

# COUP RISK, COUNTERBALANCING, AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

AARON BELKIN AND EVAN SCHOFER

*Contrary to the literature on rallies-around-the-flag, this article argues that, in some circumstances, leaders may use international conflict to promote domestic divisiveness. More specifically, the threat of a military coup generally prompts leaders to divide their militaries (a practice known as counterbalancing), and even to engage in international conflict to ensure that various branches of their own armed forces remain distrustful of one another. Two empirical tests of these claims are offered: a large-N statistical analysis that examines whether coup risk leads to counterbalancing, and whether counterbalanced nations engage in more low-level military conflict (controlling for other causes of conflict); and a case study of Georgia shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Both empirical studies support the arguments advanced by the authors.*

ACCORDING TO A report in the *New York Times*, Yasir Arafat's Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigades included two distinct security structures that carried out suicide bombings against Israeli military and civilian targets. Each faction possessed "its own funding, chain of command and capability for directing bombing attacks," and the two structures "compete[d] with each other to some extent."<sup>1</sup> Even though it may seem inefficient to maintain distinct military or paramilitary organizations that perform similar functions, the Palestinian example is far from unique.<sup>2</sup> For example, when Hafiz al-Asad became president of Syria in February 1971, Syria's ground forces consisted

Aaron Belkin is associate professor of political science at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Evan Schofer is assistant professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the comments of the editors and anonymous reviewers at *Security Studies*.

1. Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Is Given Papers That Israelis Assert Tie Arafat to Terror," *New York Times*, 12 April 2002, A1. Our analysis is based on Aaron Belkin, *United We Stand: Divide-and-Conquer Politics and the Logic of International Hostility* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); and Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofer, "Toward a Structural Understanding of Coup Risk: Concepts, Measurement, and Implications," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47, no. 5 (October 2003): 594–620.

2. The literature on military counterbalancing is enormous. Important discussions can be found in Bruce W. Farcau, *The Coup: Tactics in the Seizure of Power* (Westport: Praeger, 1994); Edward N. Luttwak, *Coup d'état* (London: Penguin Press, 1968); Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988); Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Peter D. Feaver, "The Why, What, and How of Civilian Control: Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force," paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 31

of just a single army and a few lightly equipped militias. By 1976, Syrian ground forces included six fully equipped armies.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze developed five ground forces after he took office in March 1992.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the statistical analyses that are described below show

---

August–3 September 1995; Peter Feaver, “Crisis as Shirking: An Agency Theory Explanation of the Souring of American Civil-Military Relations,” *Armed Forces & Society* 24, no. 3 (spring 1998): 407–34; Jendayi Frazer, “Sustaining Civilian Control: Armed Counterweights in Regime Stability in South Africa,” Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1994; Alain Rouquié, *The Military and the State in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Alfred Stepan, “The New Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role Expansion,” in *Armies and Politics in Latin America*, ed. Abraham F. Lowenthal and John Samuel Fitch (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 244–57.

3. On military counterbalancing in Syria, see Middle East Watch, *Syria Unmasked: The Suppression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 41, 52, 174; Mark Heller, ed., *The Middle East Military Balance* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Post Press, 1983), 229–30; Richard F. Nyrop, ed., *Syria: A Country Study* (Washington: American University, 1978), 216; Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Sectarianism, Regionalism, and Tribalism in Politics, 1961–1978* (London: Croon Helm, 1979), 90; Hanna Batatu, “Some Observations on the Social Roots of Syria’s Ruling Military Group and the Causes of Its Dominance,” *Middle East Journal* 35, no. 3 (summer 1981): 331–44; Alasdair Drysdale, “Ethnicity in the Syrian Officer Corps: A Conceptualization,” *Civilisations* 29 (December 1979): 372; and Itamar Rabinovich, “Syria,” in *Security Policies of Developing Countries*, ed. Edward A. Kolodziej and Robert E. Harkavy (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1982), 269. On Asad’s survival strategies more generally, see Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*; Fred H. Lawson, “From Neo-Ba’th to Nouveau: Hafiz al-Asad’s Second Decade,” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 14 (winter 1990): 1–21; Fred H. Lawson, *Why Syria Goes to War: Thirty Years of Confrontation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Peasant and Bureaucracy in Ba’thist Syria* (Boulder: Westview, 1989); Raymond A. Hinnebusch, “Asad’s Syria and the New World Order: The Struggle for Regime Survival,” *Middle East Policy* 2, no. 1 (1993): 1–14; Adeer I. Dawisha, “Syria under Asad, 1970–78: The Centres of Power,” *Government and Opposition* 13, no. 3 (summer 1978): 341–54; and Patrick Seale, *Asad* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988). For a study of military counterbalancing in the Middle East, see James T. Quinlivan, “Coup-proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East,” *International Security* 24, no. 2 (fall 1999): 131–65.

4. On Georgian civil-military relations in the early years of Shevardnadze’s presidency, see Irakli Aladashvili, “Georgian Internal Forces,” *Army and Society in Georgia* 4, nos. 1–2 (January–February 1996): 11–13; Roy Allison, “Military Forces in the Soviet Successor States,” Adelphi Paper no. 280 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1993); David Darchiashvili, *Elections in Georgia 5 November 1995* (Tbilisi: Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development, 1995); David Darchiashvili and Irakli Aladashvili, “The 11th Brigade—The Past and the Present,” *Army and Society in Georgia* 4, no. 5 (May 1996): 10–14; Carolyn McGiffert Ekedahl and Melvin A. Goodman, *The Wars of Eduard Shevardnadze* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Charles H. Fairbanks, “Postcommunist Wars,” *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 4 (October 1995): 18–34; Elizabeth Fuller, “Georgia’s National Guard,” *Report on the USSR* 3, no. 7 (February 1991): 18–19; Stephen F. Jones, “Adventurers or Commanders? Civil-Military Relations in Georgia since Independence,” in *Civil-Military Relations in the Soviet and Yugoslav Successor States*, ed. Constantine P. Danopoulos (Boulder: Westview, 1996), 35–52; and Tamara Patarai, “Some Problems of Conscripted Georgian Army,” *Army and Society in Georgia* 4, nos. 1–2 (January 1996): 13–15. On Georgian state-building more generally, see Jonathan Aves, *Georgia: From Chaos to Stability?* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996); Revaz G. Gachechiladze, *The New Georgia: Space, Society, and Politics* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995); Stephen F. Jones, “Georgia’s Power Structures,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report* 2 (1993): 5–9; and Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

that most countries in the developing world maintain highly divided military and paramilitary structures.

This article questions whether a leadership's efforts to divide its own armed forces might in some cases provide incentives for engaging in international conflict. It asks, in other words, to what extent might leaders participate in international conflicts to promote divisiveness among various branches of their own armed forces? According to the literatures on diversionary war and the rally-around-the-flag phenomenon, leaders sometimes use aggressive foreign policies to unify their domestic followers.<sup>5</sup> This article turns

5. The diversionary hypothesis holds that leaders use aggressive foreign policies including war to divert the public's attention away from domestic problems. The closely related rally-around-the-flag hypothesis suggests that leaders who engage in aggressive foreign policies benefit from a rally, or boost in domestic popularity. See Robert B. Smith, "Disaffection, Delegitimation, and Consequences: Aggregate Trends for World War II, Korea and Vietnam," in *Public Opinion and the Military Establishment*, ed. Charles Moskos (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1971); John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973); and Michael B. MacKuen, "Political Drama, Economic Conditions, and the Dynamics of Presidential Popularity," *American Journal of Political Science* 27, no. 2 (spring 1983): 165–92. Both claims are grounded in the ingroup-outgroup hypothesis, the notion that conflict with an external group promotes internal cohesion in pre-existing groups that face a common threat and that believe that they can address the threat. See Georg Simmel, *Conflict*, trans. Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, ILL.: Free Press, 1955); Lewis A. Coser, *The Function of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956). The ingroup-outgroup hypothesis has been confirmed in many psychological, anthropological, and sociological studies (see Arthur A. Stein, "Conflict and Cohesion: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 20, no. 1 [March 1976]: 143–72), and the idea is so well accepted that one scholar claimed it "to be a general law that human groups react to external pressure by increased internal coherence" (Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964], 58, quoted in Jack S. Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989], 261). Despite the robustness of the ingroup-outgroup hypothesis, however, scholars have debated whether and under what conditions leaders might use aggressive foreign policies to promote domestic rallies. Baker and Oneal, Miller, Gelpi, Levy, Stohl, and others note that although some historical studies have explained leaders' willingness to use force in terms of efforts to divert the public's attention from domestic problems and bolster their own domestic standing, other quantitative studies have found quite limited empirical support for this proposition. See William D. Baker and John R. Oneal, "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?: The Nature and Origins of the 'Rally 'round the Flag' Effect," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 5 (October 2001): 661–87; Ross A. Miller, "Regime Type, Strategic Interaction, and the Diversionary Use of Force," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43, no. 3 (June 1999): 388; Christopher Gelpi, "Democratic Diversions: Governmental Structure and the Externalization of Domestic Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 2 (April 1997): 255; Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War"; Michael Stohl, "The Nexus of Civil and International Conflict," in *Handbook of Political Conflict: Theory and Research*, ed. Ted R. Gurr (New York: Free Press, 1980), 297–330; Raymond Tanter, "Dimensions of Conflict Behavior Within and Between Nations, 1958–1960," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 10, no. 1 (March 1966): 41–64; and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, ed., *Conflict Behavior and Linkage Politics* (New York: David McKay, 1973). Thus, recent work has focused on the analysis of mediating factors that might help explain when leaders use aggressive foreign policies to promote domestic popularity, and when the use of force leads to a rally effect. Some scholars, for example, have focused on the impact of regime type. While Jack S. Levy and Lily I. Vakili in "Diversionary Action by Authoritarian Regimes: Argentina in the Falklands/Malvinas Case," in *The Internationalization of Communal Strife*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (London: Routledge, 1992), find

the rally-around-the-flag hypothesis on its head by suggesting that in some cases, leaders may engage in conflict in order to fragment their own forces.

This is not meant to suggest that all leaders use aggressive foreign policies to promote divisiveness among their own military forces. Rather, the argument here is intended to apply to leaders who are highly vulnerable to a coup d'état. Military coups are a common problem in much of the world, and subordination of the armed forces is a critical domestic process that almost all new states must confront. Machiavelli's words on this topic are still relevant today: "Many more princes . . . lost their lives and their states by conspiracies than by open war."<sup>6</sup> In Zaire, for example, soldiers mutinied just five days after the country achieved independence.<sup>7</sup> Although the numbers vary slightly depending on counting methods, there were approximately 357 attempted coups in the developing world from 1945 to 1985, and about half of all developing-world states experienced a coup during this period. Of these attempts, 183 coups (or 51 percent) were successful. This phenomenon is by no means fading; militaries staged 75 coups and coup attempts between 1986 and 2000.<sup>8</sup>

---

authoritarian states more likely to use aggressive foreign policies to promote rally effects, others such as Gelpi in "Democratic Diversions" argue that democratic leaders are more likely to use force to promote domestic popularity. Another group of scholars explores whether interaction opportunities influence willingness to use force for domestic purposes. Miller in "Regime Type, Strategic Interaction, and the Diversionary Use of Force," notes that "although democratic leaders may be willing to engage in diversionary behavior, would-be adversaries anticipate this willingness and limit their interactions with those leaders" (389). See also Brett Ashley Leeds and David R. Davis, "Beneath the Surface: Regime Type and International Interaction, 1953–1978," *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 1 (January 1999): 5–21; and Alastair Smith, "Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems," *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (March 1996): 133–53. Others, such as Kurt Dassel and Eric Reinhardt in "Domestic Strife and the Initiation of Violence at Home and Abroad," *American Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 1 (January 1999): 56–85, claim that the type of domestic strife influences the likelihood of diversionary action. For recent reviews see Gelpi, "Democratic Diversions"; Karl DeRouen, Jr., "Presidents and the Diversionary Use of Force: A Research Note," *International Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (June 2000): 317; and Baker and Oneal, "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?"; for older reviews see Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War"; and Stohl, "The Nexus of Civil and International Conflict?"

6. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince and the Discourse* (New York: Random House, 1950), 410.

7. Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa: Prince, Autocrat, Prophet, Tyrant* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); and Frazer, "Sustaining Civilian Control," 196.

8. Samuel P. Huntington, keynote address, conference on "Civil-Military Relations and the Consolidation of Democracy," International Forum for Democratic Studies, Washington, D.C., March 1995, text available at <http://www.ned.org/publications/publications.html>; Stephen R. David, *Defending Third World Regimes from Coups d'Etat* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985); and Stephen R. David, *Third World Coups d'Etat and International Security* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). We compiled our list of coups from Luttwak, *Coup d'état*; Gregor Ferguson, *Coup d'état: A Practical Manual* (New York: Sterling, 1987); Rosemary H.T. O'Kane, *The Likelihood of Coups* (Brookfield: Avebury, 1987); Finer, *The Man on Horseback*; and *Keating's Contemporary Archives*; we sought to ensure the accuracy of our list by sharing it with regional experts and checking discrepant cases in the *New York Times* and the Foreign Broadcast

When leaders take steps to protect themselves from their own armed forces, international conflict can result. Even though scholars have studied the international consequences of numerous forms of domestic conflict, including riots, revolutions, and civil wars, there has been almost no systematic attention to possible external implications of subordination of the armed forces.<sup>9</sup> This article addresses the international implications of coup risk by advancing and testing two hypotheses. First, when the risk of a coup d'état is high, leaders almost always divide their armed forces into multiple organizations that check and balance each other and protect the regime as a byproduct of their independent coercive capacity—often referred to as “counterbalancing.”<sup>10</sup> Leaders have many ways to protect themselves from their own militaries; this article tests the hypothesis that high coup risk usually is sufficient to cause them to

---

Information Service bulletins when possible. Between 1960 and 2000, there were 7 failed coup attempts and 1 successful coup in Western Europe, 3 failed coup attempts and 6 successful coups in Central Europe, 22 failed coup attempts and 18 successful coups in Central America, 25 failed coup attempts and 12 successful coups in Asia, 20 failed coup attempts and 24 successful coups in South America, 23 failed coup attempts and 25 successful coups in the Middle East, and 72 failed coup attempts and 60 successful coups in Africa. Military conspiracies constitute a much more common threat to leaders than revolutions, which have toppled only a handful of regimes. See Stephen M. Walt, “Revolution and War,” *World Politics* 44, no. 3 (April 1992): 325.

9. Some of the best recent work in the literature on civil-military relations includes Deborah D. Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Deborah D. Avant, “Conflicting Indicators of ‘Crisis’ in American Civil-Military Relations,” *Armed Forces & Society* 24, no. 3 (spring 1998): 375–87; Michael N. Barnett, *Confronting the Costs of War: Military Power, State, and Society in Egypt and Israel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); David, *Defending Third World Regimes*; David, *Third World Coups d'État*; Michael C. Desch, *When the Third World Matters: Latin America and United States Grand Strategy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Michael C. Desch, “Soldiers, States, and Structure: The End of the Cold War and Weakening U.S. Civilian Control,” paper prepared for conference on “A Crisis in Civilian Control? Contending Theories of American Civil-Military Relations,” John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University, 11–12 June 1996; Michael C. Desch, “War and State Strength,” *International Organization* 50, no. 2 (spring 1996): 237–68; and Michael C. Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). With just a few exceptions that are mentioned below, however, most of this important new work tends to remain silent on whether leadership efforts to reduce coup risk might lead to international outcomes.

10. Coups d'état are defined here as efforts by small military coalitions to replace the regime. For a typology of coups, see Ekkart Zimmermann, *Political Violence, Crises and Revolutions: Theories and Research* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983). Following Ted R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 185, regimes are defined here as the incumbents who control the government. “The state” refers to governing institutions. Finally, civilian and military regimes are equated here because both must protect themselves from the risk of coups d'état. Indeed, approximately half of all coups are launched against military regimes. See Samuel E. Finer, “The Military and Politics in the Third World,” in *The Third World*, ed. W. S. Thompson (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies Press, 1983), 82. Thus, civilian and military leaders are referred to herein as “the regime” and the “military-as-institution” is referred to as “the military.” On this distinction, see Alfred Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 30.

include counterbalancing in the combination of strategies they pursue. Dividing the armed forces, however, is only the first step toward avoiding a coup. Once the military is divided, leaders must make sure that rival armed organizations stay apart and refrain from conspiring with each other. The second hypothesis tested here is that when leaders believe they can control the costs of engagement and when other strategies for promoting interservice rivalries are unavailable or expected to be ineffective, leaders use international conflict to create and exacerbate rivalries among branches of their own forces.

Despite the prevalence of civil-military instabilities, the literature does not address possible linkages between the risk of a coup and international conflict. For example, the literature on origins of war in the developing world remains curiously silent on the military.<sup>11</sup> With just a few exceptions, the literature on civil-military relations tends to ignore the relationship between leadership efforts to prevent a coup and international conflict.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the few

11. For the literature on the origins of war in the developing world, see Kalevi J. Holsti, "Armed Conflicts in the Third World: Assessing Analytical Approaches and Anomalies" paper prepared for the thirty-fourth annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Acapulco, Mexico, 23–27 March 1993; Edward E. Azar and Chung-in Moon, eds., *National Security in the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Manus I. Midlarsky, ed., *The Internationalization of Communal Strife* (London: Routledge, 1992); Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Brian L. Job, ed., *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1992); and Mohammed Ayoob, "The Security Problematic of the Third World," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991): 257–83. According to these studies, competing ethnic and religious groups contest the central authority of regimes that rest on narrow social bases, and the administrative capacities of state agencies fail to keep pace with the demands of growing populations. As a result, war in the underdeveloped world occurs when domestic violence "spills over" into interstate conflict, as was arguably the case in the India-Pakistan war of 1971 (Holsti, "Armed Conflicts in the Third World"). State weakness, then, is identified as a cause of war. Its operationalization, however, almost never includes vulnerability to the armed forces, depending instead on limited coercive capacity, scarcity of resources, institutional and administrative incompetence, and lack of national cohesion.

12. These exceptions include Desch, *When the Third World Matters*; Desch, "Soldiers, States, and Structure"; Desch, "War and State Strength"; Stephen Biddle and Robert Zirkle, "Technology, Civil-Military Relations, and Warfare in the Developing World," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 19, no. 2 (June 1996): 171–212; Kurt Dassel, "Civilians, Soldiers, and Strife: Domestic Sources of International Aggression," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (summer 1998): 107–40; and Dassel and Reinhardt, "Domestic Strife and the Initiation of Violence." Most scholarship on civil-military relations, however, tends to ignore the causes of war. Sociologists who dominate the largest academic society in the field, the Inter-University Seminar, are not trained in international relations theory, and they tend to conceptualize civil-military relations as a dependent variable. With a few important exceptions, many of the political scientists who study civil-military relations are comparativists who tend not to study the causes of war (Finer, *The Man on Horseback*, 315–29). As Kasza notes in a review of the literature, "comparativists rarely analyze the politics of the military in the context of its war-making mission or when the country under study is at war" (Gregory J. Kasza, "War and Comparative Politics," *Comparative Politics* 28, no. 3 (April 1996): 355–56). Although some scholars do incorporate various aspects of civil-military relations as an independent variable, usually their aim is to account for domestic consequences of civil-military relations. For example, a subset of the literature explores the political role of

studies that seem to address most closely the focus of this analysis tend to be based on questionable assumptions.<sup>13</sup> Finally, the literature on regime vulnerability and diversionary action does not trace the international implications of leadership efforts to avoid a coup and does not acknowledge the military as a source of regime insecurity. Two reviews of the literature on regime

---

the military, in particular whether service in the armed forces undermines ethnic affiliations. See John J. Johnson, ed., *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); and Henry Bienen, "Armed Forces and National Modernization: Continuing the Debate," *Comparative Politics* 16, no. 1 (October 1983): 1–16. A few scholars do use civil-military relations as an independent or mediating variable to explain international outcomes, including Elizabeth Kier, "Culture and Military Doctrine: France between the Wars," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (spring 1995): 65–93; Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Jack L. Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes*, trans. H. Norden (New York: Kelley, 1951); and Biddle and Zirkle, "Technology, Civil-Military Relations, and Warfare." Van Evera, for example, argues in *Causes of War* that militaries cause war as an unintended side effect of efforts to protect their own organizational interests when they purvey myths that exaggerate the necessity and utility of force. Posen in *Sources of Military Doctrine* argues that the degree of international threat influences whether or not civilians allow military preferences for offensive doctrines to prevail. Although this literature sheds light on important issues such as the origins of doctrine and the influence of military culture (Kier, "Culture and Military Doctrine"), scholars in this subfield tend to base their accounts on great powers, for whom the risk of coups d'état usually is low. As a result, their analyses tend to ignore the risk of coups. Thus, the majority of scholarship on civil-military relations does not seek to account for the causes of international conflict. Moreover, those scholars who do use civil-military relations to explain international outcomes tend not to address the critical aspect of civil-military relations that is central to this project: leadership efforts to protect themselves from their own militaries.

13. For example, Dassel and Reinhardt argue in "Domestic Strife and the Initiation of Violence" that domestic instability is most likely to lead to international conflict when the military's interests are challenged. Their argument is premised, however, on the incorrect assumption that "demonstrations, rebellions, and revolutions frequently lead to military coups" (59). Popular protest, however, does not cause coups d'état. Most coups take place absent popular disorder, and most disorder does not lead to coups. Indeed, to the extent that coups and domestic instability are related, it is probably the case that military disloyalty causes domestic instability by opening a window of opportunity for popular protest. See Katharine Campbell Chorley, *Armies and the Art of Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943); Ted R. Gurr, *The Conditions of Civil Violence: First Tests of a Causal Model* (Princeton: Center for International Studies, 1967); Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 251; Diana E.H. Russell, *Rebellion, Revolution, and Armed Force: A Comparative Study of Fifteen Countries with Special Emphasis on Cuba and South Africa* (New York: Academic, 1974); and Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Dassel and Reinhardt's theoretical mechanism is heavily dependent on the assumption that domestic instability leads to coups, and this assumption is incorrect. In addition, like almost all of the rest of the literature on domestic politics and war, Dassel and Reinhardt assume that the military is a unitary actor. They fail to "unpack" the military or to theorize the origins and international implications of military fragmentation. Dassel in "Civilians, Soldiers, and Strife" does theorize the international implications of military fragmentation, but as in Dassel and Reinhardt, "Domestic Strife and the Initiation of Violence" (63), Dassel's 1998 study is heavily dependent on the unquestioned assumption that "international crises encourage a 'rally 'round the flag effect'." Finally, Dassel and Reinhardt assume that "the military uses force to protect itself" without explaining how and why this may be the case.

vulnerability and international conflict survey more than one hundred studies, but they mention the military as a source of regime insecurity only once.<sup>14</sup> Some scholars do address the opposite question—whether wars might increase the likelihood of coups<sup>15</sup>—but it is not an overgeneralization to claim that with just a few exceptions, the literature on regime vulnerability and international conflict does not analyze or even acknowledge the military as a possible source of regime insecurity.

