

**THIRD-PARTY INTERVENTION AS A  
CAUSE OF ESCALATED VIOLENCE AGAINST MINORITIES**

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Third-party interventions on behalf of persecuted minorities have become subject to intense debate and controversy since the end of the Cold War. Interventions were nothing new, of course, but the environment created by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the corresponding reordering of international relations was. That environment was characterized by several bloody conflicts in Europe and not too far from it, which accompanied the collapse of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, as well as the freed up political energy that could now be directed at things other than managing the nuclear rivalry between the superpowers. Liberal intellectuals and activists in the West in particular saw this environment as very conducive to creating a new normative and legal framework, which would allow, indeed obligate, the “international community” to step in whenever a minority is subjected to violence. They insisted that the norm of sovereignty was a political and moral anachronism, because it allowed criminal states to target minorities with impunity, and that therefore it should be discarded.<sup>1</sup>

This argument had detractors from the very beginning. Some of them have argued that the moral benefits of such a policy do not justify its political material costs.<sup>2</sup> Others have criticized the incoherence of the interventionists’ political position pointing to their obliviousness to certain trade-offs, such as that between peace and or that between impartiality and the imperative of helping the group that is suffering the most.<sup>3</sup> Yet others have dismissed the discourse of “new interventionism” as an exercise in hypocrisy and as an effort to sugarcoat Western neo-imperialism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Different shades of this argument can be found in Smith 1994; Onuf 1995; Wheeler 2000; Power 2002; Rieff 2002; Mills and Brunner 2002; Holzgrefe and Keohane 2003; Nardin and Williams 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Buchanan 1990; Fromkin 1994; Mandelbaum 199

<sup>3</sup> Betts 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Chomsky 1999; Jatrass 2000; Bandow 2000.

What seemed to attract less attention in those debates was the implicit assumption of the interventionist position that violence against minorities is monotonically decreasing function of intervention, which implied that any intervention was better than no intervention, and that the worst interventions could do was fail to improve the suffering minorities' lot. With the exception of one important school of thought, which I will discuss in more detail below, critics refrained from challenging this assumption, because it seems to be based on an unassailable logic: any intervention against a state should weaken its incentives for persecuting a minority, because it raises the costs for doing so. The logic indeed seems so obvious that it is difficult to find academic studies explicitly making it.<sup>5</sup> This is why the debate mostly focused on other problems associated with intervention without systematically scrutinizing the assumption that interventions would invariably minimize the targeted states' incentives for continued violence.<sup>6</sup>

Challenging that assumption is the aim of this paper. To be sure interventions *can* produce reduced violence. But interventions can make things worse as well. Imposing costs on a targeted state will certainly make continued violence more costly, but as I hope to show in the pages that follow, that may generate incentives for intensified, not reduced, violence under certain conditions. The article will proceed as follows. First, I will propose a causal mechanism, which describes third-party interventions as instances of bargaining under incomplete information, and specifies the conditions under which intervention generates escalation. More specifically, I demonstrate escalation to be the

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<sup>5</sup> One exception I know of is Regan 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Some proponents of intervention also dismissed the charge of impure motives arguing that as long as interventions help victims of persecution the interveners' motives are unimportant, which is also something that relies on the monotonicity assumption. See, for example, Wheeler 2000, 37-39; and Finnemore 2003, 12. I demonstrate later that motives indeed may matter.

consequence of private information regarding the state's brutality threshold, and the third party's cost-tolerance. Second, I will formally model the argument. Third, I will illustrate the model using the intervention in Kosovo as a case-study. Fourth, I will briefly discuss the other conflicts in Yugoslavia to check whether the dependent and independent variables specified in the model covary as predicted. I will conclude with a set of general observations, as well as a discussion of certain potential criticisms and counterarguments.

### *Escalation Dominance*

Before getting on with the description of the mechanism, which, borrowing the name of a certain nuclear war-fighting doctrine during the Cold War, I call escalation-dominance,<sup>7</sup> I should briefly discuss the exception I mentioned earlier. The exception is the moral hazard theory of intervention, which has been the most interesting critique of the interventionist argument to date, and which has gone beyond the standard criticisms and challenged its core logic. I have dealt with this theory elsewhere in some detail,<sup>8</sup> but because my own argument builds on certain puzzles generated by it, a brief summary of both the theory and some of my earlier criticisms is necessary.

As I do in this study, the proponents of the moral hazard theory frame conflicts between states and minorities as problems of bargaining, which implies that minorities are strategic actors and not just objects of violence as the interventionist argument tends to do. If that is true, their bargaining behavior should be a function of their bargaining power, which itself will be affected by whether they can count on help or not. It is at

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<sup>7</sup> For what the term means in the context of nuclear deterrence see Jervis 1984, 59.

<sup>8</sup> Grigorian 2005.

least conceivable then that the prospects of intervention would change their bargaining behavior in the direction of stiffer demands and higher risk-tolerance for violent escalation. In fact, the proponents of this school argue that minorities not only change their bargaining behavior, they sometimes outright provoke violence against themselves in order to bring the interveners in.<sup>9</sup>

Alan Kuperman provides evidence of such provocative behavior from Yugoslavia, where the leaders of the victim groups – Bosnian Muslims and Kosovo Albanians – scuttled negotiations or intentionally provoked violence in the hope of triggering Western intervention. Thus, one influential Bosnian Muslim official stated that their goal was to “put up a fight for long enough to bring in the international community.”<sup>10</sup> In another example, a KLA negotiator stated: “The more civilians were killed, the chances of international intervention became bigger, and the KLA of course realized that.”<sup>11</sup> Other scholars and observers have provided similar evidence.<sup>12</sup>

Despite its unquestionable advantages over the conventional interventionist position, the moral hazard account has certain important shortcomings. Here I will focus on two of them. First, it does not deal adequately with perhaps the most important question that any moral hazard argument should deal with, namely why the principal is unable to claim breach of contract, if the agent causes the very problem against which the principal had insured her. The answer is that moral hazard exists precisely because it is often very difficult to prove breach of contract. In the context of interventions, this means not being able to observe whether the minority was responsible for provoking the

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<sup>9</sup> Rowlands and Carment 1998; Kuperman 2002; Kuperman 2003; Kuperman 2005; T. Crawford 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Kuperman 2005, 158.

<sup>11</sup> Kuperman 2003, 68.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Bodansky 1995.

violence.<sup>13</sup> Although such a possibility cannot be ruled out logically, empirically it is very unlikely. The evidence from Yugoslavia, which has been particularly important for the proponents of moral hazard school, shows clearly that third parties never had difficulties determining who bore responsibility for provoking violence.

Another answer is that even if it can be proven that the minority, or at least its representatives, are responsible for provoking violence, the potential intervener may be entrapped into helping the minority, because after innocent non-combatants come under attack, the issue of responsibility for provoking the violence becomes irrelevant.<sup>14</sup> This is essentially the argument commonly referred to as the “CNN effect.” The problem with the “CNN effect,” however, is that it does not exist. The strong reactions of the Western media tend to be correlated with cases where intervention is likely in the first place. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why certain conflicts attract Western media’s attention, and others do not,<sup>15</sup> or worse yet, when that media takes the “wrong” side as it did in the recent conflict in South Ossetia.

The second, and even more important, shortcoming of the theory is that it treats a three-actor strategic problem as if it was a two-actor interaction. Even if we ignore the other problems and accept the argument that minorities radicalize if they can reasonably hope to be protected in case of violence, it is not clear why the same prospect of intervention should not have the same effect on the target state, only in the opposite direction, i.e., in the direction of moderating its bargaining position. And if that is the case, and there is nothing in the moral hazard logic suggesting that it is not, then

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<sup>13</sup> Rowlands and Carment 1998, 271

<sup>14</sup> Rowlands and Carment 1998, 271; Kuperman 2002, 377.

<sup>15</sup> The best studies substantiating this claim are Carpenter 1995; Herman and Chomsky 1998. Clifford Bob does not necessarily dispute this claim, but focuses also on the rebel groups’ skill and ability to market their causes. See Bob 2005.

interventions or threats of intervention should affect the terms of peace, not its likelihood. At best then, the moral hazard logic can explain radicalization as minority's *optimal response*, not violent escalation as an *equilibrium outcome*.<sup>16</sup> The question then is whether intervention or a threat of intervention can ever lead to escalation in equilibrium. If the last criticism of the moral hazard logic is correct, then it seems that intervention can only shift the location of the principal disputants' reservation points by the same amount and in the same direction, leaving the likelihood of violence, or the escalation of ongoing violence unchanged. This is exactly the conclusion Cetinyan reaches in his analysis of the question.<sup>17</sup> The conclusion, however, is not justified.

To explain why, we should begin with a brief discussion of what the bargaining framework implies for state-minority conflicts or conflicts in general, briefly leaving third parties aside. Framing state-minority conflicts as problems of bargaining implies first and foremost that violence in them is inefficient, because bargains that both should prefer to violence always exist, provided, of course, that both are rational, and that none of them prefers fighting for fighting's sake. One of the mechanisms in the context of interstate relations, which explains why even rational disputants end up fighting sometimes despite war's inefficiency is private information about resolve and capability, as well incentives to misrepresent them.<sup>18</sup> Private information about capabilities is probably never relevant in conflicts between states and minorities. There can hardly be any disagreement about relative power between an actor that has an organized police and an army and one that does not. Divergent estimates in these conflicts are usually about resolve, but the content of resolve has a certain special quality in state-minority conflicts.

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<sup>16</sup> On this point see also Cetinyan 2002.

<sup>17</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Fearon 1995.

If interstate conflicts resolve is primarily about the disputants' willingness to incur costs, in state-minority conflicts resolve is about that, but also about the state's willingness to impose costs. It is, to be more specific, about the state's willingness to act barbarically.<sup>19</sup> Minorities, or rather agents acting on their behalf, rarely have illusions about directly defeating states by imposing unacceptable material costs on them. It is usually the state's threshold of brutality that is subject to uncertainty, and it is the minority's misestimate of that threshold, as well as the state's misestimate of the minority's threshold for suffering, that drives state-minority conflicts down the path of violence.<sup>20</sup>

What violence does is help identify those thresholds. The revelation does not happen instantaneously, of course, and bargaining does not stop after the conflict becomes violent. Violence typically starts at low levels of intensity, each disputant gradually escalating in search of the other's breaking point. States do not start out with

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<sup>19</sup> The reason states have to resort to barbarism is because minorities either do not have military forces that can be targeted for coercion, or their military efforts take the form of insurgency. Perhaps the most important feature distinguishing insurgency from regular war is the blending of combatants and non-combatants. Insurgents use the non-combatant population for cover, for communication, and for logistics. Not targeting the non-combatant population if an army wants to target the insurgents, or their communication and logistics, is extremely difficult for regular armies as a result. The choice often is not between using barbaric methods or not, but using force or not, where using force will inevitably involve barbarism. The latest and most comprehensive study making this argument is Kalyvas 2006. Some of the other important studies dealing with this and other related problems of irregular warfare are Mack 1975; Krepinevich 1986, ch. 6; Valentino 2004, ch.6; Arreguin-Toft 2006.

