Conflict Management and Peace Science, 23:1–21, 2006

ISSN: 0738-8942 print / 1549-9219 online
DOI: 10.1080/07388940500503770

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

State Power, Linkage Mechanisms, and Diversion against Nonrivals

DENNIS M. FOSTER

Department of International Studies and Political Science
Virginia Military Institute
Lexington, Virginia, USA

Mitchell and Prins (2004) have recently found that diversion from high levels of inflation is observed only among enduring rivals. However, neither this nor any other cross-national test of the relevance of opportunity to diversion has included a potentially important determinant of diversionary capacity*: major power status. I contend that since militarily powerful states have both more extensive sets of international commitments and much greater physical capacities to divert against broader sets of opponents, they are less likely to limit their diversionary behavior to enduring rivals. Cross-national time series analyses of the association between inflation and militarized interstate dispute (MID) initiation for the period 1960–1999 reveal several differences between the diversionary activity of major powers and that of all other states. Models that account for the interaction between inflation and rivalry reveal that while nonmajor powers seemingly divert only against enduring rivals, major powers are marginally less likely to do so against rivals than they are against nonrivals. However, more detailed analyses indicate that these latter findings are being driven by the American case: While the United States is more likely to initiate MIDs against nonrivals than rivals at the highest levels of inflation, other major powers are more likely to initiate MIDs against rivals than nonrivals at all points. Moreover, the United States is, on average, more likely than all other states to initiate MIDs at all levels of inflation. At minimum, these findings imply that the United States is unique among major powers both in its capacity to divert from inflation and in its propensity to link diversion from inflation against nonrivals to its most important rivalries.*

Keywords diversionary conflict, domestic politics, state power, United States

Perhaps no theoretical claim in the field of foreign policy has been so regularly expounded and yet received such mixed empirical support as the diversionary hypothesis. Despite its intuitive appeal and seemingly clear applicability in some cases, few international relations (IR) scholars have marshaled convincing evidence that state leaders engage in diversion with regularity. As analyses of the hypothesis have become more refined over the past generation of IR scholarship, several works have sought to develop explanations for this paucity. Perhaps the most compelling of these centers upon limitations not on the *incentives* of leaders to use force internationally for the purposes of diverting domestic attentions from their failings, but on the *opportunity* of those leaders to employ diversionary conflict to meet those incentives. Because leaders cannot automatically identify international situations to

The author would like to thank Jim McCormick and three anonymous reviewers for their comments and Sara Mitchell for data assistance. An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago, Illinois.

Address correspondence to Dennis M. Foster, Department of International Studies and Political Science, Virginia Military Institute, 432 Scott Shipp Hall, Lexington, VA 24450, USA. E-mail: fosterdm@vmi.edu

which the use of force is germane and/or because likely targets strategically become more conciliatory at the precise times when diversion is most attractive, leaders seeking to engage in diversion may be unable to do so on a consistent basis (Meernik, 1994, 2000; Meernik & Waterman, 1996; Leeds & Davis, 1997; Mitchell & Prins, 2004; Fordham, 2005). These theses offer a compelling and empirically supported accounting of the relative dearth of support for the diversionary hypothesis.

In this article, I seek to develop a more complete perspective on the importance of opportunity to diversion by adding a crucial but heretofore underaddressed extension to the compelling arguments outlined above. In general, while the scholars propounding these perspectives have identified several *dyadic determinants of diversionary opportunity*, other *systemic determinants of diversionary capacity* have been largely ignored. Most importantly, the number of a state's international commitments and dealings should have a significant effect on its capacity to engage in conflict behavior of all types, including diversion. The greater the size of this commitment set (which I argue is predicated on state power), the easier it is for states to identify potential targets for diversion. As such, I expect the states with the largest commitment sets in the system—major powers—to divert with more regularity than states with smaller commitment sets.

Moreover, broad commitment sets may modify states' assessments of the importance of other diversionary opportunity facilitators, several of which have been identified in previous work. Of greatest interest, Mitchell and Prins (2004) find strong evidence supporting their claim that diversionary behavior should only be regularly observed in the context of enduring rivalry. This is mainly because rivalry allows for the identification of enemies and facilitates the mobilization of popular support essential to "rally effects." However, if states with broader diversionary capacity (as a function of larger commitment sets) have more potential enemies from which to choose than just their rivals, are more likely to emphatically prevail against states outside their rivalries than inside them, and especially if they are able to portray conflict against these "ancillary" states as being integral to success against their rivals, then we might expect such states to have different views of the importance of the rivalry context to diversion than others.

Based on this and other considerations, I hypothesize that while "normal" states in the international system are more likely to divert against enduring rivals than other states, major powers are actually more likely to divert against states outside of rivalry settings than they are against rivals. Generalized estimating equation (GEE) analyses of Mitchell and Prins's data on the international system from 1960–1999 provide support for the contentions that major powers are more likely to divert against nonrivals and that nonmajor powers are more likely to divert against rivals (as measured by the association between inflation and militarized interstate dispute [MID] initiation). However, analyses of the U.S. case in particular, believed by many scholars to be unique in regards to diversionary behavior precisely because of the vast extent of American involvement in the international arena, reveal that the American experience is driving the findings concerning major power diversion outside of the context of enduring rivalry. While both the United States and all other major powers are more likely to initiate disputes when inflation is high, only the United States among major powers is more likely to do so against nonrivals than it is against rivals, and only when experiencing very high levels of inflation. In fact, the remaining major powers are more likely to initiate disputes when inflation is high against rivals than nonrivals. Moreover, the United States is, in an absolute sense, more likely to use force than all other states at all levels of inflation. These findings provide evidence supporting an important addition to arguments that consider the postwar American case unique because of its "superpower" status: While America was probably better able than other states to employ diversion due to its large array of international commitments, it was also probably better able than other

major powers to portray diversionary conflict against less dangerous and potentially more "beatable" nonrivals as essential to success against their main Cold War rival, the USSR.

The article proceeds as follows. First, I briefly outline extant diversionary literature, focusing on the ambivalence of its general findings and the arguments concerning variable opportunity put forth to explain that ambivalence. Second, I develop the theoretical extension outlined above. After laying out the empirical research design, I interpret and discuss the importance of the results of several statistical analyses. I conclude by offering some summary remarks and identifying avenues for refinement and further research.

The Extant Literature: Do/Can States Divert?

The idea that leaders use conflict with outside actors for domestic political purposes has been espoused by historians, sociologists, political scientists, and commentators alike for centuries (e.g., Bodin, 1576/1955). Essentially, because the mere act of conflict with outside enemies can lead to increased amity and unity within social groups (Simmel, 1955; Coser, 1956), it is feasible that the leaders of fractionalized groups can actively attempt to reduce disunity by targeting "out-groups." Moreover, given that leaders can both increase their political power and work to ensure their continued tenure by engendering favorable "in-group" perceptions of their job performance, and because these perceptions are likely enhanced by the "rally effects" resulting from the engagement of a common enemy, leaders seemingly have political incentives to initiate conflict abroad when they or their policies are unpopular (Waltz, 1967; Mueller, 1973). Such rallies are thus attractive because they can allow for the diversion and refocusing of popular enmity towards leaders. Beginning with the work of Ostrom and Job (1986), contemporary political scientists have sought to test the empirical veracity of the diversionary hypothesis, identifying such factors as low public opinion (e.g., Morgan & Bickers, 1992; Morgan & Anderson, 1999) and lagging economic conditions (Russett, 1990; James & Oneal, 1991; James & Hristoulas, 1994; Hess & Orphanides, 1995) as indicators of dissatisfaction for which modern leaders have incentives to divert via the international use of force.

Despite the intuitive appeal of the diversionary hypothesis, evidence of its empirical applicability has been mixed, and several potential reasons for this ambiguity have been advanced. First, the majority of findings produced by scholars in support of the diversionary hypothesis have been made in regards to the postwar American case, leading to claims that the diversionary phenomenon may be unique to the United States during that period (e.g., Levy, 1989; James & Hristoulas, 1994; Fordham, 1998a). Even within the American experience, however, findings are irregular. Lian and Oneal (1993) produce evidence casting doubt on the assumption that American presidents can expect significant rallies to result from force usage with any regularity. Second, several works indicate that the relationship between dissatisfaction and force usage is more complicated than envisioned by the basic diversionary hypothesis in the American case and posit instead that rallies accrue with variable regularity given partisan orientation and indirect linkages between dissatisfaction indicators (DeRouen, 1995, 2000; Fordham, 1998b, 2002). Third, more "realist" interpretations indicate that systemic or power factors are consistently more reliable predictors of conflict than American domestic factors (e.g., Gowa, 1998). Fourth, some scholars question the regularity with which leaders choose to employ international force as a diversionary measure rather than other, less costly means by which dissatisfaction can be addressed (Clark, 2003). Finally, investigations of the cross-national applicability of the hypothesis (e.g., Miller, 1995, 1999; Gelpi, 1997; Heldt, 1999; Bennett & Nordstrom, 2000; Enterline & Gleditsch, 2000; Pickering & Kisangani, 2005) have produced findings demonstrating that diversionary activity (when observed) is variable across regime types, levels of economic deprivation, levels

of violent domestic conflict, and leaders' abilities to employ other ameliorative measures. Moreover, several of these works conclude that the factors associated with diversion in the American case may not be associated with diversion in other countries, reinforcing the notion that the United States may be somehow unique in its diversionary behavior.

