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Opportunities and Presidential Uses of Force

*A Selection Model of Crisis Decision-Making**

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Political vulnerability is thought to influence the opportunities available to the US president to engage in uses of force abroad. Conventional theories linking economic misfortune and partisan opposition to presidential uses of force detail the incentives and constraints facing the president in decisions to use force. In contrast, these theories' strategic counterparts focus on the ability of US adversaries to respond to the president's vulnerability through either avoidance or exploitation. The behavior of US adversaries is thought to critically affect the president's opportunities to use force. Conventional and strategic accounts of the linkage between domestic political vulnerability and the use of force provide contradictory expectations. To assess these theories we identify hypotheses related to four dependent and selection variables corresponding to dispute initiation and reciprocation involving the US. These hypotheses are tested with a two-stage Heckman Probit model to account for selection effects due to strategic interaction. The results are most supportive of orthodox diversionary theory. Our findings challenge the other perspectives evaluated—the strategic conflict avoidance (SCA) perspective, Howell and Pevehouse's party cover approach, and Schultz's signaling model.

KEYWORDS: congressional–executive relations; diversionary theory; partisan cover theory; presidential use of force; signaling theory; strategic conflict avoidance; war powers

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Taken together, theories linking domestic political vulnerability to the presidential use of force abroad pose a puzzle for students of international relations. Some forms of vulnerability are expected to be associated with more assertive foreign policies, while others are expected to reduce the conflict propensity of US presidents. Moreover, the expectations associated with the forms of vulnerability differ according to whether the theorist considers the role of strategic interaction. Two prominent sources of domestic vulnerability for the president include economic misfortune and congressional opposition. For instance, diversionary theory anticipates a causal link between domestic political and economic turmoil and the use of military force (e.g. Levy, 1989; Morgan and Bickers, 1992; Richards et al., 1993). But other research— referred to as the strategic conflict avoidance (SCA) perspective— suggests that opportunities for diversion are limited under such conditions as potential targets for US diversions actively avoid behavior that could result in their targeting (Smith, 1996; Leeds and Davis, 1997; Fordham, 2005; Foster, 2006). Thus, while orthodox diversionary theory and the SCA perspective both link poor domestic conditions to presidential conflict behavior, they offer divergent expectations.

A similar problem exists for theories linking congressional opposition to US uses of force. According to the party cover perspective, a lack of partisan support in Congress is expected to constrain the president's foreign policy autonomy and, hence, assertiveness in international crises (Wang, 1996; Clark, 2000; Howell and Pevehouse, 2005). On the other hand, the signaling perspective suggests that partisan support should buttress the president's signal of resolve, leading US adversaries to capitulate, eliminating the necessity of a use of force (Schultz, 1998; Foster, 2006). Consequently, these perspectives offer conflicting hypotheses concerning the influence of congressional opposition on the use of force.

A unifying problem facing these theories revolves around the generation of opportunities to use force. Do such opportunities originate in the international environment independent of the president's vulnerability, or are they driven by vulnerability? Attempts to answer this question suggest insufficient theoretical and empirical attention has been given to strategic interaction and selection bias (Foster, 2006). Indeed, some scholars insist that extant research designs generally fail to adequately test diversionary theory implications (Meernik and Waterman, 1996; Enterline and Gleditsch, 2000; Gelpi, 1997; Bennett and Nordstrom, 2000). Since opportunities to engage in uses of force are excluded from consideration in empirical tests, results are almost certainly biased. Similarly, evidence indicating a positive relationship for the partisan opposition–use of force hypothesis (Schultz, 2001) has been corroborated largely by case studies in which the existence of an opportunity (i.e. the crisis under investigation) may be correlated with partisan opposition to the president's policies (see also Foster, 2006).

To remedy these potential biases, we propose to test other implications of extant theories by examining four dependent and selection variables corresponding to dispute initiation and reciprocation involving the US. We contend that the SCA perspective implies that targets of conflict initiations by the US should back down when presidents face domestic economic turmoil. Furthermore, presidents should take advantage of any initiations that occur during periods of political and

economic weakness. We also argue that, consistent with the party cover account, presidents should become less likely to initiate disputes as their partisan support in Congress decreases. But if the signaling perspective is correct, US adversaries should be more likely to reciprocate uses of force initiated by presidents facing congressional opposition. The results of Heckman selection analyses of foreign government responses to US initiations and US responses to foreign government initiations offer mixed support for diversionary theory, but challenge the expectations associated with the other theoretical perspectives.

The article begins by reviewing the orthodox expectations of diversionary theory and the conflicting empirical evidence that has been produced. Next, we examine strategic conflict avoidance theory and the challenge it offers to standard externalization models. The influence of domestic political opposition in presidential decisions to use force is then assessed from diversionary, strategic conflict avoidance, and signaling perspectives. Competing hypotheses are derived and tested using Heckman two-stage probit models. Lastly, we discuss implications of our results and offer suggestions for moving diversionary research forward.

Domestic Political Vulnerability and the Use of Force

Presidents are thought to seek a record of policy successes in order to enhance their own electoral fortunes or those of their party (e.g. Neustadt, 1960; Bond and Fleisher, 1990; Richards et al., 1993). The extent to which they are able to establish such a record is threatened by domestic political vulnerability. Political vulnerability arises when the state of the economy indicates poor policy choices on the part of the president, or Congress works to thwart presidential efforts to establish a record of success. The implications of vulnerability for presidential conflict behavior depend on its source. Presidents are thought to have incentives to engage in aggressive foreign policy when faced with poor economic conditions at home, leading to an increased propensity to use force abroad (Ostrom and Job, 1986; Morgan and Bickers, 1992; DeRouen, 1995). Conversely, presidential autonomy with respect to foreign policy may be constrained by congressional opposition, resulting in a reduced likelihood to intervene militarily abroad (Wang, 1996; Clark, 2000; Howell and Pevehouse, 2005). However, when considered in a strategic context, these expectations associated with political vulnerability are reversed, presenting a puzzle for scholars of US foreign policy and conflict processes (Smith, 1996; Leeds and Davis, 1997; Schultz, 1998).

Office Seeking, Out Groups, and Opinion Rallies

Diversionary theory specifies the linkage between poor domestic political and economic conditions as sources of vulnerability and interstate conflict behavior. The linkage rests on two basic premises. First, political leaders seek to remain in office. Second, members of a group tend to rally behind leaders when faced with external threats or dangers. This latter premise is rooted in sociological studies of in-groups and out-groups where opposing domestic interests are expected to put aside their differences and unite in support of the national leader in his or her effort to defeat foreign enemies (Simmel, 1955; Coser, 1956; Levy, 1989). Together these two conditions suggest the possibility of externalization. That is, if rallies are real on a national level, then leaders have an incentive

to manufacture foreign policy crises primarily, if not exclusively, in an effort to alleviate political vulnerability (Mueller, 1973; Lee, 1977; MacKuen, 1983).