<sup>20</sup> A particularly good, direct piece of evidence that misestimating the state's brutality threshold explains seemingly hopeless challenges from minorities comes from the conflict in Chechnya. Explaining his support for Boris Yeltsin during the coup attempt in Moscow in 1991, Shamil Basayev, who became the most ferocious leader of the Chechen separatist movement, once told a Russian newspaper that "you [could] kiss Chechnya's independence goodbye" if the coup had been successful. See Steven Lee Myers, "Chechen Rebel Chief is Killed, Russia Says," *The New York Times*, July 10, 2006. The hard-liners' willingness to engage in brutal suppression of Chechen demands, in other words, was not doubted. The Russian liberals, on the other hand, were expected to be less likely to sanction such suppression if they were the ones in the position of deciding how to deal with the Chechens, which was a reasonable expectation, even if it was proven wrong. Basayev's statement is interesting for another reason. He was perhaps as radical and fanatical a separatist as the world has seen. If we could expect statements that Chechnya's independence was indivisible and non-negotiable, it would be from him. Yet even this walking symbol of Chechen radicalism was willing to fold his tent if the *coup d'etat* had succeeded in 1991.



maximal intensity, because they want to use only as much force as they estimate will be necessary to break the minority's will, not as much force as they can. Of course, they may underestimate how much force is necessary, but the basic point about the economy of violence remains. Certain political constraints on states may also make it difficult to err on the side of using too much force. For example, even if Yeltsin's government had some utopian preference for a massive use of force against the Chechens in 1992, it could not have adopted such a strategy. It became possible in 1996, however, and then even easier in 1999.<sup>21</sup>

As this discussion makes clear, intervention is not a necessary condition for escalation. State-minority conflicts can become violent, and escalate in intensity, without it. Intervention is a powerful contributor to escalation under certain conditions, however, even if it also leads to reduction of violence sometimes. When and how does intervention produce escalation? Let us start by considering the effects of intervention, or credible threats of intervention, on the target-state's incentives. What intervention does is threaten the state's ability to coerce the minority successfully by imposing additional costs and risks for trying. The product of these costs and risks may be large enough to make the state's expected payoff for continued violence lower than capitulating. The state will indeed capitulate if that is the case *and* if it has no other option. It is possible of course, that the costs and risks will not be so high, in which case it will be optimal for the state simply to absorb these additional costs and risks and to continue as before. If, however, the costs and risks are sufficiently high, but the state has the option to escalate, escalating will become optimal if it promises a higher payoff than capitulating. We can make this a

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<sup>21</sup> This example also reminds us that the belligerents' thresholds may shift endogenously with fighting. On this point see Goemans 2000 and Wagner 2000.

little more precise. The idea is that a state fighting a minority may estimate the total payoff for successful coercion to be  $\pi_{S_{coerce}}$ , and the payoff for escalating to be  $\pi_{S_{esc}}$ , such that  $\pi_{S_{esc}} < \pi_{S_{coerce}}$ , because escalation entails additional costs.<sup>22</sup> If an intervention pushes up the estimated costs and risks of the coercive campaign pushing the payoff for it down to  $\bar{\pi}_{S_{coerce}}$ , such that  $\bar{\pi}_{S_{coerce}} < \pi_{S_{coerce}}$ , then the state decides to escalate if  $\pi_{S_{concede}} < \pi_{S_{esc}}$ , where  $\pi_{S_{concede}}$  is the state's payoff for conceding to the minority's demands. The reason the payoff for escalation may be larger than the payoff for continued coercion despite the additional costs of escalation, is that escalation improves the probability of winning.

But how and why does escalation improve the probability of winning? Escalation may hold the promise of victory through two different paths. First, it may render the intervener's initial effort pointless and force it to choose between abandoning the minority and escalating the intervention further in response to the state's escalation. In game theoretic parlance this logic amounts to *screening out* the insufficiently resolved third parties. There is some evidence that this sort of thinking drove the Serbian behavior in Srebrenica, for example. According to Samantha Power, "Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic was not dabbling or using petty landgrab to send a political signal; he was taking a huge chunk of internationally "protected" territory and *challenging the world to stop him*."<sup>23</sup> The idea behind the second logic of escalation is presenting the intervener and the minority with a *fait accompli*. More specifically, the state may escalate in order to create certain facts on the ground that would be difficult to reverse. This can range from partial ethnic cleansing with the aim of changing the demography of some region claimed

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<sup>22</sup> The total payoff is a function of both the costs for the coercive campaign and the probability of winning it at those costs.

<sup>23</sup> Power 2002, xiii.

by the minority to full ethnic cleansing and genocide when less draconian escalation is unlikely to create the necessary “facts.”

A skeptic will immediately pose the next question: how is it possible for the third party to make the pre-intervention violence unsustainable for the state without removing its option to escalate? To answer this question we need to distinguish between two types of intervention – intervention by denial and intervention by punishment.<sup>24</sup> The distinction implies that the intervener can either deny the state the ability to use force against the minority, or make such behavior too costly without necessarily making it impossible. The intuition implicit in the counterargument that whatever makes lower-intensity violence difficult should make higher-intensity violence even more so is correct if we assume intervention by denial. The counterargument does not hold if intervention is of the punishment variety. An intervention that makes coercion too costly without making it impossible may indeed generate incentives for escalating.

Unfortunately, even intervention by denial may not be a full-proof solution to the problem, because states may act not only in response to actual interventions, but also in response to threats of intervention, i.e., they may act preemptively. What matters here is how fast the intervener can carry out its threat. What also matters in this case is whether, and how much, the state fears punishment after the fact. Clearly, any incentive to exploit advantages in speed would be dampened by a healthy fear of punishment for escalating, if the state thought it likely. A credible threat of intervention combined with an insufficiently credible threat of punishment, however, may become lethal for the

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<sup>24</sup> This is parallel to Schelling’s distinction between compellence and offence, and Pape’s distinction between coercion by denial and coercion by punishment. See Schelling 1966, 78-86; and Pape 1996, ch. 2.

minority.<sup>25</sup> This claim may seem suspect on the grounds that the state's fear of intervention and its fear of punishment or reversal must be correlated. Unfortunately, this is not always true even if it may be sometimes. Intervening can be less difficult and less costly for the intervener than sufficiently meaningful punishment. This is not to say that such a conjecture is always correct. It can be plausible enough in some cases, however, to divide the state's fear of intervention from its fear of punishment.

This brings us to yet another question. Why would a rational intervener not anticipate the state's escalatory response and refrain from intervening? Or if it could anticipate escalation and was prepared to take the necessary measures in response, why would it not be able to convey its intentions to the state? The answer to the first question lies in the uncertainty about the state's brutality threshold. The intervener, in other words, may calculate that faced with the choice of escalating or conceding to the minority's (and after the intervention, the intervener's) demands, the state will concede rather than escalate when in reality the state has the opposite order of preferences. It could be argued that the state's willingness to coerce the minority violently should be seen as a costly, and therefore a credible, signal that it is prepared to escalate. As the formal analysis below demonstrates, however, some violence does not always prove conclusively that the state is capable of escalating to more intense violence even if it increases the probability of such escalation. Thus even interveners that are not prepared to respond in kind to the state's escalation may intervene, having calculated that when its hand is forced the state will concede rather than escalate. Suppose, however, the

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<sup>25</sup> There are debates regarding how effective the current regime of punishing states that engage in genocidal violence or mass murder is. I take no strong position on the issue, allowing instead for some probability of punishment. For a good analysis and critique of the current thinking on the issue, see Snyder and Vinjamuri 2003/04.

intervener is prepared to escalate the intervention in response to the state's decision to escalate. Could it signal such an intention credibly and dissuade the state from escalating? Would the very fact of intervention not signal the intervener's willingness to escalate in response to the state's escalation? The problem here is the same as with the state's ability to signal its willingness to escalate in response to the initial intervention. The intervention will raise the probability that the intervener is prepared to escalate in response to escalation, but it may fail to remove all uncertainty that it is. This also will become clearer in the formal analysis.

We need briefly to touch upon two additional questions before moving on to the formal analysis of the argument. First, do interventions radicalize minorities? Second, can third parties discourage radicalization, and if they can, why do they fail to do so sometimes? The prospect of intervention definitely contains a potential for radicalizing minorities, although as I already mentioned, that need not be uniformly so. But the potential is certainly there, and the evidence of such radicalization presented by the proponents of the moral hazard theory is undeniable. I will argue later, however, that third parties do have the ability to discourage such radicalization. Sometimes they do not do so not because they cannot – as the moral hazard argument implies – but because they do not want to. I shall present evidence of this in the empirical sections of the article.

### *The Model*

I model intervention as a game of finite horizon, incomplete information bargaining. Its structure is given in Figure 1.1. As we can see there, the minority (**M**) starts out the

game deciding whether to accept the status quo or not. The game ends if it chooses to accept the status quo (SQ1), and moves on to the next stage if it decides to challenge the state. The state (**S**) moves next after the minority's challenge, deciding whether to concede or to resist the challenge violently. The game ends if the state concedes (C1), and moves on to the next stage if it resists. The third party (**TP**) enters the game after the state's move, deciding whether to intervene or not. If it decides not to intervene, the minority gets to make another decision between standing firm and backing down. The outcome is war (W1) if the minority stands firm, and return to the status quo (SQ2) if the minority backs down. If the third party does intervene, the game continues on to the next stage, where the state decides whether to concede or to escalate the violence against the minority. The game ends if the state concedes (C2), and continues for one more move by the third party if the state decides to escalate. The third party makes the last move deciding whether to escalate in response to escalation by the state or to abandon the minority. The outcome is rescue of the minority if the third party escalates (R), and war with intensified violence if the third party abandons the minority (W2). Because this is an incomplete information game, the moves of the strategic actors are preceded by the nature's selection of the types of the state and the third party. It selects a state capable of escalating (**S<sup>b</sup>**) in response to intervention with probability  $\alpha$ , and a state that would rather concede than escalate (**S<sup>~b</sup>**) with probability  $1-\alpha$ .<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the nature selects a cost-tolerant third party (**TP<sup>l</sup>**), which will escalate the intervention in response to the state's decision to escalate the violence against the minority, with probability  $\beta$ , and a cost-

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<sup>26</sup> The superscripts b and ~b stand for brutal and non-brutal respectively.

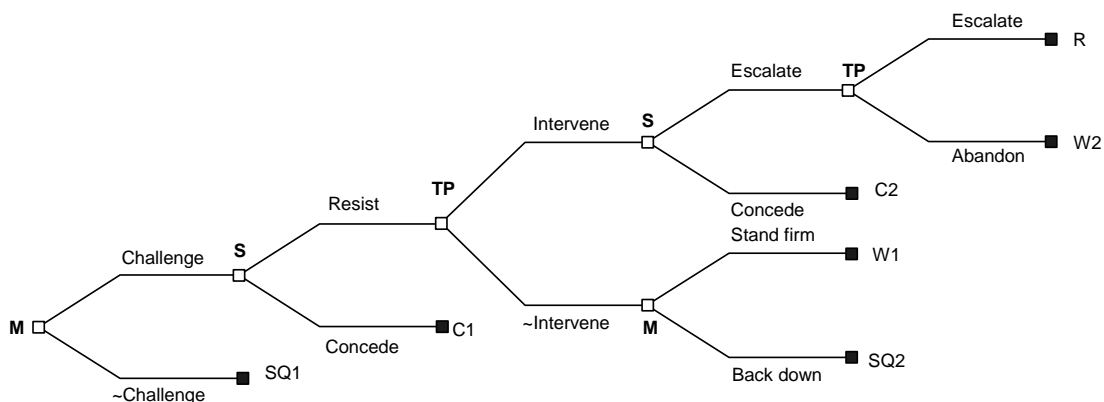


Figure 1.1: The Escalation-dominance Model

sensitive third party ( $TP^h$ ), which will abandon the minority in response to escalated violence with probability  $1-\beta$ .<sup>27</sup>

Note that the labels for the strategies of the actors and the outcomes reflect the logic of screening I described above. These labels, however, can be changed to reflect the *fait accompli* logic, as well as its version where the state responds to a threat of intervention rather than to an actual intervention. Thus if the game tree was to describe the preemptive escalation, the third party's first move would be to choose whether to intervene or not, and its response to the state's decision to escalate would be to punish the escalation or to reverse its gains. It is simply for convenience that I have chosen the labels for one particular scenario of the interaction. Fortunately, it has no analytical consequences. The payoffs, which we shall get to shortly, are generalized payoffs that

<sup>27</sup> The superscripts *l* and *h* stand for low-cost and high-cost respectively.

can be ascribed to the outcomes in either of the scenarios, and the outcomes can be easily reinterpreted in terms of either of them.

