

# HANDBOOK OF WAR STUDIES

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# CHAPTER 11

## The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique

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The idea that political elites often embark on adventurous foreign policies or even resort to war in order to distract popular attention away from internal social and economic problems and consolidate their own domestic political support is an old theme in the literature on international politics.<sup>1</sup> Generally referred to as the scapegoat hypothesis or diversionary theory of war, it is one of the few societal-level theories besides the Marxist–Leninist theory of imperialism to attract much attention in the theoretical literature on international conflict.<sup>2</sup> This hypothesis has served as the basis for the interpretation of numerous historical cases, and it also has generated a considerable amount of quantitative empirical research on the linkages between internal and external conflict. This study aims to (1) survey the theoretical, quantitative empirical, and historical literature bearing on the diversionary theory of war, (2) identify some important conceptual problems with this work, and (3) further develop the theoretical linkages leading from the domestic political interests of key elites to the outbreak of war.

Numerous scholars have noted the use of belligerent foreign policies by political leaders in order to solidify their domestic political positions. Four centuries ago Shakespeare (1845) suggested to statesmen that “Be it thy course to busy giddy minds/With foreign quarrels,” and Bodin (1955, 168–169) argued that “the best way of preserving a state, and guaranteeing it against sedition, rebellion, and civil war is to . . . find an enemy against whom [the subjects] can make common cause.” Two of the leading theories of imperialism emphasize the domestic political interests driving external expansion. Lenin (1935, V, 123) viewed World War I as an attempt by the imperialist classes “to divert the attention of the laboring masses from the domestic political crisis,” and Marxist–Leninists argue more generally that

imperialism and war are instruments by which the capitalist class secures its political position and guarantees its economic interests against revolutionary forces internal to the state. Schumpeter (1939) argued that imperialism and war serve the interests not of the capitalist class but of the military elite, which has used war and the threat of war to rationalize and maintain its dominant position within the state.<sup>3</sup>

More general forms of the scapegoat hypothesis have been endorsed by numerous modern international theorists. Wright (1965, 727) argues that one of the most important causes of war is the perception that war is a "necessary or convenient means . . . to establish, maintain, or expand the power of a government, party, or class within a state." Haas and Whiting (1956, 62) argue that statesmen "may be driven to a policy of foreign conflict—if not open war—in order to defend themselves against the onslaught of domestic enemies," particularly against enemies arising from the inequities generated by rapid industrialization and social change. Rosecrance (1963, 306) argues that the domestic insecurity of elites is one of the most important causes of war and that "domestic stability and internal peace [is] the vehicle of international stability and external peace."

The inherent plausibility of the scapegoat hypothesis, in conjunction with its apparent support from numerous historical cases, has led to its acceptance by many political scientists. Wright (1965, 257) asserts that "the direct relationship between political revolution and war, whether as cause or effect, is in fact such a historical commonplace as to need no elaboration." More recently, however, there have been numerous efforts to subject the hypothesis to rigorous and systematic empirical tests. Most of this literature links the scapegoat hypothesis to the in-group/out-group or conflict-cohesion hypothesis in sociology, which provides a theoretical explanation for the hypothesized relationship.

#### THE IN-GROUP/OUT-GROUP HYPOTHESIS

Simmel (1956), the first to treat the subject systematically, argues that conflict with an out-group increases the cohesion and political centralization of the in-group. Extending the hypothesis to international relations, Simmel (1956, 93) suggests that "war with the outside is sometimes the last chance for a state ridden with inner antagonisms to overcome these antagonisms, or else to break up definitely." Simmel recognizes, however, that war may also lead to dis cohesion, for it "appeals to those energies which are common to the discordant elements of the community. . . . [War] might either cause domestic quarrels to be forgotten, or might on the

contrary aggravate them beyond reconciliation" (Simmel 1898, 832).

Simmel's conflict-cohesion hypothesis is adopted by Coser (1956), who attempts to elaborate further on the conditions under which external conflict increases or decreases internal cohesion.<sup>4</sup> Drawing upon the work of Williams (1947), Coser (1956, 93–95) argues that external conflict will increase the cohesion of the in-group only if the group already exists as a "going concern," has some minimal level of internal cohesion, perceives itself as a group and the preservation of the group as worthwhile, and believes that the external threat menaces the in-group as a whole and not just one part of it. In the absence of these conditions external conflict will exacerbate internal conflict, perhaps to the point of disintegration, rather than moderate it.

The in-group/out-group or conflict-cohesion hypothesis, now generally associated with Coser rather than Simmel, has been so widely accepted among social scientists (although often without acknowledgment of the Simmel-Coser qualifications) that Dahrendorf (1964, 58) suggests that it has acquired the status of a general law: "It appears to be a general law that human groups react to external pressure by increased internal coherence." This proposition has been widely used to explain, among other things, the common observation that the popularity of American presidents generally increases during a crisis regardless of the wisdom of his policies, which is often referred to as the "rally-round-the-flag phenomenon" (Mueller 1973; Polsby 1964, 25; Waltz 1967, 272–273).

The cohesion-building consequences of external conflict are recognized by group leaders who often attempt to use this phenomenon to their own advantage (Simmel 1955, 98). Thus, Coser (1956, 104) argues that "groups may actually search for enemies with the deliberate purpose or the unwitting result of maintaining unity and internal cohesion," and Wright (1965, 1516) argues that "War or fear of war has often been used to integrate states." Similarly, the anthropologist Kluckhohn (1960) suggests that if aggressive impulses within a society are sufficiently strong and disruptive, that society may attempt to preserve its cohesion by initiating an external war to displace that aggressiveness.

The in-group/out-group hypothesis has generated a considerable amount of systematic empirical research by social scientists. An excellent review of the research in sociology, anthropology, and psychology can be found in Stein (1976), and for this reason I will only briefly summarize his conclusions before moving on to the political science literature. There is substantial support for the group cohesion hypothesis in the literature but only under certain well-defined conditions that are quite similar to those suggested by Coser (1956). The group must be an ongoing one with some minimal level of cohesion prior to the external conflict, and the external

conflict must involve a threat that is believed to menace the group as a whole and that is perceived as solvable by group effort. Although there are analytical problems in extrapolating from small group behavior to that of larger collectivities (and even in defining what constitutes a "group"), these findings from other disciplines do provide a source of hypotheses that might help inform the study of the relationship between the domestic and foreign conflict behavior of states.

#### THE POLITICAL SCIENCE LITERATURE

There is less convergence in the political science literature on the relationship between a state's internal and external conflict. Sorokin's (1937, chap. 14) longitudinal study of ancient Greece and Rome and of the leading European powers over 14 centuries revealed no relationship between internal disturbances and international war, although his aggregation of the data by quarter-century periods did not permit a very discriminating analysis. The most influential study of the domestic-foreign conflict relationship was Rummel's (1963) cross-sectional study of 77 states for the 1955-1957 period. His factor analysis of 9 measures of domestic conflict and 13 indicators of foreign conflict (including a frequency-of-war indicator) revealed that "foreign conflict behavior is generally completely unrelated to domestic conflict behavior" (Rummel 1963, 24). This finding was confirmed by Tanter's (1966) replication of Rummel's study with data from the 1958-1960 period and by others (Haas 1968; Burrowes and Spector 1973; Zinnes and Wilkenfeld 1971; Wilkenfeld 1972). Thus, there is substantial agreement among these studies that there is no overall relationship between the domestic and foreign conflict behavior of states.

Most of the early studies based on the Rummel paradigm were basically bivariate in nature, however, and made no attempt to incorporate the effects of other variables that might affect the relationship between domestic and foreign conflict. This limitation has been addressed in subsequent studies, which have attempted to control for the effects of other variables. The type of regime has received particular attention. Wilkenfeld (1968) found some positive relationship between war and "revolutionary" activity for centrist (authoritarian) regimes and between war and "domestic turmoil" for polyarchic regimes. The importance of governmental structure for this relationship has been confirmed in subsequent studies by Zinnes and Wilkenfeld (1971) and by other studies in Wilkenfeld (1973). Hazelwood (1973) took a different focus and found that war is associated with the combination of population diversity, ethnic diversity, and domestic turmoil.

There are numerous other studies of the link between internal and external conflict, and the interested reader is referred to excellent reviews by Stohl (1980) and Zinnes (1976, 160-175).