It is expected that highly visible military interventions will allow leaders to demonstrate competence in governing, which will increase electoral prospects and strengthen influence over public policy. President George W. Bush, for example, experienced over a 30-point gain in approval after the attacks on New York and Washington, DC on September 11, 2001, and he witnessed nearly a 20-point gain with the opening of the Iraq War in 2003.¹ Not only did these crises lead to increased popular support for the president, they also inhibited challenges to Bush's leadership. Fear of being perceived unpatriotic led opposition Democrats to acquiesce to tax cuts, the Patriot act, and the administration's hawkish orientation towards Iraq. Republicans also picked up 8 House seats and 1 Senate seat in 2002 and 3 more House seats and 4 Senate seats during the 2004 elections. Thus international crises seemingly can bolster a weak administration and strengthen a leader's control over policy.

Yet, anecdotal evidence aside, the benefits of a rally remain under-specified by extant theoretical models. While diversionary theory expects leaders to gain in subsequent elections from military interventions, such foreign policy moves must somehow then coincide with national elections. The empirical evidence, however, connecting uses of force and the electoral calendar, remains inconsistent and the theoretical logic explaining such foreign policy actions is under-developed. If military interventions increase vote share by a few points, then only leaders facing close re-election races have an incentive to gamble for political resurrection. Candidates for office that are far ahead in the polls do not need an electoral boost and those far behind cannot hope to alter public perceptions sufficiently to matter much. Ostrom and Job (1986) conclude that only presidential approval levels between 40% and 60% are really ripe for diversionary actions.

Timing military interventions around elections also seems particularly risky. Cynical publics may reason that the crisis was manufactured for political gain and consequently punish a leader at the polls. President Carter's 1980 rescue attempt of embassy hostages in Iran, and Clinton's cruise missile attacks against Afghanistan and Sudan prior to the 1998 congressional elections arguably were attempts to influence the electoral process.² President Clinton put foreign leaders on notice after ordering a cruise missile strike against Iraq, saying "We are sending a message to Hussein, when you abuse your own people or threaten your neighbors, you must pay a price" (quoted in Fisher, 2000: 105). But even more,

¹ We are not suggesting President Bush manufactured 9/11, only that the crisis generated a large rally-around-the-flag response by the American public.

² Clinton's decision to launch the missiles came in August of 1998. The move may have been designed to produce more Democrats in Congress (since 1998 was a non-presidential election year) and thus avert an impeachment trial (although the vote to impeach Clinton actually came before the election) or it may have been designed to refocus media attention on foreign policy and thus implicitly define the impeachment proceedings as frivolous.

the president's actions sent an important domestic signal to political adversaries (Fisher, 2000: 114).³ However, the Carter Administration was not rescued by its military move in the campaign against former governor of California Ronald Reagan, and the Clinton Administration was severely criticized for timing the strikes so near congressional elections. Thus, both moves seemed to backfire politically.

Perhaps more likely is that leaders will benefit from increased political support that flows from rallies, and this enhanced political clout will better allow them to move items on their domestic and foreign policy agendas.⁴ Morgan and Bickers (1992), for example, observe decreasing approval ratings among core supporters related to increased uses of military force by US presidents, while Ostrom and Job (1986) find that economic weakness propels presidents toward military confrontation.⁵ Such relationships could suggest attempts by administrations to forestall congressional defections on critical policy votes. Foreign policy crises make it difficult for the loyal opposition to challenge leader priorities and policy proposals without being labeled unpatriotic (as in the Bush case described above) and thus they may offer presidents a window of opportunity to achieve certain policy objectives.

Publics, however, may not respond as diversionary theory anticipates. Implicitly the theory assumes selectorates are incapable of discerning politically motivated uses of force. Voters either possess insufficient information to evaluate the legitimacy of interventions or they defer to political leaders who are believed to have more and better intelligence at their disposal. Yet, Brody and Shapiro (1989) find that a significant number of events deemed likely to produce a rally effect led to a decline in the president's approval rating (also see Marra et al., 1990). And, Lian and Oneal (1993) conclude that military interventions on average have no apparent effect on public opinion in the US.⁶ Further, any use of force is a dangerous gamble, and while leaders intend such foreign policy actions to demonstrate leadership skill and the ability to govern effectively, events can easily

³ It was leaked that President Clinton slept very well after ordering the devastating missile strike against Iraq. Aides acknowledged this was designed to stifle domestic criticism that the Democratic president lacked toughness and resolve. On the other hand, Hendrickson (2002) notes that Clinton received considerable input and support from military brass at the Pentagon for the cruise missile strikes in August and Operation Desert Fox in December. Further, with little partisan opposition to either military action, Hendrickson concludes that both operations were reasonable efforts to address geostrategic concerns.

⁴ In certain states, foreign policy crises also may justify expansive government powers and limitations on political and economic freedom.

⁵ Gowa (1998), however, finds no systematic relationship between military force onset and congressional opposition, the electoral cycle or economic weakness. Prins (2001) and Fordham (2002) both point out flaws in Gowa's research design.

⁶ Clearly, though, it is difficult to measure what level a president's approval score would be in the absence of an intervention.

spin out of control, creating the image of someone unfit for command.⁷ Presidents then find it even more difficult to affect the policy process, as failed interventions produce substantial political push-back in Congress.⁸

Tests of diversionary theory implications have largely focused on the US case. This is in part a consequence of data availability, but it also reflects America's unique position in the global order. The US has interests and responsibilities that span the globe, and distinctively has the ability to project power abroad at any given moment (James and Hristoulas, 1994). More recent cross-national research, though, offers similarly inconsistent empirical evidence on diversionary force. Leeds and Davis (1997), for example, examine 18 industrialized democracies, but observe no systematic relationship between economic weakness, electoral cycles, and the use of military force. However, Miller (1995), in contrast, finds leader popularity negatively correlated with MID reciprocation. Targeted leaders are more likely to respond to militarized challenges with force when their popularity with the public is low. Dassel and Reinhardt (1999) also find some evidence of cross-national diversionary behavior, but only when challenges to domestic political institutions threaten the interests of a state's military. No other measures of civil unrest, or even leader popularity, correlate with military force. It seems, then, that more general tests of diversionary theory uncover no robust relationships between domestic political and economic conditions and the use of military force.