**Payoffs and preferences.** What we need to do now is assign payoffs for each actor and each outcome, as well as rank the actors' preferences over the different outcomes given those payoffs. There are several general assumptions lying at the basis of the payoff structure. First, it is assumed that the state and the minority are in dispute over a divisible object worth 1, which is in the state's possession in the status quo. Concessions mean that a portion of the good – represented by the variable  $x \in [0, 1]$  – is transferred to the minority. Second, the third party's payoffs are all different values of the function  $\pi_{TP}(v) = \lambda v - \theta$ , where  $v$  is a general parameter representing the minority's gains either through concessions or fighting;  $\theta$  is a parameter representing the different costs the third party incurs for different actions; and  $\lambda$  is a parameter measuring the third party's bias in favor of the minority, such that  $0 \leq \lambda \leq 1$ .<sup>28</sup> Third, it is assumed that violence is costly for any of the actors, but that violence is more costly for less brutal states and more cost-sensitive third parties than it is for more brutal states and more cost-tolerant third parties. Fourth, it is assumed that the probability that the minority wins improves if there is an intervention. Fifth and finally, the probability that the minority wins decreases if the state escalates and if there is no intervention.

Now we can turn to the specific payoffs. The easiest is the SQ1 outcome, where the state retains the good in dispute in its entirety getting a payoff of 1, while the minority and the third party each get a payoff of 0. The payoffs are also quite self-explanatory for the C1 outcome: the minority gets  $x$ , the state gets  $1-x$ , and the third party gets  $\lambda x$ . The

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<sup>28</sup> This makes sure that the third party does not care about the object of dispute between the state and the minority more than the minority does. That does not imply pure altruism since the nature of third party's motives have to do with the sources for the bias and not how strong the bias is.



payoffs are  $-k_M$  and  $-\phi$  for the minority and the third party respectively when SQ2 is the outcome. The state's payoff here depends on its type. The payoff is  $1-k_S$  if it is a brutal state, and  $1-k_S-\delta_S$  if it is non-brutal state. The idea is that state's resistance to minority's demands involves certain costs for both the state and the minority even if the dispute does not escalate to a full-scale war, which is what the parameter  $k_i$ ,  $i \in I = \{M, S\}$  measures, and that the non-brutal state incurs an additional cost  $\delta_S$  for that resistance. The parameter  $\phi$  represents the costs the third party incurs for not intervening, which include a mix of strategic and moral components. For the W1 outcome, minority's payoff is  $p-k_S-c_M$ , where  $p$  is its probability of winning a violent confrontation with the state, and  $c_M$  is the cost of violence after the period of state's initial resistance. The state's payoff for this outcome also depends on its type. Thus the brutal state's payoff is  $1-p-k_S-c_S$ , whereas the non-brutal state's payoff is  $1-p-k_S-\delta_S-c_S-d_S$ , where  $c_S$  is the state's cost for the full-scale war with the minority, and  $d_S$  is the additional cost that the non-brutal state incurs for it, reflecting again the assumption that the same amount of violence is subjectively more costly for the non-brutal type. The third party's payoff for this outcome, regardless of its type, is  $\lambda p - \phi - \psi$ , where  $\psi$  is an additional cost for not intervening given the higher degree of violence characterizing the W1 outcome compared to the SQ2 outcome.<sup>29</sup> Next is the C2 outcome. Here the minority's payoff is  $x-k_M$ . The brutal state's payoff is  $1-x-k_S$ , and the non-brutal state's payoff is  $1-x-k_S-\delta_S$ , and the third party's payoff is

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<sup>29</sup> The additional cost  $\psi$  is to make sure that the third party does not prefer the W1 outcome to either of the status quo outcomes.

$\lambda x - k_{TP}$  if it is cost-tolerant, and  $\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP}$  if it is cost-sensitive, where  $\delta_{TP}$  is cost-sensitive third party's additional cost for the same intervention.<sup>30</sup>

For the R outcome the minority's payoff is  $q - k_M - \bar{c}_M$ , where  $q$  is the probability that the minority wins with the help of the third party, such that  $q > p$ . The brutal state's payoff is  $1 - q - k_S - \bar{c}_S$ , while the payoff of the non-brutal state is  $1 - q - k_S - \bar{c}_S - d_S - \delta_S$ . The cost-tolerant third party's payoff is  $\lambda q - k_{TP} - c_{TP}$ , and cost-sensitive third party's payoff is  $\lambda q - k_{TP} - c_{TP} - d_{TP} - \delta_{TP}$ . Finally, there is the W2 outcome, which gives the minority a payoff of  $r - k_M - \bar{c}_M$ , such that  $r < p$ , which is consistent with the assumption that the minority's chances of winning diminish as the state escalates. The brutal state's payoff is  $1 - r - k_S - \bar{c}_S$ , while the non-brutal state's payoff is  $1 - r - k_S - \bar{c}_S - d_S - \delta_S$ . The cost-tolerant third party's payoff for this outcome is  $\lambda r - k_{TP}$ , while that of the cost-sensitive third party is  $\lambda r - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP}$ .  $\bar{c}_i$  is player  $i$ 's cost for escalation such that  $\bar{c}_i > c_i$ ,  $i \in I = \{M, S\}$ .

The payoffs described above already contain important information about the actors' preferences, but they do not give us all the necessary information for the equilibrium analysis, for which we need to make several additional assumptions. First, we assume that the minority prefers C2 to SQ1, which means that the state's initial resistance is costly for the minority, but that the minority's net payoff is still positive, i.e.  $x - k_M > 0$ . The second, and somewhat more controversial, assumption is that the

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<sup>30</sup> The additional costs that the non-brutal state and the cost-sensitive third party incur for violent outcomes depend on the violent outcome, just as the basic costs do. This is why for less violent outcomes the non-brutal states incurs an additional cost  $\delta_S$ , such that  $\delta_S < d_S$ , and the cost-sensitive third party incurs an additional cost  $\delta_{TP}$ , such that  $\delta_{TP} < d_{TP}$ .

minority prefers SQ1 to R, which means  $q - k_M - \bar{c}_M < 0$ . This is controversial, because empirically it is possible for a minority to prefer war with the help of a third party to the status quo. Indeed it is possible to imagine a minority that prefers a W1 to the status quo. But what this assumption does is bias the minority against challenging the state, hence against the possibility of escalated violence as well. If the possibility of a challenge can be demonstrated with such a restrictive assumption, the possibility of a challenge when the minority prefers R to SQ1 will simply follow.

The next assumption has to do with the key difference between the two types of states. What distinguishes them is the preference between W2 and C1 outcomes, i.e. the preference for escalating over conceding when faced with an intervention. It is assumed that the brutal type prefers escalating to conceding, whereas the non-brutal state prefers conceding to escalating. Expressed in terms of the payoffs this means  $x > r + k_S + \bar{c}_S$ , while  $x < r + k_S + \bar{c}_S + d_S + \delta_S$ . I assume in addition that even the brutal state prefers conceding if the third party is prepared to escalate the intervention, which means  $x < q + k_S + \bar{c}_S$ .

Finally, we have to make two additional assumptions regarding the preferences of the third party. First, it is assumed that the cost-sensitive and cost-tolerant third parties have different preferences over escalating the intervention and abandoning the minority. The cost-sensitive third party prefers abandoning the minority, while the cost-tolerant third party prefers escalating when faced with state's decision to escalate. Expressed in terms of the payoffs, this means  $c_{TP} < \lambda(q - r)$  and  $c_{TP} + d_{TP} + \delta_{TP} > \lambda(q - r)$ . Second, even the cost-sensitive third party prefers intervening if the state's response to

intervention is to concede, which means  $\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP} > 0$ . We now have all the necessary information to determine the game's equilibria.

**Equilibrium analysis.** The technical details of deriving the equilibrium conditions are provided in the appendix. Here I shall discuss the intuition behind the main results. The first important observation we can make is that SQ1 or C1 are the only possible results under complete information, depending on the combination of the state's and the third party's types. Uncertainty regarding their types, however, complicates things, making it possible for Pareto-suboptimal outcomes, including W2 and R, to occur in equilibrium. The fundamental consequence of such uncertainty is that weakly resolved types – the non-brutal state and the cost-sensitive third party – acquire incentives to misrepresent their true level of resolve and appear as strongly resolved. Because of such incentives, threats of escalation get discounted by some measure.

The literature on costly signals tells us, however, that strongly resolved types can often credibly reveal their preferences by taking costly actions that only they would have incentives to take.<sup>31</sup> The availability of such actions makes it possible for resolved types to signal their preferences credibly removing the uncertainty for the opponent. Both the action and its absence credibly reveal the informed actor's type. Conceivably, resisting the minority can serve as a costly signal for the state's intention to escalate if it becomes a target of intervention, and intervening can serve as a costly signal for the third party's willingness to escalate in response. But because the costs of resistance and intervention are distributed continuously, it cannot be merely the fact of resisting or intervening that will have the revelatory effect, but *how* costly these actions are. Both the state's and the

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<sup>31</sup> On costly signals in international relations see Schelling 1966; Jervis 1970; Fearon 1997. The seminal works in economics are Akerlof 1970; Spence 1973.

third party's strategy choices are characterized by certain thresholds - two in the case of the state and one in the case of the third party. The first threshold on the state's continuum of costs, which is denoted as  $k_s^*$ , separates the state's brutal and non-brutal types. The second threshold value, which is denoted as  $k_s^{**}$ , defines the level of costs that makes even the brutal state indifferent between resisting minority's challenge and conceding.<sup>32</sup>

Having observed violent resistance by the state, what should the third party conclude? Clearly, the question is immaterial for the cost-tolerant third party, because it has a dominant strategy of intervening and then escalating if the state chooses to respond to intervention by escalating the violence against the minority. For the cost-tolerant third party the answer is that it updates its prior probability of facing a brutal state using the Bayes rule. The posterior probability of facing a brutal state is the conditional probability of facing a brutal state given resistance, which the following expression describes:

$$\Pr(k_s > k_s^* | \text{resist}) = \frac{\Pr(k_s > k_s^*)}{\Pr(k_s > 0)}$$

This expression tells us that the posterior probability of facing a brutal state given resistance is equal to the probability that that the state is brutal divided by the probability of observing resistance. What this expression implies is that *any* level of resistance increases the probability that the state may escalate because of the existence of states that do not resist at all. But this increase may not be sufficient to remove all uncertainty

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<sup>32</sup> See the appendix for the formal derivation of these threshold values.

regarding the state's type, because non brutal states have incentives to bluff when  $0 < k_S < k_S^*$ .<sup>33</sup> Under this condition the risk of becoming a target of intervention is outweighed by the likely prospect of beating the minority into submission without any intervention. Because for some costs of resistance even the non-brutal state resists, and because the cost-sensitive third party knows it, it intervenes sometimes after observing resistance in the  $0 < k_S < k_S^*$  range, running the risk of intervening against a brutal state and generating a non-zero probability of escalation.

This may raise a question as to why the brutal state would not always choose the intensity of resistance to be in the range  $k_S^* < k_S < k_S^{**}$ , which would remove all uncertainty, and which would imply that only non-brutal types resist in the  $0 < k_S < k_S^*$  range.<sup>34</sup> The answer is that the state may face certain political constraints when choosing the intensity of resistance, which means that the intensity of resistance is determined exogenously.

A similar analysis applies to the interaction following intervention. Here it is the brutal state that has to decide whether to escalate the violence against the minority after having observed an intervention. The Bayes rule allows the brutal state to determine the posterior probability of facing a cost-tolerant third party, which is the conditional probability of facing a cost-tolerant third party given intervention:

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<sup>33</sup> In the range  $k_S^* < k_S < k_S^{**}$  only brutal states resist, which allows the third party to update its probability of facing a brutal state to 1.