This study takes as given the conventional claim that vulnerable leaders use hostile foreign policy to bolster their domestic position. Although much of the literature on diversionary war emphasizes the impact of external aggression on the public, however, international conflict may be intended to influence different domestic audiences such as the armed forces. Many external conflicts are designed to promote public cohesion, but leaders who fear a coup often also engage in foreign disputes to promote divide-and-conquer politics within their own militaries.

This article develops these arguments and then reports the results of two tests of these claims. This first of these tests is a large-N crossnational quantitative analysis of the relation between coup-risk, counterbalancing, and international conflict in the contemporary era. The second is a case study of Georgia in the period shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This multimethod approach provides a rigorous test of the complex arguments proposed herein.

#### THE ARGUMENT (A): WHY LEADERS SEEK DIVISIVENESS AMONG THEIR MILITARIES

THIS ARTICLE'S first hypothesis is that when the risk of a coup d'état is high, leaders will divide their militaries into multiple forces. Of course, there is little theoretically new about this claim; many scholars have argued that high coup risk tends to prompt leaders to divide their forces into rival organizations that check and balance each other.<sup>16</sup> What is new about this hypothesis is that (1) it claims that high coup risk is a sufficient cause of counterbalancing, in that it expects almost all vulnerable leaders to play divide-and-conquer politics with

14. Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War," 264; and Stohl, "The Nexus of Civil and International Conflict."

15. See, for example, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Randolph M. Siverson, and Gary Woller, "War and the Fate of Regimes: A Comparative Analysis," *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 3 (September 1992): 638–46; and Frazer, "Sustaining Civilian Control."

16. See, for example, Quinlivan, "Coup-proofing"; Feaver, "The Why, What and How of Civilian Control"; Rouquié, *The Military and the State*; and Alfred Stepan, *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

their militaries; and (2) unlike previous studies of divide-and-conquer politics in the military, this is the first to use quantitative analysis rather than case studies to test this claim.

Coup risk is conceptualized here as the presence of background factors that make coups possible. Coup risk, in other words, refers to the presence of background or structural factors, defined below, that make regimes vulnerable to their own armed forces. Coup risk should be thought of as a deep, structural attribute of the government, society, political culture, and state-society relations rather than as a particular characteristic of military organizations.<sup>17</sup> Three guidelines that help distinguish between structural and triggering causes are that structural causes of coups tend to change slowly, whereas triggering causes can be quite fickle, that structural causes tend to be more deeply embedded in the political system than triggering causes, and that triggering causes tend not to precipitate coups in the absence of structural causes. For example, individual officers' grievances are characterized as triggering causes because they can change quite suddenly; because they are not structural, institutional features of the regime; and because they do not lead to coups in regimes that are not already structurally vulnerable. On the other hand, the political legitimacy of the regime is characterized as a structural cause because it tends to reflect factors that require years to develop. Even though legitimacy can change quickly in some cases, usually it reflects more embedded considerations such as political stability or the history of peaceful political transitions. Indeed, Jackman argues that the age of the political system can be used as a proxy indicator for legitimacy because roles and rules take time to consolidate.<sup>18</sup> The theoretical distinction between structural and triggering causes can be difficult to specify because many factors, such as civil wars, can provide long-term, structural opportunities that make coups possible but can also trigger a specific coup. Despite the fact that such determinants can constitute both structural and immediate causes, however, there is at least a conceptual difference between the two types of causes.

Coup risk can vary along a range of values. For the purposes of explanation, however, it is useful to suspend temporarily the notion of coup risk as a continuous variable, to briefly conceptualize coup risk dichotomously, and to point to the difference between high-coup-risk and low-coup-risk regimes. The difference between vulnerable (high-coup-risk) and invulnerable (low-coup-risk)

17. See Belkin and Schofer, "Toward a Structural Understanding." For a review of the causes of coups d'état, see Zimmermann, *Political Violence, Crises and Revolutions*. A conceptualization of background causes is developed below.

18. Robert W. Jackman, *Power without Force: The Political Capacity of Nation States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

regimes is that the structural causes of coups are present in vulnerable regimes and absent in invulnerable regimes. Because of the absence of structural causes in invulnerable regimes, there is low probability of a coup. Regardless of military preferences or the degree to which service members might be alienated from a low-coup-risk regime, there is very little possibility of a military conspiracy that would replace the incumbents who control the government. Such regimes are invulnerable to the armed forces, and their leaders need not implement coup-proofing strategies to protect themselves from their own militaries. It is possible and even likely that leaders of structurally invulnerable regimes such as the United States may face a variety of challenges in the realm of civil-military relations.<sup>19</sup> Reducing the risk of a coup, however, is not one of those challenges.

In vulnerable regimes, on the other hand, coups are possible because the background causes of military conspiracy are present. As noted at the beginning of this article, this is a common and serious problem in much of the world. Certainly it is true that in some political contexts, leaders may subordinate the armed forces quickly by institutionalizing stable arrangements that vitiate the possibility of a military takeover. In the very common situation of high vulnerability, however, subordination of the armed forces is a prerequisite for the consolidation of political authority. Before leaders can turn to the multiple tasks of governance, including extraction, institutional development, and pursuit of economic growth, they must implement strategies to protect themselves from their own militaries.<sup>20</sup>

When coup risk is high, we expect most leaders to “counterbalance” their militaries—that is, to divide their armed forces into rival organizations that check and balance each other. This may involve the creation of additional (possibly redundant) military branches that prevent any one part of the military from controlling too many resources—e.g., creating a “coast guard” in addition to a “navy.” It may involve the creation of special paramilitary forces of

19. As Feaver suggests, “the history of American civil-military relations has been rich with conflict.” Peter D. Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control,” *Armed Forces and Society* 23, no. 2 (winter 1996): 157. The literature on the principal-agent problem provides a theoretical foundation for understanding such conflict in terms of the costs and benefits of delegating decisions about force management to the military. See Peter D. Feaver, “Civil-Military Conflict and the Use of Force,” in *U.S. Civil-Military Relations: In Crisis or Transition?* ed. Donald Snider and Miranda A. Carlton-Carew (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1995), 113–44; and Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change*. Despite the tradition of military resistance to civilian authority in the United States, however, our findings suggest there is no chance of coup as long as background causes of coups remain absent.

20. Even Israel experienced an early, violent episode over civil-military relations. See Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Anatomy of the Israeli Army* (New York: Hippocrene, 1979), 62.

extremely loyal troops for the sole purpose of protecting the leader. Consider the following examples: In 1837 in Chile, Diego Portales created a civilian militia of 25,000 men to serve as a counterweight to the regular army.<sup>21</sup> In Brazil in 1964, just a few months after taking power via a coup, the new regime created the Serviço Nacional de Informações (SNI) and then “tried to use the resources of the SNI to gain control over the army.”<sup>22</sup> In India, “a proliferation of state security and military agencies has . . . represented a tangible counterweight to the regular military forces.”<sup>23</sup> Kenyan president Jomo Kenyatta cultivated an eclectic mix of rival paramilitaries, militias, police units, and service branches after Kenya achieved independence in January 1964. The consequent system of checks and balances deterred potential coup-plotters in any single organization.<sup>24</sup>

Leaders may draw on many distinct strategic combinations to minimize the risk of a coup, but the hypothesis of this article is that high coup risk is usually sufficient to cause them to include counterbalancing in the combination of strategies they pursue. Alternative strategies (such as appointing family members to top military positions) sometimes play an important, even crucial role in the formula for regime survival. At the same time, counterbalancing is the only strategy that pits force against force, and alternative strategies that leaders use to minimize the risk of a coup can be quite ineffective.<sup>25</sup> Hence, even

21. Rouquié, *The Military and the State*, 52.

22. Stepan, “The New Professionalism of International Warfare,” 41.

23. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 212.

24. See Frazer, “Sustaining Civilian Control.” There are many ways to divide the armed forces. Alternatives include the creation of competing service branches, intelligence agencies, paramilitaries, militias, new units within the military, and networks of watchdogs that monitor and infiltrate the chain of command. In many cases, the creation of alternative paramilitaries may be the best strategy for avoiding a coup. Syria’s late president, Hafez al-Asad, for example, cultivated at least six different ground forces including the regular army, the Special Forces, the Presidential Guard, the Struggle Companies, the Popular Army, and the Defense Units. Syria experienced twenty-one regime changes via coups d’état between 1946 and 1970, but Asad’s use of counterbalancing put an end to this tradition. See Batatu, “Some Observations on the Social Roots”; Dawisha, “Syria under Asad”; Drysdale, “Ethnicity in the Syrian Officer Corps”; Hinnebusch, *Peasant and Bureaucracy in Ba’thist Syria*; and Gerard Michaud, “The Importance of Bodyguards,” *MERIP* 12 (1982): 29–32. In other cases, however, leaders may rely on navies and air forces to reduce the risk of a coup. As Luttwak, *Coup d’état*, notes, in “certain geographical settings . . . the transport element of naval and air forces make them even more important than the army” (65).

25. For example, while Hafiz al-Asad recovered from an illness in the Syrian countryside in 1984, his brother Rif’at tried to use his private army to displace the regime. See Belkin, *United We Stand*, 22–29, for a discussion of the limitations of seven different strategies that leaders use to subordinate their own armed forces. The strategies are remuneration (bribery), indoctrination, promotion of corporate spirit (military autonomy), professionalization, patrimonialization (ethnic stacking and random shuffling), selling national autonomy to foreign powers who protect the leadership from its own forces, and strengthening civilian oversight. Strengthening civilian oversight, of course, is the most desirable strategy, but it is often unavailable to illegitimate leaders who are highly vulnerable to a coup.

though regimes do not always rely exclusively on counterbalancing, vulnerable leaders commonly rely at least partially on this strategy.

THE ARGUMENT (B): THE DOMESTIC BENEFITS OF INTERNATIONAL  
CONFLICT

COUNTERBALANCING THE military is only the first step that vulnerable leaders need to take to avoid coups. Leaders must also make sure that rival organizations stay apart and refrain from conspiring with each other, lest the balancing act topple. The second hypothesis presented here, then, is that vulnerable leaders may engage in foreign disputes to promote further divisiveness among their own armed forces. International conflict tends to drive wedges between different branches, further reducing the risk of military coup. Indeed, leaders of counterbalanced militaries have strong incentives to engage in such international conflict.

Engaging in external conflict tends to create rivalries and rifts among military branches, thereby reducing the potential for conspiracy against the central government. Military action is fraught with great risks—and potentially great rewards—for various branches of the military. Military branches gain (in terms of resources, reputation, and other factors) by playing a central role in external conflict, but they must avoid embarrassment or blame for mission failures. These high stakes pit military branches against each other; each wishes to maximize outcomes over the course of an international conflict.

There are at least three common aspects of conflict that create rifts among military branches, reducing the risk of military coup. First, preparation for war can prompt service branches to offer divergent assessments of capability or to stress the doctrinal importance of their own missions.<sup>26</sup> For example, the heads of Egyptian service branches fought bitterly in 1972 as they debated whether Egypt's forces could prevail in a limited ground operation against Israel.<sup>27</sup> In the United States during the cold war, clashes among the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps often stemmed from doctrinal differences

26. The evidence below is taken from both poorly integrated forces in the developing world as well as the best Western militaries. Such evidence is presented here not to show that Western states are vulnerable to coups, but to suggest that international conflict is so powerful a determinant of military jealousy that it can lead to inter-service rivalries even in the best-trained forces.

