Competitive Intervention, Protracted Conflict, and the Global Prevalence of Civil War

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This article develops a theory of competitive intervention in civil war to explain variation in the global prevalence of intrastate conflict. I describe the distortionary effects competitive interventions have on domestic bargaining processes and explain the unique strategic dilemmas they entail for third-party interveners. The theory uncovers the conditional nature of intervention under the shadow of inadvertent escalation and moves beyond popular anecdotes about "proxy wars" by deriving theoretically grounded propositions about the strategic logics motivating intervener behaviors. I then link temporal variation in patterns of competitive intervention to recent decreases in the prevalence and average duration of internal conflicts. The theory is tested with a quantitative analysis of all civil wars fought between 1975 and 2009 and a qualitative case study of the Angolan civil war (1975–1991). My results underscore the importance of a generalizable account of competitive intervention that not only explains past conflicts, but also informs contemporary policy.

Reductions in the prevalence of civil war—together with the analogous decline of interstate conflict—have inspired claims that the international community is "winning the war on war" ([Goldstein 2011](#)). The number of civil conflicts generating twenty-five battle-related deaths per year declined by more than 20 percent between 1991 and 2009; civil wars generating one thousand battle-related deaths per year declined by more than 50 percent.[1] While armed conflict hasn't disappeared entirely, it has been suggested that today's civil wars should be understood less as traditional warfare and more as organized crime. They are "remnants of war"—opportunistic predation by thugs and other "residual combatants" ([Mueller 2004](#)).

Curiously, however, those proclaiming the "decline of war" have overlooked the fact that the frequency of conflict outbreaks has increased in the post–Cold War period. In fact, the rate of outbreaks has almost doubled since 1991. That the number of ongoing conflicts has declined while the rate of outbreaks has increased begs the following question: what explains changing trends in the prevalence of intrastate conflict?

In this article, I highlight the role of what I call *competitive intervention*—two-sided, simultaneous military assistance from different third-party states to both government and rebel combatants. In particular, I develop a theory that explains why competitive intervention prolongs civil war duration. I then show that fewer conflicts have been afflicted by competitive intervention in the post–Cold War period. As competitive intervention has waned, average conflict dura-

[1] See Table 1 in [Themnér and Wallensteen (2014](#), 543).

tions have decreased, and the global prevalence of civil war has therefore declined.

I begin by explaining how competitive intervention distorts the bargaining process of domestic combatants in ways that prolong civil wars. Next, I describe the unique strategic dilemmas competitive interventions entail for third-party interveners. I show that while "winning" may be the primary objective for a civil war's domestic combatants, the need to avoid large-scale confrontations with one another leads third-party interveners to pursue more limited objectives. Yet, while limits serve to constrain intervener confrontation, they simultaneously prevent interveners from conferring decisive military advantages on their domestic clients. In effect, the contradiction inherent in the need to intervene and the need to control escalation warps interveners' positive objectives of winning into negative objectives of "not losing." This result not only sheds new light on the determinants of protracted conflict, but also answers a lingering question about external intervention in internal war—namely, why it is that interveners often invest in stalemated conflicts for many years or even decades, rather than do what is necessary to help their side *win*.

To account for decreases in the prevalence of intrastate conflict, I link international systemic change to variation in the percentage of conflicts afflicted by competitive intervention over time. The end of the Cold War and the attendant termination of an era of competitive intervention by the United States and Soviet Union is a contributing factor to the reversal in trends. However, the end of superpower proxy war does not entirely explain the decline—temporal shifts in the prevalence of competitive intervention by less powerful states have also played an important role. Moreover, the processes linking the Cold War to protracted conflict continue to impact some of today's most violent civil wars. This underscores that the much touted "decline in war" is not guaranteed to continue.

By developing these arguments, this article contributes to a growing body of scholarship that explores how the international system conditions conflict intensity, outcomes, and technologies of rebellion ([Lacina 2006](#); [Kalyvas and Balcells 2010](#); [Kreutz 2010](#)). It complements existing work by moving beyond popular anecdotes about Cold War era "proxy wars" and deriving theoretically grounded propositions
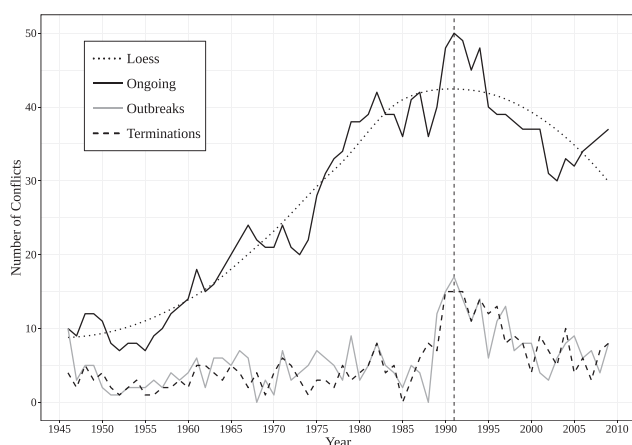
Figure 1. Trends in the prevalence of intrastate conflict with at least twenty-five battle-related deaths per year, 1946–2009. *Note*: Compiled using data from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset.

about the strategic logics motivating competitive interventions in civil wars. In doing so, it uncovers the conditional nature of intervention under the shadow of inadvertent escalation, draws attention to the pernicious role that competitive interventions by lesser powers have played in civil wars, and underscores the importance of a generalizable theory of competitive intervention that not only explains past conflicts, but also informs contemporary policy.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it overviews how trends in the prevalence of internal conflict have changed over time and reviews the existing literature. Second, it presents my theory of competitive intervention in civil war. Third, it tests the theory with a quantitative analysis of all civil wars fought between 1975 and 2009 and a qualitative case study of the Angolan civil war (1975–1991). Finally, it concludes by outlining the article's implications for researchers and the policy community.

Trends in the Prevalence of Internal Conflict

In a widely cited article, Fearon and Laitin (2003, 75, emphasis in original) observe that, "contrary to common opinion, the prevalence of civil war in the 1990s was *not* due to the end of the Cold War and associated changes in the international system," but rather "resulted from a steady, gradual accumulation of civil conflicts that began immediately after World War II." While the rate of conflict outbreaks varied during the Cold War, it did not trend upward or downward over time. Thus, while states have been subject to more or less the same risk of onset, the conflicts they suffer have proven more difficult to end in the post–World War II period. Figure 1 presents a visual summary of this argument, confirming that, despite a relatively constant rate of outbreaks, there was a gradual increase in the number of ongoing intrastate conflicts throughout the Cold War period.

As soon as the Cold War comes to an end, however, there is a *decrease* in the prevalence of internal conflict. Moreover, the post–Cold War reduction is as dramatic as the Cold War era increase. This sudden decline has attracted scholarly attention, as a growing literature documents that, contrary to popular images of rampant warfare, the international system has actually been experiencing a "decline in war"

(Gurr, Marshall, and Khosla 2000; Goldstein 2011; Pinker 2011).[2]

What is driving the reversal in trends? Curiously, the existing literature has overlooked the fact that reductions in the prevalence of intrastate conflict have occurred despite an *increase* in the rate of outbreaks in the post–Cold War period. Indeed, while the Cold War era experienced an average 4.51 conflict outbreaks per year, the post–Cold War era has seen an average 8.63 conflict outbreaks per year. This suggests that, while the number of ongoing conflicts increased due to longer durations throughout the Cold War—as identified by Fearon and Laitin—it has been decreasing due to shorter durations in the post–Cold War period. In effect, it would seem that the driver of temporal trends in the prevalence of internal conflict is not *onsets*, but rather *durations*.

A natural starting point to assess this proposition is the existing literature. Because they are by definition *intra*state conflicts, much of this research has examined domestic factors: GDP per capita (Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom 2004), regime type (Lyall 2010), natural resources (Lujala 2010), population size (Raleigh and Hegre 2009), ethnic exclusion (Wucherpfennig et al. 2012), territorial grievances (Goddard 2006), and the number of combatants vying for victory (Cunningham 2011), among others. These findings provide important insights into the determinants of protracted wars. However, many of these explanations privilege structural variables that change too slowly to fully account for the sharp discontinuity in the prevalence of internal conflict. Moreover, the closed-polity approach adopted in many existing studies overlooks the international processes that influence civil wars.