<sup>34</sup> This implies that non-brutal types would never resist, because bluffing would be impossible.

$$\Pr(k_{TP} > k_{TP}^* | \text{intervention}) = \frac{\Pr(k_{TP} > k_{TP}^*)}{\Pr(k_S > \phi)} \quad 35$$

The implication of this expression is that *any* intervention increases the probability of facing a cost-tolerant third party. Interventions in the  $k_{TP} < k_{TP}^*$  range, however, do not separate the cost-tolerant and cost-sensitive third parties perfectly.<sup>36</sup> When the costs of intervention are that low, cost-sensitive third parties have incentives to bluff, making it optimal for the brutal state to escalate sometimes. The key implication here is the non-zero probability of escalation against a cost-tolerant third party. As with the costs of resistance for the state, the assumption is that the third party's costs of intervention are determined exogenously, which means that even cost-tolerant third parties sometimes may not have the option of intervening forcefully enough to dispel any doubt about their willingness to escalate the intervention or severely punish the state for escalating violence against the minority.

Finally, we have the minority's equilibrium behavior to consider, which is less complicated, because nowhere in the game is its decision dependent on observations of the state's and the third party's prior actions. If the game has reached the node where the minority has the option of standing firm or backing down, it backs down, which follows directly from how we have specified the minority's order of preferences over these two options. Minority's decision at the initial node is only slightly less straightforward.

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<sup>35</sup> See the appendix for the derivation of  $k_{TP}^*$ .

<sup>36</sup> Interventions in the range  $k_{TP} > k_{TP}^*$  do separate third party's types perfectly, allowing the brutal state to update its probability of facing a cost-tolerant third party to 1.

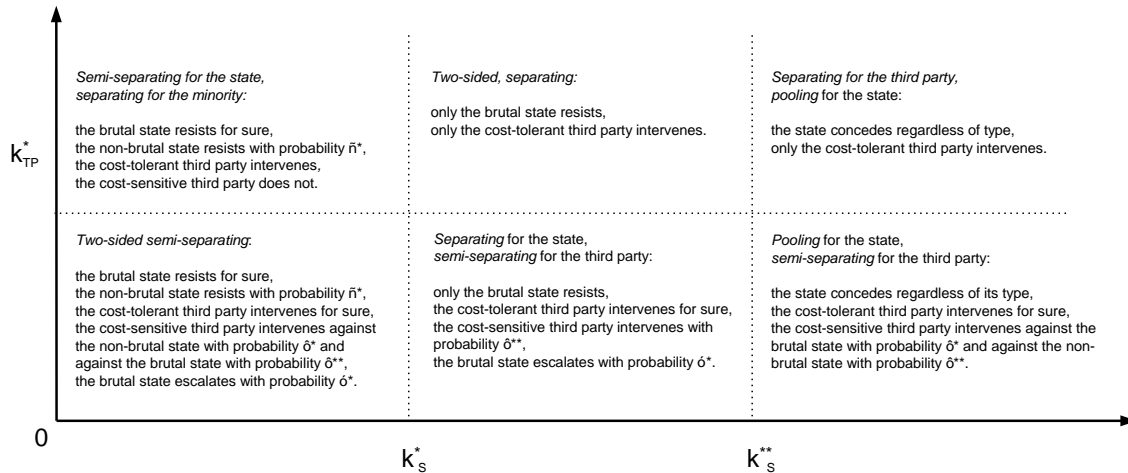


Figure 1.2: The equilibrium outcomes following a challenge by the minority

It chooses to challenge if the *expected* payoff for challenging is higher than the payoff for accepting the status quo.<sup>37</sup> Figure 1.2 summarizes the analysis.

The model has a set of interesting implications. First, like other incomplete information bargaining models, it demonstrates that for violence to occur it need not be the highest ranked preference for any of the actors. The idea has added significance in our context, because the assumption that violence against minorities can be explained as nothing more than the direct manifestation of certain states' warped preferences is even more firmly entrenched than similar assumptions in the context of interstate violence. The preceding analysis demonstrates by contrast that even states that would otherwise prefer the status quo, or even some concessions, can resort to violence and then even escalate it when their vital interests are threatened and their choices constrained. Third-party interventions often have such a radicalizing effect, because interventions compound the threats to targeted states' sovereignty while removing their less radical options.

<sup>37</sup> The minority's expected payoff is specified in the appendix.



Second, the model confirms the key proposition of the moral hazard theory of third-party interventions that minorities in dispute with states will get radicalized as the likelihood of intervention becomes larger,  $\left(\frac{\partial k_M^*}{\partial \beta} > 0\right)$ . But it also solves the puzzle of simultaneous radicalization of the minority and the state, which the moral hazard theory of intervention has not been able to, and which Cetinyan has rejected as a possibility. We can see that by looking at the partial derivatives of  $k_S^{**}$  with respect to  $\beta$  and  $\tau$ . While the first is negative  $\left(\frac{\partial k_S^{**}}{\partial \beta} < 0\right)$ , the second is positive  $\left(\frac{\partial k_S^{**}}{\partial \tau} > 0\right)$ . The interpretation is that the brutal state's threshold for conceding gets smaller as the probability of facing a cost-tolerant third party increases, and it gets larger as the probability of facing a cost-sensitive third party gets higher.

Third, we can see that the cost-sensitive third party's expected payoff for intervening improves as the parameters for both the third party's bias for the minority ( $\lambda$ ) and the negative payoff for non-intervention ( $\phi$ ) get larger. This means  $\frac{\partial \sigma^*}{\partial \lambda} > 0$  and  $\frac{\partial \sigma^*}{\partial \phi} > 0$ , where  $\sigma^*$  is the threshold probability that makes the brutal state indifferent between escalating and conceding.<sup>38</sup> This may seem like a trivial observation, but it is not. What it suggests is that under incomplete information the third party will have incentives to run much higher *risks* the higher the values of these parameters are. This statement should be analytically distinguished from the simple claim that the likelihood

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<sup>38</sup> See the appendix for the derivation of  $\sigma^*$ .

of intervention is a function of the intensity of violence.<sup>39</sup> It is rather about risking escalation as a function of the strength of the third party's bias in favor of the minority's preferences or its costs of non-intervention. There is something else interesting about this relationship. It should be recalled that I allowed for mixed motives that drive interventions. This means that we can disaggregate the parameters  $\lambda$  and  $\phi$  into humanitarian and non-humanitarian components, such that  $\lambda = \lambda^h + \lambda^{\sim h}$  and  $\phi = \phi^h + \phi^{\sim h}$ , which means we can rewrite the expression for the threshold probability of escalation that makes the cost-sensitive third party indifferent between intervening and not intervening as follows:  $\sigma = \frac{(\lambda^h + \lambda^{\sim h})x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP} + (\phi^h + \phi^{\sim h})}{\alpha(\lambda^h + \lambda^{\sim h})(x - r)} \equiv \sigma^*$ . This allows us to see that the risk tolerance for escalation increases not only as a function of the brutality with which the minority is treated, but also as a function of the third party's non-humanitarian interests in intervening. Motives, in other words, may matter after all.

Fourth, and finally, by slightly modifying the model we can see that the state's propensity to escalate diminishes the more powerful it becomes. To see why that is the case we can relax the assumption that intervention forces the state to choose between conceding and escalating. Suppose that the state has an option of resisting the minority's demands without escalating the violence even if there is intervention. Suppose also that the probability that the coalition of the minority and the cost-tolerant third party prevail in the confrontation is  $p'$ , such that  $p' > q$ , which implies that the state's chances of winning are smaller if it does not escalate. Suppose, finally, that the third party's type has been revealed as cost-tolerant, but at the same time that the brutal state now earns a better

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<sup>39</sup> Patrick Regan has argued, in fact, that the likelihood of intervention in "internal conflicts" diminishes the more intense those conflicts become. See Regan 1998.

payoff for escalating than for conceding, while its payoff for resisting without escalating is lower than the payoff for conceding. Formally, this means  $p' + c_s > x > q + \bar{c}_s$ . It is easy to see that as  $p'$  approaches  $q$ , the payoffs for escalating and resisting will converge in magnitude and then the payoff for resisting will get larger than the payoff for escalating as  $p'$  gets arbitrarily close to  $q$ , since  $\bar{c}_M > c_M$ . Since  $p'$  and  $q$  measure the distribution of power between the state and the coalition of the minority and the third party, this analysis implies that the incentives for brutal escalation are inversely related to the state's power.

### *Intervention in Kosovo*

The aim of the empirical analysis in the pages that follow is not to give a detailed history of the conflict in Kosovo and the intervention in 1999. It is rather to illustrate the logic of the escalation-dominance model on the evidence from Kosovo, and also see how it performs in comparison to its chief competitors – the conventional wisdom and the moral hazard account, which to date have been the main sources of causal explanations for the disaster that engulfed Kosovo in the spring of 1999.

The conventional wisdom, which has been the dominant of the two schools, consists of three core claims – Serbs initiated the conflict; Serbs did so because they intended to “cleanse” the province of its Albanian population in pursuit of their mad desire to create an ethnically pure Serbia; and finally, NATO intervened in response to that campaign and succeeded in reversing it. These claims have acquired the status of truth in the Western public discourse for no other merit than being repeated too often and too tenaciously. None of these claims stands up to an even casual examination raising

certain disturbing questions regarding the health of the marketplace of ideas in at least some Western democracies.

The claim that Serbs were the initiators rests either on the arbitrary and historically blind assertion that the conflict started with the downgrading of Kosovo's autonomous status in 1989 or at best the famous speech Milosevic gave in 1987, where he told an angry crowd of Serbs in Kosovo that "nobody should be allowed to beat them." Anybody with basic familiarity of Yugoslav history knows, of course, that the conflict in Kosovo predates those events. It was indeed one of the most stubborn problems in post-war Yugoslavia, which was responsive neither to attempts at reform nor to repression. Since the establishment of the Yugoslav federation after the end of WWII, the Albanians of Kosovo had been dissatisfied of their status as an autonomous republic in Serbia and had been demanding a status of a federal republic. The resentment caused by their subordinate status boiled over into violent riots and mass demonstrations several times in the 1960's, 1970's, and early 1980's, i.e. well before the crisis of the Yugoslav federation in the second half of the 1980's. Particularly serious were the riots in 1981, which took place shortly after the death of Tito and the subsequent weakening of the federal government. One of the things the rioters did was target Serbs and Montenegrins living in Kosovo, which accelerated their exodus from the province – a trend that Serbs had been worrying about for a long time already. The daily violence and harassment of the province's Slav's became so bad during and after the riots that *The New York Times* published a report on their plight in 1982 quoting the following from a statement by an ethnic Albanian Communist official: "The [Albanian] nationalists have a two-point program, first to establish an ethnically clear Albanian republic and then the merger with

Albania to form a greater Albania.”<sup>40</sup> The same newspaper, which at the time had no party line to tow, reported the following in 1987: “As Slavs flee the protracted violence, Kosovo is becoming what ethnic Albanian nationalists have been demanding for years... an ‘ethnically pure’ Albanian region.”<sup>41</sup> This situation was a source tremendous anxiety and agitation among the Serbs, weakening the Serbian elites’ commitment to “Yugoslavism” and creating a political market for nationalists. Committees of defending the rights of Kosovo’s Serbs were mushrooming in the country and Serbian intellectuals were demanding action.<sup>42</sup> This situation, along with Slovenia’s and Croatia’s turn to separatism, is the explanation for the Serbian turn to nationalism and the rise of politicians like Milosevic. Milosevic and his fellow nationalists were the consequences of the conflict in Kosovo, as well as the conflicts with Slovenia and Croatia, not the other way around, as the conventional wisdom would have us believe.<sup>43</sup> And the conflict in Kosovo was most certainly initiated by the Albanians, not the Serbs. This is not to say that the Albanian grievances and demands were illegitimate, although some undoubtedly were, or that Serbian responses were always justified. This is simply to say that the challenge to the status quo came from them over an issue as old and straightforward as nationalism itself – the Kosovars’ dissatisfaction with their political status.

This brings us to the second and third claims, according to which the problem in Kosovo was the Serbian desire to create an ethnically pure Serbia and that their attempt

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<sup>40</sup> See Marvine Howe, “Exodus of Serbs Stirs Province in Yugoslavia,” *The New York Times*, July, 12, 1982. The Human Rights Watch also documented the violence against Kosovo’s Slavs in that period. See *Yugoslavia: Crisis in Kosovo* (New York, NY: Helsinki Watch and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, 1990), pp. 21-25.

