

VIOLENCE AT HOME OR ABROAD: UNDERSTANDING HOW REBEL LEADERS
RESPOND TO DOMESTIC UNREST

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Dedicated to My Family

ABSTRACT

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Existing studies suggest that leaders with previous rebellion participation have a higher level of international conflict propensity than leaders with no such experience. This dissertation examines whether prior rebel experience will induce leaders to initiate an international conflict in response to domestic strife. I propose a preference modification approach and argue that rebel leaders' policy choice during domestic unrest is a product of their pre-existing preferences and contextual factors: contextual factors not only constrain leaders' ability to pursue a certain policy, but more importantly reshape their policy preference. Specifically, I claim that rebel leaders' willingness to use force abroad during domestic unrest is contingent on the severity level of domestic problems. When rebel leaders face severe internal unrest, they are unwilling to engage in international conflicts because severe domestic strife will reshape leaders' perceptions and neutralize their policy preference toward international conflict through two mechanisms.

First, high intensity level of domestic strife changes the deliberative cost-benefit calculation about available policy options. Specifically, serious domestic problems call for a direct, speedy, and "to-the-point" policy response, which enables domestic measures (i.e. co-optation and repression) to be more efficacious because domestic measures aim to directly and effectively address the problem that gives rise to the strife. Second, severe

domestic unrest affects rebel leaders' intuitive behaviors by activating some certain predispositions of leaders endowed by rebellion experience, which induces them to use other policy responses rather than initiating an international dispute.

Statistical analyses of the international militarized dispute initiation of leaders under domestic strife from 1875 to 2000 reveal strong support for these arguments. Two case studies of Mao Zedong and Suharto further confirm the causal mechanisms.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

War is the product of the actions of two or more states or other political organizations. It follows that to understand the outbreak of war we need to understand why states make certain decisions rather than other decisions. That leads us to an analysis of foreign policy decision-making, which focuses on the individuals and governmental organizations that are empowered to make and implement policies on behalf of the state.

—Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, *Causes of War*, 2010, p.128

Sukarno (or Soekarno),¹ the first President of Indonesia serving from 1945 to 1967, was one of the most famous revolutionary leaders² in the world. He led Indonesia's struggle for independence from the Netherlands as well as Indonesian resistance to Dutch recolonization. Sukarno's prior experience of revolutions tremendously influenced his policies while in office. In his address on the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Founding of the Republic of Indonesia on August 17, 1960, Sukarno admitted that "I am crazed, I am obsessed by the Romanticism of Revolution."³ It was argued that one reflection of his revolutionary trait was his bellicose foreign policy.

From the fall of 1963 to 1966, Sukarno had adopted an aggressive foreign policy against Malaysia called "confrontation with Malaysia" or "*Konfrontasi*". This ostensibly aimed to express Indonesia's opposition to the establishment of the Federation of Malaysia with the amalgamation of the eleven states of Malaya, Singapore, and the two former

¹ As a rule, I have spelt Indonesian names according to the current spelling system introduced in 1972, except for those in direct quotations.

² In the discussion followed, I will use revolutionary leaders and rebel leaders interchangeably to describe leaders who previously participated in activities that overthrow the existing regime.

³ Sukarno 1960.

British protectorates of Sarawak and Sabah in Borneo.⁴ As a result, an actual violent conflict took place between the two countries. Since most fighting was in the border area Borneo, the conflict is also known as the Borneo confrontation.

The motives of Indonesia behind this undeclared war were complex, including “territorial aggrandizement, a belief that Malaysia is a grave threat, and a desire to assert Indonesia’s ‘rightful place’ in Southeast Asia.”⁵ But it is also true that Indonesian leaders, especially Sukarno, had a vested interest in the confrontation and that the conflict has a domestic motivation.⁶ Specifically, Sukarno provoked the international conflict first to deflect the public attention from economic deterioration.⁷ Then, the crisis provided Sukarno an environment for anti-Western propaganda, so that he could maintain himself and the Communist party as the most important political forces in Indonesia.⁸

Given the existing consensus that revolutionary leaders or leaders with prior rebellion experience may have an aggressive feature in foreign policy, it would not be counterintuitive that revolutionary leaders, like Sukarno, would like to utilize international conflict to tackle domestic problems. As Rex Mortimer puts it, “Sukarno was a man of intensely romantic temperament, who viewed life as an unfolding drama, or a series of dramas, in which satisfaction for the revolutionary was to be found not so much in the attainment of perceived objectives but in the expectation, excitement, and tension of the struggle itself.”⁹ In other words, his revolutionary fanaticism would predispose him to

⁴ Sodhy 1988, 111.

⁵ Hindley 1964, 905.

⁶ Dake 2006, 3; Hindley 1964.

⁷ Dake 2006, 3.

⁸ Hindley 1964, 909–912.

⁹ Mortimer 2006, 80.

foreign aggression in many circumstances, not to mention the situation where the use of force could be justified by rational considerations as well.

This dissertation is about leaders with rebellion experiences and their willingness to use force in response to domestic unrest. I ask similar questions as Amy Oakes does in her book “*Diversionsary War: Domestic Unrest and International Conflict*,” but with a specific focus on rebel leaders or revolutionary leaders.¹⁰ Do revolutionary leaders use foreign adventure to improve their domestic political fortunes? If so, under what conditions are unpopular rebel leaders most likely to deploy this strategy? When is initiating an international dispute a more-effective response to internal unrest than making political concessions to opposition groups or suppressing dissent?

Oakes (2012) provides a policy substitutability approach to explain the use of diversionary tactics in general.¹¹ Specifically, she proposes that “a government’s choices result from the interaction between leader preferences and environmental factors.... Thus, if diversionary war is a leader’s preferred response to internal instability and it is practicable, then the state will pursue this policy path. If, however, environmental factors rule out the use of diversionary force, the government is compelled to select an alternative, less palatable, strategy from the menu.”¹² In contrast to Oakes’s research, this dissertation project focuses only on rebel leaders’ policy responses to domestic unrest. I propose a preference modification approach, and argue that rebel leaders’ policy choice during domestic unrest is a product of their pre-existing preferences and contextual factors:

¹⁰ Oakes 2012, 2.

¹¹ Oakes 2012.

¹² Ibid., 165.

contextual factors not only constrain leaders' ability to pursue a certain policy, but more importantly reshape their policy preference.

In particular, I borrow the definition of leader preferences from Oakes (2012) and define rebel leaders' preferences as "how the decision maker assesses the desirability of each option on the policy menu and then ranks these options from most to least attractive."¹³ The major difference from Oakes's definition is that I emphasize the pre-existing nature of these preferences. Specifically, these preferences are primarily created by leaders' previous experiences and already existed before they are faced with the domestic unrest.

In terms of contextual factors, I expand Oakes's definition of environmental factors. According to Oakes, "Environmental factors are those conditions that enable or constrain a leader's ability to pursue these options."¹⁴ The major problem of this definition is that it neglects the impact of environmental or contextual factors on reshaping leaders' preferences and only focuses on how those factors affect leaders' ability to pursue policy options. In fact, the context in which leaders are operating could influence both their ability and their pre-existing preferences. Therefore, here I define contextual factors as those conditions that could shape both leaders' pre-existing policy preferences and their ability to pursue their desirable response.

Specifically, I propose that rebel leaders' willingness to use force abroad in response to domestic unrest is contingent on the severity level of domestic problems. When rebel leaders face a risk of severe internal unrest, they are unwilling to engage in

¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴ Ibid.

international conflicts, because severe domestic strife will reshape leaders' perception and neutralize their policy preference toward international conflict through two mechanisms.

First, high seriousness levels of domestic strife change the cost-benefit calculation regarding available policy options. Specifically, serious domestic problems call for a direct, speedy, and "to-the-point" policy response, which enables domestic measures (i.e. co-optation and repression) to be more efficacious because domestic measures aim to directly and effectively address the problem that gives rise to the strife.

Second, severe domestic unrest affects rebel leaders' intuitive behaviors by activating certain predispositions of leaders endowed by rebellion experience, which induces them to use other policy responses rather than initiating international dispute. To begin with, the extremely unstable domestic environment compels leaders to choose the policy they feel most confident in. Rebellion experience causes rebel leaders to be more confident when utilizing repression to deal with oppositions, given that they came into power after they survived a severe domestic crisis (i.e. rebellion). This confidence translates into a preference of repression during severe domestic unrest. In addition, severe domestic unrest is often accompanied with the risk of international intervention. Compared to foreign aggression, domestic measures better conform to rebel leaders' appreciation of national authority and sovereignty (a predisposition they obtained from rebellion experience). Furthermore, rebellion experience predisposes rebel leaders to be ruthless to enemies, which translates into a policy preference of repression during severe domestic unrest.

WHY STUDY LEADERS WITH PRIOR REBELLION PARTICIPATION AND THEIR RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC UNREST?

The most recent decade has seen a new behavioral revolution sweep over social science and unfold in international relations.¹⁵ According to Hafner-Burton et al. (2017), “the defining characteristic of this revolution has been the use of empirical research on preferences, beliefs, and decision making to modify choice- and game-theoretic models.”¹⁶ When incorporating the new revolution into international relations, one major theme is “the heterogeneity of preferences, beliefs, and decision-making processes even across similarly situated individuals.”¹⁷ Under this general trend, a number of studies on international conflict look at how state leaders’ formative experiences affect their preferences, beliefs, and decision making.¹⁸ They find that the personal experiences of leaders in their early years have “large and persistent effects on personality and risk propensity later in life.”¹⁹ After leaders enter office later on, their personality, risk propensity, and beliefs shaped by prior experiences impact their behavior and policy-making.

Among the different life experiences that may shape leaders’ propensity for international conflict, participation in rebel movements is the one that draws the most scholarly attention. There are many reasons to think that participation in rebel movements might have a particularly large and systematic impact on leaders’ tendency for international conflict when they are facing domestic strife. First, rebellion participation has as much impact on leaders’ decision-making once they assume power as military experience.

¹⁵ Hafner-Burton et al. 2017.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ Colgan 2013; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Dyson and Preston 2006; Ellis, Horowitz, and Stam 2015; Fuhrmann and Horowitz 2015; Goldgeier 1994; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015; Saunders 2011; Saunders 2017.

¹⁹ Horowitz and Stam 2014, 530.

Michael C. Horowitz and Allan C. Stam argue that this powerful impact arises for the following three reasons. To begin with, military background “offers a potentially direct connection between a behavior someone engages in prior to entering office—fighting a war—and something they might do while in office—initiating a militarized dispute or war.”²⁰ Additionally, military experience may modify an individual’s personality and risk preference, which play a crucial role in one’s later decision-making. Lastly, empirical evidence from the United States, since the Cold War, implies that leaders with military experience might hold a different view regarding the use of force from those who do not have a military background.²¹

In addition to the reasons listed above, the experience of rebellion participation has an independent influence on leaders’ policy choices during an internal turmoil. Specifically, rebellion participation is an essential experience that can shape participants’ future beliefs about the game of political survival (e.g. how to retain power and who your primary enemy is). For instance, when his political life was threatened by both the Chinese Communist Party and Japan, Chiang Kai-shek (or Jiang Jieshi), the leader of the Republic of China between 1928 and 1949, adopted the policy “first internal pacification, then external resistance” (*rangwai bi xian annei*; 攘外必先安内), which gave precedence to suppressing the communists over resisting Japan.²² This policy is based on Chiang’s belief, formed during his rebellion period, that “the Japanese are a disease of the skin, but the communists are a disease of the heart” (*rikou wei xianzhen zhiji, gongdang nai xinfu zhihuan*; 日寇为癣疹之疾, 共党乃心腹之患).²³ Hence, in this dissertation project, I will focus on leaders

²⁰ Ibid., 531.

²¹ Horowitz and Stam 2014.

²² Chiang 1992, 54; So 2002, 213.

²³ Hopkins 2010, 161; So 2002, 231.

with prior rebellion experience and investigate their policy preferences when they encountered internal problems.

EXISTING LITERATURE AND ITS LIMITATIONS

As shown in Figure 3.1 in the quantitative chapter, there has been a gradual increase in the numbers of rebel leaders over time between 1875 to 2000 in the world. Many people may argue that the prevalence of rebel leaders is mainly the result of decolonization between the 1940s and 1970s. That said, we should expect a decrease in the numbers of rebel leaders in the near future, given the relative domestic stability of most countries. However, this should not obscure the importance of studying the behaviors of rebel leaders.

The beginning of the 21st Century witnessed a spate of rebellion movements, such as the Columbia Civil War (1970-2010), the series of uprisings in the Arab Spring of 2011, and the Syrian Civil War from 2011. Some of them have been ended whereas others are still ongoing. One of the important consequences of these recent anti-government uprisings is that they could give rise to a group of leaders with prior rebellion experience in the future and their rebellion experiences will shape their policy preferences. Therefore, it is of great realistic significance to study the behaviors of rebel leaders.

Conventional wisdom agrees that revolutionary leaders or rebel leaders play an independent and crucial role in foreign policy-making, and their unique features predispose

them to a certain set of policy preferences. Specifically, revolutionary leaders are more likely to drag their country into interstate wars.²⁴

There are primarily three approaches to explain the association. The first approach focuses on the personality traits of leaders with rebellion experiences. As Stephen M. Walt summarizes, “Its proponents begin by arguing that leaders of revolutions are usually self-confident, stubborn, suspicious, and ruthless. These traits allegedly make revolutionary leaders difficult to deter and prone to reckless foreign policies, either because they are convinced of their own infallibility or because they repeatedly seek to perform new acts of revolutionary heroism.”²⁵ In addition to these traits, recent studies indicate that revolutionary leaders are more risk-tolerant and thus are more likely to engage in risky activities, like war, than leaders with no rebellion experience.²⁶

The second approach is also about leaders’ predispositions and argues that revolutions endowed participants with a revolutionary ideology, which could then lead to a revolutionary foreign policy.²⁷ As Robert C. Tucker notes, “Revolutionary consciousness begins in estrangement, in a person's feeling of not being a part of the existing society, of not sharing its sustaining myth.... A revolutionary mind of great creative power will be one that forms or adumbrates a new concept of social living that may, if a revolution takes place, become the sustaining myth of a new society.”²⁸ Therefore, if revolutionaries tend to sell their new concept of social living abroad, war is unavoidable. For instance, before the late 1940s, “the leaders in Moscow made promoting the proletarian world revolution

²⁴ Colgan 2013; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Gurr 1988; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015; Tudoroiu 2014; Tudoroiu 2016; Walt 1992; Walt 1996.

²⁵ Walt 1992, 328–329.

²⁶ Colgan 2013; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015.

²⁷ Walt 1992, 325–327.

²⁸ Tucker 1995, 106–107.

and overthrowing capitalism's global reign the Soviet Union's sacred state mission."²⁹ This mission of exporting revolution was translated into aggressive foreign policy against capitalist countries.

Dual-process theories of neurosciences contend that "human thought processes are subserved by two distinct mechanisms: one fast, automatic, and nonconscious, the other slow, controlled, and conscious, which operate largely independently and compete for behavioral control."³⁰ In other words, "the human brain uses at least two different processes of decision-making based on different neural systems: the intuitive system and the deliberative system."³¹ In this case, if the first two approaches imply that foreign aggression is a result of revolutionary leaders' decision-making based on the intuitive system, the last approach demonstrates that it depends on the decision-making based on the deliberative system. Specifically, the first two approaches propose that the international hostility of revolutionary leaders is heavily emotionally charged, and it is the intuitive behavior guided by predispositions, which are, in part, the result of experiences. Unlike the first two approaches, the third approach claims that international conflicts serve revolutionary leaders' personal interest. That is, "revolutionary leaders seek conflicts with other states in order to rally popular support, to justify internal repression, and to provide a scapegoat should domestic problems persist."³² In other words, rebel leaders in the face of domestic unrest have a motivation for war.

When it comes to domestic unrest, it appears to be intuitively reasonable to claim that the high propensity toward international conflict may accordingly increase the chance

²⁹ Chen 2001, 4.

³⁰ Evans and Frankish 2009, v.

³¹ Kaufman 2019, 3.

³² Walt 1992, 327.

of revolutionary leaders' use of force to deal with domestic unrest, either because of rebel leaders' preposition to international conflict in general, or because those leaders perceive initiating an international dispute as an efficacious option. The Sukarno case discussed above indicates that revolutionary leaders do use foreign adventure to improve their domestic political fortunes. But the key questions remain unanswered: are rebel leaders actually more likely to provoke international conflicts than their non-revolutionary counterparts as a response to domestic unrest? Are rebel leaders more willing to use international dispute rather than other policies in the face of domestic troubles? More research is required to answer these questions.

In addition to the empirical call for more research, investigating revolutionary leaders' policy preferences to cope with domestic unrest is of critical theoretical importance for several reasons. The most important reason is that domestic unrest actually provides us with a context to further explore the relationship between leaders with rebellion experience and their war preference in order to fill the theoretical gap of conventional studies on the topic. Existing approaches regarding revolutionary leaders and war mistakenly ignore the context in which leaders are operating, which often renders them incompetent to provide a strong theoretical explanation for the connection between revolutionary leaders and international conflict on both empirical and logical grounds. Although cross-national quantitative results seem to suggest that rebel leaders are more likely to behave aggressively abroad, the explanations of conventional wisdom are far from satisfactory.

First, most relevant works fail to recognize that the impact of a revolutionary leader's personality and preference on foreign policy, is contingent upon the context. Put

differently, a state's foreign policy is not always a manifestation of its leader's personal preference. "The context in which the actor is operating is very important: the impact of leader personality increases to the degree that the environment admits of restructuring."³³ In this case, even if we agreed that the special personality and predisposition of rebel leaders make them more inclined to participate in war, we cannot explain why so many rebel leaders did not pursue an aggressive foreign policy. In other words, the failure of existing approaches to incorporate the context makes them unable to explain when revolutionary personality or predisposition counts. For instance, after the liberation of Khorramshahr in 1982, Ruhollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of Iran from 1979 to 1989, preferred terminating the Iran-Iraq war and not entering Iraqi territory. However, he was faced with various constraints that prevented him from translating his personal preference into foreign policy. Eventually, he approved to continue the war. This decision was not a manifestation of Khomeini's personal preference for the expansion of the Iranian revolution as proponents of the aggressive feature of rebel leaders may suggest, but rather the result of "the interplay and compromise among stakeholders laboring under domestic and international constraints."³⁴

The second limit of existing explanations lies in their neglect of the fact that predispositions and preferences *per se* are situational. Take the revolutionary ideology approach as an example. "Although one might hope that ideology would provide a clear guide to the intentions and actions of revolutionary leaders, in practice revolutionaries frequently shifted their policies in response to changing circumstances."³⁵ In this case,

³³ Tudoroiu 2014, 390.

³⁴ Rouhi and Snow 2019, 7.

³⁵ Goldstone 2016, 417.

predispositions of revolutionary leaders could be translated into diverse policy preferences under different conditions, but not necessarily translated into the preference for international conflict. Even if we assumed that a revolutionary leader possessed a unique personality and a revolutionary ideology, we still could not know for sure whether these traits would translate into a policy preference toward war in a specific circumstance since those explanations overlook inconsistencies within the individual's preferences and behaviors. For example, as a typical revolutionary leader with both revolutionary personalities and revolutionary ideologies, Stalin led the Soviet Union's retreat from pursuing world proletarian revolution from the late 1940s.

If the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 symbolized Moscow's retreat from pursuing world proletarian revolution as a state-policy goal, the Soviet-American agreement at Yalta in February 1945 represented the completion of a crucial step in the Soviet Union's "socialization" process. Although Moscow continued to profess its belief in the Marxist-Leninist theory of international class struggle, the Soviet Union was no longer the same kind of revolutionary country it used to be—isolated and excluded from the existing international system; rather, as a main patron of the postwar world order created at Yalta, Stalin's Soviet Union was changing into an insider of the big-power club, assuming the identity of a quasi-revolutionary country and a status quo power at the same time.³⁶

Stalin's inconsistencies in foreign policy preferences were not unusual among revolutionary leaders. Quite often in history that leaders' foreign policy preferences changed over time or changed from case to case. Suharto (or Soeharto), the President of Indonesia from 1967 to 1998, pursued an aggressive policy against China but abandoned the Confrontation with Malaysia after he assumed power. In addition, Walt finds that "[r]evolutionary elites frequently disagree about foreign policy."³⁷ This finding indicates that in a general sense,

³⁶ Chen 2001, 4.

³⁷ Walt 1992, 329.

there is neither a consistency among one's choices over time nor an inter-leader consistency in their foreign policy preferences.

Similarly, one's risk perception is situational and individuals show different risk preferences across different situations and domains as well.³⁸ According to Sitkin and Pablo (1992), people's risk propensity is determined by their inherent risk preference in combination with situational factors.³⁹ Building on that, Weber and William claim that "the situational differences in risky choice may be due to differences in the perception of risk."⁴⁰ Hence, the domestic context matters tremendously as it not only provides decision-makers with space and time to situate information within but also reshapes their basic risk perception and beliefs about policy options. For instance, studies on decision-making under pressure find that differing levels of stress may cause a difference in both decision-making processes and policy outcomes.⁴¹ Therefore, variation in the intensity levels of domestic problems could drive leaders to behave differently.

Thus, predispositions and personalities of revolutionary leaders are insufficient for them to pursue an aggressive foreign policy. This statement does not mean there are not predictable patterns of rebel leaders. Rather, we should "identify predictable patterns of variability across situations."⁴² In other words, it is necessary to bring context and conditions back when studying how rebel leaders' behavior or foreign policy preference "varies reliably as a function of the particulars of the situation" they encounter.⁴³

³⁸ Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Kahneman and Tversky 2012; Levy 1992a; Levy 1992b; Levy 1996; Levy 1997; MacCrimmon and Wehrung 1990; Mercer 2005; Payne, Laughunn, and Crum 1980; Schoemaker 1990; Weber and Milliman 1997; Wehrung and MacCrimmon 1988.

³⁹ Sitkin and Pablo 1992.

⁴⁰ Weber and Milliman 1997, 125.

⁴¹ George 1986; Herek, Janis, and Huth 1987; Hermann 1969; Hermann 2003; Stanley 2018; Trumbore and Boyer 2000; Welch 1989.

⁴² Zayas et al. 2008, 377.

⁴³ Ibid.

Third, unlike what recent studies on rebel leaders and war suggest, the influence of rebel experiences has multidimensional implications for leaders' foreign policy preferences which may affect their inclination toward foreign aggression. Even though it is agreed that revolutionary leaders are risk-taking and favor exporting revolution, it does not indicate that those traits alone were obtained from rebellion experiences. Rebellion participation may endow participants with traits that would neutralize their preference toward war in a specific context. For instance, as psychologists suggest, revolutionary struggle requires leaders to have a categorical, single-minded approach to problems. Specifically, a successful revolutionist "is characterized by a conceptually simple level of functioning: He depicts the enemy as all evil and the revolution as the ultimate good; he evaluates all individuals, classes, and nations as either enemies or friends, depending on their attitude toward the revolution; his ultimate court of appeal is the authority of the revolution; and he directs all energies, faith, and struggle toward the success of the movement. Prominent pre-takeover individuals who show less than this complete single-mindedness are probably perceived by other revolutionists as weak, if not disloyal, which would tend to endanger their later careers."⁴⁴ This trait appears to be irrelevant with a leader's foreign policy preference. However, if we consider a specific context, such as when leaders are faced with domestic unrest, it would be directly associated with leaders' foreign policy choices. In particular, when dealing with domestic unrest, leaders may have three policy options: repression, co-option, and foreign aggression. In this case, if revolution experience predisposes leaders to have no empathy for oppositions or enemies, then it would reduce the likelihood of leaders to use force abroad since repression at least equally, if not more

⁴⁴ Suedfeld and Rank 1976, 171.

than foreign aggression, conforms to their predispositions. Again, it demonstrates that the influence of predispositions is premised on certain scope conditions.

Therefore, as many social behavior theorists have long suggested, “efforts should be directed toward the identification of those changing conditions that lead to changes in behavior rather than toward the demonstration of cross-situational consistency.”⁴⁵ Domestic unrest just provides us with an important scope condition to explore the link between revolutionary leaders and their foreign policy preferences. Not only because the third approach directly addresses that domestic unrest plays a significant role in explaining the aggressive inclination of rebel leaders, but also because domestic unrest enables us to draw a comparison among possible policy options—repression, co-option, and international dispute initiation, ultimately, we can further confirm whether international conflict is always preferred by revolutionary leaders - no matter what alternatives they may have.

Another reason for investigating rebel leaders’ use of force during domestic unrest lies in the limits of diversionary war theory. As Taylor Fravel demonstrates, “Domestic unrest and the diversionary motive that it creates are, however, insufficient for a state to pursue an aggressive foreign policy.”⁴⁶ The debate over diversionary war theory, the inconsistency among empirical results, and the infrequency of diversionary war in history all confirm that further research is required. Basically, similar with the studies on revolutionary leaders and war, studies on diversionary war need to further specify the scope conditions of the diversionary use of force. To specify the scope conditions, research could either focus on a unique group of leaders or address a specific situation. My research

⁴⁵ Ibid., 170; Mischel 1968.

⁴⁶ Fravel 2010, 313.

proceeds along the first direction and studies whether leaders with prior rebellion experiences are more likely to use foreign aggression to deal with domestic unrest, given their high level of international conflict propensity.

Furthermore, examining revolutionary leaders' policy choices in the face of domestic unrest helps us fill in the theoretical gap in literature regarding leaders' policy response to dissent. There are extensive studies on leaders' policy responses to dissent. However, the research has been divided along two lines: approaches focusing on domestic measures versus approaches on international measures. Specifically, domestic approaches have been long occupied by comparativists who study measures like repression, reform, and co-optation, whereas international approaches are in the realm of international relations scholars who mainly study diversionary war. They barely speak to each other and even barely think about policy options listed by the other approach as reasonable alternatives on leaders' policy menu. For instance, limited research on repression, if any, mentions diversionary war as a possible response of leaders to dissent. Most comparative studies only consider domestic measures, such as repression, co-optation, accommodation, persuasion, and neglect.⁴⁷ This dissertation, by focusing on a specific group of leaders (i.e. leaders with rebellion experiences), tries to bring the discussion of domestic measures back to the study of the internal-external conflict nexus. Therefore, we could provide a relatively complete picture about leaders' policy choices in the face of domestic unrest.

In sum, these approaches of rebel leaders and war focus primarily on leaders' personal preferences rather than on the larger context in which foreign policy is made. They have tended to emphasize consistencies with the revolutionary leaders to explain their

⁴⁷ Davenport 1995; Dragu and Lupu 2018; Duvall and Shamir 1980; Escribà-Folch 2013; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Henderson 1991; Moore 1998; Moore 2000; Slantchev and Matush 2019.

foreign policy preferences. This tendency is problematic because it overlooks the basic fact that revolutionary leaders' foreign policy from the formation of preferences to the process of translating preferences into policy is contingent on the context in which they are operating. A more systematic approach by incorporating the context is needed. Domestic unrest is a context that provides us with opportunities to study the variation of revolutionary leaders' policy preferences and behaviors. Studying revolutionary leaders' policy responses to domestic unrest not only expands our understandings of leaders' policy preferences, but also enriches the existing discussion of internal-external conflict nexus. However, before I move to the task of providing such an approach, however, a brief discussion of research design is followed.

RESEARCH METHOD AND PROCEDURES

I define a “revolutionary leader” or “rebel leader” as one who previously participated in a rebellion movement seeking to overthrow the current government. Notably, “rebel leaders” here do not necessarily mean the leaders of rebellion movements but refer to those with rebellion experience and who come into power later. However, it is more likely for the leader of a rebellion movement to become the state head later than it is for the original participants.

In addition, this definition focuses on rebellions rather than just revolutions, thus expanding those definitions provided by Walt, Colgan and others.⁴⁸ The fundamental difference between revolution and rebellion lies in whether the movement aims at fundamental societal changes. Specifically, “rebellions are often spontaneous uprisings

⁴⁸ Colgan 2013; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Goldstone 2016; Walt 1992; Walt 1996.

aimed at changing leaders, policies, or even political institutions, but only rarely involve efforts to affect larger societal structures and norms/values directly.”⁴⁹ In contrast, “a revolution creates a fundamentally new state based on different values, myths, social classes, political institutions, and conceptions of the political community.”⁵⁰

For the purpose of this study, the distinction between rebellion and revolution does not matter very much. The three approaches on revolutionary leaders and war could be applied to understand leaders with rebellion experience and war as well. First, rebellions are risky activities too which may equally select reckless and risk-taking leaders, as revolutions do. Studies on rebellion all agree that rebellions are extremely risky for participants and endow participants with some unique characteristics.⁵¹ Second, like revolutionaries, rebels are equipped with ideologies, which have implications on their behaviors later. All of these immense anti-government activities need some ideology to legitimize rebels’ behaviors and mobilize the mass. In this sense, revolutionary ideologies are not fundamentally different from rebellion ideologies. Third, leaders who come into power through rebellion are faced with similar domestic situations as leaders who assume power through revolution. They all need to consolidate power and rally the masses. Based on existing literature, this need implies a potential need to “use external threats to justify their actions and rally popular support.”⁵² Therefore, I will expand the existing studies on leaders with revolutionary experiences and incorporate leaders with rebellion experiences into the theoretical analysis.

⁴⁹ Selbin 2013, 12.

⁵⁰ Walt 1996, 12.

⁵¹ Goldstone 2016; Gurr 1970; Selbin 2013; Wood 2003.

⁵² Walt 1992, 328.

Then what is the uniqueness of leaders with rebellion experiences compared to leaders with no such experiences? What are the policy implications of such uniqueness? In this dissertation project, I will study rebel leaders' policy responses to domestic unrest, and specifically investigate whether they would engage in an international dispute to secure their power and under what conditions they prefer provoking international conflicts to other options.

The Sukarno case above provides us with some clues on the questions. First, revolutionary leaders do use foreign adventure to improve their domestic political fortunes. But the use of force is contingent on some conditions, such as the intensity level of the domestic environment. Specifically, the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation was rather an attempt of Sukarno to consolidate power rather than an attempt to save power, because the domestic situation then was not so bad as to endanger the political survival of Sukarno. For instance, by mid-1963, Sukarno had largely restored internal security and issued a series of policies to address the major economic problems. Also, Sukarno did not have much fear of losing office. Even at the end of his rule, Sukarno was completely confident in his popular support.⁵³ As John Roosa articulates, "Sukarno had been the nation-state's only president. With his charisma, eloquence, and passionate patriotism, he remained widely popular amid all the post-independence political turmoil and economic mismanagement. By 1965 his hold on the presidency was unrivaled. It is testimony to his popularity that both the movement⁵⁴ and Major General Suharto justified their actions as means to defend him. Neither side dared appear disloyal to the president."⁵⁵ Therefore, the primary issue

⁵³ Vatikiotis 1998, 3.

⁵⁴ Here it refers to the 30 September Movement, a group of middle-ranking military officers who plotted a coup on 30 September 1965. Detailed discussions see Chapter 4.

⁵⁵ Roosa 2006, 4.

before the confrontation with Malaysia was that the economic measures failed to prevent economic deterioration. But according to some scholars, the worsening economic situation was in part a result of Sukarno's confrontation policy, since before the conflict, Sukarno largely abandoned the stabilization measures and stopped all trade with Malaysia.⁵⁶ In sum, Sukarno's foreign aggression was indeed a response to a less severe domestic situation. No evidence in history indicates that Sukarno utilized international tension to cope with acute political instability.

Sukarno's policy response to domestic problems was nothing unique when compared to the choices of other revolutionary leaders in the similar situations. History has witnessed few international disputes initiated by revolutionary leaders when they were faced with severe domestic unrest. Why? Why does their aggressive feature fail to translate into an aggressive foreign policy response to those intense domestic problems? As mentioned previously, in this dissertation, I propose a preference modification approach and argue that rebel leaders' policy choice during domestic unrest is a product of their pre-existing preferences and contextual factors: contextual factors not only constrain leaders' ability to pursue a certain policy, but more importantly reshape their policy preference. Specifically, I claim that rebel leaders' willingness to use force abroad during domestic unrest is contingent on the severity level of domestic problems. When rebel leaders face severe internal unrest, they are unwilling to engage in international conflicts because severe domestic strife will reshape leaders' perception and neutralize their policy preference toward international conflict.

⁵⁶ Hindley 1964, 904-905.

To test the theory, I utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods. I first conduct a cross-national analysis, using the data of militarized interstate disputes initiation between 1875 and 2000 by leaders under domestic turmoil with differing severity levels. The results show that rebel leaders' inclination to use force abroad is conditional on the severity level of domestic strife. The more severe the domestic strife, the less likely rebel leaders are to utilize foreign aggression. There are two advantages to begin with a quantitative analysis. First, nearly all of the prior research on either diversionary war or revolutionary leaders and war is quantitative. As Oakes articulates, "Using a statistical approach makes it possible to directly compare the argument presented here with claims in the extant literature."⁵⁷ Second, quantitative research "abstracts from particular instances to seek general description or to test causal hypotheses."⁵⁸ In this case, cross-national statistical studies demonstrate the generalizability of the theory and the probability of initiating an international dispute as a response to domestic unrest.

The next two chapters present in-depth studies of two revolutionary leaders: Mao Zedong (or *Mao Tse-tung*)⁵⁹ of the People's Republic of China (1949-1976) and Suharto of Indonesia (1967-1998). To examine the causal mechanisms, I will go over the stories of their lives with an emphasis on the time period when they were in office. The two case chapters will start with their life before assuming power and investigate how rebellion experiences affect their thought. Then the bulk of the following discussions consists of the two leaders' policy-making processes when they were faced with severe domestic strife. Despite the finding that neither of the two leaders chose international dispute as a response

⁵⁷ Oakes 2012, 10.

⁵⁸ King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 3.

⁵⁹ Similarly, I have spelt Chinese names according to the current spelling system in the People's Republic of China. The exceptions are those cases where individuals are known for the old spelling of their names (e.g. Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat-sen) or in direct quotations.

to acute domestic strife, the section following this emphasizes some aggressive attempts made by the leaders when the domestic situation was relatively settled. The last section explores the reasons for international conflicts not yet discussed and finds that none of these conflicts were launched to deal with acute domestic troubles.

The two cases are chosen for the following reasons. First, the home countries of the two leaders are divergent with regards to domestic background, institutional arrangement, culture, ideology, amongst others. As mentioned above, the context in which leaders are operating matters tremendously. Thus, by introducing two leaders in divergent domestic contexts, we can eliminate the influence of these variables listed before, thus verifying the theory efficiently.⁶⁰ Second, Mao and Suharto ruled their countries in different time periods. Mao's rule was from 1949 to 1976 whereas Suharto controlled Indonesia from 1967 to 1998. Drawing the comparison between the two could control the effect of time and structural factors (e.g. the Cold War). Third, Mao and Suharto have quite different rebellion experiences, which provides us with an opportunity to study the generalizable patterns of how rebellion experiences shape leaders' preferences. Suharto participated in rebellion for more pragmatic reasons and often changed his opposing targets a few times. In contrast, Mao was more equipped with revolutionary ambitions and was primarily loyal to one revolutionary movement. With this in mind, if we can still find some predictable patterns from leaders with such different rebellion experiences, we may have more confidence in the impact of rebellion on their future behaviors and beliefs. Lastly, both leaders have ruled their countries for a significant period of time, which gives us a plethora of cases to explore

⁶⁰ Gerring 2006.

the policy preferences of leaders who are faced with differing intensity degrees of domestic unrest.

The remainder of the dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents my theoretical argument in detail and articulates how severe domestic situations interact with the impact of rebellion experience in reshaping rebel leaders' policy preference when they are faced with serious domestic strife. Chapter 3 is a quantitative chapter, including a cross-national statistical analysis of the conditional effect of rebel experience on international dispute. Chapter 4 and 5 are the in-depth case studies of Mao Zedong and Suharto. Chapter 6 summarizes the major findings of the dissertation and describes their theoretical and practical implications.

CHAPTER 2: A THEORY OF REBEL LEADERS' POLICY

RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC UNREST

Those who participated in the events (i.e. revolutions) will be even more affected. The way they took power, looming so large for them, will influence the concepts and strategies that they later apply to ruling their country and dealing with the world.

—Robert Jervis,
Perception and Misperception in International Politics, 1976, p.262

Are rebel leaders more likely to pursue aggressive foreign policies during internal division than their non-rebel counterparts? If so, under what conditions are unpopular rebel leaders most likely to use violence abroad? When is external conflict a more-effective response to internal unrest than making political concessions to opposition groups or suppressing dissent? I argue that the willingness of rebel leaders to use force abroad is contingent on the severity level of domestic unrest. Specifically, when rebel leaders face a risk of severe internal unrest, they are unwilling to engage in international conflicts, because acute domestic instability will reshape leaders' perception and neutralize their policy preference toward international conflict through two mechanisms.

First, high seriousness level of domestic strife changes the cost-benefit calculation of available policy options. Specifically, serious domestic problems call for a direct, speedy, and "to-the-point" policy response, which enables domestic measures (i.e. co-optation and repression) to be more efficacious because domestic measures aim to directly and effectively address the problem that gives rise to the strife. Second, severe domestic unrest affects rebel leaders' intuitive behaviors by activating certain predispositions of leaders

endowed by rebellion experience, which induce them to use other policy response than initiating an international dispute. To begin with, the extremely unstable environment compels leaders to choose the policy they feel most confident in. The rebellion experience makes rebel leaders more confident in utilizing repression to deal with oppositions, given that they come into power after they survived a severe domestic crisis (i.e. rebellion). This confidence will translate into a preference of repression during severe domestic unrest. In addition, severe domestic unrest is often accompanied by the risk of international intervention. Compared to foreign aggression, domestic measures better conform to rebel leaders' appreciation of national authority and sovereignty (a predisposition they obtained from rebellion experience). Furthermore, rebellion experience predisposes rebel leaders to ruthlessness toward enemies, which will translate into a policy preference of repression during severe domestic unrest.

My explanation is laid out in three steps. First, I analyze the unique attributes rebel leaders share, in order to identify how the experience of rebellion participation affects their predisposition toward international conflict. I then set aside the subject of rebel leaders to investigate the internal-external conflict nexus in a general sense, focusing on how internal division or domestic problems motivate leaders to fight abroad. To this end, I introduce the severity level of domestic unrest as an important context to understand the internal-external conflict nexus. Next, I bring these two lines of analysis together and examine the mechanisms through which differing severity levels of domestic strife reshape rebel leaders' policy preference. Finally, I identify general hypotheses about rebel leaders' different policy choices under heterogeneous context at home.

REBELLION EXPERIENCE AND PREDISPOSITION TOWARD INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

According to Selbin (2013), “rebellions are often spontaneous uprisings aimed at changing leaders, policies, or even political institutions.”⁶¹ Rebels attempt to violently overthrow an existing regime. Nearly all rebellions exhibit certain common features. First, rebellions, like revolutions, “feature an explosion of political activity.”⁶² Participants must share some kind of “grievance” toward an existing regime, and tend to use illegal methods to challenge and overthrow it.

Second, successful rebellions are followed by a reinterpretation of history. Once previous rebels come into power, they justify their rebellion in order to forestall similar things that will happen to them. Third, rebellions, much like revolutions, “are usually characterized by violence. Force is often needed in order to oust the old regime, and even when it collapses without a fight, there are likely to be violent struggles among competing revolutionary [or rebellion] factions.”⁶³ In other words, for rebels, violence is an effective and necessary way to first overthrow the old regime and later consolidate their power if the rebellion succeeds.

In terms of the impact of rebellions and revolutions, conventional wisdom agrees that revolutionary states are more prone to international disputes.⁶⁴ Many of the existing studies focus on the system-level factors to explain the conflict-prone trait of revolutionary states. For instance, as Colgan summarizes, Walt argues that revolutions “(1) create

⁶¹ Selbin 2013, 12.