27. Janice G. Stein, "Calculation, Miscalculation, and Conventional Deterrence I: The View from Cairo," in *Psychology and Deterrence*, ed. Robert Jervis, Richard N. Lebow, and Janice G. Stein (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 46.

about how the Pentagon should prepare for war.<sup>28</sup> The Air Force emphasized the primacy of deterrence while the Army preferred large reserve forces for territorial seizure. Second, international conflict can unmask differences over battlefield tactics. During the campaign for the island of Peleliu in the fall of 1944, for example, U.S. Marines became livid at Army troops' habit of retreating from exposed positions to regroup.<sup>29</sup> During the Falklands/Malvinas war between the United Kingdom and Argentina, the Argentine army and air force "became increasingly reluctant to accept direction of the war effort from a naval officer, when the navy's ships lay impotent in their ports."<sup>30</sup> Finally, international conflict can prompt service branches to take credit for success or avoid blame for failure. In Israel, the air force's outstanding performance during the 1967 war fueled its demands for autonomous status from the Israel Defense Forces.<sup>31</sup> After the fight for Okinawa during the Second World War, "Navy admirals were furious about losing so many ships and men while the generals fought a long, slow campaign ashore, and the Army felt victimized by a public relations campaign suggesting that the Marine Corps's proposed second landing on southern Okinawa might have brought the operations to a quick end."<sup>32</sup>

Vulnerable leaders do not always engage in foreign disputes to promote mistrust among their own forces. Counterbalancing is more likely to lead to international conflict when leaders believe they can control or limit the costs of engagement. Hence, even though counterbalancing can lead to low-level

28. Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 115–38. For a history of the rivalry between the Air Force and the Navy in the United States over strategic planning, see Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 232–47; and Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: St. Martin's, 1981), 29, 93, 167. Kaplan, in *Wizards of Armageddon*, for example, describes the 1949 "Admirals' Revolt," in which, in response to cuts to the Navy's budget, "the entire top echelon of naval officers broke all tradition of subordination and publicly testified against the official emphasis being placed on the atom bomb, on the Strategic Air Command, [and] on the Air Force's B-36 bombers" (232).

29. Craig M. Cameron, *American Samurai: Myth, Imagination, and the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 153.

30. Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (New York: Norton, 1983), 218.

31. Yehuda Ben Meir, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 82, explains that after the 1949 Israeli war of independence, the commander of the Israeli Air Force "lobbied strongly for an independent air force organized as a separate service." The Air Force lost its bid for autonomy and was integrated into the Israel Defense Forces. That said, the Air Force's desire for increased autonomy did not disappear. For example, Ben Meir notes that in the early 1970's, the commander of the Air Force claimed entitlement to direct access to the defense minister and "contended that the air force was subordinate to the CGS [chief of the general staff] only, claiming that the various branches and departments of the general staff . . . function with regard to the air force in a coordinating capacity with no command authority" (82).

32. Cameron, *American Samurai*, 169.

conflict as well as war, low-level incidents such as limited strikes are expected to be more likely than war.

The argument developed here may appear at odds with three common presumptions about civil-military relations. First, it is common to argue that leaders prefer unity among military branches because interservice rivalry can undermine military effectiveness. Since divisiveness among the armed forces tends to compromise the state's fighting capacity, why would leaders intentionally fragment their own militaries and promote interservice rivalries? As Ben Meir has noted, the technological complexity of modern warfare creates "an urgent need for interservice coordination at the highest military level."<sup>33</sup> Yet when coups are possible, leaders tend to be more concerned about conspiracy at home than victory abroad. By several orders of magnitude, coups are much more likely than wars to lead to bloody regime change. Hence it should be no surprise that vulnerable leaders are willing to sacrifice military effectiveness to reduce the risk of conspiracy. For example, in 1970 and 1973 Syrian leaders kept their most powerful and loyal units in Damascus during battles against Jordan and Israel to ensure that no coup would take place during the fighting.<sup>34</sup> Josef Stalin enhanced his control over the Red Army by executing thousands of officers in the late 1930s, and historians agree that the purges weakened the Soviet military's capacity for resisting Nazi Germany.<sup>35</sup> During and after the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein executed and incarcerated hundreds of officers, including two of his most successful generals, Maher Abd al-Rashid and Hisham Sabah Fakhri, because he feared they "would develop a local or national following."<sup>36</sup> In their analysis of Iraqi air defense during the Gulf war, Biddle and Zirkle showed that Saddam Hussein refused to integrate multiple lines of command due to his fear of a coup, even after it became clear that fragmentation entailed disastrous military consequences.<sup>37</sup>

A second objection to the argument presented here is that unifying the armed forces may appear to be a better strategy for preventing a coup than

33. See Ben Meir, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel*, 78; Biddle and Zirkle, "Technology, Civil-Military Relations, and Warfare," 4; and Coser, *Function of Social Conflict*, 88, 92.

34. Seale, *Asad*.

35. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this example. For more information on Stalin's purges, see Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from Beginning to End* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Geoffrey A. Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union from Within* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Dimitry Antonovich Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, trans. Harold Shukman (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991); and David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Random House, 1993).

36. Biddle and Zirkle, "Technology, Civil-Military Relations, and Warfare," 13.

37. Biddle and Zirkle, "Technology, Civil-Military Relations, and Warfare."

dividing them. According to this perspective, when leaders are vulnerable to the possibility of a conspiracy they should seek to bolster military loyalty and cohesion rather than fragmenting the armed forces. Yet cohesion is not equivalent to loyalty, and even if the armed forces were internally cohesive, officers would not necessarily show allegiance to the regime's leadership. Positive feelings about the organization (military cohesion) should not be confused with positive feelings about the leader (loyalty to the regime); there are many instances in which the armed forces have unified around their common dislike of political authorities.<sup>38</sup> Unified militaries pose a considerable threat to leaders when coup risk is high because there is nothing to check their potential intervention in the political process.<sup>39</sup> Even with regard to the United States, one observer worried that "nearly all the military forces based in the continental United States. . . were [recently] reorganized under the control of . . . a joint military organization answerable to a single uniformed officer . . . Thus, a military leader whose control over the United States military is second only to the president must study and plan operations to take control of American cities in crises."<sup>40</sup>

A third objection is that international conflict might be expected to unify the armed forces. As noted above, Coser and others have argued that external conflict tends to increase group cohesion.<sup>41</sup> Although this claim has been confirmed in numerous experimental settings, it is important to remember that the armed forces are a network of organizations, not a group of people. Coser quite explicitly mentioned that the ingroup-outgroup hypothesis is expected to apply only to groups that perceive themselves to be groups. Although it is possible that members of a state's military and paramilitary forces might perceive themselves to be part of the same group, the literature on civil-military relations shows that service members are more likely to self-identify with their own small units or with their branch of service (for example the army or the navy) than with the ministry of defense.<sup>42</sup> Hence, international

38. Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977); Amos Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times: On Professionals, Praetorians, and Revolutionary Soldiers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); and Finer, *The Man on Horseback*.

39. Luttwak, *Coup d'état*; and Finer, *The Man on Horseback*, 5.

40. Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., "Welcome to the Junta: The Erosion of Civilian Control of the U.S. Military," *Wake Forest Law Review* 29, no. 2 (summer 1994): 362. That said, the point made above, that as long as background causes of coups remain absent there is no chance of an American coup d'état, warrants reiteration.

41. See Coser, *Function of Social Conflict*.

42. Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). On the importance of unit cohesion, see Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (summer

conflict should be expected to increase cohesion within small units as well as service branches, but there is no reason to expect conflict to promote cohesion among distinct forces. The armed forces are best conceptualized as a network of organizations rather than a group, and the ingroup-outgroup hypothesis does not apply to networks.

## A QUANTITATIVE, CROSS-NATIONAL TEST OF THE ARGUMENT

### COUP RISK AND COUNTERBALANCING

If the theory developed above is sound, then coup risk should be associated positively with counterbalancing and counterbalancing should be associated positively with international conflict. This section will focus on the years 1966–86, roughly the second half of the cold war, because it is a period for which there is unparalleled access to data. Although data from earlier periods are available for some of the variables in this study, it is not possible to measure counterbalancing prior to the mid-1960s, when *The Military Balance* expanded its annual report to include almost every country in the world. A total of 113 nations are included in the dataset used for this research, and our analyses contain, on average, 95 nations in any given year between 1966 and 1986. Others are excluded in certain years either because the country was not yet independent or because data are unavailable for one or more variables. Pooling data on each country for all available years results in a dataset with 1,713 cases.<sup>43</sup>

*Counterbalancing.* The dependent variable in our first model is counterbalancing, the effort by vulnerable regimes to protect themselves by dividing the military and pitting rival armed organizations against one another. Counterbalancing does not refer exclusively to the precise instant at which regimes decide to create new military institutions to balance old ones. Rather, counterbalancing entails the creation of new, rival military institutions as well as ongoing efforts to promote and exploit divisions and cleavages among military forces that already exist. We measured counterbalancing in terms of two dimensions: the number of military and paramilitary organizations and the relative size of the paramilitary groups compared to the total armed forces.

The first dimension—the number of military and paramilitary organizations—reflects the diffusion versus concentration of the armed forces.

---

1948): 280–315; S.L.A. Marshall, *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (New York: William Morrow, 1947); and Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier*, Vol. 2: *Combat and Its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).

43. Each case consists of a regime-year. For example, Spain-1969 is one case and Spain-1970 is another case.

If the military is divided into numerous branches and organizations, then leaders have more opportunities to create and exploit cleavages and rivalries among different institutions. If, on the other hand, the military is divided into just a few organizations, then there are less potential cleavages that leaders can exploit to create a check-and-balance system. The second dimension—the relative size of the paramilitary—is determined by the ratio of the number of troops in the paramilitary to the total number of paramilitary and nonparamilitary troops. When leaders seek to balance the power of the regular armed forces, often they depend on paramilitary organizations, defined as those organizations “whose training, organisation, equipment and control suggest they may be usable in support, or in lieu, of regular military forces.”<sup>44</sup>

Measures of both dimensions of counterbalancing are based on data from annual editions of *The Military Balance*, which records relevant characteristics of militaries in nations around the world. In 1986, for example, Ivory Coast receives a score of seven on the first dimension of counterbalancing, as it had seven separate military organizations (Army, Navy, Air Force, Presidential Guard, Gendarmerie, Militia, and Military Fire Service); and a score of .38 on the second dimension, as there were 8,000 paramilitary troops and 13,000 troops in the combined armed forces that year. These variables were combined into an index by computing z-scores for each dimension and summing them.<sup>45</sup>

*Coup Risk.* We captured the likelihood of coups in terms of two important background or structural causes identified by the literature on civil-military relations: strength of civil society and legitimacy of state institutions.<sup>46</sup> According to the literature, when civil society is weak and when the public and elites do not believe that the state is legitimate, there may be little to deter the armed forces from staging a coup.<sup>47</sup> Strength of civil society refers to whether non-state organizations are voluntary, whether they adequately perform specialized social functions, and whether they are valued by citizens as a result of their

44. International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1994–95* (London: Brassey's, 1995), 5.

45. Summary statistics follow: for the counterbalancing index, mean = .01, min. = -4.03, max = 5.75; for the number of military organizations, mean = 4.50, min. = 1, max. = 12; for the relative size of the paramilitary, mean = .28, min. = 0, max. = .9. The Pearson correlation coefficient for these two dimensions is .443;  $p < .001$ . As scores were quite stable over time, we measured each dimension for every country in every fourth year and then used the SPSS linear interpolation function to compute scores for intermediate years.

46. We also tried other measures of coup risk in other common ways, such as by a measure of recent coups. Results of our statistical models were not affected.