<sup>41</sup> See David Binder, “In Yugoslavia, Rising Ethnic Strife Brings Fears of Worse Civil Conflict,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 1987.

<sup>42</sup> The most prominent and ominous example of intelligentsia’s turn to Serbian nationalism was the famous secret memorandum prepared in 1986 at the Serbian Academy of Sciences, which argued that Serbs in Kosovo were being subjected to genocide. See Vickers 1998, 222-223; and Judah 2002, 49-50.

<sup>43</sup> For excellent accounts of this period see Woodward 1995; and Vickers 1998.

to accomplish that goal is what triggered NATO's intervention in 1999. The evidentiary support for this is as questionable, as it is for the claim that Serbs were the initiators of the conflict. It is largely based on the evidence of civilian victimization in Kosovo in 1998, and the so-called Operation Horseshoe – the alleged plan of deporting the Kosovo Albanians. The civilian victimization that took place in Kosovo is, of course, a fact, and a deplorable one. But presenting it as evidence of an ongoing or impending ethnic cleansing without discussing the context and without putting it in any comparative perspective is an example of how evidence should not be reported and interpreted.

The context I am referring to was the insurgency that the Kosovo Liberation Army had launched in 1997. As any student of irregular warfare can attest, armies or police forces fighting against insurgents cannot avoid victimizing civilians. The reason is simple: making combatants and non-combatants indistinguishable is the chief tactical weapon of insurgents. States facing insurgents can choose between only two options - fighting dirty or not fighting at all. The third option – fighting clean – does not exist.<sup>44</sup> A skeptic will object, of course, that there are degrees of barbarism, and states at least can be expected to make a maximum effort to spare non-combatants. This is entirely fair, but beside the point. The point is that even brutal and non-discriminatory application of force may be intended to coerce rather than eliminate the target group, therefore such use of force when the context is insurgency cannot be used as evidence of genocidal intent.

And how brutal exactly was the Serbian counterinsurgency? Was its brutality the reason for the mobilization of public opinion in the West? I can do no better in answering this question than cite Doug Bandow:

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<sup>44</sup> The latest and most comprehensive study making this argument is Kalyvas 2006. Some of the other important studies dealing with this and other related problems of irregular warfare are Mack 1975; Krepinevich 1986, ch. 6; Valentino 2004, ch.6; Arreguin-Toft 2006.

[a]n estimated 2000 people, *including Serbs*, were killed in Kosovo in 1998 and the first two months of 1999. At least three times as many people died in January 1999 alone in Sierra Leone. Nearly as many people died in one three-day battle between Tamil Tiger guerillas and the Sri Lankan government in the fall of 1998 as died in Kosovo during all of that year.<sup>45</sup>

The unique brutality of the Serbian counterinsurgency, in other words, can hardly be an explanation for the intervention, because it was not uniquely brutal.

What about the Operation Horseshoe? Surely this infamous Serbian plan was proof that even if they were not engaged in a campaign of ethnic cleansing, such a campaign was imminent, and therefore it made sense to preempt it by launching the intervention in 1999. It would be so had it not been for three problems. First, the Operation Horseshoe did not exist. It was a forgery, and it is shocking that, even after this has been revealed and even as the prosecutors in Hague refused to include it in their case against Milosevic, it is still being cited as one of the reasons for the intervention.<sup>46</sup> Second, the first reports about this plan surfaced on April 4, 1999, i.e. 10 days after the launch of the air strikes, which means it could not have been the reason. And we can be fairly sure that NATO governments knew nothing about the existence of such a plan prior to the intervention, otherwise they would have had incentives to publicize it at extremely high decibels. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the existence of a plan says nothing about the imminence of its implementation.

The conventional wisdom clearly has problems. But the aforementioned problems with its evidentiary record are not even the most important reason why we should discard it. We should discard it, because there is undeniable evidence of

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<sup>45</sup> Badow 2000, 34. (*italics mine*)

<sup>46</sup> On this and other claims comprising the propaganda campaign preceding the intervention in Kosovo see Wolfram 1995.

American leaders being fully aware that prior to the intervention they were *not* dealing with a case of ethnic cleansing despite their statements to the contrary and many a comparison of Serbia with Nazi Germany. I shall present that evidence later, however, because there is another context where that its discussion is even more pertinent.

Meanwhile, a few words are in order about the moral hazard interpretation of the events in Kosovo. It is very critical of the conventional wisdom as well, particularly of its portrayal of the conflict as an unprovoked carnage unleashed by the Serbs. It focuses instead on the provocative behavior of Kosovo Albanians and the fact that they launched an insurgency in 1997 hoping to provoke Serbian violence, which then would trigger a Western intervention. The new interventionist norm, they argue created this moral hazard. I think there is no doubt that Kosovo Albanians indeed thought that violence may be helpful in focusing the West's attention to their plight and there the moral hazard argument stands on firm ground. It is not the most persuasive interpretation of what happened in Kosovo, however, because it exaggerates the strength of that norm, and because it fails to account properly for the simultaneous radicalization of Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. It does not explain, more specifically, why Serbs should have been provoked at all. Nor does it explain why the Serbian response to the provocation was mass expulsion rather than punitive action. Indeed the attempted ethnic cleansing in 1999 was not a response to the Albanian provocation, but to NATO's intervention itself. Why did NATO intervene without any preparation for such an eventuality? And why did the Serbs go for such escalation if they were going to sue for peace in the end? The moral hazard account does not have good solutions for these puzzles. Does the escalation-dominance model do any better?



We can begin with the attempt to understand the NATO, or rather American, decision to intervene without contingency plans for a Serbian escalation. It was drowned out in the victory celebrations afterwards, but the question was on everybody's mind for several weeks as NATO was watching helplessly how Albanians were being expelled *en masse*. When asked why NATO was unprepared for the escalation, Wesley Clark – one of the architects of the intervention and the man who was in charge of its military component – gave the following answer:

We thought the Serbs were preparing for a spring offensive that would target KLA strongholds, which had also been reinforced in previous months. *But we never expected the Serbs would push ahead with the wholesale deportation of the ethnic Albanian population.*<sup>47</sup>

The answer is quite interesting for two reasons. First, it proves conclusively that what was taking place in Kosovo prior to the intervention was a counterinsurgency, rather than a campaign of ethnic cleansing, and that American leaders were well aware of it. . Second, it shows that there was a fatal misestimate of Serbian resolve. And this was not simply one man's poor judgment. The State Department and the CIA conducted separate studies trying to figure out the likelihood that Serbs would go after the Albanian population of Kosovo in response to the intervention.<sup>48</sup> They all came to the conclusion that it was unlikely.<sup>49</sup> The Pentagon also conducted a study with the same result, only the authors of this study estimated that upward to 200,000 Albanians may be expelled before Serbs would give up,<sup>50</sup> which was apparently considered an acceptable risk.

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in R. Jeffrey Smith and William Drozdiak, "Serbs' Offensive Was Meticulously Planned," *Washington Post*, April 11, 1999, A1. (italics mine) .

<sup>48</sup> That this would be the Serbs' only retaliatory option was the correct, and interesting, assumption in those reports.

<sup>49</sup> See Barton Gellman, "The Path to Crisis: How the United States and its Allies Went to War," *Washington Post*, April 18, 1999, p. A1; Elaine Sciolino and Ethan Bronner, "How a President, Distracted by Scandal, Entered Balkan War," *The New York Times*, April 18, p. A1.

<sup>50</sup> Power 2002, 454.

Were such estimates reasonable given what we know after the fact, and given that Milosevic had issued explicit threats to do precisely what he did in case of an intervention?<sup>51</sup> The analysis that produced these estimates certainly contained flaws.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, however, these estimates were not entirely unreasonable, because Milosevic had succumbed to outside pressure in the past practically every time such pressure had been applied. Moreover, American elites held a much more benign view of him in private than in public. Contrary to their public pronouncements, they thought of him as an opportunistic apparatchik rather than a fire-breathing nationalist who would be capable of such a decision, which was not entirely without justification.<sup>53</sup> Even ignoring his threat of expelling the Kosovo Albanians was not unreasonable, because he had incentives to make such a threat even if he did not intend to carry it out. As Kelly Greenhill has argued, the flood of refugees from the Balkans was always high on the Europeans' list of fears. The threat of sending more refugees could have made the Europeans think twice about supporting the intervention if they believed it.<sup>54</sup>

What about Milosevic's decision to escalate in response to the intervention? Was it rational given the outcome of the intervention? It does not seem to have been so given the fact that the ethnic cleansing was reversed and NATO troops were stationed in Kosovo. Before the fact, however, Milosevic had good reasons to believe that the USA

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<sup>51</sup> Milosevic had told German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer that "he could empty Kosovo in a week," in early March, 1999. The Serbian government had also circulated a letter on March 20<sup>th</sup>, which contained the following statement: "all those threatening to use force against our country must face the responsibility for the consequences of humanitarian problems, which might arise as a result of the use of such force." See Greenhill 2003, 212. According to Power, Milosevic had also communicated the threat of expelling Kosovo Albanians to Clark. See Power 2002, 454.

<sup>52</sup> For instance, the expectation that the air campaign will be successful was partially based on a flawed assessment of the effects of the air strikes against Yugoslavia in 1995. The air war in 1995 was accompanied by a successful Croatian ground campaign in Krajina, therefore it was probably not a good idea to use that earlier "success" of the air power as a basis of estimating what would happen in Kosovo. See Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000, 91-96.

<sup>53</sup> It is remarkable how thin the case against Milosevic was in the Hague.

<sup>54</sup> Greenhill 2003.

and its allies were unlikely to persist with the intervention or escalate it in response to an attempt at ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. The Serbian optimism was primarily based on the well-articulated American and NATO reluctance to fight a ground war, as well as statements designed to reassure their domestic audiences that it was going to be a short campaign.<sup>55</sup> Milosevic would be justified to take these statements at face value, because there NATO leaders not only did not have any incentives to make them as misrepresentations, they had the opposite of those incentives.

In addition, some caveats about NATO's victory are frequently overlooked. Most importantly, the terms of the cease-fire were not nearly as harsh as what the Serbs were confronted with at Rambouillet. The demand for unimpeded military access to the entire territory of Yugoslavia, for example, was dropped.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Serbs did not have to make any commitments regarding the future status of Kosovo aside from agreeing to negotiate it,<sup>57</sup> and the troops that would be deployed in Kosovo would include a Russian contingent. Calling the intervention in Kosovo a complete success for NATO and a total failure of Serbian policy, therefore, needs some important qualifications.<sup>58</sup>

Why did the US decide to launch the ill-fated air-strikes, and more importantly, why did it deliver the extremely harsh ultimatum at Rambouillet? Were these policies the result of entrapment by the KLA and the fear of having to deal with scenes of refugee

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<sup>55</sup> See Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000, 96; "Address by the President to the Nation" (White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 24, 1999); Interview with Madeline Albright, PBS, *Newshour with Jim Lehrer*, March 24.

<sup>56</sup> That demand was part of the so-called military annex of the Rambouillet ultimatum. See Auerswald and Auerswald 2000, 588.

<sup>57</sup> The ultimatum delivered at Rambouillet contained a provision for an interim status for Kosovo for three years, which would essentially suspend Serbian sovereignty over the province. After three years the status would be decided by some sort of a vaguely defined plebiscite, the outcome of which was, of course, a foregone conclusion. The text of that provision can be found in Auerswald and Auerswald 2000, 590.