Interest in the international dimensions of intrastate conflict has been longstanding. One perspective holds that external interventions help end civil wars by solving credible commitment problems faced by domestic combatants (Walter 1997). Support for these arguments can be found in studies that examine United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations, which reduce the risk of conflict recurrence (Fortna 2008). Some scholars suggest this finding helps explain the decline in civil war (Goldstein 2011). Yet, much of this literature studies the duration of postconflict *peace*, not the duration of conflict itself, and research has found the UN to be "remarkably ill-suited" for peace-enforcement strategies that require coercive force (Doyle and Sambanis 2006, 185).

Other scholars highlight that meddling by external states can make conflicts more difficult to resolve. For example, civil wars can be exploited by third-party states to prolong the suffering of their interstate rivals (Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski 2005). The simultaneous provision of troops to both government and rebel forces has also been linked to increased conflict duration, namely by generating battlefield stalemates (Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000). Dual-sided interventions below the level of troop deployments—such as weapons transfers or financial aid—have likewise been associated with longer wars (Regan 2002), though methodological complications have impeded substantive interpretation of these results.[3] More recent work explains how fungible support to rebels in particular increases uncertainty over their war-fighting capabilities in ways that prolong conflicts (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017).

[2]A related debate has emerged over the decline of combat deaths. See Gohdes and Price (2013), Lacina and Gleditsch (2013), and Fazal (2014).

[3]Specifically, monotone likelihood afflicts the aforementioned study in the form of inflated coefficient estimates. I discuss monotone likelihood in more detail below.

In this article, I build on this literature to further develop our understanding of third-party intervention, conflict duration, and their links to the global prevalence of intrastate conflict in three ways. First, while existing research examines the patron-client relationship of interveners and domestic combatants, less attention has been paid to the strategic interactions of the interveners themselves—that is, the ways in which *intervener competition* over the stakes of a conflict affect its dynamics and outcomes. Exploring this additional dimension of the intervention process refines the concept of proxy war by identifying the strategic logics that motivate it.

Second, there remains a tension in the literature between those who argue that interventions help end civil wars and those who argue that they prolong them. This suggests there is a need to more rigorously identify the mechanisms that link interventions to the microlevel dynamics of the civil war bargaining process.

Finally, the existing literature struggles to explain a lingering puzzle of external intervention and internal war: why do interveners often remain engaged in foreign conflicts for very long periods of time? Investments in civil wars make sense when domestic combatants are provided decisive military advantages that can quickly win the war, but they become puzzling when interveners maintain their support over the course of many years, or even decades. Why do intervening states continue to invest in stalemated conflicts in seemingly suboptimal ways? Why do they not do what is necessary to ensure their domestic clients *win*?

Theory: Competitive Intervention and Civil War

Given the costs associated with violent conflict, an important challenge for theories of civil war is to explain why combatants delay negotiated settlement in favor of continued fighting. Precisely because war is so costly, opponents should have strong incentives to coordinate their expectations about a conflict's likely outcome as soon as possible. Importantly, this is true for both civil war combatants engaged on the battlefield and third-party interveners supporting domestic forces. While interveners rarely pay the direct costs of war—troop casualties, civilian victimization, and destruction of property—they often invest substantial resources to affect battlefield outcomes. Consequently, a theory of external intervention must not only explain the distortionary effects of military aid on domestic bargaining processes, but also the strategic logics motivating interveners. To those ends, this section develops a generalizable theory of what I call "competitive intervention" to link the domestic battlefield with the dynamics of interstate competition.

I define competitive interventions as opposing, simultaneous transfers of military assistance from different third-party states to both government and rebel combatants engaged in a civil war. They are *competitive* insofar as they are attempts by third-party states to secure competing interests through opposing domestic combatant forces. They are *interventions* insofar as they employ military and/or economic instruments to influence the outcomes of civil wars in foreign countries by affecting the balance of power between government and rebel forces. In what follows, I first establish the microfoundations of competitive intervention and civil war duration and then develop a macrolevel account from the perspective of intervening states. I conclude the section by considering how international systemic change has affected patterns of competitive intervention over time.

Microfoundations: Competitive Intervention and Domestic Bargaining Processes

What explains protracted conflict in the face of mounting costs for domestic combatants? The bargaining approach to war provides a powerful framework to examine this question.[4] It models violent conflict as a coercive bargaining process that ends when opponents coordinate their expectations about the likely outcome of a war. Coordination of expectations is delayed because combatants possess asymmetric information about their willingness and ability to fight. The possession of asymmetric information generates powerful incentives for both sides to misrepresent their capabilities and resolve in order to secure a better settlement than they would otherwise receive. Assuming that they value the future sufficiently and that different types of opponents meaningfully vary in their probabilities of battlefield success, combatants will opt to delay agreement in order to accrue information about the relative capabilities and resolve of their opponent and to avoid settling prematurely on worse terms.[5] This information is attained through fighting, which reveals each sides' ability to endure and impose costs.

War is conceptualized as the means through which information is revealed about the combatants' capabilities and resolve. As they win or lose engagements, combatants update their beliefs about the likely outcome of continued fighting. Victories in battle embolden a combatant to raise its war-terminating demands; defeats encourage less demanding settlement terms. Over time, the sequence of victories and defeats coordinates the expectations of both sides. Negotiated settlements become possible once opponents learn enough about their prospects in war to decide that its continuation will not earn additional concessions.

Insofar as war terminates once fighting has lost its informational content and the expectations of combatants have converged, the timing of a given settlement will be a function of the rate at which fighting is able to transmit information about the combatants. A corollary of this proposition is the expectation that factors that delay or distort the information-transmission function of fighting will postpone the convergence of expectations that is necessary for settlement. Competitive intervention in civil war has three such effects.

First, competitive intervention delays the convergence of domestic combatants' expectations by decreasing their anticipated costs of war. External resources support an ongoing war effort by providing additional weapons, financing, and equipment, thereby liberating combatants from domestic resource constraints. As the costs of fighting fall, combatants' relative value for war over peace increases. This delays conflict termination by reducing the set of negotiated settlements that both sides prefer to war while subsidizing continued fighting today in the interest of greater concessions in the future.

Second, competitive intervention encourages continued fighting by balancing combatant capabilities.[6] As capabilities shift toward parity, uncertainty about the likely outcome of battlefield clashes is increased, and the significance of

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[4] For a review of the bargaining approach to civil war, see Walter (2009).

[5] If combatants do not value the future, they have little incentive to bear costly delays to secure better outcomes; if different types of opponents are equally likely to prevail in battle, combatants have little incentive to delay agreement to accrue information about the type they are facing. See Slantchev (2003).

[6] "Balance" need not mean the provision of equivalent quantities and qualities of weapons, but rather the delivery of assistance capable of curtailing an opponent's advantages.

unobservables, such as resolve, is enhanced. In such situations, combatants are strongly incentivized to misrepresent to secure more favorable terms. Thus, assuming that the variance of estimates of the probability of victory is a function of the distribution of power, civil war combatants must fight additional battles to acquire information, signal capability and resolve, and avoid settling on inequitable terms.[7] In effect, parity generates uncertainty, and uncertainty prolongs conflict by increasing the relative value of fighting.

Finally, competitive intervention complicates the bargaining process by increasing information asymmetries. Military aid is often difficult to observe, obscured by secrecy and covert networks. The inability to fully observe the quantity and quality of external aid impedes combatants' efforts to estimate their opponent's capabilities and costs of conflict, while also encouraging recipients to misrepresent the advantages they have accrued from foreign sources. Even in cases where external aid is fully observable, uncertainty about an opponent's capacity to effectively deploy provisioned capabilities, exploit military technology, or execute strategy complicates estimates of the probability of victory. Here again, uncertainty generates divergent expectations about relative strength and resolve, thereby increasing the relative value of fighting.

By reducing the costs of war, balancing combatant capabilities, and increasing information asymmetries, competitive intervention encourages continued conflict between domestic combatants. For rebel and government forces alike, competitive intervention increases the relative value of fighting while decreasing the set of negotiated agreements acceptable to both parties. This generates powerful incentives to forgo settlement today in the interest of greater returns tomorrow.

Macro Motivations: Interstate Competition and Competitive Intervention

The model described above helps explain why competitive intervention would encourage prolonged fighting between domestic combatants, but why do external states often invest in costly civil wars for long periods of time? Why do they not do what is necessary to ensure their domestic clients *win*? To answer this question, I shift the level of analysis from the microlevel of domestic combatants to the macrolevel of competitively intervening states.