Opportunities and Diversions

Standard externalization models implicitly assume that a country such as the US has a constant opportunity to use military force (Meernik, 1994; James and Hristoulas, 1994; Clark, 2003).⁹ Meernik (1994), however, questions whether opportunities are distributed uniformly across time and space. In any given year a president may have five chances to deploy military force or 15 and therefore any modeling effort that fails to control for the number of opportunities will systematically produce biased results.

While Meernik (1994) is correct that a constant-force assumption remains problematic, the use of opportunities as a unit of analysis also has its weaknesses. For Meernik, opportunities are driven by the international environment and are exogenous to domestic-political need. Yet, an important implication of the diversionary argument is that international threats, or opportunities to use force, are endogenously perceived. In other words, a leader's decision to recognize the gravity of a threat to the national interest, allies, or citizens abroad is a function of domestic political conditions. Examining the US case, Fordham (1998) finds that presidents are likely to identify more threats emanating from the international

⁷ Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson (1995) conclude that democratic leaders rarely obtain political benefits from large military interventions.

⁸ Few models have actually tested congressional reactions to presidential uses of force. Indeed, it is not clear whether leaders actually obtain policy successes following military interventions or whether any policy successes that might be achieved warrant such high-risk actions.

⁹ For example, James and Hristoulas (1994: 339) write, "with its status as superpower and global range of interests, external opportunities for crisis activity always exist for the United States."

environment when domestic political conditions are poor. Fordham's (1998) evidence challenges the assumption that crises randomly emerge on the international stage. Therefore, models that rely upon counts of force during specific temporal periods are inherently flawed. Even Meernik's (1994) method of coding crisis events to address opportunities for using force is dubious since it assumes leaders cannot or do not influence the emergence of opportunities (Meernik, 2000).

Diversionsary models also ignore the strategic nature of international politics. Leaders formally consider the domestic-political environment when contemplating military interventions, but adversary interests, preferences, and decision-making are importantly ignored. Perhaps scholars assume (implicitly again) that certain states, such as the US, possess sufficient military might to initiate crises without attention given to rival states.¹⁰ Yet, this seemingly presumes rival leaders have no foreign policy options to counter US demands or actions. Indeed it denies a leader's ability to anticipate when presidents have an incentive to launch diversionsary interventions and then act accordingly.

Strategic conflict avoidance (SCA) theory rejects this non-strategic view of international politics. If a leader has domestic incentives to respond assertively to international events, then potential targets of the leader should avoid activities that could be interpreted as threatening. Conflict avoidance on the part of potential targets means that opportunities to divert are reduced precisely when leaders have incentives to do so. Since foreign leaders can easily observe conditions in democratic countries and thus assess the need a democratic leader may have in refocusing attention away from economic weakness, they can advance strictly conciliatory policies (Smith, 1996; Clark, 2003).¹¹ Whereas standard diversionsary models expect poor domestic conditions to be associated with more opportunities for military interventions, SCA anticipates poor domestic conditions being associated with fewer opportunities to divert. Consistent with SCA, Leeds and Davis (1997) find that advanced democracies are less likely to be targeted by other states during economic downturns (see also Miller, 1999; Enterline and Gleditsch, 2000; Foster, 2006), and Fordham (2005) finds that rivals are more cooperative with the US when presidents are contending with higher unemployment.

Clearly, the diversionsary and SCA perspectives point to contradictory expectations. While the diversionsary hypothesis leads us to expect more uses of force during periods of domestic political troubles (implying more perceived opportunities), SCA indicates an inverse relationship between incentives to divert and opportunities to do so (implying fewer uses of force). The strategic environment identified by SCA theory presents a strong challenge to orthodox

¹⁰ Such an assumption logically implies that diversionsary incentives vary across regimes (see Gelpi, 1997; Miller, 1995) or perhaps security environments (see Mitchell and Prins, 2004).

¹¹ Smith (1996) does not necessarily expect a strictly linear relationship between domestic conditions and conflict avoidance. In fact, Smith suggests that foreign governments will be deterred from military interventions against the US when a president is both extremely popular (competent) and extremely unpopular (incompetent). Smith (1996: 149) does suggest that democracies will be more likely to be challenged early in the tenure of a new head of state.

externalization models—a challenge supported by recent research on the bargaining theory of war as well as signaling accounts of violent inter-state conflict (see Fearon, 1995; Gartzke, 1999; Powell, 2004). Yet, the empirical record remains inconsistent. Clark (2003) observes a decrease in MID initiations against the US as presidential approval declines (thus supporting SCA theory), but he also finds economic weakness increasing opportunities for using force (thus opposing SCA theory).¹² This latter result is confirmed by Meernik (2000), although Foster (2006) shows targeting of the US decreases during poor economic times. The inconsistencies in extant empirical results suggest that SCA theory may be logically inaccurate or that empirical models fail to adequately test SCA implications.¹³

Domestic Opposition and Institutional Constraints

The second source of political vulnerability—a lack of partisan support, or cover, in Congress—is thought to reduce the likelihood that presidential initiatives become policy. If Congress thwarts the president's program, the president is unable to establish a record of successes. With respect to interstate conflict behavior, opposition parties outside government have the capacity to impose costs on democratic leaders for pursuing military operations (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, 1992). Such costs are likely to constrain a leader's conflict propensity when the government lacks a majority in the legislature. Indeed, a good deal of the research on the US use of force finds that presidents are less likely to use force when faced with low partisan support in Congress (e.g. Wang, 1996; Clark, 2000; Howell and Pevehouse, 2005). An opposition Congress has the strength and incentives to thwart presidential initiatives (e.g. Fleisher and Bond, 2000; Fiorina, 1992). Howell and Pevehouse (2005) identify two primary sources of costs to the president for using force when faced with an opposition Congress. First, Congress may dismantle the president's venture by refusing to appropriate funds or require burdensome conditions on funding (see also Auerwald and Cowhey, 1997). Second, congressional criticism may serve as the catalyst for turning public opinion against a military operation (see also Brody, 1991; Zaller, 1992). Using either avenue, an opposition Congress can deny the president the opportunity to obtain and capitalize on a foreign policy victory.

In spite of these potential costs, there is some debate about the ability or willingness of an opposition Congress to block military operations launched by the president. Given the separation of powers, US presidents may have little choice but to focus on foreign policy when facing partisan opposition. While the president requires the cooperation of Congress to affect domestic policy, he enjoys *de facto* ascendancy in foreign policy (generally) and formal supremacy

¹² Miller (1995), in a cross-national study, observes low levels of leader popularity correlated with higher levels of force reciprocation by the targeted state.

¹³ Tarar (2006) finds that target leaders may actually prefer conflict with diversionary leaders if the target leader is sufficiently dissatisfied with the current status quo. This result suggests SCA theory may need to be qualified a bit.

in decisions to use military force abroad (see e.g. Hinckley, 1994; Meernik, 1994; Howell and Pevehouse, 2005).¹⁴ Consequently, when the president is denied the opportunity to establish a record of successes with respect to domestic policy due to an intransigent Congress, he may be left with only the foreign policy avenue.