Another compelling explanation for the inconsistency of diversionary findings (and the one upon which this study largely focuses) is that though states may have regular incentives to engage in diversionary activity, their opportunity to do so may be irregular. First, Smith (1996) (following from Downs & Rocke, 1995) posits that since international conflict is a strategic, dyadic activity in which states must functionally "agree" to engage, there are reasons to believe that conflict is less likely at precisely the points where diversion would be most beneficial to leaders. Because domestic weakness provides leaders with political incentives to both initiate conflict and see that conflict through to a favorable resolution, potential diversionary targets have incentives to refrain from fighting leaders when those leaders are domestically weak. Since the domestic dissatisfaction which compels leaders to divert is (especially in democracies) often visible to potential targets, we should expect a decreased likelihood of dyadic conflict when it is present. Leeds and Davis (1997) and Fordham (2005) find support for this "strategic conflict avoidance" perspective in cross-national targeting behavior and the tenor of other state's approaches to the United States, respectively.

Meernik (1994, 2000) and Meernik and Waterman (1996, 576) also contend that a state's ability to divert is predicated on the opportunities that it has to fight other states. If few or no such opportunities are available, then leaders are unlikely to have the "necessary justification for embarking on a military operation of sufficient size to capture public attention." Moreover, if the populace does not feel that an action is justifiable, not only will there be no political benefits associated with force usage, but leaders also stand to pay a political price for putting their troops in harm's way without sufficient security benefits. As such, because previous studies failed to limit their analyses to periods in which leaders have sufficient occasion to divert, their analyses have been incorrectly specified. Meernik (1994, 2000) and Meernik and Waterman (1996) consistently find that, using American "opportunities" to use force (or "international events likely to be perceived as sufficiently threatening to the United States as to cause the president to consider using military action" [Meernik and Waterman 1996, 588; e.g., threats to territorial security, loss of American influence, advances by international opponents]) as the unit of analysis, there is no significant association between domestic political variables and force usage. Mitchell and Prins (2004), positing that enduring rivalry provides leaders with both increased opportunity and justification for diversion, find in a cross-national study that states are more likely to use force against rivals than against nonrivals when facing high inflation and that this relationship prevails only among nondemocratic states.

In sum, there is general lack of consensus concerning the empirical applicability of the diversionary hypothesis to the behavior of states. Two of the major caveats proposed by scholars to help explain this variability are the notions that the United States may be unique in its diversionary activity and that the opportunity for states to engage in diversionary behavior fluctuates based on the amount of extant threat facing potential diverters and the foreign policies of strategically acting potential targets. This paper uses these caveats as a starting point for the development of a more complete view of diversionary opportunity and activity.

Theoretical Model

In this section, I offer partial critiques of current scholarly views of diversionary opportunity for the purposes of theoretical advancement. First, I seek to add a systematic "global"

dimension to the concept of opportunity as an augmentation to the extant literature, which has focused almost exclusively on variations of opportunity within states' foreign policy experiences. Based on this consideration, I review Mitchell and Prins's assertion that the context of enduring rivalry increases the opportunities for states to divert. In essence, I contend that their formulation, while a crucial refinement of the concept of target-specific opportunity, is incomplete because it does not explicitly delineate factors outside of the rivalry context that could drastically impact overall opportunity. Most notably, the number of a state's international dealings and commitments is likely to have an important direct effect on its opportunity to use force for domestic political purposes; the more numerous these commitments are, the greater the absolute number of diversionary opportunities a state should have. If there are systematic dissimilarities in the absolute number of diversionary opportunities across states based on differences in commitment levels, then it is feasible to speculate that states also differ in the extent to which they view rivalries as especially attractive diversionary environments, thus affecting the empirical relationship between rivalry and diversion.

State Power and Diversion: Opportunity as a Function of Capacity and Commitment

The importance of factoring the extent of states' commitments into diversionary theories of war has been addressed only obliquely in the existing literature. As noted earlier, one of the most important critiques of the quantitative work on diversion regards its preponderant focus on the post–World War II American case, which some view as unique. Put simply, the reason most regularly advanced for this uniqueness is the vast extent of America's international commitments (e.g., Fordham, 1998b). James and Hristoulas (1994) go so far as to claim that the United States' "superpower" status translates into almost constant diversionary opportunity. While Meernik and Waterman's (1996) findings dispute the claim that diversionary opportunity is constant within the American foreign policy experience, it is a near certainty that the *absolute number* of diversionary opportunities they identify is larger in the American case than in others because of the United States' broad involvement in the international arena. Thus, though there is compelling evidence to indicate that American leaders cannot engage in diversionary activity with impunity, there are also convincing reasons for us to expect them to engage in diversion more often than other states, as the United States' ascendant foreign policy position affords it more opportunities for international action than others.

The combination of the belief that the United States enjoys increased diversionary opportunities because of its broad set of commitments and the contention that this opportunity is nevertheless inconstant thus brings a crucial issue to the fore, especially for scholars wishing to test the cross-national applicability of the diversionary hypothesis. While the identification of increased opportunity *within* states' foreign policy experiences is of great importance to a more thorough conceptualization of the diversionary hypothesis, it is just as critical when conducting cross-national studies to recognize that variation in states' *levels of overall international involvement* is itself a determinant of opportunity. As an illustration, it is useful to view opportunity as varying on two separate axes. The first, which might be termed the "systemic" axis, hinges on the breadth of the array of a state's international commitments. When states "score" high on this axis, they have greater opportunities (all else being equal) to engage in military activity of any sort—including diversion—than states which "score" low on the axis. The second, or "dyadic" axis (one on which Meernik and Waterman focus exclusively, even though their empirical tests are at the monadic level), reflects a more nuanced consideration of absolute variations in the opportunity for conflict with particular actors within the sets of commitments (large or small) held by states. A higher position on this axis reflects greater opportunities (all else equal) to use force given

whatever level of international commitment a state possesses, while lower positions reflect the waning of these immediate opportunities.[1]

As straightforward as the distinction between the "systemic" and "dyadic" axes seems, no direct analyses of how cross-national variations in the "systemic" axis can affect diversionary behavior have been conducted. This is especially distressing given other authors' contentions that the United States is *not* singularly unique in its increased capacity to divert. Though perhaps not "superpowers," there are certainly other states that have increased capacities to regularly interact with numerous actors on the international stage. At least one of the relatively few cross-national tests of the diversionary hypothesis (Leeds & Davis, 1997) explicitly associates factors related to these increased interactive capacities with the opportunity to divert. In addition to limiting their dataset to advanced industrialized countries, Leeds and Davis note that "perhaps foreign policy becomes a useful domestic tool only when states have a very large power advantage in the international community" (1997, 830). The logic of this conclusion largely parallels that of James and Hristoulas's claim concerning the source of American diversionary latitude.[2] Moreover, many of the oft-cited anecdotal accounts of diversionary activity outside the American case (e.g., the British in the Falklands War) involve powerful countries with broad sets of international commitments. We might thus surmise that the breadth of *any* state's international involvement, which is largely predicated on global power advantages, is positively related to the regularity with which it can engage in diversionary conflict relative to others.

In line with these considerations, I hypothesize first that broadly committed states have a greater capacity to divert from domestic distress than more narrowly committed states and are thus more likely overall to engage in diversionary activity than others. For four reasons, I contend that major power status is a useful empirical proxy for the classification of states' commitment breadths. First, major power status, at least as it is operationalized in the Correlates of War data, reflects a systemic (rather than dyadic) consideration of the breadth of a state's international commitments. A dyadic measure of relative power, which has been used in several cross-national studies, only measures the ratio of capabilities between two states and therefore cannot by itself reflect the wider considerations of international commitment breadth that are at the heart of the arguments outlined above.[3] Second, several scholars have

[1]Fordham (1998a) is one of the few authors who concisely (though obliquely) addresses the importance of variability on both axes, noting that while the impetus for diversion is domestic, threats are essentially given from the international system, delimiting the extent to which opportunity for diversion exists.