The distribution of military aid to domestic combatants can be understood as an instrument of foreign policy, provisioned to secure a sponsor's national interests. Civil wars present a number of threats (e.g., risks to foreign investments), but also opportunities (e.g., to overthrow rivals), that incentivize third-party states to respond in ways that shape conflict dynamics and outcomes. Like any international policy issue, however, the interests of states are often overlapping and competing. While some profit from the persistence of the status quo, others are advantaged by its revision. Competing interests generate divergent responses, which often take the form of competitive interventions.

Competitive intervention presents a unique strategic dilemma for intervening states. The desire to improve the battlefield situation of a client encourages an intervener to escalate the scope of its support. Greater quantities of war

matériel, more sophisticated weapon systems, or the deployment of troops can reinforce a client's own forces, improving their battlefield performance and their probability of victory—a victory that can deliver an intervener the spoils of war.

However, the desire to escalate must be balanced by the uncertainty surrounding how an opposing intervener might respond. Viewing the increasing scope of its competitor's intervention, an opponent is incentivized to expand its own participation in the war. The opponent might respond "in kind," negating the military gains achieved by its competitor through increasing levels of violence. But the opponent might also counterescalate, further expanding the scope of intervention to punish its competitor and affect a reprisal. The latter response is especially precarious insofar as it risks a spiraling of actions and reactions leading to ever larger confrontations between the interveners. This threat of inadvertent escalation—perhaps to the level of war between the interveners—looms in the background of competitive interventions.[8]

Competitive interveners face a painful dilemma: their national interest generates upward pressure to provide support at a level sufficient to ensure their client enjoys a decisive military advantage; yet, the risk of responses in kind, counterescalations, and action-reaction dynamics generates downward pressure to constrain the scope of that support to avoid uncontrolled escalation.[9] In effect, competitive interveners find themselves in a mixed-motive strategic game of interdependent decision-making; the challenge for both is to pursue their individual interests while limiting mutual destruction of potential gains.

The establishment of limits requires communication, but communication is complicated, not least because of the scorn it would inspire in one's client fighting on the ground. Even if open communication is possible, there are additional challenges to overcome: talk is cheap, enforcement is uncertain, and a willingness to negotiate can be mistaken for weakness. Where explicit communication is nonviable, tacit coordination assumes central importance.[10] Through a sequence of patterned behaviors, opponents can find limits to regulate their competition by exploiting focal points to manage the expectations of the other side. Restraint is then signaled by conveying intentions through actions, behaving in predictable ways, and acquiescing to existing limits.[11] While detailed examples of this "cooperative competition" will be elaborated in the Angolan case study below, a few illustrative examples of limits commonly observed by competitive interveners can help elucidate the form and function of these credible signs of restraint.

GEOGRAPHY: Bodies of water, mountains, railways, and even cartographic principles of latitude and longitude can serve to delimit areas of control and contestation. In the 1980s, for example, France and Libya found themselves supporting opposing government and rebel forces, respectively, during

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[7] If there is no variance in combatants' estimates of the probability of victory, the significance of information asymmetries is null and combatants have little incentive to delay agreement. Thus, I assume that increases in the variance of a combatant's estimate of the probability of victory increases the likelihood of continued conflict by increasing the differences among combatant types. See Reed (2003).

[8] This is akin to a "threat that leaves something to chance." See Schelling (1980, chap. 8).

[9] For purposes of theory-building, I make a simplifying assumption that competitive interveners aim to see their clients through to victory. This assumption will not always hold; interveners may seek more limited objectives, such as merely preventing the defeat of a client or "bleeding" the resources of a rival. However, no generality is lost. Regardless of the objective, an intervener's opponent is likely to see all such actions as hostile to its own interests. This increases the chance of responses in kind and counter escalations, necessitating that both sides avoid provoking inadvertent escalation.

[10] On tacit bargaining and limited war, see Schelling (1980, chap. 3).

[11] Escalation can also be managed with the strategic use of secrecy. See Carson (2016).

the Chadian civil war. To constrain confrontation, an "interdiction line" was established at the fifteenth, and later sixteenth, parallel. French forces remained south of the line; Libyan forces remained north of it. While this agreement amounted to a *de facto* partition of Chad, it controlled escalation by circumscribing areas of operation (Nolutshungu 1996, 189–91).

LETHAL VERSUS NONLETHAL AID: Differentiation between guns and body armor, bullets and communication radios, and mines and medical supplies limit the scope of confrontation by emphasizing the different effects this aid has in combat: lethal aid directly destroys enemy forces; nonlethal aid does not. References to this distinction have become ubiquitous in press statements about the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. For example, while Germany has provided hundreds of millions of dollars of nonlethal aid to Kiev, it has repeatedly warned against supplying lethal weaponry, arguing it risks "dangerous, permanent escalation."[12]

WEAPONS: Restraint can be communicated by exploiting the qualitative distinctions of different weapon systems. While the transfer of small arms and light weapons to combatants is banal, the question of whether to provision heavy weapons—such as antitank missiles or man-portable air-defense systems—is regularly the subject of heated debate. For example, fears over direct confrontation with Moscow have animated American unwillingness to arm Syrian rebel forces with heavier weapons that would enable defense against Russian aircraft and artillery (Miller and Entous 2016).

These distinctions help regulate confrontation between interveners. They are limits with symbolic significance that are recognizable even in the absence of explicit communication; they provide guidelines for one's own commanders; and they make violations by the enemy relatively easy to detect. They are the "rules of the game" that bound the scope of competition between interveners.

But these limits are not only symbolically significant—they have tactical implications that prolong an intervener's involvement in a civil war. The need to limit intervention constrains tactically advantageous maneuvers and prevents the delivery of equipment needed for battlefield success. In effect, the contradictions inherent in the need to intervene to ensure one's domestic client prevails and the need to constrain that intervention to control escalation warps an intervener's positive objective of winning into a negative objective of not losing. This leads to stalemated conflicts and prolonged interventions, as interveners refrain from providing the level of support necessary to enable a decisive military victory, and instead provide a level of support sufficient only to enable continued fighting. When combined with the distortionary effects of competitive intervention on domestic bargaining processes, intractable war is the inevitable result.

Notably, this outcome, while tactically suboptimal, is nonetheless strategically rational from the perspective of competitive interveners. To forgo investing in the civil war at any level is to forfeit the stakes that inspired intervention in the first place, whether they be shifts in the relative balance of power, trade and market access, or credibility concerns; yet, to invest at the level required to ensure a domestic client's victory risks the spiraling of costs and enlarged conflict with the opposing intervener. In the face of these trade-offs, an intervener's optimal solution is a limited intervention strategy, which while prolonging involvement in the civil war, nonetheless provides higher net payoffs than the alternative options of doing nothing (and ceding the stakes) or fighting to win (and risking mutual destruction of potential gains).

Systemic Dimensions: The Varying Prevalence of Competitive Intervention

The framework articulated above not only provides a comprehensive account of the duration effects of competitive intervention on civil wars—it also highlights a candidate explanation for the recent decline in the prevalence of intrastate conflict. Insofar as state decisions to aid combatants are consistent with competitive state policy-making, temporal variation in geopolitical competition between states should affect trends in the prevalence of competitive intervention. Variation in the prevalence of competitive intervention should in turn affect temporal trends in the prevalence of internal conflict through the duration effects described above.

Consider the pervasiveness of US-Soviet competition during the Cold War. Bipolarity extended the geographic scope of concern and broadened the range of factors included in the competition between the superpowers. American and Soviet leaders worried that challenges to the existing distribution of power might raise doubts about the credibility of their alliance commitments, thereby encouraging their allies to drift toward neutrality or, worse still, switch sides (Hironaka 2005, 107–11). Because challenges to the status quo were perceived to threaten the relative balance of power and credibility, they were resisted. Yet, because any action by one superpower was perceived as an attempt to gain a geostrategic advantage, it demanded a response. The end result was a proliferation of US-Soviet competitive intervention, wherein the superpowers committed resources to opposing government and rebel forces fighting on the periphery of their spheres of influence.

That many civil wars during the Cold War were superpower proxy wars is a well-rehearsed perspective, but what is missing from existing accounts is an explanation for why superpower sponsorship should be associated with longer conflicts. If foreign civil wars played such a key role in the larger Cold War struggle, why did the superpowers not do what was necessary to help their respective sides *win*? The theory outlined above provides an answer: challenges to the relative balance of power and credibility necessitated reflexive responses, but the impossible stakes of direct confrontation advised caution. While the superpowers were compelled to intervene, they were simultaneously—and paradoxically—compelled to do so with restraint.