Although the results of some of the controlled studies are somewhat more encouraging, few of the correlations indicate strong relationships. Moreover, there is still little convergence among the findings of different studies using different measures of internal and external conflict, different data sources, different temporal spans, and different statistical techniques.<sup>5</sup> One fears that this mass of unstructured and often contradictory findings may be the artifact of particular data sets, measurement procedures, or statistical techniques. Although the type of regime appears to be important, this has yet to be explained theoretically. Different dimensions of internal conflict are related to different dimensions of foreign conflict for each type of regime, and no theoretical framework has been proposed to integrate the observed patterns. Thus, Zinnes (1976, 170-175) concludes that if the type of regime is considered, the "internal-external conflict hypothesis has some meaning," but she concedes that "exactly how these variables interact requires considerably more research."

It is generally agreed that a decade and a half of quantitative research on the relationship between the internal and external conflict behavior of states has failed to produce any cumulative results. We have a set of findings that are scattered and inconsistent, and these inconsistencies have yet to be resolved or explained. The failure of quantitative empirical research to uncover any indication of a strong relationship between the internal and external conflict behavior of states is disturbing for a number of reasons. It is in contrast with the empirical findings from other social science disciplines, which provide considerable evidence as to the validity of the conflict-cohesion hypothesis for small groups. Because of the far greater complexity of decision processes in the nation-state than in small groups, however, one cannot directly extrapolate from the latter to the former. The gap between these quantitative empirical findings and the theoretical literature is of greater concern. As Hazelwood (1975, 216) notes in developing a point made by Burrowes and Spector (1973, 294-295), "in no other instance do the arguments present in international relations theory and the results recorded through systematic empirical analysis diverge so widely as in the domestic conflict-foreign conflict studies."

This gap between theory and empirical research is all the more disturbing because evidence from a large number of historical cases suggests that decisions for war are frequently influenced by the domestic political interests of political elites facing internal challenges to their political authority. Here I will mention only a few of the more widely cited cases. With regard to the French decision for war in 1792, Michon denies the

existence of an external threat and argues that "War was willed solely to act as a diversion from the social problems. . . . [War] would give the government dictatorial powers and would allow it to eliminate its detested enemies. For these groups war was a grand maneuver of domestic politics" (in Blanning 1986, 71). The Crimean War has been interpreted by many in terms of Louis Napoleon's attempt to increase his political support at home, particularly among French Catholics, by aggressively supporting the Catholics in Jerusalem against the Russian-backed Greek Orthodox. As Marx said, Louis Napoleon "has no alternative left but revolution at home or war abroad" (Mayer 1977, 225). The origins of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904 have also been traced to the scapegoat motivation. As stated by the Russian minister of the interior at the time, "What this country needs is a short victorious war to stem the tide of revolution" (White 1964, 38; Langer 1969, 29; Lebow 1981, 66).<sup>6</sup>

State behavior in the period leading up to World War I is also commonly interpreted in terms of the scapegoat hypothesis. A. J. P. Taylor (1954, 529) argues that the leading European statesman in 1914 believed "that war would stave off their social and political problems." German imperialism under Bismarck, her naval expansion at the turn of the century, the hostile tariff policy against Russia, and other German policies leading up to the war have all been interpreted in terms of the attempt by the traditional ruling classes to block or co-opt the forces of social democracy and hang onto the reins of power (Kehr 1970; Wehler 1985; Fischer 1975; Mayer 1967, 1977; Berghahn 1973). Fischer (1975) argues that "large-scale industry and the *Junker*, the army . . . and the civil service . . . viewed world policy and national power politics essentially as a means of dissipating social tensions at home by campaigns abroad" (in Wehler 1985, 196). In fact, one recent review suggests that "a far-reaching consensus now agrees that German foreign policy after 1897 must be understood as a response to the internal threat of socialism and democracy" (Kaiser 1983).<sup>7</sup>

It is difficult to generalize from individual case studies, of course, and some historical studies have adopted a comparative methodology in an attempt to establish a more general relationship between international war and the perceived domestic interests of the political leadership or ruling class. Mayer (1977, 220) argues that, under conditions of internal crisis (which he claims applies to most of the period since 1870), "the primary motives, preconditions, and causes of war are political. The governors opt for war for reasons of domestic politics rather than of foreign policy and international politics." Their aim is "to restabilize political and civil society along lines favorable to the hegemonic bloc, notably to certain factions, interests, and individuals within that bloc." Mayer (1967, 1977) argues that this hypothesis applies not only to all of the great powers in 1914 but also to

most of the major wars since 1870—including the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), and the two world wars—as well as to the French Revolutionary Wars and Crimean War before then.

In a more detailed comparative historical study, but one guided by a different theoretical orientation, Rosecrance (1963) examines nine distinct European systems in the 1740–1960 period. He concludes that the primary determinant of international stability and peace was internal stability and the resulting security of political elites, whereas domestic turmoil and elite insecurity were associated with war. Rosecrance finds that this relationship holds regardless of the political structure or ideology of the regime. Similar findings emerge from Lebow's (1981, chap. 4) comparative study of 13 "brinkmanship crises" over the previous century in which states initiate major challenges to an important commitment of the adversary in the hope that the adversary will back down. Lebow finds that only 5 of these crisis initiations can be explained by deterrence theory—by weakness in the adversary's capability of defending its commitment, the credibility of that threat, or its communication of that threat to its opponent. Lebow finds that the other crises were initiated by political elites in part as a response to their own sense of domestic political vulnerability and in the hope of buttressing their political positions at home through a diplomatic success abroad. Once initiated, several of these crises escalated to war largely for domestic reasons.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, there is a striking gap between quantitative empirical studies and historical case studies regarding the validity of the scapegoat hypothesis. It would be valuable and, in fact, necessary to examine each of these historical cases to determine (1) whether the scapegoat interpretation actually does have greater empirical support than the leading alternative interpretations and (2) whether these studies taken together systematically demonstrate the superiority of the scapegoat hypothesis over alternative theories of the causes of war. On the surface, however, the supporting evidence is plausible enough, particularly in conjunction with the theoretical literature emphasizing the importance of the diversionary use of force, to suggest that much of the explanation for the observed discrepancy between the historical and the quantitative literature can be traced to flaws in the quantitative literature itself. We shall now examine this literature in more detail while reserving judgment on the question of the validity of the historical literature dealing with diversionary processes.

Some of the reasons for the failure of quantitative empirical studies to confirm the hypothesized relationship between internal and external conflict may be methodological. The limited temporal domain of most of these studies is particularly troubling. The 1955–1960 period upon which nearly

all of these studies have been based is not only too narrow to permit an adequately controlled empirical study, but it also coincides with an especially peaceful period of international politics. Even if one were to accept the validity of the finding of the absence of a relationship between domestic and foreign conflict for various groups of states in this period, there would be little reason to believe that this is a general relationship applicable in a wide variety of historical circumstances. This is particularly true if one is interested in the domestic sources of war involving the great powers because there were no great power wars during this period.

There are a number of additional methodological questions that might be raised about various aspects of the research designs guiding these studies, particularly the difficulties in coding events data. These include the comparability of nominally similar events in different political and cultural systems, the trade-offs between using single sources and multiple sources, the problem of counting numbers of events (especially if multiple sources are used), and the weighting (if any) of inherently unequal events. Another set of problems concerns the different units of temporal aggregation and the different time lags utilized by the various studies. The interested reader is referred to the critiques by Scolnick (1974), Mack (1975), Vincent (1981), and James (1988) for an analysis of these and other problems. The most serious problems confronting these studies are theoretical rather than methodological, however, and our attention will be focused primarily on these.

The basic problem, one that is widely recognized in the literature, is that few of the quantitative empirical studies of the relationship between internal and external conflict behavior of states have been guided by any coherent theoretical framework. As Stohl (1980, 325) argues, "the continuing lack of theoretical foundation has worked against the cumulation of evidence. Rather, what has resulted is the accumulation of isolated bits of information supporting neither theoretical argument nor conventional wisdom."