The president's ascendancy in foreign policy is unlikely to be constrained by partisan opposition in Congress for two reasons. First, many foreign policy initiatives launched by the president—especially the deployment of troops—do not require the *ex ante* approval of Congress. For example, an opposition Congress may initiate a robust debate that casts doubt on the wisdom of the president's military venture. Congress may also threaten such *ex post* action as the withdrawal of funding for military operations to which it is opposed (Smith, 1996; Schultz, 1998; Howell and Pevehouse, 2005).¹⁵ But such actions are *ex post* in the sense that they are unable to preclude the president's option to pursue a foreign policy venture. If presidents expect operations to be relatively brief and successful, they may pursue a use of force over the objections of Congress in order to reap the rewards of a foreign policy victory.

Second, an opposition Congress may lack incentives to oppose the president on foreign policy issues. Parties tend to be organized around social and economic debates (e.g. Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Mair, 1997). Foreign policy issues involving the use of force are likely to lie on a dimension that is orthogonal to ideology.¹⁶ The evidence appears to weigh in favor of non-ideological, or cross-cutting, foreign policy. For example, US presidents' partisan opponents in Congress are likely to support presidential national security policies (Fleisher and Bond, 1988; Stoll, 1987). Similarly, Schultz (2001) offers crisis-specific, cross-national evidence of opposition parties supporting an executive's call to arms. This suggests legislative opposition may work to stop a government's efforts on social and economic policy, but not necessarily on foreign policy.¹⁷

¹⁴ Gowa (1998) found that the unified-divided government dichotomy had no influence on the presidential use of force. Also, for another account of the relative autonomy of presidents, see Auerswald (1999).

¹⁵ The military authority of the president is formally "checked" by Congress since the 1973 War Powers Act. But because the president may deploy troops for up to 60 days without Congressional approval, a potential Congressional "veto" does not preclude the presidential use of force. Of course, there is the possibility that Congress—even an opposition Congress—supports the president's position in an international crisis (Stoll, 1987; Schultz, 2001).

¹⁶ This would tend to support the basic thrust of the two-presidencies conjecture (see for example, Oldfield and Wildavsky, 1989).

¹⁷ Klingemann et al. (1994) conclude that right parties are pro-military, while left parties tend to be anti-military. Although these differences may drive the parties' preferences with respect to allocation of the budget (i.e. defense versus social welfare), the diversity of foreign policy issues warranting a use of force (e.g. alliance commitments, perceived threat, humanitarian crisis) is likely to transcend ideology.

Domestic Opposition and Credible Signals

If the constraining effect of partisan opposition is accurate, presidents should be reluctant to launch a use of force when facing an intransigent Congress. When considered in the strategic context, a partisan constraint on the president's military autonomy may serve to embolden potential adversaries, leading to more uses of force. Schultz (1998, 2001) argues that partisan opposition to a leader's venture may cripple the ability of the leader to credibly signal resolve. In such an event, the adversary is likely to doubt the leader's willingness to respond assertively to threats, increasing the likelihood that an adversary presses its claims. Schultz (2001) finds crisis-specific support for this argument in case studies of the Boer War and Suez Crisis. Consistent with Schultz's (1998) argument, Foster (2006) finds that the US is more likely to be targeted when Congress generally opposes the president's foreign policy agenda.¹⁸

In contrast to the party cover perspective, the signaling account suggests a positive relationship between congressional opposition and the use of force. If US adversaries are encouraged by the presence of partisan opposition, the president may pursue his demands through threats or force. But this expectation is inconsistent with the empirical record (Howell and Pevehouse, 2005; Clark, 2000; Wang, 1996), casting doubt on the signaling perspective.

Like the contrast between orthodox diversion and SCA, the party cover approach and signaling accounts of the role of partisan opposition offer contradictory expectations. On the one hand, Howell and Pevehouse (2005) insist unified government provides political cover for presidential uses of force and thus political opposition in Congress serves to reduce the propensity of military intervention abroad. On the other hand, Schultz (2001) concludes rival leaders will likely observe congressional restraints on presidential actions. The result theoretically should be more opportunities under divided rather than unified government.

Hypotheses

Previous research has variously examined participation, initiation, targeting, and reciprocation of disputes. Although these research strategies are typically consistent with the hypotheses tested, they are unable to account for the selection effects inherent in strategic accounts. Moreover, the body of research leaves us with a vexing set of mixed findings. What is needed is a set of hypotheses that distinguish between the perspectives in a unified framework; a framework that models selection while testing the implications of strategic accounts.

The diversionary hypothesis is best evaluated by examining the president's propensity to initiate disputes. If the decision to identify opportunities to divert rests with the president, rather than an adversary, we should expect a greater probability of initiation when diversionary incentives exist. Given the arguments of the SCA literature, the consideration of dispute initiation constitutes a hard test for

¹⁸ Meernik (2000) suggests that it is presumptuous to assume foreign leaders base their decisions on US domestic political and economic conditions, although this is exactly what SCA theory and Schultz's signaling model do.

diversionary hypotheses. According to the SCA perspective, indicators of a poor domestic situation should be associated with fewer opportunities for the president to engage in diversionary uses of force as potential targets of US diversions respond to presidential incentives to use force by avoiding confrontational interactions with the US. Focusing on the initiation of force largely circumvents problems associated with a dearth of opportunities due to SCA. If presidents have fewer opportunities to use force abroad during hard times, results indicating a significant relationship between poor domestic conditions and the initiation of force should be especially supportive of the argument. This leads to our first expectation.

Diversions Theory H₁: Presidents are more likely to initiate disputes during economic downturns.

An implication of diversionary theory is that presidents should regard activity aimed at the US as more threatening during economic downturns (Fordham, 1998). Threats or mobilizations that may not have elicited a US response during good times may lead to forceful action when economic growth is low. Thus, when the US is targeted by an adversary, the president should be more likely to counter with some military action when diversionary incentives exist.

Diversions Theory H₂: Presidents are more likely to reciprocate disputes during economic downturns.

The strategic conflict avoidance perspective suggests that others should avoid targeting the US during economic downturns (Leeds and Davis, 1997). The initiation of a dispute against the US when a president is faced with diversionary pressure would likely be met with a militarized response. Consequently, leaders seeking to avoid a military confrontation with the US should be reluctant to target the US under such conditions.

Strategic Conflict Avoidance H₁: The US is less likely to be the target of disputes during economic downturns.