Superpower rivalry also had secondary duration effects. Constrained by the need to both deter and avoid direct confrontation, Washington and Moscow employed indirect strategies for projecting power. Military aid was an integral element of their competition for influence, and accordingly, money and weapons diffused not only to civil wars, but across the international system. This assistance empowered client states, providing a set of Cold War framings and superpower arms that could be used to justify and implement independent foreign policy objectives. Notably, the superpowers struggled to control their clients' adventurism; by exploiting fears of defection to the opposing bloc, clients found ways to commandeer superpower aid for their own self-interested ends (Krause 1991). The net result was a

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[12] The quotation is German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in VOA News (2015).

proliferation of interventions by otherwise weak states in civil wars across the globe.

In the post–Cold War period, by contrast, state clients have a harder time garnering American aid. Regional powers continue to intervene in civil wars, but they can no longer rely on the reflexive support of the USSR when conflicts of interest arise vis-à-vis US policy, nor can they threaten defection to the Soviet-bloc in the face of American sanction. In the unipolar period, the United States has greater choice in which state clients it chooses to support, enjoys greater flexibility to discipline adventurism by weaker powers, and maintains "command of the commons" to restrict flows of economic and military aid around the globe (Posen 2003). Together, these features of the unipolar system constrain foreign adventurism by lesser powers relative to the Cold War period, thereby reducing—though not eliminating—the prevalence of competitive interventions among neighboring states and regional rivals. In this way, the transition from a bipolar to unipolar system not only terminated superpower proxy warfare, but also decreased the rate of competitive intervention by lesser powers.

Testing the Theory

The preceding arguments can be summarized as a set of hypotheses about the outcomes predicted by the theory and a set of observable implications about the processes that link the theory's explanatory and outcome variables. With respect to outcomes, I expect that competitive interventions prolong civil wars; that there was a higher rate of competitive intervention during the Cold War relative to the post–Cold War period; and that the increased prevalence of competitive intervention during the Cold War was a factor in the increased prevalence of civil war during that period. With respect to observable implications, I expect to find evidence that third parties constrain the scope of their assistance to domestic clients during competitive interventions, even when it is tactically disadvantageous; that this restraint is motivated by fears of conflict escalation vis-à-vis opposing interveners; and that external support distorts domestic bargaining processes in ways that incentivize continued fighting between domestic combatants.

To test these propositions, I adopt a mixed-method, nested-analysis approach (Lieberman 2005). The central strength of nested analysis is its ability to leverage the inferential opportunities afforded by both large- and small-N research within a single framework, combining quantitative and qualitative tools in ways that preserve their respective strengths while overcoming their respective limitations. I begin with an across-case statistical analysis that tests the outcome hypotheses of the theory to generate estimates of the relationships between variables and probe the theory's external validity. I then turn to a within-case qualitative analysis of competitive intervention in the Angolan civil war (1975–1991) to examine the theory's observable implications and probe its internal validity.

Quantitative Testing: Competitive Intervention and Civil War, 1975–2009

This section tests the outcome hypotheses of the theory by undertaking a statistical analysis of all civil wars fought between 1975 and 2009.[13] Conflict data are drawn from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)/Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD), which defines armed conflict as "a contested incompatibility that concerns government or territory or both, where the use of armed force between two parties results in at least [twenty-five] battle-related deaths in a calendar year. Of these two parties, at least one has to be the government of a state" (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Themnér and Wallensteen 2014, 541). To minimize concerns over heterogeneity of cases inherent in such a low fatality threshold, I add a one thousand cumulative battle-related deaths requirement to my case selection criteria.[14] I confirm the robustness of my results to the exclusion of this cumulative requirement in the online appendix. I follow existing studies by analyzing conflict episodes, defined as "continuous period[s] of active conflict-years" (Kreutz 2010, 244).[15] A conflict's start date is recorded once the ACD criteria are met; it is considered terminated once it ceases to meet the criteria for one year. I demonstrate the robustness of my results to using a two-year break criteria in the online appendix. The resulting dataset is cross-national time-series in structure, with yearly observations recorded for all time-varying variables. The dependent variable, conflict duration, is calculated using the start and end dates recorded in the ACD and is measured in days.[16]

Data on external aid to domestic combatants are drawn from the UCDP External Support Dataset (Högbladh, Pettersson, and Themnér 2011), updated where appropriate using secondary sources. That dataset draws a distinction between substantiated evidence of external support and alleged instances of external support. I exclude alleged support in my main analyses, but confirm the robustness of my results to its inclusion.[17] Observations are coded for both governments and rebels engaged in ongoing conflicts at a yearly resolution for multiple forms of assistance, including boots-on-the-ground military operations, weapons and ammunition transfers, financial aid, territorial access, war matériel and logistical support, training, access to military infrastructure, intelligence support, and recruitment, gun running, and harboring. For statistical tests, these different forms of aid are aggregated to record state support of any kind to governments and/or rebels engaged in a civil war. I then code my competitive intervention variable to identify cases where the government and the rebels received simultaneous support from different third-party states. The dataset also records which state(s) send military aid to domestic combatants, enabling me to distinguish between US-Soviet competitive interventions and competitive interventions by lesser powers.

Finally, the models reported below include an indicator for the Cold War period and a battery of control variables to account for a range of competing explanations in the existing civil war duration literature. These include a number of characteristics of the civil war state (GDP per capita, regime type, oil production, population size, and mountainous terrain) and a range of conflict-specific factors (whether it is ethnically based, secessionist, or multiparty; whether a UN peacekeeping operation is deployed; whether the

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[13] The temporal scope of the dataset is restricted to 1975–2009 due to data constraints. This coverage does not bias the empirical findings reported below. For a discussion, see the online appendix.

[14] On fatality thresholds and empirical findings in the civil war literature, see Anderson and Worsnop (2019).

[15] By employing this criteria, I adopt a negative conception of peace—my focus is the absence of violent armed conflict, not necessarily the resolution of a conflict's underlying incompatibilities.

[16] Most start and end dates are coded to a specific day in the ACD. In cases where precise information about dates is lacking, the ACD sets the date to the last day of a known period, usually a month. To eliminate any bias, I set any imprecise dates to the middle of the known period.

[17] See Table 3, Model 7.

Table 1. Control variables, operationalization, and data sources

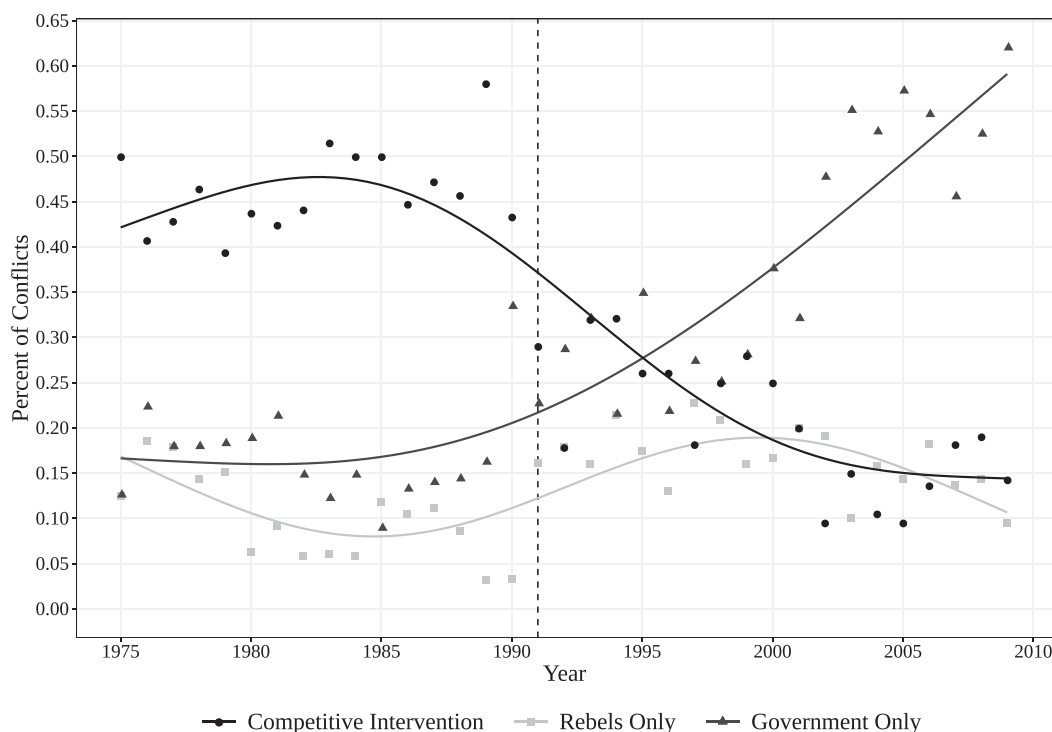| Variable	Operationalization	Primary data source
Cold War	Dummy; 1 = years 1975–1990; 0 = years 1991–2009[18]	Author
GDP per capita	PPP (int'l $, fixed 2011 prices); lagged one year; log transformed to adjust for skewness	Lindgren (2015)
Democracy	Dummy; 1 = polity2 score ≥ 7; 0 otherwise; lagged one year	Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers (2014)
Oil producer	Dummy; 1 = state is an oil producer; 0 otherwise	Wimmer, Cederman, and Min (2009)
Population size	State's population size; log transformed to adjust for skewness	Lindgren (2012)
Mountainous terrain	Share of state's terrain covered by mountains; log transformed to adjust for skewness	Fearon and Laitin (2003)
Ethnic conflict	Dummy; 1 = ethnic conflict; 0 otherwise	Wimmer, Cederman, and Min (2009)
Secessionist conflict	Dummy; 1 = secessionist conflict; 0 otherwise	Wimmer, Cederman, and Min (2009)
Multiparty conflict	Dummy; 1 = greater than two domestic combatants fighting concurrently; 0 otherwise	Gleditsch et al. (2002); Themnér and Wallensteen (2014)
UN peacekeeping	Dummy; 1 = UNPK operation deployed; 0 otherwise	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (2014)
Rebel territorial control	Dummy; 1 = rebels possess territorial control; 0 otherwise	Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2009)
Parity	Dummy; 1 = rebel strength at parity with government forces; 0 otherwise	Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2009)
Rebels stronger	Dummy; 1 = rebel strength greater than government forces; 0 otherwise	Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2009)