These studies appear to be driven by method and data availability rather than theory. They have been more concerned with duplicating or disconfirming Rummel's (1963) findings for different spatial or temporal domains in the post-1945 period than with asking the question of whether or not the research design guiding those studies is appropriate for the theoretical questions supposedly being asked. This literature has focused on the operational question of whether or not an empirical association between internal and external conflict exists with little regard for the causal processes that might generate such a pattern. There has been little concern with the direction of the relationship between internal and external conflict, alternative explanations for any such relationship, the precise form of the relationship, or the conditions under which it is likely to hold. As a result,

the models being tested are technically misspecified, and it is conceivable that important empirical patterns are being obscured by inappropriate research designs. Let us explore each of these problems in more detail.

#### THE DIRECTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONFLICT

Most quantitative empirical studies of the internal-external conflict relationship simply attempt to determine if there is a correlation between the levels of domestic and foreign conflict (conceptualized along several dimensions) at a given point in time. They fail to distinguish between two distinct processes: (1) the externalization of internal conflict, in which internal conflict has a causal impact on external conflict, as predicted by the scapegoat hypothesis, or (2) the internalization of external conflict, in which independently generated external conflict has a causal impact on internal conflict.<sup>9</sup>

The importance of the internalization of external conflict is recognized in other bodies of literature. Laqueur (1968, 501), for example, argues that "War appears to have been the decisive factor in the emergence of revolutionary situations in modern times . . . [because] the general dislocation caused by war, the material losses and human sacrifices, create a climate conducive to radical change." Although this occurs in victorious as well as defeated states, it may be particularly likely in the latter: "In a defeated country authority tends to disintegrate, and acute social dissatisfaction receives additional impetus from a sense of wounded national prestige." Similarly, Tilly (1975, 74) identifies two main paths by which external war generates internal conflict: (1) the exaction of men, supplies, and particularly taxes for the war effort induces resistance from key elites or masses, and (2) the weakening of a government's capacity for domestic repression by war, coupled with a decline in its ability to meet its domestic commitments, encourages its enemies to rebel.

Although some (but not all) quantitative empirical studies recognize that the internalization of external conflict may occur, what they generally fail to recognize is that the different causal mechanisms involved in the two distinct processes mean that the operational indicators appropriate for tapping one process may not adequately tap the other one. Rummel's (1963) use of the number of foreign protests, ambassadors recalled, negative sanctions, and the like may be useful measures of external conflict resulting from internal scapegoating, but they are less adequate as independent variables in predicting internal conflict. In addition, because the conditions

under which internal conflict leads to external conflict are different than the conditions under which external conflict contributes to internal conflict, the analyses of these two different processes require the incorporation of different contextual or control variables. One might hypothesize, for example, that democratic regimes may be more prone to scapegoating than authoritarian regimes because of electoral accountability, but that democratic regimes are less likely to suffer from internal conflict as a result of external war.

More importantly, there may also be a reciprocal relationship between internal and external conflict. Domestic conflict may lead to external conflict, which in turn may further increase the level of domestic conflict along lines suggested by Tilly (1975) or decrease domestic conflict by unifying the society against the external threat. The existence of the second scenario would seriously complicate any empirical test of the hypothesis, for whether it predicts a positive or negative relationship between internal and external conflict would be critically dependent on the times at which these variables are measured. This temporal dimension cannot be captured by the cross-sectional analyses of the domestic-foreign conflict relationship that basically follow Rummel's original research design.

One example of the seriousness of the problem is illustrated in Stohl's (1980) review of this literature. He notes that "the most common form of the hypothesis in the conventional wisdom . . . is that foreign conflict behavior should be inversely related to domestic conflict behavior, that is, that increases in foreign conflict behavior lead to decreases in domestic conflict behavior" (Stohl 1980, 311). Thus, Stohl treats external conflict as an exogenous variable predicting an increase in domestic cohesion and a decrease in internal conflict, but ignores the sources of external conflict.

The scapegoat hypothesis, however, is not the same as the in-group/out-group or conflict-cohesion hypothesis as Stohl conceptualizes it. The basic point of the scapegoat hypothesis is that external conflict cannot be treated as an exogenous independent variable leading to internal conflict. The scapegoat hypothesis is fundamentally dynamic and reciprocal in nature. It suggests that internal conflict at time  $t$  will generate an increase in external conflict at time  $t + m$ , which in turn reduces internal conflict at time  $t + n$  ( $n > m$ ).<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the absence of studies producing negative correlations, which Stohl laments, may not necessarily be inconsistent with the scapegoat hypothesis.<sup>11</sup> It all depends on the points in time at which the variables are measured.

The use of lagged variables in a regression analysis, which might capture a simple model of one-way causation, would not be as appropriate as some form of causal modeling procedure or simultaneous equation model, as Stohl (1980, 327) recognizes. The problem of specifying time lags

would remain, however, because there is no solid theoretical basis for discriminating among essentially arbitrary time lags. The problem is particularly serious for a large  $N$  aggregate study because there is little reason to believe that there is one set of time lags appropriate for a large number of states under a variety of international and domestic conditions. What is clear, however, is that the attempt to test a hypothesis that is temporal, dynamic, and causal with research designs that are cross-sectional, static, and correlational is flawed from the start.

#### THE EXTERNALIZATION OF INTERNAL CONFLICT: ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Even if we were to restrict our attention to the relationship leading from internal conflict to external conflict, we would have to recognize several distinct causal mechanisms that could be involved. Conflict within state  $A$  may lead  $A$ 's political elite to attempt to solidify its domestic political support through diversionary actions abroad, as suggested by the scapegoat hypothesis. Alternatively, conflict within state  $A$  may generate internal weaknesses, or perhaps be a symptom of such weaknesses, which may tempt state  $B$  to intervene militarily.  $B$ 's intervention may be motivated by the desire to exploit a temporary window of opportunity created by the disruptive effects of  $A$ 's turmoil on its military power, as illustrated by Iraq's attack against Iran in 1980. Alternatively, it may be designed primarily to influence the outcome of the struggle for political power in  $A$ , as illustrated by the Soviet interventions in Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1980), the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic (1965), and numerous other interventions by the strong in the internal political affairs of their weaker neighbors.

One can also imagine situations in which both of these processes are operative. Internal conflict may weaken  $A$  and tempt  $B$  to attack, which then provides a real external threat that can be exploited by  $A$ 's political elite for its own domestic political purposes. This can be particularly useful for a revolutionary regime, as demonstrated by the cases of France in 1792, Russia in 1918, and Iran in 1980 (Skocpol 1979).<sup>12</sup>

These alternative mechanisms leading from internal to external conflict are only occasionally acknowledged in the quantitative empirical literature on the internal-external conflict relationship (Gurr and Duvall 1973; Weede 1978; Ward and Widmaier 1982), but there appears to be substantial evidence that this process is historically important. Blainey (1973, chap. 5) constructs a list of over 30 international wars between 1815 and 1939 that

had "visible links" with civil strife and concludes that, in most cases, the war was not initiated by the strife-torn nation, contrary to the predictions of the scapegoat hypothesis. Internal conflict leads to international war, Blainey argues, not by scapegoating but instead by weakening a state internally, upsetting a stable dyadic balance of power, and creating the opportunity for an attack from the outside.

Internal conflict does not always provoke external intervention, however, and Blainey (1973) attempts to identify some of the conditions under which this is most likely to occur. He hypothesizes that civil strife in the stronger state is most likely to disturb the peace because it muffles the existing hierarchy of power and undermines deterrence. Civil strife in the weaker state, on the other hand, tends to preserve peace because it reinforces the existing dyadic balance of power. This is illustrated by the historical phenomenon of "death-watch" wars (Blainey 1973, 68–70), in which the deaths of monarchs led to a succession crisis, the dissolution or weakening of defensive alliances that rested on personal ties, a general shift in the balance of power, and often led to war.<sup>13</sup>

Although Blainey's (1973) empirical analysis is not sufficiently rigorous or systematic to provide definitive support for his hypotheses, his arguments and his examples must be considered seriously in any analysis of the relationship between internal and external conflict. An important theoretical problem with Blainey's analysis, however, is that he fails to recognize that external intervention in the weaker state is not always motivated by the aggressor's desire to seize territorial or economic resources, or more generally to increase its own military power and potential relative to that of its weakened adversary. Civil strife is often the manifestation of a struggle for political power, and external interventions may be designed primarily to influence the internal political processes and struggle for power in the strife-torn state. For this reason, civil strife in weaker states rather than in stronger states may be most likely to trigger external military intervention.<sup>14</sup>

Although great powers are more likely than other states to initiate such interventions because great powers have more extensive interests as well as greater military capabilities to defend those interests (Levy 1983b, chap. 2),<sup>15</sup> intervention in the internal political affairs of weaker states is not limited to the great powers. This is illustrated by Israeli and Syrian interventions in Lebanon as well as by numerous other cases. The likelihood of intervention is increased if there are ethnic, religious, and political cleavages in the strife-torn state that provide the external state with ideological as well as power-political motivations to support one particular internal faction over another, which is again illustrated by the Lebanese case.