⁶² Walt 1996, 20.

⁶³ Ibid., 20–21.

⁶⁴ Colgan 2013; Enterline 1998; Gurr 1988; Goldstone 1996; Goldstone 2001; Maoz 1989; Maoz 1996; Skocpol 1988; Snyder 1999.

windows of opportunity for revolutionary states in turmoil to be attacked by other states, (2) increase the perception of hostility between the revolutionary state and its nonrevolutionary neighbors, (3) alter the offense-defense balance in the international system, and (4) increase the chance of miscalculation by lowering the quality of information available to state leaders.”⁶⁵

In addition to the system-level mechanisms that link rebellion to international conflict, there is an individual-level mechanism. That is, rebellions could influence the participants and predispose them to war. If those who have prior rebel experience come into power, they are more likely to engage in international conflict. Based on this mechanism, there is a consensus that leaders with rebellion experience are usually prone to international disputes and war.⁶⁶

In particular, the destructive and violent features of a rebellion will greatly influence its participants and predispose them toward international conflict through two pathways: selection and “socialization.” Simply put, rebellions first select people with certain conflict-prone attributes,⁶⁷ then reinforce their conflict-preference through the process of socialization.

In the next two sections, I will delve into these two mechanisms to explain how rebellion participation experience predisposes participants to use force abroad. Then, a discussion of the limitations of this individual-level mechanism will follow.

⁶⁵ Colgan 2013, 659.

⁶⁶ Colgan 2013; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Fuhrmann and Horowitz 2015; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015.

⁶⁷ In other words, for participants, participating in rebellion movement is a self-selective process. For example, only people who would like to take the high risk of rebellion will rebel.

SELECTION

Rebellions and revolutions are “deadly serious contests for extremely high stakes.”⁶⁸ This means that most people prefer not to rebel. Therefore, people who do participate in a rebellion must exhibit certain common features that differentiate them from their non-rebel counterparts. Specifically, rebellions select people with two characteristics: risk-tolerance and ambition to alter the status quo.⁶⁹ In terms of their implications on international conflict, these two features predispose rebel leaders to use violence abroad.

The first feature is risk-tolerance. Rebellion is such a dangerous activity that participants may run a tremendously high individual risk, which suggests that rebellion participants are more likely to be risk-taking than people without this experience. Research by Elisabeth Jean Wood gives an elaborate account of the high-risk circumstances for insurgents in El Salvador. During the process of insurgency, “[m]any paid the ultimate price. Just before and during much of the war, covert death squads and regular military forces carried out assassinations and disappearances with impunity throughout the contested areas.”⁷⁰ To make the account more persuasive, Wood quotes a young woman who was a resident living in the contested area:

*Some armed themselves, others fled. We [those who stayed in the area] were all seen as guerrillas. Every time we went to the coast, we were searched at the intersection. 1982 was a year of desperation, almost everyone left. My brother disappeared in 1982, one of hundreds who disappeared in 1982 and 1983—every day there were two or three bodies at the intersection. After all these years of war, the dead weigh heavily.*⁷¹

⁶⁸ Walt 1996, 21.

⁶⁹ Colgan 2013.

⁷⁰ Wood 2003, 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

The quote implies that since the primary target of rebellion movement is the government, rebels are consistently under the threat of state violence. For them, success is a relatively rare event and failure “will likely result in the rebel’s imprisonment or death.”⁷² Walt explicitly articulates the difficulty and rarity of successful revolutions:

*Successful revolutions are rare, because even weak and corrupt states usually control far greater resources than their internal opponents. States have better access to the means of violence and can use these tools to monitor, suppress; or coopt potential challengers. It is not surprising, therefore, that most revolutionary movements are rapidly extinguished, and would- be revolutionaries often end up in prison, in exile, or dead. Indeed, it is perhaps more surprising that revolutions ever succeed.*⁷³

Hence, those who can still take up arms to rebel against the existing regime must be much more risk-tolerant than those who do not. Nevertheless, one may question this logic link by arguing that participating in a rebel movement is not always self-selective and people sometimes rebel because they lack options. For example, Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) claims that the risk of participation in an insurgent collective action is not always higher than nonparticipation, as such, some combatants find that they are better off when participating in a rebellion.⁷⁴ It is true that in certain cases noncombatants do run a high risk as well. However, rebellion participation is generally riskier. After all, it is a movement undertaken by a relatively small group of people under the pressure of the violent state apparatus. As an active move, participation in rebel movements is easier to identify and results in a more grievous punishment if the rebellion fails. In this case, leaders who survive

⁷² Horowitz and Stam 2014, 536.

⁷³ Walt 1996, 22–23.

⁷⁴ Kalyvas and Kocher 2007.

rebellion participation have a greater level of risk tolerance, which means they are able to handle more risk and are more likely to take a riskier move when facing a similar situation.

The implication of this risk-tolerant personality trait of leaders on international conflict is quite straightforward. Given that international conflict is also a risky policy option, it is nearly a consensus in conventional wisdom that risk-taking leaders are more conflict-prone.⁷⁵ Specifically, leaders with a greater degree of risk-tolerance perceive more payoff from risky gambles, such as foreign aggression.

Second, as Jeff D. Colgan suggests, “in addition to risk tolerance, revolutionary politics selects for individuals who have ambitions to change the status quo.”⁷⁶ That is because rebellions by their nature are violent activities aiming at changing the status quo at home. Colgan claims that the ambition of revolutionary leaders makes them more willing to reject the status quo and engage in international disputes. “[W]hile some nonrevolutionary leaders are satisfied to simply enjoy the spoils of executive office, revolutionaries are systematically more likely to come to office with a desire to change the status quo in society.”⁷⁷ The foreign policy implication of this is that revolutionary leaders are inclined to change the status quo of international politics through war. Many other scholars draw a similar conclusion and use terms such as “transformative goals” or “the belief in a transformative mission” to describe this characteristic of revolutionary leaders.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Colgan 2013; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Fuhrmann and Horowitz 2015; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015; O’Neill 2001.

⁷⁶ Colgan 2013, 663.

⁷⁷ Colgan 2013, 663.

⁷⁸ Carter, Bernhard, and Palmer 2012; Jowitt 1993; Skocpol 1979.

SOCIALIZATION

In addition to the pathway listed above, participation in rebellion movements endows participants with new features that make them more conflict-prone. First, through revolution or rebellion, participants, especially leaders of the rebellion movements, can foster a sort of revolutionary ideology which would induce them to export revolution to other countries. As John W. Garver generalizes,

Successful revolutions require leaders who are completely dedicated to the revolutionary cause, who are willing to persist in the struggle even in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties and setbacks, who are willing to die for the cause and who have no qualms about the sacrifice of human life entailed in the victory of the revolution. Deep conviction, a dedication rooted in the very elements of the leader's personality, is required if the revolution is to succeed.⁷⁹

This revolutionary ideology is similar to the ambition discussed above. Both the revolutionary ideology and the ambition to alter the status quo are derived from the hope of transforming the domestic society and imply international conflict. Yet, there is a nuanced difference in terms of the international implication. The ambition to alter the status quo is more about the preference to transform the domestic society and somehow unintentionally challenge the existing international rules. In contrast, the revolutionary ideology dictates that leaders should actively intervene in international affairs and in many cases, it requires force abroad to export the ideology or externalize the domestic conflicts. According to Snyder (1999), a major reason for the breakdown of the relationship between the U.S. and third world revolutionary states is that “the radicals in these revolutionary states initiated hostilities with the U.S. in order to externalize their domestic conflicts with

⁷⁹ Garver 1997, 87.

the liberal bourgeoisie, who were previously part of the revolutionary coalitions. Since the bourgeoisie had strong transnational ties with the U.S., the radicals believed they had to defeat these moderates in order to establish completely new orders.”⁸⁰ Hence, the revolutionary ideology, compared to the ambition to alter the status quo, has a more direct impact on the onset of international violence.

For instance, Yang and Xia (2010) points out that Mao Zedong had a natural inclination toward the worldwide revolution, which was formed during the communist revolution and became “a pattern of behavior throughout his life.” Sheng’s research also shows that this inclination is not typical to Mao, but “became the foundation of the ‘psychological self’” for Mao and his revolutionary peers.⁸¹ Notably, communist ideology is not the only revolutionary ideology that might result in the export of revolution, the ideology of independence, self-determination, or democratization may also predispose followers to export revolution. That, to some extent, explains why we saw decolonization movements took place in different countries during the second half of the last century.

Furthermore, through the process of rebellion, people obtain a sense of military efficacy from their rebellion experience. Rebel leaders, especially those with a successful rebel experience, are more prone to value the utility of military forces as a policy tool.⁸² Mao provides us a good example of how rebel experience shapes people’s martial efficacy. Learning from his rebel participation experience, Mao wrote about his belief on the Chinese power struggles in 1938— “political power comes out of the barrel of a gun” (*qiangganzi limian chu zhenquan*; 枪杆子里面出政权)⁸³, one of his most well-known

⁸⁰ Snyder 1999, 266.

⁸¹ Sheng 1997, 192–193.

⁸² Corr 2004; Horowitz and Stam 2014.

⁸³ Mao 1967, vol. II, 224.

dicta. This dictum dictates the policies of his early years in power when we witnessed high levels of violence, both at home and abroad. Notably, this dictum also confirms what I argue above, that is, rebel experience shapes rebel leaders' beliefs about the game of political survival.

Rebellion experience also shapes the attitude of participants (especially leaders of rebellion) toward enemy. Specifically, as psychologists suggest, a successful revolutionist “is characterized by a conceptually simple level of functioning: He depicts the enemy as all evil and the revolution as the ultimate good; he evaluates all individuals, classes, and nations as either enemies or friends, depending on their attitude toward the revolution; his ultimate court of appeal is the authority of the revolution; and he directs all energies, faith, and struggle toward the success of the movement. Prominent pre-takeover individuals who show less than this complete single-mindedness are probably perceived by other revolutionists as weak, if not disloyal, which would tend to endanger their later careers.”⁸⁴ Therefore, rebellion experience usually makes leaders more ruthless toward their enemies, either because they think this is the right thing to do or because they do not want to be perceived as weak.

Drawing on the existing literature, Figure 2.1 demonstrates the direct link between rebel experience, domestic politics, and international conflict. It clearly illustrates how rebel experience predisposes leaders to foreign aggression. In addition to the strong predisposition to international conflict conferred by leaders' prior experience of rebellion participation, “post-revolutionary leaders are typically free of any meaningful constraint on their ability to declare war, such as a legal requirement to get congressional or cabinet

⁸⁴ Suedfeld and Rank 1976, 171.

approval.”⁸⁵ Carter et al. (2012) has similar findings that “revolutionary leaders have at their disposal highly disciplined organizations that pursue their transformational goals with exceptional zeal.”⁸⁶ Thus, the favorable domestic institutional environment that rebel leaders face will “amplify the salience of leaders’ characteristics”⁸⁷ and enable them to be more likely to use forces beyond the border.

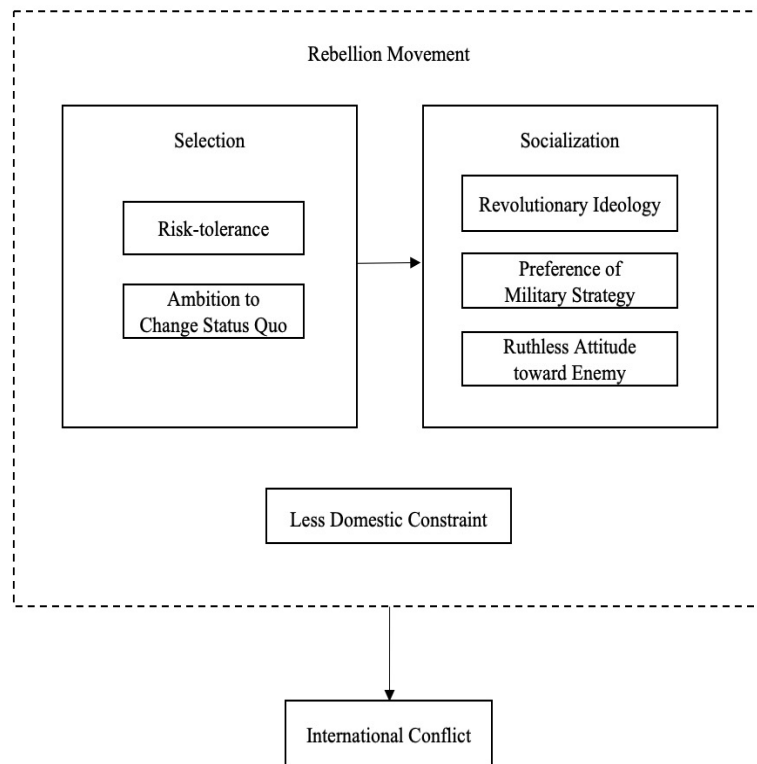


FIGURE 2.1. *The theoretical relationship between rebellion participation and international conflict*

⁸⁵ Colgan 2013, 664.

⁸⁶ Carter, Bernhard, and Palmer 2012, 443.

⁸⁷ Colgan 2013, 657.

LIMITATIONS

Although empirical research on leaders' rebellion experience and international conflict deepens our understandings of the conflict behavior of rebel leaders, it still has limitations.

One limitation is its inability to explain the variation of policy choices over time. This inability may first stem from the feature of personal experience factors. Factors that track individual background information (e.g. gender, education, military service, and family background) rarely change once a person reaches adulthood. For instance, the educational background of most people remains fixed after they finish school in late adolescence or early adulthood. This constancy of those factors makes it difficult for them to account for the variation of leaders' policy choices over time. But in practice, leaders' policy choices may change over time and context. Mao Zedong fought the U.S. in the Korean Peninsula in the 1950s but achieved rapprochement with the U.S. in the 1970s. This variation of policy choices presents an example of what cannot be explained by those static factors.

Furthermore, although empirical studies appropriately take domestic politics into their analytic framework, they misleadingly equate domestic politics with domestic political institutions and just discuss how those institutional arrangements affect the decision-making of leaders.⁸⁸ Domestic institutional arrangements are relatively static once set up, which means their effect, as with that of personal experience factors, is constant and

⁸⁸ Colgan 2013; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Fuhrmann and Horowitz 2015; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015.

static. Consequently, their research fails to capture the dynamics of leaders' decision-making processes.

Additionally, domestic politics is not just about political institutions and could be more dynamic. For instance, the domestic political context, such as domestic stability, changes over time and accounts for different policy outcomes in various settings. Specifically, as the following sections illustrate, leaders' policy making in the face of severe domestic problems is different from their decision making in peacetime. In this dissertation project, I will take the domestic stability level into consideration and discuss how it interacts with rebel leaders' prior perception and leads to diverse policy outcomes.

The second limitation lies in their understanding of the relationship between leaders' risk attitude and international conflict. The major mechanism suggested by recent works that links rebel experience to a high level of international conflict propensity is revolutionary leaders' higher level of risk tolerance.⁸⁹ However, the relationship between risk-tolerance and foreign aggression is far from definitive. Among the conventional wisdom on this topic, there is a consensus that a greater degree of risk-tolerance of decision-makers predicts a higher level of a decision-maker's propensity for interstate conflict, given that militarized conflict resembles a risky gamble. The underlying assumption for this argument is that among all the policy choices on the menu, international conflict is the riskiest one. It is true that in peacetime, initiating a conflict against a foreign country could be a risky decision compared to doing nothing. Yet in the real world, the policy alternative of conflict often extends beyond doing nothing and maintaining the status quo. For instance, when facing domestic turmoil, in addition to launching an international

⁸⁹ Colgan 2013; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Fuhrmann and Horowitz 2015; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015.

conflict, leaders could also choose to reform or to repress within their border.⁹⁰ Therefore, under some circumstances, the alternatives could be as risky, if not riskier, as international conflict. As scholars on repression long argue, repression is actually a risky choice. “Being costly and risky, it might not rank high among the ones preferred even by determined autocrats.”⁹¹

Second, international conflict is not the only policy preference induced by the prior rebellion experience of leaders. As Kim (2016) suggests, the personality trait of risk-tolerance not only predisposes revolutionary leaders to foreign aggression but also makes them prone to domestic violence like mass killing.⁹² Similarly, Colgan (2013) acknowledges that the ambition of revolutionary leaders “makes it more likely that a leader will reject the status quo internationally as well as domestically”.⁹³ In other words, revolutionary leaders could equally favor both international and domestic violence, which gives rise to a significant problem: when it comes to the policy choice between domestic violence and foreign aggression, the explanatory power of rebel experience and risk-tolerance will be largely undermined. Consequently, a special attention should be given to this scenario.

Based on the analysis above, I find that the existing discussion of rebel experience is not persuasive to permit us to predict how leaders will behave. As Walt correctly points out, “The main difficulty is the lack of a strong theoretical connection between personality traits and foreign policy preferences. Even if we knew that a leader possessed a ‘revolutionary personality’ (whatever that may be), this knowledge would not tell us very

⁹⁰ Oakes 2006; Oakes 2012.

⁹¹ Slantchev and Matush 2019, 3.

⁹² Kim 2016.

⁹³ Colgan 2013, 664.

much about his or her choice when facing a specific decision for war or peace.”⁹⁴ Therefore, I have to bring in factors that are more contextual, structural and dynamic, which here refers to the domestic political stability. In the following section, I will discuss how the domestic political context (i.e. the level of domestic stability) will affect leaders’ decision-making, and specifically, when and why leaders would like to go to international conflict in the face of internal problems.

THE INTERNAL-EXTERNAL CONFLICT NEXUS

On April 2, 1982, General Leopoldo Galtieri, the leader of the military junta and acting president of Argentina, ordered the Argentine armed forces to invade and occupy the Falklands Islands, which precipitated the Falklands War between Argentina and Great Britain. Although an immense amount of research has been done on the war, scholars have not yet reached a consensus on what led to this war. Diversionary theorists perceived the clash as “the archetypal case of diversionary war.”⁹⁵ They claim that General Galtieri went to war in the hope of mobilizing Argentines’ patriotism, rallying people behind the junta, and thus diverting public attention from domestic problems (e.g. economic decline and mass unrest).⁹⁶ Other researchers, like Giacomo Chiozza and Henk E. Goemans, believe that in this case, “the evidence for diversionary war is limited and questionable.”⁹⁷ They argue that “[a]t a time of social unrest and political uncertainty, the invasion of the Falklands was a unifying mission for an institution that was lacking a sense of purpose and mission, and allegedly the quid-pro-quo that earned General Galtieri the support for his

⁹⁴ Walt 1992, 329.

⁹⁵ Oakes 2006, 432.

⁹⁶ Dabat and Lorenzano 1984; Lebow 1983; Levy and Vakili 2014; Oakes 2006.

⁹⁷ Chiozza and Goemans 2011, 92.

rule from the navy commander, Admiral Jorge I. Anaya.”⁹⁸ Despite disagreement on the causes of the clash, people agree that to understand the conflict, “it would be incorrect to ignore domestic politics.”⁹⁹

As the Falkland War indicates, domestic unrest may motivate leaders to war. Theoretically, scholars like Alex Weisiger, also identify that war could be “driven by principal-agent problems—in other words, misbehaving leaders—in domestic politics.”¹⁰⁰ The root of this principal-agent problem lies in the fact that leaders may privately benefit from war initiation and war is not *ex post* inefficient for leaders.¹⁰¹ In particular, domestic unrest increases the incentive for leaders to use force abroad as a way to reduce internal difficulties and maintain power.¹⁰² Conventional wisdom provides four explanations of why leaders would like to go to war during domestic unrest. The first one is a classic diversionary explanation, which proposes that leaders instigate an interstate dispute in order to rally the public support by triggering in-group and out-group bias so that they can shift the public attention away from the internal problems and remain in power.¹⁰³ According to this explanation, international conflict produces in-group cohesion and out-group bias, which is the so-called “rally-around-the-flag” effect. Ideally, in this scenario, people put aside their differences and prioritize external threat, so that leaders will be saved from the domestic strife and gain a short-term boost in public approval. For instance, conventional wisdom finds that the external use of force by an American president will

⁹⁸ Ibid.; See also Hastings and Jenkins 1984; Pion-Berlin 1985; Thornton 1998.

⁹⁹ Weisiger 2013, 179.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰¹ Chiozza and Goemans 2004b; Weisiger 2013.

¹⁰² Chiozza and Goemans 2004a; Chiozza and Goemans 2011; Coser 1956; Miller and Elgün 2011; Nicholls, Huth, and Appel 2010; Oakes 2006; Simmel 1898; Tir 2010.

¹⁰³ Clark 2003; Coser 1956; Levy 1989; Oakes 2006; Simmel 1898.

generate a “rally-around-the-flag” effect and thus boost his popular support among the electorate, if only temporarily.¹⁰⁴

The second motivation provided by domestic unrest is what the current research called “gambling for resurrection.”¹⁰⁵ Chiozza and Goemans describe this mechanism as follows:

*leaders who expect to lose power soon can rationally prefer the risky lottery of war because their punishment in terms of time in office is truncated: they cannot lose more days in office as a result of war than they expect to have when they stay at peace. Thus, if staying at peace is very likely to lead to removal from office, even a small probability of victory – with its associated boost in tenure – is enough to make war preferable over peace for leaders.*¹⁰⁶

According to this strand of argument, leaders at risk of losing power postulate that they would gain more, or at least would not lose more, from the risky gamble of international conflict. The benefit of conflict initiation for leaders is clear and tempting. For instance, through international conflict, leaders could gain an opportunity to reveal their competence, which would give them a better chance to stay in power.¹⁰⁷

Building on these two accounts, Chiozza and Goemans contribute another two explanations: “fighting for survival” and “gambling for survival”.¹⁰⁸ The former refers to the idea that leaders obtain a better opportunity to defeat their domestic opponents by initiating an interstate conflict. For instance, they could eliminate their opponents by sending them to the battlefield or at least distract them from domestic plots. By “gambling for survival”, Chiozza and Goemans refer to the logic that leaders who have a risk a forcible

¹⁰⁴ Levy and Thompson 2010, 100; Kernell 1978; Mueller 1973.

¹⁰⁵ Chiozza and Goemans 2004a; Chiozza and Goemans 2011; Downs and Rocke 1994; Richards et al. 1993; Smith 1996; Williams, Brulé, and Koch 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Chiozza and Goemans 2004a, 425.

¹⁰⁷ Chiozza and Goemans 2004a; Chiozza and Goemans 2011; Richards et al. 1993; Smith 1996.

¹⁰⁸ Chiozza and Goemans 2011.

removal are more likely to initiate conflict, because once they win the conflict, they may have more legitimacy and capability to fight against their domestic opponents. It is a similar logic to “gambling for resurrection”. As Chiozza and Goemans point out, the major difference between the two mechanisms is that in their theory, “leaders act to save their lives, rather than just their job.”¹⁰⁹ This difference in goals implies the differing degree of leaders’ willingness to take the risk and how much risk they would like to take when making a war decision. Chiozza and Goemans (2011) argues that Saddam Hussein provides a good example of fighting and gambling for survival,¹¹⁰ because “Saddam Hussein’s personal survival played a crucial role in his wars against Iran in 1980 and against Kuwait in 1991.”¹¹¹ They quoted *The New York Times* to specify how Hussein fought and gambled for survival:

*Mr. Hussein told his interrogator on one occasion that a principal reason for invading [Kuwait, added] was his belief that he needed to keep his army occupied. One senior intelligence official familiar with that interview said Mr. Hussein seemed to suggest that he distrusted what his restive officer corps might do if they were not otherwise distracted.*¹¹²

Figure 2.2 illustrates the domestic political motivations for leaders to initiate an international conflict when they are facing domestic strife.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 26–28.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 26.

¹¹² Ibid., 27.

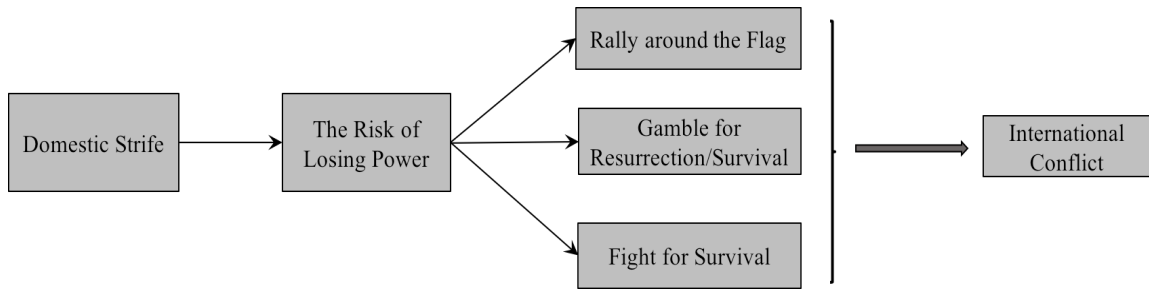


FIGURE 2.2. *The theoretical relationship between domestic strife and international conflict*

However, some scholars argue that although internal problems might spark leaders' willingness to initiate an international conflict, internal troubles could also induce policymakers to avoid foreign aggression.¹¹³ For example, according to Geoffrey Blainey, "It would be surprising if most wars broke out when or where economic pressures and needs were most compelling, for those are times and places which are less capable of financing a war."¹¹⁴ In addition to the inability to fight both internally and externally, the desire to directly address those internal problems also transfers both leaders' attention and resources that they could have otherwise deployed in the domestic arena. This makes leaders less inclined to ignite or exacerbate international tensions.¹¹⁵

To address this inconsistency, more studies start to realize that oversimplified aggregation of internal problems largely undermines our understanding of the internal-external conflict nexus.¹¹⁶ It is significantly valuable to distinguish between diverse types of domestic strife and not treat them as a single homogenous phenomenon. Building on this general finding, a number of scholars modify the internal-external nexus argument by

¹¹³ Hazlewood 1975; Kegley, Richardson, and Richter 1978; Salmore and Salmore 1973.

¹¹⁴ Blainey 1988, 87–88.

¹¹⁵ Gelpi 1997.

¹¹⁶ Davies 2002; Gelpi 1997; Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz 2008; Hazlewood 1975; Levy 1989.

adding conditions to make the argument hold.¹¹⁷ For instance, some studies focus on a specific kind of society (e.g. democracies) and identify when domestic problems motivate leaders toward foreign aggression. Morgan and Bickers (1992) uses data from the United States from 1953 to 1976 and argues that leaders go to war only when they notice an erosion of domestic support within groups that are crucial in maintaining their ruling coalition.¹¹⁸ Similarly, Dassel and Reinhardt (1999) finds that domestic strife leads to foreign aggression only when it threatens the organizational interest of the military.¹¹⁹ Daxecker (2011) also demonstrates that political instability at home has no independent effect on international disputes. More specifically, the impact of political instability is contingent on states' involvement in a civil war.¹²⁰

In addition, some other research has a more general scope and investigates how the differing severity level of domestic strife affects the international conflict propensity. As Hazlewood (1975) and Levy (1989) suggest, the relationship between domestic disturbance and international conflict might be curvilinear, not linear. The effectiveness of international diversion, as a policy response to internal disturbance, is conditional on the magnitude of domestic turmoil. They argue that when faced with less severe strife, decision-makers would like to initiate an international conflict to maximize the security of their hold on office. As the strife becomes serious, leaders believe that the externalization of the internal problem would exacerbate the strife and threaten their political survival, so they are less willing to go into international conflict.

¹¹⁷ Dassel and Reinhardt 1999; Daxecker 2011; Ward and Widmaier 1982.

¹¹⁸ Morgan and Bickers 1992.

¹¹⁹ Dassel and Reinhardt 1999.

¹²⁰ Daxecker 2011.

As Charles Tilly points out, “It is not hard, then, to find instances of plausible ties between domestic and international conflict. The difficulties begin with efforts to generalize and to model such instances.”¹²¹ The inconsistency of current studies’ conclusions and findings reveals a major limitation of their theories and models: they overlook the variation in leaders’ personal beliefs. It is true that different domestic problems may have a diverse impact on leaders’ decision-making. However, current research spends too much time trying to find the correlation between domestic turmoil and the onset of international conflict whilst failing to clearly recognize the mechanism through which domestic turmoil predisposes leaders to war. The fear of losing office, proposed by the conventional scholarship, is not enough to account for the variation of leaders’ decisions, since other policy options (e.g. domestic repression) could also save them from losing power.¹²² Without considering the difference in leaders’ beliefs and preferences, it is hardly possible to uncover when leaders would like to go to war as opposed to other policies.

In particular, most literature on the internal-international conflict nexus assumes that decision-makers have homogeneous preferences and perceptions when faced with domestic strife, so decisions made by leaders are supposed to be alike in the similar context.¹²³ Therefore, they only focus on structural factors that shape leaders’ beliefs and decisions. While this assumption may simplify the research and also provide some useful explanations of how domestic unrest relates to international tension, it is unable to give a full picture of the decision-making process because it overlooks leaders’ varying

¹²¹ Tilly 1985, 524.

¹²² For examples, see Chiozza and Goemans 2011; Foster, Mitchell, and Thyne 2010; Kegley, Richardson, and Richter 1978.

¹²³ For examples, see Dassel and Reinhardt 1999; Levy 1989; Moore and Davis 1998; Nicholls, Huth, and Appel 2010; Richards et al. 1993; Tir 2010.

preferences. As discussed above, leaders' preferences do vary, which induces them to heterogeneous decisions even when facing a similar situation. Hermann (2003) records that Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States from 1953 to 1961, had a special preference to "controlling the spread of nuclear weapons through developing peaceful uses for atomic energy,"¹²⁴ which was revealed in his decision-making process and relevant policies. Thus, to better understand the nexus, we should bring leaders back. Specifically, my argument is that domestic problems affect leaders' decision-making by reshaping their beliefs and perceptions of war as a policy response.

In the next section, I will discuss how the interaction between domestic politics and leaders' beliefs affects leaders' policy-making under domestic unrest. In particular, conventional wisdom on leaders' experience and conflict propensity has come to the consensus that rebellion background predisposes leaders to use force abroad.¹²⁵ However, this conclusion may not hold consistently when leaders encounter domestic problems with differing levels of intensity. It will add great value if we can distinguish diverse types of domestic strife and not treat the domestic context as invariant. As mentioned above, more and more scholars have realized that oversimplified aggregation of internal problems largely undermines our understanding of the internal-external conflict nexus.¹²⁶

Building on this, I argue that the conflict propensity of revolutionary leaders is contingent on the seriousness level of domestic problems. That is, some internal problems of low severity might make revolutionary leaders continue to favor foreign aggression, whereas others with a higher severity level could totally neutralize their aggressive

¹²⁴ Hermann 2003, 60.

¹²⁵ For examples, see Carter, Bernhard, and Palmer 2012; Colgan 2013; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Fuhrmann and Horowitz 2015; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015.

¹²⁶ Davies 2002; Gelpi 1997; Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz 2008; Levy 1989.

preference beyond the border. In the next section, I will distinguish internal strife with differing degrees of severity to investigate whether leaders with prior rebel participation will behave differently. Also, unlike the previous studies that emphasize the effect of foreign aggression on political survival, I argue that the differing levels of domestic strife lead to heterogeneous decisions through shaping rebel leaders' international conflict propensity and policy preferences.

THE INTERACTION OF DOMESTIC UNREST AND LEADERS' BELIEFS

As the decision-making approach argues, "an explanation of the foreign policy actions of states requires an understanding of the processes through which political leaders perceive the external world and make and then implement their decisions."¹²⁷ It follows that to understand foreign policy decisions we need to understand the interaction between leaders' beliefs and the domestic environment in which leaders operate, and why "states make certain decisions rather than other decisions."¹²⁸

When it comes to leaders' decision-making in the face of domestic troubles, although foreign aggression has been long regarded as one of the main instruments leaders could use to deal with internal problems and retain power, there are few comparative and systematic studies on what makes leaders favor foreign aggression over its policy alternatives. For instance, most research on international conflict emphasizes the mechanisms (e.g. diversionary theory) through which internal unrest leads to international

¹²⁷ Levy and Thompson 2010, 128.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

militarized disputes but overlooks the reasons why domestic repression, as a possible policy alternative, is less attractive to those decision-makers.¹²⁹ As Oakes puts it, “the decision to launch a diversionary conflict may result more from the inability to reform or repress, than it does from the perceived utility of using force to rally the public.”¹³⁰ Thus, a good explanation for the onset of international conflict during domestic turmoil should not only account for why violence beyond the border happens but also account for why leaders do not choose other policy responses.

As discussed above, leaders’ prior rebel experience predisposes them to international conflicts. Domestic strife also motivates leaders to foreign aggression. Therefore, there will be a strong expectation that when facing domestic strife, rebel leaders are more likely to go to war than anyone else. However, violence beyond the border is not always the option those leaders take. Under domestic unrest, revolutionary leaders could equally, if not more, favor domestic measures, like repression and co-optation. I argue that the preference for a certain kind of policy is contingent on the severity of domestic strife. An extremely unstable domestic environment, such as revolution and civil war, could neutralize rebel leaders’ aggressive preference abroad, and shift their preference and priority toward domestic issues. In particular, I argue that the logic of rebel leaders’ policy-making under severe domestic strife is different from the logic under less serious domestic strife: extremely unstable domestic environment may reshape rebel leaders’ beliefs, neutralize their international conflict preference, and induce them to domestic policy options (i.e. repression and co-optation).

¹²⁹ Foster, Mitchell, and Thyne 2010; Miller and Elgün 2011; Nicholls, Huth, and Appel 2010; Tir 2010.

¹³⁰ Oakes 2006, 431.

WHY DOMESTIC STRIFE SEVERITY MATTERS?

People agree that it is of tremendous value to categorize domestic problems by their magnitude, but fail to reach an agreement on the rules and standards.¹³¹ For instance, some use the frequency of the political unrest activities (also referred to as intensity) to divide domestic strife into differing levels,¹³² whereas some others employ the presence of violence as the standard.¹³³ As Davenport criticizes, only one aspect of dissidence is not enough.¹³⁴ Here, borrowing from Davenport (1995), I identify three attributes to illustrate the seriousness level of domestic strife. They are “1) basic frequency counts of events, 2) the presence of violence, [and] 3) the variety of strategies employed by dissidents.”¹³⁵

Two caveats about the definition should be noted before we proceed. First, I do not include Davenport’s fourth attribute— “deviations from culturally accepted levels of dissent,”¹³⁶ because it will be tautological for my purpose. For Davenport, the fourth attribute is about how far away the strife deviates from “the particular amount of political conflict that the regime will allow to take place before it applies repressive behavior.”¹³⁷ This may have a policy implication on how leaders will respond, which entails a tautological threat to my theory.

The second caveat is about the relationship between a severe domestic situation and a substantial threat to leaders’ rule. Although existing studies on the internal-external conflict nexus do not provide a clear definition of domestic unrest, they generally agree

¹³¹ Dassel and Reinhardt 1999; Davies 2002; Gelpi 1997; Levy 1989.

¹³² Aflatooni and Allen 1991; Cingranelli 1992; Hibbs 1973.

¹³³ Hazlewood 1975; Levy 1989.

¹³⁴ Davenport 1995.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 685.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 686.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 688.

that domestic unrest refers to “internal social, economic, or political problems that threaten their domestic political survival.”¹³⁸ This definition suggests a causal link between domestic problems and leaders’ rule. That is, domestic problems developed to a certain degree will result in relatively large-scale dissent which, if growing to a certain level, will pose a severe threat to leaders’ rule.

A few clarifications should be in order here. To begin with, the definition actually implies the importance of the severity level of domestic troubles. Different problems may pose differing degrees of threat to leaders. Furthermore, domestic problems and unrest could affect leaders’ rule in both direct and indirect ways. One scenario is that domestic unrest would threaten a leader’s political survival directly because people blame problems on their leader and oppose his or her rule. For instance, on April 16, 2014, a ferry known as MV Sewol carrying 476 people sank in South Korea. The sinking of MV Sewol resulted in popular opposition to the rule of the incumbent President Park Geun-hye since many people held the president responsible for the incident. The approval rating of President Park sharply dropped and there was even a call for her resignation.¹³⁹

The other scenario is that people may not directly oppose the leader’s rule, but their dissent about the current domestic situation could develop into mass incidents, thus placing the country into disorder. The disorder in turn weakens the leader’s legitimacy and capability to control the country. As we will discuss in detail later, domestic turmoil of China under Mao’s rule was not targeting Mao. Instead, it was a tool of Mao to eliminate opposition. However, after the unrest developed into large-scale turmoil, Mao’s rule was weakened and threatened. In both scenarios, the severity level of domestic unrest plays a

¹³⁸ Fravel 2010, 311.

¹³⁹ Choe 2014.

role in linking domestic problems to the threat of leaders' rule. Although domestic troubles may not necessarily pose a direct challenge to leaders' rule, they could be translated into threat to their rule if they grow to a certain level later.

After making the severity level of domestic strife clear, we should now ask why the severity level matters.

First, only relatively severe domestic problems that pose a great threat to leaders' power can get a policy response, because it is not the domestic problem *per se* but the risk of losing power incurred by internal troubles that push leaders to respond in different policies. Most public contention activities targeting the incumbent government are non-violent with a low-severity level and barely threaten leaders' power, so leaders may just ignore them and pay no special attention to them. According to the Crowd Counting Consortium (CCC), a dataset documenting crowds and contention in the United States, over 8,700 protests took place from January 21, 2017, through December 31, 2017. Roughly 1.8 to 2.8 percent of the population of the United States participated in those protests, and 89 percent of these people were protesting the incumbent president, Donald Trump, or his agenda.¹⁴⁰ Chenoweth and Pressman (2018) also finds that

While the media offer more coverage of the occasional violent protest, the overwhelming majority of crowds engaged in nonviolent resistance. We find only 294 injuries and one death (of Heather Heyer in the Charlottesville car attack) during protests the entire year, fewer than 0.000005 percent of those who protested. Only 39 incidents involved reports of property damage — less than 0.5 percent of protests in 2017.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Pressman and Chenoweth 2017; Chenoweth and Pressman 2018.

¹⁴¹ Chenoweth and Pressman 2018.

Therefore, it is impossible and of little need, if any, for President Trump to respond to each protest due to the high frequency and the low threat those protests pose to his rule. It is of particular importance to examine how the increasing severity level of domestic unrest affects the policy-making of leaders.

Second, severe domestic strife indicates a setting of internal crisis, which may lead to a completely different decision-making process and thus policy choice. Research on decision-making under stress already finds that differing levels of pressure could cause a difference in both the decision-making processes and the policy outcomes by reshaping leaders' cost-benefit calculations and cognitive process.¹⁴² Some rationalists argue that a high-pressure context, like extreme domestic instability, that may forcibly remove leaders from office, will reframe leaders' cost-benefit calculations of policy options and predispose them to gamble on a riskier policy.¹⁴³ Other rationalist studies, as discussed above, argue that the choice among different violent policies is conditional on the severity level of the domestic strife. For instance, drawing on Levy (1989), Gelpi (1997) generalizes the curvilinear relationship between internal and external conflict as follows: "domestic unrest may increase incentives for diversion until the disturbances are so great that the dissenting groups may no longer consider the state to be an in-group. Beyond this threshold of unrest, diversion is not a viable strategy for leaders to maintain their hold on power, and they must turn to repression."¹⁴⁴ Researchers focusing on the cognition and psychology of leaders, such as Elizabeth A. Stanley, propose that different levels of stress activate different neuroceptive processes, resulting in differing levels of performance.¹⁴⁵ Specifically, "[a]t

¹⁴² Chiozza and Goemans 2011; George 1986; Herek, Janis, and Huth 1987; Hermann 1969; Hermann 2003; Stanley 2018; Trumbore and Boyer 2000; Welch 1989.

¹⁴³ For example, see Chiozza and Goemans 2011.

¹⁴⁴ Gelpi 1997, 262.