Figure 2. Trends in external military assistance in the form of competitive interventions and one-sided support to civil war combatants, 1975–2009

rebels possess territorial control; and a composite measure of combatant strength that records whether the rebels were at parity or stronger than the government). Variables, their operationalization, and the primary data sources used to construct them are reported in Table 1; summary statistics are reported in the online appendix.

I employ an extension of the Cox model that enables the incorporation of time-varying covariates.[19] These mod-

els provide estimates of the conditional probability of an event occurring—in this case, of a civil war terminating— given the length of time since its onset.

CHANGING TRENDS IN COMPETITIVE INTERVENTION

How has the prevalence of competitive intervention varied over time? Figure 2 plots the percentage of conflicts experiencing competitive intervention or one-sided assistance to either governments or rebels from 1975 to 2009. The figure uncovers a striking discontinuity in the prevalence of competitive intervention coinciding with the end of the Cold War. In numbers, the percentage of conflicts experiencing

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[18] This periodization aligns with the Supreme Soviet's order to cut all forms of foreign aid, especially military assistance, to Third World allies around the globe. See Westad (2007, 384).

[19] For an accessible reference, see Kleinbaum and Klein (2012, chap. 6).

Table 2. Cox model estimates

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Competitive intervention		−0.780***	−0.701**	−1.023***	−0.835***	−1.090***
		(0.281)	(0.301)	(0.302)	(0.261)	(0.298)
		0.458	0.496	0.360	0.434	0.336
Cold War	−0.584**		−0.288	−0.385	−0.207	−0.387
	(0.248)		(0.271)	(0.281)	(0.254)	(0.250)
	0.558		0.749	0.680	0.813	0.679
GDP per capita	0.057			−0.055		−0.057
	(0.164)			(0.159)		(0.181)
	1.059			0.946		0.945
Democracy	−1.034**			−1.072**		−0.847**
	(0.477)			(0.422)		(0.432)
	0.356			0.342		0.429
Oil producer	0.178			0.350		0.370
	(0.311)			(0.311)		(0.376)
	1.195			1.419		1.447
Population size	−0.215			−0.326**		−0.370**
	(0.131)			(0.130)		(0.152)
	0.807			0.722		0.691
Mountainous terrain	−0.044			0.003		−0.041
	(0.101)			(0.090)		(0.093)
	0.957			1.003		0.960
Ethnic conflict	0.059				0.406	0.090
	(0.299)				(0.287)	(0.297)
	1.061				1.500	1.094
Secessionist conflict	0.189				−0.269	0.323
	(0.329)				(0.281)	(0.356)
	1.209				0.764	1.381
Multiparty conflict	−0.791***				−0.683**	−0.713**
	(0.304)				(0.314)	(0.283)
	0.453				0.505	0.490
UN peacekeeping operation	0.548				0.923**	0.476
	(0.389)				(0.384)	(0.428)
	1.729				2.516	1.609
Rebel territorial control	0.154				0.468**	0.202
	(0.251)				(0.210)	(0.253)
	1.167				1.597	1.224
Parity	0.074				0.093	0.092
	(0.345)				(0.355)	(0.348)
	1.077				1.098	1.097
Rebels stronger	0.934				0.951	1.161*
	(0.638)				(0.601)	(0.648)
	2.545				2.588	3.193
Conflict episodes	98	98	98	98	98	98
Terminations	78	78	78	78	78	78
Observations	955	955	955	955	955	955

Notes: (1) The table lists variable coefficients, with robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses, followed by hazard ratios (e^β). (2) Statistical significance levels: *$p \leq 0.10$; **$p \leq 0.05$; ***$p \leq 0.01$.

this form of external meddling has dropped from a Cold War yearly average of 46 percent to a post–Cold War yearly average of only 20 percent.[20] In other words, the degree to which competitive interventions afflict civil wars has been more than *halved* in the post–Cold War period.

Notably, the prevalence of competitive intervention during the Cold War is not simply a function of US-Soviet proxy war. Disaggregating competitive interventions into their superpower and nonsuperpower varieties reveals that, while superpower proxy wars were a defining characteristic of the Cold War era, they only afflicted an average 11 percent of conflicts during that period and never more than 17 per-

cent of conflicts in any given year. At the same time, the Cold War was associated with pervasive levels of competitive intervention by less powerful states, afflicting an average 36 percent of conflicts per year during that period. This underscores that the superpowers' use of military aid as a foreign policy instrument had important secondary effects on civil wars—namely, the proliferation of competitive interventions by client states that leveraged their sponsor's military and economic resources for self-gain.

COMPETITIVE INTERVENTION, CONFLICT DURATION, AND THE PREVALENCE OF CIVIL WAR

Are changing patterns of external military aid associated with a decline in civil war duration in the post–Cold War

[20] There is a statistically significant difference in the prevalence of competitive intervention between the two periods; t(31.03) = 12.50, $p = 0.000$.

Table 3. Cox model estimates

Variables	Model 7 (incl. alleged)	Model 8 (CI vs. reb)	Model 9 (CI vs. gov)	Model 10 (disaggregated)	Model 11 (Firth)
Competitive intervention	−1.027***	−1.430***	−1.045***		
	(0.323)	(0.335)	(0.331)		
	0.358	0.239	0.352		
No support		−0.461	−0.071		
		(0.294)	(0.259)		
		0.631	0.931		
Government only		−0.436			
		(0.323)			
		0.647			
Rebels only			0.314		
			(0.318)		
			1.369		
US/Soviet competitive intervention				−2.018**	−1.636**
				(0.793)	(0.882)
				0.133	0.195
Nonsuperpower competitive intervention				−0.980***	−0.943***
				(0.324)	0.315
				0.375	0.389
Cold War	−0.404	−0.408	−0.400	−0.345	−0.339
	(0.257)	(0.256)	(0.253)	(0.252)	(0.258)
	0.667	0.665	0.670	0.708	0.712
Other controls included	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Conflict episodes	98	98	98	98	98
Terminations	78	78	78	78	78
Observations	955	955	955	955	955

Notes: (1) Models 7–10 report variable coefficients, with robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses, followed by hazard ratios (e^{β}). (2) Model 11 reports a Cox model with Firth penalized likelihood estimates. (3) Statistical significance levels: *$p \leq 0.10$; **$p \leq 0.05$; ***$p \leq 0.01$.

period? Table 2 reports results obtained from running Cox models on the dataset described above.[21] I begin by considering the relationship between the Cold War and conflict duration. Model 1 estimates a model of civil war duration that includes a Cold War indicator, a range of state characteristics, and a number of conflict-specific factors. The model reports a statistically and substantively significant relationship between the Cold War and protracted conflict, estimating the Cold War period to be associated with an average 44 percent decrease in the hazard of civil war termination. That is, the average Cold War conflict is nearly twice as long as the average post–Cold War conflict.