This discussion makes it clear that although most of the quantitative empirical literature on the internal–external conflict relationship as well as most reviews of that literature suggest that this relationship is equivalent to the scapegoat hypothesis, it is not. There are several distinct causal mechanisms, of which the scapegoat mechanism is only one, leading from internal to external conflict and vice versa. Consequently, the observation of an empirical relationship between the internal and external conflict behavior of states would not necessarily confirm the scapegoat hypothesis. Such an empirical association could reflect (1) the internalization of external conflict, (2) the externalization of internal conflict through the intervening mechanisms of (a) a shift in the dyadic balance of power or (b) external intervention in the political affairs of another state. The first could be differentiated from scapegoating through the use of time lags, but the second two could not. Identifying the initiator of the war would not always solve this problem because the diversionary action may not necessarily be war itself.<sup>16</sup> It might also be actions short of war that provoke or otherwise lead the external target to initiate the actual war. In addition, we have seen that the scapegoat hypothesis also differs from the in-group/out-group hypothesis in that the latter usually treats external conflict as an exogenous variable and posits one-way causation, whereas the scapegoat hypothesis posits a dynamic and reciprocal relationship leading from internal conditions to external conflict and then back to internal conditions.

There is another reason why the scapegoat hypothesis is analytically distinct from the relationship between domestic and foreign conflict. Internal "conflict" is not a necessary condition for the diversionary use of force against another state if, by conflict, we mean demonstrations, riots, general strikes, purges, major governmental crises, or other activities that are used to define conflict in the quantitative literature. Other conditions can contribute to elite insecurity and to the temptation for the diversionary use of force even in the absence of overt internal conflict. It has been suggested, for example, that democratic states are particularly likely to use force externally during an election year, especially when the election occurs at a time of economic stagnation (Ostrom and Job 1986; Russett 1989a). Thus, the key question is not the connection between internal and external conflict, but the kinds of internal conditions that commonly lead to hostile external actions for diversionary purposes. We will return to this question in the next section.



## THE FORM OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONFLICT

Another problem with the quantitative literature on the domestic-foreign conflict hypothesis is the lack of attention given to the form of the relationship. Nearly all of these studies measure the relationship between internal and external conflict through factor analysis, regression analysis, or related statistical methods that assume a linear relationship between the two variables. Much of the theoretical literature on group cohesion suggests, however, that the relationship is neither linear nor even monotonically increasing. As Coser (1956, 93) hypothesizes,

The relation between outer conflict and inner cohesion does not hold true where internal cohesion before the outbreak of the conflict is so low that the group members have ceased to regard preservation of the group as worthwhile, or actually see the outside threat to concern "them" rather than "us." In such cases disintegration of the group, rather than increase in cohesion, will be the result of outside conflict.

As we have seen, Coser's hypothesis has received some support from empirical work in psychology and anthropology. Although these findings cannot be directly extrapolated to the behavior of states in international politics, there are enough historical cases to suggest that this is at least a plausible hypothesis. The German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian Empires were each beset by serious internal problems in 1914, and it has been widely argued that an important factor influencing the foreign policies of each of these great powers was the attempt of conservative forces at home to strengthen their position through an aggressive foreign policy and, perhaps, even war (Kehr 1970; Fischer 1975; Mayer 1967). The consequences of the war, of course, were precisely the opposite: the war contributed to the disintegration of each of the empires and, in fact, strengthened the forces of revolutionary change in those states in the postwar world.<sup>17</sup>

These examples suggest that the internal consequences of external war may be a function of the outcome of the war as well as the preexisting level of internal conflict, although this possibility is rarely acknowledged in quantitative empirical studies of internal-external conflict linkage.<sup>18</sup> As Solzhenitsyn (1974, 274) suggests, "whereas governments need victories, the people need defeats." The argument is developed by Mayer (1977, 219-220), who argues that "victory (success) and defeat (failure) result in opposite outcomes." Mayer also emphasizes the interaction effects between the outcome of the war and the preexisting level of internal stability, for which he uses a threefold classification. If the government and society are

relatively stable, "victory has the unintended but not unwelcome effect of further solidifying the existing structure of class, status, and power, while defeat weakens incumbent governments and ruling classes, though not to the point of endangering the regime itself." If the government faces a limited "inorganic" crisis, the internal effects of war are somewhat greater. And if the government and society face a more serious "organic" or general crisis, victory reunifies and relegitimizes the regime, whereas a serious defeat can lead to revolution (Mayer 1970, 220).

Political elites often recognize these dangers and, under such conditions, are less inclined to engage in the diversionary use of force. Whereas some German leaders in 1914 sought war as a means of unifying the country, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg feared that "a world war with all its unpredictable consequences is likely to enhance the power of the Social Democrats" and undermine the existing political order (Mommsen 1973, 33).<sup>19</sup> Mayer (1969, 295-296) generalizes from this and other cases and argues that political leaders generally refrain from war if "internal disturbances and tensions are so acute that they cannot rely on the loyalty of critical segments not only of the working and peasant population but also of the armed forces" because that creates prohibitive risks. Under such conditions they often prefer to postpone war until internal conditions are more conducive to successful scapegoating.

If these arguments are correct, the diversionary use of force should be a nonlinear function of the level of internal conflict, with scapegoating being most likely at moderate levels of internal conflict and less likely at both very low or very high levels of internal conflict. This view is reinforced by some additional arguments by Blainey (1973, 81). He argues that, under conditions of open civil war, states are more likely to seek external peace rather than war so that they can turn their full attention toward their internal problems. From his list of over 30 international wars linked to significant civil unrest, he argues that governments facing grave internal tensions tend to direct their military forces against the rebels rather than against an external scapegoat. Moreover, serious internal problems weaken the state militarily and reduce the chance of victory in an external war. He notes that scapegoat interpretations have more often been applied to states suffering from mild tensions than open civil war, and he suggests an inverse relationship between the need for diversionary action and the positive benefits from such actions: diversionary actions are most useful where they are least necessary and most likely to boomerang where they might be the most helpful.

These are plausible arguments, but the linear model of diversionary processes cannot be so easily rejected. As Mayer argues, in apparent contradiction to the passages quoted previously, "strained and unstable

internal conditions tend to make elites markedly intransigent and disposed to exceptionally drastic . . . [and] extravagantly hazardous preemptive solutions." Beleaguered and vulnerable governments "seek war, or do not exert themselves to prevent it, in spite of the high risks involved." They adopt a "fortress mentality [and] are particularly inclined to advocate external war for the purpose of domestic crisis management even if chances for victory are doubtful" (Mayer 1969, 295; 1977, 220–221).