[2]Neither James and Hristoulas nor Leeds and Davis systematically discusses the mechanisms by which greater state power translates into either greater force usage opportunity or greater diversionary opportunity. In this treatment, I attempt to better specify these mechanisms by positing that increased power results in greater levels of international involvement, which then translates into greater opportunity for force usage of all types (including diversion; see later discussion in this paper). A feasible alternative argument is that increased perceptions of the need to become involved on the international scene spurs military buildup (i.e., that major power status results from perceived needs to increase involvement). Whether the "chicken" actually comes before the "egg" in this scenario is, however, probably irrelevant: if it can be argued that states assume that increased power translates into increased commitment capacity, then major power status can be considered a viable measure of commitment set breadth.

[3]Since I am examining diversionary activity, I ultimately employ a directed-dyadic research design in my analyses, using both (a) the major power measure to identify and run separate analyses of states of different types, and (b) the dyadic relative power measure to test the effects of relative power on force usage. Indeed, several scholars posit that relative power is itself an important determinant of diversionary behavior within dyads: Heldt (1999) finds that diversion is most likely when the attendant risks of failure (as measured by power preponderance) are low, and Bennett and Nordstrom (2000) find that diversionary incentives are most operative when the potential diverter possesses a clear power advantage. Additional analyses will be conducted to address possible issues resulting from the use of these two variables in conjunction (see section entitled "Research Design and Analyses").

posited and found that the international behavior of major powers is significantly different than that of minor powers (e.g., Mearsheimer, 2001; Haldi, 2003), most probably because of such states' increased international responsibilities and incentives for international action. Third, as suggested by Fordham's (2002) findings in the American case, increases in diversionary opportunity/propensity may not be limited to "superpower" status, but may accrue to major powers as well.

Finally, major power status is very highly correlated with both measures of nonmilitary international involvement and the capacity to project power abroad. An analysis of Barbieri's (1996) total trade data for all politically relevant dyads indicates that the mean level of annual total trade is thirteen times larger for major powers than it is for nonmajor powers for the period 1960–1992. Second, Harkavy (1982, 228–233) notes that, while American military basing activity contracted after 1965 and Soviet basing activity began expanding around that time, both states held a gigantic numerical advantage in basing numbers over all other states throughout the Cold War. While America's major allies (France and Britain) saw a significant shrinkage in basing numbers after WWII, some of Britain's key overseas bases were maintained (e.g., Diego Garcia, Gibraltar, Bermuda, etc.), and France had begun to reestablish a military foothold in Africa by the 1970s. Aside from a few other limited basing forays by nonmajor powers (e.g., Iran and Cuba) and minimal basing activity by China, one can conclude that the major powers possessed nearly all of the major overseas military bases during the Cold War. Thus, I consider major power status to be a useful measure of international involvement (and therefore of the opportunity to use force) and empirically expect major powers to engage in diversionary activity with more frequency than nonmajor powers.[4]

> *Hypothesis* 1: *All else being equal, major powers will be more likely than nonmajor powers to initiate international conflict given diversionary incentives.*

State Power, Rivalry, and Opportunity: Revisiting Mitchell and Prins (2004)

As noted in the literature review, Mitchell and Prins's (2004) study represents a significant advancement in our understanding of diversionary conflict because it explicitly links enduring rivalry to diversionary opportunity. The authors offer several reasons why we might expect diversionary behavior to prevail more often within the context of rivalry than without. First, in a direct fashion, rivalries are characterized by "deep mistrust and animosity," affording political elites greater capacity to "manipulate foreign affairs to satisfy their own personal and/or political objectives" without necessitating the "manufacturing" of external conflict. Second, "leaders in rivalry situations can effectively blame domestic turmoil (such as economic weakness) on foreign enemies, further concealing and diverting attention away from domestic political problems." In sum, Mitchell and Prins claim that "states involved in enduring rivalries understand that their environment offers greater opportunities for using diversionary force. Leaders of states without rivals will find it more difficult to identify an

[4]It is not a given, however, that increased conflict opportunity translates into increased diversionary opportunity. For instance, if major powers have fewer reasons to employ diversion (i.e., if they have relatively fewer domestic problems than nonmajor powers), the increased capacity to use force derived from greater commitment sets is largely moot in constructing expectations about the influence of international involvement on diversionary activity. However, the measure used in this work to indicate domestic turmoil, mean logged first-differenced CPI (or the level of inflation), is 0.87 for major powers and −0.40 for nonmajor powers. This indicates, substantively, that the average major power experiences inflation in a given year, while the average nonmajor power actually experiences deflation in a given year. Thus, one can conclude that not only might major powers have greater opportunity to use force for all purposes because of increased international commitments, but they might also have greater incentives than nonmajor powers to use force for diversion.

external enemy and justify the use of force abroad to their constituents" (Mitchell & Prins, 2004, 945–6).[5] Mitchell and Prins's notion that rivalry increases the ease with which leaders can identify enemies and justify conflict to their populaces can be viewed as an important extension of Meernik and Waterman's (1996) consideration of "dyadic" opportunity variability to the cross-national setting. Indeed, by finding that rivals are more likely to target one another for the purposes of diversion, Mitchell and Prins have clearly demonstrated that the diversionary incentive is inconstant for states across time and strategic settings.

But what about the impact of factors associated with the "systemic" axis on absolute diversionary opportunity? Mitchell and Prins raise some interesting considerations pertaining to the degree to which rivalry itself increases states' absolute diversionary opportunity relative to others. They claim that the *mere presence* of rivalries can indirectly increase overall diversionary opportunity insofar as leaders can portray uses of force against nonrivals as being taken in the broader strategic context of existing rivalries. In fact, using the "proxy" conflicts fought by the United States during the Cold War as examples, they portray the widely noted "uniqueness" of America's broad diversionary opportunity as deriving in large part from its Cold War rivalry with the USSR (Mitchell & Prins, 2004, 947). From this perspective, then, Mitchell and Prins imply that extensive arrays of international commitments are in some ways the *results* of enduring rivalries.

Even if one accepts the claim that states seek to increase their international commitments for the purposes of rivalry-specific strategy,[6] this conceptualization might need further refinement when one considers the important variations on the "systemic" opportunity axis discussed above. First, Mitchell and Prins (2004, 946), by claiming that "being involved in an enduring rivalry will influence a leader's decision to become involved in a militarized dispute or crisis, even if the state faces nonrival opponents," imply that the expanding effect of rivalry on commitment set size is operative for all states in the system. While this may be the case, states are not equal in their capacity to extend commitments. Instead, as reflected in Hypothesis 1, the capacity to increase one's commitments—especially insofar as these commitments involve the ability to use force—is likely predicated on state power. Generally speaking, less powerful states should have more limited capacities to increase their commitment sets than more powerful states, even if rivalry provides them with the incentive to do so. At a minimum, even if less powerful states are able to increase their commitment sets for strategic purposes, they are less likely to do so with as much breadth as more powerful states. As such, the degree to which stronger and weaker states can link other targets to existing rivalries—for any purpose, including diversion—is variable.

Moreover, the mere attempt to broaden one's commitment set to resolve disputes with existing rivals can lead to the development of new rivalries. Even for the most powerful states in the system, "proxy" conflicts, ostensibly fought to bolster one's position vis-à-vis important rivals (e.g., the USA vs. USSR), can themselves lead to new rivalries (the USA vs. North Korea), which may in turn lead to strategic conflict with "ancillary" states to resolve the secondary rivalry (the USA vs. China). Other issues of endogeneity aside, it is probable that at some early point, weaker states find themselves physically incapable of continuing this "broadening" trend. If such restrictions on weaker states do lead to new rivalries in the described fashion without the concomitant capacity to resolve those new

[5]Support for the reasoning underlying this contention can be found in the work of Enterline and Gleditsch (2000), who posit that states with a "large supply" of "plausible enemies" might be more likely to engage in diversion.