47. See Douglas A. Hibbs, *Mass Political Violence: A Cross-National Causal Analysis* (New York: John Wiley, 1973); Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Finer, *The Man on Horseback*; and Luttwak, *Coup d'état*.

providing meaning, resources, and strategies for coping with the problems of daily life.<sup>48</sup> Nonstate organizations constitute a powerful safeguard against military intervention when they “talk back” or resist a coup by mobilizing protests or refusing to comply with plotters’ orders. As David noted, “without strong independent trade unions, political parties, and voluntary associations, there will be very little standing in the way of successful military coups.”<sup>49</sup> On the basis of his analysis of 108 countries between 1948 and 1967, Hibbs concluded that “institutionalization *alone* has a negative impact on coups.”<sup>50</sup>

We measured strength of civil society in terms of the number of associational memberships that individuals and groups maintain in international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). Ideally, we would have directly measured civil association participation, but such data do not exist for most countries in the world during the time period under examination. INGO membership serves as the best available proxy, capturing the amount of civil participation in associations of international, rather than local, origin. To an extent, INGO membership does measure domestic association, because such memberships often are held by associations, not just individuals. INGO membership also has a strong, statistically significant correlation with available measures of nonstate organization.<sup>51</sup>

We measured legitimacy in terms of the competitiveness and degree of regulation of participation in the political system. These indicators capture the extent to which a political system supports open and peaceful competition among stable and organized political parties. Competitiveness was measured with a five-point index ranging from “suppressed competition (1),” in which no significant oppositional activity is permitted, to “competitive (5),” in which stable groups compete for political influence.<sup>52</sup> Totalitarian states and authoritarian military dictatorships were typically coded 1, as they allow little or no oppositional activity. Examples based on data in 1980 include Mozambique, Uganda, China, North Korea, Kuwait, the Soviet Union, and Uruguay. On the other hand, countries scoring at the top of the scale included the industrialized Western democracies as well as Japan and Costa Rica. Degree of regulation of political participation measures the stability, fairness, and transparency of

48. Francis Fukuyama, *Trust* (New York: Free Press, 1995); and Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 26.

49. David, *Defending Third World Regimes*, 5; Luttwak, *Coup d'état*, 33, 103; Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa*, 64; and Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 206–37.

50. Hibbs, *Mass Political Violence*, 102 (emphasis in original).

51. See Hyeyoung Moon and Evan Schofer, “The Globalization of Geological Science,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, August 2004.

52. Ted R. Gurr, *Polity II: Political Structures and Regime Change, 1800–1986* (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1990).

rules that govern political participation. Like competitiveness, it was measured on a five-point scale, with “unregulated” participation scoring 1. In unregulated political systems, “political groupings tend to form around particular leaders, regional interests, religious or ethnic clan groups, etc.” and are not stable over time.<sup>53</sup> Countries scoring low on this index included Bangladesh, Ecuador, and Ghana. High-scoring nations are the industrialized democracies. Countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, South Korea, and Hungary, which sustain organized and orderly political participation but exclude certain groups or political parties, scored in the middle on this measure. To ensure that our index was not simply a proxy for whether the regime is military or civilian, we checked and found that legitimacy was only weakly correlated with regime type, defined as whether the regime is military or civilian ( $-.263$ ). Our index of legitimacy was constructed by taking z-scores of each component indicator and then summing them.

Finally, we calculated our measure of coup risk by summing the civil-society and legitimacy indices, resulting in a coup risk index that ranges from about  $-5$  to  $+5$  with a mean close to zero. We reversed the sign of the index to make it intuitively understandable. Hence, a high score indicates a high level of coup risk.<sup>54</sup>

*Additional Control Variables.* A number of factors can influence whether leaders divide or unify their armed forces, and we included these alternatives in our statistical analyses to avoid spurious results. For example, leaders may respond to international threat by unifying their militaries under joint command structures that increase their capacity for waging war.<sup>55</sup> In our model, we included a control for “international threat,” a moving average of the number of recent disputes among regional neighbors during the past five years.<sup>56</sup> In addition, leaders may develop new forces to carry out internal missions, such as

53. Gurr, *Polity II*, 17.

54. To determine whether our findings are sensitive to decisions about operationalization, however, we also measured legitimacy in terms of the age of the political system as coded by Gurr in *Polity II*, 41. Jackman argues that age is a useful proxy for legitimacy because rules take time to set in and because old political regimes are more likely to depend on legitimacy to sustain themselves than young regimes. See Jackman, *Power without Force*. The respecification does not influence the direction or significance of our findings, reported below, and only minimally influences the magnitude of coefficients.

55. Ben Meir, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel*.

56. We scaled this variable in proportion to the number of actors in the region to account for the fact that regions with many nations are likely to have more conflict, and we experimented with both five- and ten-year variants. Conflict data were taken from Michael Brecher, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Sheila Moser, *Handbook of International Crises* (New York: Pergamon, 1988). We also ran our models using a different specification of this variable that consisted of a dichotomous measure that we set to one if the regime was involved in an international dispute in the previous ten years and zero if it was not involved in such a conflict. The alternative specifications did not change the positive, significant relationship between coup risk and counterbalancing.

suppression of domestic violence. To control for this possibility, we include a measure of “domestic unrest,” an annual count of strikes, riots, assassinations, revolutionary actions, purges, anti-government protests, and acts of guerilla warfare.<sup>57</sup> Third, regimes may create new armed forces to compartmentalize and isolate rival linguistic, ethnic, or tribal groups in separate organizations.<sup>58</sup> Our model therefore includes a measure of “ethnic fragmentation,” an indicator of the diversity of ethno-linguistic groups residing within the population of a given country.<sup>59</sup> Finally, the decision to counterbalance may be influenced by a variety of national attributes of the political system. We include controls for “wealth,” measured by the natural logarithm of real gross domestic product per capita; “military size,” a continuous count of the number of troops in the regular armed forces, including the army, air force, navy, and marines; and “regime type,” a dichotomous measure that is coded 0 for civilian regimes and 1 for military or combined civilian-military regimes.<sup>60</sup>

#### COUP RISK AND COUNTERBALANCING: STATISTICAL MODELS

Our analysis of coup risk and counterbalancing was based on pooled yearly cross-sectional data for 113 nations over the period 1966–86, resulting in a dataset of 1,713 cases. Because nations are represented by multiple cases in the analysis, our cases are not independent and we may expect correlated errors across them. Under these circumstances, OLS regression underestimates standard errors. We employed a random effects (GLS) regression model that

57. Charles L. Taylor and David Jodice, *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators*, 3d ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). We also ran our models with a variable that emphasized recent economic instability rather than political strife. This was a dichotomous variable that identified nations in which the prior moving average (over three years) of gross domestic product (GDP) was less than 1.0. In other words, the variable indicates if a nation experienced three or more years of economic stagnation or a short-term economic crisis in which current GDP dropped below the GDP of the prior three years. Economic crises did not influence the direction or significance of the findings, and it had only a slight impact on the magnitude of other coefficients.

58. Stephen Peter Rosen, *Societies and Military Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

59. This variable reflects the probability that any two people randomly chosen from the country are of the same ethno-linguistic group. A score of 100 indicates a totally homogeneous country. Charles L. Taylor, *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators II: Sections II–V, Annual Event Data, Daily Event Data, Intervention Data, Raw Data*, 2d ed. (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1976).

60. For the latest wealth data previously published by Robert Summers and Alan W. Heston, see “The Penn World Table (Mark 5): An Expanded Set of International Comparisons, 1950–1988,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 106, no. 2 (May 1991): 327–68. See also the Penn World Tables, Mark 5.6, at <http://www.nber.org/pub/pwt56/>. For military size, see David J. Singer and Melvin Small, “National Material Capabilities Data, 1816–1985” (computer file) (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1990). For regime type, see Gurr, *Polity II*.

Table 1  
RANDOM EFFECTS GLS REGRESSION ANALYSIS: THE IMPACT OF COUP RISK ON  
COUNTERBALANCING, 1966–86 (113 COUNTRIES, N = 1,713 COUNTRY-YEARS)

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error
Coup risk	.271***	.078
International threat	-.357***	.091
Domestic unrest	-.0006	.004
Ethnic fragmentation	.008*	.004
Wealth	.137	.101
Military size	.0004**	.0001
Regime type	.077	.091
Constant	-1.65	.860
$\chi^2$ (7 DofF)	46.0***	

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ , two-tailed test.

contains specific terms to model the properties of the error structure resulting from nonindependence across nations and across time.<sup>61</sup>

The results of our fully specified model are presented in Table 1. We found that coup risk has a positive and significant effect on counterbalancing.<sup>62</sup> Each unit increase in coup risk is associated with a .271 unit jump in counterbalancing.<sup>63</sup> These findings are quite robust, regardless of the specific variables included in the model, and the stability between bivariate and multivariate models and between different combinations of variables in multivariate models makes us confident that our results are not an artifact of multicollinearity. Although our theory does not offer any expectation as to whether coup risk might provide a better or worse explanation of counterbalancing than other factors such as domestic unrest, our model suggests that coup risk is a very powerful predictor.<sup>64</sup> As an additional check on our findings, we did a simple test to determine whether counterbalancing works: are high-coup-risk regimes

61. Models were estimated using STATA version 7.0. (Stata Statistical Software Rel. 7.0, Stata Corp., College Station, Texas).

62. As can be seen in the table, coup risk is a predictor of counterbalancing even after controlling for other possible causes of military fragmentation.

63. To interpret the meaning of this result, note that the coup-risk score ranges from a minimum of -4.53 to 5.34 and the counterbalancing score ranges from -4.03 to 5.75. See note 45 for details.

64. This finding is not biased by serial correlation even though many of the variables are correlated over time. For example, the level of coup risk in any country at any point in time likely is related strongly to the level of coup risk in the previous year. Corollary analyses, however, make it clear that these findings are not biased by such autocorrelation. We ran our model 21

that counterbalance less prone to coups than high-coup-risk regimes that do not counterbalance? Consistent with our expectations, we found that counterbalancing does lower the incidence of coups: high-coup-risk regimes that counterbalance are 44 percent less likely to have a coup or coup attempt than high-coup-risk regimes that do not divide their militaries.<sup>65</sup>

#### COUNTERBALANCING AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

The first set of results shows that coup risk is associated positively with counterbalancing. This next section explores whether or not counterbalancing might be related to international conflict. Our conceptualization of international conflict consists of a normative and a behavioral dimension that includes hostile rhetoric, threats, troop mobilizations, blockades, limited uses of force, and war. We predicted a link between counterbalancing and conflict—especially low-level forms of conflict.

*Dependent Variable.* We relied on international conflict measures from two separate data sets, the Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID) data compiled by Gochman and Maoz and the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) data compiled by Brecher et al.<sup>66</sup> The MID data identify “interactions between or among states involving threats to use military force, displays of military force, or actual use of force. To be included, these acts must be explicit, overt, nonaccidental, and government sanctioned.”<sup>67</sup> The ICB data define crises in terms of “an increase in the intensity of disruptive interaction between two or more adversaries, with a high probability of military hostilities.”<sup>68</sup> Between 1966 and 1986, the MID

---

times (once for each year in the data set), and the direction and magnitude of the effect of coup risk on counterbalancing are consistent at every point in time over the 1966–86 period. The variable was statistically significant at the .05 level in 18 of the 21 years and nearly so in the others.

65. Analyses available upon request from the authors. A final point to mention is that it is very unlikely that our finding is biased by backward causation (endogeneity). In other words, it is very unlikely that the positive correlation between coup risk and counterbalancing results from the possibility that counterbalancing causes coup risk. The reason is that we conceptualize and operationalize coup risk in terms of deep, structural factors, and it seems implausible to argue that the number of military organizations and the size of the paramilitary are important causes of the strength of civil society (as measured by INGO membership) or level of legitimacy (as measured by competition and regulation or age of the political system).