What role does competitive intervention play in this result? Models 2–6 examine this question by incorporating competitive intervention into the analysis. Model 2 reports a bivariate specification; Model 3 reincorporates the Cold War indicator; Model 4 adds state characteristics; Model 5 examines conflict-specific factors; and Model 6 presents a fully saturated model. Across all specifications, competitive intervention is estimated to decrease the hazard of civil war termination by an average 50 (Model 3) to 66 (Model 6) percent relative to conflicts that were not experiencing competitive intervention. These large effects are statistically significant across all models. Moreover, the addition of the competitive intervention variable renders the Cold War indicator statistically insignificant, suggesting that an important mechanism linking the Cold War to longer conflicts was indeed the prevalence of competitive intervention during that period.

Collectively, these results show that temporal variation in average conflict duration is an important driver of the prevalence of civil war; that competitive intervention has large duration effects on internal conflicts; and that there was a greater prevalence of competitive intervention in the Cold War period relative to the post–Cold War period. Drawing these three lines of evidence together provides an integrated explanation for the waxing and waning of civil wars over time.

With respect to the control variables, neither GDP per capita, oil production, mountainous terrain, ethnically based, nor secessionist conflicts are shown to have a statistically significant relationship with duration. UN peacekeeping operations, rebel territorial control, and rebel strength have more tenuous and conditional relationships. In contrast, regime type, large populations, and multiparty civil wars are more strongly correlated with protracted conflicts.

Table 3 extends the analysis by examining alternate specifications and disaggregating the competitive intervention variable.[22] Model 7 confirms that the results are insensitive to the inclusion of alleged support, as coded in the UCDP External Support Dataset. Models 8 and 9 demonstrate that civil wars experiencing competitive interventions are longer than conflicts in which only one of the domestic combatants enjoys external support.

Finally, Models 10 and 11 disaggregate competitive intervention into its superpower and nonsuperpower varieties. Prior to running these models, examination of the US/Soviet competitive intervention variable revealed the

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[21] To interpret the effect of a one-unit change in x_i, one subtracts 1 from the reported hazard ratio and multiplies by 100 to recover the percent change in the hazard of conflict termination.

[22] I also confirmed the results were not the product of reverse causality. For a discussion, see the online appendix.

potential for a problem often encountered when working within a duration model framework: monotone likelihood. Monotone likelihood occurs when a value of a covariate (or a linear combination of covariates) perfectly predicts—or almost perfectly predicts—the value of the dependent variable.[23] With respect to Models 10 and 11, there is only one case that saw civil war termination during a US/Soviet competitive intervention. Notably, this is powerful evidence that superpower competitive interventions had pronounced impacts on conflict duration. However, monotone likelihood risks inflated coefficient estimates; thus, the inclusion of the US/Soviet competitive intervention variable risks model-dependent estimates. Recently developed correctives for this problem—namely, the application of Firth's penalized likelihood estimators to Cox models—provide finite parameter estimates of constant and time-dependent effects in the presence of monotone likelihood (Heinze and Schemper 2001; Heinze and Dunkler 2008). I therefore report standard Cox model estimates in Model 10 and then rerun the analysis with Firth penalized likelihood estimation in Model 11 to confirm the robustness of my findings.

Results show that superpower competitive intervention decreased the hazard of civil war termination by more than 80 percent relative to those conflicts that were not experiencing competitive intervention, on average. Model 11 confirms that these results are robust to the application of Firth penalized likelihood estimation. Notably, competitive interventions by lesser powers are also estimated to decrease the hazard of conflict termination by more than 60 percent relative to those conflicts that were not experiencing competitive intervention, on average. Thus, while superpower proxy warfare prolonged internal conflicts, so too do competitive interventions by lesser powers. This highlights the importance of a generalizable theory of competitive intervention and suggests that the decline of civil war in the post–Cold War period should not be taken for granted.

Case Study: The Angolan Civil War, 1975–1991

Having found support for the outcome hypotheses derived from the theory, the task that remains is to verify the processes that link competitive intervention to protracted conflict. I now turn to a within-case analysis of one of the deadliest conflicts of the past century: the Angolan civil war (1975–1991).[24] Drawing on fieldwork, semistructured interviews, archival research, and participant memoirs, I argue that, while winning was the primary objective for the Angolan government led by *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) and for its rebel challengers in *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA), escalation fears led competitive interveners—on one side, Cuba and the USSR, and on the other, South Africa and the United States—to constrain the scope of their interventions.[25] Strategic restraint was manifest in distinctions drawn between advisory and combat missions, geographic areas of operation, and target selection, resulting in a set of interventions on the part of South Africa and the United States that aimed to sustain the rebel insurgency rather than propel it to victory and a corresponding set of interventions on the part of Cuba and the USSR that aimed to prevent the

dislodging of the Angolan government rather than end the civil war.[26]

In what follows, I employ process-tracing to uncover how competitive intervention affected the Angolan battlefield. My objective is not to comprehensively overview the conflict, but rather to analyze evidence of actor behaviors and events to examine the theory's observable implications and verify the processes linking my explanatory and outcome variables. I seek to examine the degree to which external interveners exploited focal points to signal restraint; whether this restraint was motivated by escalation fears; and whether limits regulated intervener confrontation. I then consider whether this restraint prevented the conferral of decisive military advantages on domestic combatants and how it distorted domestic bargaining processes.

"Advisory" versus "Combat" Missions

Despite committing billions of dollars of aid to the civil war, neither the United States nor the USSR deployed combat troops to Angola. As was the case with other "hotspots" during the Cold War, the impossible stakes of direct confrontation precluded sending American or Soviet soldiers to decisively shift the balance of power between the domestic combatants. However, simply delivering military equipment to their Angolan clients proved problematic. As the former chief of the CIA's Angola Task Force explains, domestic combatants "were not able to organize the logistical systems necessary to deploy [weapons] or to develop the communications, maintenance, combat leadership, and discipline to organize an effective military effort" (Stockwell 1978, 176). The superpowers therefore faced a dilemma: how could they provision effective aid without committing their own forces?

Their solution was to draw a distinction between "advisory missions," which involved training client forces, and "combat missions," which involved direct participation in the conflict. Both sides deployed personnel that became deeply involved in the management of the conflict, organizing domestic combatant forces, undertaking strategic and tactical planning, and servicing equipment.[27] This support was critical to the combat effectiveness of both the MPLA and UNITA; it was active superpower participation in the conflict that directly contributed to the war. But by drawing a distinction between "advisory" and "combat" missions, the United States and USSR established an observable limit that precluded direct confrontation between American and Soviet troops.

The distinction was reinforced by a prohibition against advisers participating in combat, even when deployed on the frontlines. Sergey Kolomnin, a Soviet officer who served in Angola, notes that "[Russian advisers] were told time and again that we should only instruct, train, and advise . . . but not fight" (Kolomnin 2005, 188, as quoted in Gleijeses 2013, 187). Upon coming under fire, Russian advisers were instructed to withdraw. Petr Khrupilin, a senior member of the Soviet military mission, explains that, "[a]s a rule, our advisers in the Angolan brigades moved to the rear when there were military operations" (Khrupilin 2000, 6 as quoted in Gleijeses 2013, 187). For their part, American advisers

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[23] Monotone likelihood is equivalent to the problem of separation in binary response models (cf. Firth 1993).

[24] A note on case selection and sources is included in the online appendix.

[25] The MPLA and UNITA had armies known as the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) and the Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FALA), respectively. In what follows, I simply refer to the MPLA and UNITA to cut down on acronyms.

[26] A third group, Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA), briefly participated in the conflict. However, after suffering a rapid defeat at the hands of the MPLA in November 1975, the group was a spent force (George 2005, 90). For brevity, I limit the following discussion to Angola's main combatants, as the FNLA never again posed a threat to the MPLA nor influenced the strategic interactions of the competitive interveners.