¹⁴⁵ For example, see Stanley 2018.

low levels of stress arousal, individuals may not experience enough activation to be alert and motivated to complete the task at hand effectively. Conversely, at high levels of arousal, individuals may find their attention and energy diverted from the task to focusing on and coping with the stress itself. As the distress worsens, performance degrades steadily, eventually reaching a point of paralysis or freeze.”¹⁴⁶ Both rationalists and scholars emphasizing cognition agree that we should pay special attention to the severity level of domestic strife because the severity level determines not only whether leaders would respond, but also how to respond.

In sum, domestic political contexts (e.g. the severity level of domestic strife) matter because they modify individual leader’s beliefs in the efficacy of policy options and thus their preference to those policies. When facing low-severity strife, even when leaders do respond, the low level of stress would not change their pre-existing policy preferences and beliefs, because individual preferences and beliefs formed during their prior life are relatively persistent. The reestablishment of personal beliefs needs an external shock. The extremely unstable internal environment could serve as the external shock for leaders to modify their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs, dictating leaders to options they otherwise would not take. Then how does increasing internal instability reshape rebel leaders’ policy preferences? Are they still prone to fight abroad to save their political life (even physical life in some cases)?

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 184.

REBEL LEADERS AND HIGH-LEVEL STRIFE

The main object of this dissertation project is how rebel leaders respond to domestic unrest. I argue that the existence of domestic unrest may reshape rebel leaders' policy preferences and lead to different policy outcomes from what rebel leaders could have when they are not faced with domestic unrest. Given the general findings of existing literature on rebel leaders and international conflict, we already have a general sense about how rebel leaders will behave in a stable domestic setting. That is, holding other conditions constant, rebel leaders are more likely to provoke international disputes than their non-rebel counterparts, when they are not in the face of domestic unrest.¹⁴⁷ Thus, in the following sections, I will not discuss more about how rebel leaders behave when there is no domestic strife, but rather will focus on rebel leaders' responses to internal division.

Although leaders with a prior rebellion experience generally have a higher international conflict propensity and aggressive preference, this propensity and preference for international conflict are subject to differing levels of domestic unrest. More specifically, as demonstrated in Figure 2.3, severe domestic strife will reduce their inclination to use force abroad in two fundamental ways.

¹⁴⁷ Colgan 2013; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Fuhrmann and Horowitz 2015; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015; Walt 1992; Walt 1996.

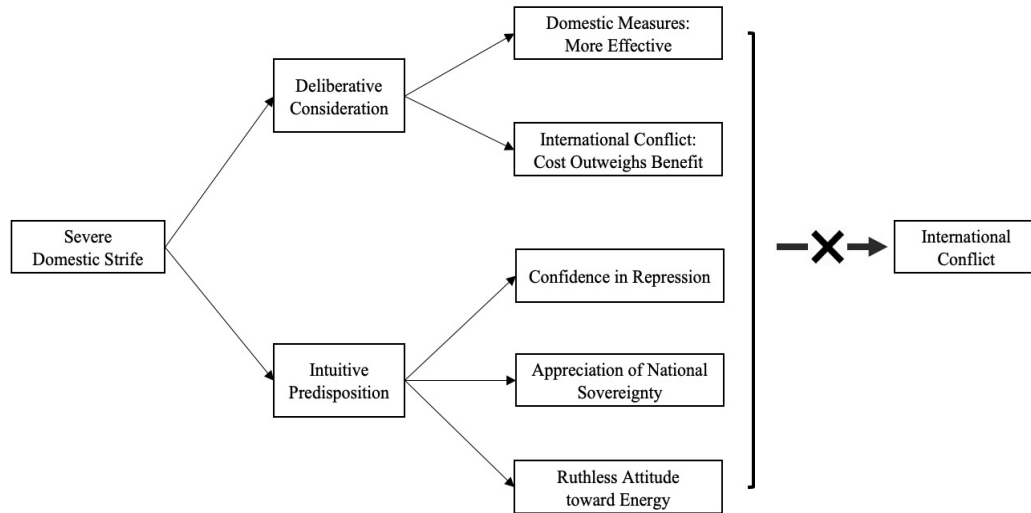


FIGURE 2.3. *The effect of severe domestic strife on rebel leaders' policy preference*

Dual-process theories of neurosciences contend that “human thought processes are subserved by two distinct mechanisms, one fast, automatic, and nonconscious, the other slow, controlled, and conscious, which operate largely independently and compete for behavioral control.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, “the human brain uses at least two different processes of decision-making based on different neural systems: the intuitive system and the deliberative system.”¹⁴⁹ In this case, high-level domestic unrest reshapes rebel leaders’ policy preferences by affecting both their deliberative and intuitive systems. Specifically, a severe domestic environment not only changes rebel leaders’ intuitive behaviors, which are guided by predispositions resulting from past experiences, but also alters their rational considerations based on cost-benefit rationale.

¹⁴⁸ Evans and Frankish 2009, v.

¹⁴⁹ Kaufman 2019, 3.

The Deliberative System of Rebel Leaders and Perception of Policy Efficacy

Severe domestic strife, as a crisis of rule, is more likely to be urgent and to unfold rapidly. It calls for a more direct, quick, and efficient solution that could solve the problems, for which international conflict is generally not an effective option. As Chris Zebrowski's recent work suggests, "In the time-sensitive field of emergency response, speed is critical. The sudden onset, non-linear amplification and rapid spread of emergent 'complex emergencies' demand the capacity for a speedy and flexible response."¹⁵⁰

It is true that an international conflict could give leaders a chance to rally support at home, prove their competence, and even eliminate domestic opponents. However, the choice of interstate war may be more reasonable and meaningful when the domestic strife is not as pressing and fatal, as all the benefits of international conflict need time to emerge. Take the "rally-around-the-flag" effect as an example. A war against a foreign target cannot spontaneously lead to in-group cohesion and out-group hatred. The formation of the large-scale social emotion requires continuous mobilization underpinned by wide-spread and strong government power. Yet, time and strong government power are the two exact things that leaders facing severe domestic strife lack. As studies on the causes of domestic conflict indicate, weak state capacity is a crucial determinant.¹⁵¹ Thus, the emergence of severe internal strife is always accompanied with weakening state capacity and shattering government authority. In this case, leaders may not have enough time to wait for an international conflict to take effect and also are incapable of bolstering the policy to take effect.

¹⁵⁰ Zebrowski 2019, 148.

¹⁵¹ Besley and Persson 2010; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Fjelde and De Soysa 2009; Hironaka 2008.

Moreover, the logic of relying on international dispute to save political life is roundabout and indirect. This approach aims to use a foreign target, a third party, as a scapegoat to solve domestic problems. The actual goal here is to buy time or opportunity to defeat domestic rivals, and not to directly address the problem that threatens leaders' power. As Fravel correctly points out, "Leaders have little reason to conclude that a short-term rally will address what are usually structural sources of domestic dissatisfaction."¹⁵² Also, foreign aggression during internal division will complicate the situation when the threat is imminent and pressing, by dragging another actor into the game to circumvent the real problem.

Despite the reasons I list above, some scholars claim that leaders would like to engage in international conflict when domestic unrest is severe.¹⁵³ For example, James and Hristoulas (1994) finds an association between higher levels of political opposition and American involvement in international disputes.¹⁵⁴ Oakes (2006) also claims that "the risky gamble of diversionary war is more likely to be undertaken by impoverished governments that are running out of solutions to their mounting domestic problems. While leaders may prefer simply quashing their opposition to diverting attention, states with access to few resources often do not possess the capability to engage in repressive internal policing."¹⁵⁵ Given the mixed results of how the severity level of domestic unrest relates to international conflict, it is meaningful to introduce the role of leaders' beliefs here to explore the interactive impact of rebel leaders' beliefs and severe domestic unrest on the initiation of international disputes.

¹⁵² Fravel 2010, 339.

¹⁵³ For example, see Dassel and Reinhardt 1999.

¹⁵⁴ James and Hristoulas 1994.

¹⁵⁵ Oakes 2006, 439.

I argue that given the contextual constraint on use force abroad, leaders with rebellion experience are even less willing to provoke international disputes during severe internal division than their non-rebel counterparts are.

One of the major reasons is that in the face of a serious domestic problem, rebel leaders would rather solve it with domestic measures than evade it with use force abroad, since costs of evading problems could include regime collapse and death, which of course would be too high for rebel leaders. Countries led by rebel leaders are less likely to be well institutionalized, which endows rebel leaders with more fear about regime survival. First, having been part of a rebellion that contributed to their ascent to power, rebel leaders are more likely than other leaders to think of domestic unrest (such as rebellion) as a real threat to regime survival. From 1875 to 2000, more than 84.7% rebel leaders lived in non-democracies, which may imply that people in these countries have less legitimate outlet to express their grievances and thus have a high probability to utilize illegal methods, like rebellions. Similarly, Suharto once explicitly expressed his concern about the consequence of coup: “I was firm in my wish not to hand down a black page in the history of the Indonesian Armed Forces by staging a coup. Once that had happened, it would always be open for repetition such as in Latin America or Africa.”¹⁵⁶

Second and related, since rebel leaders, by definition, rule at a time shortly after a rebellion, they are likely to see the stability of their regime as more tenuous than leaders of a regime that exists decades or centuries after its founding rebellion. From 1875 to 2000, 40% rebel leaders come to power through an irregular way (i.e. ways other than regular elections) whereas only less than 8% non-rebel leaders assume power irregularly. Thus,

¹⁵⁶ Soeharto 1991, 149.

leaders with rebellion experiences are more concerned for regime stability and survival than their counterparts.

With weak institutional guarantee, rebel leaders face a much more severe consequence (e.g. being forcibly removed from the office, physical imprisonment, and exile) than just losing the job, if they fail to immediately and successfully handle problems.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, in the face of severe domestic unrest, rebel leaders are more eager to find solutions that could directly and effectively tackle the problem.

Under this situation, international conflict would not be a good choice, because “unlike repression or reform, it fails to tackle the root problem—a dissatisfied population. Any amelioration in unrest is dependent on the continuing diversion of the public, a situation that could end at any time. The problem with offering circuses without bread is that the population is still hungry after the performance ends.”¹⁵⁸ In contrast, domestic measures, like co-optation and repression, are better options for rebel leaders, because they directly deal with the internal opposition using either carrot or stick, whilst also reassuring rebel leaders’ doubts about regime instability. “Event suppression ensures security not by preventing an event from happening, but by quickly closing down the ‘disruptive’ time of the emergency event and restoring the linear historical time of standard political processes.”¹⁵⁹

The second reason why rebel leaders are reluctant to use force abroad is that involvement in foreign aggression during serious internal divisions entails more cost and less benefit to them. To begin, the effect of international conflict on domestic unrest is

¹⁵⁷ Chiozza and Goemans 2011.

¹⁵⁸ Oakes 2006, 439.

¹⁵⁹ Zebrowski 2019, 148.

short-lived.¹⁶⁰ This short-term effect could benefit those who aim to boost public support for electoral purpose but not those who want to maintain political rule for a long time. As mentioned above, most rebel leaders are from non-democracies, which means that a short-term boost may not help them achieve their goal.

In addition to the less benefits, engaging in international conflict may entail more cost for rebel leaders. Given a weaker domestic institutional endowment of most countries led by rebel leaders, the failure of the conflict could be disastrous. To begin with, initiating an international conflict drags a third-party into the domestic turmoil, which may be perceived as aggressive. It will incur criticism from the international community, worsen the international environment, and in return exacerbate domestic problems. Furthermore, if the war ends in defeat, “the end of the regime is often at hand.”¹⁶¹ Even before the war ends, the negative effect appears. For example, if “the war drags on and requires greater than anticipated sacrifices, the mobilization process will aggravate the social fragmentation it was waged to ease.”¹⁶² In contrast, domestic measures are much less risky and straightforward.

In sum, based on the cost-benefit rationale, rational rebel leaders would not count on an international conflict to maintain their power in the extremely unstable environment, because this measure is not only inefficient when dealing with the root problems, but is also too costly.

¹⁶⁰ Mueller 2002, 188; Oakes 2006, 439.

¹⁶¹ Oakes 2006, 439.

¹⁶² Ibid.

The Intuitive System of Rebel Leaders and Policy Preference

In addition to the deliberative system, high-level domestic unrest reshapes rebel leaders' policy preference away from international conflict through affecting their intuitive behaviors in following three ways.

First, rebel leaders, especially those who assume power through rebellion, have extensive experience in domestic political struggles, which may give them more confidence in using force at home. As Walt notes, throughout the revolutionary process, people always feel tempted to use force to enhance their position.¹⁶³ This indicates that rebel leaders are more familiar with using force at home than their non-rebel counterparts. Hermann (2003) finds that predominant leaders “tend to gravitate toward the area of policy where they feel comfortable”, and the more extensive their experience or expertise the more likely such leaders become involved in what is happening.¹⁶⁴ Although Hermann focuses more on different areas of policy, the statement can be applied in the policy choice of leaders as well. Also, previous experience gives leaders a sense of what policies will be effective or ineffective in a specific situation.¹⁶⁵ Thus, rebellion experience predisposes leaders to use domestic measures, especially repression, when dealing with domestic oppositions.

Mobutu Sese Seko, the President of the Republic of the Congo (renamed Zaire in 1971), provides us with a perfect example of how rebel leaders favor domestic measures to deal with internal problems. During his 32-year rule from 1965 to 1997, Mobutu encountered numerous and persistent challenges from individuals and groups. Among

¹⁶³ Walt 1996, 21.

¹⁶⁴ Hermann 2003, 59.

¹⁶⁵ Hermann 1986; Preston and Hart 1999.

them, many of the opposition events were very violent and intense, such as Stanleyville mutinies and the First Congo War (the conflict that replaced Mobutu with a new rebel leader, Laurent-Désiré Kabila). To consolidate power and address threats and opposition, Mobutu mainly either repressed or co-opted and never initiated an international conflict.¹⁶⁶ On one hand, he relied on brutality to execute his political rivals, like the former Prime Minister Evariste Kimba, and repress rebellions; on the other hand, he bought off political dissidents through bribery.¹⁶⁷ In Mobutu's eyes, "Leaving people in exile was a danger, they were making a lot of noise. The game was to neutralise their capacity to damage him."¹⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Mobutu quoted his father's words to describe his co-opting tactic: "Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer still."¹⁶⁹ Therefore, the conclusion drawn by existing work on rebel experience and high international conflict propensity may not hold for rebel leaders in the context of violent domestic strife.

Second, the prior rebel experience predisposes leaders to domestic measures when facing severe domestic unrest, because they conform to rebel leaders' appreciation of national authority. To begin with, as Fuhrmann and Horowitz (2015) points out "leaders that participate in rebellions before taking office—whether or not the rebellion itself brings them into power—have an appreciation of the tenuous nature of national authority and sovereignty."¹⁷⁰ The extreme domestic instability could largely undermine national authority and sovereignty. The appreciation of national authority and sovereignty will

¹⁶⁶ During Mobutu's rule (1965-1997), there were seven wars involving the Republic of the Congo (Zaire after 1971)—the First Stanleyville Mutiny (1966), the Second Stanleyville Mutiny (1967), the Angolan Civil War (1975-1979), the Shaba I (1977), the Shaba II (1978), the Chadian-Libyan Conflict (1983-1987), the Rwandan Civil War (1990-1991), and the First Congo War (1996-1997). None of these were driven by a diversionary cause. Also, when being challenged by rebellion or threatened by coup, Mobutu was inclined to use direct repression and resistance.

¹⁶⁷ McCormick 1994.

¹⁶⁸ Meredith 2011, 564.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Fuhrmann and Horowitz 2015, 75.

make revolutionary leaders more inclined to policies that directly preserve independence and national unity.

Specifically, by dragging at least one foreign country into the existing domestic strife, initiating an international conflict is more likely to further undermine national unity by provoking international intervention. For instance, in the face of economic collapse, political tension and popular dissent, the former Uganda President Idi Amin attempted to annex the Kagera Salient in Tanzania in 1978. Scholars disagree on whether the severe domestic situation led to Amin's external violence.¹⁷¹ Yet, they have little disagreement on the result of the Uganda-Tanzania War: in response to Amin's annexation of the Kagera Salient, the incumbent Tanzania President, Julius Nyerere, "launched a controversial counter-attack that routed Amin's forces and swept him from power in April 1979."¹⁷² Whether or not this is an example of failed diversionary attempt, it demonstrates the high risk of initiating an international conflict when one still suffers from serious domestic problems.

Third, as discussed earlier, revolutions are more likely to select conceptually simple individuals who "exaggerates the differences between alternatives, sees all opponents as evil or cowardly, subordinates all other considerations to the ideas of correct principles, and is confused and frustrated by the demands of the administrative process."¹⁷³ This characteristic of rebel leaders predisposes them to repress oppositions, because the rebellion experience makes them inclined to show no empathy to enemies. Thus, domestic

¹⁷¹ For example, studies supporting the diversionary explanation see Mambo and Schofield 2007; for studies disagreeing with the diversionary explanation see Roberts 2014 for an example.

¹⁷² Roberts 2014, 692.

¹⁷³ Suedfeld and Rank 1976, 171.

measures, especially repression, as a response to acute political instability would appear more attractive to leaders with a rebel background.

In conclusion, the interaction of high-level domestic unrest and rebellion experience predisposes rebel leaders to repression instead of international conflict in response to domestic unrest for three reasons. First, rebel leaders are more confident in utilizing repression to deal with oppositions because they come into power after they survived a severe domestic crisis (i.e. rebellion). Second, domestic measures conform to rebel leaders' appreciation of national authority and sovereignty. Third, rebellion experience predisposes rebel leaders to be ruthless to enemies, which will be translated into a policy preference of repression during severe domestic unrest.

REBEL LEADERS AND LOW-LEVEL STRIFE

In contrast with high-level strife, low-severity level internal dissatisfactions do not pose such a serious and urgent threat to leaders as the severe strife does, and thus do not reshape leaders' pre-existing preferences. Specifically, non-severe strife undermines government authority less, giving leaders more room and time to choose policies they favor. First, for rebel leaders, low-level strife does not always call for speedy and direct response, so provoking an international conflict is possible. Second, for leaders in general, there is always a temptation to use force abroad to boost short-term popular support. Low-level strife provides a context where international conflict is less risky and potentially beneficial, because rebel leaders do not have to worry about the failure of international conflict that will immediately lead to the demise of the regime.

Many people may argue that given the confidence in repression, appreciation for national sovereignty, and ruthlessness toward enemies, we should expect that rebel leaders are more likely to repress all the time regardless of the severity level of domestic unrest. However, this is not the case. As a strategy to maintain political control, sheer repression has its limits.¹⁷⁴ As Crawford Young quoted a leading Africanist, “coercion may well be conceived of metaphorically as a gold reserve underpinning the currency of power. If constantly employed, the reserves are emptied in short order, and rapid devaluation of power itself soon follows.”¹⁷⁵ Therefore, even though the inclination to repress, rebel leader do not always use repression to secure loyalty and bolster legitimacy. Notably, the predisposition for repression mitigates rebel leaders’ inclination for the use of force abroad in the face of low-level strife.

	No Strife	Low-level Strife	High-level Strife
Rebel Leaders	High	High	Low
Non-Rebel Leaders	Low	High	High

TABLE 2.1. *Rebellion participation and the relative risk of initiating international conflict*

In sum, internal problems with a low level of seriousness, like street demonstrations or strikes, are quite common globally, which rarely harm a country’s political stability, so rebel leaders may behave differently under this circumstance from their actions under severe domestic strife. Based on discussion above, Table 2.1 above shows the risk of

¹⁷⁴ Danopoulos 1988; Lai and Slater 2006, 117; Wintrobe 1988.

¹⁷⁵ Young 1994, 37.

leaders with or without rebellion experiences to initiate international conflict across different levels of domestic strife.

These leads to my central hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Leaders with prior rebellion experience are less likely to initiate an international conflict when they are faced with more severe domestic strife than leaders with no such experience.

Hypothesis 1a: Leaders with prior rebellion experience are less likely to initiate an international conflict when they are faced with high-level domestic strife than leaders with no such experience.

Hypothesis 1b: Leaders with prior rebellion experience are more likely to initiate an international conflict when they are faced with low-level domestic strife than leaders with no such experience.

DOMESTIC REPRESSION VERSUS INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

Although violence has been long regarded as one of the main instruments leaders could use to deal with internal problems and retain power, existing literature on domestic turmoil and violent solutions is deeply divided. There are few comparative and systematic studies of what makes leaders favor one violent policy over the other. Instead, they developed theories along separate lines. For instance, most research on international conflicts emphasizes the mechanisms (e.g. diversionary theory) through which internal unrest leads to international militarized disputes, but overlooks the reasons why domestic repression, as a possible policy alternative, is less attractive to those decision-makers.¹⁷⁶ In

¹⁷⁶ Miller and Elgün 2011; Foster, Mitchell, and Thyne 2010; Nicholls, Huth, and Appel 2010; Tir 2010.

contrast, as discussed previously, literature on repression rarely sees international conflict initiation as a reasonable response to domestic unrest.¹⁷⁷

Here I try to bring the direct comparison between violence at home and violence abroad back and explore the conditions under which foreign aggression is preferable to domestic repression. As articulated above, in the face of severe domestic unrest, rebel leaders are less likely to use force abroad. In other words, they prefer domestic measures. Among domestic measures, the most preferable one may be repression. It not only meets leaders' need for a speedy and efficient response, but also reflects their preference of being ruthless to enemies and the belief in military efficacy. Therefore, repression may be even more preferable than other domestic measures. Building on the previous analysis, I argue that the choice among different violent policies is conditional on the intensity level of the domestic strife. One hypothesis follows from this theoretical discussion:

Hypothesis 2: Leaders with prior rebellion experience are more likely to repress when they are faced with more severe domestic strife than when faced with less severe domestic strife.

SUMMARY

Given that both rebel experience and domestic strife may predispose leaders to international conflict, will rebel leaders definitely go to war when facing domestic strife? This chapter argues that rebel leaders' inclination to foreign aggression is contingent on the severity level of the domestic strife. As shown in Table 2.1, the more severe the domestic strife, the less likely rebel leaders are to initiate an international conflict. This is

¹⁷⁷ Davenport 1995; Dragu and Lupu 2018; Escribà-Folch 2013; Henderson 1991; Moore 1998; Moore 2000; Slantchev and Matush 2019.

because severe domestic strife reshapes leaders' perceptions and neutralize their policy preferences toward international conflict through two mechanisms. First, high seriousness level of domestic strife changes the cost-benefit calculation about available policy options. Specifically, serious domestic problems call for a direct, speedy, and "to-the-point" policy response, which enables domestic measures (i.e. co-optation and repression) to be more efficacious because domestic measures aim to directly and effectively address the problem that gave rise to the strife. Second, severe domestic unrest selects many predispositions of leaders endowed by rebellion experience, which modifies rebel leaders' preference for international conflict. To begin with, rebel leaders are more confident in utilizing repression to deal with opposition because they come into power after surviving a severe domestic crisis (i.e. rebellion). Moreover, domestic measures conform to rebel leaders' appreciation of national authority and sovereignty. Lastly, rebellion experience predisposes rebel leaders to be ruthless to enemies, which translates into a policy preference for repression during severe domestic unrest.

To verify the theory, the theory generates 2 central testable hypotheses. In the next chapter, I will conduct a cross-national analysis to test the hypotheses, using the data of militarized interstate disputes initiation between 1875 and 2000 by leaders under domestic turmoil with differing severity levels.

CHAPTER 3: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Precisely defined statistical methods that undergird quantitative research represent abstract formal models applicable to all kinds of research, even that for which variables cannot be measured quantitatively. The very abstract, and even unrealistic, nature of statistical models is what makes the rules of inference shine through so clearly.
— Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba,
Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research, 1994, p.6

This chapter conducts a cross-national statistical analysis to explore when rebel leaders are more likely to respond to domestic unrest with an international dispute and when the alternative policy (i.e. repression) is more preferable. The results support my hypotheses and suggest that rebel leaders' inclination to foreign aggression is contingent on the severity level of the domestic strife. Specifically, rebel leaders are less likely to initiate an international conflict, the more severe the domestic strife. In the face of serious domestic unrest, domestic measures, especially repression is more preferable.

This chapter starts with a discussion of the research design, with the first part focusing on the conditions under which rebel leaders are less likely to use foreign aggression in response to domestic unrest than their non-rebel counterparts. The second part explains when repression is preferable to international dispute initiation for rebel leaders. Then a brief summary and conclusion is in order.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The theory of rebel leaders' policy response to domestic unrest, presented in Chapter 2 sees the policy choice of rebel leaders as a function of their policy preferences

combined with contextual factors. Policy preferences refer to the policies that leaders would adopt in an ideal situation, and contextual factors refer to the external situations that reshape their preferences and constrain their ability to adopt certain policies. This chapter investigates how a particular contextual factor—severity of domestic unrest—influences rebel leaders’ responses to internal troubles, and especially their decision to use violence abroad. In the preceding chapter the theory generates two central testable hypotheses: (1) rebel leaders are less likely to exhibit inclinations to provoke an international dispute than their non-rebel counterparts when faced with severe domestic unrest; and (2) rebel leaders are more likely to adopt domestic repression than international conflict, to deal with severe internal problems.

To follow the practice of previous research, I first conduct a monadic test in which the unit of analysis is the leader-year and then evaluate these claims using a dyadic approach, which uses the dyad-year as the unit of analysis.¹⁷⁸ This sequential research design has numerous advantages. To begin with, as Fravel notes, “the actions and behavior of opposing states should be unimportant or at least secondary in explaining leaders’ decisions to provoke crises or use force. Instead, the logic of diversion is monadic.”¹⁷⁹ Thus, a monadic analysis is appropriate for a monadic theory. However, the sole use of monadic tests to study international conflicts has been proven to be inadequate, because though war initiation may appear to be a monadic decision of the initiator, the decision-making process does not operate in vacuum. The initiator must take the opposing state into its consideration whenever it decides to provoke an international dispute. For instance, leaders must consider whether they can win the war against an opponent, and may not

¹⁷⁸ Colgan 2013; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015; Mansfield and Snyder 2005; Rousseau 2005.

¹⁷⁹ Fravel 2010, 312.

challenge someone that they would not unequivocally prevail over. Therefore, a dyadic analysis helps us to incorporate the opposing state into the game.

In the monadic analysis, there is one observation per leader and per year, spanning from 1875 to 2000. However, it is possible that in a given year a leader initiated more than one militarized dispute. Given that all the data is coded on an annual basis, including all of the dispute observations in a single year does not serve our purpose. Thus, only the first militarized dispute in a given year is used if the leader initiates several different militarized disputes in the same time period.

In terms of the dyadic analysis, building on the dyadic dataset of Downes and O'Rourke (2016), I constructed a directed-dyad dataset of all politically relevant dyads in the international system from 1875 to 2000. Here, I use Downes and O'Rourke's definition of politically relevant dyads— "those pairs that were either territorially contiguous or that contained a major power."¹⁸⁰ The dataset includes 161,712 directed-dyad years. The use of directed-dyads could help us specify who the initiator or the target is, which conforms to the goal of this research: identifying the policy choice of the initiator. Similarly, it is also beneficial to study politically relevant dyads, as "[t]he use of politically relevant dyads helps to reduce this problem of irrelevant no-conflict observations on the dependent variable."¹⁸¹

The following sections will describe the data used in both analyses and then present the results of the tests.

¹⁸⁰ Downes and O'Rourke 2016, 64.

¹⁸¹ Huth and Allee 2003, 23.

REBEL LEADERS, DOMESTIC UNREST, AND INTERNATIONAL DISPUTE

This section primarily tests whether rebel leaders are more likely to provoke international militarized disputes than non-rebel leaders. In the section, I conduct both monadic and dyadic analysis. The period of analysis is 1875–2000, given the restrictions of existing datasets. First, the Leader Experience and Attribute Descriptions (LEAD) dataset that provides most of the leaders’ experiences variables restricts our analysis start date to 1875. Second, most recent studies on rebel leaders and international conflicts employ the Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID) data which ends around 2000.¹⁸² Therefore, using datasets in a similar time frame helps us directly speak to existing research and avoids inconsistency resulting from utilizing data from different time periods.

The main dependent variable is *MID Initiation*, which measures whether the leader of one state initiates a militarized interstate dispute against another state. Borrowing from the MID dataset, the variable is dichotomous coded 1 if one state, in a given year, initiated a MID towards another state, and 0 otherwise.¹⁸³ The MID dataset records five “hostility levels” in a militarized dispute— “no militarized action”, “threat to use force”, “display of force”, “use of force” and “war”. In my dataset, I only focus on those disputes with a hostility level greater than 1 (i.e. “threat to use force”, “display of force”, “use of force” and “war”), which ends up with 1975 instances of MIDs initiation from 1875 to 2000. Although the MID dataset has many known disadvantages,¹⁸⁴ it still has a prominent advantage for our research purposes. Given that war is a relatively rare event, the MID dataset expands our interstate conflict sample by including events below the hostility level

¹⁸² Colgan 2013; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015.

¹⁸³ Palmer et al. 2015.

¹⁸⁴ Downes and Sechser 2012; Gibler, Miller, and Little 2016.

of war. “While there is heterogeneity in these events, from full-fledged wars to relatively minor disputes, they provide considerable information about a state’s interstate conflicts.”¹⁸⁵ Since this dependent variable is binary, I employ a logit regression model with robust standard errors clustering on leaders in the monadic tests and clustering on directed dyads in the dyadic tests.

My analysis features two independent variables. The first independent variable of interest is the rebel experience of leaders. Constructed using the LEAD dataset,¹⁸⁶ the variable *Rebel Experience* is binary and codes whether “a leader had prior experience as part of a rebel movement seeking to overthrow the government of the state.”¹⁸⁷ Notably, unlike some existing studies that tell coup d’état apart from mass upheaval,¹⁸⁸ the LEAD dataset also codes participation in coups as participation in rebellion. According to Ellis, Horowitz, and Stam (2015), “a leader is coded as a rebel, as long as the coups were carried out by actors who were willing to use violence to overthrow the leadership of the state.”¹⁸⁹

The dataset is comprised of over 2200 leaders in total, of whom 27 percent previously participated in a rebellion movement. Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 display the distribution of rebel leaders over time and place. As Horowitz and Stam note, two groups contribute to the increased numbers of rebel leaders in the 1940s and 1950s: “European leaders who served in resistance movements in World War II and leaders of newly decolonized countries.”¹⁹⁰ Broken down by region, the percentage of rebel leaders varies

¹⁸⁵ Colgan 2013, 672.

¹⁸⁶ Ellis, Horowitz, and Stam 2015.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 728.

¹⁸⁸ See for example, Walt 1992; Walt 1996.

¹⁸⁹ Ellis, Horowitz, and Stam 2015, 729.

¹⁹⁰ Horowitz and Stam 2014, 540.

between 15 and 40 percent, with the exception of Oceania. There were no rebel leaders coded in the region.

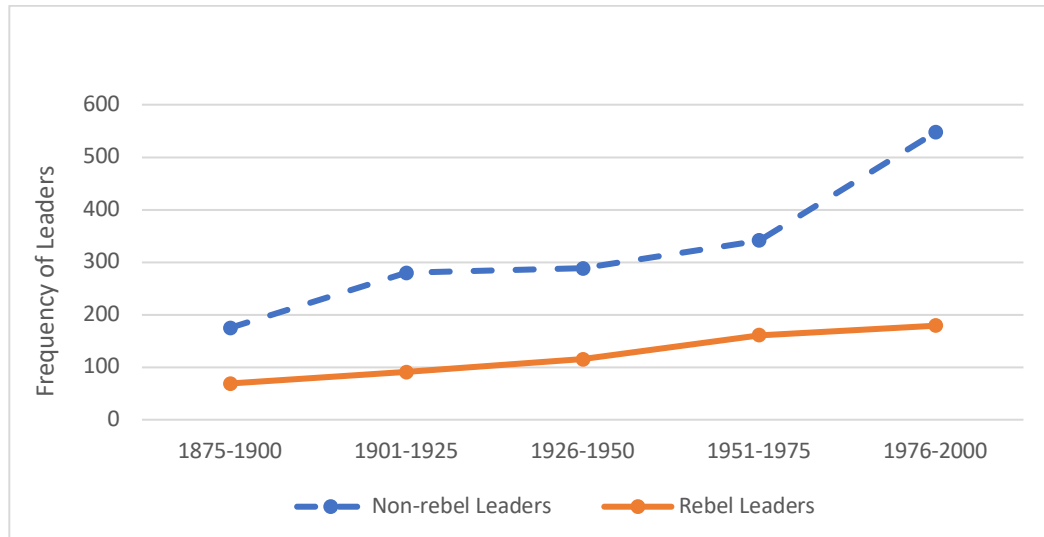


FIGURE 3.1. *Frequency of Rebel Leaders over Time*

Figure 3.3 illustrates that the percent of leader-year MID initiation fluctuates over time. Contrary to the prediction of existing studies, revolutionary leaders are not always more conflict-prone than their non-rebel counterparts. For instance, leaders with prior rebel participation experience are not necessarily more likely to initiate a MID during 1875 to 1925 than leaders without this experience. Proneness to conflict becomes evident only after 1925. This calls for a further investigation of how rebel experience affects their international conflict propensity.

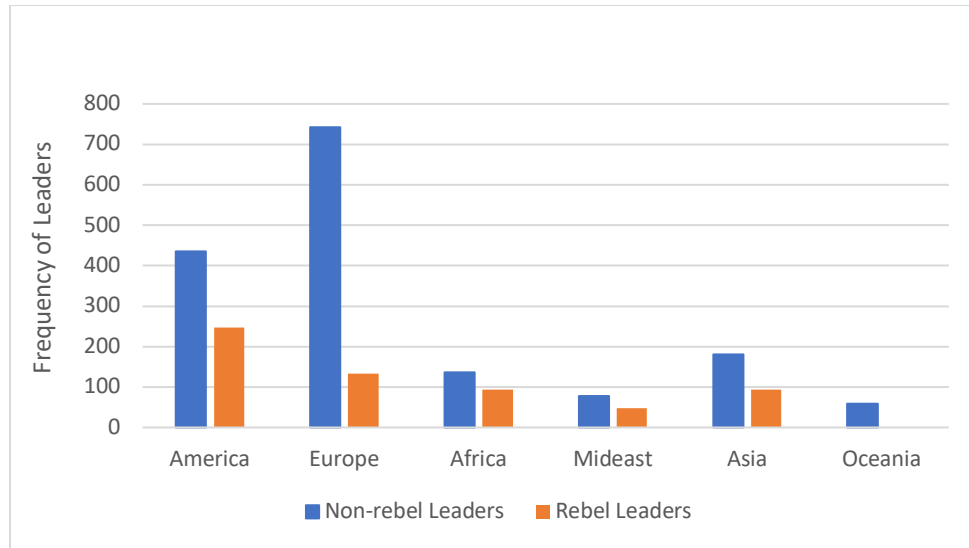


FIGURE 3.2. *Frequency of Rebel Leaders across Regions*

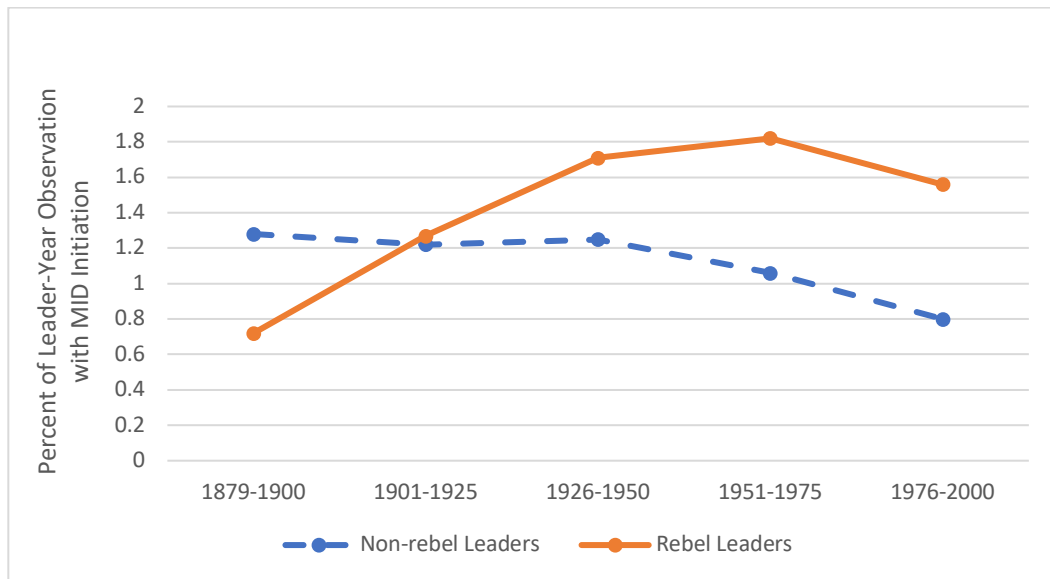


FIGURE 3.3. *Rebel Experience and MID Initiation over Time*

The second independent variable is the *Severity Level of Domestic Unrest*. To measure domestic turmoil, I use domestic conflict events from the Cross-National Time-Series (CNTS) Data Archive.¹⁹¹ The dataset codes eight types of domestic conflict events: assassinations, anti-government demonstrations, major government crises, purges, general strikes, riots, revolutions, and guerilla warfare. As Table 3.1 displays, I exclude purges from the domestic unrest list. According to the definition of the CNTS, purge is defined as “any systematic elimination by jailing or execution of political opposition within the ranks of the regime or the opposition.”¹⁹² This suggests that purge is indeed a kind of leaders’ response to opposition. Given that the purpose of my study is to investigate leaders’ policy response to domestic unrest, it is not appropriate to include it as an event of domestic unrest.

To capture the differing severity levels of domestic unrest, I modify the weighted conflict measure from the CNTS dataset and construct the key independent variable *Severity Level of Domestic Unrest*. Specifically, the CNTS dataset gives each event a different weight to describe its severity level—assassinations at 25, general strikes at 20, guerrilla warfare at 100, government crises at 20, riots at 25, revolutions at 150, and anti-government demonstrations at 10. I modify the formula¹⁹³ from the CNTS dataset to calculate the severity level of domestic unrest a country faces in a given year:

$$\textit{Severity Level of Domestic Unrest} = \frac{\textit{Sum (event times occurred in a given year * weight)}}{\textit{The number of event types coded in total}}$$

¹⁹¹ Banks 2011.

¹⁹² The Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive 2007.

¹⁹³ Since I exclude purge from the event list, this will be different from the numbers in the original formula, *the number of event types coded in total* in my formula is 7 not 8.

In order to limit concerns about endogeneity, the variable is lagged by one year. Given that the study investigates the conditional impact of rebel experience on leaders' conflict propensity under different domestic strife, I generate the following interaction term: *Rebel* Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag*.

The severity score ranges from 0 to 590. Nearly 51% of the data are coded as having no strife in the previous year with the severity score being 0. Based on this variable, I also generate a categorical variable to denote the differing levels of domestic unrest. I use 100 as the cut-off point: if the severity score of a country in the previous year exceeds 100, this means that the country was faced with a high-level strife; if the severity score is below or equals to 100, it shows that the strife was low-level; and score 0 indicates that there was no strife. Based on this cut-off points, around 1.2% of the data are coded as having a high-level strife.

The major reason to choose 100 as the cut-off point is that it is neither too high to make the sample of high-level strife too small nor too low to fail to distinguish high-level strife from low-level strife. Also, the weight of guerrilla warfare is 100. One should expect that high-level strife denotes a situation as similarly severe as a guerrilla warfare. Although 100 as the cut-off point is arbitrarily chosen, I test the models using different cut-off points (e.g. 50, 60, 90, 105, and 110), and the results are consistent.