Restated in the language of decision theory, Mayer is suggesting that political elites are risk acceptant when faced with nearly certain losses. When decision-making elites perceive that their political authority is becoming increasingly tenuous, they are inclined to take particularly drastic measures to maintain control. The greater the internal threat, the less elites have to lose from risky measures and the more likely they are to gamble. This hypothesis is reinforced by some recent experimental and theoretical work in social psychology, which demonstrates that individuals tend to be risk averse with respect to gains but risk acceptant with respect to losses (Kahneman and Tversky 1979).<sup>20</sup>

In addition to emphasizing the risk-seeking behavior of elites faced with a deteriorating political climate, Mayer (1977, 220–221) emphasizes the likelihood of misperceptions contributing to the tendencies toward the diversionary use of force. The misperceptions include not only the overestimation of one's military capabilities relative to those of the adversary, but also the underestimation of the political pressure and will for war in would-be enemy nations.<sup>21</sup> Thus, there is a tendency to exaggerate both the likelihood of diversionary actions short of war being successful without escalating to war and the probability of victory in the event of war (Levy 1983b, 1989; Blainey 1973, chap. 3).<sup>22</sup> In fact, the motivated biases (Jervis *et al.* 1985, chap. 2) that help generate these misperceptions are particularly likely to occur under conditions of internal (or external) crisis. The greater the internal crisis and the greater the need for an external diversion, the greater the tendency toward motivated biases that convince elites that diversionary action would be successful both externally and internally and that it would involve minimum costs and risks. Mayer (1977, 201–202) also argues that ruling elites also have a tendency to exaggerate the seriousness of the internal crisis, the frailty of the institutional apparatus of the existing political order, and, therefore, the need for extraordinary action. Mayer (1977, 201–202) concludes that resorting to external war and internal repression is often the result of "overreaction to over-perceived revolutionary dangers rather than any calibrated and hazardous resistance to enormous and imminent insurgencies."<sup>23</sup>

Thus, both the linear and nonlinear versions of the scapegoat hypothesis can be supported by plausible theoretical arguments and, undoubtedly,

by well-selected historical examples; which (if either) is correct is ultimately an empirical question. Before these models can be tested—either against each other or against the null hypothesis of no diversionary action under any domestic conditions—more attention needs to be directed to the questions of what kinds of domestic conflict are likely to lead to diversionary actions and what kinds of foreign conflict serve as useful distractions for internal unrest. These questions have been touched upon in the literature in that internal and external conflict are each conceptualized along several different dimensions. These have not been integrated into any larger framework, however, and much more work needs to be done.

Different foreign responses involve different costs as well as different probabilities of effectively distracting attention from domestic difficulties, and whether each brings net benefits is a function of the nature of domestic conflict and its threat to the interests of the elite. As Hazelwood (1975, 224) notes, "nations using diversion mechanisms to reduce domestic conflict will generally engage in that type of foreign conflict which is sufficiently intense to divert attentions from domestic to external matters but which is also sufficiently limited to control the costs to the regime." Moreover, as Blainey (1973) reminds us, there are internal as well as external means of reducing internal conflict. Presumably, whether elites resort to internal or external solutions for domestic unrest depends on the relative expected utilities of the best internal and external responses (Bueno de Mesquita 1980, 394–395).<sup>24</sup>

An example of the application of a cost-benefit framework to the domestic/foreign conflict problem is provided by Hazelwood (1975), who recognizes that the form of the domestic-foreign conflict relationship is a function of the nature of the domestic conflict. He identifies three distinct categories of domestic conflict: mass protest, elite instability, and structural war, which provides a more differentiated typology than Mayer's (1977) distinction between inorganic and organic crises.<sup>25</sup> Mass protest refers to popular dissatisfaction with existing policy orientations or programs and involves demands against the incumbent regime. Elite instability refers to significant cleavages among the elites and disagreements over policy, procedures, and role occupancy. It constitutes an important challenge to the incumbents and is generally more intense and violent than mass protest. Structural war is the most extreme form of domestic conflict and refers to violent and widespread attempts not only to overthrow the government and change current policy, but also to change other substructures of society and establish a new order (Midlarsky 1988a). Each of these dimensions is measured by a different set of operational indicators.

Hazelwood (1975) also categorizes the dependent variable into disputes, conflicts, and hostilities (following Barringer 1972, 20), which involves an ascending scale of seriousness and violence. He argues that mass

protests are likely to generate diversionary mechanisms only if the protests are chronic and persisting, and he posits an increasing exponential relationship between foreign conflict (of all types) and the intensity of mass protest. He argues, however, that diversionary actions are more likely responses to divisions in the elite. He suggests a monotonically (concave) increasing relationship that turns slightly negative after a certain threshold because if elite instability is too great, internal "encapsulation" processes are more likely responses. The hypothesized relationship between foreign conflict and structural war is similar but with a much sharper decline after a certain threshold, which reflects the fact that the ability to use diversionary actions is severely constrained if a society is beset with open civil war.

These are intriguing hypotheses and a significant conceptual contribution to the literature on the linkages between internal and external conflict. Many of these hypotheses, however, are not supported by the results of Hazelwood's (1975) quantitative empirical analysis of 75 countries for the 1954–1966 period. Mass protests, not elite instability, are the best predictor of foreign conflict. Because extreme elite instability is often associated with foreign conflict rather than internal responses and foreign conflict is more likely at high levels rather than lower levels of structural war, Hazelwood concludes that there is no evidence of a curvilinear relationship between internal and external conflict. Moreover, there is little evidence of proportionality or balance between the nature and intensity of internal conflict and the intensity of foreign conflict behavior. Mass protest is as likely to lead to serious hostilities as to lower level disputes, and structural war is more closely associated with disputes than with hostilities. While these findings are intriguing, it should be emphasized that the 1954–1966 temporal domain of Hazelwood's study seriously restricts our ability to generalize about the relationship between internal and external conflict at other times and in other systems. In other words, Hazelwood's empirical analyses may not be as damaging to his hypotheses as they might appear.

#### OTHER CONDITIONS FOR DIVERSIONARY ACTION

I noted earlier that one of the most serious limitations of quantitative studies of the domestic–foreign conflict linkage is their general failure to specify the conditions under which the hypothesis is likely to hold. We have already discussed the question of whether or not the relationship holds under conditions of high levels of preexisting internal conflict. The focus here is on other conditions contributing to the diversionary use of force. There is good

reason to believe that sweeping analyses that fail to control for these contingent conditions may be masking some significant empirical patterns.

One variable affecting the relationship between internal and external conflict that has received some attention in the literature is the type of regime. We have seen that Wilkenfeld (1973) and others have found that, by controlling for regime type, some significant relationships between internal and external conflicts emerge. In the absence of a more coherent theoretical framework, however, it is not clear how to interpret a variety of findings involving different types of relationships between different types of internal and external conflicts for different types of regimes. Russett (1989a) also emphasizes the importance of regime type—particularly the differences between democratic and nondemocratic regimes. He emphasizes the vulnerability of governments in industrial democracies to electoral punishment following economic downturns, notes the temptations for scapegoating, and finds (in an empirical analysis spanning more than a century) that the likelihood of the involvement of these states in international disputes is somewhat greater during periods of economic decline. For nondemocratic states, however, involvement in international disputes is greater in periods of economic expansion rather than decline.<sup>26</sup> These relationships disappear, however, if the focus shifts from involvement in international disputes to the escalation of disputes to higher levels of conflict, including war. Recall here that Rosecrance's (1963) comparative historical study of the previous two centuries suggests that the tendency of political elites to resort to external war in response to their internal problems holds true regardless of the nature of the political system.

The domestic–foreign conflict linkage and the propensity toward scapegoating are also affected by external constraints. Because the internal impact of external diversionary actions, particularly war, depends on the success of those actions, militarily more powerful states are freer to engage in scapegoating than are states with lesser military capabilities.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Russett (1989a) finds that the linkage between economic downturns and involvement in international disputes is stronger for major powers than for minor powers and is particularly strong for the leading great powers. Failing to control for these and other external conditions can introduce a serious bias into the analysis of the domestic conditions contributing to the external use of military force.<sup>28</sup>

The rate of change in military capabilities (as distinct from the existing dyadic balance of military power) is another important variable affecting whether or not political elites engage in the diversionary use of force beyond their borders. A decline in military strength relative to a particular adversary may lead to war directly by creating the temptation for a "preventive war" in an attempt to block or retard the rising challenger (Levy 1987).<sup>29</sup>

Systemic decline may also interact with domestic variables to increase further the likelihood of war. Decisionmakers in declining states who are also faced with serious internal political problems may be particularly willing to gamble on a war that might solve both sets of problems simultaneously; thus, they may be driven to war by the combination of preventive and scapegoat motivations.<sup>30</sup>

The impact of external decline and the internal problems confronting elites are not necessarily independent, of course. They may both be the product of the same underlying processes. Economic decline generates social conflict and, therefore, political problems for the ruling elite at the same time that it undercuts the military power of the state, which intensifies the incentives for scapegoating as well as for preventive war. In addition, political and ethnic divisions can affect the strength and reliability of the army as well as the internal cohesiveness of the state. This is illustrated by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1914. Berghahn (1973, 213) concludes that Germany's ruling elites "were increasingly haunted by the nightmare of impending internal chaos and external defeat so that an offensive war appeared to be the only way out of the general deadlock." This view, which is shared by Fischer (1975) and numerous other historians, is applied to Austria-Hungary as well as to Germany (Ritter 1970, vol. 2, 227-239; Fischer 1975, 398; Levy 1988c).