[6]Even if one does not accept this assertion and instead maintains that states' commitment sets largely develop in isolation from rivalry considerations, the central conclusion of my reformulation—that the relationship between diversion and rivalry is contingent upon the size of a state's commitment sets—is functionally unaffected.

rivalries with strategic "ancillary" conflict outside of them, then there are some compelling reasons to believe that variations in states' *capacities* to widen commitment sets might lead to fundamental differences in the *importance* of rivalry to diversionary opportunity across states.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, powerful states' increased capacities to strategically expand international commitments for the purpose of "beating" rivals may result in the diminution of the costs they face when engaging in diversion *outside* of rivalry settings, especially when "ancillary" conflict can be portrayed as being essential to success within important rivalries. Focusing again on the American example, the defining characteristic of the "Cold" War was the relative absence of direct military confrontation between the United States and USSR. A plausible and generally accepted reason for this lack of fighting was the uncertainty and immense costs that both sides stood to incur by the act of engaging in violent conflict with one another (e.g., Gaddis, 1992). However, since the United States possessed a vast capacity to fight "proxy" wars and less intense actions against a host of other (weaker) states, and since the outcomes of those conflicts could often be portrayed to the American public as essential to success in the wider war against communism, American leaders could identify *both security and diversionary* incentives to fight weaker states within the broader conflict against the Soviets rather than fighting the Soviets themselves. Put differently, fighting states other than the USSR provided likely diversionary benefits for American leaders because: (a) costs were limited (unlike in any direct confrontation with the Soviets); (b) victory was likely against weaker opponents; and (c) both the conflict itself and the victory that would likely result could be easily portrayed to the American public as crucial in the larger struggle against communism. The ability to portray such conflicts thusly increased their capacity to produce popular rally effects.

In sum, in order to increase the likelihood of successful conflict prosecution and minimize costs while still being able to portray conflicts as essential to victory against a rival, leaders may *prefer* to fight states only obliquely associated with rivalries than to fight important rivals directly when such targets are available, and especially when such conflict can be used for diversionary purposes. Again, however, while all states likely share this incentive, weaker states are largely unable to meaningfully engage such "ancillary" states because of their limited capacity to strategically expand their commitment sets. Instead, such states are more likely to engage rivals directly (even for diversion), because their rivalries normally comprise a very large portion of their available resources. Even if weaker states can marginally expand their commitment sets to include "ancillary" states, they can only do so in a very limited fashion; if they continue to engage in conflict against this small set of "ancillary" states, then rivalries with those states themselves are likely to develop.

The upshot of this reassessment is that the relationship between enduring rivalry and diversionary activity is contingent upon states' general capacities to engage in conflict in the international system. It is likely that major powers, because of their superior capabilities, the costs they might stand to incur by engaging in conflict with their most important rivals, and the increased probability of victory against "ancillary" enemies, have both the capacity and incentives to target nonrivals for diversion. Conversely, nonmajor powers, because they are limited in their capacity to strategically extend their commitment sets for the purposes of resolving rivalries, and perhaps also because these limitations translate into the development of new rivalries that cannot themselves be addressed with further "ancillary" conflict, are more often forced to target rivals when they attempt to divert.

Hypothesis 2: *All else being equal, major powers will be more likely to target nonrivals than rivals when engaging in diversionary conflict.*

Hypothesis 3: *All else being equal, nonmajor powers will be more likely to target rivals than nonrivals given diversionary incentives.*

One must also allow for the possibility, however, that authors like James and Hristoulas (1994) are correct in positing that the postwar American experience is truly unique in regards to diversion. In fact, given Mitchell and Prins's argument concerning the "indirect" effects of rivalry on diversion and their contention that the size of America's postwar commitment set was the result of its overarching desire to prevail against the USSR and communism worldwide, there may exist another reason to believe that the United States was unique beyond its immense power. It is possible that postwar American leaders, in addition to having an unparalleled capacity to divert because of the United States's large commitment set, possessed a unique and compelling "mechanism" by which to publicly link "ancillary" conflict to national security and even survival (due to the rivalry with the Soviets and the battle against world communism), and therefore greater ability than other leaders (even those of major powers) to domestically portray diversionary conflict against nonrivals as being crucial to success against its most important rival. Insofar as other major powers did not possess the ability to regularly link "ancillary" conflict to important existing rivalries on the basis of global competition for national survival, then it is possible that the targeting of nonrivals is itself peculiar to the United States in the postwar era. Thus, I include hypotheses stipulating that the United States was unique among major powers both in its capacity to divert (because it possessed the largest number of international commitments) and in its ability to target nonrivals for diversion (due to the ability of its leaders to portray such "ancillary" conflict as crucial to the struggle against communism).

Hypothesis 4: *All else being equal, the United States will be more likely than all other states in the post–WWII era to initiate international conflict given diversionary incentives.*

Hypothesis 5: *All else being equal, the United States will be more likely than all other states in the post–WWII era to target nonrivals rather than rivals given diversionary incentives.*

Research Design and Analysis

I test the hypotheses derived above using annual directed-dyadic analyses of the data set developed by Mitchell and Prins for their 2004 study. An annual directed-dyadic research design allows for the identification of the amount of activity (in this case, militarized conflict) that any one state "directs" toward another state in a given year (e.g., State I → State J and State J → State I) and of the factors correlated with that activity. Mitchell and Prins test their hypotheses by gauging the association between enduring rivalry, the inflation rate, and militarized dispute initiation among politically relevant dyads in the international system for the period 1960–1999. Since the hypotheses in this paper are reflective of potential differences among the diversionary behaviors of nonmajor powers, major powers,[7] and the United States specifically, the population is first bifurcated on the basis of major power

[7]I rely upon the Correlates of War (COW) dataset to identify major powers. The United States, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and China are coded as major powers for the entire data range; Germany and Japan become major powers in 1991. I divide the sample on the basis of whether the state that is "directing" activity towards the other state is a major power.

status, and then trifurcated to single out the United States, with separate analyses being run on each subset.[8]

The binary dependent variable is taken from the COW MID dataset (Jones, Bremer, & Singer, 1996; Bremer, Ghosn, & Palmer, 2004), which codes the threat, display, and use of force by all states against all others for the period 1816–2002. If a state is listed as an initiator of a dispute and is a dispute originator (i.e., was involved on the first day of the dispute) against another state in a given dyad-year, the dependent variable is coded 1, and zero otherwise. For the central explanatory variables, Mitchell and Prins rely upon Diehl and Goertz's (2000) definition of enduring rivalry, which identifies as rivals "pairs of states that have fought a minimum of six militarized disputes over a time period of twenty or more years," and codes a rivalry as "ending when the states involved have experienced no militarized disputes for ten years" (Mitchell & Prins, 2004, 948). Rivals are expected to engage in conflict with greater regularity than nonrivals. Inflation, an indicator of domestic political weakness which is mainly chosen by Mitchell and Prins because of its relative availability, is measured as the natural log of the percent change in the consumer price index (CPI) as reported by the World Bank World Development Survey (2001) through 1999. A positive statistical association between inflation and MID initiation is considered by Mitchell and Prins to be indicative of diversionary conflict. Finally, since the hypotheses require an estimate of the impact of inflation on MID initiation given the presence of a rivalry between the two states in a dyad, the primary explanatory variable is a multiplicative interaction of the inflation and enduring rivalry measures. If, when accounting for the magnitude of the coefficients of each of the component variables, the coefficient of this interaction term is positive and significant, then inflation can be considered to increase the probability of MID initiation against rivals; if it is negative and significant, then inflation can be considered to increase the probability of MID initiation against nonrivals.

In addition to these, I use the four control variables that Mitchell and Prins include in their analyses. The first is relative power, which is a ratio of relative global capabilities shares (COW CINC score) of one state in a dyad to the combined capabilities of that state and the other state in the dyad (State I/(State I + State J)). Based on the notion that states are likely to attack others when the prospects of success are high (e.g., Bennett & Stam, 2000), states are expected to initiate conflict when they are more powerful than their dyadic opponents. As noted earlier, this dyadic measure captures a different dynamic than the systemic measure of major power. Second, geographic distance is controlled for using the natural log of the "great circle distance formula," which measures the distance between capital cities. Since states are expected to fight other states that are geographically closer to them with more regularity than states that are farther (e.g., Bremer, 1992), this variable is expected to be negatively and significantly related to MID initiation.[9] Third, I include

[8]In other words, I conduct separate analyses of the conflict activity of major powers, nonmajor powers, and the United States against all other included states. It must be noted that politically relevant dyads include only those dyads containing either contiguous states or at least one major power. As such, though Mitchell and Prins find no major differences in their findings between politically relevant dyads and all dyads for the period under investigation, it is possible that the results of my models would be different if all states were included. However, one could argue that findings concerning major power diversion in the context of politically relevant dyads are especially robust given the importance of opportunity to my hypotheses, as the remaining (contiguous) states in the dataset ostensibly have greater interaction opportunity (and therefore more conflict opportunity, against both rivals and nonrivals) than noncontiguous states.