66. MID data are available at [http://pss.la.psu.edu/MID\\_DATA.HTM](http://pss.la.psu.edu/MID_DATA.HTM). Charles Gochman and Zeev Maoz, “Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816–1975,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 29, no. 4 (December 1984): 585–615; and Brecher, Wilkenfeld and Moser, *Handbook of International Crises*.

67. Gochman and Maoz, “Militarized Interstate Disputes,” 586, quoted in Bruce M. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post–Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 75.

68. Brecher, Wilkenfeld, and Moser, *Handbook of International Crises*, 5, quoted in Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, 75.

data set identifies 1,353 conflicts, while the ICB data set identifies 305 conflicts among our cases.<sup>69</sup>

*Additional Control Variables.* International conflict can be caused by many factors, aside from the mechanism outlined above. For example, conflict may be caused by previously unsettled disputes or by threatening regional environments.<sup>70</sup> In our model, we included a control for “international threat,” a moving average of the number of recent disputes among regional neighbors during the past five years.<sup>71</sup> A second possibility is that international conflict may result from a rally-around-the-flag phenomenon: leaders may engage in aggressive foreign behavior to divert the public’s attention from domestic problems.<sup>72</sup> To control for this possibility, we included a measure of “domestic unrest,” an annual count of strikes, riots, assassinations, revolutionary actions, purges, antigovernment protests, and acts of guerilla warfare.<sup>73</sup> A third, related possibility is that international conflict may be a direct result of coup risk, as leaders may use hostile foreign policy to focus the military’s attention on war. Hence, we included a control for “coup risk” in our model. Fourth, international conflict may result from various attributes of the national political system. To account for this possibility, we included controls for “wealth,” a crossnational comparison of real gross domestic product per capita, logged; “military size,” a continuous count of the number of troops in the regular armed forces; “superpower status,” a dichotomous variable that we set to zero for most countries of the world and one for the United States and the Soviet Union; and “level of democracy,” a ten-point index of electoral freedom.<sup>74</sup>

Conflict takes the form of events that are initiated at specific points in time. We thus modeled the rate of these incidents using Event History Analysis

69. Because our interest is in the initiation of conflict rather than the length of a dispute, we set our conflict variables to one for any regime-year in which a dispute began and zero for all other years.

70. Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, “Enduring Rivalries—Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Patterns,” *International Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (June 1993): 147–71.

71. For details on the different specifications of this variable that we used in our models, see note 56. The alternative specifications did not change the positive, significant relationship between counterbalancing and conflict.

72. Levy, “The Diversionary Theory of War”; and Stein, “Conflict and Cohesion.”

73. Taylor and Jodice, *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators*. We ran our models with another specification of this variable that emphasized recent economic instability rather than political strife as described above in note 57. The alternative specification did not influence the direction or significance of other coefficients in the model and had only a slight impact on the magnitude of other effects.

74. For wealth, see the Penn World Tables, Mark 5.6. For military size, see Singer and Small, “National Material Capabilities Data.” For level of democracy, see Gurr, *Polity II*. The coup risk variable is described above.

Table 2  
THE EFFECT OF COUNTERBALANCING ON INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT (EVENT HISTORY ANALYSIS)

Dependent variable	ICB conflicts <sup>a</sup>		MID conflicts <sup>b</sup>	
	Coefficient	(S.E.)	Coefficient	(S.E.)
Counterbalancing	.132**	(.052)	.159**	(.022)
International threat	.824**	(.160)	.445**	(.077)
Domestic unrest	.016**	(.007)	.011**	(.003)
Coup risk	-.132	(.077)	-.138**	(.029)
Wealth	-.237*	(.112)	-.163**	(.012)
Military size	.000	(.000)	.0002**	(.00004)
Superpower status	1.740**	(.433)	1.313**	(.150)
Democracy	-.059	(.039)	-.035**	(.017)
Constant	-.567	(.851)	.208**	(.067)

<sup>a</sup> ICB model:  $\chi^2 = 94.79$ ; D.F. = 8; 186 events.

<sup>b</sup> MID model:  $\chi^2 = 564.12$ ; D.F. = 8; 1,184 events.

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01 (two-tailed tests).

(Tuma and Hannan 1984). Each nation may have experienced any number of events between 1966 and 1986.<sup>75</sup> Because we modeled the process in historical time, we employed an exponential model.<sup>76</sup>

Our results, presented in Table 2, indicate that counterbalancing is associated with significantly higher rates of conflict over the 1966–86 period, as measured by both the ICB and MID data sets.<sup>77</sup> Event history coefficients can be interpreted by exponentiation to determine the multiplicative impact of a unit change in an independent variable on the hazard rate. Each one-unit

75. If time resolution was insufficient to distinguish between two events that occurred at similar points in time, we divided the time periods into equal portions and assumed that the events occurred evenly spaced within those smaller periods. This is a safe assumption that is unlikely to have any substantial impact on the results.

76. In doing so, we assumed that variation in the rate of events is due to changes in covariates, rather than any inherent function of time. We find little difference, however, when we specify some other form of event history model.

77. Because our dependent variable, the act of a nation's engaging in conflict, is a discrete event initiated at a single point in time, we use event history analysis to model the process. These models, explicitly designed to deal with dynamic time-varying processes, have several advantages over pooled time-series models. See Nancy B. Tuma and Michael T. Hannan, *Social Dynamics: Models and Methods* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984). The sign of the effect and level of statistical significance can be interpreted similarly to OLS regression. Models were estimated using RATE. See Nancy B. Tuma, *Invoking Rate* (Palo Alto: DMA Corporation, 1992).

increase in counterbalancing results in a 14 percent increase in the rate of ICB conflicts [ $\exp(.132) = 1.14$ ] and a 17 percent increase in the rate of MID conflicts [ $\exp(.159) = 1.17$ ].<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the rate of ICB conflicts increases by 61 percent between regimes in the lowest and highest quartiles of counterbalancing, and the rate of MID conflicts increases by 74 percent.<sup>79</sup>

The robustness of the two models is demonstrated by the fact that even though the dependent variables were taken from distinct data sets, the magnitudes of seven of the eight independent variables are very similar and the directions are equivalent. Because only 27 percent of the MID disputes are identified by the ICB dataset and 72 percent of ICB disputes are included in the MID data, to use Russett's words, "the use of both sets allows us to establish whether the conclusions we draw about the causes of conflict are robust."<sup>80</sup>

As an additional check on our results, we tested to determine whether high-coup-risk regimes that counterbalance and that also engage in subsequent international conflict are less coup-prone than high-coup-risk regimes that counterbalance but do not engage in conflict. The result is striking. High-coup-risk regimes that counterbalance and engage in subsequent conflict in the next five years are 27 percent less likely to have a coup than high-coup-risk regimes that counterbalance but do not engage in conflict. This suggests that counterbalancing is a critical strategy for reducing the risk of a coup—but the most effective way to lower that risk is to divide the military and then to engage in international conflicts that drive wedges among rival armed forces.

Still, we were concerned that our findings might be the footprint of another theoretical process. For example, perhaps divided militaries are associated positively with international conflict because leaders use foreign disputes to unify their armed forces. In response to this possibility, three points can be raised. First, our counterbalancing variable does not reflect instability or strife. Although we refer to counterbalancing as "dividing the military," our counterbalancing variable is a count of the number of military organizations

78. Note that a 1.17 multiplier is equivalent to a 17 percent change in the dependent variable. To interpret the meaning of this result, recall that our counterbalancing index ranges from -4.03 to 5.75. See note 45 for details.

79. Because international disputes are dyadic phenomena, we also used a data set of dyad-years to capture the interactive nature of conflict when we estimated our second model (Spain-Portugal-1966 is an example of a dyad-year). When we used dyad-years instead of regime-years to estimate our second model, we found that counterbalancing was related positively and significantly to international conflict. For a complete description of this procedure, see Belkin, "Civil-Military Relations as a Cause of International Conflict."

80. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, 74.

and the size of the paramilitary, not the number of hostile cleavages within the armed forces.<sup>81</sup> Since the rally-around-the-flag argument is driven by hostile cleavages and since our counterbalancing variable does not reflect such strife, there is no reason to believe that our statistical findings constitute evidence of the diversionary mechanism. Second, as argued above, cohesion is not equivalent to loyalty and military cohesion should not be confused with loyalty to the regime. Unified militaries can be dangerous when coup risk is high because their influence is unchecked by other armed organizations. Hence, there is little reason to suspect that leaders would try to unite their armed forces to lower the risk of a coup. Third, the case study of Georgian civil-military relations below provides a concrete example of how international conflict can promote interservice rivalries that keep the military divided.

#### A CASE-BASED EXPLORATION OF THE ARGUMENT: CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN GEORGIA

ALTHOUGH THE statistical tests above lend some plausibility to our theory, it is important to determine whether expectations derived in the first sections of this article can help explain particular cases. Hence, this section considers civil-military relations in Georgia in the mid-1990s. The decision to focus on Georgia was motivated by two considerations. First, Georgia and Russia have been involved in an enduring conflict, and the regime of Eduard Shevardnadze was vulnerable to a coup from the moment it came to power in March 1992. Hence, recent Georgian history could be probed to determine if coup risk was related causally to international conflict via the counterbalancing mechanism we had specified at the very earliest stages of state-building. Second, senior Georgian officials were willing to provide access to decision-making processes in the Border Guard, the Ministry of Defense, the President's Office, the parliament, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

One advantage of undertaking theory-driven historical research is that data can be used to test theoretical expectations. At the same time, because our theory was developed before an investigation into Georgian politics, there was a risk of overestimating the impact of the theory—of seeing what was expected. As a check against this bias, aspects of the story that do not appear

81. Indeed, it is because counterbalancing does not lead automatically to interservice rivalries that we argue that leaders use international conflict to promote mistrust among their own forces. Dassel's conceptualization of divided militaries reflects political cleavages. See Dassel "Civilians, Soldiers, and Strife," 136.

to confirm our theoretical expectations are identified herein. In brief, the evidence below indicates that the Georgian case study strongly supports the first part of our theory and probably supports the second part. High coup risk was a critical driving force behind Shevardnadze's decision to counterbalance, and counterbalancing probably was a partial determinant of the conflict between Georgia and Russia.

Several factors explain why the Shevardnadze regime was vulnerable to the possibility of a coup after coming to power in March 1992. To begin, civil society was weak. Jones noted that "the Soviet past [had] left Georgians without constituencies, institutions and practices conducive to a pluralistic power structure."<sup>82</sup> By late 1996 there were only 200 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Georgia and many of these were inactive. Most Georgian NGOs are "dependent on grants from the international community or financial support from the state" rather than financial or other contributions from their own members.<sup>83</sup> They tend to be based in Tbilisi and to cater to the elite and intellectuals. In addition, the legitimacy of the political system was questionable. Although Georgian elections in 1992 and 1995 may have been freer than other elections held in other former Soviet republics, international observers reported instances of electoral malpractice including unfair voting rules and the use of humanitarian aid to bribe voters.<sup>84</sup> Tax evasion and non-compliance with the law were common problems, and Georgian courts were only minimally capable of administering justice. Finally, Georgian politics was based on one-man rule. Aves has referred to "the almost total domination of the main political institutions by President Shevardnadze and his supporters. . . . [P]olitical rule still depends to a worrying extent on the survival of Shevardnadze himself."<sup>85</sup> Shevardnadze retained vast powers as parliamentary chairman, head of state, and then president.<sup>86</sup> In addition to his formal powers,

82. Stephen F. Jones, "Georgia: A Failed Democratic Transition," in *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, ed. Ian A. Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 298.