## PLURALIST MODELS

Most of the discussion up to this point has assumed the existence of a relatively homogeneous political elite or ruling class that attempts to bolster its domestic political position through the diversionary use of military force abroad. Scapegoating can also arise under conditions in which political elites are divided. One faction may be tempted to engineer a foreign confrontation or push for the use of military force as a means of advancing its own interests in the intraelite struggle for power. Lebow (1981, 74-79), for example, argues that the attempts to expand Russian influence in Korea, which ultimately led to the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905, resulted in part from the deliberate efforts of the navy and the so-called Bezobrazov clique to undermine the political influence of Witte, the foreign minister.

Although the intraelite struggle for power might appear to reflect bureaucratic politics rather than domestic politics, the two may be very difficult to separate in many cases, particularly in democratic political systems. Appealing to public opinion can be an important source of influence in bureaucratic politics (Art 1973; Halperin 1974), and appearing

as the strongest defender of the "national interest" through a hard-line foreign policy may serve as a useful means of increasing one's public support. The calculations of elites regarding the domestic impact of foreign policy actions may focus on the population as a whole, but they may also focus on particular subgroups of society. These subgroups may be defined ideologically, with scapegoating being motivated primarily by the desire to appeal to those on the right of the political spectrum. Diversionary actions may also be designed to boost a particular elite's standing among certain economic interest groups or ethnic groups. Diversionary actions, whether directed at the population as a whole or at certain subgroups within it, may be affected by a current political issue, especially in democratic states during election years. The dominant elite's main concern may be to deny potential opponents a key political issue. Scapegoating by U.S. presidents in the cold war period, for example, has occasionally been designed to counter the potential charge that one is "soft on communism."

The domestic interests perceived by contending elites are not always incompatible. Several different factions may simultaneously perceive that a foreign policy of confrontation or war would advance their own domestic or bureaucratic political interests, and they may support such a policy to further those interests. A good example is revolutionary France, where nearly all of the major factions (except the extreme radicals) sought war for different reasons. In this case it was only the perceived interests, not the "objective" interests, of the different factions that were compatible. Their respective preferences for war were based on mutually inconsistent expectations regarding the likely consequences of a war, and many of these expectations were based on wishful thinking and serious misperceptions of military strength (Blanning 1986).<sup>31</sup>

The objective domestic political interests of different factions need not be fully incompatible, however. Snyder (1987) constructs a theory of imperial overextension driven by coalition politics and strategic ideology. He demonstrates how coalition building among groups with different but not mutually incompatible interests can generate a logrolled outcome leading to both external expansion and internal harmony, particularly when those perceived interests are reinforced by rationalizations based on strategic ideology. The consequences, however, are often a more aggressive foreign policy than is desired by any single domestic group and the creation of more external enemies than can be managed by existing national resources and diplomatic arrangements. A classic example is the coalition of "iron and rye" in Germany in the decades before 1914.

Snyder's theory of imperial extension based on coalition politics and strategic ideology is, in many respects, more plausible than alternative theories of diversionary war that focus on the domestic interests of a single

dominant elite.<sup>32</sup> It also raises a critical issue that is rarely explored in other discussions of scapegoating: Exactly how does a belligerent foreign policy or war work to consolidate the domestic support of a political elite? Nearly all discussions of scapegoating—and, in fact, the very concepts of scapegoating or of diversionary mechanisms—assume that some form of psychological mechanism is at work. This is not surprising in that the same assumption is made by the conflict-cohesion hypothesis. The outcome is explained by the inherent psychological propensities of in-groups toward cohesion in response to out-group threat, in conjunction with the forces of modern nationalism. In addition, these tendencies can be further manipulated by the elite because of their influence over the media and instruments of propaganda.<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting to note that the scapegoat hypothesis implies that diversionary policies are adopted because they are expected to serve elite interests but that they work because of the response of the mass public to symbolic politics rather than their real interests. It is not clear, however, why elites but not the mass public, are driven by their private material or political interests. Why do elites give priority to their domestic political interests, whereas others give priority to the national interest and are so easily seduced by symbolic psychological scapegoating? One could presumably construct an explanation for this based on the higher degree of concentration of elite interests (while costs are diffuse) as opposed to mass interests (Olson 1982; Snyder 1987) or on the basis of some alternative framework. My point, however, is that this is something that needs to be explained but that is rarely, if ever, addressed.

The possibility that the externalization of internal conflict may work because it serves the interests of masses as well as elites reinforces a point made earlier: the adoption of an aggressive foreign policy by political elites for the primary purpose of advancing their domestic political interests is analytically distinct from the in-group/out-group or conflict-cohesion hypothesis. The conflict-cohesion hypothesis specifies one possible mechanism through which elite interests might be served by an aggressive foreign policy, but there may be others.<sup>34</sup>

This was recognized by Lenin. Although I previously cited Lenin's statement suggesting that diversionary mechanisms were involved in the processes leading up to World War I, his primary argument in *Imperialism* (1939) is that imperialism serves the interests of the capitalist class (for a time, at least) because it also serves the material interests of the upper strata of the proletariat and divides the working class. Imperialism succeeds in propping up the falling rate of profit and increasing the pool of surplus value for paying off the labor aristocracy (Lenin 1939, 104–108). Snyder (1987) develops this idea further by incorporating the material and political

interests of various elites and interest groups into a theory of coalition behavior reinforced by strategic ideology.

It should be noted, however, that Snyder's dependent variable is imperial expansion, not war. If our concern is to explain not just imperial expansion but also the phenomenon of interstate war, the linkages from imperial expansion to war must be specified. This raises the more general question of how the dependent variable in diversionary theories is to be conceptualized.

#### THE NATURE OF THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Most of the literature on the diversionary theory of war exhibits a puzzling lack of attention to the question of the nature of the dependent variable. Although much of the theoretical literature surveyed earlier speaks explicitly about *war* as a means of distracting attention from internal problems (Wright 1965; Haas and Whiting 1956), most empirical studies of scapegoating have focused on various forms of foreign conflict short of war rather than on war itself. The incidence of war, for example, is only one of about 13 measures of external conflict utilized by Rummel (1963) and others in their quantitative empirical studies. Moreover, the research designs guiding nearly all of the quantitative studies are further biased against the analysis of war as the dependent variable in another sense: the 1954–1960 period covered by most of these studies is characterized by the relative absence of war, and certainly the absence of major war. Even Lebow (1981) is more concerned with the domestic sources of crisis initiation than with the escalation of those crises to war, although he gives some attention to the latter.

This focus is not unreasonable because, on theoretical grounds, we would expect more diversionary actions short of war instead of war itself: actions short of war are generally more cost effective in achieving the desired internal effect than an actual war, and political elites are further driven by their own motivated biases to believe this. If political leaders have calculated correctly, their actions will not lead to war. In other cases, however, diversionary actions undertaken with little expectation of war can inadvertently lead to war by triggering a conflict spiral driven by misperceptions (Jervis 1976; Levy 1983c), by precluding certain diplomatic commitments that are necessary for stability, or in other ways.<sup>35</sup> The Argentine occupation of the Falklands/Malvinas in 1982, for example, was motivated largely by domestic politics but was undertaken without the intention or expectation of war (Hastings and Jenkins 1983).

In these and similar cases an explanation for the causes of the war would be incomplete without including the diversionary actions and the domestic interests that generated them. Not all diversionary actions lead to war, however, and an important question is whether those that do (and those that do not) follow any particular pattern. That is, we need a theory that specifies the conditions under which certain types of diversionary actions help lead to war (directly or indirectly) and the processes through which this is likely to occur.<sup>36</sup> This raises another point. Whether or not diversionary actions short of war lead to war depends not only on the actions of the scapegoater but also on the behavior of the target and, perhaps, of other states in the system. That is, the diversionary theory of war is not really a theory of war. It is a theory (although an incomplete one) of the foreign policy behavior of an individual state with respect to one particular issue area. War, on the other hand, generally involves the strategic interaction of two or more states.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the diversionary theory of war is logically incomplete unless it is incorporated into a broader theory of strategic interaction and international politics.