<sup>58</sup> For similar conclusions see Posen 2000; Mandelbaum 1999; Hosmer 2001, ch. 4.

columns and dead bodies on CNN? The answer has to be an unequivocal no. The architects of the intervention clearly had the opposite problem, when they were reassuring their publics about the expected low costs of the intervention.<sup>59</sup> According to some of her confidants, Madeleine Albright was relentlessly pushing for intervention shortly after the Racak incident,<sup>60</sup> arguing that its galvanizing effect would not last long.<sup>61</sup> Shortly after Rambouillet, Albright also stated that the failure of negotiations there was key to “getting the [Europeans] to agree to the use of force.”<sup>62</sup> The full meaning of this statement is made more transparent by Christopher Hill, who told the *Washington Times* that the American representative knew that there was no chance that the Serbs would agree to what they were offered at Rambouillet.<sup>63</sup> In an expression of even more astonishing honesty, Albright’s deputy – James Rubin – wrote in the *Financial Times* that “the only failure at Rambouillet would be a rejection by the Albanians.”<sup>64</sup> The logic of entrapment is nowhere to be seen in any of these statements. In addition, the US government and its NATO allies had proven that if they wanted, they could discipline the KLA. As Timothy Crawford reports, after becoming exasperated with the KLA’s intransigence, NATO did not only did not get in the way of a Serbian offensive in the summer of 1998, its Supreme Allied Commander in Europe – the same Wesley Clark – made threats about the possibility of some unspecified anti-KLA operations, as well as

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<sup>59</sup> A good indicator of the public interest in getting involved in Kosovo militarily was the fact that shortly before the intervention 199 members of the House of Representatives voted against a resolution committing 4,000 American peacekeepers to Kosovo *if both sides agreed to a peaceful settlement*. See Jessica Lee, “GOP Backs Clinton on Kosovo Vote,” *USA Today*, March 12, 1999, A1.

<sup>60</sup> 24 non-combatant Albanians were killed in this small town on January 15, 1999. This event set in motion the crisis, which led first to Rambouillet, and then to the air-strikes.

<sup>61</sup> Barton Gellman, “The Path to Crisis: How the United States and its Allies Went to War,” *Washington Post*, April 18, 1999, p. A1.

<sup>62</sup> *The New York Times*, April 18, 1999, p. A13.

<sup>63</sup> *Washington Post*, March 27, 1999, p. A15.

<sup>64</sup> James Rubin, “The Promise of Freedom,” *Financial Times*, October 7, 2000.

the likelihood of shutting down its funding. As a result of this, the KLA was sidelined, the more moderate forces in Kosovo were empowered and new negotiations were initiated with Serbia.<sup>65</sup> Soon, however, the US made a U turn refocusing the pressure on Serbia, probably fearing that the success of the negotiations would strengthen Milosevic, and the whole process collapsed.<sup>66</sup>

In sum, the available evidence from Kosovo lends virtually no support to the standard narrative and it reveals several puzzles that the moral hazard account is unable to account for. The escalation-dominance model, on the other hand, seems to have survived the test. Looking at Kosovo alone, however, is hardly sufficient. At best, it can be seen as a “plausibility probe.” To increase our confidence in the power of the model, we should briefly look at some of the other cases of conflict, intervention, and non-intervention in Yugoslavia, which is a natural laboratory for testing all these theories.

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<sup>65</sup> T. Crawford 2001, 509.

<sup>66</sup> Although the question of motives is not central to my argument, at least beyond demonstrating that it was not humanitarian entrapment, it is interesting to ask what motivated the US not just in Kosovo but in former Yugoslavia as a whole throughout the 1990’s. I actually do not believe there was a single, well-defined motive, but rather a logroll of several motives. It was fed by some US allies’ preference for supporting Slovenia and Croatia in the early 1990’s and the subsequent antagonism that this generated between them and Serbia; the “new left’s” desperate efforts both in the US and Europe to anchor its new identity in “human rights” while distancing itself from communism and socialism, which could be done most conveniently by demonizing Serbia; the effective lobbying efforts of the Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Kosovo Albanians in the USA, combined with a near total absence of such effort by Serbs. Finally, the overarching US goal of extending and deepening NATO’s dominance of Europe was bound to put Serbia in the crosshairs after Serbs had found themselves on the wrong side of the barricade with all those myriad special interests in the West. The best evidence for the latter claim comes from John Norris, who was Strobe Talbott’s director of communications during the air-strikes against Yugoslavia, and who wrote that it was Yugoslavia’s resistance to the broader trends of “economic and political reform,” and not the plight of Kosovo Albanians that best explains the war. See Norris 2005, xxiii (I am grateful to Noam Chomsky for alerting me to this statement). For more details regarding the motives behind West’s policies in Yugoslavia see Johnstone 2002.

### *The Other Conflicts in Yugoslavia*

Kosovo was not the only case in Yugoslavia, where third parties played a destabilizing role. There were two other conflicts – Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia - where third parties' contributed to escalation. The conflict in Vojvodina, meanwhile, did not escalate, because the relevant third party in this case played a moderating role. The structured-focused comparison of these cases demonstrates that both the conventional wisdom and the moral hazard theory have problems explaining these cases as well, while the escalation-dominance model survives them intact.

Let us begin with the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina. As in the case of the conflict in Kosovo, the conventional wisdom portrays this conflict as the consequence of Serbian nationalists' dream of creating an ethnically pure Greater Serbia, which envisioned the seizure of a part of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the expulsion of the Muslim population from there. What the Serbs argued, however, was that it was not clear why Muslims had the right to self-determination and the right to violate Yugoslavia's territorial integrity, but Serbs had to respect the essentially arbitrary borders of the federal republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Contrary to what is commonly assumed, however, they did not insist on annexing the majority Serb areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina to Serbia. They were willing to settle for less, but what they saw as unacceptable was the idea of a Muslim-dominated, unitary Bosnia-Herzegovina. They argued instead that Bosnia-Herzegovina should be cantonized along ethno-confessional lines, adopt a federal constitution, and work out certain power-sharing arrangements between the different groups. They simultaneously threatened catastrophic consequences if this demand was rejected.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Burg and Shoup 1999, 65.

Both the USA and its European allies were initially receptive if not sympathetic to the Serbian position, which was reflected in the refusal to recognize Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent state before parties had reached an agreement regarding its constitution, as well as EU's mediation of negotiations aimed at reaching such an agreement. While these negotiations were in progress, however, the American policy changed dramatically. It was essentially made clear to the Bosnian Muslim leaders that they can count on recognition regardless of the outcome of these negotiations, which eliminated their rationale for a compromise. Warren Zimmerman, who was the American ambassador to Yugoslavia, went so far as to tell the Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegovic that he did not have to sign any agreement he did not like, after Izetbegovic had expressed some uneasiness about the so-called Cutileiro process – the EC-sponsored negotiations, which envisioned cantonizing Bosnia.<sup>68</sup> Bosnians pulled out of the negotiations and declared independence, which indeed was recognized by the USA on 6 April, 1992, presenting the Serbs with a difficult choice – either accept a minority status in a Muslim-dominated Bosnia or resort to violence.

Why the US decided to make this shift is not entirely clear, but certain things can be ruled out. It was not violence against the Bosnian Muslims that compelled the American recognition that conceivably could aim to deter further Serbian violence, since the crisis had not turned violent yet. Indeed, Serbs had threatened in no uncertain terms that violence is precisely what will follow *if* Bosnia-Herzegovina was recognized before a negotiated compromise had been found. Entrapment can even more easily be ruled out in this case, because Izetbegovic had already given his preliminary agreement to a plan of cantonizing Bosnia before essentially being told that he did not have to go along with that

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<sup>68</sup> Johnstone 2002, 44; Burg and Shoup, 1999, 113.

plan by Zimmerman.<sup>69</sup> The aim quite clearly was to force the Serbs to accept an inferior bargain. It is worth quoting Burg and Shoup at length on this point:

[I]t was ... clear that the United States did not interest itself greatly in the details of discussions over the future constitutional order in Bosnia and that Baker did not use the opportunity at Brussels to meet with Izetbegovic to put the maximum pressure possible on the Muslims to accept the EC proposals. American attention was focused on Milosevic, not on the delicate negotiations that would be required to strike a balance between the autonomy for the ethnic communities and maintaining the integrity of the Bosnian state. Zimmerman was skeptical of the claim that Bosnian Serbs' rights were being violated and was unsympathetic to the Bosnian Serb call for self-determination. He told [the Bosnian Serb leader] Karadzic in October 1991: "It seems to me you are just angry that Serbs are a minority. But that's how elections come out, that's democracy."<sup>70</sup>

One can only wonder what Zimmerman would say if that definition of democracy was applied to Kosovo... But again, regardless of what accounted for the hard-line American position against Serbia, the interesting question is what the American decision-makers thought was going to happen after the recognition, for even if they despised Milosevic and the Serbs, it would be irresponsible to force their hand, given that the USA and its allies did not intend to respond to Serbian escalation. The answer is that in this case also the American leaders had concluded that if forced to choose between capitulating and escalating, the Serbs were going to capitulate. We can turn to Zimmerman yet again:

I believed that early Western recognition, right after the expected referendum majority for independence, might present Milosevic and Karadzic with a *fait accompli* difficult for them to overturn. Milosevic wanted to avoid economic sanctions and to win recognition for Serbia and Montenegro as successors of Yugoslavia: we could offer him that recognition in exchange for the recognition of the territorial integrity of the four other republics, including Bosnia.<sup>71</sup>

Americans were not alone in their optimism. Reports in the European press suggested that Serbs were resigned to the idea that Bosnia will become an independent state within the borders of the federal republic.<sup>72</sup> Izetbegovic also had come to a similar conclusion.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *The New York Times*, August 29, 1993, p. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Burg and Shoup 1999, 116.

<sup>71</sup> Zimmerman 1996, 192.

<sup>72</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 5, 1992, p. 3; *Economist*, March 7, 1992, p. 49.

<sup>73</sup> *Der Spiegel*, January 13, 1992, p. 124.



This optimism again looks completely unjustified after the fact, but there were good reasons for it, including a change in Milosevic's tone, which had become conciliatory and the observation that Serbs were exhausted after the war in Croatia. Moreover, because Milosevic was convinced that Bosnian Serbs can win a war against the Muslims without much help from Serbia proper, he had ordered the Yugoslav National Army to withdraw from Bosnia,<sup>74</sup> which was interpreted as a Serbian signal of accepting the loss of Bosnia. The optimism, as it turned out, was unjustified. Serbs did carry out the threat of escalating in case an attempt was made to impose a solution on them, which resulted in the bloodiest war in Europe since the end of WWII.

The earlier conflict in Croatia was driven by a similar dynamic, only in this case the consequential third party was Germany. Here as well the drive to independence raised serious concerns among Croatia's Serbs, which its new, nationalist leaders, and particularly Franjo Tudjman, did little to ameliorate. Thus Croatia revived the checkered flag and the coat of arms of the Ustashe, which was the organization responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Serbs during WWII. The new Croatian constitution also failed to mention the Serbs in contrast to the old constitution, which spoke of Croatia as the republic of the "brotherly Croatian and Serbian peoples." Not to leave any stone unturned, Tudjman made statements, which could be interpreted as claims on Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had been under Croatian rule during WWII, and where much of the Serbo-Croatian violence had taken place during WWII. The population of Krajina and Slavonja, which were regions of the Croatian republic with predominantly Serbian populations, reacted to these developments by declaring regional autonomy first, and then rebelling outright after Croatia declared independence on 25 June, 1991. Tudjman may

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<sup>74</sup> Burg and Shoup 1999, 101.

have moderated his position under this pressure, especially since the federal army had allied with the Serbs, stripping Croatia of all the weaponry deployed on its territory in the meantime. He did not, however, and John Zametica explains why:

Tudjman, facing strong pressures from the radical nationalist wing in his own party, staked everything on gaining international recognition. Croatia certainly needed this badly to retain its existing frontiers, for during July and August almost a third of its territory fell to the Serbs, who had often been assisted by the federal army. In the light of this, a cessation of hostilities was not in the least desirable from a Croatian point of view. Since Germany had so helpfully talked of recognition unless the war in Croatia stopped, the bloodier the conflict, the greater the chance of obtaining recognition. The latter would not merely confirm Croatia's statehood, but also, so the government hoped, reimpose Croatian sovereignty over the Serbian enclaves.<sup>75</sup>

Again, as with the American position in Bosnia and Kosovo, the motives for German behavior cannot be ascribed to humanitarian concerns or entrapment by the Croats.<sup>76</sup>

Regardless of the basic motives, however, it is again clear that the German government expected the threat of recognition to have a restraining effect on Serbs.<sup>77</sup> It had the opposite effect.