An implication of SCA theory concerns the probability of reciprocation. If potential targets of diversions seek to avoid conflict, actual targets may also pursue avoidance. Targets may refuse to respond to military activity aimed at them by the US. Rather than counter US threats or deployments with force, targets may acquiesce, absorb, or simply ignore US actions.

Strategic Conflict Avoidance H₂: US targets are less likely to reciprocate disputes during US economic downturns.

Like the diversionary hypothesis, the empirical expectation corresponding to the constraining effect of congressional opposition is best tested by examining initiation. The decision to initiate a dispute lies largely with the president who must then consider the potential costs imposed by an opposition Congress. According to the arguments of Howell and Pevehouse (2005), Clark (2000), and others, presidents should avoid risky and politically costly military interventions when facing strong opposition in the US House and Senate.

Congressional Opposition H₁: Presidents are less likely to initiate disputes when faced with congressional opposition.

Presidents may also be expected to forego military responses to threats or other militarized action by states targeting the US when doing so could lead to costly action by Congress. Indeed, it makes little sense to escalate low-level disputes when Congress might significantly curtail presidential actions or ambitions. Thus, we anticipate that when facing congressional opposition, presidents should take a more conciliatory approach to dispute resolution with rivals so as to avoid undermining their influence in the legislative process.

Congressional Opposition H₂: Presidents are less likely to reciprocate disputes when faced with congressional opposition.

In contrast, US adversaries should be emboldened by constraining conditions on presidents. If Congressional Opposition H₂ is accurate, US adversaries can target the US with impunity when presidents face an opposition Congress. Similarly, targets of US disputes may doubt the resolve of presidents facing congressional opposition. Given that presidents saddled with an intransigent Congress can be expected to face higher than normal costs for pursuing protracted conflicts, targets should be more likely to resist assertive US action. This leads to two additional conjectures relating to the strategic implications of congressional opposition.

Signaling H₁: The US is more likely to be the target of disputes when faced with congressional opposition.

Signaling H₂: US targets are more likely to reciprocate disputes when presidents face congressional opposition.

Research Design

To test the hypotheses, we construct a directed-dyadic dataset of which the US was a member, 1945–2001.¹⁹ The units of analysis and measurement of the dependent variables are determined by the Correlates of War (COW) Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data (Jones et al., 1996). Consistent with the hypotheses, we identify four dichotomous endogenous (i.e. dependent and selection) variables coded on the basis of the MID data (Jones et al., 1996). The first of these is *US dispute initiation*, which is the propensity of the United States to initiate a dispute against the other state in the dyad in a given year. It is valued 1 for each dyad-year that the United States initiates a dispute (hostility level greater than 1) and 0 otherwise. The second dependent variable is *Target reciprocation*. This variable takes the value 1 when the target of a US dispute initiation reciprocates US action. Third is *US adversary initiation*. Adversary initiation assumes the value 1 when the US is targeted by another state. Finally, *US reciprocation* takes on the value of 1 when the US reciprocates a dispute initiated by an adversary.

¹⁹ This dataset was constructed using the EUGene data generation program (Bennett and Stam, 2000).

US dispute behavior is hypothesized to be a function of domestic political incentives and constraints. Consequently, we include measures of the state of the economy, presidential popularity, and congressional support as the key independent variables. To indicate economic conditions, we include an annual measure of US *GDP growth*.²⁰ According to the diversionary view, lower levels of GDP should be associated with a greater propensity for the president to initiate and reciprocate disputes. But the SCA account expects that the US is less likely to be targeted or to have disputes initiated by the US reciprocated when GDP growth is low.

The analysis includes *Presidential approval*, which is measured as the annual average of all Gallup presidential job approval polls.²¹ Presumably, lower levels of presidential approval provide the president with incentives to participate in disputes in order to affect an opinion rally (e.g. Mueller, 1973; Lee, 1977; MacKuen, 1983). However, much of the empirical research has found a positive relationship between approval and various measures of US conflict behavior (see Foster and Palmer, 2006).

We include three measures of congressional support. The first, *Partisan support*, consists of the percentage of seats held by the president's co-partisans in the chamber of Congress in which the president's co-partisans hold the fewest seats. The second measure is *Cohesive partisan support*, which takes into account the relative size and cohesiveness of the two major parties in Congress.²² The measure is derived from the "legislative potential for policy change" (LPPC) scores (Brady et al., 1977). The score from the chamber with the lower congressional support score is included in the analysis. The third measure, *Presidential success*, is the percentage of congressional roll call votes that concurred with the president's position.²³ Again, we use the score corresponding to the chamber in which the presidential success score is lower. According to the party cover model, lower levels of congressional support should exert a negative effect on US dispute initiation and reciprocation. However, the strategic account set forth by Schultz suggests that the US is more likely to be targeted and meet resistance to actions initiated by the US when congressional support is low.

Large literatures on international conflict identify a number of factors thought to influence dispute behavior. The analysis takes many of these factors into account. The first of these concerns domestic regime type. That democracies are unlikely to fight each other is a robust finding (e.g. Maoz and Russett, 1993; Dixon, 1994). As a democracy, the United States is not expected to initiate disputes with other

²⁰ GDP growth is the annual rate of growth in US gross domestic product. The source for GDP is US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis (retrieved from <http://www.bea.doc.gov/>).

²¹ The Gallup polls ask "do you approve of the job (name of president) is doing as president?" These polls were retrieved from the Roper Center via Lexis-Nexis.com.

²² Congressional support is computed as follows: Legislative support = [(president's party size in percent) X (cohesion of president's party)] - [(opposition's party size in percent) X (cohesion of opposition's party)]. Party cohesion scores are from Cooper and Young (2002).

²³ The source for Presidential success is Ragsdale (1998). Presidential success was available for the time period 1953 through 1996.

democracies. Therefore, the analysis includes a variable called *Adversary's level of democracy*, which is the level of democracy of the opposing state in the dyad using the Polity III dataset (Jagers and Gurr, 1995).²⁴

Another robust finding in the literature suggests that dyads composed of states with very unequal military capabilities are unlikely to experience conflict (e.g. Blainey, 1973; Organski and Kugler, 1980). Thus, the analysis includes a variable, *Adversary's capabilities*, which consist of the other state's military capabilities from the COW data on national material capabilities (Singer et al., 1972).

Geographic proximity also exerts a strong influence on the probability that a dyad experiences a dispute (e.g. Bremer, 1992; Vasquez, 1993). The nearer two states are to each other, the more likely that they engage in a dispute. A measure tapping this concept is included. *Distance* is a measure of the capital-to-capital distance between the two states in the dyad, controlling for the curvature of the earth (great circle measure).

