's behavior, anticipates that partisan opposition will reduce the popularity of the war (and possibly military effectiveness as well), and nonetheless goes ahead and makes the threat despite these risks, the implication is that the government must have very high resolve, perhaps even more so than if the government had initiated the threat with the support of the opposition (Trager 2004). If the adversary understands these dynamics, it will be less likely to stand firm in the crisis, the anticipation of which by the government further reinforces its own resolve.

¹¹It is true that the act of opposition, by dividing the country, will reduce the popularity of the war. If the opposition expects a successful war, however, it will generally limit its opposition to the period before war begins, and then turn and support the war effort if its blocking strategy fails. The opposition's refusal to support the war once it is underway would only compound the political costs of its failed effort to block it. Still, this ex ante opposition can have a divisive impact on the country and undercut the government's effectiveness in fighting the war, although if this effect were extensive enough to create expectations of net costs from war, the government presumably would not make its initial threat. Similarly, the impact of opposition on the effectiveness of the government's military effort should be minimal if the opposition supports the war after its unsuccessful attempt to block it. The only circumstances under which the opposition might continue to oppose the war and encourage resistance would be if the war continued to be unpopular among its constituents and the opposition saw this as an opportunity to bolster its partisan support. This is illustrated by the Federalist opposition to the War of 1812.

American political opposition to war in the Quasi-War with France and in the War of 1812 with Britain (Mabe and Levy 1999).

Granted that oppositions in democratic states are better informed than those in nondemocratic states, it would still be useful to explore the assumption that oppositions have the same information as governments and consequently the same expectations about the likely outcome and popularity of a war. If the gap between the expectations of governments and oppositions is sufficiently large, then it is difficult to infer that opposition to war is based on conflicting political interests as opposed to different expectations about outcomes. It would be useful to explore this question through detailed historical studies of cases that are as comparable as possible on other dimensions.

Another useful line of inquiry would be to undertake a more rigorous examination of the likelihood that opposition to war will arise in different kinds of political systems. We have used historical examples to show that political opposition to war has arisen in nondemocratic as well as democratic regimes, in presidential and parliamentary regimes, in unitary as well as federal political systems, in ethnically divided and ethnically homogenous states. It would be useful to construct a more nuanced typology of political systems; theorize about the incentives for opposition to war, the probability of successfully blocking war, and the implications for relations with external adversaries for each kind of political system; and test these propositions empirically exploring how frequently opposition to war arises in each type of system.

In these and other ways, scholars can build on research that is still in its early stages and contribute significantly to the cumulation of knowledge about opposition to war. Such research will also contribute to developing a more logically complete theory of diversionary behavior by emphasizing that the likelihood of external scapegoating is a function of the governing elite's calculations of the behavior of political oppositions as well as of public opinion and external adversaries.

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