Now we can contrast the outcomes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo to the outcome of the dispute with the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, which despite the very serious tensions in the early 1990s, did not escalate to serious violence.<sup>78</sup> As elsewhere in Yugoslavia, there was nationalist mobilization in Vojvodina in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which intensified after Vojvodina's autonomy was effectively revoked in 1990, followed by the closings of Hungarian language schools, newspapers, as well as radio and television stations. These events were taking place parallel to the considerable rise of irredentist sentiment in Hungary. As Yugoslavia's break-up started looking more and more likely in 1991, the Hungarian Prime Minister Josef Antall stated

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<sup>75</sup> Zametica 1992, 18-19.

<sup>76</sup> On what motivated German policy see B. Crawford 1996.

<sup>77</sup> B. Crawford 1996, 494.

<sup>78</sup> What follows draws on Jenne 2007, 164-69.

that Hungary's respect of its southern border applied to Yugoslavia, and not to Serbia. The Hungarian government also stated that it had a duty to protect Hungarian communities outside of Hungary, and launched a covert operation supporting secessionist movements in Yugoslavia, including those of the Croats and Bosnian Muslims.

The increased support from Hungary produced some radicalization of the Hungarian population of Vojvodina in this period, simultaneously fueling the Serbian suspicions that like other minorities, Hungarians of Vojvodina were a fifth column. The main organization of Vojvodina's Hungarians – the Democratic Community of Vojvodina Hungarians (DCVH) – began demanding territorial autonomy, as opposed to merely cultural autonomy, which is what they had been demanding after Belgrade had revoked their autonomy altogether. Soon, however, the situation in Vojvodina deescalated, because Hungary changed its policy. Hungarian irredentism, which would be a problem not only in its relations with Serbia, but also with Romania and Slovakia, was a major concern for both the EU and NATO. Since Hungary wanted membership in both, it had to shelve its irredentist aspirations, which it did. The effect of this shift was the de-radicalization of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, which elected the moderate Jozsef Kasza to replace the more radical Andras Agoston to be their leader, and which decided to abandon its demands for territorial autonomy. The Serbian repression of the province eased as a consequence, particularly after Milosevic was removed from power. By 2000 the situation had improved to a point where Kasza became deputy prime minister of Serbia and his Democratic Alliance joined the coalition government.

The outcome in Vojvodina should also be considered puzzling both for the conventional wisdom and the moral hazard account. The conventional wisdom cannot

explain why Serbs did not go as far in Vojvodina as they did in Kosovo if the driving force behind the Serbian policy was to create an ethnically pure Serbia. If it was the content of Serbian nationalism, the outcome should have been no different. Such an account has an even harder time explaining the current atmosphere of reconciliation and cooperation there. Of course, the one important difference between then and now is Milosevic. But if Milosevic's removal is sufficient for explaining the change of attitudes in Vojvodina, we have to explain why the same has not happened in Kosovo, where the parties' preferences are as far removed from each other today as they were when Milosevic was the president of Serbia.

As for the moral hazard account, it has an obvious problem in this case. It cannot explain why Vojvodina Hungarians behaved differently from Kosovo Albanians. If indeed the behavior of Kosovo Albanians was a function of their expectation of intervention, why did Hungarians not have the same expectation? A case can be made, in fact, that Hungarians should have been more optimistic. And if they could expect intervention, why did that not radicalize to the degree Kosovo Albanians did? One possible answer is that the Hungarian minority could not realistically press more radical demands, because it was only 18% of Vojvodina's population, and that this is the variable responsible for the outcome. As Erin Jenne points out, however, Hungarians formed majorities in some regions of the province, which is what they could have focused their demands on. Moreover, cases where a minority pressed for secession with an even smaller percentage of the local population are not unknown. The case of Abkhaz secessionism in Georgia, where the Abkhaz constituted 17% of the population of Abkhazia prior to the war in 1991, is an example of that. The most plausible answer is

that a clear and credible signal to the Hungarian minority that its radicalization will not be supported had a moderating effect on it. Serbs, meanwhile, had no reason to do anything radical here, because they were never pushed into the corner of choosing between capitulating and escalating.

### *Conclusion*

The public discourse on interventions in the West is all too frequently reduced to debates regarding the choice between callousness and compassion, or between respect for state sovereignty and respect for human rights. As this article demonstrates, however, these debates do not take us far enough. Interventions are first and foremost political phenomena, which may sound like a platitude, but politics is precisely what has been drained out of the mainstream conversation on interventions, which has focused instead on normative, legal, and technical issues.

The moral hazard theory of interventions has been an important and welcome advance in the debate, but it has had a particularly important, and somewhat ironic, flaw. Criticizing the standard interventionist account for not seeing minorities as strategic actors, the proponents of the moral hazard school have basically committed the same error with regard to the states that become targets of intervention, and hence been unable to explain why threats of intervention should ever produce escalation, rather than shifts in both the minority's and the state's bargaining positions. Providing an answer to that question is perhaps the most important contribution of this study.

I conclude with anticipating an important objection, which is that the theory I have developed here does not make sufficiently precise predictions. Even if it more

accurately explains cases of past escalations than the alternatives, it does so only after the fact and can hardly be used to predict the next intervention-induced escalation. The model, of course, makes predictions, but the predictions are conditional, and they are conditional on two things that are unobservable *ex ante* – the state’s brutality threshold and the third party’s cost-tolerance. The model, in other words, can predict something and its opposite based on the values of these variables, which we can only measure after the fact.

This is, of course, a problem if we insist on a certain epistemology that banishes theories unable to make point predictions from the realm of science. As Timur Kuran has pointed out answering a similar objection, however, certain theories are designed to explain processes rather than predict outcomes, and that should not be held against them. Otherwise, we would have to exclude Darwin’s evolutionary theory from the realm of science since it “illuminates the process by which species evolve but without enabling us to predict the future evolution of the gazelle.”<sup>79</sup> If we insist on such an epistemology, we would also have to exclude theories that demonstrate certain limitations to what we can know, such as the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. One possible way of seeing the theory I have proposed is that it points to a fundamental limitation, namely to our inability to know in advance whether an intervention will produce escalation or reduction of violence, which is probably not unimportant.

There are reasons to be even more generous. First, we should recall that this theory was developed to challenge the key assumption of the interventionist argument that violence is a monotonically decreasing function of interventions, i.e. that interventions can at worst fail to help. Demonstrating the erroneousness of that

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<sup>79</sup> Kuran 1991.

assumption is no small thing given the dangerous popularity of the belief that any intervention is better than no intervention. Second, it should be pointed out that even though the theory cannot make point predictions, it does imply certain falsifiable hypotheses that could in principle be tested statistically. For instance, because preemption plays a large role in its logic, it implies that *ceteris paribus* democracies would be more dangerous interveners in terms of generating incentives for escalation, because they are slow to mobilize. For the same reason we can also hypothesize that multilateral interventions would be more dangerous. These, and certain other hypotheses, however, cannot be properly tested given the small number of relevant cases. Let us hope that it stays that way, as unfortunate as it would be for the advancement of this debate.

## APPENDIX: DERIVATION OF THE EQUILIBRIA IN THE ESCALATION-DOMINANCE MODEL

The solution concept is the Perfect Bayesian Equilibrium (PBE), which requires that actors make optimal choices at each information set in the light of available information, and that players draw correct inferences from relevant observations using the Bayes rule.

The determination of four critical values forms the foundation of the analysis – the threshold level of costs that makes the non-brutal state indifferent between resisting minority's initial challenge and the conceding, the threshold level of costs that makes the brutal state indifferent between resisting minority's initial challenge and conceding, the threshold level of costs that makes the cost-sensitive third party indifferent between intervening or not, and the threshold level of costs that makes the minority indifferent between challenging the state and accepting the status quo.

To determine the first critical value we calculate the non-brutal state's expected payoff for playing {resist, concede}, set it equal to the certain payoff for playing {concede} immediately following the minority's challenge, and solve for the costs of the initial resistance. The strategy {concede} is the combination of {concede, escalate} and {concede, concede}, which are equivalent, because the game ends after the state concedes immediately following the minority's challenge. The strategy {resist, escalate} is ignored, because it is dominated by {resist, concede}. The following is the non-brutal state's expected payoff for {resist, concede}:

$$EU_{s-b}(\text{resist, concede}) = \beta(1 - x - k_s - \delta_s) + \\ + (1 - \beta)[\tau(1 - x - k_s - \delta_s) + (1 - \tau)(1 - k_s - \delta_s)]$$



where  $\tau$  is the probability that the cost-sensitive third party intervenes. Setting this expression equal to  $1-x$  and solving for  $k_s$  gives us

$$k_s = x(1-\tau)(1-\beta) - \delta_s \equiv k_s^*$$

To determine the second critical value, we calculate the brutal state's expected payoff for playing {resist, escalate}, set it equal to the certain payoff for playing {concede} immediately following the minority's initial challenge, and solve for the costs of the initial resistance. We ignore {resist, concede} in this case, because it is dominated by {resist, escalate}.<sup>80</sup> The following is the brutal state's expected payoff for {resist, escalate}:

$$EU_{s^b}(\text{resist,escalate}) = \beta(1-q-k_s - \bar{c}_s) + (1-\beta)[\tau(1-r-k_s - \bar{c}_s) + (1-\tau)(1-k_s)]$$

Setting this expression equal to  $1-x$  and solving for  $k_s$  gives us

$$k_s = x - \tau(r + \bar{c}_s)(1-\beta) - \beta(q + \bar{c}_s) \equiv k_s^{**}$$

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<sup>80</sup> The brutal state can resist and then concede in equilibrium after the intervention reveals third party's type as cost-tolerant. But the expected payoff for resisting must be calculated with the prior probability of facing a cost-tolerant third party. Clearly, if that probability is too high, the brutal state will want to concede immediately. If it is too low, i.e. if it expects to be confronted by a cost-sensitive third party, its initial plan will be to resist and then escalate, since it prefers escalating against a cost-sensitive minority, but conceding against a cost-tolerant one.

To determine the third critical value, we calculate the cost-sensitive third party's expected payoff for playing {intervene, abandon} prior to observing the state's response to the minority's challenge, set it equal to the certain payoff for playing {~intervene}, and solve for the costs of intervention. The strategy {~intervene} is the combination of {~intervene, abandon} and {~intervene, escalate}, because failing to intervene after the state's decision to resist removes the possibility of either abandoning the minority or escalating the intervention later. Note also that the strategy {intervene, escalate} is dominated for the cost-sensitive third party. The following is the cost-sensitive third party's expected payoff for {intervene, abandon}:

$$EU_{TP^h}(\text{intervene, abandon}) = \alpha[\sigma(\lambda r - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP}) + (1 - \sigma)(\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP})] + (1 - \alpha)(\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP})$$

where  $\sigma$  is the probability that the brutal state escalates. Setting this expression equal to  $-\phi$ , and solving for  $k_{TP}$  gives us

$$k_{TP} = \lambda x - \delta_{TP} - \alpha\sigma\lambda(x - r) + \phi \equiv k_{TP}^*$$

To determine the fourth critical value we calculate the minority's expected payoff for playing {challenge, back down}, set it equal to its payoff for {~challenge}, and solve it for the costs of the state's initial resistance. The strategy {~challenge} is the combination of {~challenge, back down} and {~challenge, stand firm}, and we ignore {challenge, stand firm}, because it is dominated by {challenge, back down}. I make three simplifying assumptions to calculate the minority's expected payoff for {challenge, back

down}. First, I assume that the brutal state always resists and then escalates when confronted with an intervention. Second, I assume that the non-brutal state always resists, but concedes when confronted with an intervention. And third, I assume that the cost-sensitive third party never intervenes.<sup>81</sup> The following is the minority's expected payoff for playing {challenge, back down}:

$$EU_M(\text{challenge, back down}) = \alpha\beta(q - k_M - \bar{c}_M) + \alpha(1 - \beta)(-k_M) + \\ + (1 - \alpha)\beta(x - k_M) + (1 - \alpha)(1 - \beta)(-k_M)$$

Setting this expression equal to 0 and solving for  $k_M$  gives us

$$k_M = \beta[(q - \bar{c}_M - x) + 1] \equiv k_M^*$$

This set of critical values, combined with the assumption that {intervene, abandon} is the cost-tolerant third party's dominant strategy, allows us to identify the equilibrium conditions of the game.