[9]As Mitchell and Prins imply, since the dataset includes only politically relevant dyads, any analyses of nonmajor powers include only contiguous dyads, rendering the distance formula somewhat less applicable. Though the findings involving major powers reported here include the coefficient for the formula, other analyses that do not include this variable return almost identical substantive results concerning rivalry and diversion.

a control for joint democracy, which has been found by numerous works (e.g., Russett & Oneal, 2001) to have a pacifying effect on state relations. Finally, in order to further control for temporal dependence in the dependent variable, I include Mitchell and Prins's peace years variable, which measures the number of years that have elapsed since the two states in the dyad last experienced a MID. Several scholars concerned with the effects of temporal trends on conflict involvement (e.g., Reed, 2000) have found this variable to be negatively related to MID involvement and initiation.

As the dependent variable is binary (and its relationship with the explanatory variables therefore nonlinear), logit and/or probit analyses are most suitable (Long, 1997); this study employs only logit models. As noted by Mitchell and Prins, since the data take the form of a cross-sectional time series, and since temporal and cross-unit correlation can confound analysis, I employ generalized estimating equation (GEE) models with cubic splines. GEE models allow for population-averaged specification and control of dependence in the error structures of observations within panels (Zorn, 2001), and cubic splines mitigate the confounding effects of both linear and nonlinear (quadratic) temporal trends in binary data (Beck, Katz, & Tucker 1998).[10]

Results

A replication of Mitchell and Prins's original analysis of all politically relevant dyads yielded identical results to the ones Mitchell and Prins list in Table 1 (p. 952) and Figure 1 (p. 954) of their 2004 article: The coefficient for the interaction of inflation and enduring rivalry is positive and significant and predicted probability of MID initiation increases for rivals and decreases for nonrivals as inflation goes up. Moreover, the coefficient for inflation is negative and significant. Taken together, these findings provide solid evidence that, though states are generally less likely to target nonrivals when diversionary incentives are present, they are more likely to use force against rivals given such incentives. Finally, relative power is found to be positively associated, and joint democracy and geographic distance negatively associated, with MID initiation.

Table 1 of this article reports the results concerning the association of rivalry and diversion given the bifurcation of the data based on major power status. This table reflects models that include and do not include the rivalry–CPI interaction.

The first two columns contain the results of the analysis of nonmajor power dyads, and the last two contain the results of the analysis of major power dyads. In sum, it appears that Mitchell and Prins's findings hold only for nonmajor powers (Hypothesis 2).[11] Indeed, the findings of the first two columns are substantively identical to those produced by the original study; the direction and significance of every coefficient are the same. However, the findings for major powers seem to offer support for Hypotheses 1 and 3. First, the column labeled "Base model: Major powers" shows that, like other states, major powers are significantly more likely to initiate MIDs against enduring rivals. Yet, unlike other states, major powers appear significantly more likely to initiate MIDs when inflation is high. This lends some credence to the contention that the leaders of major powers, because they have increased capacities to divert due to relatively large commitment sets, are pushed

[10]Mitchell and Prins employ this method in their article. Though the GEE model allows for the specification of a particular temporally autoregressive correlation structure, it does not account for the duration component or hazard/failure rate of dependent variable incidence. Following from Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998), splines account for changes in the hazard rate within time periods, which are not controlled for in the GEE model. I would like to thank Christopher Zorn for his assistance regarding this issue.

[11]Later findings qualify this claim. See the discussion attendant to Table 2.

TABLE 1 Major power status, enduring rivalry, and diversion from high inflation, 1960–1999 (politically relevant dyads; splines as temporal control)

Variable	Base model: Nonmajor powers	Interactive model: Nonmajor powers	Base model: Major powers	Interactive model: Major powers
ln-differenced CPI	−0.01 (−0.74)	−0.04** (−2.71)	0.53** (4.67)	0.70** (4.67)
Enduring rivalry	1.81** (10.73)	2.00** (13.25)	1.96** (6.27)	2.38** (6.73)
CPI–rivalry interaction	—	0.08** (3.13)	—	−0.61** (−2.51)
Relative capabilities	1.25** (5.29)	0.53** (3.03)	−1.08* (−2.04)	−1.00* (−1.90)
ln distance	−0.27** (−4.42)	−0.38** (−8.04)	−0.12 (−0.72)	−0.10 (−0.59)
Joint democracy	−0.52** (−2.78)	−0.63** (−3.74)	−123** (−3.10)	−121** (−3.07)
Peace years	−0.01* (−1.65)	−0.02** (−3.08)	0.03* (−1.88)	−0.02* (−1.67)
Constant	−1.95** (−4.06)	−0.88** (−2.46)	−1.55 (−1.12)	−1.97 (−1.39)
N	22742	22742	14847	14847
Number of Groups	1489	1489	956	956
Chi-Squared	525.63**	536.35**	272.94**	277.49**

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$ (one-tailed tests).
Z-scores in parentheses. Cubic spline coefficients not shown.
Dependent variable is MID initiation.

toward diversionary action in times of economic weakness (possibly indicating support for Hypothesis 1).[12] Also, dyadic relative capabilities are negatively and significantly associated with MID initiation for major powers, indicating that as relative power decreasingly favors major powers, initiation is more likely. As it stands, this result differs from both the findings concerning nonmajor powers and the overall results produced by Mitchell and Prins.[13]

[12]Though the findings of the base models concerning inflation are of some interest, one must take care in assessing their overall robustness and/or reliability. As Mitchell and Prins (2004) and the findings of the interactive models presented here indicate, the base models are underspecified because they do not include the interaction between rivalry and inflation. Moreover, they do not account for differences in the absolute amount of MID initiation between major powers and nonmajor powers. See the discussion attendant to Figures 1 and 2. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggestions regarding this issue.

[13]Though interesting, further analyses indicate that both the tests conducted here and those done by Mitchell and Prins are underspecified with regards to dyadic relative power. First, additional models examining the conflict activity of major powers against other major powers reveal a positive and significant correlation between dyadic relative power and MID initiation. Second, the inclusion of a quadratic (squared) measure of relative capabilities reveals a positive and significant correlation between the raw power measure and initiation, but a negative and significant relationship between the squared measure and initiation. The same findings hold for nonmajor powers. Thus, there is evidence of the existence of a nonlinear, "inverted-U"-shaped relationship between relative power and conflict (first identified in the context of war by Mansfield, 1994). These findings are very important and should be acknowledged in further directed-dyadic research on diversion. However, as this paper seeks to test the viability of my argument vis-à-vis Mitchell and Prins's findings, and because the inclusion of the quadratic measure does not change the findings concerning inflation, rivalry, and initiation in either the overall, major power, or nonmajor power models, I continue to employ only the linear measure of power to maintain consistency with the original piece. I would again like to thank an anonymous reviewer for his/her suggestions regarding this issue.

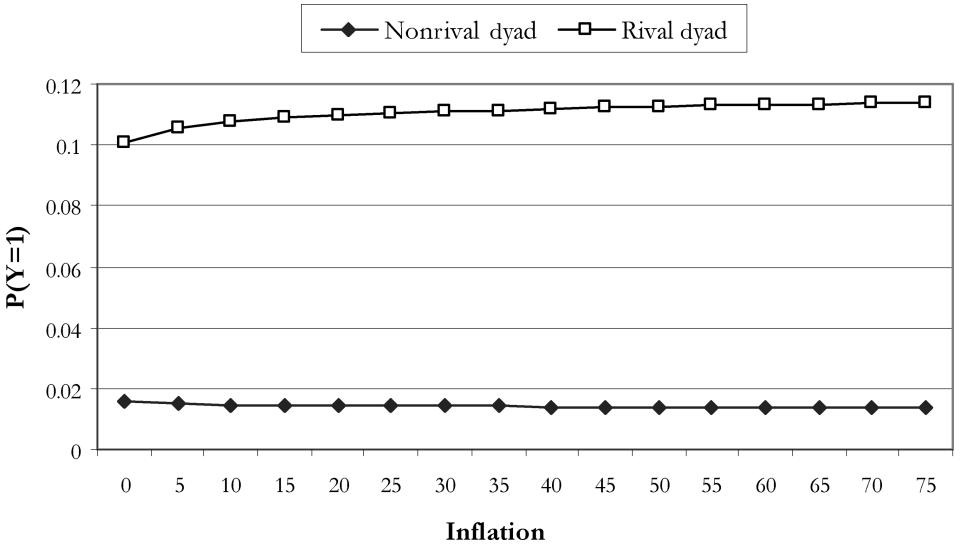

FIGURE 1 Predicted probability of nonmajor power MID initiation, 1960–1999.