Alliance similarity is also thought to reduce the likelihood of conflict within a dyad. When the states in the dyad are allies or have allies in common, they are likely to share preferences over security issues (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, 1992). Alliance similarity is taken into account by including the variable *Alliance portfolio*, which is a tau-b rank-order coefficient of two states' alliance portfolios generated by the EUGene software (Bennett and Stam, 2000).

The analysis employs a Heckman estimation framework to explicitly capture any shared dynamics between the two decision stages (initiation and reciprocation). The fundamental problem for estimation is the possibility that leaders anticipate whether and/or how targets will respond and this affects their decision to initiate in the first place. Similarly, the leaders of targeted states must consider the incentives initiators have for issuing the challenge. The initial decision to use military force can create an estimation problem for parameters explaining the latter choice of reciprocation. From a simple utility framework, the problem is that leaders only initiate conflict when their utility for such action is greater than no initiation. So, a subsequent reciprocation is only possible when an initiation occurs, which is determined by the leader's utility for initiation. Thus, the decision by a target to respond to a challenge is not a random draw from an exogenously determined set of opportunities. If the likelihood of initiation is truly independent of reciprocation, there exists no dilemma for estimation. But if this assumption does not hold and regressions are estimated separately, this would be equivalent to the problem of omitted variable(s) in estimating the likelihood of reciprocation. In other words, the parameters estimating reciprocation will be biased and inconsistent.

Empirical Results

Table 1 presents empirical results from Heckman selection models. In columns 2–4, we model US initiation and target reciprocation. In columns 5–7, we model target initiation and US reciprocation. The models presented in Table 1 are designed to test implications of orthodox diversionary, SCA, party cover, and signaling

²⁴ This is the net democracy score for each state, which is defined as its democracy score minus its autocracy score.

theories. Columns 2 and 5 include the Partisan support measure, while the third and sixth columns include the Cohesive partisan support and Presidential success variables, respectively. Models A, B, and C offer some support for standard diversionary theory expectations, which suggests that presidents are more likely to initiate disputes during periods of economic weakness. Indeed, as economic growth weakens, we find an increase in the propensity of presidents to initiate militarized disputes among the selection equations. Changing GDP growth from its maximum to its minimum, while holding other variables at constant values, increases the predicted probability of a US initiation from an average of .01 to .06 across these three models. This supports Diversionary Hypothesis 1. A similar result is expected with presidential approval in the selection equations and yet we observe no relationship between this measure of domestic-political conditions and dispute initiation.²⁵ Contrary to the expectations of the party cover model, we find that the level of congressional support enjoyed by the president—however measured—does not exert a statistically significant effect on US dispute initiation across Models A through C in Table 1.²⁶

The coefficients for GDP growth in the outcome equations across Models A–C are negative and significant. Because GDP growth is included in both the selection and outcome equations, however, it must be adjusted in order to be interpreted. As

²⁵ One reviewer recommended modeling Ostrom and Job's (1986) suggestion that the effects of approval on presidential decisions to use force are only felt in the 40%–60% range. This same reviewer also inquired about the possible curvilinear effects of approval on militarization. In ancillary analyses, we ran both a dummy of approval and a quadratic term (in separate models). We find little support for Ostrom and Job's conjecture. Indeed, we observe a negative and significant relationship with US reciprocation decisions. Evidence of a curvilinear relationship between approval and force is limited as well. We do find that a linear measure of presidential approval is positively related to US MID initiation while the approval quadratic is negatively related to MID initiation. However, the variables do not reach standard statistical significance levels.

²⁶ We also examine the role of congressional ideology in explaining initiation and reciprocation. Limited research suggests that right-of-center parties tend to be more hawkish naturally than their more left-leaning counterparts (see for example, Klingemann et al., 1994; Schultz, 2001; Palmer et al., 2004; Foster and Palmer, 2006). Consequently, our results concerning a president's support in Congress may be due to the hawkishness (or dovishness) of Congress. We re-estimated our models including a weak link measure of the share of seats held by Republicans (we use the chamber with the smaller score). In general, the inclusion of the weak link Republican measure does not alter the results presented in the paper. None of our conclusions in the paper change as a result of including this measure of legislative hawkishness. As one might expect, the share of Republicans decreases target reciprocation (although in most models this variable is not statistically significant). Oddly, however, the share of Republicans also decreases US reciprocation (and this variable is weakly significant in most models we run on adversary initiation and US reciprocation). The weak link Republican measure appears to have little to no effect in the selection equations (US initiation and adversary initiation). Importantly, though, the coefficient estimates of the other variables in the models remain nearly unchanged with the inclusion of the legislative hawkishness variable.

Table 1. Models of Initiation and Reciprocation

<i>Reciprocation</i>	<i>Models of US initiation and target reciprocation</i>			<i>Models of adversary initiation and US reciprocation</i>		
	<i>Target reciprocation</i>			<i>US reciprocation</i>		
	<i>Model A</i>	<i>Model B</i>	<i>Model C</i>	<i>Model D</i>	<i>Model E</i>	<i>Model F</i>
GDP Growth	-.067** (.031)	-.069** (.031)	-.077** (.043)	.044 (.038)	.054 (.043)	.372*** (.038)
Presidential approval	.048*** (.019)	.049*** (.018)	.065*** (.019)	.029*** (.010)	.030*** (.012)	.063*** (.005)
Congressional support ^a	-3.36 (4.15)	-.022 (.026)	-.025 (.027)	-3.91*** (.823)	-.044*** (.008)	-.171*** (.014)
Constant	2.21 (2.27)	.510 (.990)	1.42 (1.66)	1.28 (1.28)	-.646 (1.32)	8.41*** (.806)
<i>Initiation</i>	<i>US initiation</i>			<i>Adversary initiation</i>		
GDP Growth	-.025** (.014)	-.025** (.014)	-.038* (.023)	.008 (.014)	.009 (.014)	.008 (.020)
Presidential approval	.000 (.004)	.000 (.004)	-.003 (.005)	.005* (.003)	.005* (.003)	.003 (.004)
Congressional support ^a	-.874 (.746)	-.004 (.005)	-.001 (.004)	.339 (.656)	.002 (.005)	.003 (.005)
Adversary's capabilities	9.94*** (.797)	9.97*** (.805)	11.13*** (.808)	11.65*** (.818)	11.66*** (.816)	11.97*** (.814)
Adversary's level of democracy	-.039*** (.013)	-.039*** (.014)	-.036*** (.014)	-.046*** (.010)	-.046*** (.010)	-.047*** (.010)
Distance	-.0001*** (.000)	-.0001*** (.000)	-.0001*** (.000)	-.0001*** (.000)	-.0001*** (.000)	-.0001*** (.000)
Alliance portfolio	-.762*** (.256)	-.759*** (.256)	-.817*** (.279)	.069 (.304)	.067 (.305)	.082 (.336)
Constant	-1.17** (.595)	-1.60*** (.368)	-1.23** (.538)	-2.40*** (.497)	-2.23*** (.382)	-2.22*** (.481)
ρ	-.585*** (.266)	-.615*** (.249)	-.614*** (.276)	.545** (.260)	.558** (.269)	1.00*** (.000)
Wald test of ρ = 0	2.71*	3.22*	2.61 (p=.10)	2.74*	2.59 (p=.10)	50.89***
N (uncensored)	5440 (54)	5440 (54)	4933 (53)	5450 (64)	5450 (64)	4940 (60)

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$; one-tailed tests. The numbers in parentheses are semi-robust standard errors to correct for clustering on dyads.