Event	Domestic Conflict Event Data Definitions	Example
Anti-government Demonstrations	Any peaceful public gathering of at least 100 people for the primary purpose of displaying or voicing their opposition to government policies or authority, excluding demonstrations of a distinctly anti-foreign nature.	Brazil 2011
Assassinations	Any politically motivated murder or attempted murder of a high government official or politician.	Afghanistan 2011
General Strikes	Any strike of 1,000 or more industrial or service workers that involves more than one employer and that is aimed at national government policies or authority.	Italy 2011
Guerrilla Warfare	Any armed activity, sabotage, or bombings carried on by independent bands of citizens or irregular forces and aimed at the overthrow of the present regime.	South Sudan 2011
Major Government Crises	Any rapidly developing situation that threatens to bring the downfall of the present regime—excluding situations of revolt aimed at such overthrow.	Spain 2011
Revolutions	Any illegal or forced change in the top government elite, any attempt at such a change, or any successful or unsuccessful armed rebellion whose aim is independence from the central government.	Turkey 2011
Riots	Any violent demonstration or clash of more than 100 citizens involving the use of physical force.	Yemen 2011

Source: The Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive, <https://www.cntsdata.com/domconflict>.

TABLE 3.1. *Domestic conflict event data description*

Both monadic and dyadic analysis in the section control for some key individual-level and state-level variables. Specifically, I control for two binary variables of leaders' military experience: *Military Service Without Combat Experience* and *Combat Experience*.¹⁹⁴ The former measures whether the leader had prior military service but no combat experience, and the latter denotes whether the leader had combat experience.

¹⁹⁴ Data is drawn from the LEAD dataset.

According to previous research, these two variables have a powerful and systematic effect on leaders' conflict propensity.¹⁹⁵

Aside from the individual controls, I also control for three binary country-level variables: material capabilities, regime type, and the number of peace years between MIDs. First, using the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) scores from the National Material Capabilities 4.0 dataset of the Correlates of War (COW),¹⁹⁶ I generate a variable *Material Capabilities* for the country that initiates the militarized dispute. Next, given that domestic political institutions may not only constrain leaders' policy choices, but also affect the likelihood of militarized conflict, this analysis controls for the regime type of the country in both monadic and dyadic studies. Yet, I employ different datasets and operationalizations in each analysis. In the monadic analysis, I use an *Autocracy* variable constructed on the data from the Polity IV project, to control for the effect of regime type on the probability of the militarized dispute initiation.¹⁹⁷ The variable is coded as 1 if a state's Polity score is at or below -7 and 0 otherwise. In the dyadic analysis, however, constructed using the data from Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013), the variable of regime type *Democracy* is dichotomous coded 1 if the state is democratic, and 0 otherwise.¹⁹⁸ Utilizing different datasets and operationalizations of regime type may give us more confidence in controlling for the effect of different domestic institutions on the initiation of MIDs. Lastly, to control for temporal dependence, I add peace years into control in both studies.¹⁹⁹ There are nuances between the operationalizations of this variable. Given that the unit of analysis for the monadic test is leader-year, the number of peace years in that

¹⁹⁵ Ellis, Horowitz, and Stam 2015; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015.

¹⁹⁶ Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972; Singer 1988.

¹⁹⁷ Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2018.

¹⁹⁸ Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013.

¹⁹⁹ Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998.

study measures the time since the leader was last in MID, whereas the variable in the dyadic test measures the time since the dyad was last in MID.

In addition to the confounding variables that the monadic and dyadic analysis share in common, they also select different sets of control variables. In the monadic tests, I borrow the variable *Five-Year Challenge Lag* from Horowitz and Stam (2014) to account for the potential that a country intentionally selects conflict-prone leaders when it faces the risk of international dispute.²⁰⁰ The variable “measures whether or not a country has been challenged in an MID in the last five years, a good indication of the interest a country might have in selecting a leader based on the *ex ante* risk of a dispute. This controls for the possibility that a country in a more dangerous neighborhood may be more likely to select a leader with *ex ante* characteristics that would bias our results.”²⁰¹ Table 3.2 shows the descriptive statistics of each variable in monadic analyses.

In terms of the dyadic analysis, I control for a number of variables identified by existing studies that affect the likelihood of interstate dispute in a dyad.²⁰² In addition to the material capability of initiator mentioned above, I also include the material capability of the target and the initiator’s proportion of dyadic capabilities, using the proxy indicator of the CINC scores from the COW dataset.²⁰³ Similarly, as democratic peace theory suggests, the impact of regime type on international conflict is not monadic but relates to the interactions of pairs of states.²⁰⁴ Therefore, this analysis not only controls for the regime type of the initiator but also controls for the regime type of the target, as well as an interaction term to indicate whether both states are democratic. Constructed using the data

²⁰⁰ Horowitz and Stam 2014, 541–542.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 542.

²⁰² Downes and O’Rourke 2016; Singer 1988; Weeks 2012; Weeks 2014.

²⁰³ Sarkees and Wayman 2010.

²⁰⁴ For example see Doyle 2005; Williams 2001.

from Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013), the variable *Joint Democracy* is binary coded 1 if both states are democratic, and 0 otherwise.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, borrowing from Downes and O’Rourke (2016), one more dyadic variable is controlled for: the logged distance between the two countries’ capital cities. The purpose of controlling for the distance between capital cities is to take the geographic proximity into consideration. Table 3.3 shows the descriptive statistics of each variable in dyadic analyses.

	Mean / Proportion	SD	Min	Max	Observations
<i>Dependent Variables</i>					
MID Initiation	0.146		0	1	10,822
Violent Policy Choice					6,604
Do Nothing	0.819				5,410
MID Initiation	0.152				1,004
Domestic Repression	0.029				190
<i>Independent Variables</i>					
Rebel Experience	0.339		0	1	10,797
Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag	12.283	24.686	0	590	8,098
<i>Control Variables</i>					
Military Service without Combat Experience	0.105		0	1	10,795
Combat Experience	0.263		0	1	10,797
Material Capabilities	0.012	0.035	0	0.384	10,822
Autocracy	0.299		0	1	10,822
Five-Year Challenge Lag	0.444		0	1	10,822
Peace Years	3.158	4.686	0	36	10,822

Note: Observations for Violent Policy Choice are from 1955; observations for all the other variables are from 1875.

TABLE 3.2. *Descriptive statistics of variables used in monadic analyses*

²⁰⁵ Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013.

	Mean / Proportion	SD	Min	Max	Observations
<i>Dependent Variables</i>					
MID Initiation	0.012		0	1	180,498
Violent Policy Choice					103,756
Do Nothing	0.949				98,454
MID Initiation	0.012				1,198
Domestic Repression	0.004				4,104
<i>Independent Variables</i>					
Rebel Experience	0.310		0	1	154,548
Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag	14.693	26.975	0	590	127,068
<i>Control Variables</i>					
Military Service without Combat Experience	0.115		0	1	154,535
Combat Experience	0.317		0	1	154,575
Material Capabilities, Initiator	0.426	0.065	0	0.383	180,498
Material Capabilities, Target	0.426	0.065	0	0.383	180,498
Initiator's Proportion of Dyadic Capabilities	0.500	0.416	0	1	180,498
Democracy, Initiator	0.395		0	1	180,498
Democracy, Target	0.395		0	1	180,498
Joint Democracy	0.194		0	1	180,498
Logged Distance between Capitals	5.427	3.920	0	9.392	180,498
Peace Years	32.125	32.008	0	184	180,498

Note: Observations for Violent Policy Choice are from 1955; observations for all the other variables are from 1875.

TABLE 3.3. *Descriptive statistics of variables used in dyadic analyses*

To test the interactive effect of rebel experience and the severity level of domestic unrest on MID's initiation, I analyze a cross-national dataset of 2,258 leaders from 178

countries between 1875 and 2000. Given that the dependent variable is binary, the model is

$$\Pr(y_{it}=1|y_{it-1}=0, X_{it}) = \text{logit}^{-1}(\eta + \alpha R_{it} + \beta S_{it-1} + \delta R_{it} S_{it-1} + \gamma X_{it} + \varepsilon),$$

Where y_{it} is a binary variable measuring whether the leader of country i initiated a MID in year t in the monadic analysis and whether country i initiated a MID against the other country in the dyad during year t in the dyadic analysis. R_{it} is the variable *Rebel Experience* whereas S_{it} denotes the variable *Severity Level of Domestic Unrest*. X_{it} is a vector of control variables. α , β , δ , and γ describe the influence of those variables on the probability of a MID onset and ε is the error term.

Statistical Results

Before turning to regression analysis, I first conduct a simple descriptive examination of the relationship among rebel experience, domestic unrest, and MIDs initiation. As empirical studies note, diverse internal unrest activities could entail different levels of threat to leaders, not only because they were conceived with differing levels of severity, but also because they have a different political logic that could affect how leaders respond.²⁰⁶ Constructed using the variety of domestic unrest events from the CNTS dataset, Figure 3.4 demonstrates the probability of MIDs initiation of rebel leaders versus non-rebel leaders when they experienced different internal problems. In general, rebel leaders are more likely to initiate a MID than non-rebel leaders, but this likelihood varies across

²⁰⁶ Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz 2008; Wolford 2014.

different types of domestic troubles. Also, compared to a situation without domestic unrest, both rebel leaders and non-rebel leaders are more likely to provoke an international dispute. Meanwhile, the likelihood gap between rebel leaders and non-rebel leaders narrows in the face of internal troubles. This in part confirms our hypothesis that the impact of rebel experience on MIDs initiation may be contingent on the severity level of domestic unrest, which calls for a more systematic analysis on the relationship.

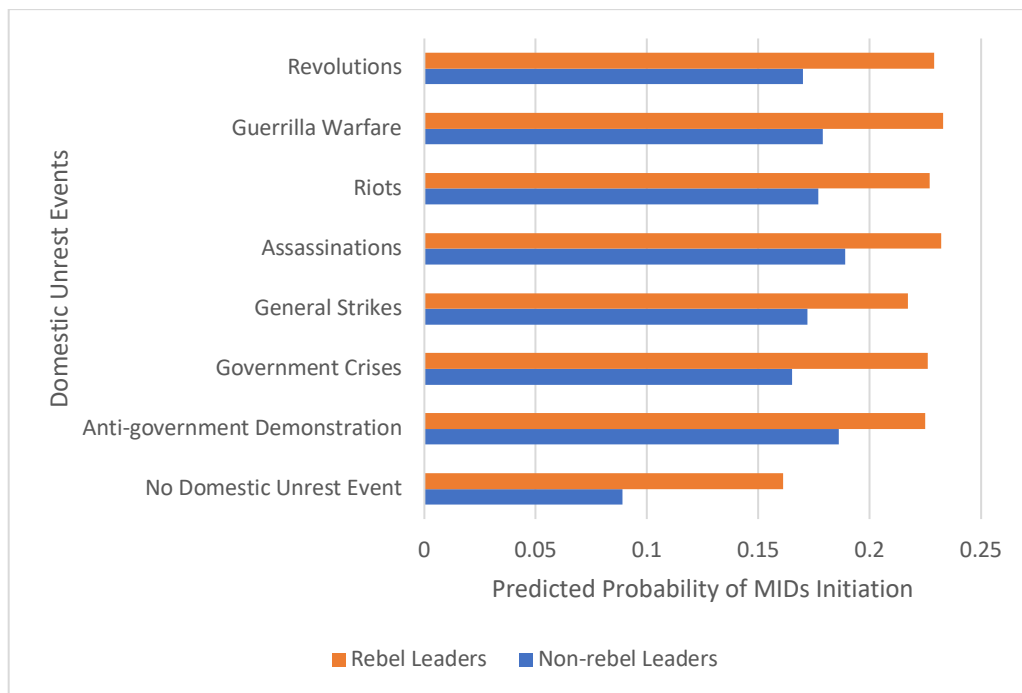


FIGURE 3.4. *Rebel experience and MID initiation in the face of different domestic unrest events*

As mentioned above, I conduct both monadic and dyadic analyses to examine the relationship among rebel experience, the severity of domestic unrest, and MIDs initiation. All the statistical models report Huber-White robust standard errors clustered either by leader in monadic tests or by directed dyad in dyadic tests.

Table 3.4 displays the findings from a logit analysis of MID initiation using monadic data. Models 1 through 3 show the results of using different samples of the data whereas Model 4 uses the whole data. Specifically, Model 1 presents that when there was no strife in the previous year, rebel leaders are more likely to initiate a MID, which conforms to the findings of existing literature on the conflict-prone feature of rebel leaders. Model 2 looks at the sample with a low-level strife in the previous year and finds similar results that rebel leaders are more likely to provoke a MID in the face of low-level domestic strife. This evidence confirms Hypothesis 1b. In the context of high-level strife shown in Model 3, no statistically significant effect on MID initiation is detected between rebel leaders and non-rebel leaders. Although this result fails to confirm Hypothesis 1a (rebel leaders are less likely to provoke a MID during severe domestic strife), it does show that rebel leaders are no longer more conflict-prone than non-rebel leaders in that context.

Similarly, in Model 4, the interaction between rebel experience and the severity of domestic unrest fails to reach the conventional significance level, seemingly casting some doubt on H1. Despite the insignificance of the interaction term, Model 4 demonstrates that the impact of the interaction on MID initiation is no longer positive, which suggests that the positive effect of rebel experience is neutralized in the severe domestic unrest. A further look on the marginal effect of the interaction term confirms this (see Figure 3.5). This supports our hypotheses.

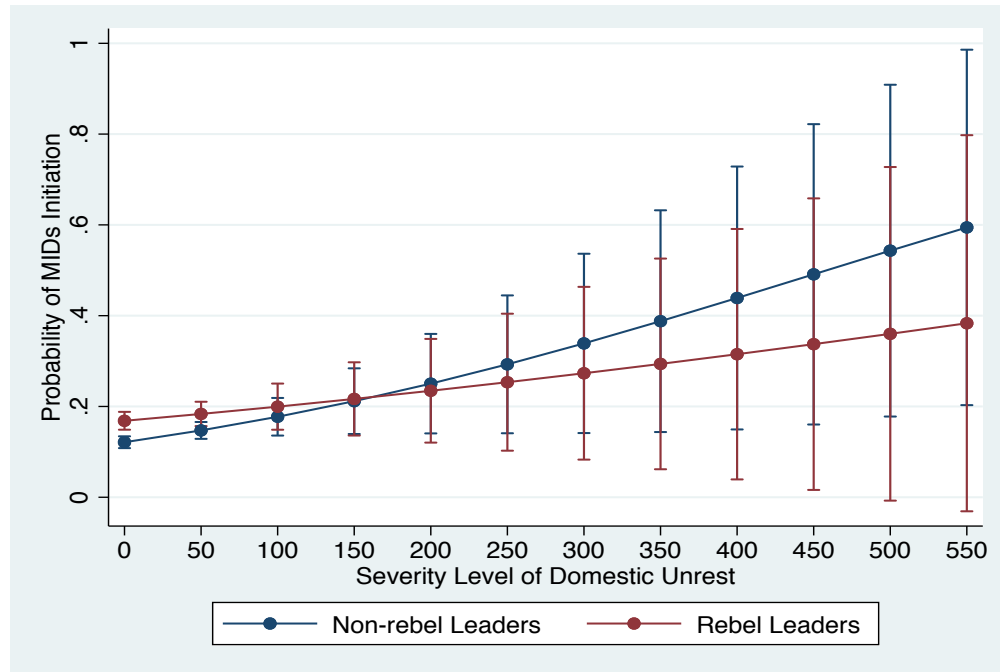


FIGURE 3.5. *Predicted marginal effect of rebel experience on MID initiation with the 95% confidence interval*

Table 3.5 presents the result of the dyadic tests. Models 5 and 8 show consistent results with the monadic tests. When faced with no strife or low-level strife, rebel leaders are more likely to initiate an international dispute, which supports H1b. In the face of severe domestic unrest, rebel leaders are not more conflict-prone than their non-rebel counterparts. Also, the more severe the domestic problems, the less likely rebel leaders are to provoke a MID. This evidence further confirms H1.

	Model 1 (No Strife)	Model 2 (Low Strife)	Model 3 (High Strife)	Model 4 (Full Model)
Rebel Experience	0.339* (0.131)	0.432*** (0.120)	-0.114 (0.182)	0.427*** (0.111)
Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag				0.005** (0.002)
Rebel*Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag				-0.003 (0.003)
Military Service without Combat Experience	0.349 (0.185)	0.286 (0.151)	0.468* (0.224)	0.280* (0.128)
Combat Experience	0.150 (0.171)	0.159 (0.132)	0.446* (0.188)	0.152 (0.110)
Material Capabilities	17.981*** (2.308)	6.436*** (1.311)	11.259*** (1.434)	9.226*** (1.414)
Autocracy	0.465** (0.149)	0.253* (0.116)	0.384* (0.186)	0.338** (0.098)
Five-Year Challenge Lag	0.868*** (0.121)	0.993*** (0.108)	0.529*** (0.131)	0.973*** (0.082)
Peace Year	-0.117*** (0.020)	-0.161*** (0.030)	-0.140*** (0.026)	-0.142*** (0.016)
Constant	-2.742*** (0.133)	-2.292*** (0.115)	-2.306*** (0.120)	-2.534*** (0.091)
<i>Observations</i>	4,117	3,863	2, 808	8,078
<i>Pseudo R-squared</i>	0.141	0.095	0.119	0.125
<i>Log pseudo-likelihood</i>	-1187.752	-1675.738	-1054.271	-2942.206
<i>SE adjusted for</i>	1,030	1,266	878	1,659

Note: All lagged variables are one-year lagged.
Time for analyses is 1875-2000. Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses.
*<0.05, **<0.01, ***<0.001

TABLE 3.4. *The monadic impact of rebel experience and severity level of domestic unrest on the initiation of militarized disputes, 1875-2000*

	Model 5 (No Strife)	Model 6 (Low Strife)	Model 7 (High Strife)	Model 8 (Full Model)
Rebel Experience	0.580*** (0.124)	0.209* (0.101)	0.007 (0.141)	0.405*** (0.093)
Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag				0.006*** (0.001)
Rebel*Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag				-0.005** (0.002)
Military Service without Combat Experience	0.317* (0.157)	0.269* (0.136)	0.211 (0.190)	0.279* (0.113)
Combat Experience	-0.015 (0.159)	0.143 (0.100)	0.332** (0.128)	0.121 (0.092)
Material Capabilities, Initiator	7.841*** (1.736)	4.930*** (0.895)	4.645*** (0.981)	5.521*** (0.958)
Material Capabilities, Target	8.050*** (1.441)	5.860*** (1.301)	3.686*** (1.133)	7.053*** (1.059)
Initiator's Proportion of Dyadic Capabilities	0.395 (0.258)	0.107 (0.195)	0.376 (0.226)	0.361* (0.174)
Democracy, Initiator	0.415* (0.183)	0.095 (0.145)	0.225 (0.171)	0.198 (0.124)
Democracy, Target	0.460** (0.146)	0.455** (0.144)	-0.013 (0.215)	0.473*** (0.121)
Joint Democracy	-1.549*** (0.297)	-0.884*** (0.210)	-0.607* (0.296)	-1.045*** (0.181)
Logged Distance between Capitals	-0.322*** (0.023)	-0.299*** (0.015)	-0.168*** (0.016)	-0.306*** (0.014)
Peace Year	-0.034*** (0.007)	-0.029*** (0.004)	-0.017*** (0.003)	-0.030*** (0.003)
Constant	-4.024*** (0.238)	-3.262*** (0.171)	-3.719*** (0.182)	-3.768*** (0.154)
<i>Observations</i>	48,960	70,814	34,698	121,763
<i>Pseudo R-squared</i>	0.157	0.158	0.062	0.153
<i>Log pseudo-likelihood</i>	-2298.867	-3905.022	-2458.611	-6421.623
<i>SE adjusted for</i>	3,533	3,521	2,813	3,648

Note: The variable *Severity Level of Domestic Unrest* is one-year lagged.
Time for analyses is 1875-2000. Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses.
* <0.05 , ** <0.01 , *** <0.001

TABLE 3.5. *The dyadic impact of rebel experience and severity level of domestic unrest on the initiation of militarized disputes, 1875-2000*

Robustness Check

As Horowitz and Stam note, one potential challenge to the results is that “countries may select their leaders, at least in part, based on the collective beliefs among the country’s electorate about the international security environment and the military challenges the country is likely to face.”²⁰⁷ Specifically, countries may select conflict-prone leaders when they are faced with a potential risk of conflict in the near future. Also, “[f]ormer rebels might be more likely to enter office during times of domestic turmoil or engage in radical domestic change, both of which could make militarized disputes more likely.”²⁰⁸ To account for this possibility, I first control for the international security environment using the variable *Five-Year Challenge Lag* in all the models (see Table 3.4 and Table 3.5), as mentioned above. Then I run an additional model with a sample that experienced domestic unrest in the previous year to account for the possibility that domestic turmoil may drive the results (see Appendix A). Our results are consistent when we control for these two instances.

Next, I use different measures of domestic unrest to test the robustness of the results. To measure domestic turmoil, I still use domestic conflict events from the CNTS but measure them in a different way. Based on their definition, three variables are generated to capture different types of domestic conflict event: *Total Strife*, *Low-level Strife*, and *High-level Strife*. *High-level Strife* is an aggregate yearly count of guerrilla warfare, riots, and revolutions, whereas *Low-level Strife* is an aggregate count of assassinations, general strikes, government crises, purges,²⁰⁹ and anti-government demonstrations in a given year.

²⁰⁷ Horowitz and Stam 2014, 550.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 554.

²⁰⁹ In this section, I include purge to test whether our results will be consistent once this is included.

Similarly, *Total Strife* is an aggregate yearly count of all the conflict events coded in the CNTS dataset. In addition, I generate a new categorical variable, *Domestic Strife*, coded as 1 if there is low-level strife in that year, 2 if there is high-level strife, and 0 otherwise. To limit concerns about endogeneity, all the variables are lagged by one year. As shown in Appendix B, in the context of nonviolent strife, the odds of MID initiation of rebel leaders is 26.4% higher than of non-rebel leaders. However, in the context of violent strife shown in Model 2, no statistically significant effect on MID initiation is detected between rebel leaders and non-rebel leaders. This evidence confirms Hypothesis 1.

Table B.2 in Appendix B highlights the robustness check of the interactive models by using different samples of the data. Model 4 looks at the samples with high-level strife last year, whereas Model 5 just investigates initiators experiencing low-level strife last year. The results are consistent with the results presented in Table B.1: rebel experience does not predispose leaders to ignite international tensions in the context of high-level strife but does increase the likelihood of international disputes under the circumstance of low-level strife.

VIOLENCE AT HOME OR ABROAD

In the previous section, we find that rebel leaders are not more likely to provoke an international dispute than non-rebel leaders in the face of severe internal troubles. This section uses both monadic and dyadic analysis to primarily test whether rebel leaders are more likely to provoke international militarized disputes than to repress domestically. The period of analysis is 1955–2000, as the data of domestic violence is only available from 1955.

Regarding the variables, except for the dependent variable, this section uses exactly the same sets of independent variables and control variables as the ones that the previous section uses.²¹⁰

The dependent variable of interest in this section is leaders' violent policy choice in response to domestic unrest. Specifically, we examine whether leaders will repress domestically or fight internationally. Given that we already had a clear operationalization of international dispute, the major problem here is how to measure repression. In practice, to secure their hold on power, leaders could take different types of repressive measures ranging from persecuting, executing, purging to mass killing,²¹¹ so it is not an easy task to measure repression. Given the absence of a complete cross-national dataset that includes all the types of repression in a long time period, here I employ genocide and politicide from the Political Instability Task Force (PITF) dataset²¹² as the proxy indicator of repression, since mass killing (i.e. genocide and politicide) is more comparable to international dispute than other forms of repression. First, compared to other forms of repression, mass killing like international dispute is a rare event. The PITF dataset only codes 44 episodes of genocide and politicide with 286 case-year in total from 1955 to 2017 in the world.²¹³ In contrast, the CNTS dataset codes 935 case-year of purges from 1955 to 2000. Thus, it makes more sense to draw the comparison between policies with the similar probability of

²¹⁰ Specifically, the variables included in the monadic tests are independent variables *Rebel Experience Rebel*, *Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag*, and their interaction term, as well as control variables (i.e. *Military Service Without Combat Experience*, *Combat Experience*, *Material Capabilities*, *Autocracy*, *Peace Years*, and *Five-Year Challenge Lag*). As for the dyadic study, I employ independent variables *Rebel Experience Rebel*, *Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag*, and their interaction term, as well as control variables (i.e. *Military Service Without Combat Experience*, *Combat Experience*, *Material Capabilities of Initiator*, *Material Capabilities of Target*, *Initiator's Proportion of Dyadic Capabilities*, *Democracy of Initiator*, *Democracy of Target*, *Joint Democracy*, *Peace Years*, and *Logged Distance between Capitals*).

²¹¹ Colaresi and Carey 2008; Kim 2016; Mann 2005; Midlarsky 2011; Straus 2015; Valentino 2004; Weitz 2003.

²¹² Marshall, Gurr, and Harff 2018.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

occurrence. Second, mass killing entails more cost and risk for the initiator than other repressive measures.²¹⁴ Since the conventional wisdom agrees that international dispute is risky and costly,²¹⁵ only risky and costly policy options such as mass killings are comparable to international dispute when we investigate the policy preference of leaders.

This dataset follows the definitions and guidelines of the PITF dataset to code genocide and politicide:

*Genocide and politicide events involve the promotion, execution, and/or implied consent of sustained policies by governing elites or their agents—or in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities—that result in the deaths of a substantial portion of a communal group or politicized non-communal group.*²¹⁶

Constructed using both genocide/politicide and the MID data, the dependent variable of the section, *Violent Policy Choice*, is nominal with three levels. The variable is coded as 1 if the leader decides to initiate an international dispute, 2 if the leader decides to use force domestically, and 0 if none of these measures are taken. Given that the major object of the project is rebel leaders' willingness to use force abroad, if in a given year the leaders use force both at home and abroad, we code it as 1—use force abroad.

As mentioned above, the primary purpose of this section is to investigate the violent policy choices of rebel leaders in the face of differing levels of domestic unrest. This suggests that our subjects of research are rebel leaders. Table 3.6 and Table 3.7 display the descriptive statistics of variables used in this section.

²¹⁴ Kim 2016.

²¹⁵ See, for example, Colgan 2013; Fearon 1995; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015.

²¹⁶ Marshall, Gurr, and Harff 2018, 14.

	Mean / Proportion	SD	Min	Max	Observations
<i>Dependent Variables</i>					
Violent Policy Choice					2,313
Do Nothing	0.754				1,744
MID Initiation	0.199				460
Domestic Repression	0.047				109
<i>Independent Variables</i>					
Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag	14.219	26.270	0	590	2,223
<i>Control Variables</i>					
Military Service without Combat Experience	0.170		0	1	2,306
Combat Experience	0.459		0	1	2,305
Material Capabilities	0.006	0.016	0	0.139	2,313
Autocracy	0.559		0	1	2,313
Five-Year Challenge Lag	0.485		0	1	2,313
Peace Years	3.402	4.630	0	27	2,313

Note: Observations for all the variables are from 1955. The total number of observations for rebel leader is 2,313.

TABLE 3.6. *Descriptive statistics of variables used in monadic multinomial analyses*

	Mean / Proportion	SD	Min	Max	Observations
<i>Dependent Variables</i>					
Violent Policy Choice					31,873
Do Nothing	0.889				28,321
MID Initiation	0.016				523
Domestic Repression	0.095				3,029
<i>Independent Variables</i>					
Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag	14.418	26.033	0	590	31,082
<i>Control Variables</i>					
Military Service without Combat Experience	0.153		0	1	31,817
Combat Experience	0.511		0	1	31,808
Material Capabilities, Initiator	0.026	0.042	0	0.139	31,873
Material Capabilities, Target	0.036	0.057	0	0.266	31,873
Initiator's Proportion of Dyadic Capabilities	0.473	0.408	0	1	31,873
Democracy, Initiator	0.216		0	1	31,873
Democracy, Target	0.451		0	1	31,873
Joint Democracy	0.104		0	1	31,873
Logged Distance between Capitals	5.102	4.104	0	9.392	31,873
Peace Years	30.068	29.672	0	178	31,873

Note: Observations for all the variables are from 1955. The total number of observations for rebel leader is 31,873.

TABLE 3.7. *Descriptive statistics of variables used in dyadic multinomial analyses*

Given that this dependent variable has three categories, a multinomial logit analysis with robust standard errors clustering on leaders (for monadic tests) and directed dyads (for dyadic tests) is conducted. The multinomial logit model is the most often-used method

when the dependent variables have more than two non-ordered outcomes, since the model is straightforward and computationally convenient.²¹⁷ Yet, a primary drawback of the model is the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) assumption.²¹⁸ As Huth and Allee (2003) illustrates, “The IIA assumption is met when an individual’s preferences among alternatives remain consistent regardless of which choices are or are not available. IIA is most likely to be a problem when any two outcome choices are clear substitutes. If the IIA assumption does not hold, then parameter estimates will be inconsistent.”²¹⁹ Given that the standard Hausman test cannot be used to the case in which we want to adjust for clustering, I use a generalized Hausman specification test via “seemingly unrelated estimation” in STATA to test the assumption of IIA.²²⁰ All my models cannot reject the assumption.

Statistical Results

Table 3.8 presents the results of the multinomial logit analysis in the monadic tests. “The multinomial coefficients must be interpreted in the context of the base category ... and the other coefficients for that variable.”²²¹ The base category for the whole section is MID initiation. As shown in Table 3.8, compared to doing nothing, rebel leaders are more likely to initiate a MID when domestic unrest becomes more severe. However, the more severe the domestic unrest, the more likely rebel leaders are to utilize domestic repression rather than MID initiation, which provides evidence in favor of H2. The impact of the

²¹⁷ Amemiya 1985; Greene 2011; Hausman and McFadden 1984; Huth and Allee 2003, 141; Long 1997.

²¹⁸ Hausman and McFadden 1984, 1219.

²¹⁹ Huth and Allee 2003, 141.

²²⁰ STATA Manuals n.d.

²²¹ de Rouen and Sobek 2004, 311; Long 1997.

severity level of domestic unrest on rebel leaders' violent policy choice, in the monadic tests, is statistically significant.

The multinomial model in Table 3.9 examines rebel leaders' violent policy choice using the dyadic data. Consistent with the monadic analysis, the high severity level of domestic unrest predisposes rebel leaders to use violence at home, rather than to use violence abroad, which supports H2.

Robustness Check

Given that there is no relatively unified measure of domestic repression, I use another popular measure of repression to test the consistency of my results. To measure repression, I employ the Cingranelli-Richards Physical Integrity Rights Index (CIRI).²²² This variable scales states between 0 and 8 based on the level of disappearances, extrajudicial killing, political imprisonment, and torture. Low scores denote no governmental respect for physical integrity rights and a high number indicates government respect for human rights. In the dataset, I convert the variable of repression into a dichotomous variable coded as 1 if there is no government respect for human rights (i.e. the physical integrity score is 0), and 0 otherwise. Notably, the start date of CIRI data is 1981, which leaves the time period between 1875 and 1980 out of the multinomial models on policy choices. The drawback of this is that it leaves us less observations, while the advantage is that by using datasets with different time intervals, we can control for the temporal dependence.

²²² Cingranelli and Richards 1999.

	Violent Policy Choices	
	Doing Nothing	Domestic Repression
Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag	-0.009* (0.004)	0.009* (0.004)
Military Service without Combat Experience	-0.314 (0.206)	-0.130 (0.600)
Combat Experience	-0.078 (0.175)	-0.561 (0.617)
Material Capabilities	-16.575** (5.886)	-9.205 (5.576)
Autocracy	-0.129 (0.162)	0.376 (0.388)
Five-Year Challenge Lag	-0.815*** (0.139)	-0.440 (0.387)
Peace Year	0.158*** (0.030)	-0.043 (0.073)
Constant	1.785*** (0.189)	-1.238 (0.523)
<i>Observations</i>	2,215	
<i>Pseudo R-squared</i>	0.108	
<i>Log pseudo-likelihood</i>	-1342.493	
<i>SE adjusted for</i>	312	

Note: The reference category of policy choice is MID initiation. All lagged variables are one-year lagged.

Time for analyses is 1955-2000. Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses.

*<0.05, **<0.01, ***<0.001

TABLE 3.8. *The monadic impact of the severity level of domestic unrest on rebel leaders' violent policy choices, 1955-2000*

	Violent Policy Choices	
	Doing Nothing	Domestic Repression
Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag	-0.008*** (0.002)	0.010*** (0.002)
Military Service without Combat Experience	-0.157 (0.183)	-0.741*** (0.226)
Combat Experience	0.092 (0.170)	-1.348*** (0.226)
Material Capabilities, Initiator	-3.170 (2.238)	-0.335 (2.783)
Material Capabilities, Target	-9.296*** (1.764)	-7.853*** (2.283)
Initiator's Proportion of Dyadic Capabilities	-0.429 (0.259)	0.774* (0.371)
Democracy, Initiator	-0.114 (0.248)	-3.726*** (0.709)
Democracy, Target	-0.401* (0.158)	-0.680*** (0.182)
Joint Democracy	0.769* (0.358)	2.275** (0.806)
Logged Distance between Capitals	0.314*** (0.020)	0.361*** (0.026)
Peace Year	0.053*** (0.008)	0.047*** (0.008)
Constant	2.865*** (0.243)	0.433 (0.303)
<i>Observations</i>	31,017	
<i>Pseudo R-squared</i>	0.195	
<i>Log pseudo-likelihood</i>	-9934.0425	
<i>SE adjusted for</i>	1,604	

Note: The reference category of policy choice is MID initiation. All lagged variables are one-year lagged.

Time for analyses is 1955-2000. Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses.

*<0.05, **<0.01, ***<0.001

TABLE 3.9. *The dyadic impact of the severity level of domestic unrest on rebel leaders' violent policy choices, 1955-2000*

Based on this, I generate the dependent variable *Violent Policy Choice*, which is nominal with more than two levels. The variable is coded as 1 if the leader decides to initiate an international dispute, 2 if the leader decides to repress domestically, 3 if the leaders use force both at home and abroad, and 0 if none of these measures are taken. Given that the second dependent variable has four categories, a multinomial analysis with robust standard errors clustering on directed dyads is conducted.

The dyadic test using the new measure finds a consistent and statistically significant result that as the severity level of domestic unrest increases, rebel leaders are more likely to repress domestically, rather than provoke a MID beyond the border. This gives us more confidence in H2.

SUMMARY

This chapter conducts two sets of statistical analyses to respectively test when rebel leaders are less likely, or at least no more likely, to provoke international dispute than their non-rebel counterparts and also when rebel leaders are inclined to use repression rather than international dispute. It not only draws the comparison of policy choices between rebel leaders and non-rebel leaders, but also examines variations of rebel leaders' response to different situations. The statistical results provide strong supporting evidence for both hypotheses: (1) compared to non-rebel leaders, rebel leaders are not more likely to provoke a MID in the face of severe domestic unrest; and (2) when the severity level of domestic unrest increases, rebel leaders are more willing to use violence at home, not abroad.

However, the statistics do not reveal the process by which severe domestic unrest affects rebel leaders' willingness to provoke an international dispute. In Chapter 2, I have

outlined the main pathways through which the preferences of rebel leaders and domestic environments interact to generate different policy responses to internal problems. As Oakes notes, evaluating whether these variables interact along these causal pathways is “best accomplished with the careful study of individual cases.”²²³ Therefore, in the Chapters 4 and 5, I conduct in-depth case studies of Suharto and Mao Zedong to investigate these causal pathways.

²²³ Oakes 2012, 68.

CHAPTER 4: SUHARTO AND INDONESIA UNDER HIS RULE

The indirect Javanese style of the letter belonged to President Suharto, and showed the remarkable combination of threat and solicitation that was the hallmark of Suharto's rule.
—Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 2005, p.169

On March 11, 1966, the incumbent president of Indonesia, Sukarno, signed a presidential decree (i.e. *Supersemar*) ceding much of his authority to General Suharto. This indicated that all the *de facto* presidential power was gradually transferred into the hand of General Suharto, despite the fact that Sukarno remained the lawful president.²²⁴ Since then, Suharto and his New Order administration (as opposed to the Old Order of Sukarno) ruled the country for more than thirty years, until his dramatic resignation in 1998.²²⁵ Not only was Suharto the leader of a military-dominated government, he also had a rebel background. As such, militarist and individual experience theories would predict Suharto to have a great interest in using force abroad.²²⁶

Yet, although Suharto occasionally was faced with strong domestic opposition and acute political instability during his long rule, he rarely, if ever, provoked international conflict as a response. This is because, I argue, that the high intensity levels of domestic turmoil negate his inclination towards foreign aggression, resulting from his formative

²²⁴ Abdulgani-Knapp 2007, 57–58; Vickers 2005, 160.

²²⁵ Right after the ouster of Sukarno in 1967, Suharto was appointed as acting president, and then as president in the following year.

²²⁶ For example, Colgan 2013; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Gurr 1988; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015; Weeks 2012; Weeks 2014.

revolutionary experience. Four specific reasons explain why Suharto seldom turned to use force abroad to retain his power during emergencies: first, previous rebellion experience made Suharto more experienced in domestic measures, like repression. Thus, he had more confidence in his capability to utilize violence at home to achieve his goal; second, in the face of acute domestic problems, he saw repression as a more effective policy option to directly address the root problem; third, he needed a stable external environment to bolster domestic development. This neutralized his preference toward international conflict; and lastly, the Chinese Indonesians served as a worthwhile substitute for foreign scapegoats in the face of severe crises. Thus, when his rule was challenged, his direct policy response never included provoking an international conflict.

In the next section, I will first review Suharto's early life before he came to power, including his humble origin, harsh military career, and rebellion experience. These factors may provide us with some clues for predicting his future behaviors. Then I briefly introduce how Suharto responded to major political threats during his rule and explain why foreign aggression was not favorable. It is important to establish that Suharto's intrinsic unwillingness to use force abroad during domestic unrest does not mean that he was reluctant to use scapegoating more generally. Therefore, the section following, will examine how he utilized the tactic towards a domestic target—ethnic Chinese—to retain his power under the circumstances of severe internal turmoil. The last section of this chapter addresses the one major international conflict initiated by Suharto, that is, the invasion of East Timor in 1975. The in-depth investigation of this conflict shows that it, by no mean, aimed at dealing with domestic troubles.

SUHARTO'S EARLY LIFE: A COMMONER

Suharto was born on 8 June 1921 during the Dutch colonial era, in Kemusuk, a small village near the city of Yogyakarta in Central Java. His father, Kertosudiro, was an *ulu-ulu*, also known as an irrigation official of the village. Suharto grew up in the village but due to his parent's divorce and subsequent remarriage, just after Suharto's birth, he lived in various homes away from his parents. He finished secondary school but failed to continue studies in 1939 when his father and relatives could not afford the school expenses any more.²²⁷ Both his origins and early life show that Suharto did not have a privileged background – he was just a commoner.

With a period of unemployment, young Suharto was “yearning for a job,” and for him, “[a]nything would do, as long as it was legal.”²²⁸ In 1940, he finally got his chance for a career when the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (KNIL) had an opening. On 1 June 1940, Suharto joined the Kortverband (a three-year short-term service) of KNIL at Gombang and started his long military career. There he received tough military training and was promoted to Sergeant. On 8 March 1941, when the Dutch surrendered to the Japanese, Suharto fled to Wurjantoro in order not to be detained by the Japanese. After several months of unemployment and recuperation from malaria, Suharto knew that the police were recruiting, so he decided to take the risk. Suharto joined the Yogyakarta police force, one of the Japanese-organized security forces. As Suharto recalled, soon after, the Japanese chief of police more or less suggested that he should enlist in the Defenders of the Homeland (*Pembela Tanah Air*, or PETA), the newly formed voluntary army to defend

²²⁷ Soeharto 1991, 5–15; Vatikiotis 1998, 7–9.