[27] While the Clark Amendment barred US advisory missions in Angola, they were active prior to its passing in 1976 and following its repeal in 1985.
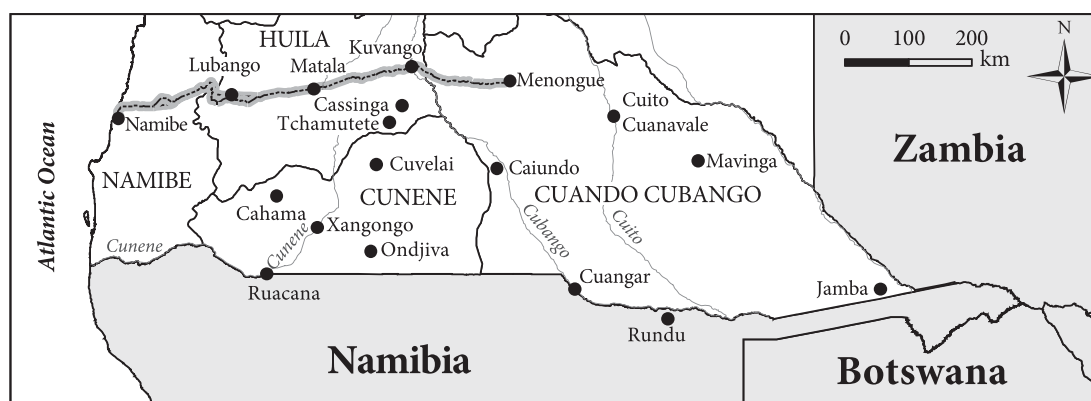
Figure 3. Southern Angola
Note: The Cuban defensive line, stretching from Namibe to Menongue, is indicated in dark grey.

avoided the frontlines. Former Director of Central Intelligence William Colby (1978, 422) writes that between 1975 and 1976, training was conducted outside of Angola "as no CIA officers were permitted to engage in combat or train there." Likewise, in the mid-1980s US advisers instructed their clients far from the fighting, basing at UNITA's headquarters in Jamba.

Geographic Areas of Operation

Two countries did maintain prolonged deployments of troops during the war: South Africa and Cuba. However, while the South African Defense Force (SADF) regularly targeted the MPLA, and while Cuban troops regularly targeted UNITA, both sides went out of their way to avoid confrontations with each other. Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this restraint was their observance of geographic saliencies to establish a buffer zone between their forces.

From January 1979 until the spring of 1988, Cuba maintained a defensive line that ran roughly along the Moçâmedes Railway from Namibe to Menongue (see Figure 3). Cuban forces did not operate south of the defensive line, though MPLA units regularly did. As Major General (ret.) Johann Dippennar explained to me, Cuban forces were positioned behind Angolan units "all the time, or sometimes in the front in the defensive positions, but in an advisory capacity, not behind the weapons."[28] In fact, Cuba's official policy dictated that its troops were not to operate in Cunene or southern Cuando Cubango provinces (George 2005, 119–20).

South Africa's response to Cuba's reticence was to contain their own operations to south-central Angola. Major General (ret.) Roland de Vries explained to me that, "strategically, [the SADF] established an area of dispute from the [Namibian] border, along the Cunene River, and up to Tchamutete, Cuvelai, those areas." South African forces would regularly conduct operations inside this territory, but would always remain south of the Cuban defensive line. As de Vries put it, "there were constraints placed on the tactical commanders . . . in terms of how far you could go. Can you attack Menongue? No. Can we attack Cuito Cuanavale from the west? No. Rather, stay on the eastern side of the river so that the war does not escalate."[29]

The buffer zone virtually eliminated the risk of Cuban/South African confrontation. Between May 1978

and January 1988, there were no confrontations between South African and Cuban ground forces despite their deep involvement in the civil war.

Targets

Target selection was "critical" to controlling escalation during the war.[30] Here, the focal point that served to constrain escalation was nationality: Angolan targets were distinct from South African/American and Cuban/Russian targets. The SADF, for example, was keenly aware that operations against Angolan forces could be perceived as actions against Cuba or even the Soviet Union—interpretations that risked escalation. Consequently, cross border raids "had to be played very carefully, because the conflict could have developed into a regional war," as de Vries put it. "We didn't really want to fight against Cubans," he explained, "that was not part of the idea."[31] To those ends, engagements tended to stop short of confrontations with Cuban and Russian advisers that were forward-deployed with MPLA units.

This selective targeting was appreciated by Russian advisers. Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) Igor Zhdarkin (2011, 161) writes the following:

> I think the bombardment of our camp wasn't part of their plans. Perhaps they didn't want to risk international complications or confrontation with the Soviet Union. . . The South Africans sent us an ultimatum before 11 March 1988 stating: "Soviets, leave Cuito Cuanavale, we don't want to touch you." . . . Those leaflets were packed inside hollow artillery shells, like propaganda! Their warning was precise, concrete, and clearly written. "Soviets, we don't want to touch you. Go away. Leave, please. We want right now to cut up these Angolans."

Encounters between intervening forces in the air were equally rare. The account of Anatoliy Alekseevsky (2011, 178), who served as a Russian interpreter, is typical: "[o]nce when the Cubans encountered the [SADF] Mirages, they almost entered aerial combat, but the South Africans simply left, ran away. They could see from the MiGs' flight pattern that these weren't Angolans. The Cubans didn't insist on aerial combat and returned to base." Air battles between Russians and South Africans likewise did not occur. As the

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[28] Interview, Major General (ret.) Johann Dippenaar, June 2014, Pretoria, South Africa.

[29] Interview, Major General (ret.) Roland de Vries, September 2014, telephone.

[30] Interview, Ambassador (ret.) Victor Zazeraj, July 2014, Johannesburg, South Africa.

[31] Interview, Major General (ret.) Roland de Vries, September 2014, telephone.

CIA (1985, 12) reported, Moscow "was not inclined . . . to take on South African aircraft, despite sufficient opportunities." Nor did South Africans entertain the idea of confronting Russian-piloted aircraft. As Ambassador (ret.) Victor Zazeraj explained to me, "there was an unspoken rule that if it was a Russian pilot or even a Cuban pilot, the South African Air Force wouldn't interfere with them too much. . . . [W]e didn't want to get into a dogfight with them. . . . [I]f we were to deliberately engage and shoot down a Soviet plane that was not a threat to us—that would have worried us, because we did not want to draw them into the war any more. You don't want to scratch the bear and create a problem that you can't solve."[32]

RESTRAINT IN THE FINAL MONTHS OF THE WAR

Much has been made of the final months of the Angolan civil war. Spawned by a large-scale MPLA offensive against UNITA in the southeast of the country, the period between October 1987 and March 1988 saw heavy fighting around Cuito Cuanavale, a desolate but strategically valuable town on the western banks of the Cuito River, as well as a joint Cuban/MPLA advance into Cunene province— the first time Cuban troops had moved into the southwest since January 1979. On its face, this period challenges my argument that fears of escalation lead competitive interveners to constrain the scope of their support to domestic combatants. However, while the intensity of the war increased between the fall of 1987 and the spring of 1988, it is precisely for this reason that the highly constrained nature of Cuban/South African confrontation is so striking.

Consider the response to the MPLA's 1987 southeastern offensive. Alarmed by the threat it posed to their client, South African strategists devised a plan, in close consultation with UNITA, to halt the advance. An internal debate developed over whether a counteroffensive should be launched from the southwest, which would permit a breakthrough operation into the MPLA's rear areas to capture Cuito Cuanavale, or the southeast, which would require confronting MPLA forces head-on. Despite agreement that the southwestern option presented tactical advantages, it was rejected by the high command. A top secret planning document, written on June 5, 1987, sheds light on this decision. The document explains that "[t]he central idea is to let the [MPLA] offensive fail without totally committing the [Republic of South Africa]"; that "operations must not provoke revenge attacks"; and that "the conflict must not be allowed to escalate beyond the capacity of . . . the SADF" (H Leër/D OPS/309/1 1987, para. 5e and 16e). Consequently, the decision was made to confront the MPLA offensive head-on, from the southeast.

South African efforts to control escalation were reciprocated by their Cuban opponents. When the MPLA's offensive began in mid-August 1987, no Cuban forces participated. It was only in late January 1988, by which time the combined SADF/UNITA force was threatening to overrun Cuito Cuanavale, that some 1,500 Cuban combat troops joined the MPLA's defense (Gleijeses 2013, 423). The majority of these units were placed in rear positions in the third (and last) defensive line that protected the town (Scholtz 2013, 316). This force posture signaled Castro's limited objectives: while he would not allow the remaining MPLA brigades to be destroyed, he was unwilling to force a decisive battle.

A clash did occur between the SADF and Cuban troops that were attached to an Angolan unit on February 14, 1988—"the first time since the Battle of Cassinga a decade previously that South Africans and Cubans would come eye to eye on the battlefield," as Scholtz (2013, 330) describes it. Cuban troops also manned artillery and piloted aircraft that defended the town. But as Gleijeses (2013, 425) writes, "[n]o climatic battle was fought at Cuito Cuanavale. The South Africans did not launch a major assault on the town; nor did the Cubans and the [MPLA] surge from the town to push them back."