^a Congressional support is Partisan support in Models A and D, Cohesive partisan support in Models B and E, and Presidential success in Models C and F.

Sigelman and Zeng (1999) show, the adjusted coefficient for the k th element of x can be written as

$$\frac{\partial E(y | z^* > 0, x)}{\partial x_k} = \beta_k - \gamma_k \rho \sigma_{\epsilon} \delta(-w\gamma) \quad (1)$$

where β refers to the coefficient for the outcome equation, γ refers to the corresponding coefficient for the selection equation, ρ is the correlation between the errors in the two equations, σ is the error from the outcome equation, and δ is a function of the inverse Mills ratio used in the Heckman estimator. This procedure produces an adjusted coefficient for each value of x , the independent variable. Consistent with Sigelman and Zeng (1999), we conduct a sensitivity analysis to assess the change in $E(y | z^* > 0)$ given a change in the value of x . In practice, the sensitivity analysis consists of an examination of the mean and standard deviation of the adjusted coefficients produced by equation 1 above across the range of x .

The means of the adjusted coefficients for GDP growth are nearly identical to those reported in the table with very tight distributions.²⁷ The results indicate that targets are more likely to reciprocate US initiations when presidents face lower levels of GDP growth, which fundamentally challenges the expectations of SCA theory. Rather than avoiding escalatory actions when a president has diversionary incentives, rival states appear to confront US initiations with militarized responses. Substantively, dropping GDP growth from its maximum observed value to its minimum yields an average increase in the predicted probability of target reciprocation of 43% across Models A–C in Table 1.

Although the results for GDP growth in the outcome equations in Models A–C appear to contradict the expectations of SCA, the effect of presidential approval on target reciprocation can be said to support SCA. The coefficients for presidential approval are positive and significant across Models A, B, and C, suggesting that targets are reluctant to resist disputes initiated by the US when presidents are faced with low popularity. Low popularity is thought to be a source of diversionary incentives (e.g. Morgan and Bickers, 1992). The means of the adjusted coefficients for presidential approval in the outcome equations in Models A through C are virtually identical to those reported in the table with compact distributions.²⁸ Despite the apparent robustness of presidential approval across the three models, the substantive effects are quite modest—shifting presidential approval from its minimum to its maximum yields an average increase in the predicted probability of target reciprocation of only .9%. Similar to the selection equations, congressional support appears to be unrelated to target reciprocation in the outcome equations in Models A–C, casting some doubt on Schultz's signaling account.

²⁷ The standard deviation for the distribution of adjusted GDP growth coefficients for Model A is .0000393, while those for Models B and C are .0000405 and .0000767, respectively.

²⁸ The standard deviations for the distributions of adjusted Presidential approval coefficients are 4.06e–08 for Model A, 2.33e–07 for Model B, and 2.43e–06 for Model C.

Table 1 also shows the Heckman probit selection models for adversary initiation and US reciprocation, using three measures of congressional support. Among the selection equations for Models D, E, and F, few of our variables of interest play a significant role in adversaries' choices to target the US. Indeed, only presidential approval exerts a statistically significant effect in Models D and E. A marginal increase across the range of presidential approval yields an average increase of 85% in the predicted probability of adversary initiation against the US. Like the effect of approval on adversary reciprocation, this result can be construed as support for the SCA perspective. US adversaries are less willing to target the US when the president is unpopular and, hence, subject to diversionary incentives. However, contrary to previous studies (e.g. Leeds and Davis, 1997; Foster, 2006), we find no support for the SCA claim that US adversaries base their decisions to target the US on the state of the US economy. GDP growth is unrelated to target initiation across Models D through E. We also find no evidence that US targets consider the extent to which presidents can expect Congress to support the president in a potential conflict. Rather than indicating that US adversaries are emboldened by a lack of congressional support, as the signaling account suggests, we find that the measures of congressional support exert no significant effects on targeting of the US.

The performance of our variables of interest in the outcome equations in Models D–E is somewhat surprising. First, we find that GDP growth is significant, but positive, in Model F, which includes the presidential success measure of congressional support. Presidents are more likely to reciprocate disputes during periods of greater economic growth. However, before we make too much of this finding, it should be noted that the substantive effect of the average adjusted coefficient for GDP growth in the outcome equation is infinitesimally small—a marginal decrease across the range of GDP growth yields a .000004% decrease in the predicted probability of a US reciprocation. Nonetheless, such a result appears to challenge orthodox diversionary theory insofar as presidents should be less likely to seize on opportunities to use force when enjoying higher levels of economic growth.

Second, our findings concerning the effect of Presidential approval among the outcome equations in Models D–F also challenge diversionary theory. Presidential approval is positive and significant across the three models, suggesting that presidents are reluctant to take advantage of opportunities to use force when their popularity is low. The mean adjusted coefficients for presidential approval are virtually identical to those generated by the Heckman estimator.²⁹ Substantively, an increase in presidential approval across its observed range produces an average increase of 21% in the predicted probability of US reciprocation.

Perhaps our most interesting findings concern the effects of our measures of congressional support on US reciprocation. The coefficients for all three measures are negative and significant, suggesting that lower levels of support from

²⁹ The standard deviation for the distribution of adjusted Presidential approval coefficients for Model D is 3.68e–06, while those for Models E and F are 4.12e–06 and 1.72e–06, respectively.

Congress are associated with a greater likelihood of US reciprocation. These results, which are invariant as to the measurement of the independent variable, contradict the expectations of the party cover model (Howell and Pevehouse, 2005, 2007). Rather than demonstrating resolve in the face of threats when congressional backing is forthcoming, presidents appear to be more likely to demonstrate such resolve when faced with a recalcitrant Congress. One explanation for this finding is that presidents seize upon opportunities to use force as congressional opposition increases because such opposition is likely to thwart the president's domestic program, but not necessarily his foreign policy program (Brulé, 2006; Marshall and Prins, 2008). The mean adjusted coefficients for cohesive partisan support and presidential success are nearly identical to those produced by the Heckman estimator. However, the average of the adjusted coefficients for partisan support is actually slightly larger ($\beta_{adjusted} = -4.03$). Nonetheless, the associated measures of dispersion indicate that the distributions of the adjusted coefficients are narrow.³⁰ A marginal increase across the ranges of the three measures of congressional support decreases the predicted probability of US reciprocation by an average of 91%.