²²⁸ Soeharto 1991, 14.

the homeland.²²⁹ Suharto was transferred from the police to the Japanese-supported militia. The harsh training in the PETA fostered Suharto's nationalist sentiment and solidified his militarist ideology that would have a profound influence in his future thinking and behaviors.²³⁰ Following the surrender of Japan and the proclamation of Indonesian independence in 1945, "the young Suharto felt he had been 'called' to join the new People's Army."²³¹ He joined the People's Security Force (*Badan Keamanan Rakyat*, or BKR) and then the People's Safety Army (*Tentara Keamanan Rakyat*, or TKR).²³²

In the meantime, the Dutch did not recognize the independence of Indonesia. With the assistance of Great Britain, the Netherlands tried to regain control of Indonesia. With the arrival of the Allied troops in October 1945, tensions mounted and conflicts broke out. Suharto participated in fighting against the Allies first around Magelang and then Semarang. His success in the battlefield had earned recognition and respect as a military officer. Soon he was appointed "Commander of the Third Regiment with the rank of lieutenant colonel" in control of "the Yogyakarta region with Major Rekso as deputy commander."²³³

On 19 December 1948, the Dutch launched a second aggression by initiating a surprise attack on Yogyakarta from Maguwo. Suharto organized guerilla warfare against the Dutch to weaken the enemy's position and tried to recapture the city. His success in

²²⁹ Ibid., 19.

²³⁰ Ibid., 19–23.

²³¹ Vatikiotis 1998, 11.

²³² With the formation of TKR, all the BKR troops became the TKR troops. Also, the name of TKR has been changed several times. Specifically, "On 7 January 1946, TKR was renamed Tentara Kedaulatan Rakyat (People's Sovereign Army); two weeks later, the name was again changed to Tentara Republik Indonesia (Republic Indonesian Army). Tentara Republik Indonesia was the embryo of TKR, which was to later become Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI) through a Presidential Decree announced by President Soekarno on 3 June 1947. TNI later came to be called Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (ABRI), incorporating the navy, police and air force. Since the mid-950s, the names TNI and ABRI have been used synonymously." (Abdulgani-Knapp 2007, 28)

²³³ Soeharto 1991, 28.

this fight was “an important factor contributing to his later position in the armed forces.”²³⁴ Under pressure from the United Nations, the Dutch eventually withdrew and transferred complete sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia in the December of 1949. After the transfer of power back to the Sukarno government in 1949, Suharto participated in a number of operations to cease resistance and revolts to the new unitary state.²³⁵ His talent and loyalty demonstrated in the post-independence period from 1950 to 1965, led to a smooth military career with frequent promotions.

As important as the power Suharto obtained during this time period was, the beliefs and perceptions that he formed. These were the most significant factors that would shape his future behaviors once he assumed power. First, his nationalism and patriotism exponentially grew during his military training. He wrote in his autobiography that “All my experience in PETA convinced me that in no way could we condone the brutal treatment meted out by some of the Japanese officers. I felt a growing desire to fight back.”²³⁶ This patriotic sentiment pushed him to prioritize national unity and independence.²³⁷ For instance, Suharto opposed any idea that foreign countries could use foreign aid to override the Indonesia government, despite the dependence on foreign aid for Indonesian development. He stressed that “we continue to regard foreign aid as supplementary. We also guard against letting foreign assistance lead to any undue burdens. Foreign aid should not in any way lessen our own capability.”²³⁸

In addition, his previous experience during revolutions (e.g. the experience of mopping up revolts) endowed him with great appreciation for conformity and loyalty, and

²³⁴ Vatikiotis 1998, 12.

²³⁵ Ibid., 13.

²³⁶ Soeharto 1991, 21.

²³⁷ Abdulgani-Knapp 2007, 34.

²³⁸ Soeharto 1991, 202.

deep distaste for rebellions. “To some extent this heavy emphasis on internal security was already imbued in those officers who had served in the Dutch colonial army, where the ever-present threat of insurrection underpinned military training.”²³⁹ Suharto was no exception. His great appreciation of internal stability led to his brutal suppression of those opposing groups. As Retnowati Abdulgani-Knapp notes,

*He had no empathy for those who rebelled against the lawful government. He showed no qualms and was always ready to go after the rebels. It was for this same reason that he did not trust the Indonesian Communist Party which argued that the “Indonesian revolution is not over.” For him, the communists were using this as an excuse to put an end to imperialism and feudalism in order to generate social disorder.*²⁴⁰

Lastly, the military and revolutionary experiences predisposed Suharto to see more efficacy and more confidence in the use of force at home to deal with internal problems, compared to other policy responses. The decisive role played by the military in the defense of the Republic during the Independence Revolution between 1945 to 1949 enabled military leaders, like Suharto, to consider the military as the defender of the unitary country and “the embodiment of Indonesian nationalism.”²⁴¹ The suppression of domestic revolts in the 1950s reinforced the perception that the military should take on the sole responsibility to ensure internal security.

As Michael R. J. Vatikiotis articulates, neither his boyhood nor his experience in the military during the early years differ greatly from other people in his era.²⁴² However, these early life experiences did still mold Suharto’s thought, directing his future preference and behaviors in a specific way after his accession to power.

²³⁹ Vatikiotis 1998, 66.

²⁴⁰ Abdulgani-Knapp 2007, 34–35.

²⁴¹ Vatikiotis 1998, 64.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 9, 12.

SUHARTO'S RISE TO POWER: THE 30 SEPTEMBER MOVEMENT

The previously little-known General Suharto came into power out of the chaos of the 30 September Movement in 1965. Unlike the rise of Mao, many people do not think that Suharto's rise to power was destined. Instead they see it as "a result of his being in the right place at the right time."²⁴³ Therefore, to understand the rise of Suharto, people have to look at the still unexplained coup attempt on 30 September.

In the evening on September 30, 1965, a clique of military conspirators gathered in Jakarta. At dawn on October 1, the group, "on the orders of a commander of President Sukarno's Palace Guard, Lieut. Colonel Untung, and a commander of the Army's Jakarta region, Colonel Latief," kidnapped and assassinated six²⁴⁴ top generals of the Army.²⁴⁵ "Whether the events of 30 September/ 1 October 1965 were mounted by dissident soldiers against President Sukarno, or with the President's connivance against the army leadership remains to this day unresolved."²⁴⁶ According to the official explanation, this abortive coup was attempted by the Communist Party of Indonesia (i.e. *Partai Komunis Indonesia* or PKI) against President Sukarno, but it failed. However, there is a suspicion that Suharto actually involved in the coup.

*On the night of 30 September 1965, six hours before the military coup, Latief confirmed with Suharto that the plan to kidnap seven army generals would soon start. Latief was an officer attached to the Jakarta military command. As head of the Army Strategic Reserve Command (Kostrad), Suharto held the optimum position to crush the operation, so his name should have been at the top of the list. When troops who conducted the kidnappings asked why Suharto was not on the list, they were told: 'Because he is one of us.'*²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Ibid., 16.

²⁴⁴ The initial plan was to kidnap seven generals, but one general escaped.

²⁴⁵ Holtzappel 1979, 216.

²⁴⁶ Vatikiotis 1998, 2.

²⁴⁷ Poulgrain 1999.

Given the controversy about who plotted the coup, what we know for sure is its epochal effects: “It marked the beginning of the end of Sukarno’s presidency and the rise to power of Suharto.”²⁴⁸

As many scholars agree, it was Suharto’s decisive moves to restore order after the 30 September Movement that “earned him kudos he would have found hard to accumulate under normal circumstances.”²⁴⁹ Dake (2005) comes to similar conclusion: “The only person, in that confused situation, who advanced sure-footed was Suharto. His new official responsibility was national law and order, and he exploited it to the hilt.”²⁵⁰ After Lieutenant Colonel Untung announced that the movement had controlled all state power and taken Sukarno under its protection on October 1, Suharto, the commander of the Army Strategic Reserve Command, “moved quickly to marshal his forces. By the end of the day he had taken over the key installations from Untung’s troops. With the radio transmitter in his hands, he was able to prevent the broadcast of an order by Sukarno for all troops to be confined to their barracks and for Maj. Gen. Pranoto Reksosamudro to take over administration of the army.”²⁵¹ Later, Suharto proclaimed that he had assumed the leadership of the army.²⁵² “By 2 October Suharto’s group had a firm grip on power, and on 5 October when the funeral procession was held for the dead generals, the military propaganda campaign against the PKI swept the country.”²⁵³ If crushing the 30 September Movement was the most straightforward step in Suharto’s rise to power, cleansing the PKI

²⁴⁸ Roosa 2006, 4.

²⁴⁹ Vatikiotis 1998, 17.

²⁵⁰ Dake 2006, 157.

²⁵¹ Bourchier 2015, 126.

²⁵² Sundhaussen 1982, 196–209.

²⁵³ Vickers 2005, 156.

was the next key step to consolidate his rule, since the PKI was the army's only serious competitor.²⁵⁴

The rise of Suharto saw the brutal massacre of communist supporters and Sukarnoists, coupled with the stigmatization of the PKI as the primary plotter of the 30 September Movement.

Army leaders allied to Suharto organised a demonstration in Jakarta in which the PKI headquarters was burned to the ground – after they had removed all documents of interest. There was some confusion within the military as to who should be regarded as Communist and who not, so the ever-helpful CIA created lists of those who should be rounded up. Leading Party members were immediately arrested, some summarily executed, and the airforce in particular was targeted for a purge. The purge rapidly spread to Central Java, to where Chairman Aidit had flown in early October, and where other leftist officers had also supported the Movement through local actions in Yogyakarta, Salatiga and Semarang.²⁵⁵

Up to a million of people lost their lives after the military “encouraged a witch-hunt against members of the Communist party of Indonesia.”²⁵⁶ Vatikiotis (1998) portrayed the horror of the situation:

Tens of thousands of artists, intellectuals and civil servants who had made the mistake of either joining the Communist Party or tagging along to benefit from its patronage, were arrested and classified by their degree of involvement with the PKI. Many thousands ended up on Buru island, a remote prison camp in the Moluccas.²⁵⁷

In the autobiography, Suharto emphasized his respect for Sukarno and expressed no intention to take power from the incumbent president,²⁵⁸ however, analysts agree that

²⁵⁴ Bourchier 2015, 126.

²⁵⁵ Vickers 2005, 157.

²⁵⁶ Vatikiotis 1998, xv.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 33–34.

²⁵⁸ For example, Soeharto 1991, 156–157.

those were his “clever subterfuge,”²⁵⁹ and “[t]he months to come saw a fierce battle for power between the President, who fought tooth and nail against further erosion of his authority, and Suharto.”²⁶⁰ As John Roosa notes, “Suharto used the movement as a pretext for delegitimizing Sukarno and catapulting himself into the presidency. Suharto’s incremental takeover of state power, what can be called a creeping coup d’état, was disguised as an effort to prevent a coup.”²⁶¹ Through cleansing the PKI and the supporters of Sukarno, the previously little-known general appeared on screens nationwide. On March 11, 1966, Sukarno signed a presidential decree ceding much of his authority to Suharto, which indicated that although Sukarno remained the lawful president, all the de facto presidential power was gradually transferred into the hands of Suharto.

THE HALLMARK OF SUHARTO’S LONG RULE: THE COMBINATION OF STICK AND CARROT

Before examining the reasons for Suharto’s specific policy response in the context of political unrest, it is worthwhile to briefly review the history of how he dealt with major domestic challenges. In the late 1960s, Suharto rose to power in the context of political turmoil and faced strong opposition from Sukarno supporters. He consolidated his power through the brutal repression of communists. Despite his consolidation of power in the 1970s and 1980s, Suharto’s rule still encountered occasional domestic challenges from opposing groups. The most significant challenge Suharto faced in this period was the Malari Incident in 1974. In response to this challenge, Suharto, true to form, ordered the

²⁵⁹ Vatikiotis 1998, 28.

²⁶⁰ Dake 2006, 158.

²⁶¹ Roosa 2006, 4.

military to curtail the opposition operations. In the late 1990s, when faced with economic and political crisis, Suharto encountered a large-scale public resistance against his presidency. Suharto, predictably tried to suppress the movement, however his policy failed. Evidently, when faced with acute political instability, Suharto never engaged in international dispute to retain his power, instead he heavily relied on internal measures, especially repression. In the following sections, I will specifically examine how Suharto responded to serious domestic problems over time.

SUHARTO'S RULE IN THE 1960s

In the wake of the 30 September Movement in 1965, General Suharto emerged on top. Suharto described the situation after 1965 as “disquieting.”²⁶² There were “dangerous clashes of opinions” which lead to the actual confrontation “between groups for and against Soekarno.”²⁶³ Vatikiotis (1998) quoted Slamet Bratanata, a former Indonesian Cabinet Minister, to describe the tentative nature of Suharto’s personal power in the early years: “In the period 1965–7 Suharto’s was a frail shell of power. On the outside he appeared in control, but inside there was an empty void. Sukarno could have struck at any time.”²⁶⁴ For Suharto, the priority in the 1960s was political stability and the restoration of security and order.²⁶⁵ Through the process of order restoration, Suharto consolidated his personal power.

The brutal massacre and repression of communist supporters was the primary step of Suharto to restore order and consolidate power in the aftermath of the 30 September

²⁶² Soeharto 1991, 154.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Vatikiotis 1998, 23–24.

²⁶⁵ Soeharto 1991, 202.

Movement. Suharto accused the PKI of “masterminding the movement and then orchestrated the extermination of people affiliated with the party. Suharto’s military rounded up more than a million and a half people. All were accused of being involved in the movement. In one of the worst bloodbaths of the twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of individuals were massacred by the army and army-affiliated militias, largely in Central Java, East Java, and Bali, from late 1965 to mid 1966.”²⁶⁶

Although Suharto did not mention his engagement with the egregious anti-communist killing starting from 1965, in his autobiography, he did mention a few political unrest activities in this period, which, according to his account, were either crushed or solved through negotiation.²⁶⁷ In his own words, “First, peace had to be restored and maintained. In an effort to secure political stability, I put pressure on hard-liners, no matter what groups they represented.”²⁶⁸ In 1965, Suharto set up the Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order (*Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban* or Kopkamtib), a secret police operation through which Suharto could tightly control internal security before it was dissolved in 1988. As Crouch (1988) points out, the Kopkamtib served as a powerful institutional arrangement for Suharto to use force at home, since it “had almost unlimited power to seek out and detain the regime's opponents.”²⁶⁹ The initial goal of the Kopkamtib was to organize the liquidation of the PKI and its related organizations. However, after the bloody cleansing of communist supporters and pro-Sukarno groups, by 1968, the PKI was no longer a threat to Suharto’s rule. Suharto had successfully consolidated his power in the late 1960s.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Roosa 2006, 4.

²⁶⁷ Soeharto 1991, 154, 163, 169, 213.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 167.

²⁶⁹ Crouch 1988, 161.

²⁷⁰ Abdulgani-Knapp 2007, 114; Crouch 1988, 161; Liddle 1985, 75.

In terms of foreign policy, unlike what existing studies on leaders' experience would expect, in this period in Indonesia there was an era of tranquility with few, if any, international disputes. Additionally, to a significant extent, Indonesia actively sought for peace and cooperation with foreign countries. For instance, shortly after he seized power from Sukarno, in June 1966, Suharto delegated Adam Malik, the current Foreign Minister of Indonesia, to reach a tentative agreement to end the confrontation (i.e. Konfrontasi) with Malaysia.²⁷¹ By September, Indonesia rejoined the United Nations and other international institutions.²⁷² One year later, on August 8 1967, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand formed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). One of the primary aims of ASEAN is to promote regional peace and collaboration.

To summarize, in the aftermath of the 30 September Movement, Suharto's power was not consolidated as he faced strong opposition from the communists. His response was to brutally repress communists domestically and meanwhile he sought to improve foreign relations with the West. Notably, international conflict was an option that had never been put on the table, when Suharto was faced with the great domestic challenge in this period.

SUHARTO'S RULE IN THE 1970s AND 1980s: THE MALARI INCIDENT

Suharto's rule in the 1970s and 1980s experienced much less social unrest and domestic resistance, compared to his rule in the late 1960s and 1990s. For instance, during this period, the diminution of domestic political competition meant that Suharto's New

²⁷¹ Abdulgani-Knapp 2007, 61–62; Dassel 1998, 132; Sukma 1995, 311.

²⁷² Soeharto 1991, 154.

Order government could formulate and implement its preferred foreign policies without the need to consider the impact of these policies on political competition.²⁷³ The political stability of Suharto's rule during this period was mainly due to the measurable economic growth of Indonesia which earned legitimacy for Suharto. Just as Michael Leifer mentioned in the *Preface* of Vatikiotis's book: "The basis of that power had been a sustained economic success."²⁷⁴ In addition to the positive effect of economic development on his leadership, Suharto further secured his unanimous power through various institutional arrangements that in turn dissolved potential opposition and repressed actual resistance. The most important institution to recognize is the re-organization of the Party of the Functional Groups (i.e. *Partai Golongan Karya* or Golkar). To participate in elections, Suharto needed to be affiliated to a political party. He decided to align with Golkar and transformed this institution into his electoral machine in 1969. In the subsequent legislative elections under Suharto's rule, Golkar won every time by a landslide from 1971 to 1997. To guarantee the predominance of Golkar, Suharto kept reducing the influence of other parties as described in detail below.

In 1973 the government forced all the non-government parties to regroup in two new parties which were both placed under leadership amenable to the military. In the four tightly controlled elections held during the 1970s and 1980s the combined non-government vote has declined from a high of 38 per cent in 1977 to 27 per cent in the 1987 election. In any case the non-government parties have been weeded of dissidents by the Kopkamtib and have always proclaimed their support for the President during election campaigns.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Weinstein 2007, 326–327.

²⁷⁴ Vatikiotis 1998, ix.

²⁷⁵ Crouch 1988, 161.

Another set of institutions that bolstered the leadership of Suharto was the state security network, like Kopkamtib mentioned above.

The overall stability during this period, however, does not negate domestic turmoil that did occur. The most dangerous challenge Suharto faced with in this period was the Malari Incident, which took place in January 1974. As David Bouchier notes,

By 1974 considerable resentment had built up among groups that had supported the New Order's rise to power over a number of aspects of the government's economic management. First, and earliest, was the extent of corruption among government officials in general and among Soeharto's circle in particular. Student protests became more frequent from 1970 and criticism of government corruption and wastage in newspapers such as Harian Kami more strident. There was also a nationalist dimension to criticism of the government's economic policies. This was because of the government's approval of large-scale foreign investment in industries, such as textiles, that were traditionally dominated by indigenous producers. Nationalist sentiment was also stirred by the well-founded perception that the government's economic policies favoured the domestic Chinese, who had long dominated the retail and trade sectors.²⁷⁶

There was a general “apprehension of the New Order’s reliance on foreign aid and investment which was seen as an act of ‘selling out the country to foreign capital’, especially to the Japanese,”²⁷⁷ and civilian discontent reached a peak in January 1974 with the outbreak of large-scale student protests on the occasion of Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka’s visit to Jakarta. In the morning of January 15, the next day after Tanaka’s arrival, tens of thousands of students marched through the city of Jakarta calling for “the dissolution of the *Aspri*²⁷⁸, the reduction of prices, and the suppression of corruption.”²⁷⁹ Soon the demonstrations turned into violent riots. According to Harold Crouch,

²⁷⁶ Bouchier 2015, 177.

²⁷⁷ Sukma 1999, 103.

²⁷⁸ *Aspri* is short for *Asisten Pribadi* in Indonesian, which refers to personal assistants to President Suharto. From early 1970s, students had mounting discontent with the military’s role in politics, especially the role of Suharto’s *Aspri*.

²⁷⁹ Crouch 2007, 315.

In the afternoon, however, the student demonstration turned into an uncontrolled riot in which the main participants were youths and children from Jakarta's slum areas, who burned Japanese and other cars, wrecked the showrooms of the Toyota-importing Astra Motor Company (with which the president's wife was said to be associated), attacked a Coca Cola plant, and the following day burned and looted the huge Senen shopping complex.²⁸⁰

Analysts maintain that the Malari Incident presented the most dangerous challenge to the Suharto leadership because it also heightened intra-military tensions.²⁸¹ The tensions were centered around two leaders of the Indonesian Armed Forces (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*, or ABRI): General Sumitro, the Commander of *Kopkamtib*, and the Major General Ali Murtopo, one of President Suharto's *Aspri*. In early January 1974, there was a rumor that Suharto had decided to dismiss Sumitro. "It can be surmised that Sumitro hoped that the student protest against Tanaka's visit could be used to weaken the position of Ali Murtopo and Sudjono Humardhani²⁸², both of whom were identified in the public mind with a pro-Japan outlook."²⁸³ As a response, Murtopo "ordered his formidable network of underworld provocateurs to join the demonstrations, causing the mass rallies to degenerate into violent riots. This served to discredit the genuine protesters while demonstrating Sumitro's inability to control the situation."²⁸⁴

To deal with this incident, Suharto relied heavily on domestic measures. Before the occurrence of the violent riots on 15 January 1974, Suharto agreed to meet student leaders to peacefully solve the problem. However, after the demonstration turned violent, the military began to suppress it. In the wake of the incident, Sumitro was forced to retire and

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ See, for example, Bourchier 2015, 177–179; Crouch 2007, 313–317; Sukma 1999, 104.

²⁸² Sudjono Humardhani is one of the *Aspri* to President Suharto.

²⁸³ Crouch 2007, 314.

²⁸⁴ Bourchier 2015, 178.

Aspri was disbanded. After the riots had been quelled, Suharto further cracked down on the press, the universities and the intelligentsia. “Six daily newspapers and four weekly magazines were shut down, troops occupied the University of Indonesia, and over 800 people were detained, including several of the nation’s leading intellectuals and rights activists.”²⁸⁵ Again, the option of using force abroad during this serious internal division was never put on the table.

As mentioned above, the governmental response to this incident involved both co-optation and repression. It was through these uses of state violence that Suharto managed to uncover internal dissent and suppress domestic turmoil.²⁸⁶ As Vatikiotis points out, “Instead of gaoling his people, Suharto relied on elitist fears about social unrest and religious extremism. Opposition to his rule was numbed by these fears and advancing levels of prosperity so long as the economy ticked along nicely.”²⁸⁷ After the Malari incident, there was “almost a decade of inactivity on the nation’s campuses.”²⁸⁸ This again signals the political stability in Indonesia during this period. To sum up, under the help of both domestic development and terror, the Suharto administration in the 1970s and 1980s enjoyed popular support, feeble resistance, and legitimate dominance.

Yet, the political tranquility of 1980s hides the “slow erosion of Suharto’s popularity.”²⁸⁹ On one hand, there was an increasing criticism of Suharto family as they engaged in corruption throughout the 1980s. “By the late 1980s the scale of Suharto’s family enterprise was so great that scarcely any large project could proceed without the involvement of one or another of the family’s business groups. Government ministers came

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Budiardjo 1986, 1221.

²⁸⁷ Vatikiotis 1998, xvii.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

under pressure to channel tenders and projects their way.”²⁹⁰ On the other hand, by the late 1980s, as Suharto grew old, Indonesia was enveloped in an atmosphere of uncertainty about the succession.²⁹¹ According to Vatikiotis’s account,

By the time he was elected to his fifth term of office in March 1988, a generation had come of age who knew no other president than Suharto. Yet muted criticism of his rule was being heard from young and old alike in educated circles. After almost a decade of inactivity on the nation’s campuses, students in late 1988 began, in small numbers, to call for a change of leadership. By the middle of 1989, student protests—still in limited numbers and seemingly guided by the armed forces—were regularly reported in the press. In the course of 1989, the size and frequency of these protests increased, and some arrests were made to keep it all under control. The focus of demonstrations in the mid- and late 1970s had been on corruption. Now the ‘corruptors’ were singled out.²⁹²

SUHARTO’S RULE IN THE 1990s

Vickers (2005) describes Suharto’s regime as a bubble, “but one that took a remarkably long time to burst.”²⁹³ The 1990s was the time the bubble burst. The end of the Cold War marked the period where the US would no longer tolerate Suharto on the accounts of corruption and human rights issues. In the meantime, Suharto adopted a policy of social liberalism—Openness. Under the policy, the government loosened its control over the economy. The economic liberalization and subsequent development gave rise to a growing middle class and the rise of a middle-class social consciousness, which lead to increasing discontent with Suharto’s autocracy and corruption of his families. Coinciding with the growing middle-class discontent, Suharto diversified his power base away from

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 6.

²⁹¹ Crouch 1988, 162.

²⁹² Vatikiotis 1998, 5.

²⁹³ Vickers 2005, 196.

the military. As such, the military were no longer able to hold a tight control on people's lives. Since the late 1980s, Suharto perceived a growing threat to his power from the military, so he tried to downplay the role of the military in politics. The first step was the dissolution of Kopkamtib in 1988. By the 1990s, civilian politicians started to dominate Suharto's government. All of these changes in the late 1980s and the early 1990s prepared the Suharto bubble for its burst. "There was in 1997, already before the economic crisis set in, a widespread feeling that the Suharto era was approaching its end."²⁹⁴

As mentioned above, it was the sustained economic success that bolstered the long rule of Suharto. However, as Michael Leifer describes, following the Asian Financial Crisis, from mid-1997, "Indonesia was afflicted with an acute economic adversity which exposed the structural defects of his rule. The scale of economic failure served to undermine his legitimacy and precipitated his political downfall some two months after his re-election for a seventh consecutive term of office."²⁹⁵ By October 1997, "depreciation of the rupiah had reached 55%, while it was 41% for the Thai baht, 31% for the Malaysian ringgit, 34% for the Philippine peso and only 11% for the Singapore dollar."²⁹⁶ With the collapse of the Rupiah, Indonesia's economy suffered severe damage, which weakened Suharto's power. The economic meltdown resulted in crisis of trust. People started to put blame on Suharto for their negligence of the real needs of their people.²⁹⁷ Critics identified the causes of the economic crisis as "corruption, collusion and nepotism" (i.e. *korupsi, kolusi, nepotisme*, or KKN) of Suharto's government and demanded a total reform.²⁹⁸ The deep discontent and anger among Indonesians soon developed into increasing political tension and widespread

²⁹⁴ Eklof 2003, 95.

²⁹⁵ Vatikiotis 1998, ix.

²⁹⁶ Sadli 1998, 272–273.

²⁹⁷ Vickers 2005, 205.

²⁹⁸ Abdulgani-Knapp 2007, 209; Vickers 2005, 205.

unrest. “By the end of 1997, with the economy in disarray and social discontent brewing within the society, it looked as if a big opportunity for the anti-Suharto opposition might be approaching.”²⁹⁹

Initially and true to form, Suharto used state violence in an attempt to curtail the social unrest. For instance, by 1998, students organized a series of national demonstrations calling for Suharto’s resignation and reform. In May 1998, students assembled against the Suharto government at Trisakti University in Jakarta. This demonstration incurred governmental repression: four students were killed and dozens of demonstrators were injured. “The violence of government forces had turned from marginal areas to the centre of power, against the children of the middle class. The outrage was overwhelming.”³⁰⁰ Given the overwhelming outrage caused by the Trisakti shooting, riots and mass violence broke out throughout the country and the military gradually lost its control. This eventually led to the resignation of Suharto. Due to the inability of the military to control the situation, Suharto tried to appease demonstrators by promising to resign in 2003 and reshuffle the cabinet. However, these efforts did not work as well as they used to. Suharto’s political allies, like Emil Salim, who had public support and credibility, abandoned him and refused to join the new cabinet. Emil Salim even joined the student demonstrators. It was not until then did Suharto finally realize the game of his long rule was over. He announced his resignation on 21 May 1998 with the current vice-president Habibie assuming the presidency as Indonesia’s third president.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Eklof 2003, 121.

³⁰⁰ Vickers 2005, 205.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

To sum up, Suharto's long rule as President was characterized by a political game of retaining power in the face of opposition and turmoil. He utilized domestic measures to successfully maintain his power for more than thirty years. As Adrian Vickers summarizes, the hallmark of his rule is "the remarkable combination of threat and solicitation."³⁰²

WHY IS FOREIGN AGGRESSION UNDER SEVERE DOMESTIC STRIFE NOT FAVORED?

According to existing studies on how formative experiences and domestic institutions shape leaders' inclination toward foreign aggression, Suharto, under this analysis, is predicated to be a leader with a strong motivated bias toward using force abroad, as he was a leader backed by the military and he had a rebellion experience.³⁰³ For instance, Jessica Weeks categorizes the Suharto government as a personalist regime led by military strongmen, which in turn forecasts a higher likelihood of international conflict initiation.³⁰⁴ After tracing the history of Suharto's rule, however, a puzzle emerges: in the face of severe turmoil that threatened his rule, why did Suharto not favor international conflict as a potential policy response to retain his power?

Current research seeks to answer this question from different levels of analysis. For instance, Dassel (1998) argues that "the military prefers to maintain its interests by using force internally. If, however, the domestic use of force will divide the military against itself, then the military will protect its interests by pursuing diversionary aggression abroad."³⁰⁵

³⁰² Ibid., 169.

³⁰³ For example, Colgan 2013; Colgan and Lucas 2017; Colgan and Weeks 2015; Gurr 1988; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015; Weeks 2012; Weeks 2014.

³⁰⁴ Weeks 2012, 337; Weeks 2014, 40.

³⁰⁵ Dassel 1998, 108.

Hence, compared to Sukarno's belligerent stance on the international issues, Suharto demonstrated a pacific inclination, as there were no longer "contested institutions" that opposed the internal use of force and thus "[t]he military under Suharto's leadership could now protect and advance its interests by using force at home, should it prove necessary."³⁰⁶ Other research on the militarist establishment of Indonesia claim that repression may appeal to Suharto more than other policy choices because he was better equipped with institutions of repression, such as Kopkamtib and ABRI.³⁰⁷ Thus, it is easier for Suharto to rule "by a violent and ruthless military bureaucracy which controls every facet of life."³⁰⁸

Yet, these domestic political arguments heavily neglect the role of Suharto and his individual perception. Actually, in the majority of his time as President, Suharto's position "as the ultimate decision-maker remained unchallenged."³⁰⁹ Hence, his perceptions mattered greatly when he was curating his own policy. It is true that the lack of military-civilian cleavage and the institutionalization of Suharto's system of repression enabled this policy choice to gain more leverage in the face of acute political instability. However, one of the initial causes that led to the lack of military-civilian cleavage and the institutionalization of the repressive system in the New Order government itself, could have been Suharto's preference for domestic measures, such as repression. Scholars on the institutionalization of Indonesia find that, Suharto himself, was the key promoter of institutionalization during his rule.³¹⁰ For instance, it was Suharto that created the repressive institutions, like Kopkamtib, as instruments to consolidate his power and eliminate opposition. Suharto's skillful maneuvers of both stick and carrot enabled his final

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 132.

³⁰⁷ Budiardjo 1986; Liddle 1985.

³⁰⁸ Budiardjo 1986, 1219.

³⁰⁹ Weinstein 2007, 333.

³¹⁰ See, for example, Liddle 1985, 70.

consolidation of power, that was eventually coupled with little political debate from the opposition. Hence, it is clear that during this process, Suharto's individual perception of how to cope with internal opposition is integral.

Some may question the importance of the President's perception alone and propose that as a leader backed by the military, Suharto also had an organizational interest to use force. Yet, many scholars, like Max Lane, disagree with the idea that Suharto had a military organizational interest in the first place. According to Max Lane, "The Suharto regime is not a military regime but a militarist regime—it uses military force to rule but the interests of the military as a social or political group are not its first concern."³¹¹ Even though we agree on the existence of Suharto's organizational interest with the military, the major problem is that this theory cannot solve why Suharto preferred the use of force at home as opposed to the use abroad, in most cases. A perfect example to explain this was the general demilitarization in the late 1980s, which was obviously not due to an organizational interest in the military, but rather Suharto's individual perception towards this idea. Since the 1980s, Suharto perceived more threat to his power from the military than other spheres, so he adopted a series of policies to downplay the role of the military in the politics. "By the early 1990s, the demilitarization of Suharto's New Order had gone so far it could barely be recognized as a military-led government."³¹²

Some others may contend that, despite the recognition of the importance of Suharto's perception, it is not necessarily his perception of military efficacy at home and confidence in repression that matter. It could be that the Suharto government had a peaceful worldview and despised foreign aggression. We do see many peaceful moves taken by the

³¹¹ Lane 1991, 7.

³¹² Vatikiotis 1998, 61.

New Order administration right after Suharto's accession to power. However, in reality, this is not the case. Drawing on in-depth interviews conducted during 1969 and 1970 with Indonesian foreign policy elites, Franklin B. Weinstein finds that "Indonesian leaders on the average answered 73 percent of the relevant questions in a manner indicating adherence to the hostile world perspective. Those components of the foreign policy elite closest to the center of power in the New Order—namely, the army, technocrats, and foreign ministry—were all above the average in holding to this view."³¹³ Even Suharto himself held a very suspicious and hostile view of some countries, especially China. He often used foreign scapegoats (e.g. China) to explain the government's inability to solve problems.³¹⁴ Yet, despite the hostile view Suharto bore to Communist countries, he did not tend to initiate an international conflict toward those countries when faced with severe domestic problems.

In addition to the competing explanations focusing on the first and second images, people could also question the feasibility and desirability of initiating an international dispute during domestic turmoil in general from a perspective of international system. Specifically, they may argue that the weak national capability and small numbers of neighboring states made international conflict not feasible for Suharto. However, this is not the case. As exemplified by the confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia during Sukarno's rule, despite the weak national capability, it was still feasible and beneficial to use force abroad.

Therefore, the question remains: why did Suharto not favor the use of force abroad but show a particular bias toward domestic measures? I argue that Suharto's preference of domestic measures compared to international conflict, in the face of severe domestic unrest,

³¹³ Weinstein 2007, 332.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

is not only due to a calculation under the current circumstance, but also his choice has a dispositional root that derived from his previous experience. His experiences prior to his accession to power and the extremely instable situation he inherited motivated him to perceive more efficacy and more confidence in the use of force at home, when trying to cope with the severe internal threat.

Throughout Suharto's rule, development and stability were the two paramount themes. "Development was Suharto's leitmotiv"³¹⁵ that justified his personal power,³¹⁶ whereas domestic stability was the prerequisite for development. "He was a firm believer that people had a moral duty to respect the order of existence: they had to respect the order of society, and honour the elderly and their superiors because development could only take place in the presence of stability. Growth could not take place if political and social instability abounded."³¹⁷ In addition to the rational calculation, as discussed above, his respect of national unity and stability has a dispositional root that was formed through his revolutionary and military experiences. The priority of national unity and stability under Suharto's administration predisposed him to favor domestic measures, not international conflict, in the face of severe internal strife.

First, leaders perceived that domestic measures are more effective in coping with severe unrest yet, the high intensity level of internal unrest will neutralize the motivated bias of revolutionary leaders like Suharto. Specifically, under severe strife, there is limited time for international conflict to take effect, since for example, it will take some time for the "rally-around-the-flag" effect to work. In contrast, domestic measures are the quickest

³¹⁵ Vatikiotis 1998, 5.

³¹⁶ Eklof 2003, 3.

³¹⁷ Abdulgani-Knapp 2007, 14.

response to directly solve imminent problems. For Suharto, he adopted domestic measures, especially repression, to deal with his major threats because those threats were so imminent that he had no choice but eliminate them.

Before he fully consolidated his power, Suharto had seen or personally encountered opposition and tensions that were created by different groups who posed a threat to the lawful government. This left him with different perceptions about each opposing group. In other words, he cultivated a threat perception with differing degrees, with some groups being perceived as extremely threatening and others less threatening. By corresponding to the differing degrees of threat posed by various groups, he was inclined to adopt different policy responses while in power. For example, as mentioned before, previous experience gave him a strong distaste for communists and political Islam extremists which he perceived as the major threats to the unity of the nation. Suharto had “no empathy for those who rebelled against the lawful government,”³¹⁸ and showed “no qualms and was always ready to go after the rebels.”³¹⁹ Once he detected a threat from these groups, he would always choose to repress. This previous experience and subsequent perception meant that Suharto’s rule manifested itself in ruthless suppression and the brutal massacre of communists and Islamic extremists. According to Adrian Vickers, “The New Order’s claim to represent law and order meant that its enemies were to be ruthlessly suppressed.”³²⁰

However, Suharto did not always repress the opposition with cruelty. In contrast to his deep hatred of communists and political Islamic extremists, Suharto’s feelings toward students was more complicated as students helped him to come to power yet later voiced

³¹⁸ Ibid., 34.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Vickers 2005, 167.

oppositions to his rule.³²¹ Hence, Suharto's policies toward student movements were complex, "combining mild forms of repression (compared to the brutal treatment of Communists) with manipulation and cooptation."³²² Specifically, "[s]tudent groups that demonstrated against the Soeharto government were disbanded and their leaders arrested. More cooperative students joined a government-sponsored youth organization and played a leading role in the formation of the government party Golkar."³²³

Second, it is known that previous experiences in coping with opposition during revolutions enable these leaders to have more confidence in utilizing domestic measures. Prior to his accession to power, Suharto mainly participated in two conflicts that had a foreign target: the fight against the Allies (primarily Great Britain) around Magelang and Semarang in 1945, and the Second Dutch Invasion against the Dutch from 1948 to 1949. Despite the success he obtained in the battlefield, his role was a minor one, since he was not a highly ranked military officer at that time.³²⁴ In contrast to his few experiences and his minor role in international conflict, his experiences in coping with oppositions abounded.

After the transfer of sovereignty to the Hatta government under Sukarno's constitutional presidency in 1949, Suharto, now a lieutenant-colonel, participated in a number of operations to mop up resistance to the new unitary state in the Eastern provinces. Suharto's troops, known as the 'Martaram Brigade', were among those sent to South Sulawesi in April 1950 to put down a revolt.³²⁵

³²¹ See for example, Vatikiotis 1998, 6–7.

³²² Liddle 1985, 76.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Vatikiotis 1998, 12.

³²⁵ Ibid., 13.

In addition to the abundance of experiences of using force at home, his formative years as a divisional commander in 1950s “provided him also with a pool of loyal subordinates, on whom he was to draw to appoint his key henchmen before and after 1965 in Jakarta.”³²⁶ With the help of these loyal subordinates, Suharto set up the powerful security apparatus of the Department of Defense and Security, which “enables the authorities to arrest and hold indefinitely anyone whom they suspect of subversive activity.”³²⁷

Third, during serious domestic unrest, initiating an international conflict would risk complicating the situation further by dragging a foreign country into the turmoil, and thus undermining the national unity, destabilizing the country, and jeopardizing the development. Given the centrality of development within Suharto’s policy, “the principal duty of Indonesia's foreign policy was to serve national interests defined largely in terms of economic interest.”³²⁸ Put differently, in Suharto’s view, Indonesian development required both internal and external stability.³²⁹ Thus, on one hand, he restored and ensured domestic stability by cooptation and repression; on the other hand, he adopted a “low-profile” foreign policy to create a relatively stable environment for economic development.³³⁰ In this case, when faced with serious internal tensions, Suharto was reluctant to appeal to international conflict, because destabilizing the external environment would contradict his fundamental principle of maintaining internal and external stability for development.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

³²⁷ Liddle 1985, 72.

³²⁸ Sukma 1995, 312.

³²⁹ Grant 1979, 141; Vatikiotis 1993, 353.

³³⁰ It is true that Suharto’s foreign policy became more assertive in the late 1980s. However, for the majority of his rule, he pursued a low international profile. See Sukma 1995; Vatikiotis 1993.

Simply put, Suharto primarily relied on domestic measures to cope with severe strife, because the high intensity level of the domestic situation molded his inclination toward the use of force abroad. This was achieved in the following three ways. To begin with, Suharto perceived more efficacy from domestic measures in the face of severe strife, since this was an immediate response and directly addressed the problem. Additionally, due to his abundant experiences in domestic repression, Suharto was more confident in using force at home. Lastly, under domestic strife, Suharto was unwilling to be provocative in the international realm, as an international response would potentially make his situation worse by destabilizing the international environment for development and further undermining national unity. Therefore, during Suharto's rule, he has imposed "a pattern of state-society relations that combines cooptation and responsiveness with repression."³³¹ In contrast, foreign aggression as a potentially reasonable policy response to domestic strife was never favored by the Suharto administration.

DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL SCAPEGOATS

Some may think the lack of engagement into international conflict during Indonesian severe domestic strife was because Suharto was not a huge fan of diversionary tactics and scapegoating practices. Yet, it is not the case. Throughout his rule, Suharto had both international and domestic scapegoats for his policy failure. For instance, Suharto liked to hold international Communist subversion, especially that emanating from China, responsible for the government's inability to solve domestic problems.³³² In the aftermath

³³¹ Liddle 1985, 70.

³³² Weinstein 2007, 28.

of the 30 September Movement, Indonesia's ally, the U.S., attempted to link the Movement plotters to China. Bradley R. Simpson cited some resources to illustrate the situation:

U.S. officials were particularly interested in linking the September 30th plotters to Beijing. They helped to spread stories about China's alleged involvement and reported on caches of weapons purportedly "discovered" by the Indonesian army with the hammer and sickle conveniently stamped on them. "We have bonanza chance to nail chicoms (Chinese Communists, added) on disastrous events in Indonesia," Green³³³ wrote the State Department. He urged a "continuation [of] covert propaganda" as one of the "best means of spreading [the] idea of chicom complicity," an allegation still being put forth by former U.S. officials forty years later.³³⁴

Despite the active efforts of the U.S. to implicate China, the Indonesian army leaders took a more tentative approach.³³⁵ The *Telegram from the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State* on October 17, 1965 quoted one general of Indonesia: "We already have enough enemies. We can't take on Communist China as well."³³⁶ This partially explains why, although international communism (mainly China) was made to be a scapegoat, coupled with the rapid deterioration in relationship with China and Soviet Union, Suharto was not prone to organize aggression towards those foreign countries to divert public attention when his rule was threatened. Given the complication of the domestic environment and Suharto's priority of development, an international conflict with China, which may have been potentially escalated into a world war in the Cold War era, it was not desirable for Suharto to engage with this – however it was possible.

In contrast, Suharto was more likely to use force with a diversionary purpose toward domestic targets—primarily Chinese Indonesians. Basically, scapegoating ethnic

³³³ Marshall Green, the United States Ambassador to Indonesia at that time.

³³⁴ Simpson 2010, 179–180.

³³⁵ Melvin 2013, 71.

³³⁶ Keefer 2001, vol. XXVI, 325.

Chinese followed by anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia has become a common occurrence. This scapegoating occurred in 1945-1949, 1966-1967 and 1997-1998 when there was widespread discontent, severe social unrest and serious political breakdowns. A brief historical background may illuminate the frequency of anti-Chinese outbreaks. The anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia can be tracked back to the Dutch colonial era when the Dutch “both utilized and distinguished the Chinese, allowing them a favoured status, although it subjected them to legal restrictions and higher taxes compared to the native group.”³³⁷ The growing economic power of the Chinese and the inherent difference in religion between Chinese and the native groups gradually prompted the resentment among the indigenous Indonesians. It is agreed that the affluence of the Chinese made them easy scapegoats.³³⁸ The existing resentment under the manipulation of the government was easily translated into anti-Chinese riots ever since the Indonesian revolution. During times of economic hardship especially, the native Indonesians were easily persuaded by the government that “Chinese traders are responsible for their difficulties.”³³⁹

Suharto came into power in the aftermath of the brutal massacre of communists and ethnic Chinese. Suharto’s policies towards Chinese Indonesians while in power were complex. On one hand, Suharto utilized the Sino-Indonesian community, which was economically powerful but politically weak, as an avenue for diversification to reduce potential political risk. Specifically, Suharto promoted the private activities of Sino-Indonesian entrepreneurs by offering benefits like tariff protections and preferential access to monopoly licenses and contracts. In turn these Chinese entrepreneurs provided Suharto

³³⁷ Heidhues 2012, 382.

³³⁸ Dunning 2005, 460; Twang 1998.

³³⁹ Crouch 1988, 174.

with “an important source of financing as well as an increased domestic tax base”³⁴⁰ without posing a credible threat to his power, conceived by the historical resentment toward them and their weak political position.³⁴¹ Consequently, many Chinese Indonesians accumulated wealth during this process, while Suharto successfully diversified his ruling base. However, his political tactics often backfired. For instance, the close relationship Suharto and his family had with Chinese businessmen provided his opponents with an excuse to criticize him for his collusion with Chinese business interest.³⁴²

On the other hand, surprisingly, the Suharto regime “systematized, institutionalized, and routinized many of the pre-1965 discriminatory practices against Chinese-Indonesians.”³⁴³ Specifically, Suharto kept scapegoating Chinese minorities for his policy failure by drawing on nationalist sentiments to divert public discontent. This peaked in the anti-Chinese campaign in 1998. Starting from January 1998, there were growing episodes of violence toward Chinese Indonesians. The first significant anti-Chinese events took place on Java in the early January, and in the late January a new round of violence against Chinese targets began between the cities of Semarang and Surabaya. “These violent events demonstrated that the political potential for anti-Chinese riots both to displace contentious politics against the regime and the willingness of state officials at both local and national levels to incite violence against ethnic Chinese as a diversionary strategy aimed at stabilizing the regime nationally.”³⁴⁴ In the meantime, Suharto was faced with a severe regime crisis, with widespread discontent and opposition. With the increasing demands for his resignation and the approaching of the presidential election, Suharto initiated a

³⁴⁰ Dunning 2005, 469.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 468–469.

³⁴² Aspinall 1995, 36.

³⁴³ Aguilar 2001, 518.

³⁴⁴ Panggabean and Smith 2011, 234.

campaign to scapegoat the Chinese Indonesians and took advantage of existing small episodes of anti-Chinese violence.

In February, President Suharto accused a conspiracy of domestic and international elements of trying to destroy the rupiah, and alluded to 'certain business people', a thinly veiled reference to the country's ethnic Chinese, supposedly responsible of triggering the crisis. Meanwhile, Aburizal Bakrie, chairman of the Indonesian chamber of commerce, Kadin, and the leader of one of Indonesia's largest non-Chinese business conglomerates, suggested that the economic crisis be used by the government to redistribute the property of the ethnic Chinese to indigenous Indonesians.³⁴⁵

Thus, the first months of 1998 saw growing numbers of small-scale anti-Chinese violence which escalated into larger and more organized events with either implicit endorsement or active involvement of the government.³⁴⁶ As Panggabean and Smith (2011) points out,

During the first half of February, following the end of Ramadan, a new round of government rhetoric against Chinese Indonesians emerged, this time linked with important Muslim organizations. Following a meeting on January 23 between Prabowo Subianto, Suharto's son-in-law and Commander of the army's Special Command Unit, and leaders of the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI), demonstrations against Chinese targets close to the regime escalated. The Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, or MUI) declared a need to protect pribumi business interests against outsiders. Army generals Feisal Tanjung and Syarwan Hamid made statements accusing Chinese Indonesians implicitly or explicitly of hoarding capital. In short, the regime both cultivated and responded actively to the expression of popular anti-Chinese sentiment on Java by stoking those prejudices and giving them official cover.³⁴⁷

In short, the anti-Chinese campaigns “served to deflect attention from the government’s handling of the crisis and to achieve Suharto’s smooth re-election as president in

³⁴⁵ Eklof 2003, 136.

³⁴⁶ Panggabean and Smith 2011, 234.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 234.

March.”³⁴⁸ In the short term, these diversionary tactics were successful, given that through the anti-Chinese violence, Suharto’s regime managed to survive and even got re-elected in March.

The efficacy of scapegoating Chinese Indonesian emboldened the Suharto administration. In May 1998, when the student demonstrations grew out of control, the government not only tried to “shift the frame of rioting from anti-regime to anti-Chinese,”³⁴⁹ but they also got involved in a series of anti-Chinese incidents in that month. However, this time the diversionary tactics backfired. Just as Eklof concludes, “In the short term, the tactics were successful, in that they managed to mobilise support for the president and silence or isolate oppositional voices within the elite. In a little longer perspective, however, these tactics carried high costs in terms of increasing social and political polarisation and increasing levels of intra-elite competition and suspicion.”³⁵⁰ Suharto eventually paid the cost and resigned on 21 May 1998.

It is thus evident that Suharto had more confidence in playing the ethnic Chinese card, rather than using force toward a foreign scapegoat, when trying to consolidate power. First, anti-Chinese racism had long historical roots, back to the Dutch colonial time, so it was easy to rally the indigenous Indonesian population. Second, as the head of the state, using force toward a domestic target is safer and more legitimate. For a long time, Suharto’s brutal repressive measures in the country did not displease the international community and thus suffered little international pressure. Simply put, the lack of international conflict as a response to severe domestic strife does not result from Suharto’s distaste of the

³⁴⁸ Eklof 2003, 122.

³⁴⁹ Panggabean and Smith 2011, 236.

³⁵⁰ Eklof 2003, 146–147.

diversionary tactics. On the contrary, he adopted the violent diversionary tactics very often, but toward a domestic scapegoat—the Chinese Indonesians. Partially due to the advantages of targeting domestically, Suharto never tended to initiate an international conflict when faced with a severe regime crisis.

THE INVASION OF EAST TIMOR

Despite the relative international tranquility Indonesia enjoyed under Suharto's rule, Suharto did in fact initiate international conflict. The major event was the invasion and occupation of East Timor in 1975 after he had fully consolidated his power in the country. Given that the Malari incident took place just a year previously, some may contend the conjecture that the invasion had a domestic root. However, this was not the case. This conflict had nothing to do with Suharto's solution of domestic problems and the need to retain power. Indeed, as discussed before, by the time Indonesia invaded East Timor, Suharto's rule was relatively unchallenged and faced with little, if any, internal resistance.

East Timor (at the time a Portuguese colony) "stood on the threshold of independence in 1975."³⁵¹ In 1974, the authoritarian Portuguese regime of the Estado Novo was overthrown during the Carnation Revolution. The new government decided to withdraw from East Timor, which created a power vacuum in the area and led to a civil war between East Timorese political parties, in 1975. The civil war ended with the victory of the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin), a leftist party. Fretilin declared independence of East Timor on 28 November 1975. But nine days later, Suharto authorized a full-scale invasion of East Timor, claiming to prevent the establishment of a

³⁵¹ Budiardjo 1986, 1235.

communist state. To gain the support of Western countries, “Indonesia used Fretilin’s vaguely Marxist leanings to discredit it in the international media, and the spectre of a civil war was conjured up to induce Australia and the US to support Indonesian actions.”³⁵² On July 17 1976, East Timor was officially annexed into Indonesia as the 27th province.³⁵³

Scholars agree that the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, by nature, was a territorial conquest using the anti-communism cover.³⁵⁴ As Abdulgani-Knapp describes, “Indonesia’s argument when President Soekarno wanted West Irian back as part of Indonesia’s lawful territory was the same argument President Soeharto has used, that East Timor belonged to Indonesia.”³⁵⁵ This territorial conquest in East Timor, as well as the takeover of West Papua³⁵⁶ in 1969 was under the guidance of Suharto’s nationalist sentiment of a “Greater Indonesia” which he and Sukarno both shared.³⁵⁷ Therefore, undoubtedly, Suharto’s goal of the invasion was totally territorial, since it was by no means domestic. Yet, the consolidation of his power at home in this period definitely gave Suharto the courage to engage in international conflicts like this, given the long-lasting severe separatist resistance of East Timorese since 1975.

To consolidate his control over East Timor, Suharto’s policy was nothing different from his policy toward communists. In the face of an indigenous separatist movement, with varying degrees of intensity in East Timor since 1975, “the army’s methods of counter-

³⁵² Vickers 2005, 167.

³⁵³ Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste 2012.

³⁵⁴ McCloskey 2000, 3–4; Kiernan 2003, 585.

³⁵⁵ Abdulgani-Knapp 2007, 156.

³⁵⁶ When Indonesia declared independence from the Netherlands in 1945, it claimed all of the territory of the former Netherlands Indies, including Western New Guinea. However, the Netherlands refused to include Papua in the transfer of the sovereignty from the Dutch East Indies to Indonesia in 1949. The region was under the control of the Netherlands until the mid-1960s when Indonesia defeated the Dutch. In 1969, a plebiscite called “the Act of Free Choice” was conducted, which officially added West Papua into the territory of Indonesia. Yet, various groups in West Papua questioned the result of the Act of Free Choice, and thus conducted a series conflict for independence. In sum, from the perception of Indonesia, West Papua is an integral part of Indonesia, so the conflict surrounding West Papua is a domestic separatist conflict.

³⁵⁷ Vickers 2005, 138–139.

insurgency were at best heavy-handed, at worst brutal.”³⁵⁸ Suharto perceived the resistance in East Timor as a threat to the unity of the state and thus used this method.³⁵⁹ A huge number of East Timorese perished in the civil war, the invasion and the following consolidation of Indonesian rule.

*The president of the pro-Indonesian provisional government of East Timor, Lopes da Cruz, announced on 13 February 1976 that 60,000 people had already been killed “in the six months of civil war in East Timor,” suggesting a toll of over 55,000 in just the two months since the invasion. A late 1976 report from the Indonesian Catholic Church estimated that 60,000 to 100,000 Timorese had perished. In March 1977, Indonesian foreign minister Adam Malik conceded that “50,000 people or perhaps 80,000 might have been killed during the war in Timor.” On 12 November 1979, Indonesia’s new foreign minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja estimated that 120,000 Timorese had died since 1975.*³⁶⁰

The 1991 Dili Massacre marked a turning point for the East Timorese independence cause.³⁶¹ On 12 November 1991, Indonesian troops fired on several unarmed pro-independence protestors in Dili, the East Timorese capital. This massacre, for Suharto, was nothing different from what he had done within Indonesia. However, the event had a profound effect. The broadcasting of the massacre heavily damaged Suharto’s international image and transferred the attitudes of international community, and eventually led to the international support of East Timorese independence.

³⁵⁸ Vatikiotis 1998, 183.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 90.

³⁶⁰ Kiernan 2003, 594.

³⁶¹ Sherlock 1996, 844.

SUMMARY

As a military-backed government leader with revolutionary experience, why did Suharto never initiate an international conflict in the face of severe domestic strife? I argue, in this chapter, that his potentially aggressive inclination toward foreign aggression had been cancelled out by the severe domestic context. In the context of severe internal strife, for Suharto, domestic measures, namely cooptation and repression, are more appropriate. First, imminent and severe problems call for direct and time-saving solutions and in this regard, domestic measures are much better options for Suharto. Second, Suharto had more experiences in using domestic measures, which gave him more confidence in utilizing them. Confidence of leaders in policies is important, especially when they are dealing with emergencies. Third, as a leader prioritized development and stability, for Suharto, the loss of initiating an international conflict during severe internal division outweighs the gain, since fighting with a foreign scapegoat will destabilize the external environment, damage development, and incur international censure. Lastly, the Chinese Indonesians served a good substitute for a foreign target for his scapegoating purpose during severe regime crises. All the reasons above predisposed Suharto to take domestic measures instead of international conflict, as a policy response when his rule was threatened.

CHAPTER 5: MAO ZEDONG AND CHINA UNDER HIS RULE

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.
—Mao Zedong, *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan, March 1927*

Mao Zedong, the founding father of the People's Republic of China, ruled the country from its foundation in 1949 until his death in 1976. Unlike Suharto, who pledged loyalty to different lords (i.e. he used to work for the Dutch colonizers and then the Japanese), Mao almost only had one faith (i.e. communism) and participated in one overarching movement (i.e. communist revolution) throughout his life. Thus, he had an even stronger revolutionary belief. Most of time, Mao adopted a revolutionary foreign policy and tried to export revolution, which was manifested as his aggressive stance on international issues. For him, world revolution was the way to achieve international peace. As Mao clearly expressed in the “Opening Address at the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China” in 1956,

To achieve a lasting peace in the world, we must further develop our friendship and co-operation with the fraternal countries in the camp of socialism and strengthen our solidarity with all peace-loving countries. We must [endeavor] to establish normal diplomatic relations on the basis of mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, and equality and mutual benefit, with all countries willing to live together with us in peace. We must give active support to the national independence and liberation movement in countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America as well as to the peace movement and righteous struggles in all countries throughout the world. We firmly support the entirely lawful action of the Government of Egypt in taking back the Suez Canal Company, and resolutely oppose any attempt to encroach on the sovereignty of

*Egypt and start armed Intervention against that country. We must completely frustrate the schemes of imperialism to create tension and prepare for war.*³⁶²

However, sometimes foreign aggression lost its attractiveness and necessity to Mao. When faced with severe domestic strife, Mao refrained from using international conflict as a response and would intentionally avoid engaging in international disputes so that he could focus on solving domestic problems.

Mao's reluctance to rely on international conflict was a result of both his revolutionary experience and the domestic context. First, during the long revolutionary years, Mao fostered a strong capability for defeating opposition within the party. This gave him more confidence to deal with those issues directly, rather than using a circumvent way, like provoking an international conflict. Second, the concerning domestic environment forced Mao to look for a response that would be quick and direct, in other words, he needed a timely solution, like domestic measures. Lastly, through reviewing Mao's long rule, little evidence indicates that Mao's high level of risk-tolerance predisposed him to ever engage in international aggression during acute domestic instability. At this time, his conflict paradigms were pragmatic and contingent on the context. This means that although his high levels of risk-tolerance would endow Mao with a preference for foreign aggression, the possible alternatives, coupled with the severe domestic situation, may neutralize his inclination toward international dispute as a response.

In the following sections of the chapter, I will illustrate a brief history of young Mao in the first two sections, with an emphasis on how he fostered his revolutionary ideas and how he managed to come into power. The third section will primarily address the

³⁶² Mao 1956.

various major problems Mao was faced with after 1949, how he coped with the severe domestic situations, and why international conflict was not an option for Mao in those situations. However, the absence of international conflict used by Mao in the face of severe domestic strife did not mean that Mao never used the technique. Therefore, in the following section, I elaborate some cases in which Mao utilized international conflict to achieve his goal. The section following this investigates all the major conflicts Mao engaged in during his long rule and specifically discusses the causes of those conflicts and why none of them took place as a policy response to severe domestic problems. The last section is a brief summary of the chapter.

EARLY YEARS: A REBELLIOUS YOUNG MIND (1893-1918)

Mao Zedong was born on 26 September 1893 into a relative wealthy rural family of Shaoshan village, Hunan Province. During his childhood, Mao was by no means more rebellious than his peers. Mao's rebellious behaviors were at most enjoying stories of rebellion, running away from school to avoid being beaten by the teachers, and contradicting his harsh demanding father. The unpleasant father-son relationship seemed to be the only major adversity in Mao's childhood.³⁶³

At age sixteen, Mao left home and entered a new school.³⁶⁴ There he absorbed new knowledge and learnt about the West. Through the readings, he was deeply impressed by the reform movement of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. As Mao recalled, he at that time

³⁶³ Terrill 1980, 5.

³⁶⁴ Lawrance 1991, 3.

was not yet an antimonarchist, as he still held a positive view about the Chinese Emperor and thought that Kang Youwei's reforms were beneficial to the Emperor himself.³⁶⁵

One year later, Mao gained an opportunity to study at the Xiangxiang Middle School in Changsha, the capital city of Hunan province. Before long, however, "he was caught up in the political enthusiasm when the revolutionary forces of Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan, added) attempted to seize the city in October 1911."³⁶⁶ Mao changed his idea about the Qing monarchic system and joined the regular revolutionary army in the hope of helping complete the revolution against the Manchus, but still admired Kang and Liang.³⁶⁷ During this time period, he first learned the term "socialism."³⁶⁸ In his first rebellion experience, with little or no fighting, Mao did not form a deep attachment to the army life.³⁶⁹ Mao resigned from the army half a year later when Sun Yat-sen and Yuan Shikai came to an agreement to unify the North and South, which in his mind signaled the end of the revolution.³⁷⁰

In 1912, Mao continued his study and entered the Hunan Normal School. During that period, his "political ideas began to take place."³⁷¹ At that time, according to Mao, "my mind was a curious mixture of ideas of liberalism, democratic reformism, and Utopian socialism. I had somewhat vague passions about 'nineteenth-century democracy,' utopianism, and old-fashioned liberalism, and I was definitely antimilitarist and anti-imperialist."³⁷² Through his reading of revolutionary magazines, like the *New Youth* (*Xin*

³⁶⁵ Snow 1968, 300.

³⁶⁶ Lawrance 1991, 3.

³⁶⁷ Snow 1968, 302–307.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 307–308; Terrill 1980, 23.

³⁶⁹ Terrill 1980, 24.

³⁷⁰ Snow 1968, 309.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 316.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 324.

Qingnian; 新青年), Mao modified his political belief, rejecting the reformism of his previous heroes, Kang and Liang. Hu Shi³⁷³ and Chen Duxiu³⁷⁴ became his new intellectual models.³⁷⁵ However, he had not yet formed a systematic revolutionary ideology. “Mao in these years rarely uttered the word ‘revolution,’ and when he did he meant by it only a sweeping away of the old.”³⁷⁶

There, he gradually built up a group of friends around himself to exchange their political beliefs and later formed different closely-knit organizations. For instance, in 1918 he founded the Xinmin Institute (*xinmin xuehui*; 新民学会), a fully political organization. Many of its members (e.g. Li Weihan) later became communists, taking the lead in Chinese communism and the Chinese Revolution.

His early school life armed the young man with knowledge, inner strength, and a group of friends who shared his political concerns. As Ross Terrill summarized, Mao’s early life surroundings and experiences endowed him with the traits of earthiness, a spirit of rebellion, Robin Hood romance, love of books, a good sense of organization, and care for public affairs.³⁷⁷ In 1918,

Mao was only a student leader. His radical plot was merely to take cold baths. But the nature of the times clinched a link that Mao himself perhaps could not yet see. Education; the body; a political revolution.

The three were linked because, given China’s mess, knowledge was for action, and action would mean sweat and the gun. To be a student rebel and a physical fitness zealot at FTTS³⁷⁸ during World War I was by its own logic to take a big stride toward Marxism—rather Leninism—even though there was not in 1918 a single Marxist doctrine in Mao’s tousled head.³⁷⁹

³⁷³ Hu was the editor of the New Youth and one of the leading intellectuals in the New Culture Movement.

³⁷⁴ Chen was one of the pioneer Chinese revolutionary socialists and the cofounder of Chinese Communist Party.

³⁷⁵ Snow 1968, 323–324; Terrill 1980, 34.

³⁷⁶ Terrill 1980, 34.

³⁷⁷ Terrill 1980, 6–7.

³⁷⁸ FTTS here is short for the First Teachers Training School, a different name of the Hunan Normal School.

³⁷⁹ Terrill 1980, 35.

REVOLUTION YEARS: FROM A REVOLUTIONARY TO A REVOLUTIONARY LEADER (1919-1949)

The establishment of Mao's power has been intertwined with the complex history of the Chinese revolution. His accession to power was not accidental and without challenge. Mao eventually established his power within the Communist party, despite numerous struggles within and outside the party, and later became the founding father of the People's Republic of China.

In 1918, Mao went to Beijing.³⁸⁰ During his stay in Beijing, Mao became more interested in politics, and his political mind became increasingly radical and developed rapidly towards a Marxist framework.³⁸¹ When he returned to Hunan in 1919, he was more directly involved in politics. Especially after the May Fourth Movement, Mao tried to influence student movements and organized a general student strike against the warlord ruler of Hunan, Zhang Jingyao. Under the help of Xinmin Institute, this later developed into a general antimilitarist movement. In this process, Mao gradually realized that "only mass political power, secured through mass action, could guarantee the realization of dynamic reforms."³⁸²

In the winter of 1920, under the influence of Marxist theory and the Russian Revolution, Mao, for the first time, organized workers politically. By 1920, Mao said "I had become, in theory and to some extent in action, a Marxist, and from this time on I considered myself a Marxist."³⁸³ Then Mao organized a Communist Party in Changsha and

³⁸⁰ Snow 1968, 326.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 330, 431; Terrill 1980, 40.

³⁸² Snow 1968, 337.

³⁸³ Ibid., 338.

participated in the first Party Congress as a delegate in 1921.³⁸⁴ The establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), made Mao into the communist revolutionary he is known to be.

After returning from the founding meeting of the CCP, Mao “led the movement to unionize the urban workers of Hunan,”³⁸⁵ for the next two years. The Third Party Congress of the CCP in 1923 made the historic decision that the CCP and the Kuomintang (KMT) would cooperate and create a United Front against the northern militarists. Mao was assigned to coordinate the measures of the CCP and the KMT.³⁸⁶ Since 1924, Mao had been a member of the political bureau of the CCP.³⁸⁷

In March 1925, Sun Yat-sen, a strong advocate of the United Front and the leader of the KMT, died, and Chiang Kai-shek became the new Commander-In-Chief. The nationwide political activities following the May 30th Movement³⁸⁸ made Mao start to realize the importance of “class struggle among the peasantry.”³⁸⁹ Mao proposed for the vigorous organization of the peasantry. However, Chen Duxiu, the General Secretary of CCP then, objected to this proposal, as he believed that the role of the CCP was to organize workers and win over the cities.³⁹⁰ Later, Mao was sent to Hunan to inspect peasant organizations. Based on this experience, Mao made his famous article “*Report on an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan*” in March 1927, “urging the adoption of a new line in the peasant movement.”³⁹¹ This proposal again was rejected by the Central Committee of the

³⁸⁴ Lawrance 1991, 6.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 5; Snow 1968, 343–345.

³⁸⁶ Snow 1968, 345.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 358.

³⁸⁸ It was a popular anti-imperialist demonstration in Shanghai on May 30, 1925. British Settlement police opened fire on Chinese demonstrators, which provoked nationwide anti-foreign activities.

³⁸⁹ Snow 1968, 346.

³⁹⁰ Lawrance 1991, 6; Snow 1968, 348.

³⁹¹ Snow 1968, 349.

CCP. This discussion of the party line was interrupted by the White Terror in April. In April 1927, Chiang Kai-shek instigated the violent suppression of left-wing supporters in Nanjing and Shanghai, and later Guangdong. This marked the failure of the First United Front between the CCP and the KMT, and gave rise to the downfall of Chen Duxiu.³⁹²

In August 1927, an extraordinary meeting of the CCP Central Committee (i.e. the August 7th Meeting) was held to discredit Chen Duxiu and his policy of cooperation with the KMT. A new party line of building up its own military and struggling with the KMT was adopted. This signaled the beginning of the long, open struggle for power between the CCP and the KMT.³⁹³ Later, CCP launched several uprisings against the rule of Chiang Kai-shek. The Autumn Harvest Uprising in September attacking Changsha, led by Mao, was one of them. The uprising was soon defeated by the KMT. Mao decided to give up on the offense and abandon the attack of the big city (i.e. Changsha), so he transferred the troops to Jianggangshan, the border area between Hunan and Jiangxi, and established a base there. The Central Committee blamed the failure on Mao and dismissed him from his position.³⁹⁴ However, Mao ignored the decision, recruited more people into the army, and became its commander.³⁹⁵ In the course, Mao realized the importance of the CCP's control over military forces and "put forward two famous principles: 'The Party commands the gun,' and 'Establishing party branches at the company level.'"³⁹⁶

Since Mao established the revolutionary base in Jinggangshan, the struggle between Mao and the Central Committee had continued for years, because the Central Committee believed that Mao's commitment to the peasant revolution was a defection from

³⁹² Lawrance 1991, 7; Snow 1968, 352–353.

³⁹³ Snow 1968, 358.

³⁹⁴ Mao was dismissed from the Politburo, and also from the Party Front Committee.

³⁹⁵ Lawrance 1991, 7; Snow 1968, 363.

³⁹⁶ Gao 2009, 14.

the party line of the proletarian revolution. Mao insisted on his agrarian mass movement in the base.³⁹⁷ Inner-party struggle led to several political ups and downs for Mao. In 1930, Mao was put on the Politburo again.³⁹⁸ With the Central Committee moving to Jiangxi in 1931, on November 7, the Soviet Republic of China, an independent Communist-governed state, was proclaimed, with Mao as Chairman. During this period, Mao “gave up his hopes of easy victory.”³⁹⁹ Again, he was proved to be right. Through a moderate agrarian reform and a democratic program, the CCP gradually consolidated its dominance in those new bases.

In the meantime, Chiang Kai-shek launched a series of Encirclement Campaigns to annihilate the Chinese Red Army and the newly-built Jiangxi Soviet, from the end of 1930. The first four Encirclement Campaigns were defeated by the Jiangxi Soviet. However, the Fifth Encirclement Campaign between 1933 and 1934 almost destroyed the Jiangxi Soviet. One of the major reasons for the CCP’s failure in this Counter Encirclement Campaign was the defection from Mao’s previous war strategies.⁴⁰⁰ As a consequence, the CCP decided to abandon the Jiangxi base and started the Long March (1934-1935) to transfer the main living forces of the Red Army to a new base.⁴⁰¹ In October of 1935, the Long March ended with the Red Army reaching Shaanxi and enlarging its base in China’s Northwest.⁴⁰² During the Long March, in January 1935, an “enlarged” meeting of the politburo was held at Zunyi. Mao “persuaded his old opponents to accept his strategic concepts and his

³⁹⁷ Lawrance 1991, 8; Terrill 1980, 100–103.

³⁹⁸ Terrill 1980, 112.

³⁹⁹ Lawrance 1991, 8.

⁴⁰⁰ Snow 1968, 393.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 406.

⁴⁰² Lawrance 1991, 9; Snow 1968, 396.

leadership,⁴⁰³ and was elected the Chairman of the politburo. In this meeting, Mao finally established his dominance in the party.

With the increasing pace of the Japanese aggression, the Communists, under the leadership of Mao, actively sought cooperation with the KMT against the Japanese. In late 1936, the Second United Front between the CCP and the KMT was formed. Throughout the eight-year anti-Japanese war (1937-1945), Communists developed tremendously. “By 1945 Red China had ninety million people led by one million party members and defended by nearly one million soldiers.”⁴⁰⁴ This lay down a solid foundation for the Communists success in the Civil War. After four-year fight, the Chinese Civil War ended with a Communist triumph.

In general, since the establishment of Mao’s leadership in 1935, the CCP and Mao had achieved great military success in the Anti-Japanese War and the Civil War, which reaffirmed the potency of Mao’s strategies and awarded him with unprecedented popularity and prestige. Before long, on October 1 1949, Mao proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China and unfolded the rule of Mao over the whole country.

MAO’S LONG RULE OVER THE NEW CHINA

The long period of Mao’s rule could be divided into two major political eras: from the foundation to the Cultural Revolution (1949-1965) and the Cultural Revolution years (1966-1976). During the first political era, the central leadership acted with high unity and enjoyed nationwide popular support, while in the second political area, in the Cultural

⁴⁰³ Lawrance 1991, 9.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 10.

Revolution years, there was a deep division within central leadership and a growing dissent across the country. As one of the most “dangerous” men in the world, Mao initiated and engaged in numerous international disputes when he was in power. Some of the disputes, like the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, were on the brink of a major power war or even a nuclear war. However, Mao barely ever initiated an international dispute out of domestic political reasons. Instead, to cope with the serious dissenting voices, Mao was more likely to use domestic measures, like repression and co-optation throughout his rule. This reveals that his high level of risk-tolerance and perception of military efficacy failed to translate into a policy preference toward international disputes. These “dangerous” characteristics his previous life experience had endowed him with disposed Mao to domestic measures, particularly repression, when he was faced with severe domestic strife.

THE FIRST ERA: REMOLDING, BUILDING, AND EXPLORING (1949-1965)

Right after the establishment of the New China in 1949, Mao’s tasks were mainly domestic: consolidation of CCP power within liberated parts of China; the liberation of Taiwan, Hainan and Tibet; and economic recovery, reform and development. Internationally, Mao chose to “lean to one side,” this being the Soviet side in the Cold War. As mentioned above, the central leadership of CCP during this period enjoyed high levels of solidarity and popular support, so there were few dissenting voices across the country. The two major events of domestic unrest occurred during the Hundred Flowers Movement and the Great Leap Forward Movement. To address the public dissent, Mao did not try to divert the public attention by creating international tension, but utilized domestic measures,

such as initiating a repressive campaign towards the dissenters and making compromises to pacify the turmoil. For most of the time, use force abroad was never even a viable policy option in response to severe internal divisions. Therefore, in the sections followed, I will trace back in history to discuss the reasons why international conflict was not favorable, or even thinkable during this period.

The Hundred Flowers Movement and Its Aftermath

In early 1956, Mao inaugurated the Hundred Flowers Movement—“Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools contend,” to relax the political control over intellectuals and encourage their open expression.⁴⁰⁵ These series of liberalization policies aimed to “harness the enthusiasm and talents of the intellectuals”⁴⁰⁶ and to expedite socialist transformation and economic development of the new China. Mao evidently did realize that conformity of intellectuals would hold back economic progress.⁴⁰⁷ In the beginning, the campaign was limited to academic debate. Soon, Mao extended it into the political sphere with an encouragement of criticism of the party cadres, because for him, shortcomings of the party, like bureaucratism, would impede modernization.⁴⁰⁸ Most of his colleagues had strong reservations of this task conversion. However, as the ultimate authority, Mao easily overrode dissenting opinions.⁴⁰⁹ In Mao’s view, criticism by non-party people was helpful in its nature.⁴¹⁰ “The Hundred Flowers policy was predicated on

⁴⁰⁵ Teiwes 1987, 123.

⁴⁰⁶ MacFarquhar 1989, 5.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁰⁸ Goldman 1989, 39–40.

⁴⁰⁹ Teiwes 1987, 60–61.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

the belief that a genuine exchange of ideas and the criticism of repressive officials would ultimately lead to ideological unity.”⁴¹¹

At first, the response of the intellectuals was tepid. Meanwhile, student demonstrations and workers’ strikes took place due to “the de-Stalinization of the Soviet Union and the international crises in Poland and Hungary,⁴¹² hasty social reforms, and unbalanced domestic investments.”⁴¹³ This did not worry Mao too much, because on one hand, he believed that CCP rectification could prevent Poland and Hungary-type riots from happening in China, and on the other hand, Mao had the faith in the loyal support of the “masses”.⁴¹⁴ Under the continuing call of the government and the mounting pressure on staying silent, in the spring of 1957, those bold intellectuals started to speak out. Before long, the intellectual criticism deviated from Mao’s expectation. In May 1957, complaints gradually targeted and questioned the party authority, and some even proposed for institutional change, such as converting the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) into an upper house of the National People’s Congress (NPC).⁴¹⁵ What concerned Mao more was that although critics still expressed loyalty toward his leadership, they unavoidably denounced some of Mao’s policies and even Mao himself. Increasingly wary of the “malicious criticisms”, Mao’s attitude toward the Hundred Flowers Movement had changed. Mao started to think about the policy response to deal with the changed situation. Political crackdown was not Mao’s immediate option, despite the strong preferences toward a tough policy, suggested by his colleagues. Mao’s reputation was at stake if he decided to crack down on the movement, as it was he who

⁴¹¹ Goldman 1989, 44.

⁴¹² This refers to the massive anti-communist government uprisings that occurred in Poland and Hungary in 1956.

⁴¹³ Chung 2011, 394.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.; Goldman 1989, 40–41.

⁴¹⁵ Teiwes 1987, 136–137.

rejected the leaders' opposition to allowing the expansion of criticism into the political sphere. The defeat of the Hundred Flowers Movement would also be a defeat for Mao, since it showed that his idea of "a benevolently-run communist society"⁴¹⁶ was wrong. Thus, Mao adopted a so-called "open conspiracy" plan. Specifically, the party continued to encourage the free expression of intellectuals, so that it could lure out "poisonous weeds" (i.e. malicious intellectuals), or the "rightists", who favored capitalism and were against socialism.

However, the growing student unrest in Beijing made the situation deteriorate. In May 1957, large-scale student demonstrations against existing political institutions broke out, which pushed Mao to take a serious counter-measure. Students established the Democracy Wall and Democracy Square at Peking University, which spread to other universities. This "may have finally convinced even Mao that China might be on the verge of a Hungarian-type uprising."⁴¹⁷ Soon in early June 1957, a counterattack, the Anti-Rightist Campaign, was launched, which marked the end of the Hundred Flowers Movement. Those who were labeled as "rightists" "were subjected to violent press attacks and large-scale struggle meetings and forced into abject confessions."⁴¹⁸ From the policy-making level, there was no discussion of policy choices within the party leadership. Crackdown was the only option on the board and an international conflict was not an option for discussion. "The only difference was the timing of the crackdown."⁴¹⁹

A couple of reasons made international conflict rare. First, revolutionary experiences and experiences in suppressing counterrevolutionaries predisposed Mao and

⁴¹⁶ MacFarquhar 1989, 13.

⁴¹⁷ Goldman 1989, 57.

⁴¹⁸ Teiwes 1987, 139.

⁴¹⁹ Chung 2011, 397.

his colleagues to choose repression as their first response to deal with domestic oppositions, as it was aligned with their revolutionary ideology and tough stance against enemies. Chung (2011) describes how quick and easy it was for Mao and his high-ranking colleagues to arrive at the consensus on a crackdown. All the revolutionary top favored a tough stand against critics.⁴²⁰

On 27 May, the Party Centre held a meeting of provincial Party secretaries during which Deng made a speech on behalf of the Centre. In this speech Deng assessed the current situation and asserted that “obviously, some Rightists are trying to compete with us for the leadership,” and therefore “the Party Centre has no choice but to struggle with them.”⁴²¹

Also, the previously successful repressive and revolutionary experiences gave Mao and his revolutionary colleagues much more confidence in utilizing repressive tools against enemies. As Strauss (2006) concludes, “[t]he successful regime consolidation of the revolutionary PRC owed much to its inheritance from the KMT and its own superiority in definitively ‘out-generalling’ the KMT military in the civil war and crushing meaningful military resistance.”⁴²² Its glorious past endowed CCP, under Mao, with “the absolute confidence in its moral correctness” and efficacy of repressive measures.⁴²³ For example, Yang (2008) identifies that the successful campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries (the *zhenfan* campaign) in the early 1950s “was an important watershed in solidifying Mao’s view that class-based analysis and class struggle ought to be carried out by the revolutionary state. Thus the *zhenfan* campaign set the young People’s Republic of China

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 399.

⁴²² Strauss 2006, 894.

⁴²³ Ibid.

well on the road to later campaigns against class enemies such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution.”⁴²⁴

In addition, Mao’s goal of eliminating domestic enemies quickly and effectively, would only be made possible through suppression. For Mao, the Hundred Flowers Movement proved the unreliability of the intellectuals. Some of them even held the malicious intention of overthrowing the regime. Thus, the ideal policy choice to deal with this situation should be the one that was able to stop the criticism immediately and force intellectuals under the party control in the long run. According to Merle Goldman, the Anti-Rightist Campaign exactly had this dual purpose and successfully helped Mao achieve his goals: first, silencing the critics he had summoned, and second, damaging the prestige of intellectuals by labeling them as “rightists” and re-imposing tighter controls over their life.⁴²⁵ In contrast, initiating an international conflict would have been too indirect to solve these immediate problems. Regardless of the potential costs of dragging a foreign country into the complication, it was impossible for Mao to eliminate his potential enemies through an international conflict. Although an international conflict may divert public attention from the criticism toward the party and achieve the first goal, it failed to enable Mao to distinguish the malicious rightists from the rest of the group and thus have the ability to impose a tighter control over intellectual life again. Under an international dispute, problems would stay unsolved with the “poisonous antisocialist weeds” remained untouched.

In conclusion, the development of the Hundred Flowers Movement in the early summer of 1957 posed a great threat to Mao’s leadership. Mao later on 13 November 1957

⁴²⁴ Yang 2008, 121.