Second, the column labeled "Interactive model: Major powers" seemingly provides support for Hypothesis 3: Major powers appear significantly more likely to initiate MIDs when inflation is high against nonrivals than against enduring rivals, even though they are still generally more likely to fight stronger states. If one is convinced (as implied by Mitchell and Prins) that states expand their commitment sets and conflict behavior to address existing rivalries, it seems apparent that major powers have a greater capacity to do so successfully—especially for the purposes of diversion—than lesser powers. Even if one does not accept that this process is operative, the findings support the contention that the diversionary targeting decisions of major powers are different than that of nonmajor powers.

Figures 1 and 2 plot the predicted probability of incident initiation given various levels of inflation for both nonmajor and major powers inside and outside the context of enduring rivalry. In order to present the findings in a more comprehensible fashion, the *x* axes of Figures 1–4 represent the inflation levels associated with the values of the raw measure used in the analysis (logged, first-differenced CPI). For example, a value of 5 in these figures represents a value of about 1.61 for the measure of logged CPI (i.e., exp[1.61] = 5). Therefore, the figures functionally compress negative logged, first-differenced CPI values into the area between inflation level values of 0 and 1. As such, these figures have the added advantageof eliminating the need to analyze the impact of extremely miniscule (and ostensibly unnoticed or unnoticeable) changes in the inflation level on MID initiation.[14]

[14]At the same time, also to enhance comprehensibility and due to space constraints, the upper ends of the *x* axes in Figures 1 and 2 have been set at 75, thus omitting from the predicted probability analyses several states with very extreme inflation levels (e.g., Angola in 1997, which initiated two MIDs with a logged first-differenced CPI change of +9.14, or an inflation level of 9321). Though an inflation level of 75 may still seem unrealistically large to some, several states (including major powers) have experienced inflation that high during the period under review *and* have initiated MIDs during those periods. For example, Russia initiated a MID in 1997 with a logged first-differenced CPI change of +4.94 (or an inflation level of 140). Thus, it can be concluded that the probabilities presented here are not predicting "false positives" in the actual values of the dependent variable in any systematic way.

TABLE 2 Enduring rivalry and diversion from high inflation for the United States and all other major powers, 1960–1999 (politically relevant dyads; splines as temporal control)

Variable	Base model: USA	Interactive model: USA	Base model: Other MPs	Interactive model: Other MPs
ln-differenced CPI	0.26 (1.50)	0.57* (2.21)	0.86** (5.34)	0.89** (5.42)
Enduring rivalry	1.19** (2.69)	1.52** (3.09)	0.21 (0.24)	0.69 (0.74)
CPI–rivalry interaction	—	−0.62* (−1.76)	—	0.08** (3.13)
Relative capabilities	−3.73** (−3.43)	−3.58** (−3.37)	−1.77* (−2.24)	−1.77** (−2.23)
ln distance	−0.24 (−0.75)	−0.28 (−0.90)	−0.77** (−3.40)	−0.77** (−3.39)
Joint democracy	−1.90** (−2.46)	−1.90** (−2.54)	−1.47** (−2.20)	−1.47** (−2.80)
Peace years	−0.03 (−1.04)	−0.02 (−0.87)	−0.01 (−0.45)	−0.01 (−0.42)
Constant	2.99 (0.93)	3.00 (0.96)	2.83 (1.60)	2.77 (1.56)
N	4234	4234	10613	10613
Number of groups	161	161	795	795
Chi-Squared	141.77**	146.36**	95.45**	95.76**

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$ (one-tailed tests).
Z-scores in parentheses. Cubic spline coefficients not shown.
Dependent variable is MID initiation.

As seen in Figure 1, nonmajor powers are always more likely to initiate MIDs against rivals, and predicted MID initiation increases (very slightly) against rivals and decreases (very slightly) against nonrivals as the inflation level rises. Figure 2, however, shows that while major powers are more likely to initiate MIDs against rivals than against nonrivals during periods of relatively low inflation (and that the predicted probability of incident initiation against rivals marginally increases as inflation goes up), rising inflation begins to reverse this trend. Indeed, at points where inflation is severe (at a magnitude of between 45 and 50, or about three standard deviations above the mean inflation level for major powers), major powers become more likely to target nonrivals than rivals for MIDs. Thus, we may conclude that rising inflation somewhat consistently closes the gap between expected major power MID initiation against rivals and nonrivals and that periods in which inflation is very severe are more likely to be characterized by MID initiation against nonrivals than against rivals. This finding therefore offers qualified support for Hypothesis 3.

A closer look at Figures 1 and 2 shows, however, that Hypothesis 1 is empirically unsupported when accounting for the interaction between inflation and rivalry. The data comprising these figures indicates that major powers are *never* predicted to initiate more MIDs (in an absolute sense) than nonmajor powers, regardless of the level of inflation. We must thus conclude that, though high inflation and the presence of rivalry appear to impact major and nonmajor power MID initiation in the expected ways relative to lower/null values of inflation and rivalry *for those states*, a comparison of the predicted frequencies of initiation across groups fails to bear out the prediction that major powers generally initiate more MIDs than nonmajor powers given diversionary incentives.

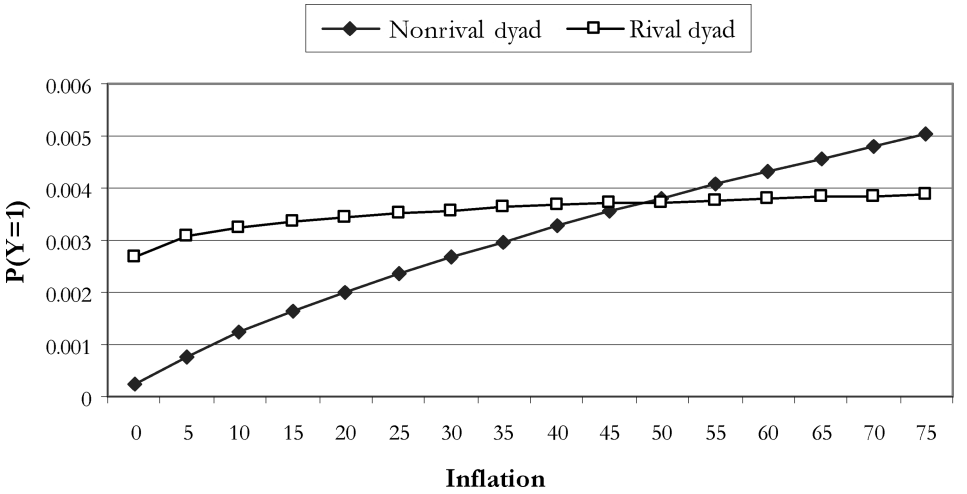

FIGURE 2 Predicted probability of major power MID initiation, 1960–1999.

The Uniqueness of the United States?

Hypothesis 4 allows for the possibility that the United States is unique among all states in its capacity to divert, and Hypothesis 5 stipulates that the United States is unique in its decision making regarding rivalry and diversionary targeting. Specifically, if the findings on major power status and diversion against nonrivals (Hypothesis 3) are being driven by the American case, then there is good reason to believe that U.S. leaders are different than those of other major powers not only in their capacity to divert (based on commitment set breadth) but also in their ability to link "ancillary" conflict to America's most important rivals. Table 2 includes the results of analyses of U.S. diversionary activity and that of all other major powers.

The first column of Table 2 indicates that the United States is not significantly more likely to initiate MIDs given high inflation in the post-1960 period; the sign of the coefficient for CPI is in the expected direction, but barely fails to achieve statistical significance at the .05 level. Nevertheless, the interactive model reported in the second column indicates that the United States is both significantly likely to initiate MIDs given high inflation in the post-1960 period and more likely to do so against nonrivals than against rivals, findings that are almost identical to the results for all major powers reported in Table 1.[15] Some very important similarities and differences are found, however, in the analyses of all other major powers reported in the third and fourth columns. First, in both the base and interactive models, major powers other than the United States are found to initiate MIDs given high inflation with significant regularity. Yet the direction and significance of the interaction coefficient in the fourth column indicates that these states are similar to nonmajor powers in their diversionary targeting decisions regarding rivals: They appear more likely to target rivals than nonrivals when inflation is high (qualifying the support for Hypothesis 2 provided

[15] As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, I divided the data on U.S. initiation activity at 1989 to determine, as I claim, that one should expect the American targeting of nonrivals to be at its height during the Cold War. Analyses of these two periods offer limited support; while the United States was likely to target nonrivals given high inflation prior to 1990, the almost total absence of rivalries involving the United States in the post–Cold War era precludes GEE model convergence. Thus, we may conclude that when the United States did have rivals, including the USSR, it was more likely to target nonrivals for diversion.