The control variables in Table 1 generally perform as expected. The US is less likely to initiate disputes against democratic states and allies, while power parity increases the likelihood of MID initiation. These results apply to adversary initiations against the US. The more democratic a country is, the less likely it will target the US. But power parity is once again positively related to adversary initiation against the US. Geographic distance expectedly decreases the probabilities of US and adversary initiation.

The ancillary ρ parameters in all models are statistically significant at a $p = .10$ level, suggesting correlated errors among the selection and outcome equations. Because the norms concerning the interpretation of ρ in the discipline are diverse, we proceed with caution in our effort to do so. Generally, a positive ρ indicates that standard probit estimation would have overestimated the effects of unobserved factors associated with selection—in our case, dispute initiation—on the outcome under examination; that is, reciprocation. Conversely, a negative ρ suggests that standard probit estimation would have underestimated the effect of unobservables associated with initiation or reciprocation. Put another way, these results suggest that had we employed standard probit estimation rather than the Heckman model, our estimates would have been biased up or down according to the sign of ρ (see e.g. Vandenberghe and Robin, 2004).

Curiously, the direction of correlation changes from Models A–C to Models D–F. In Models A–C, the ρ parameters are negative, indicating that errors associated with US initiation would have led to underestimation in a standard probit model. In Models D–F, we find positive ρ parameters, suggesting that unobserved factors associated with adversary initiation against the US would have resulted in overestimation of US reciprocation using standard probit estimation. Both results

³⁰ The standard deviation for the adjusted coefficients for Partisan support is .0182899, while those for Cohesive partisan support and Presidential success are 1.16e–06 and 3.35e–06, respectively.

offer fairly direct evidence of a selection effect (Greene, 2003: 786). Thus, one might conclude that the world is strategic.

Conclusion

In this article, we examined two prominent sources of domestic vulnerability for the president—economic misfortune and congressional opposition. We assessed hypotheses consistent with orthodox, externalization theories (i.e. diversionary theory, the party cover model) as well as their strategic counterparts (i.e. SCA, signaling). By extending these perspectives to encompass dependent and selection variables corresponding to four types of dispute behavior involving the US, we are able to take a new look at the body of research linking political vulnerability to the use of force.

First, among the four accounts we examine, orthodox diversionary theory receives the most—albeit, mixed—support. Diversionary theory claims that presidents have incentives to respond to poor economic conditions by using force abroad. According to this perspective, we expected presidents to be more likely to initiate and reciprocate disputes during periods of economic decline. Our results suggest that presidents initiate disputes during economic downturns, but our measure of economic performance had no significant bearing on the likelihood that the president reciprocates disputes.³¹

Second, our study appears to undermine the SCA perspective. SCA argues that potential targets of presidential diversions recognize the president's diversionary incentives during periods of economic decline and steer clear of activities that are expected to invite US action. In spite of the progressiveness of SCA research, we found virtually no support for the SCA perspective with respect to US economic conditions. SCA implies that presidents should have few opportunities—even those rooted in relatively low-level events (Fordham, 2005)—to initiate or reciprocate disputes during economic downturns. Moreover, targets of US initiations should be unlikely to reciprocate US action when presidents are facing poor economic conditions. In contrast, we find that presidents manage to find opportunities to initiate disputes when economic conditions are poor. Similarly, targets of US initiations seem to pay no heed to the economic problems facing the president and tend to reciprocate US initiations.

Third, our study challenges the party cover model (Howell and Pevehouse, 2005). Howell and Pevehouse (2005) argue that presidents are reluctant to engage in military conflicts when Congress is expected to oppose such action and, subsequently, impose a number of political and operational costs associated with the president's venture. Our findings indicate that lower levels of partisan support in Congress do not reduce the president's propensity to initiate or reciprocate disputes. Indeed, presidents are more likely to reciprocate disputes when facing an intransigent Congress. This finding contradicts the expectations of the party cover model. As we argue above, this finding may be due to the greater autonomy presidents enjoy with respect to foreign policy as opposed to domestic policy,

³¹ Although this latter null finding may be attributed to a selection effect consistent with SCA, other expectations of SCA fail to be supported, as we discuss below.

which requires the cooperation of Congress. Consequently, presidents can be expected to focus on foreign policy when institutional constraints of partisan opposition foreclose domestic policy options. Such a focus by the president is likely to yield a greater propensity to reciprocate disputes in his quest to contribute to a record of policy successes.

Finally, we find no evidence weighing in favor of Schultz's (1998) signaling perspective. This account suggests that a partisan opposition can weaken the president's signal of resolve in crisis bargaining, emboldening US adversaries to stand firm or press their claims. Accordingly, we expected our measure of congressional support to exert a negative effect on the likelihood of both initiations against the US and reciprocations of disputes initiated by the US. However, we found that lower levels of partisan support in Congress do not appear to influence US adversaries' dispute behavior on either count.

We have two recommendations for future research. First, subsequent research should re-examine SCA. Our results appear to challenge the notion that adversaries are able to avoid being targeted by bellicose presidents with diversionary incentives. Presidents may be able to generate (and justify) international crises regardless of the immediate behavior of potential targets. Although other democratic leaders with diversionary incentives may lack this capacity, scholars should seriously consider the power, reach, and broadly defined "interests" of the US. Second, later studies should consider the implications of our findings for Schultz's (1998) signaling account. Although our results appear to challenge the conditions—partisan support—under which targets believe the president is resolved, such findings do not necessarily challenge the logic of strategic interaction advanced by Schultz. Like others (Brulé, 2006; Marshall and Prins, 2008), we suggest that presidents may choose between two broad areas of policy: foreign and domestic. Because congressional cooperation is necessary for presidents to succeed in domestic policy making—but not necessarily in foreign policy making—partisan opposition forestalls presidential efforts to pursue domestic policy. Consequently, presidents are likely to advance energetic foreign policy agendas in their pursuit of policy success when facing congressional opposition, signaling resolve to potential adversaries abroad. Indeed, such an argument is consistent with research finding that the president's propensity to engage in international conflict declines as partisan opposition increases (Wang, 1996; Clark, 2000; Howell and Pevehouse, 2005). If the president's resolve is not in doubt during periods of low partisan support, actual uses of force are unlikely to ensue as adversaries back down or avoid conflict with the US.

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