83. Adrian Karatnycky, Alexander J. Motyl, and Boris Shor, eds., *Nations in Transit 1997* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1997), 165; and Ghia Nodia, "The Georgian Perception of the West," *Georgia Profile* 1, no. 9 (September 1996): 20–29.

84. Aves, *Georgia: From Chaos to Stability?* 17; and Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development, "Developing a National Security Concept for Georgia," conference proceedings, Tbilisi, 1–2 April 1996.

85. Aves, *Georgia: From Chaos to Stability?* 58–59; and Karatnycky, Motyl, and Shor, *Nations in Transit 1997*, 147.

86. For a list of these powers see Jones, "Georgia's Power Structures," 7; and Aves, *Georgia: From Chaos to Stability?* 8–9.

structural problems in the parliament undermined the legislative opposition's ability to check the executive branch.<sup>87</sup>

These structural attributes of the Georgian political system, all of which have been identified by the literature on civil-military relations as important background causes of coups, attested to the ongoing structural vulnerability of the regime. Indeed, on the evening of 29 August 1995, troops from the Ministry of State Security detonated a bomb in the courtyard of the parliament building as Shevardnadze was entering his car.<sup>88</sup> Almost a year before the bombing, on 13 November 1994, armed groups and armored equipment under the command of former defense minister Tengiz K'it'ovani had gathered in a Tbilisi suburb and threatened to take over the government.<sup>89</sup> As one military official said in the summer of 1997, "after the Tbilisi war [of 1991–92], we don't want to kill each other. But money makes anything possible."<sup>90</sup>

The argument here is that Shevardnadze sought to reduce the risk of a coup by establishing a network of military organizations that checked and balanced each other. When he came to power in March 1992, Georgia's armed forces consisted of two paramilitary organizations. Over the next few years, Shevardnadze destroyed the paramilitaries and developed five major ground forces, including the Army, the Border Guard, the Government Guard, the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Special Units of the Ministry of State Security, as well as several smaller forces.<sup>91</sup> This section argues that the possibility of a coup was the critical driving force behind Shevardnadze's decision to establish multiple, armed organizations.

To begin, Georgian officials acknowledge that they created new armed forces to balance one another, that counterbalancing was an important regime priority, and that the regime played various armed organizations off against one another. One parliamentary official said in the summer of 1997, "We are trying to balance MOD [Ministry of Defense] and Border Guards." In March 1997 a senior official said that the Border Guard was created to balance the

87. Jones, "Georgia's Power Structures," 7; Aves, *Georgia: From Chaos to Stability?* 24; Levan Tarkhishvili, "Parliament of Georgia: The Fight of Bulldogs under the Carpet," *Georgia Profile* 1, nos. 7–8 (July–August 1996): 20–21; and Darchiashvili, *Elections in Georgia*.

88. Bodyguards helped Shevardnadze out of the burning car and he suffered only minor wounds. See *Georgian Chronicle*, October 1995, 1. The minister of state security, Igor Giorgadze, never faced trial, as he escaped to Moscow with the help of Tbilisi-based Russian troops.

89. *Georgian Chronicle*, November 1994, 1–2.

90. Author interview, Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development, Tbilisi, July 1997.

91. Shevardnadze developed three additional military organizations—the Air Defense Forces, the Air Force, and the Navy—but these tiny forces were not cultivated to protect the regime from coups. See Jones, "Adventurers or Commanders?" 37; Allison, "Military Forces in the Soviet Successor States," 69; and *Georgian Chronicle*, November 1995, 4.

Army, and he noted that Shevardnadze “made the decision to balance the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defense.”<sup>92</sup>

In addition, counterbalancing worked. It was the most important and effective strategy for subordinating the Georgian armed forces. When K’it’ovani threatened to take over the government in November 1994, for example, his forces were disarmed quickly by loyal troops of the Ministries of State Security, Defense, and Internal Affairs.<sup>93</sup> The regime deployed six armed units in the Tbilisi area, drawing them from separate military organizations: a special detachment of the Government Guard responsible for protecting the president; a commando unit of the Ministry of State Security, probably consisting of about 100 troops; a unit of paratroopers of the Ministry of State Security of about 1,000 troops; several battalions of Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, comprising 1,000–2,000 soldiers armed with tanks, antitank weapons, and armored personnel carriers; the Army’s National Guard Brigade of about 2,000–3,000 troops; and a motorized unit of about 300 Border Guard troops deployed adjacent to the Tbilisi airport and armed with three tanks, several armored personnel carriers, and an unknown number of antitank weapons. Each of these units deterred potential conspirators in other organizations as a result of its ability to come to the regime’s immediate assistance.

Other strategies that Shevardnadze used to subordinate the Georgian armed forces were loosely implemented and minimally effective.<sup>94</sup> For example, although the regime attempted to enhance the professionalization of the officer corps through overseas training and the establishment of a small military academy, the officer corps was only weakly professionalized.<sup>95</sup> Civilian institutions responsible for monitoring and controlling the armed forces were unable to obtain information, monitor compliance, or influence policy. Troops of the Ministry of State Security, among the best paid in the Georgian military, were responsible for the bombing attempt on Shevardnadze’s life in August 1995.

92. Author interviews, Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security, Tbilisi, July 1997 and March 1998.

93. *Georgian Chronicle*, November 1994, 1–2.

94. One exception to this claim is that the regime did use patrimonialization effectively to reduce the risk of a coup. Aside from counterbalancing, this was its only important survival strategy. Patrimonialization refers to purging, shuffling, and other tactics designed to replace adversaries in the armed forces with political loyalists. From 1992 until 1995, eleven different ministers ran the Ministries of Defense, Internal Affairs, and State Security. See *Georgian Chronicle*, December 1992, September 1993, and December 1995. In addition, Shevardnadze appointed incompetent subordinates to senior military posts. In 1992, for example, he appointed thirty-one-year-old philosopher Irakli Batiashvili to head the Bureau of Information and Intelligence, the successor to the Department for National Security and the Georgian KGB. See Jones, “Georgia’s Power Structures,” 5.

95. Strategic Affairs Group, *Georgia* (Villahermosa: Strategic Affairs Group, 1996).

Finally, counterbalancing cannot be explained by other theories of institutional development or militarization. Shevardnadze could have developed a network of military organizations to separate domestic from international forces and to focus the Army's attention on external threat while delegating responsibility for domestic security to the paramilitary. Yet this possibility appears to have little plausibility, as the regime used all ground forces, except for the president's personal guards, for domestic and international missions. Indeed, domestic and international rationales are written into the founding documents of all Georgian ground forces.

Perhaps Shevardnadze established multiple armed organizations to reflect institutional structures that prevailed in other states. As Meyer has argued, regimes may seek to acquire the trappings of the modern state by mimicking institutional patterns they associate with legitimate governance.<sup>96</sup> It is hard to see, though, how counterbalancing could have been expected to reflect military patterns in other states, as several of Georgia's new armed organizations (such as the Rescue Corps and the Rapid Reaction Corps) had no institutional precedent in the Soviet Union or the West.

A final possibility is that arguments focused on national security and territorial integrity can account for counterbalancing in Georgia. For example, the building up of the armed forces may have been intended to protect the country from foreign threats and to allow for the eventual recapture of the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Alternatively, even if the regime had no intention of pursuing military solutions to secessionist conflicts, perhaps counterbalancing was intended to strengthen Georgia's hand in negotiations with Russia by allowing it to threaten the use of force. Unlike the institutional theories discussed above, these arguments share the premise that the Georgian armed forces, in particular the Army, were cultivated to serve as fighting forces. The development of five armies, however, did not establish a war-waging capacity, because the regime struggled to keep its forces apart rather than integrating them into a coordinated fighting force. All five Georgian ground forces reported directly to the president rather than to any central coordinating agencies, and they did not engage in joint training, planning, or threat assessment. If the regime had designed its ground forces primarily for waging war, then it would have attempted to coordinate military forces and

96. Alexander Wendt and Michael N. Barnett, "Dependent State Formation and Third World Militarization," *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 4 (October 1993): 335–70; John W. Meyer, "Institutionalization and the Rationality of Formal Organizational Structure," in *Organizational Environments: Ritual and Rationality*, ed. J. W. Meyer and W. Richard Scott (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983).

to institutionalize that coordination.<sup>97</sup> Even Georgian security experts do not believe that the armed forces were built for war. As one Georgian military specialist asked, “Why do we need an army? It is not related to [an] external threat. It . . . has no real mission.”<sup>98</sup>

Thus high coup risk does seem to have been an important cause of counterbalancing in Georgia after 1992. What of the other argument advanced above—that Shevardnadze provoked conflicts with Russia to drive a wedge between the Army and the Border Guard? Before developing this argument, it should be noted that the conflictual aspect of Georgian-Russian relations has included nonviolent as well as violent behavior. In 1992, for example, there were 268 Georgian assaults on Russian installations in Georgia; twenty-nine Russian troops died during these attacks.<sup>99</sup> Between 1994 and 1997 the White Legion, a Georgian paramilitary force that was trained, equipped, and supported by the Shevardnadze government, carried out a systematic campaign of attacks on Russian peacekeeping forces in the Gali region of Abkhazia that led to the deaths of more than forty Russian troops.<sup>100</sup> Shevardnadze used acrimonious language to characterize the Russians on many occasions. On 27 October 1997, for example, he accused Russia of joining “the few countries that shelter terrorists, assiduously hiding the group that committed terrorist acts in Georgia” and “cheat[ing] us with regard to Abkhazia.”<sup>101</sup>

Five arguments will be presented below to support the claim that Shevardnadze may have provoked and engaged in conflicts with Russia to

97. Belkin, “Civil-Military Relations as a Cause of International Conflict”; and Ben Meir, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel*.

98. David Darchiashvili, “Georgia—The Search for State Security,” unpublished manuscript, photocopy obtained from the author.

99. David Darchiashvili, “Russian-Georgian Military Relations,” *Georgia Profile* 1, no. 8 (August 1996): 12. Note that this article by Darchiashvili was published in several installments of *Georgia Profile* in 1996 and 1997.

100. Edward W. Walker, “No Peace, No War in the Caucasus: Secessionist Conflicts in Chechnya, Abkhazia, and Karabakh,” manuscript, photocopy obtained from the author, 11.

101. *Monitor*, 30 October 1997. The relationship between Georgia and Russia can be characterized in terms of broad trends that are punctuated by a few critical junctures. Darchiashvili specifies four distinct periods of recent Georgian-Russian relations: (1) During the initial period under Zviad Gamsakhurdia in 1991, Gamsakhurdia poisoned relations by supporting Chechen separatist demands, using blatantly anti-Soviet rhetoric, declaring Soviet troops in Georgia to be an occupying force, and refusing to criticize frequent attacks on Soviet bases; (2) Shevardnadze improved relations in 1992 and 1993 although the Georgian public resented Russian military support for Abkhazian separatists and Tbilisi attempted gently to break free of Moscow’s orbit; (3) Relations warmed after the Georgian surrender in Sukhumi forced Shevardnadze join the Commonwealth of Independent States in early 1994; (4) Open friction became apparent in early 1996 as Georgians tired of waiting for long-promised Russian assistance to restore territorial integrity and settle the Abkhazian conflict. The point here is neither to periodize Georgian-Russian interactions nor to explain specific events. Rather, it is to identify one factor that explains why even during the warmest periods of recent relations, tensions persisted. See Darchiashvili, “Georgia—The Search for State Security.”

drive a wedge between the Army and the Border Guard: that the regime was highly motivated to foment military divisiveness, that a serious rivalry did in fact divide the Army and the Border Guard, that conflict with Russia was an important cause of that rivalry, that other factors do not appear sufficient for explaining that rivalry, and that other factors do not seem sufficient for explaining Georgian-Russian hostilities. To begin, the Shevardnadze regime was highly motivated to promote military divisiveness. Shevardnadze's predecessor, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, had not fomented conflict between Georgia's two most powerful armies, and this oversight led directly to his downfall when these two forces collaborated to oust him from office in December 1991.<sup>102</sup> Recall that fragmenting the armed forces is only the first step toward avoiding a coup; once the military is divided, leaders must make sure that rival organizations refrain from conspiring with each other. Feaver has noted that "institutional checks work best when the interests of the two agents are in conflict. . . . Otherwise, the two agents could collude."<sup>103</sup> As argued above, Shevardnadze was quite vulnerable to the possibility of a coup in the mid-1990s and Georgian officials have conceded that the regime played various armed forces off against one another.