## CONCLUSION

I have argued that there is a considerable discrepancy between the theoretical and historical literature on the diversionary theory of conflict, on the one hand, and the quantitative empirical literature on the other. Whereas the theoretical and historical literature suggests the importance of the diversionary use of force by political elites to bolster their internal political positions, the quantitative empirical literature in political science has repeatedly found that there is no consistent and meaningful relationship between the internal and external conflict behavior of states. Although a careful examination of the validity of the historical evidence of diversionary processes is needed, the focus of this study has been on the limitations of the quantitative empirical literature.

This literature deals with an extremely important theoretical question and a level of analysis that has generally been neglected by political scientists studying war. It has generated a compilation of data that are based on rigorous and systematic coding procedures and have involved an enormous amount of scholarly effort, and it has utilized sophisticated statistical methods to analyze this data. The basic problem, I have argued, is that there is too poor a fit between the hypotheses supposedly being investigated and the overall research design guiding the empirical analyses. There is no well-developed theoretical framework guiding what are basically

descriptive correlational analyses. Little attention is given to questions of under what kinds of conditions what kinds of states resort to what kinds of external conflict in response to what kinds of threats to the security of political elites. Consequently, there is a significant risk that large numbers of correlations between many variables for large numbers of states without any form of scientific control may be masking significant relationships that hold under a more restricted set of conditions.

Although most of these studies refer explicitly to the scapegoat hypothesis based on group cohesion theory and present their empirical studies as a means of testing that hypothesis, they fail to recognize that the scapegoat hypothesis or diversionary theory of war is not the same as the relationship between internal and external conflict. Consequently, operational models of domestic-foreign conflict linkages are often not congruent with the hypothesized theoretical relationships supposedly being tested. Inadequate attention is given to the direction of the relationship between internal and external conflict and to the causal mechanism driving the relationship, and there is a failure to introduce controls that could differentiate scapegoating processes from others that might produce some similar empirical patterns. Neither static linear models based on one-way causation between internal and external conflict nor cross-sectional research designs are appropriate for analyzing the dynamic and reciprocal relationships involved in diversionary processes. A causal modeling perspective, and particularly a longitudinal research design, would be more useful.

Diversionary actions are more likely to occur under some domestic and internal conditions than others, but these conditions have yet to be analyzed. Internal conflict is not a necessary condition for diversionary action, and attention should also be directed to other conditions under which political leaders seek domestic gains through forceful external actions. Of particular interest here are the questions of what *kinds* of domestic political stability, or what kinds of threats to what kinds of elite interests, are more likely to lead to diversionary actions. More attention also needs to be directed to the dependent variable. What types of external behavior are driven by internal political considerations, and are certain types of internal conflicts or conditions linked to certain forms of external behavior? Some of the quantitative empirical literature (for example, Hazelwood 1975) has suggested certain useful categories, but far more work needs to be done here. Classifications of internal variables based only on behavioral indicators of domestic conflict (riots, protests, and so on) are particularly inadequate.

A more complete theory of scapegoating would also require additional analysis of the causal mechanism through which aggressive foreign behavior advances the domestic political interests of decisionmakers. Does scapegoat-

ing work because an external threat increases the cohesion of the in-group and because of nationalism, or do aggressive external actions also serve the more concrete interests of various domestic constituencies? There also has been little concern with how diversionary processes actually contribute to war. Political elites are probably more inclined to diversionary actions short of war than to war itself because the former are far less risky domestically as well as internationally. But under what conditions do what types of diversionary actions lead to war? This can be understood only by integrating the scapegoat hypothesis of foreign policy motivation into a dyadic or systemic-level theory of strategic interaction and bargaining.

In addition to these theoretical issues, more attention needs to be given to the question of how these relationships can best be tested empirically. There must be a clearer specification of an operational model consistent with hypothesized theoretical relationships. There must also be greater sensitivity to the question of what classes of behavior we want to generalize about and what empirical domains should be analyzed for these purposes. The 1954–1960 period used by many of the existing quantitative studies is far too narrow and unrepresentative of the larger universe of international conflict, particularly if one wants to focus on war as the dependent variable and even more so if one is interested in wars involving the great powers.

The extension of the temporal domain is one possibility. The events data used by most existing studies are confined to the post-1945 period. It would be very costly and time consuming to extend the data enough to incorporate a sufficient number of major wars, although Leng's work on crisis bargaining in 40 historical cases since 1815 demonstrates the feasibility and utility of using events data to analyze conflict in earlier periods (Leng 1983; Leng and Singer 1988). Another possibility would involve the use of aggregate indicators rather than events data. The utility of this approach is illustrated by the Ostrom and Job (1986) and Russett (1989a) studies of the impact of electoral and economic cycles on the use of force.

Another possibility would be the application of the methodology of structured, focused comparison in a more intensive analysis of a smaller number of cases (George 1982). This would permit a more focused analysis on war as the dependent variable and also a more careful examination of the motivations of decisionmakers, which is a central concern in the theory. Structured, focused comparison might also be used to validate some of the findings of historical case studies mentioned earlier, but from a perspective that is more explicitly driven by key theoretical questions and more sensitive to the methodological problems of comparative analysis. The potential utility of constructing a research program involving several different methodologies should also be considered. Russett (1970) suggests the advantages of combining correlational and case study methodologies. There

are undoubtedly other approaches as well. What is clear is that we need new methodological approaches that go beyond the previous generation of studies based on the Rummel paradigm and research designs that are more closely related to the theoretical questions being asked.

## NOTES

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2. Elsewhere I have emphasized the contrast between the lack of attention given by political scientists to domestic sources of international conflict and the primacy given to these factors by many contemporary historians (Levy 1988a; Iggers 1984). Note that recently there has been a revival of interest in the Kantian concept of a "pacific union" among liberal democratic states (Doyle 1986). See Levy (1989) for a general review of societal-level theories of war.

3. Schumpeter (1939) argues that although war was once functional for the development of the modern state, it was now "objectless" and "atavistic." In a widely quoted passage regarding the machinery of war and the military elite whose interests it served, he stated that "created by the wars that required it, the machine now created the wars it required" (in Art and Jervis 1973, 296).

4. For a good discussion of Coser's (1956) modifications of Simmel's (1956) thought, see Sylvan and Glassner (1985, chap. 2). They argue that Coser's theory is more mechanistic than Simmel's theory, that it is less sensitive to contextual variables affecting the conflict-cohesion hypothesis, and that it is also more functionalist in orientation.

5. The statistical methods used include correlation, regression, and factor analysis (Rummel, 1963; Tanter 1966), Markovian models (Zinnes and Wilkenfeld 1971), and canonical analysis and path analysis (Hazelwood 1973). Some of these studies introduce time lags and others do not.

6. The validity of this evidence for the Russo-Japanese case is questioned by Blainey (1973, 76–77).

7. There are similar interpretations of British social imperialism in the four decades prior to World War I (Semmel 1960).

8. For a critique of Lebow's emphasis on domestic political variables in these cases, see Orme (1987).

9. The concepts of the externalization and internalization of conflict are suggested by Ward and Widmaier (1982), but I define these concepts differently. Ward and Widmaier (1982, 78) define the internalization of external conflict as a situation in which one state, *A*, becomes the target of another state's military attack because internal conflict within *A* creates weaknesses and an opportunity for an external aggressor. But this process results in external conflict between states, and the antecedent conditions generating this conflict is internal conflict within one state, even if the causal mechanism involved is different than scapegoating. For this reason I classify this as one form of the externalization of internal conflict. I define the internalization of external conflict as any process through which external conflict has a causal

impact on domestic conflict. These internalization and externalization mechanisms may have a negative as well as positive effect, so external conflict may decrease as well as increase domestic conflict (and vice versa). In addition, these two processes may be characterized by reciprocal interaction.

10. The last link in the chain, the actual reduction in internal conflict, can be excluded from the model if one's focus is limited to decisions leading to scapegoating rather than its actual effectiveness in reducing internal conflict. Decisions for the diversionary use of force are based on expectations of its domestic political impact rather than the accuracy of those expectations.

11. Stohl (1980) reports only one study (Kegley *et al.* 1978) finding a negative relationship between internal and external conflict.