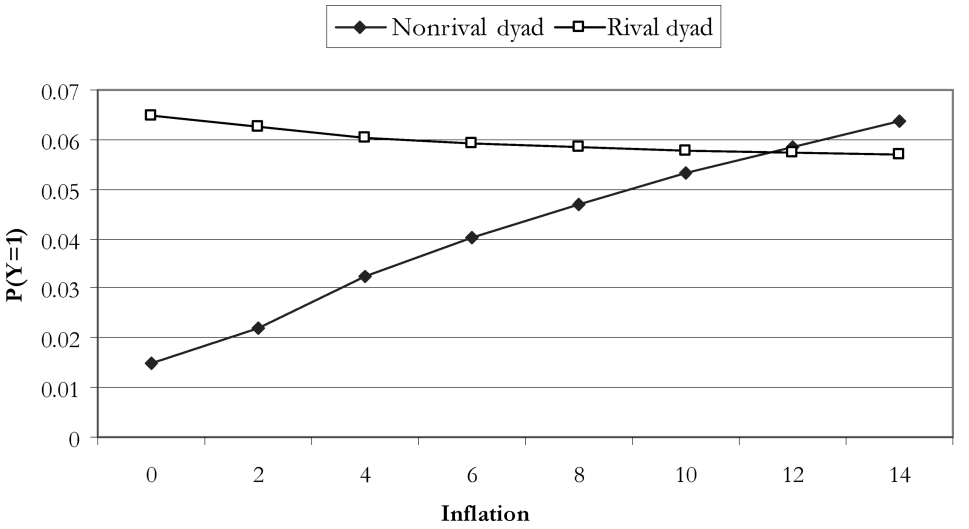

FIGURE 3 Predicted probability of U.S. MID initiation, 1960–1999.

by Table 1). Interestingly, these columns also reveal that major powers other than the United States do not target enduring rivals with greater frequency than nonrivals in their general conflict activity. Overall, the results given in Table 2 suggest that the United States is not unique in its capacity to use force given high inflation after 1960, but that the relationships between major power diversionary targeting and rivalry reported in Table 1 are being driven largely by the American diversionary experience (leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 3 and acceptance of Hypothesis 5).[16]

Figures 3 and 4 plot the predicted probability of incident initiation given various levels of inflation for both the United States and other major powers inside and outside the context of enduring rivalry.

Figure 3 shows that the positive differential between expected incident initiations against rivals over nonrivals is at its greatest at the lowest levels of American inflation and that predicted incident initiation decreases against rivals and increases against nonrivals as inflation rises. At relatively severe levels of inflation (at about 11, or about two and a half standard deviations above the mean),[17] the United States becomes more likely to target nonrivals than rivals for MIDs. Figure 4 suggests that other major powers are significantly different from the United States and nonmajor powers in diversionary targeting behavior, but that the relationship is more nuanced than an initial reading of the raw findings indicates. Specifically, while other major powers are always at least marginally more likely to initiate MIDs against rivals than nonrivals (they are about 1.75 times more likely to initiate against rivals than nonrivals at near-zero inflation), and the positive differential between expected MID initiations against rivals over nonrivals steadily increases as inflation rises (they are over two times more likely to initiate against rivals than nonrivals at levels of inflation near 75), the predicted probability of MID initiation against nonrivals also goes up as inflation rises. Thus, nonrivals are targeted by other major powers with more frequency at higher

[16]Table 2 also lends some credence to the notion that the United States possessed the greatest capacity to project power of all states in the international system. The null finding concerning the coefficient for distance indicates that the United States' experience is driving the null finding for that variable regarding all major powers in Table 1.

[17]As with other states, the United States does actually (and is not just predicted to) initiate MIDs when inflation is this high (e.g., against North Korea in 1981, with an inflation level of over 12).

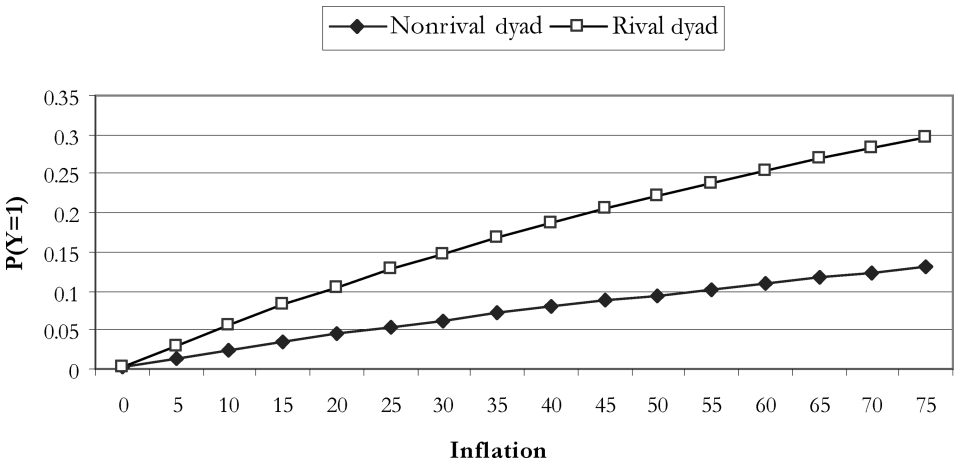

FIGURE 4 Predicted probability of MID initiation by all major powers except the United States, 1960–1999.

levels of inflation than they are at lower levels, but are never targeted more frequently than rivals, even at the highest levels of inflation. One would therefore conclude that, among major powers (and all other states, when analyzed aggregately), the United States is the only country to initiate more diversionary MIDs against nonrivals than rivals, and only at very high levels of inflation. As such, Mitchell and Prins's (2004) original argument is supported for nonmajor and major powers, with the important exception of the most powerful and broadly committed state in the system.

A final issue concerns differences in the absolute magnitude of American MID initiation and MID initiation by all other states. The raw data comprising Figures 1 and 2 revealed that major powers were less likely than nonmajor powers to initiate MIDs at all levels of inflation, leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 1. However, a comparison of the data comprising Figures 1, 3, and 4 indicates that the United States is more likely to initiate MIDs than both other major powers and nonmajor powers at all levels of inflation (when the values of all remaining variables are held at their means). As such, analyses of the American experience produce empirical support for Hypothesis 4.

Discussion and Conclusion

Given the findings presented in this paper, what practical conclusions can be drawn concerning the relationship among diversion, rivalry, and major power status? Generally, it appears as though (a) only the most powerful state in the international system from 1960 to 1999, the United States, was unique in its general capacity to divert from high inflation; and (b) the relationship between rivalry and diversion is variable across states with different levels of "systemic" opportunity as measured by power status. While nonmajor powers significantly curtail their conflict activity against nonrivals and increase their targeting of rivals as their inflation levels rise, major powers other than the United States are more likely to target both rivals and nonrivals when inflation is relatively high than when it is relatively low, even though they always target rivals with more frequency. Only the United States, and only at the highest levels of inflation, targets nonrivals more often than rivals for diversionary purposes.

Taken together, these findings advance our understanding of the diversionary use of force in several ways. In general, they serve to better specify the relationship between rivalry and diversion first identified by Mitchell and Prins (2004). Notably, the findings

concerning the increased diversionary targeting of rivals and decreased diversionary targeting of nonrivals (Mitchell and Prins's major substantive finding) may, as they hold only for nonmajor powers, validate the claim that such states cannot expand their commitment sets for diversionary purposes (at least not without creating new rivalries). Moreover, the findings regarding major powers other than the United States indicate that such states both engage in more conflict with rivals and increase their commitment sets when diverting. Perhaps the findings with the broadest implications, however, involve the United States. The results here indicate that America's diversionary uniqueness seems to derive not only from its superior strength or broad commitments (as James & Hristoulas, 1994, have claimed), but perhaps also from the unique incentives and capabilities that its leaders had during the Cold War to target nonrivals for diversion at the times when such action was most attractive (as Mitchell and Prins have implied). Because conflict with most nonrivals could be portrayed to the American public as integral to success in the global struggle against the Soviets and communism, because conflict against the Soviets themselves was more costly and less "winnable" than against other states, and because the United States had an increased relative capacity to cast a broad international net without creating new rivalries, American leaders likely had exclusive security and diversionary incentives to fight nonrivals at points when domestic conditions were at their worst. Perhaps because other major powers did not have such readily available linkage mechanisms, their diversionary activity could not be conducted mainly or mostly against nonrivals.