Castro was unwilling to confront the SADF in direct clashes at Cuito Cuanavale, so he adopted an indirect approach. With a limited number of Cuban troops stiffening the MPLA's defense in the southeast, he ordered a major combat formation to advance into the southwest. From March to May 1988, thousands of Cuban soldiers, in coordination with several thousand MPLA troops, began moving into Cunene Province—a territory they had not entered for nearly a decade. The strategy was not without risks, as saliencies that had been exploited to limit confrontation were becoming blurred. But Castro realized that, with their forces tied down in the southeast, the SADF and UNITA could not respond to the advance. His aim was to pry his opponents out of southeastern Angola without directly challenging South African military power. As Crocker (1992, 371) puts it, "the potent Cuban force was primarily a political demonstration in keeping with Castro's 'strutting cock' school of grand strategy."

To signal his limited intentions, and to forestall a major clash between Cuban and South African troops, Castro carefully calibrated the advance. SADF troops noticed that Cuban scouts were "quite careful and cagey," and it is notable that South African military intelligence correctly interpreted the southwestern advance as a "predominantly defensive strategy" (MI/204/3/A6/8 1988, para. 3a). Consequently, there were no decisive confrontations—only brief skirmishes on April 18, May 5, and May 22. A fourth and final clash occurred on June 26/27, when the SADF shelled a Cuban forward-operating base at Techipa, provoking a retaliatory Cuban airstrike on the Calueque dam that has been described as "a very academic attack" and "measured response."[33] Such was the nature of Cuban/South African confrontation in the final months of the war.

BARGAINING DISTORTIONS AND PROTRACTED WAR

Strategic restraint served to regulate confrontation between interveners in Angola, but also had tactical implications. The withdrawal of advisers undermined the morale of domestic combatants, geographic limits restricted the area of effect of supporting troops, and the need to avoid engagements with an opposing intervener frustrated local forces. These were tactically disadvantageous outcomes that prolonged the Angolan civil war. But as Major General (ret.) Gert Opperman explained to me, "one of the constant factors to be considered was: would it result in unnecessary escalation of the war? . . . [I]t might make sense from a military point of view, a tactical point of view, but from a strategic point of view that would be exactly the type of escalation that we would like to prevent."[34] Unwilling to do what was necessary to see their domestic clients win, the competitive interveners settled for a more limited objective: preventing

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[32] Interview, Ambassador (ret.) Victor Zazeraj, July 2014, Johannesburg, South Africa.

[33] The former quotation is SADF Brigadier-General (ret.) Dick Lord, as quoted in Bridgland (1990, 362); the latter quotation is Crocker (1992, 372).

[34] Interview, Major General (ret.) Gert Opperman, June 2014, Pretoria, South Africa.

their defeat. The consequences of these behaviors for the domestic bargaining process were significant.

First, external aid decreased domestic war costs. As early as 1979, South African military intelligence estimated its supplies, training, and organizational aid generated 90 percent of UNITA's combat power (MI/203/4/0502 1979, para. 21). Likewise, Havana paid the salaries of all the Cuban troops that defended the MPLA, and while the USSR technically did "sell" the weapons it transferred, 85–90 percent were provided on credit—a debt that remained unpaid as the Soviet Union collapsed (Gleijeses 2013, 515, 521). Little wonder, then, that Angola's domestic combatants chose to sustain their war efforts rather than sue for peace: external aid subsidized continued fighting in the interest of greater concessions in the future.

Second, external aid shifted the domestic combatants' military capabilities toward parity. Soviet MiGs flown by MPLA pilots were repelled by American antiaircraft weapons fired by UNITA troops. Rebel assaults were repulsed by Cuban-trained MPLA counterinsurgency units, while government offensives were halted by South African–trained UNITA mortar teams. In effect, aid provided by the competitive interveners balanced combatant capabilities and countered military advantages. This increased uncertainty over likely battlefield outcomes, thereby encouraging continued fighting to acquire additional information and avoid settling prematurely on unfavorable terms.

Finally, external aid enhanced information asymmetries. Covert assistance was the primary source of military power generated by the domestic combatants throughout the war. The inability to fully observe the quantity and quality of this aid impeded estimates of domestic combatants' relative military capabilities. Likewise, uncertainty over how and when the interveners might join their clients in combat complicated estimates of the probability of victory. That the MPLA could capture and hold Luanda is attributable to the unexpected deployment of Cuban combat troops; that the rebels could survive is attributable to the SADF's willingness "to go to UNITA's assistance and save its skin" (Breytenbach 2002, 252). In short, the inability to predict the extent of support that would be provided by the competitive interveners increased uncertainty over relative strength and resolve, thereby increasing the relative value of continued fighting.

It is therefore not surprising that the internal peace agreement signed between the MPLA and UNITA in 1991 was preceded by the Tripartite Accord, an *external* agreement signed between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa in December 1988. It was only after an international agreement that terminated external aid was reached that a domestic settlement was possible. That external aid distorted the domestic bargaining process is manifest in the remarkable fact that Angolan president José dos Santos and UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi met *for the first time* only in June 1989—some fourteen years after the start of the war. This meeting concluded with a temporary ceasefire under the Gbadolite Declaration, and by May 1991, UNITA and the Angolan government had signed the Bicesse Accords, a comprehensive agreement including stipulations for political reconciliation, elections, and military monitoring. While the conflict would relapse in the fall of 1992 due to a dispute over electoral results, the first phase of the Angolan civil war was over.

Implications and Conclusions

This article has presented a framework to explain how competitive intervention affects temporal trends in the average duration and global prevalence of civil war. What are the implications for researchers and the policy community?

First, the results reported above draw renewed attention to a problematic assumption that continues to inform calls for deeper involvement in foreign conflicts—namely, that interventions can end civil wars by helping one side win or by facilitating a negotiated settlement.[35] To the contrary, this article explains why the effectiveness of interventions is often constrained: under the shadow of inadvertent escalation, the contradiction inherent in the desire to intervene and the need to control the risk of enlarged conflict warps positive objectives of winning into negative objectives of not losing. Far from facilitating negotiated settlements, this prevents the conferral of decisive military advantages while distorting domestic bargaining processes. The importance of these insights for conflict management is manifest in the strategic dilemmas currently facing the United States in Syria. While deeper involvement will increase the scope of violence inflicted in the war, the effectiveness of such efforts will remain dependent on Russian responses. Resolving the strategic dilemma competitive intervention entails is a necessary prerequisite for peace.

Second, the preceding analysis highlights the importance of policy-makers' capacity to envision their opponent's expectations during competitive interventions. Attentiveness to a conflict's context and frames of reference plays a critical role in communication and signaling, while a failure to consider an opponent's perspective can be dangerous. Policy-makers must look carefully for signs of restraint, which can often manifest in unexpected forms. Consider, for example, Russia's recent deployment of "little green men"—seemingly professional soldiers in Russian-style combat uniforms with Russian weapons, but without identifying insignia—to Ukraine. The need to maintain plausible deniability for these foreign interlopers forced Russia to limit the scope of its invasion, but it also provided the essential space needed for the West to save face and avoid a forceful counteraction that could spark a wider war.

Navigating tacit signaling during competitive intervention will also be important as the international system undergoes renewed change. Current debate over the global diffusion of power and its implications for international stability has unfolded against the backdrop of Russian interventions and Chinese military modernization. A central question for policy-makers is whether Russia's recent assertiveness and China's rise will be accompanied by new challenges to existing global governance structures and the proliferation of ungovernable spaces in weak states. Russia is already engaged in competitive interventions against the United States in Syria and Ukraine, and for its part, China has been accused of offering to transfer "huge stockpiles" of arms to a Libyan regime under assault by American-armed rebels (Smith 2011).

These developments are symptomatic of what the theory outlined above would predict for renewed global rivalry. Consequently, while the number of ongoing civil wars has declined in the post–Cold War period, researchers must keep abreast of changing patterns of external military assistance, interstate competition, and competitive intervention. As this article has stressed, these factors go a long way in explaining the average duration and global prevalence of internal wars.

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[35] For an example of this logic applied to the ongoing civil war in Syria, see the leaked internal memo prepared by US State Department officers that surfaced in 2016 (US State Department Draft Dissent Memo, n.d.).

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the Harvard Dataverse (https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/noelanderson) and the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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