12. Conflict in *A* may also provide an opportunity for its rival *B* to attack *C* on the assumption that *A* is too weak or internally involved to respond, which in turn could conceivably lead *A* to intervene either for diversionary or balance-of-power reasons (Levy 1982).

13. Examples might include the War of the Spanish Succession (1700–1713), the War of the Polish Succession (1733–1738), the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748), and the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778–1779).

14. The conditions under which internal conflict is most likely to lead to scapegoating may be precisely the opposite: stronger states are probably more prone than weak states to the diversionary use of force precisely because their strength minimizes the external military risks. The differences in the conditions under which these two processes are most likely to occur reinforce the need to distinguish between different causal mechanisms driving the hypothesized relationship.

15. Note that there may be political or economic instruments of policy that are more cost effective than military intervention for the purposes of shaping the outcome of struggles for power in other states.

16. The question of how to define the initiator of a war involves a very difficult analytical problem. This problem has received far too little attention in the literature. Blainey (1973), for one, ignores it.

17. Another clear case of scapegoating that boomeranged on a political elite is the Argentine attempt to occupy the Falkland/Malvinas Islands in 1982 (Hastings and Jenkins, 1983).

18. For an exception, see Sorokin (1937, 489–492).

19. Where some see risks in war, others see opportunities. Marx and Engels, after observing the revolutionary consequences of defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (the Paris Commune), came to see war as a possible vehicle for social progress. Similarly, Jaurès anticipated (by 1905) a world war and thought that there was a good chance that it would strengthen the forces of revolution and advance social democracy in Europe, but he also recognized that it could result in counterrevolution, dictatorship, and militarism as well (Mayer 1977, 215, 223).

20. That is, given a choice between a certain gain  $x$  and a lottery involving an expected value  $y > x$  (in typical experiments,  $x$  and  $y$  differ by 20–30 percent), individuals generally choose  $x$ . But given a choice between a certain loss  $x$  and a lottery involving an expected value  $y < x$  (a larger expected loss), they tend to gamble and choose  $y$ . Although these findings emerge from studies of individuals in experimental situations, they are fairly robust in that they are valid over a range of individual characteristics and a range of external situations. Thus, in these situations individuals do not act to maximize expected utility.

21. This is consistent with the fundamental attribution error of exaggerating the external constraints on one's own behavior while minimizing the external constraints on one's adversary (Kelley 1972).

22. It is interesting that while Blainey (1973, chap. 3) emphasizes the importance of military overconfidence and other forms of misperception in the processes leading to war, he does not incorporate misperceptions into his critique of the scapegoat hypothesis.

23. There are important contradictions in Mayer's arguments regarding the likelihood of the diversionary use of force under conditions of profound internal crisis.

24. An expected-utility framework, therefore, provides a useful way to conceptualize the problem. Unless the costs of domestic unrest and the costs and probabilities of the success of all of the internal and external options can be specified, however, this framework cannot generate any predictions as to the conditions under which states are likely to resort to various forms of the diversionary use of force.

25. These can be compared with Rosenau's (1964) three types of internal war: personnel, authority, and structural war.

26. There is also a lively debate on the question of whether the United States' use of force externally has been greater during election years (Ostrom and Job 1986; Job and Ostrom 1986; Stoll 1984; Russett 1989a).

27. The important consideration here, of course, is the dyadic balance of military power. Note, however, that although the risks of diversionary military action are reduced if the adversary is militarily weak, so are the potential benefits. Weaker adversaries are less of a threat and are, therefore, less useful as an external scapegoat. Scapegoating against stronger targets, while risky, is potentially more useful internally (witness the Iranian regime's use of the United States as a scapegoat). The internal utility of scapegoating against weak adversaries (with minimum risks) cannot be entirely dismissed, however, as demonstrated by the case of the United States and Grenada.

28. This does not mean that military superiority over a particular adversary is a necessary condition for diversionary action or that the likelihood of such action is a direct and monotonically increasing function of the relative military strength of the state. Weaker states with stronger allies may be in a good position to engage in the diversionary use of force. Moreover, domestic problems may create such strong incentives for diversionary action that such actions are taken in spite of their military risks (Lebow 1981; Stein 1985). In fact, empirical studies provide strong evidence that an expected-utility model provides a better predictor of the use of force than a dyadic balance-of-power model (Buono de Mesquita 1981) and that the outcomes of disputes are determined more by asymmetries of motivation than by the military balance (George and Smoke 1974; Maoz 1983; Levy 1988b). For an interesting effort to combine external expected-utility considerations with internal conflict variables, see James (1988, chap. 5).

29. Preventive war is only one of several possible policy responses to a decline in one's military power and potential. For an analysis of the conditions under which declining power is most likely to generate pressures for preventive war, see Levy (1987).

30. Note that the risk-acceptant tendencies of political elites facing a deteriorating domestic situation is intensified if they are simultaneously confronted with external decline relative to other states.

31. For example, Lafayette and some others in the military wanted war because they expected a short victorious war over Austria that would bring a restoration of the monarchy and increased influence and prestige to the military. The Girondins and Jacobins wanted war because they expected that it would discredit the king, consolidate the revolution, and bring lucrative contracts to the bourgeoisie.

32. Note that Snyder's theory is not necessarily incompatible with scapegoating. Many agree with Kehr (1970, 39–40), for example, that the coalition of iron and rye was basically an "agrarian–industrial condominium against social democracy."

33. One question that is raised (but rarely addressed) by all of this literature concerns the



precise identity of the political elite or ruling class that is doing the scapegoating or (more generally) is using the foreign policy of the state to further its own political interests.

34. This raises the following question: Should the concept of scapegoating or diversion be used to refer to any aggressive foreign policy behavior designed primarily to advance the domestic political interests of internal groups, or should it be conceived more narrowly to refer to one particular causal mechanism through which this is accomplished—one involving a psychological response to external threats and the manipulation of political symbols? It would probably be best to retain the broader meaning of scapegoating or diversionary actions (1) because any purely interest-based response would presumably be reinforced by psychological and symbolic mechanisms—particularly to appeal to some mass groups whose interests were not served by aggressive external actions; (2) because precisely *how* hostile external actions work may be less important than decisionmakers' expectations that they will work, at least for questions concerning the causes rather than the internal consequences of foreign policy behavior; and (3) because the concept of scapegoating is probably too deeply ingrained to be redefined in a more narrow manner. The question of the specific causal mechanisms through which scapegoating is effected, however, should not be ignored.

35. The German tariffs against Russian grain and the exclusion of Russians from German financial markets precluded Russian diplomatic support that would be essential for the effective conduct of a *Weltpolitik* that was certain to alienate Britain (Kehr 1970; Gordon 1974; Kaiser 1983). In this way, hostile actions undertaken without any desire or expectation of war contributed to the polarization of alliances and the isolation of Germany, which played a major role in the processes leading to war.

36. Such a theory would not be equivalent to a dyadic or systemic-level theory of strategic interaction. The hostile impact of *some* diversionary actions may be dampened if the target accurately perceives that such actions were driven by domestic concerns.

37. The only exception is if the political authorities of one state prefer war to any set of concessions that might plausibly be offered by the adversary and consequently initiate or provoke a war for that reason. Although technically the target can choose to surrender rather than fight, this is not much of a choice. For all practical purposes, it is possible for one state to start a war, contrary to Blainey (1973).

## CHAPTER 12

# Lateral Pressure in International Relations: Concept and Theory

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### OVERVIEW

In the study of international relations, lateral pressure is defined as the extension of a country's behavior and interests outside of its territorial boundaries (and, in some circumstances, the extension of the boundaries themselves). The theory of lateral pressure is an explanation of the determinants and consequences of extended behavior, and it accounts for immediate as well as less proximate sources and outcomes. Despite the focus on state behavior, the core elements and processes of lateral pressure are not state centered, but derived from and applicable to all conglomerations of populations at all levels of analysis.<sup>1</sup> The theory draws primarily upon the established literature of international and global politics, but it borrows from other fields and disciplines as needed.

The theory is anchored in core concepts that include the interactive effects of demand and capability—both of which are required for effective behavior. These phenomena are conditioned, in turn, by three “master variables” (population, technology, and access to resources) whose interactions define the essential characteristics, or basic profile, of each state in the international system. The population variable includes all demographic features, technology encompasses both mechanical and organizational knowledge and skills, and resources refer to arable land, water supplies,