It should be noted that further refinements to this study could produce important caveats. First, it is reasonable to argue that the USSR, because it too was embroiled in a global struggle during the Cold War, possessed a similar mechanism that allowed for the linkage of "ancillary" conflict to its rivalry with the United States. Additional analyses, however, were unable to identify such a linkage due to missing inflation data for the Soviet case. Second, as noted earlier, Mitchell and Prins's study finds that the targeting of rivals for diversion is undertaken only by nondemocratic states. Perhaps, then, it is not solely the United States that targets nonrivals for diversion, but all democratic major powers. Analyses of all remaining democratic major powers (Great Britain, France, and Japan, and Germany for portions of the time series) indicate that this is not the case: neither inflation nor the interaction term is significantly related to MID initiation in these models. Finally, it is possible that, by including several years in the analysis that were not characterized by the Cold War rivalry (i.e., 1993–1999), the results may not be reflective of American activity only within that period. However, the results concerning the American targeting of nonrivals remain almost identical for those of the full model when these years are removed.

Useful extensions of this study could include indicators of domestic distress other than inflation that might have different effects on diversionary propensities. For instance, Fordham (1998b) finds evidence in the American case that liberal leaders, because they appeal to their constituent bases when undertaking domestic ameliorative measures to battle unemployment, are more likely to divert when inflation is high, as domestic remedies for inflation run counter to liberal interests. Based on the same considerations, conservative leaders are more likely to divert from high unemployment than high inflation. The addition of both these other measures of distress and the ideological orientations of governments could reveal further important differences in the relationship among diversion, rivalry, and capacity.

References

Barbieri, K. 1996. *Economic interdependence and militarized interstate conflict, 1870–1985*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY.

Beck, N., J. M. Katz, and R. Tucker. 1998. Taking time seriously: Time-series cross-section analysis with a binary dependent variable. *American Journal of Political Science* 42: 1260–1288.

Bennett, D. S., and T. Nordstrom. 2000. Foreign policy substitutability and internal economic problems in enduring rivalries. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44: 33–61.

Bennett, D. S., and A. Stam. 2000. *EUGene*: A conceptual manual. *International Interactions* 26: 179–204.

Bodin, J. 1576/1955. *Six books of the commonwealth*. Abridged and translated by M. Tooley. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bremer, S. A. 1992. Dangerous dyads: Conditions affecting the likelihood of interstate war. 1816–1965. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36: 309–341.

Bremer, S. A., F. Ghosn, and G. Palmer. 2004. The militarized interstate dispute data sets. Version 3.0: Procedures, coding rules, and description. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 21: 133–154.

Clark, D. H. 2003. Can strategic interaction divert diversionary behavior? A model of US conflict propensity. *Journal of Politics* 65: 1013–1039.

Coser, L. 1956. *The functions of social conflict*. New York: Free Press.

DeRouen, K. 1995. The indirect link: Politics, the economy, and the use of force. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39: 671–695.

DeRouen, K. 2000. Presidents and the diversionary use of force: A research note. *International Studies Quarterly* 44: 317–328.

Diehl, P. F., and G. Goertz. 2000. *War and peace in international rivalry*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Downs, G. W., and D. M. Rocke. 1995. *Optimal imperfection? Domestic uncertainty and institutions in international relations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Enterline, A. J., and K. S. Gleditsch. 2000. Threats, opportunity, and force: Repression and the diversion of domestic pressure. 1948–1982. *International Interactions* 26: 21–53.

Fordham, B. 1998a. The politics of threat perception and the use of force: A political economy model of U.S. uses of force, 1949–1994. *International Studies Quarterly* 42: 567–590.

Fordham, B. 1998b. Partisanship, macroeconomic policy, and U.S. uses of force, 1949–1994. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42:418–439.

Fordham, B. 2002. Another look at parties, voters, and the use of force abroad. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46: 572–596.

Fordham, B. 2005. Strategic conflict avoidance and the diversionary use of force. *Journal of Politics* 67: 132–153.

Gaddis, J. L. 1992. *The United States and the end of the Cold War*. New York: Oxford.

Gelpi, C. 1997. Democratic diversions: Governmental structure and the externalization of domestic conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41: 255–282.

Gowa, J. 1998. Politics at the water's edge: Parties, voters and the use of force abroad. *International Organization* 52: 307–324.

Haldi, S. B. 2003. *Why wars widen: A theory of predation and balancing*. London: Frank Cass.

Harkavy, R. E. 1982. *Great power competition for overseas bases: The geopolitics of access diplomacy*. New York: Pergamon Press.

Heldt, B. 1999. Domestic politics, absolute deprivation, and the use of armed force in interstate territorial disputes, 1950–1990. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43: 451–478.

Hess, G., and A. Orphanides. 1995. War politics: An economic, rational-voter framework. *American Economic Review* 85: 828–846.

James, P., and Hristoulas, A. 1994. Domestic politics and foreign policy: Evaluating a model of crisis activity for the United States. *Journal of Politics* 56: 327–348.

James, P., and J. R. Oneal. 1991. The influence of domestic and international politics on the president's use of force. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35: 307–332.

Jones, D., S. Bremer, and J. D. Singer. 1996. Militarized interstate disputes, 1816–1992: Rationale, coding rules, and empirical patterns. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 15: 163–213.

Leeds, B. A., and D. Davis. 1997. Domestic political vulnerability and international disputes. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41: 814–834.

Levy, J. S. 1989. The diversionary theory of war: A critique. In *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus Midlarsky, pp. 259–288. London: Unwin-Hyman.

Lian, B., and J. R. Oneal. 1993. Presidents, the use of military force and public opinion. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37: 277–300.

Long, J. S. 1997. *Regression models for categorical and limited dependent variables*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Mansfield, E. 1994. *Power, trade, and war*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mearsheimer, J. 2001. *The tragedy of great power politics*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Meernik, J. 1994. Presidential decision making and the political use of force. *International Studies Quarterly* 38: 121–138.

Meernik, J. 2000. Modeling international crises and the political use of international force by the USA. *Journal of Peace Research* 37: 547–562.

Meernik, J., and P. Waterman. 1996. The myth of the diversionary use of force by American presidents. *Political Research Quarterly* 49: 573–590.

Miller, R. A. 1995. Domestic structures and the diversionary use of force. *American Journal of Political Science* 39: 760–785.

Miller, R. A. 1999. Regime type, strategic interaction, and the diversionary use of force. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43: 388–402.

Mitchell, S. M., and B. C. Prins. 2004. Rivalry and diversionary uses of force. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48: 937–961.

Morgan, T. C., and C. Anderson. 1999. Domestic support and diversionary external conflict in Great Britain. 1950–1992. *Journal of Politics* 61: 799–814.

Morgan, T. C., and K. Bickers. 1992. Domestic discontent and the external use of force. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36: 25–32.

Mueller, J. 1973. *War, presidents, and public opinion*. New York: Wiley Press.

Ostrom, C., and B. Job. 1986. The president and the political use of force. *American Political Science Review* 80: 541–566.

Pickering, J., and E. F. Kisangani. 2005. Democracy and diversionary military intervention: Reassessing regime type and the diversionary hypothesis. *International Studies Quarterly* 49: 23–43.

Reed, W. 2000. A unified statistical model of conflict onset and initiation. *American Journal of Political Science* 44: 48–93.

Russett, B. 1990. Economic decline, electoral pressure, and the initiation of international conflict. In *Prisoners of War?*, eds. C. Gochman and N. Sabrosky, pp. 123–140. Lexington, MA: DC Heath and Co.

Russett, B., and J. R. Oneal. 2001. *Triangulating peace: Democracy, interdependence, and international organizations*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Simmel, G. 1955. *Conflict and the web of group affiliations*. Translated by Kurt Wolff and Reinhardt Bendix. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Smith, A. 1996. Diversionary foreign policy in democratic systems. *International Studies Quarterly* 40: 133–153.

Waltz, K. 1967. Electoral punishment and foreign policy crisis. In *Domestic sources of foreign policy*, ed. J. Rosenau, pp. 263–294. New York: Free Press.

World Bank. 1997. *World development indicators* [CD-ROM]. London: World Bank.

Zorn, C. 2001. Generalized estimating equation models for correlated data: A review with applications. *American Journal of Political Science* 45: 470–490.