⁴²⁵ Goldman 1989, 57–58.

characterized the time period as “a time when the skies were covered with dark clouds.”⁴²⁶ To deal with the urgent situation brought about by the Hundred Flowers Movement, Mao and his revolutionary colleagues had refrained from initiating an international dispute as a policy response. First, their revolutionary experience predisposed them to have a tough stance against enemies. Repression was their natural response against dissents. Second, due to previously successful repressive experiences, Mao and other revolutionary leaders perceived more efficacy in using repression against domestic oppositions. They were more confident in the repression as a powerful tool to eliminate dissenting voices. Lastly, unlike the indirect measures, such as the initiation of an international conflict, domestic repression better served Mao’s goals. The crackdown of the Hundred Flowers Movement not only stopped the criticism against the party immediately, but also forced the intellectuals under the party’s control. This eliminated the long-term threat posed by the intellectuals.

The Great Leap Forward and Its Aftermath

With the waning credibility in the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the strained relations with the Soviet Union, Mao “desperately needed a new initiative” to restore his credibility and divert public attention toward economic production.⁴²⁷ Also, for Mao, the superiority of the Soviet model vanished over time. By the end of the First Five Year Plan (1953-1957),⁴²⁸ the Soviet model had created many economic problems that would hold back China’s modernization. For example, there was emerging development imbalance

⁴²⁶ Mao 1967, 56; Goldman 1989, 57.

⁴²⁷ MacFarquhar 1989, 14.

⁴²⁸ The development strategy adopted during the First Five Year Plan was mainly imported from the Soviet Union with an emphasis on the heavy industry.

between agriculture and industry. Agriculture fell behind the demands of industrialization, which in the long term, would undermine the development of the Chinese economy.⁴²⁹ According to Mao on February 27, 1957, “with over 80 per cent of her population in the rural areas, industry must develop together with agriculture, for only thus can industry secure raw materials and a market, and only thus is it possible to accumulate fairly large funds for building a powerful heavy industry.”⁴³⁰ Mao continued to point out that there were “two different attitudes towards learning from others. One is the dogmatic attitude of transplanting everything, whether or not it is suited to our conditions. This is no good. The other attitude is to use our heads and learn those things which suit our conditions, that is, to absorb whatever experience is useful to us. That is the attitude we should adopt.”⁴³¹ Thus, Mao intended to break with the Soviet model and find China’s own model for development. Eventually in 1958, driven by the overall optimism of the top CCP leadership about their economic development ability, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward (GLF) movement as an alternative strategy to the Soviet model. This relied on the massive mobilization and the rapid increase of the industrial and agricultural production and for the People’s Communes (i.e. collectives or cooperatives) to undergo a socialist transformation.

*In its New Year’s editorial, the People’s Daily—the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party—proclaimed that the GLF would propel China to surpass Great Britain in industrial production in 15 years and the United States in 20 or 30 years. The nation was soon propelled to a state of exuberance, as news about extraordinary gains in agricultural and industrial production broke out across the country.*⁴³²

⁴²⁹ MacFarquhar 1989, 15.

⁴³⁰ Mao 1971, 476.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 478.

⁴³² Li and Yang 2005, 841.

The program itself showed Mao's great confidence in his policy choices during the revolutionary years, such as mass mobilization and guerrilla warfare. His success during the revolution enabled him to believe that these techniques would be still helpful in economic development. However, the program did not progress as smoothly as Mao and his colleagues initially expected. With a nationwide frenzy of enthusiasm in the revolutionary change, severe problems unavoidably arose. For instance, grain output fell precipitously, which jeopardized economic development.⁴³³ By the end of 1958, Mao was aware that "extremism in the name of the Leap was already causing some damage," and he tried to rectify the excesses to "keep the movement on track."⁴³⁴ For example, intellectuals were allowed to criticize the irrationality of the GLF publicly.⁴³⁵ In middle of 1959, while retaining the job of the CCP Chairman, Mao stepped down as head of state and gave way to Liu Shaoqi (the new State Chairman) and Deng Xiaoping (the CCP General Secretary) to bring economic recovery. Unfortunately, the Lushan Conference in July 1959 interrupted Mao's process of modification. In the conference, Peng Dehuai, the minister of National Defense, made a harsh criticism of the GLF. Peng's critique coincided with the Soviet criticisms of the program, which made Mao suspect that Peng was supported by the Soviet Union to challenge his leadership. Thus Mao responded sharply. Mao first dismissed Peng from his position with Lin Biao as the replacement, and then launched a nationwide purge of Peng's supporters. The immediate result of this was that Mao "produced a second upsurge in radical policies lasting into 1960."⁴³⁶

⁴³³ Chan 2001, 3, 17; Kung and Lin 2003, 51.

⁴³⁴ Leiberthal 1997, 88.

⁴³⁵ Goldman 1969, 58.

⁴³⁶ Leiberthal 1997, 89.

The GLF turned out to be a disaster, which resulted in economic recession, widespread famine, and minor revolts.⁴³⁷ Due to the campaign, millions of people died and “China lost five years on its new long march to modernity.”⁴³⁸ Faced with the severe economic crisis, Mao supported his colleagues’ recovery policies and decided to retreat from the radical GLF. In June 1961, “Mao made a self-criticism at a key Party meeting in Beijing, and the Party as a whole adopted policies of retrenchment as official doctrine.”⁴³⁹ With the retreat from the GLF, economic problems soon began to ease. Although the economic stagnation did not develop into popular opposition against Mao, Mao’s power and image did erode, as the GLF itself was mobilized based on people’s “impressive loyalty to Mao’s summons.”⁴⁴⁰ This increased his concern of a potential tarnished influence, so Mao sought to regain his power once the economic tensions were reduced. This move caused further split of CCP leadership. According to Kenneth Leiberthal, starting in 1963, Mao utilized two strategies to boost his policy preference. The first was to promote the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) as the role model for the Chinese people and subsequently propagandized its achievements, such as the victories in the border conflict with India in 1962 and the development of the first atom bomb in 1964. The second measure he took was through open debate with the Soviet Union about what real socialism looks like. This tried to engage the domestic audience and dismiss the policies he disliked.⁴⁴¹ Also, in the battle with his colleagues, Mao gradually formed a new coalition to enhance his strength

⁴³⁷ Leiberthal 1997; Terrill 1980, 268–269.

⁴³⁸ Terrill 1980, 269.

⁴³⁹ Leiberthal 1997, 89.

⁴⁴⁰ Terrill 1980, 269.

⁴⁴¹ Leiberthal 1997, 91.

between 1962 and 1965, which lay the political foundation for the future Cultural Revolution.⁴⁴²

In retrospect, Mao's response towards the domestic unrest caused by the GLF varied from case to case, but he never chose international conflict. First, when he felt severely threatened by Peng's criticism in 1959, he took repressive measures by denouncing Peng and his supporters as "bourgeois" and later initiated a campaign against them. Subsequently, as the GLF became an economic disaster, Mao decided to retreat and made compromises with his colleagues. Once the economy recovered, Mao was able to mobilize support from the opposition through non-violent means, such as establishing a new coalition, propagandizing the PLA achievement, and open debate with the Soviet Union.

International conflict again, was not an option. The reasons are as follows. First, Mao's prior revolutionary experience neutralized his propensity toward international conflict and predisposed him to alternative policy options when he was faced with severe domestic strife. During the process of his accession to power during the revolutionary ages, Mao had developed a strong ability "to prevail over his colleagues, to subdue them, and to manipulate them, against their better judgement, into willing and even enthusiastic supporters of his vision and policies."⁴⁴³ It could be the case that this ability was so strong that it not only predisposed Mao to deal with within-party oppositions through the strategy of political maneuvers (i.e. repression, cooptation, and coalition), but also to unconsciously eliminated international conflict as an alternative. As Alfred L. Chan concluded, Mao had

⁴⁴² Ibid., 90.

⁴⁴³ Chan 2001, 9.

showed his primary ability to “define and redefine ideology, and to set the agenda” during the GLF to “assure his unassailable position.”⁴⁴⁴

Second, domestic measures directly addressed Mao’s concern in a short time frame. Specifically, during the GLF, Mao’s major concerns were twofold: opposition within the party and popular unrest caused by the economic disaster. Domestic measures solved Mao’s problems efficiently and quickly. On 23 July, nine days after Peng made the criticism, Mao asked his colleagues about their opinions on the issue. They convinced him that “he had a snowballing problem on his hands that he had better deal with quickly and decisively.”⁴⁴⁵ Soon Mao decided to fight back through repressive measures, since this was a solution that could fix the problem quickly and decisively. Through the campaign against Peng and his supporters, the dissents within the party “were either destroyed politically or converted to the Maoist cause.”⁴⁴⁶ This fundamentally solved the problem for Mao and maintained his dominance in the party. Similarly, his compromises made with moderate colleagues brought about the economic recovery and eliminated the causes for popular unrest. These benefits could not be obtained by utilizing international conflict as a policy response.

To conclude, the GLF was catastrophic in both a domestic and international sense. Domestically, it jeopardized the development process and created domestic unrest. Also, it set the stage for the final split of the CCP leadership.⁴⁴⁷ Internationally, the open debate about the GLF and socialism further strained the relationship between China and the Soviet Union, which in turn caused the domestic situation to deteriorate. To cope with the

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁴⁵ Leiberthal 1997, 105.

⁴⁴⁶ Chan 2001, 10.

⁴⁴⁷ Leiberthal 1997, 111.

domestic problems caused by the radical campaign, Mao never turned to using international conflict as a policy response. Under the serious domestic circumstances, it was vital that Mao chose a policy response that was quick, effective and easy to adopt. These two requirements together ruled out international conflict as an alternative policy for discussion.

THE SECOND ERA: CULTURAL REVOLUTION (1966-1976)

As mentioned above, the failure of the GLF led to the split of central leadership and the authority crisis within the party. Fortunately, the series of recovery policies enabled the CCP to weather the crisis. By 1966, the country had been recovered from the economic disaster. “But the Cultural Revolution overwhelmed careful plans and policies. For a decade, the Chinese political system was first thrown into chaos and then paralyzed.”⁴⁴⁸

The decision of launching the Cultural Revolution reflected “Mao’s reactions to a complex mix of domestic and foreign developments over the decade preceding its launch.”⁴⁴⁹ The final split of the Sino-Soviet alliance and the furious polemics between the two countries impelled Mao to rethink the fate of the Chinese communist revolution. Domestically, people had lost the faith in collectivism due to the travail of the GLF. The pragmatic economic policies adopted by Mao’s colleagues to recover the economy in the aftermath of the GLF, deviated from Mao’s revolutionary routes. Dissatisfied with the new moderate direction and his reduced authority, in 1963, Mao launched a Socialist Education Movement (SEM). The two themes Mao intended to emphasize in the SEM were: fighting corruption of rural cadres and fostering revolutionary consciousness. Compared to the

⁴⁴⁸ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 2.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

corruption problem of rural cadres, “[i]t was the ideological backsliding of party members and the consequent danger of a capitalist restoration that concerned him more.”⁴⁵⁰ For example, during the SEM, some of his colleagues, such as Liu Shaoqi, were not fully supportive of Mao’s specific radical policies, which seemed to Mao as threatening, because “with a strong base in the party machine”, Liu was “able to topple him if he turned his back.”⁴⁵¹ Also, the fall of Khrushchev in the Soviet Union in 1964 alerted Mao to the danger of his similar fate. Under this circumstance, Mao needed a more fundamental movement that could help him to remove the high-level “capitalist roaders” in order to continue the revolution and regain his power to lead the country. Therefore, history witnessed the advent of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966. As the CCP’s Central Committee concluded in its 1981 *Resolution on Party History*:

*The “cultural revolution,” which lasted from May 1966 to October 1976, was responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state and the people since the founding of the People’s Republic. It was initiated and led by Comrade Mao Zedong.*⁴⁵²

The Cultural Revolution years were characterized by anarchic chaos with massive violence and turmoil. Mao had been faced with different forms of strife and domestic opposition that all required his response. As Mobo Gao points out, “[t]he violence, cruelty, suffering and deaths that occurred during the initial years of the Cultural Revolution were caused by different groups of people, for different reasons. Some conflicts were of a class nature, others were social in character; some of the violence involved personal grudges, in

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁵² Chinese Communist Party 1981, 32; MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 3.

other cases the violence was due to blindness, ignorance and stupidity.”⁴⁵³ The most salient unrest events were the massive turmoil in the late 1960s (including the Wuhan Incident), and the turmoil manipulated by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four⁴⁵⁴. In order to restore disorder and thus maintain authority, Mao utilized various measures, but refrained from using international dispute as a response, even international conflicts were generally rare during this period. In the following sections, I will go over the brief history to explain why international conflict was not a favorable option for Mao to deal with severe domestic unrest.

The Initial Years of the Cultural Revolution

The initial years of the Cultural Revolution, especially from 1966 to 1969, were full of violence and turmoil. Some turmoil even posed a severe threat to the leadership of Mao. Therefore, Mao had to deal with this strife with caution. Most of the time, Mao chose to suppress the violent turmoil. International dispute was never an option. More accurately, when faced with severe domestic turbulence, Mao intentionally avoided international disputes, and never utilized international tension to solve domestic problems, as he needed to focus on domestic issues.

The Cultural Revolution, by its nature, was an extension of the class struggle. Mao tried to rally the people against the “revisionists” and “capitalist roaders” in power. As Zhou Enlai clarified later, the movement would “target the center, rather than the localities, the domestic scene rather than the international one, inside rather than outside the party,

⁴⁵³ Gao 2008, 17.

⁴⁵⁴ The Gang of Four was a political faction during the Cultural Revolution. Its leading figure was Mao’s last wife, Jiang Qing.

and higher levels rather than lower levels.”⁴⁵⁵ To achieve this goal, Mao decided to mobilize the mass and “create ‘great disorder under heaven’ for the purpose of ultimately achieving ‘great order under heaven.’”⁴⁵⁶ Similarly, Mao’s blueprint of the revolution, the “Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” also known as the Sixteen Points, clearly indicated the importance of mobilizing the mass and building up a new order through disorder. For instance, the third point was to “put daring above everything else and boldly arouse the masses,” because “[t]he outcome of this great cultural revolution will be determined by whether the Party leadership does or does not dare boldly to arouse the masses.”⁴⁵⁷ The fourth point directly mentioned that “[d]on’t be afraid of disorder.”⁴⁵⁸ Therefore, starting from the summer of 1966, Mao manipulated the popular opposition, specifically within schools, to target the incumbent top officials of the government. “A mood of rebellion spread through colleges and schools across China.”⁴⁵⁹ Before long, the mood developed into “red terror.” Student rebels, or the Red Guard, with the endorsement of Mao, engaged in violent attack against the “revisionists” and their supporters. In the fall of 1966, “the violence ranged from the destruction of private and public property, through expulsion of urban undesirables, all the way to murder.”⁴⁶⁰ Under the chaotic circumstance, many people took advantage of the opportunity to topple the incumbent power figures whom they may have had personal grievances with.

⁴⁵⁵ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 41.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁵⁷ Regai 1976, 122.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴⁵⁹ Lawrance 1991, 16.

⁴⁶⁰ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 102.

The increasingly intense “red terror” and mob violence destroyed the political instrument, and many top leaders of the CCP had been denounced during the Red Guard Movement. By the end of 1966, “the threat to the very existence of the party became acute, Mao was forced to choose between Leninism and anarchy. He had no hesitation in preferring the former.”⁴⁶¹ The army started to intervene to restore order.⁴⁶² However, in the beginning of 1967, while urging caution on the application of violence, Mao tried to restrain the army to make it secondary to the movement. For example, in a short note to Lin Biao, Mao expressed clearly that “the military should be dispatched to provide support to the broad masses of the left.”⁴⁶³ The violence and chaos continued and ultimately mushroomed. By the summer of 1967, “China descended into a state of what Mao later described as ‘all-round civil war’. At the start of this rival groups used cudgels and knives, but soon moved on to machine guns and artillery.”⁴⁶⁴ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2008) quotes a Chinese historian to describe the situation at that time: “in actual fact, violent clashes occurred in all of China’s cities. There were virtually no exceptions.”⁴⁶⁵ The domestic turmoil and revolutionary violence culminated in what is known as the *Wuhan Incident*.

The Wuhan Incident of late July 1967 by its narrow definition, refers to the “the kidnapping on 20 July of the two Central Committee emissaries,” Xie Fuzhi and Wang Li, “by dissident worker and military units in Wuhan.”⁴⁶⁶ However, it was not an isolated event, but rooted in a long series of armed clashes over the control of the Wuhan, the capital city

⁴⁶¹ Schram 1989, 173.

⁴⁶² Lawrance 1991, 17.

⁴⁶³ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 175.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 199.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 214.

⁴⁶⁶ Robinson 1971, 417.

of Hubei Province, between two contending factions—mass organizations of rebels and established Party authorities.⁴⁶⁷ The latter⁴⁶⁸ was led by the regional military commander, Chen Zaidao. “When the rebels became strong enough to present a real challenge”, Chen physically suppressed their activities, outlawed their organizations, and arrested their leaders.⁴⁶⁹ With the support of Beijing, rebels “set aside their factional disputes and returned, united, to the streets, denouncing Chen.”⁴⁷⁰ Soon, disputes evolved into clashes and by early June major clashes became a regularity. By late June, Chen’s group had gained the upper hand, which alerted Beijing. The center decided to further denounce Chen’s conservative orientation and to endorse the rebels. Meanwhile, the Cultural Revolution Committee in Beijing sent two members, Xie Fuzhi and Wang Li to Wuhan “to investigate the cause of the trouble and work out a solution.”⁴⁷¹ After the investigation, the two delegates “severely criticized Chen’s use of troops against the rebel masses” and advised him to work with the rebels.⁴⁷² These decisions and what followed until mid-July, indicated that the top leaders, such as Zhou Enlai, “greatly underestimated the depth of anger among the ‘conservative’ politico-military establishment at having become the principal target of the Cultural Revolution, and overestimated the power of the military commanders to control the tense situation in Wuhan.”⁴⁷³ A few days later, instead of accepting the advice, Xie and Wang were kidnapped.

In Mao’s view, the incident was extremely threatening. First, when the incident took place, Mao was in Wuhan. Although Mao’s presence was a secret and he believed that

⁴⁶⁷ Hinton 1972, 69.

⁴⁶⁸ Later, the group was organized into the Million Heroes (*baiwan xiongshi*, 百万雄师).

⁴⁶⁹ Hinton 1972, 69; MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 201.

⁴⁷⁰ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 202.

⁴⁷¹ Hinton 1972, 69.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*

⁴⁷³ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 208.

“the danger from the wounded Chen Zaidao was minimal,” Mao was still concerned that “as a result of events that he had set in motion, his safety from a mob of soldiers and party cadres could not be guaranteed.”⁴⁷⁴ Therefore, he left Wuhan in the early morning of July 21. Other than his personal safety, Mao feared more a spillover effect of the incident. The incident marked the first time that regional military leaders disobeyed the order of Beijing, which could have had a spillover effect and ultimately have led to a widespread military revolt. According to Thomas W. Robinson, “Recurrence (of this type of incident, added) would mean a severe defeat for the Cultural Revolution but more importantly could place China as a whole in danger of widespread warlord-type conflict leading to incipient breakup.”⁴⁷⁵

Under this seriously intense circumstance, Mao and his colleagues first designated the incident as a “counterrevolutionary revolt.”⁴⁷⁶ In the meanwhile, Mao ordered to rescue Xie and Wang and sent troops to surround Chen and his regional army. This “was the only instance where regular troops in battle array actually faced each other during the Cultural Revolution.”⁴⁷⁷ Realizing “the futility of fighting,” Chen surrendered and was dragged to the capital.⁴⁷⁸ Chen was dismissed and replaced with loyal supporters of the Revolution. After successfully dealing with the incident, Mao adopted a harsh policy against regional military authorities. First, in the Hubei area, the killing continued for months. “In the months that followed, more than 184,000 alleged members and supporters of the Million Heroes in Hubei province were beaten up or killed; in Wuhan, 66,000 were wounded, over

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁴⁷⁵ Robinson 1971, 435.

⁴⁷⁶ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 212.

⁴⁷⁷ Hinton 1972, 70.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

600 killed.”⁴⁷⁹ More broadly, to avoid the recurrence of the incident, Mao purged the army. “Thus, from the end of July onward, calls were made to ‘drag out’ the ‘handful’ in the Army itself.”⁴⁸⁰

The event was perceived as a turning point of the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁸¹ Following the incident, Mao had to gradually give up his original thought of creating order through disorder and carefully deal with “actual threats of anarchy.”⁴⁸² However, this change did not take place right after the end of the incident. As MacFarquhar and Schoenhals point out, “Mao’s first reaction to the Wuhan incident was to strengthen the left, not to back down for fear of a PLA revolt.”⁴⁸³ In other words, Mao was still hopeful that the new order could be built on an armed left and a restrained army. On July 22, Jiang Qing, the wife of Mao and one of the leaders of the Cultural Revolution Committee, reiterated and endorsed the idea of “attack with reason, defend with force” (*wengong wuwei*; 文攻武卫). The rebels took this inflammatory remark as an endorsement of armed rebellion, which further intensified armed clashes across the country. With nationwide fighting and industrial disruption, in the fall of 1967, Mao called for the regular army to restore order. However, Mao initially still felt uncertain about the role of the PLA and did not give explicit permission to the army to use force to suppress the rebels. Without Mao’s permission, “the PLA was powerless to cope with the fresh outbreak of factionalism in November and December which threatened once again to plunge China into ‘armed struggle’ and anarchy.”⁴⁸⁴ Later, “the army was given authority for the first time to use its power to

⁴⁷⁹ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 214.

⁴⁸⁰ Robinson 1971, 435.

⁴⁸¹ Hinton 1972, 69–70; MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 199–220; Wang 2006, 241.

⁴⁸² MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 199.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴⁸⁴ Bridgham 1968, 34.

defend itself from attack,” and “the Cultural Revolution therefore entered a phase of overt military take-over.”⁴⁸⁵ Therefore, domestic strife and violence was not fully contained until 1969 which marked the end of the “exuberant phase of the Cultural Revolution.”⁴⁸⁶

Another objective of Mao at that time was “to dissociate Mao and his Cultural Revolution from responsibility for the violence and lawlessness endemic in China by finding new scapegoats.”⁴⁸⁷ For instance, Wang Li was purged and scapegoated for the armed struggle in Wuhan.⁴⁸⁸ Similarly, leftist forces were purged and many rebels became victims themselves.⁴⁸⁹ Mao blamed domestic friction on the Red Guards and their violence, so he proposed ultimate military control and dispersed the Red Guards through the campaign “up to the mountains and down to the villages” (*shangshan xiaxiang*; 上山下乡). “[T]he glory days of the Red Guards were over soon after July 1968.”⁴⁹⁰

During the initial years of the Revolution, Mao’s attitude toward domestic strife changed over time. Initially, he believed that the Chinese mass were on his side and that disturbance or armed clashes could work for his revolutionary goal. Thus, Mao’s major strategy was to take advantage of the chaos. But when the chaos became threatening, as Robinson summarizes, Mao “had no choice but to deal severely with the regional authorities.”⁴⁹¹ This lack of choice not only reflected the inability of international conflict initiation, as a policy choice, to cope with the severe danger, but also indicated the predisposition of Mao to repression. First, the intense turmoil required imminent policies

⁴⁸⁵ Robinson 1971, 437–438.

⁴⁸⁶ Lawrance 1991, 17.

⁴⁸⁷ Bridgham 1968, 27.

⁴⁸⁸ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 229–233.

⁴⁸⁹ Gao 2008, 18; Robinson 1971, 438.

⁴⁹⁰ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 251.

⁴⁹¹ Robinson 1971, 413.

that could directly cope with the threat. Take the Wuhan Incident as an example. The primary concerns Mao had during the incident were Chen's regional military group and the potential military revolt in other locations. Using force abroad was not able to eliminate Chen and his supporters, nor help to prevent the recurrence of a military revolt. In contrast, repressive measures, such as purge and suppression directly dealt with these concerns. Through repressive measures, Mao ensured that those who had previously, or sought to, defy his revolutionary policies were eliminated so that he could reduce the possibility of the occurrence of another Wuhan Incident.

Second, his preference for military intervention to restore order had a deep root in the early 1960s when he felt "the party to be slipping from his grasp" and decided to "develop a power base" in the PLA.⁴⁹² This set the stage for "the dialectic between anarchy and military control during the period 1966-72."⁴⁹³ "Not until after the fall of Lin Biao would Mao be able to start trying to recover power for civilians."⁴⁹⁴

Furthermore, Mao's capability to mobilize, which he fostered through the revolutions, did not predispose him to international conflict in the face of severe domestic strife. The initiation and development of the Cultural Revolution reflected Mao's astonishing capability of mobilization and ultimately his dominance in the country. As Chan puts it, "at those times when he was being driven by a utopian vision, as during the GLF and the 'Cultural Revolution', his dominance was especially pronounced. The breadth of Mao's dominance was made crystal clear by his ability, time and again, to inspire, to arouse, and to motivate virtually the entire Chinese population from the central bureaucracy

⁴⁹² Schram 1989, 173.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 174.

⁴⁹⁴ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 246.

down to the grass roots.”⁴⁹⁵ Specifically, during the first couple years of the Cultural Revolution, the cult of Mao reached the apex. He had successfully mobilized the public to work for his revolutionary goal. Therefore, another round of mobilization along the line of conflict/cohesion did not make sense for him to deal with the problems he was faced with.

Lastly, during this time period, Mao intentionally avoided international tensions so that he could focus on domestic issues. The initial years of the Cultural Revolution was a time when “China was surrounded by hostile superpowers.”⁴⁹⁶ For example, along the northern border, war with the Soviet Union was possible, which was confirmed later by the clash on Zhenbao/ Damansky Island between the two communist countries. Simultaneously, the United States posed a potential threat on China’s southern border. The fear of war spread across the country. Contrary to what the diversionary theory of war suggests, Mao and his colleagues carefully dealt with those tensions and tried their best to avoid provoking their rivals during their own domestic strife. As MacFarquhar and Schoenhals points out, “Mao had launched the Cultural Revolution on the assumption that the Vietnam War would not spill over into China at a time of internal upheaval.”⁴⁹⁷ Not until late 1968 when the upheavals mostly ended and the relatively greater stability assumed, did Mao and his colleagues “ponder the threatening international environment.”⁴⁹⁸ This indicated that, at a time of severe domestic strife, Mao refrained from diverting public attention through international disputes. Instead, he intentionally avoided any potential conflict with foreign countries so that he could stabilize the internal environment first.

⁴⁹⁵ Chan 2001, 9.

⁴⁹⁶ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 308.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 309.

To conclude, the interactive effect between severe domestic strife and Mao's revolutionary experience resulted in diversion never being an option for solving these threatening circumstances in the initial years of the Cultural Revolution. Specifically, first the severe situation required a quick, direct, and to-the-point response, such as repression. This was coupled with his former revolutionary experience that predisposed him to repressive measures rather than to foreign aggression.

The Lin Biao Affair and Its Aftermath

By 1969, the radical Red Guard movement subsided, but the country was split along antagonizing factional lines. Among them, two opposing power groups “emerged from the chaos of the Cultural Revolution: Jiang Qing and her Central Cultural Revolution Small Group (CCRS), and Lin Biao and his generals.”⁴⁹⁹ Although the two groups were usually put together as “counter-revolutionary cliques” and accused of creating disastrous consequences of the Revolution, they “had little in common and were often in conflict.”⁵⁰⁰ Their struggle for power resulted in the turbulence and crisis in the last part of the Cultural Revolution.

With Mao's increasing trust of Lin Biao and the rising role of the military, Lin was officially designated as the closest comrade-in-arms and successor of Mao in 1969 by a new party constitution issued at the Ninth National Congress of the CCP. To explain this official designation, MacFarquhar and Schoenhals quoted Edgar Snow's observation “Lin Biao's ascent to power shows that militant communism has the upper hand on bureaucratic

⁴⁹⁹ Qiu 1999, 107.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

communism.”⁵⁰¹ However, the reaffirmation of Lin’s position not only failed to prevent but intensified the power struggle.

The tension between Lin and Jiang was nothing new. It dated back to the Red Guard Movement when the military, under Lin, felt dissatisfied as they were under constant attack by the rebels and Jiang was discontented with the military officers’ reluctance to accede to her wishes.⁵⁰² The accumulated tension gradually evolved into rupture. In 1969, Ye Qun, Lin’ wife, dictated the military not to vote for Jiang and her supporters in the election of Party Central Committee members. This irritated Jiang. “Jiang Qing openly turned against Lin Biao after the Ninth Congress.”⁵⁰³ The Lin-Jiang tension then catalyzed the split between Lin and Mao. In August 1970, the Second Plenum of the Ninth Central Committee was held at Lushan. Lin, under the instruction of Mao, criticized Zhang Chunqiao, Jiang’s supporter, without mentioning his name. Most delegates preferred Lin’s group to Jiang’s group because Lin’s policy was less radical. The rupture between the two groups became evident, which pushed Mao to make a decision. Despite the catalyst role that the Lin-Jiang tension played in the Lin-Mao split, the relationship between Mao and Lin was not seamless in 1969. Mao and Lin were increasingly at odds. The major issue of dispute was the role of the military. After the radical violence subsided in 1969, for Mao, “it seemed unnecessary for military personnel to remain on the civilian posts.”⁵⁰⁴ However, Lin was reluctant to “accept the renewed subordination of the army to the party.”⁵⁰⁵

Mao’s role in helping to stir up the factional struggle during the Lushan conference, remained opaque and indecisive. Some scholars argued that popular support for Lin’s

⁵⁰¹ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 139.

⁵⁰² Qiu 1999, 108–116.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 120.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁰⁵ 7/19/19 5:05:00 PM

position altered Mao. When Jiang Qing tried to defend Zhang and told Mao that Lin's critique "was actually directed at Mao and the Cultural Revolution," Mao was convinced.⁵⁰⁶ In contrast, some other scholars are inclined to believe that Mao played an independent and active role in the process. The rationale behind this was that Mao tried to whip up emotions against the rump of the Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG) to justify his "moving against the military faction loyal to Lin Biao."⁵⁰⁷ Regardless of Mao's true thought was, on August 25, Mao defended Zhang and expressed his discontent with Lin's group, which marked the beginning of Lin losing Mao's favor. After the Lushan Conference, Mao on one hand attacked the members of Lin's faction but not Lin himself so as to "lull Lin Biao into a sense of false security."⁵⁰⁸ On the other hand, Mao made a series of changes in terms of the military, such as weakening the military control of governments and reorganizing military regions to make sure that troops around Beijing were only loyal to him. Gradually, the tension between Mao and Lin became apparent. Mao criticized Lin and his supporters in the military and compelled them to make self-criticism.⁵⁰⁹ However, Lin refused to do so. Mao was frustrated and afraid of Lin's faction against his Revolution line.⁵¹⁰ In Mao's mind, "he regarded his wife and her henchmen as his true ideological heirs."⁵¹¹ Therefore, "[b]y July 1971, Mao had decided to get rid of Lin Biao and his generals."⁵¹²

The following events remain mysterious. According to the official Chinese account, in 1971 Lin Biao plotted an assassination of Mao during his inspection tour of southern

⁵⁰⁶ Qiu 1999, 126.

⁵⁰⁷ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 331.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁵⁰⁹ Qiu 1999, 131–135.

⁵¹⁰ Gao 2008, 108.

⁵¹¹ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 325.

⁵¹² Qiu 1999, 135.

China. This is called the “571 project.” It is also said that “the alleged coup was a Maoist invention to depose Lin Biao, whose power within and over the PLA had grown too fast and great for Mao to countenance. Rather than a successor, Lin had become a rival.”⁵¹³ What was similarly mysterious was the primary conspirator of the coup. Little evidence has showed that Lin Biao was the primary conspirator. Instead, based on current sources, people were inclined to believe that Lin’s son, Lin Liguo, was the one who devised the plot to react to increasing challenges from Mao.⁵¹⁴ Given the mysterious nature of the event, the only element that is evidenced is that after the failure of the project, Lin and his family intended to flee to the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, their airplane crashed in Mongolia on September 13, 1971. After the Lin Biao incident, Mao eradicated the military dominance of the party and “averted any danger of a military coup.”⁵¹⁵

Whatever the root of the incident, many scholars agree that “the day of the incident, September 13, 1971, was also the day of the greatest crisis in Mao's China.”⁵¹⁶ It was difficult for Mao to “make his people believe that their ‘beloved vice-chairman,’ who had helped whip the country into the frenzied cult of Mao's personality, had turned overnight into a would-be assassin of Mao himself and a traitor to the country.”⁵¹⁷ Over the next several months, Mao directed nationwide denunciations of Lin. “As knowledge of it spread, the Lin Biao affair had a profoundly negative impact on perceptions of the Cultural Revolution among all Chinese who had any pretensions to political literacy.”⁵¹⁸ The fall of Lin Biao heavily discredited the Cultural Revolution.

⁵¹³ Karl 2010, 145.

⁵¹⁴ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 324–336.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁵¹⁶ Qiu 1999, 4.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵¹⁸ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 338.

During the whole process, no matter when Mao was faced with the potential military opposition or the actual abortive coup of Lin, Mao's reaction was direct and immediate, for example the purging of Lin's faction and downplaying the role of the PLA demonstrates this. Mao not only refrained from using foreign aggression, but also intentionally improved China's international environment. Before we investigate the possibility that Mao may have used foreign aggression as a response to specific domestic problems, we should first examine the changes in the context as well as Mao's international visions. From late 1960s, Mao gradually changed his originally aggressive international view out of both pragmatic and emotional reasons.

First, the dangerous situation China was faced with urged Mao to take a less provocative stance to deal with international relations. With the scare of the Soviet preemptive strike against China in the north and the threat of the United States in the south, Mao's goal now was to contain the Soviet Union and avoid war - not to provoke the Soviet Union and America. Second, Mao was "extremely disappointed with the outcome of continually launching and fomenting world revolution in the preceding decade. Chinese-supported violent insurgencies in both Africa and Latin America failed to produce appreciable results."⁵¹⁹ With the vanished confidence in a world revolution and the perceived threat of the Soviet Union, Mao became less aggressive internationally. The best example of this was the US-China rapprochement, which took place in early 1970s.

Other than the general inclination against international tension, international conflict was not useful to Mao's domestic problems. The major domestic threat for Mao was Lin and his military faction. To get rid of them, international conflict would not be a

⁵¹⁹ Yang and Xia 2010, 400.

good choice, because “if preparing for war remained the principal preoccupation of the Chinese state, then inevitably the PLA and its leaders would dominate the political stage.”⁵²⁰ The Nixon administration’s change to their strategic posture made the time ripe for Mao to open up to America so that he could neutralize the Soviet threat and thereby diminish the role of the PLA and Lin. In sum, the threat of Lin and his military coup did not motivate the revolutionary leader to adopt an aggressive foreign policy. Instead, Mao dealt with internal pressure through the combination of domestic repression and rapprochement with the former rival, America.

In the aftermath of the Lin Biao affair, Mao suffered from a dramatic physical decline.⁵²¹ For him, the main problem now was “to reconstruct the top leadership and in particular to select a credible successor.”⁵²² Despite severe health problems, Mao’s dominance within the party was unquestionable. This absolute control did not relieve dismay and disillusionment. When he was faced with challenges from different factions and popular chaos, he tried to manipulate the existing factional struggle to achieve his goal. Despite the possibility of foreign aggression, Mao still remained concentrated on solving problems with domestic measures and avoiding international tension.

Unlike what the radicals expected, the demise of Lin did not bring about the rise of Jiang and her faction. Instead, Mao elevated Zhou Enlai and rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping. Mao’s passive attitude toward ideological issues after the Lin Biao affair provided Zhou and Deng an opportunity to “cool the temperature of the Cultural Revolution.”⁵²³ This posed a danger to the radicals because leaders of the radicals, like Jiang, came to

⁵²⁰ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 320.

⁵²¹ Meisner 2006, 191.

⁵²² MacFarquhar 1991, 336.

⁵²³ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2008, 347.

prominence due to the ideological preference of leftists. Jiang aligned with Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyan against Zhou and Deng. This political coalition was later dubbed as “the Gang of Four.” They kept on mobilizing the mass into ideological campaigns in order to suppress their enemies. The factional political struggle therefore continued.

Since Mao still favored a like-minded successor, the Tenth Party Congress held in August 1971 marked the resurgence of the radicals. After recapturing the political highland, the radicals started to get rid of their old enemy, Zhou Enlai. Contrary to what the radicals expected, the terminal illness of Zhou “posed Mao a major political problem, and he solved it in a manner repugnant to his radical followers.”⁵²⁴ Broadly speaking, the radicals were good at manipulating domestic violence and stirring up factional emotions, but Mao was well aware that he needed someone to replace Zhou as the stabilizing force in order to prevent total chaos.⁵²⁵ Narrowly speaking, Mao did not trust Jiang’s political capability and no one else in the radicals showed a strong competence in replacing Zhou’s role.⁵²⁶ In a Politburo meeting in July 1974, Mao for the first time publicly criticized Jiang’s political action, and referred to her coalition as a “Gang of Four.”⁵²⁷ Later, Mao decided to put Deng Xiaoping in charge of the country, which irritated the Gang of Four. However, the elevation of Deng did not indicate that Deng had won the war. Mao’s attitude was ambivalent throughout Deng’s year in power. He defended Deng’s measures from attacks by the radicals, but his view remained leftist and radical.⁵²⁸ This led to another fall of Deng after the death of Zhou in 1976.

⁵²⁴ MacFarquhar 1991, 347.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 348–349.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 354.

In the last days of Mao, he did not trust either faction and eventually chose Hua Guofeng as his heir, who Mao thought would preserve Maoist road without precipitating a backlash.⁵²⁹ This simply was another mistake of Mao to choose Hua. Instead of promoting unity within CCP leadership and preventing factional disputes, it became the springboard for a new round of power struggle after Mao's death on September 9, 1976. By 1976, "the chaos had spread from the Politburo to society at large. China was plagued by economic stagnation, rising social discontent, an upsurge of crime, and a rash of workers' strikes."⁵³⁰

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS IN RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC UNREST UNDER MAO'S RULE

The failure of international conflict as a potential policy response to severe domestic unrest does not mean the absence of the strategy during Mao's rule. Mao did use the tactic when he was not facing severe domestic strife. As discussed later, the Second Taiwan Crisis and the Zhenbao Island Incident have been long argued as Mao's diversionary attempts when he was not faced with severe domestic problems. According to Jian Chen, "[i]n order to justify and promote this process of revolutionizing China's Party, society and population, Mao, informed by his previous experience, fully realized that the creation of a perception of China facing serious external threats would help strengthen the dynamics of revolutionary mobilization at home, as well as his authority and controlling position in China's political life."⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ Meisner 2006, 192.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 190.

⁵³¹ Chen 1995, 361.

In the 1960s, Mao took advantage of the war-time situation in Vietnam to eliminate opposition within the party and prepare for starting the Cultural Revolution. For instance, in 1962, when Wang Jiaxiang, the head of the CCP International Liaison Department argued that China should not engage in another Korean-style confrontation with the United States in Vietnam, which incurred quick and harsh criticism from Mao. Mao viewed this idea as demonstrating a revisionist tendency, which should be eliminated from the party. Before long, Mao publicly announced a more belligerent policy toward Vietnam. With this strategy and rhetoric, Mao won the potential confrontation with his colleagues and reconsolidated his dominance in the party.⁵³²

Similarly, in 1964, right after the escalation of the Vietnam War, Mao launched a nationwide “Resist America and Assist Vietnam” movement to mobilize the Chinese people along his revolutionary lines - this lay the basis for the future revolution.⁵³³ Notably, unlike what traditional diversionary war theory implies, Mao in 1960s was unwilling to see the situation where the Chinese support for Vietnam would evolve into a direct confrontation with the United States. On 2 April 1965, Zhou Enlai, the premier, asked the President of Pakistan to convey a message to Washington. Part of his message suggested that China would not initiate a war with the United States, but to be prepared for a defensive war.⁵³⁴ In other words, Mao only intended to take advantage of the tension among China, Vietnam, and the U.S. without being directly involved in the conflict. Thus, based on the severity level of the event, this case was not disastrous, however, this low-level of severity ought not to discredit its importance as an attempt to deal with domestic troubles through

⁵³² Ibid., 362.