**Proposition 1:** *There exists a two-sided separating equilibrium when  $k_M < k_M^*$ ,  $k_S^* < k_S < k_S^{**}$ , and  $k_{TP} > k_{TP}^*$ , where the minority issues a challenge, only the brutal state resists and only the cost-tolerant third party intervenes,*

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<sup>81</sup> These assumptions do away with the additional uncertainties regarding the actions of these actors – the parameters  $\tau$  and  $\sigma$ . That makes minority's expected payoff formula for issuing a challenge inconsistent with the other expected payoff formulas. It greatly simplifies the calculation, however, without any analytical consequences, since this specification rigs minority's decision against issuing a challenge. If challenging, and hence escalation, is possible with these assumptions, it is possible and even more likely with the additional uncertainties.

Proof:  $k_s^* < k_s < k_s^{**}$  implies that the non-brutal state's expected payoff for resisting is smaller than its payoff for conceding, while the brutal state's expected payoff for resisting is larger than its payoff for conceding. This allows us to determine two conditional probabilities – the probability of facing a brutal state given resistance denoted as  $\Pr(\text{resistance}|S^b)$  and the probability of facing a non-brutal state given resistance denoted as  $\Pr(\text{resistance}|S^{\sim b})$ . For  $k_s^* < k_s < k_s^{**}$   $\Pr(\text{resistance}|S^b)=1$ , and  $\Pr(\text{resistance}|S^{\sim b})=0$ . This information allows us to calculate another conditional probability – that of facing a brutal state given resistance denoted as  $\Pr(S^b|\text{resistance})$  – using the Bayes rule:

$$\Pr(S^b | \text{resistance}) = \frac{\Pr(S^b) \Pr(\text{resistance} | S^b)}{\Pr(S^b) \Pr(\text{resistance} | S^b) + \Pr(S^{\sim b}) \Pr(\text{resistance} | S^{\sim b})}$$

If we denote  $\Pr(S^b | \text{resistance})$  as  $\alpha'$ , we get

$$\alpha' = \frac{\alpha \times 1}{\alpha \times 1 + (1 - \alpha) \times 0} = 1$$

which is the posterior probability of facing a brutal state. This allows us to recalculate cost-sensitive third party's expected payoff based on the new information:

$$EU_{TP^b}(\text{intervene}, \text{abandon}) = \alpha'[\sigma(\lambda r - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP}) + (1 - \sigma)(\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP})] + (1 - \alpha')(\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP}) = \sigma(\lambda r - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP}) + (1 - \sigma)(\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP})$$

Given sufficiently low values for  $\sigma$ , the cost-sensitive third party's expected payoff for intervening could still be larger than its payoff for not intervening. However, that is precluded by the condition  $k_{TP} > k_{TP}^*$ , which makes sure that intervening will always leave the cost-sensitive third party worse off, than not intervening. The argument here is identical to the argument about the revelation of the state's type.  $\Pr(\text{intervention}|TP^h)=0$ , whereas  $\Pr(\text{intervention}|TP^l)=1$ , which means

$$\Pr(TP^l | \text{intervention}) = \frac{\Pr(TP^l) \Pr(\text{intervention} | TP^l)}{\Pr(TP^l) \Pr(\text{intervention} | TP^l) + \Pr(TP^h) \Pr(\text{intervention} | TP^h)}$$

If we denote  $\Pr(TP^l|\text{intervention})$  as  $\beta'$  we get

$$\beta' = \frac{\beta \times 1}{\beta \times 1 + (1 - \beta) \times 0} = 1$$

which is the posterior probability of facing a cost-tolerant third party. The brutal state's expected payoff for escalating becomes a certain payoff of  $1 - q - k_S - \bar{c}_S$ , which we know is smaller than its payoff for conceding.

The outcomes are C1 if the state is non-brutal; C2 if the state is brutal and the third party is cost-tolerant; and SQ2 if the state is brutal and the third party is cost-sensitive.

**Proposition 2:** *There exists an equilibrium that is pooling for the state and separating for third party when  $k_M < k_M^*$ ,  $k_S > k_S^{**}$ , and  $k_{TP} > k_{TP}^*$ , where following a demand by the*

*minority the state concedes immediately, the cost-tolerant third party intervenes, while the cost-sensitive third party does not.*

Proof:  $k_S > k_S^{**}$  implies that the brutal state's expected payoff for resisting is smaller than its payoff for conceding, which means it concedes when faced with a challenge by the minority and the prospect of an intervention by a cost-tolerant third party. This implies that the non-brutal state's expected payoff for resisting is even lower, which means it also concedes, hence the pooling of the state's types. The separation of types of the third party is the result of the argument already proven for case 1. Its relevance, however, is technical, because the third party never gets a chance to move in this equilibrium. The only possible outcome here is C1.

***Proposition 3:*** *There exists a two-sided semi-separating equilibrium when  $k_M < k_M^*$ ,  $k_S < k_S^*$ , and  $k_{TP} < k_{TP}^*$ , where following a demand by the minority, the brutal state resists for sure, while the non-brutal state resists with probability  $\rho^*$ , the cost-tolerant third party intervenes for sure, while the cost-sensitive third party intervenes with probability  $\tau^*$  against the non-brutal state and with probability  $\tau^{**}$  against the brutal state, the brutal state escalates with probability  $\sigma^*$ , followed by the third party escalating if it is cost-tolerant and abandoning if it is cost-sensitive.*

Proof: We begin with a demonstration that neither pooling nor separation of the state's types can occur when  $k_S < k_S^*$ . When  $k_S < k_S^*$ , both the brutal and the non-brutal states have expected payoffs for resisting that are higher than their payoffs for conceding, which means both will have incentives to resist. Observing resistance, therefore, will not allow the third party to conclude that it is facing a brutal state. Resistance, in other words, will not separate the state's types.

The state's types will not pool either, because if the non-brutal state mimicked the brutal state and always resisted, the cost-sensitive third party can improve its payoff by intervening sometimes. Thus it is reasonable for the non-brutal state to resist sometimes and for the cost-sensitive minority to intervene sometimes. More precisely, the non-brutal state should resist with some probability  $\rho^*$  that makes the cost-sensitive third party indifferent between intervening and not, while the cost-sensitive third party intervenes with probability  $\tau^*$  that makes the non-brutal state indifferent between resisting and conceding. To find  $\rho^*$ , we first need to determine the cost-sensitive third party's posterior probability  $(1-\alpha')$  for facing a non-brutal state after observing an (insufficiently costly) resistance. Since the probability that the non-brutal state resists is  $\rho$ , the Bayes rule gives us

$$(1-\alpha') = \frac{(1-\alpha)\rho}{(1-\alpha)\rho + \alpha}$$

The corresponding posterior probability for facing a brutal state is

$$\alpha' = \frac{\alpha}{\alpha + (1-\alpha)\rho}$$

The revised expression for the cost-sensitive third party's expected payoff for intervening given resistance by the state becomes

$$EU_{TP^h}(\text{intervene, abandon}) = \frac{\alpha}{\alpha + (1-\alpha)\rho} [\sigma(\lambda r - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP}) + (1-\sigma)(\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP})] + \frac{(1-\alpha)\rho}{(1-\alpha)\rho + \alpha} (\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP})$$

Setting this expression equal to  $-\phi$  and solving for  $\rho$  gives us

$$\rho = \frac{-[\alpha(\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP} - \sigma\lambda(x-r) + \phi)]}{(1-\alpha)(\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP} + \phi)} \equiv \rho^*$$

To determine  $\tau^*$ , we need to set the non-brutal state's expected payoff for intervening to 0 and solve for  $\tau$ , which gives us

$$\tau = \frac{1 - k_S - \delta_S - \beta x}{x(1 - \beta)} \equiv \tau^*$$

The argument is identical for the third party's types when  $k_{TP} < k_{TP}^*$ . Neither separation nor pooling of the third party's types can occur under this condition, because both the cost-sensitive and the cost-tolerant third parties do better by intervening against a brutal state than by not intervening. Observing an intervention, consequently, will not be sufficient for the state to conclude that escalation will be met with escalation.

Intervention will fail to separate the third party's types. The third party's types cannot pool either, because, if the cost-sensitive third party always intervened, the brutal state will improve its payoff by escalating sometimes. Therefore, it will be reasonable for the brutal state to escalate sometimes and for the cost-sensitive third party to intervene



sometimes. More precisely, the brutal state escalates with probability  $\sigma^*$ , while the cost-sensitive third party intervenes with probability  $\tau^{**}$ .  $\tau^{**}$  is determined by setting the brutal state's expected payoff for resisting and then escalating equal to 0 and solving for  $\tau$ :

$$\tau = \frac{1 - k_S - \beta q}{(1 - \beta)(r + c_S)} \equiv \tau^{**}$$

$\sigma^*$  is determined by setting cost-sensitive third party's expected payoff for intervening to equal to  $-\phi$ , and solving it for  $\sigma$ :

$$\sigma = \frac{\lambda x - k_{TP} - \delta_{TP} + \phi}{\alpha \lambda (x - r)} \equiv \sigma^* .$$

**Proposition 4:** *There exists an equilibrium that is semi-separating for the state and separating for the third party when  $k_M < k_M^*$ ,  $k_S < k_S^*$ , and  $k_{TP} > k_{TP}^*$ , where following a demand by the minority the brutal state resists for sure, while the non-brutal state resists with probability  $\rho^*$ , the cost-tolerant third party intervenes and the cost-sensitive third party does not. Both the brutal and not brutal states concede in response to an intervention.*

Proof: This is nothing more than a special case that combines the logics of propositions 1 and 3. Everything is the same here as in proposition 3, except for the fact that intervention credibly reveals the third party's type.

**Proposition 5:** *There exists an equilibrium that is separating for the state and semi-separating for the third party when  $k_M < k_M^*$ ,  $k_S^* < k_S < k_S^{**}$ , and  $k_{TP} < k_{TP}^*$ . where following a demand by the minority only the brutal state resists, the cost-tolerant third party intervenes for sure, while the cost-sensitive third party intervenes with probability*

$\tau^{**}$ , followed by the state escalating with probability  $\sigma^*$ , which is then followed by the third party escalating if it is cost-tolerant and abandoning the minority if it is cost-sensitive.

Proof: This is also a special case combining the logics of propositions 1 and 3, only in this case it is the initial resistance to the minority's demand that is sufficiently costly to reveal the state's type, while the intervention is not costly enough to reveal the third party's type.

**Proposition 6:** *There exists an equilibrium that is pooling for the state and semi-separating for the third party when  $k_M < k_M^*$ ,  $k_S > k_S^{**}$ , and  $k_{TP} < k_{TP}^*$ , where following a demand by the minority, the state concedes regardless of its type, the cost-tolerant third party intervenes for sure, the cost-sensitive third party intervenes with probability  $\tau^*$  against the non-brutal state and with probability  $\tau^{**}$  against the brutal state.*

Proof: This is a combination of propositions 2 and 3. The outcome is exactly the same as in proposition 2. The difference is technical in that the costs of intervention are such that the third party's types can neither pool nor separate. Just as in proposition 2, however, the node where the third party gets a chance to make a move is never reached.

There are additional six cases, where the state's and the third party's behavior follows the same logic as in the first six cases, but the decision nodes where the state and the third party move are never reached. These are the trivial cases where  $k_M > k_M^*$ , which induces the minority to refrain from making a challenge. The outcome in all of these six cases is SQ1.

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