⁵³³ Ibid., 365.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 367; Zhou 1990.

international dispute. The goal of the belligerent attempt was clear: rally people around the flag to eliminate within-party opposition and promote domestic policies. This perfectly conforms to the prerequisite of diversionary conflict.

To sum up, as a leader who had demonstrated a great talent in massive mobilization during the revolutions, Mao never neglected the power of the mass. The GLF was an example of Mao's use of massive mobilization as a strategy in economic construction and societal transformation. Therefore, it was not surprising that he would use international tensions to mobilize the population to achieve his goal. However, historical evidence indicated that he only provoked international conflict when he was not faced with severe domestic strife. Mao's encounters with severe situations of domestic unrest required measures that were quick, direct, and decisive, which absolutely neutralized his preference of international dispute.

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS UNDER MAO'S RULE

Throughout Mao Zedong's rule, from the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to his death in 1976, China engaged in dozens of international disputes. It is argued, by the existing literature, that Mao is an exemplar for aggressive features in revolutionary leaders.⁵³⁵ However, none of these international conflicts were resulted from Mao's intention to address severe domestic strife. The existence both an intense domestic turmoil and a dangerous revolutionary leader failed to translate into a real international conflict. In this section, I will go over all the major international conflicts that China, under Mao's leadership, had engaged in and briefly discuss the reasons for China's participation.

⁵³⁵ Horowitz and Stam 2014; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015; Kennedy 2011; Tudoroiu 2014; Tudoroiu 2016.

THE KOREAN WAR

The Korean War, “a civil war fought as a product of the incomplete independence of Korea from the Japanese after the Second World War,” broke out as the North invaded the South in the early 1950s.⁵³⁶ As Chen puts it, “The eruption of the Korean War on 25 June 1950 did not take Beijing’s leaders by surprise, but Washington’s decision to intervene not only in Korea but also in Taiwan did.”⁵³⁷ Khrushchev recalled that during Mao’s visit to Moscow, Mao expressed his opinion on the issue that the United States would not interfere in such an internal affair as the Korean War.⁵³⁸ The involvement of the U.S. concerned Mao and made him gradually acknowledge that it had changed China’s strategic position. Specifically, after the outbreak of the Korean conflict, the U.S. not only interfered in Korean war but had also changed its indifferent policy toward Taiwan. China was now “compelled to face challenges in two directions at once, Taiwan and Korea.”⁵³⁹ Mao had to choose one challenge to concentrate China’s forces on. By October 1950, the U.S. troops had great success in the battlefield and almost reached the Yalu River, the border between China and Korea. “A faction of U.S. senators loudly supported the ‘nuking’ of China, or at least, an invasion to overthrow Communism.”⁵⁴⁰

Under this circumstance, Mao “quickly concluded that the real U.S. aim was to threaten China itself, and he began to act accordingly.”⁵⁴¹ On October 19, 1950, Chinese troops crossed the Yalu river and entered the war, which marked the beginning of the three-year long fighting between the two sides. China’s interference into the conflict has two

⁵³⁶ Karl 2010, 82.

⁵³⁷ Chen 2001, 87.

⁵³⁸ Goncharov, Lewis, and Litai 1995, 130.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 158.

⁵⁴⁰ Karl 2010, 82.

⁵⁴¹ Goncharov, Lewis, and Litai 1995, 159.

explanations: one being a threat explanation and the other being an opportunity explanation. The latter argues that the Korean crisis provided Mao with various opportunities. First, it “would help establish the foundation for Mao’s grand plans to transform China’s old state and society into a new socialist country.”⁵⁴² Second, the Korean War was perceived by Mao as a revolutionary war, so the success of the war could advance China’s international reputation and influence.⁵⁴³ The considerations of domestic mobilization and international reputation advancement may have also motivated Mao to interfere in the Korean War.

In retrospect, Mao’s decision to enter the war was due to the combination of threat and opportunity, and it had nothing to do with the domestic politics. For the moment, the relationship between internal problems and external conflict was not what the diversionary war theory predicted: leaders tried to divert public attention from domestic problems via initiating an international dispute. Rather, the real situation in China was that the international conflict urged Mao and his colleagues to eliminate domestic problems. After the Chinese entry into the Korean War, Mao launched a series of campaigns, such as the campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries from February 1951 to 1953. As Frederick C. Teiwes puts it, “Party leaders saw a genuine need for vigilance, given not only the danger of American attack but also the possibility of KMT efforts to return to the mainland. In any case, KMT sabotage operations were real, and dissident elements were encouraged by the potential opportunities created by the Korean involvement.”⁵⁴⁴ Another impact of the international conflict on domestic situation was that “the war placed huge strains on an already fragile economy and society.”⁵⁴⁵ After the Chinese involvement in the Korean war,

⁵⁴² Chen 2001, 87.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 88; Goncharov, Lewis, and Litai 1995, 159.

⁵⁴⁴ Teiwes 1997, 37.

⁵⁴⁵ Karl 2010, 83.

domestic policies had shifted to a more radical line. “As a result, the new land reform program of stepped-up implementation, an emphasis on class struggle, and mass mobilization even at the risk of some social disorder was in sharp contrast to the principles of the agrarian reform law.”⁵⁴⁶

Some may argue that the Korean War did help the new CCP government consolidate its power. This may relate to why Mao decided to participate in the conflict in the first place. However, the actual consequences of the event did not necessarily imply the causes of the event. Most of the time, they do not, partially because “many of the results of actions are unintended.”⁵⁴⁷ In terms of the situation here, it is true that after the Chinese’s intervention in the war, “the regime penetrated society in a much more thorough manner than initially.”⁵⁴⁸ This does not mean that Mao intentionally engaged in the conflict for the purpose of consolidating power and dealing with domestic problems. Therefore, we can conclude that China’s entry in the Korean War had no domestic root.

With the actual fighting moving into a stalemate, the two sides started to negotiate a peace treaty. Eventually, on July 27, 1953, the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed, which marked the end of fighting in the Korean War.

TWO TAIWAN STRAIT CRISES

During Mao’s years in charge, there were two Taiwan Strait Crises: one took place in 1954 and the other in 1958. Although the two crises were the continuation of the Chinese

⁵⁴⁶ Teiwes 1997, 35.

⁵⁴⁷ Jervis 1998, 6.

⁵⁴⁸ Teiwes 1997, 20.

Civil War and should not be treated as purely international conflicts, the crises shared some basic logic with international conflicts. The primary reason for these common features is that the crises occurred in the shadow of the Cold War, which means it was not just about the CCP and the KMT, but also involved international players (i.e. the Soviet Union and the U.S.). As Allen S. Whiting puts it, “The Taiwan Strait situation was a function, at least in part, of Sino-American relations with a history extending back to the first offshore island crisis in 1954-55.”⁵⁴⁹ Therefore, it is reasonable to investigate the two crises for our purpose.

The First Taiwan Crisis of 1954-1955 refers to the offshore armed conflict between the CCP and the KMT. China’s plan to seize the offshore islands was not a new thought. It was a continuation of the long-standing civil war. Meanwhile, the U.S. did not intervene when China took small islands along Zhejiang’s shoreline, since “the view in Washington was that while the islands were useful, they were probably not worth fighting for.”⁵⁵⁰ However, the situation changed considerably in the summer of 1954. Mao launched a nationwide propaganda campaign to reiterate the slogan of “liberating Taiwan.” Later, Mao intensified the hostility against Jinmen and Mazu in addition to the military operation along the coastline of Zhejiang. For Washington, the assault on Jinmen seemed to be the first step of Mao’s “liberating Taiwan” campaign.⁵⁵¹ Therefore, on September 3, when the Chinese artillery started to shell Jinmen, it quickly turned the continuation of the civil war into “a full-blown international crisis, pushing Washington to the brink of a nuclear confrontation.”⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁹ Whiting 1987, 485.

⁵⁵⁰ Brands Jr 1988, 126.

⁵⁵¹ Sheng 2008, 483.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 484.

Mao's provocative decision was deeply rooted in his long-standing fear of inevitable direct military confrontation with the United States regarding the strait. Specifically, Mao thought that war with the U.S. was most likely to take place in three places: the Korean Peninsula, Indochina, and Taiwan. With the easing situation in Korean and Indochina, it became increasingly possible that war may occur around the Taiwan Strait. The fear urged him to adopt an aggressive policy which he thought would frighten the U.S. from aligning with the KMT government and thus drive them apart. However, "his action completely defeated his purpose: he pushed Washington much closer to Taiwan."⁵⁵³ On one hand, Washington and Taipei were officially aligned. On December 2, 1954, Washington and Taipei signed the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty, which was ratified by the U.S. Senate on February 9, 1955. On the other hand, the U.S. seriously considered the possibility of using nuclear weapons against China. "The threat of a nuclear war and firm commitment finally caught up with Mao."⁵⁵⁴ In April, under the direction of Mao, Zhou Enlai expressed China's willingness to negotiate with the United States. A few months later, the First Taiwan Crisis ended. It is evident that the onset of the crisis was purely due to foreign policy considerations rather than domestic political purposes. The termination of the crisis was cursory and indecisive. It failed to address the fundamental areas of dispute, so before long, the Second Taiwan Crisis broke out.

In 1958, Mao ordered the shelling of the KMT-held offshore islands, which was known as the Second Taiwan Crisis. There are various explanations of the event. Some argue that the crisis had a deep root in the Sino-Soviet split and reflected Mao's anger about

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 486.

Soviet appeasement with the United States.⁵⁵⁵ After the death of Stalin and the ascent of Khrushchev, the Soviet Union adopted a “peaceful coexistence” foreign policy and tried to avoid the possibility of a nuclear war. “This implied Soviet acquiescence in the American defense commitment to Taiwan, which shielded the Chinese Nationalists from final defeat in their civil war with the Communists.”⁵⁵⁶ Thus, as scholars like Whiting and Melvin Gurtov summarize, the outbreak of the Second Taiwan Crisis, according to this school of argument, was due to either Mao’s intention to test the reliability of the Sino-Soviet alliance, to demonstrate to the Soviet the vulnerability of the U.S. and drag the Soviet back into the revolutionary orbit or because of his increased confidence in winning the region prompted by the Soviet missile achievements.⁵⁵⁷

Another group of analysts sees the crisis as a function of Sino-American relations and argues that Mao’s bombardment decision was actually a reaction to American actions in Taiwan, elsewhere in Asia, and in the Middle East.⁵⁵⁸ For instance, the increasing military KMT buildup on the islands and the acquiescence of the U.S. convinced Mao that “he must take direct action in the Strait.”⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, Mao ordered “a limited, low-risk preemptive move against the offshore islands” in order to “deflect a dangerous and growing threat to China’s security at a time of rapid domestic change and military weakness,” and “bring the Americans to their senses about their ally on Taiwan.”⁵⁶⁰ In this sense, scholars of this group are implying that the two Taiwan crises shared the same goal for China: driving a wedge between the U.S. and the KMT.

⁵⁵⁵ Sheng 2008.

⁵⁵⁶ Whiting 1987, 479–480.

⁵⁵⁷ Gurtov 1976; Whiting 1987, 485–486.

⁵⁵⁸ Gurtov 1976.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

In addition to the two sets of foreign policy arguments, existing literature suggests that the crisis was also prompted by domestic considerations.⁵⁶¹ Michael Sheng concludes that the crisis, in part, was due to Mao's intention to manipulate "international tension to serve his goal of domestic mobilization", and promote his domestic agenda of the GLF.⁵⁶² As Mao's speech in September 1958 clearly pointed out, "besides its disadvantageous side, a tensed [international] situation could mobilize the population, could particularly mobilize the backward people, could mobilize the people in the middle, and could therefore promote the Great Leap Forward in economic construction."⁵⁶³ Similarly, Gurtov indicates that, other than the mobilization argument, there is a diversionary explanation of the crisis.⁵⁶⁴ Specifically, this explanation tries to link the onset of the crisis to domestic problems and argues that Mao used the crisis to silence domestic opposition. However, Gurtov challenged the argument, because he thought Mao's authority was secure at that time.⁵⁶⁵ Notably, secure authority of leaders does not imply the absence of domestic strife and revolt. Thus, theoretically it is possible for leaders to initiate a diversionary dispute when they feel secure about their power. Whether or not the crisis was a diversionary attempt *per se* lie outside the focus here. What I care more about is that even if it was resulted from a diversionary consideration, it took place when Mao did not face a severe domestic opposition. Sufficient evidence has proven this, as discussed before.

American reaction to the Second Taiwan strait Crisis was different from its reaction to the first one. This time "the United States was fully committed to the defense of the

⁵⁶¹ Christensen 1996.

⁵⁶² Sheng 2008, 479.

⁵⁶³ Mao 1987, 389–390.

⁵⁶⁴ Gurtov 1976.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

offshore islands, and was dangerously drawn to the brink of war with China.”⁵⁶⁶ In the face of a possible direct military confrontation against the U.S., China backed down. The U.S. “quickly responded to the Chinese announcement of a cease-fire on October 6, 1958” and before long the crisis ended.⁵⁶⁷

THE SINO-INDIA BORDER WAR OF 1962

The Sino-India Border Conflict was the short war between China and India in 1962, around the disputed territory along their border. The border dispute can be traced back to 1959. In early 1959, a Tibetan revolt broke out. As a result, the Dalai Lama and tens of thousands of refugees, who were all potential future guerrillas, fled to India for safety. This “forced the issue of control over high Himalayan passes through which guerrillas could flee and also return.”⁵⁶⁸ It also set the stage for the long-standing Sino-India Border dispute. A series of violent border incidents already took place before the war, together with the establishment of outposts in the disputed areas.

In June 1962, India established a new outpost in the disputed areas of the Himalayan frontier. “The resulting confrontations, protests, and incidents gradually raised the level of public acrimony and quickened the pace of private diplomacy in the late summer and early fall.”⁵⁶⁹ Despite repeated diplomatic protests by the Chinese, which resulted in an ultimatum, India refused to give in. “It appears Nehru was hoping for ‘victory without war’ and planned to establish the permanent frontier on India’s terms with China’s eventual

⁵⁶⁶ Takamatsu 1987, 143.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁵⁶⁸ Whiting 1987, 502.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 522.

acquiescence.”⁵⁷⁰ Under this circumstance, on October 20, 1962, “China took advantage of the then ongoing Cuban missile crisis, when the American attention was diverted, to teach India a lesson by launching a long-prepared surprise attack.”⁵⁷¹ As Neville Maxwell puts it, China’s war decision was imposed and reactive:

*India created a border dispute, refused to negotiate it, and then attempted to make good its claims by armed force. A military response was imposed upon Beijing, and when it came it was measured and appropriate. China’s reactive use of force was justified, strategically and politically, indeed Indian policy had left Beijing no realistic alternative.*⁵⁷²

The war ended in India’s catastrophic defeat and China’s unilateral cease fire a month later. At the conclusion of the war, China pulled back to the line of actual control “to create a demilitarize minimize tension and conflict along the border.”⁵⁷³ Due to the public neutrality of Moscow in the war, the rift between China and the Soviet Union continue to deepen, since for Mao, a neutral stance of the ally was seen as supporting the enemy.⁵⁷⁴ In terms of the causes of the war, it is widely accepted that the border war was simply a logical outcome of long-existing border disputes, rather than a result of domestic concerns.⁵⁷⁵ Thus, it is of little controversy that the root of the conflict was not domestic in nature.

⁵⁷⁰ Devereux 2009, 74.

⁵⁷¹ Maxwell 2003, 100.

⁵⁷² Maxwell 1999, 913.

⁵⁷³ Garver 1996, 338.

⁵⁷⁴ Whiting 1987, 513.

⁵⁷⁵ Brecher 1979; Chaudhuri 2009; Devereux 2009; Garver 1996; Maxwell 1999; Maxwell 2003.

THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER CLASH OF 1969

The Sino-Soviet Border Clash, also known as the Zhenbao Island Incident, refers to the border conflict between China and the Soviet Union around the Zhenbao Island in 1969. The border clash marked the final split of China and the Soviet which could traced back to the late 1950s. It is contested in academia about who was the initiator of the conflict. More recent research, with the help of newly released documents, suggests that although it was the Soviet Union who opened fire first in March 1969, the incident was indeed a defensive counterattack intentionally designed by China.⁵⁷⁶ The major question now is how to explain China's decision.

According to Thomas Robinson, explanatory possibility could fall into three clusters: "rationales flowing from the local and regional situation in China, rationales concerning politics in the Chinese capital, and foreign policy-related motivations."⁵⁷⁷ The first category focuses on local commander's personal consideration and the development of the local firefight. Robinson elucidates one of the possibilities in the first category: "the local Chinese border commander may have possessed enough latitude to initiate military action if growing border tensions seemed to warrant it."⁵⁷⁸ Robinson is somewhat skeptical about the first category, and thinks the most convincing explanation should be a combination of foreign policy rationales and national political motivations.⁵⁷⁹

At the foreign policy level, various possibilities stand out in the existing literature. First, the incident was actually a reaction to Soviet aggression. By early 1969, Mao and his colleagues could no longer endure the long-lasting Sino-Soviet border disputes, and

⁵⁷⁶ Goldstein 2001; Yang 2000, 25–27.

⁵⁷⁷ Robinson 1991, 261.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 262–264.

thought it necessary to “strike back in a well-planned military attack” to teach the Soviet Union a bitter lesson.⁵⁸⁰ The opportunity finally came when Soviet provocation intensified at Zhenbao Island. As a result, China launched the first counterattack on March 2. The second possibility is about preemption. As Robinson specifies, it is

*the idea that whenever the Chinese Communists perceived a superior force about to attack, the proper strategy (learned through bitter experience during the Shanghai- Kiangsi-Yenan days) was to preempt the situation at a place and time of one's own choosing, thus throwing the enemy off balance and perhaps even preventing his coming ahead at all.*⁵⁸¹

Third, Mao tried to use the border conflict to estrange the Chinese mass from the Soviet Union and the “bourgeois revisionist line.” In addition to the three possibilities listed by Robinson, the existing literature provide a fourth one, that is, Mao’s desire to adjust the relationship with the United States.⁵⁸² At that point, Mao needed a compelling argument to persuade the U.S. that the Sino-Soviet split was authentic and serious. Thus, an open confrontation with the Soviet Union was a viable demonstration of its legitimacy. However, the validity of this explanation was challenged by some scholars. For instance, Kuisong Yang argued against this by indicating that the unprecedented war scared the top leadership of CCP in 1969, which made it impossible for Mao and his colleagues to initiate a conflict, purely to woo the United States.⁵⁸³

At the national political level, Robinson illustrates two possibilities. The first possibility fits the logic of “gamble for survival.” Specifically, “factional strife in Peking was so fierce that some groups, realizing they were literally fighting for their lives, took

⁵⁸⁰ Yang 2000, 27.

⁵⁸¹ Robinson 1991, 263.

⁵⁸² Ryabushkin 2007, 76–77.

⁵⁸³ Yang 2000, 22.

extreme measures.”⁵⁸⁴ According to Robinson, among those factions, only Mao and Lin Biao had the possible motives and the power to initiate a conflict. The most likely option would be Lin who “may have felt that a foreign threat would provide additional argumentation for continued military administration and thus enhance his own chances of long-term survival.”⁵⁸⁵ However, little evidence shows that it was Lin who ordered counterattack at the Zhenbao Island. Even though Lin was proved to be the initiator, it is still not that convincing. The incident took place one month before Lin was designated as the heir of Mao in the Ninth National Congress of the CCP, which means Lin was not faced with Mao’s mistrust as he was years later. In other words, there was no severe threat or problem that pushed Lin to gamble for survival.

The second national-level explanation follows the logic of diversion. For the leadership, “a foreign incident was necessary to divert popular attention from domestic tensions. The ensuing war scare and its concomitant outpouring of nationalism would enable the leadership to carry through an ideologically based permanent restructuring of Chinese society previously planned but sabotaged by the bureaucrats.”⁵⁸⁶ Scholars, like Dmitri Ryabushkin and Yang, have made similar arguments to explain how Mao could scapegoat the Soviet Union, having organized battles at the border, for “[t]he crash of the economy, the degradation of education and culture, catastrophe in the social sphere, full disorder and lawlessness in the country.”⁵⁸⁷ According to Yang, “the military clashes were primarily the result of Mao Zedong’s domestic mobilization strategies, connected to his worries about the development of the ‘Cultural Revolution’.”⁵⁸⁸ To support this argument,

⁵⁸⁴ Robinson 1991, 262.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 263.

⁵⁸⁷ Ryabushkin 2007, 77.

⁵⁸⁸ Yang 2000, 22.

Yang quoted Mao's words after the incident: "we should let them [the Soviet] come in, which will help us in our mobilization."⁵⁸⁹ This possibility may be true, but it does not challenge my argument that revolutionary leaders are less likely to use force abroad when they are faced with severe domestic problems. As discussed above, although China was full of problems, the domestic situation in 1969 was not as pernicious as the initial years of the Revolution. Order was restored and turmoil was contained. Therefore, this aggressive attempt was a response to deal with less intense problems.

Mao's initial plan was to fight "a controllable military conflict that would serve his larger political purpose."⁵⁹⁰ However, soon after the onset of the incident, the situation was out of control and created "a perceived danger of war that Mao had never intended."⁵⁹¹ Before long, Beijing and Moscow took steps to de-escalate the conflict and ended the border clashes.

SUMMARY

As one of the prominent revolutionary leaders, Mao's policy decision-making has caught scholars' eyes. They provide various accounts for his aggressive foreign policies and repressive domestic campaigns. However, they fail to bridge the two and explain why in most cases, if not all, Mao refrained from using international conflict as a policy response to severe domestic problems, but preferred measures like repressive campaigns.

In this chapter, after scrutinizing the history under Mao's long rule, we find his reluctance or even neglect to use foreign aggression when coping with intense domestic

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 22.

problems a result of his revolutionary experience and the current intense context. First, Mao's revolutionary experience and ascent to power during the revolution fostered his confidence in eliminating opposition through repressive campaigns and mobilizing the mass. He had considerable expertise when setting an agenda and eliminating enemies by given then various stigmatic labels.

Second, the revolutionary experience endowed him with low tolerance for opposition and enemies and predisposed him to repressive measures. One of the major lessons he learned from the previous revolutions was that "struggle is the means to unity and unity is the aim of struggle. If unity is sought through struggle, it will live; if unity is sought through yielding, it will perish."⁵⁹² Specifically, he believed that ruthless repression was the right way to deal with "the die-hard forces."

Third, starting from the communist revolution, "Mao's strategic doctrine had long called for concentrating forces in only one direction."⁵⁹³ This made him less likely to provoke conflict during severe domestic strife, because provocative behaviors may force him into a situation in which he had to deal with both internal and external problems at the same time.

Lastly, the serious domestic situation requires direct and immediate measures to deal with the problems. With a prominent dominance and strong popular support in China, Mao had no reason to rely on foreign aggression rather than a more direct solution. It remains questionable whether international tension will ever solve the problem and even if it does, it still takes more time for international disputes to take effect than other measures do.

⁵⁹² Mao 1940.

⁵⁹³ Goncharov, Lewis, and Litai 1995, 158.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The field of psychohistory has explored the peculiar fit between the personalities of great individuals and the requirements of history in their particular time and place.
—John W. Garver, *Little Chance: Revolutions and Ideologies*, 1997, p.87

How do rebel leaders respond to domestic unrest? Are they more likely to provoke an international conflict and, if so, under what conditions? These questions can be disaggregated into two major sub-questions answered in this dissertation project: (1) “are rebel leaders more likely to provoke an international conflict than their non-rebel counterparts in the face of internal unrest?” and (2) “are rebel leaders more likely to provoke an international conflict rather than to utilize other policies (e.g. repression) to deal with domestic troubles?” This concluding chapter recapitulates the theoretical arguments and empirical findings in this dissertation. The following section will highlight the importance of the aforementioned aspects to both the study of rebel leaders’ policy preferences and international conflicts. The final section discusses the practical implications of my findings.

DO REBEL LEADERS FAVOR INTERNATIONAL DISPUTE DURING DOMESTIC UNREST?

This dissertation project introduces a new framework to understand rebel leaders’ policy response to domestic unrest and investigates whether rebel leaders have a policy preference of initiating international dispute in response to domestic unrest. I argue that

leaders' policy response to domestic unrest is a function of their pre-existing preferences and contextual factors. Pre-existing policy preferences suggest the policies that leaders' predispositions (shaped by their rebellion experience) would induce them to adopt in an ideal situation, whereas contextual factors refer to the external situations that would reshape their preferences and constrain their ability to adopt certain policies. Thus, if a rebel leader has a pre-existing preference of using foreign aggression to cope with internal troubles, and the current context neither changes his or her preference nor constrains his or her ability to implement it, then the country may provoke an international conflict. If, however, contextual factors either reshape the leader's preference in favor of an alternative policy or make initiating international dispute impractical, the leader may pursue another policy path.

This dissertation project proposes that the severity level of domestic unrest is a contextual factor that significantly affects how rebel leaders respond to such domestic turmoil. In other words, rebel leaders' willingness to use force abroad is contingent on the level of severity of domestic unrest. When rebel leaders face a risk of severe internal unrest, they are less willing to engage in international conflicts, because severe domestic strife will reshape leaders' perception and neutralize their policy preference toward international conflicts via deliberative cost-benefit calculation and intuitive behaviors modifications.

This is because first, high intensity domestic strife changes the cost-benefit calculation about available policy options. Specifically, serious domestic problems call for a direct, speedy, and "to-the-point" policy response, which enables domestic measures (i.e. co-optation and repression) to be more efficacious because domestic measures aim to directly and effectively address the problem that gives rise to the strife.

Second, severe domestic unrest affects rebel leaders' intuitive behaviors by activating some certain predispositions of leaders endowed by rebellion experience, which induce them to use other policy response than initiating international dispute. To begin with, the extremely unstable environment compels leaders to choose the policy they feel most confident in. The rebellion experience makes rebel leaders more confident in utilizing repression to deal with oppositions, given that they come into power after they survive a severe domestic crisis (i.e. rebellion). This confidence will be translated into a preference of repression during severe domestic unrest. In addition, severe domestic unrest is often accompanied with the risk of international intervention. Compared to foreign aggression, domestic measures better conform to rebel leaders' appreciation of national authority and sovereignty (a predisposition they obtained from rebellion experience). Furthermore, rebellion experience predisposes rebel leaders to be ruthless to enemies, which will be translated into a policy preference of repression during severe domestic unrest.

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses discussed in the preceding chapters provide support for these claims. In the statistical studies of Chapter 3, the monadic and dyadic cross-national tests indicate that when the severity level of domestic unrest increases, rebel leaders are not more likely to provoke a MID than their non-rebel counterparts. In the extreme instable situation, rebel leaders are more willing to use violence at home, not abroad.

Two historical case studies discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 provide further support. Through his long rule over Indonesia from 1967 to 1998, Suharto never responded to severe domestic unrest by using force abroad, since the severe domestic environment reshaped his preference in favor of domestic repression. In particular, imminent and severe problems

called for direct and time-saving solutions and in this regard, domestic measures were more effective for Suharto. In addition, his rebellion experience made Suharto more experienced in using domestic measures, especially repression, which gave him greater confidence in utilizing them. The confidence of leaders in policies is very important, especially when they are dealing with emergencies. Moreover, his prior rebellion participation predisposed Suharto to be ruthless toward opposition, which was later translated into a preference for repression against opposition. All of these reasons resulted in the absence of international dispute during severe domestic troubles.

Similarly, although China under Mao Zedong initiated a couple of international militarized disputes, none of them took place as a response to serious domestic problems. When Mao was faced with serious internal troubles, he turned to domestic repression, not only because his long-term revolutionary experiences gave him more confidence in repressive measures but also because in a severe situation, repression was a more efficient and thus the preferable response. Specifically, like Suharto, prior revolutionary experiences caused Mao to have less empathy toward opposition and more confidence in repression, ultimately predisposing him to repression in the face of opposition. Furthermore, repression is a prompter, direct, and thus more efficient way to cope with high intense troubles, compared to launching an international dispute. All of these factors led to Mao's preference for repression rather than foreign aggression in the face of serious internal problems.

When considered together, these findings indicate strongly that rebel leaders rarely choose to provoke international conflicts in response to severe domestic unrest. Instead, they are more likely to repress domestically. This is because the high levels of domestic unrest reshape their preference in favor of domestic repression.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

The primary goal of this dissertation has been to develop a better understanding of rebel leaders' behaviors. The dissertation project, I hope, helps to advance the existing studies in several ways. First, the theoretical approach introduced in Chapter 2 tries to bring the context back to the forefront of the research into rebel leaders and international conflict. The existing studies of rebel leaders and war focus primarily on leaders' personal preferences rather than on the larger context in which foreign policy is made. They have tended to emphasize consistencies with the rebel leaders to explain their foreign policy preferences. This tendency is problematic, because it overlooks the variations of rebel leaders' behaviors. The more systematic approach that incorporates contextual factors with leaders' personal preferences could fill the theoretical gap.

Secondly, this approach offers more accurate understandings of leaders' policy preferences. When making claims that leaders with certain traits may have a predisposition or preference of some type of policy, most existing scholarly explanations of leader preferences assume these predispositions or preferences as given, pre-existing and fixed. This assumption, however, is misleading and overestimates the complication of individual preference. In fact, predispositions and preferences are situational and subject to the change of the context. In other words, preferences obtained from previous life experiences could be reshaped by the current situation. In this case, rebellion participation may endow rebel leaders with an inclination toward using force abroad, but contextual factors could also shape leaders' pre-existing preferences and make them favor alternative policies in a

particular situation. Therefore, the theory introduced in this dissertation provides a more thorough analysis of leaders' decision-making process.

Third, the approach incorporates the role of leaders into the internal-external conflict nexus and fills an important gap left by conventional wisdom. The conventional wisdom on one hand assumes that initiating international dispute in response to domestic unrest is driven by the principal-agent problem emphasizing how leaders behave when their private interests deviate from national interests,⁵⁹⁴ and on the other hand classifies this approach into the state and societal level of analyses neglecting the active role of leaders.⁵⁹⁵ Put differently, the existing studies assume away the variation of individual leaders and their cross-situational inconsistency and believe that domestic unrest will produce a consistence among leaders' choice. This has left an important gap—the field simply cannot explain whether leaders will go to war unless we treat leaders as the real actors and allow them to play an active role. The dissertation project thus tries to bring the role of leaders back into the internal-external conflict nexus and discusses whether rebel leaders prefer foreign aggression as the response to domestic unrest, given their motivation of securing their political survival.

To summarize, one of the major problems of existing relevant research is that it focuses on the influence of one image and neglects the impact of other images. Kenneth Waltz in his book *Man, the State, and War* classified theories of causes of war into three “images”—individuals, the nation-state, and the international system.⁵⁹⁶ Later, J. David Singer renamed them as three levels-of-analysis.⁵⁹⁷ Most recent quantitative studies of

⁵⁹⁴ Chiozza and Goemans 2004b; Downs and Rocke 1994; Weisiger 2013.

⁵⁹⁵ Levy 1988; Levy and Thompson 2010.

⁵⁹⁶ Waltz 1959.

⁵⁹⁷ Singer 1960; Singer 1961.

rebel leaders and war unfold in one level of analysis and rarely discuss the interaction between different levels. This results in a failure to provide a complete picture of rebel leaders' foreign policy-making. My theory, in this dissertation, aims to investigate the interaction between the individual level and the state level of analysis to explain why rebel leaders provoke an international dispute in the face of domestic unrest at some time, but do not at other times.

PRATICAL IMPLICATIONS

With the end of large-scale decolonization movements and world-wide communist revolutions, the substantial reduction of most dramatic rebellion movements (e.g. revolutions) makes many people believe that rebel leaders are rapidly becoming obsolete. It is certainly true that we may be less likely to encounter a large number of revolutionary leaders like Mao and Suharto who participated either in communist revolutions or revolutions for independence from the colonizers. Rebellions against current regimes, however, could take other forms than those two kinds of revolutions. Given the risky and violent features shared by all kinds of rebellion movements, we can expect contemporary rebel leaders to behave similarly to how past (communist or postcolonial) rebel leaders behaved.

From the civil war in Columbia, Nepal and Syria, the revolution in Ukraine and Kyrgyz to a series of uprisings in the Arab Spring, the recent decade has shown that rebellion is fresh in the air. That said, having someone with prior rebellion experience come to power will be more than just thinkable in the future.

Even at present, it could be of great significance if we can better know how rebellion participation experiences would affect participants' behaviors after they assume power later. In 2000, 26.29% countries of the world were under the leadership of a former rebel. Now, rebel leaders are still in control of many countries that may affect international politics greatly. For example, Ali Khamenei, the Incumbent Supreme Leader of Iran, was a key figure in the Iranian Revolution. Cuba is still under the rule of Raúl Castro, who was a commander in the Cuban Revolution. Paul Kagame in Rwanda and Abdel Fatah el-Sisi in Egypt serve as the examples of leaders who participated in the rebellions that occurred after the end of the Cold War. Therefore, understanding how rebel leaders behave will enable states to control the risk when interacting with those rebel-led countries.

As Rouhi and Snow (2019) notes, “Despite the critical importance of revolutionary regimes to international security, most scholarship attempts to generalize about these diverse and complex cases.”⁵⁹⁸ In other words, existing scholarship assumes that previous rebellion participation endows leaders with some special characteristics, such as a predisposition toward foreign aggression, thus making their foreign policies easy to predict. This generalization is dangerous in practice, because it could stereotype rebel leaders as warmongers and drive policy-makers without such an experience to make inappropriate policies when dealing with a rebel leader. For instance, when explaining the tension between revolutionary states and status quo states, Walt introduces a “spiral model,” which suggests that revolution, for a variety of reasons, leads to mutual suspicion.⁵⁹⁹ In this case, the stereotype of rebel leaders would definitely deepen the mutual suspicion between revolutionary states and status quo powers and thus is more likely to cause conflict.

⁵⁹⁸ Rouhi and Snow 2019, 1.

⁵⁹⁹ Walt 1992; Walt 1996.

Therefore, a useful foreign policy toward countries led by rebel leaders needs to unravel the complexities of rebel leaders' decision-making. By introducing a new framework to understand rebel leaders' policy making, this dissertation project hopes to delineate a detailed process through which the decisions are made. The implications of this study's findings for the foreign policy of rebel leaders should be a source for optimism, since they are not more likely to provoke an international conflict in response to severe domestic unrest. More accurately, rebel leaders prefer repression to foreign aggression in the face of serious internal troubles. That said, states may feel less concerned about a rebel-led desperate country, since rebel leaders would devote most resources to directly solving problems rather than initiating an international conflict. However, states should be relatively careful when a rebel-led country is experiencing low-level domestic strife, since rebel leaders are more likely to use foreign aggression in this situation.

Yet, when it comes to domestic politics, the results of this study provide reason for caution. Given the inclination of rebel leaders to repress as a response to severe domestic unrest, the possibilities of the infringement of human rights is high. In an extreme case, if the infringement of human rights becomes a state-sponsored atrocity, it may incur humanitarian intervention from the international community and thus lead to international conflict.

APPENDIX A: COUNTRIES WITH DOMESTIC UNREST IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR

	Initiation of Militarized Disputes
Rebel Experience	0.509*** (0.137)
Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag	0.004* (0.002)
Rebel Experience* Severity Level of Domestic Unrest Lag	-0.004 (0.003)
Military Service without Combat Experience	0.227 (0.152)
Combat Experience	0.126 (0.131)
Material Capabilities	6.603*** (1.282)
Autocracy	0.268* (0.117)
Five-Year Challenge Lag	0.987*** (0.106)
Peace Years	-0.164*** (0.030)
Constant	-2.354*** (0.121)
<i>Observations</i>	3,961
<i>Pseudo R-squared (%)</i>	9.78
<i>Log pseudo-likelihood</i>	-1734.1266
<i>SE adjusted for</i>	1,280

Note: All variables about domestic strife are one-year lagged.
Time for analyses is 1875-2000.
Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses.
*<0.05, **<0.01, ***<0.001

TABLE A.1. *Coefficients from logistic regression model of the monadic impact of rebel experience and severity level of domestic unrest on the initiation of militarized disputes, 1875-2000*

APPENDIX B: CATEGORICAL MEASURES OF UNREST

	Model 1 (Rebel*Domestic Strife)	Model 2 (Rebel*High-level Strife)	Model 3 (Rebel*Low-level Strife)
Material Capabilities, Initiator	1.054*** (0.010)	1.059*** (0.010)	1.052*** (0.010)
Material Capabilities, Target	1.070*** (0.011)	1.072*** (0.247)	1.070*** (0.011)
Initiator's Proportion of Dyadic Capabilities	1.306 (0.230)	1.405 (0.247)	1.337 (0.237)
Logged Distance between Capitals	0.737*** (0.011)	0.737*** (0.011)	0.737*** (0.011)
Democracy, Initiator	1.203 (0.150)	1.240 (0.154)	1.193 (0.149)
Democracy, Target	1.580*** (0.190)	1.602*** (0.193)	1.573*** (0.189)
Joint Democracy	0.357*** (0.065)	0.352*** (0.064)	0.356*** (0.064)
Peace Years	0.971*** (0.003)	0.971*** (0.003)	0.971*** (0.003)
Combat Experience	1.082 (0.098)	1.114 (0.101)	1.081 (0.099)
Military Service without Combat Experience	1.330* (0.150)	1.337** (0.151)	1.339* (0.152)
Rebel Experience	High-level Strife 1.225 (0.138)	High-level Strife 1.247 (0.141)	
	Low-level Strife 1.408** (0.180)		Low-level Strife 1.264* (0.125)
	No Strife 1.572*** (0.217)	No High-level Strife 1.432*** (0.142)	No Low-level Strife 1.570*** (0.157)
Constant	0.020*** (0.003)	0.022*** (0.003)	0.022*** (0.003)
<i>Observations</i>	121,790	121,778	121,763
<i>Pseudo R-squared (%)</i>	15.45	15.24	15.36

Note: All variables about domestic strife are one-year lagged.
Time for analyses is 1875-2000. Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses.
* <0.05 , ** <0.01 , *** <0.001

TABLE B.1. Odds ratio from logistic regression model of MID initiation with interaction

	Model 4 (High-level Strife)	Model5 (Low-level Strife)
Material Capabilities, Initiator	1.062*** (0.008)	1.056*** (0.008)
Material Capabilities, Target	1.044*** (0.009)	1.049*** (0.009)
Initiator's Proportion of Dyadic Capabilities	1.063 (0.185)	1.050 (0.180)
Logged Distance between Capitals	0.785*** (0.010)	0.780*** (0.010)
Democracy, Initiator	1.101 (0.145)	1.125 (0.138)
Democracy, Target	1.276 (0.178)	1.282 (0.170)
Joint Democracy	0.462*** (0.089)	0.430*** (0.077)
Peace Years	0.978*** (0.002)	0.977*** (0.002)
Combat Experience	1.218* (0.110)	1.137 (0.090)
Military Service without Combat Experience	1.280* (0.155)	1.218 (0.141)
Rebel Experience	1.166 (0.112)	1.195* (0.103)
Constant	0.035*** (0.005)	0.037*** (0.005)
<i>Observations</i>	83,736	97,470
<i>Pseudo R-squared (%)</i>	10.82	11.76

Note: All variables about domestic strife are one-year lagged.
Time for analyses is 1875-2000.
Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses.
* <0.05 , ** <0.01 , *** <0.001

TABLE B.2. Odds ratio from logistic regression model of MID initiation without interaction

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