Second, Georgian armed forces (in particular the Army and the Border Guard) did not trust each other. Senior officials in the Army, the Border Guard, and the parliament acknowledge that the Army and the Border Guard were quite jealous of each other and that cooperation among them was rare and marginal.<sup>104</sup> The forces prepared their own budgets without consulting with one another and they almost never held joint tactical exercises.<sup>105</sup> The commander of a Border Guard base near Tbilisi said that he had no contact with a neighboring Army outpost located just a few meters away, and a senior Army official said that there was no department in the entire Defense Ministry responsible for coordinating with the Border Guard or other Georgian forces.<sup>106</sup>

Third, this mistrust between the Army and Border Guard was the result of Georgian-Russian conflict. Georgian-Russian hostilities drove a wedge between these two forces because the Army was allied closely with Moscow while the Border Guard was oriented toward the West. Relations between the

102. Jones, "Adventurers or Commanders?"

103. Feaver, "Civil-Military Conflict and the Use of Force," 28.

104. Caucasian Institute for Peace, *Democracy and Development*, 47.

105. Author interviews, Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security, Ministry of Defense, and State Department of the State Frontier Guard, Tbilisi, July 1997.

106. Author interviews, Ministry of Defense and State Department of the State Frontier Guard, Tbilisi, June 1997, July 1997, and March 1998.

Georgian Army and Moscow were so tight that Georgian journalists referred to former defense minister Vardiko Nadibaidze as a “borrowed” minister, a foreign agent, and a “stooge of Moscow.”<sup>107</sup> Nadibaidze barely speaks Georgian, and before his appointment as Georgian defense minister in 1994 he had served for thirty-five years in the Soviet military and its Russian successor, most recently as deputy commander of the group of Russian troops in Caucasia. While serving as minister, he began each day with a visit to the Tbilisi headquarters of the Russian Army.<sup>108</sup> Soon after his appointment as Defense Minister, Nadibaidze and his assistants “cut down contacts with the military circles in the Western World and . . . [pursued] a policy of co-operation exclusively with the armed forces of Russia.”<sup>109</sup>

Unlike the Army, the Border Guard rejected Russian influence over Georgian security affairs. The Border Guard received naval vessels from the United States, Germany, and Ukraine, and its leaders embraced opportunities to cooperate with the West. On 2 October 1996, for example, Valerie Chkheidze, the commander of the Border Guard, greeted two Ukrainian warships in Poti and used the occasion to criticize the deployment of Russian frontier troops in Georgia as illegal. Chkheidze has denounced Russia many times and accused Moscow of ignoring Georgian interests. Whereas the Army intentionally modeled itself on the Russian Army, the Border Guard explicitly distinguished itself from Russian frontier troops. One senior official said, “Russian border troops never did these functions that we perform now.”<sup>110</sup>

As a result of their divergent orientations, conflict with Russia drove a wedge between the Army and the Border Guard by embarrassing the Army and providing ammunition with which the Border Guard could criticize Moscow. For example, after Russian forces detained the Ukrainian ship *Almaz* on 4 December 1996, near the Georgian city of Batumi, Shevardnadze declared the seizure to be an act of piracy and noted that the presence of Russian frontier troops in Georgia was illegal. The Border Guard reacted by affirming the illegality of the Russian presence in Georgia. Defense Minister Nadibaidze, however, said, “If the ship has violated law it must be detained and, generally speaking, I am not interested in the case. I have too many problems

107. Nadibaidze was replaced as defense minister by a the Western-oriented Davit Tevzadze in 1998.

108. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Daily Report*, no. 80 (27 April 1994); David Darchiashvili, “Russian Troops in Georgia—The Aims and the Means,” *Georgia Profile* 1, no. 7 (July 1996): 12–16; Darchiashvili, “Russian-Georgian Military Relations,” *Georgia Profile* 1, no. 8 (August 1996): 11–18; Darchiashvili, “Russian-Georgian Military Relations,” *Georgia Profile* 1, no. 9 (September 1997): 12–17; and *Army and Society in Georgia*, August–September 1996, 6.

109. *Georgian Military Chronicle*, December 1994, 1.

110. Author interview, State Department of the State Frontier Guard, Tbilisi, July 1997.

on myself. . . . and, actually, frontier troops are beyond our competence.”<sup>111</sup> Numerous similar examples provided ammunition for the Border Guard to criticize the Army, embarrass it, and keep it on the defensive.

Fourth, alternative explanations do not seem to account for the rivalry between the Georgian Army and the Border Guard. Perhaps the rivalry resulted from accidental or random considerations. Recall, however, that Georgian officials acknowledged creating new armed forces to balance one another and playing various armed organizations off against one another. It is highly unlikely that senior government officials would have admitted playing divide-and-conquer politics with their own armed forces if interservice rivalries had been unintended. Another possibility is that interservice rivalries resulted from competition over the budget. Yet the Border Guard and the Army tended not to compete for the same funds. Whereas the state provided most of the Border Guard’s budget, most of the Army’s funding came from local governments in the areas where Army units were based, rent and profits that were derived from land and business enterprises under the Army’s control, and bribery paid by recruits who were eager to avoid the draft.<sup>112</sup> As a result, competition over budget funds is an unlikely explanation for interservice rivalries.

A final possibility is that mission overlap was the cause of interservice hostilities. As Stepan has noted, “no organization—least of all a military organization—wants to coexist with an alternative claimant to doctrinal and political authority in its sphere of action.”<sup>113</sup> Officials in the Army and the Border Guard, however, did not perceive their missions to be redundant. The comments of one senior Border Guard official were typical: “We have nothing to do with the Ministry of Defense. The Ministry of Defense defends threats from outside the country and every day they train for this. We, the Border Guard, actually stand on the border. Only on the border.” Another senior Border Guard official explained that the Army “has different functions compared to the structure of the Border Guard. The Border Guard are not a defense structure.” An Army official explained that “All ministries work

111. Army and Society in Georgia, December 1996, 4.

112. For example, about 35,000 Georgian men were eligible for the draft each year, but only 5,000–8,000 new recruits were needed to serve. Because service conditions were extremely harsh, potential recruits were desperate to avoid their two-year service commitment. According to one Western expert, most new recruits were individuals who could not afford to pay a bribe of about \$500. Hence, this bribery alone probably yielded a total of over \$14 million per year for the Army. While this may seem like a small amount, the total official Army budget for 1997 was only about \$50 million; this form of bribery was only one of the Army’s unofficial mechanisms for funding itself. See Archil Melikadze, “Financing the Country’s Defense,” *Army and Society in Georgia* 5, no. 1 (January–February 1997): 22.

113. Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics*, 46.

separately and have our own tasks."<sup>114</sup> To the extent that these and other remarks reflected an honest understanding of organizational roles rather than spin control, senior members of the Army and the Border Guard did not appear to perceive their missions to be redundant.

Fifth, other accounts of Georgian-Russian hostilities do not appear sufficient for explaining the case. One possibility, for example, is that Russian obstructionism was the critical determinant of the intensification of Georgian-Russian hostilities after early 1996. The long list of Tbilisi's valid complaints against Moscow included Russian support for Abkhazian separatists, refusal to deliver promised military hardware, and assistance in attempted assassinations of Shevardnadze.<sup>115</sup> Although there is no doubt that such considerations provide a partial explanation of Shevardnadze's decision to inflame Georgian-Russian relations in early 1996, it is important to remember that Russia interfered constantly in Tbilisi's affairs in the years immediately after the end of the cold war. Since Moscow's meddling has been constant, it is not possible to invoke Russian interference as the sufficient or exclusive explanation for the change in Georgian foreign policy that occurred in early 1996.

Another possibility is that changes in the international opportunity structure and availability of allies explain the 1996 policy shift. According to this perspective, Shevardnadze turned against Russia and oriented Georgia toward the West once Washington came to appreciate the usefulness of the Caucasus as a buffer against Russia and as a transit corridor for oil. Although the Clinton administration did become more engaged with post-Soviet republics in 1995 and 1996, two factors suggest that changes in the international opportunity structure only partially account for Shevardnadze's decision to inflame Georgian-Russian relations. To begin with, military assistance had been available to Georgia through the Partnership for Peace program of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since early 1994. If changes in the international opportunity structure were critical determinants of Georgia's reorientation away from Moscow, it is hard to explain the two-year time lag that separated NATO's offer to provide assistance and Georgia's open defiance of Russia.<sup>116</sup> In addition, Shevardnadze's turn toward the West coincided with the Western betrayal of Georgia at the May 1996 Review Conference of the

114. Author interviews, Ministry of Defense and State Department of the State Frontier Guard, Tbilisi, June 1997, July 1997, and March 1998.

115. Darchiashvili, "Russian Troops in Georgia," and Darchiashvili, "Russian-Georgian Military Relations," 1996 and 1997.

116. Michael Mihalka, "European-Russian Security and NATO's Partnership for Peace," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report* 3 (1994): 34-45.

Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE).<sup>117</sup> One senior American official admitted that the incident proved to Tbilisi that it could not trust Washington's word.<sup>118</sup> If the prospect of American support was an important driver of Shevardnadze's decision to turn against Russia, it is hard to explain why Shevardnadze continued to move Georgia toward the United States even after the CFE betrayal signaled that Washington's word could not be trusted in important security matters.

A final possibility is that the enhanced strength of the Georgian state can explain the 1996 intensification of Georgian-Russian hostilities. According to this perspective, Shevardnadze decided to bandwagon with Moscow after the disintegration of the Georgian armed forces in September 1993. As the strength of the Georgian state increased over the following two years, however, Shevardnadze became confident enough to defy Russia more openly. This explanation founders, however, on the fact that as of early 1996, Georgia was still a terribly weak state. Its system was based on one-man rule, tax evasion and non-compliance with the law were widespread, and Georgian courts were only minimally capable of administering justice.<sup>119</sup> The state was just as weak militarily as it was institutionally: the one-one brigade, supposedly the Army's finest elite unit, was not "able to be involved in any fighting longer than a week. 'Ours is the best brigade', sarcastically [said] one of the officers."<sup>120</sup> Although the Georgian state was a bit stronger in early 1996 when Shevardnadze inflamed relations with Russia than it had been in 1993 when Shevardnadze bandwagoned with Moscow, it seems implausible to claim that enhanced state strength can account for the decision to defy Moscow openly. Both militarily and institutionally, the Georgian state was somewhat of a hollow shell.

Thus the Georgian case strongly supports the first part of the theory presented in the first section of this article and probably supports the second part. High coup risk was a critical driving force behind Shevardnadze's decision to counterbalance, and counterbalancing probably was a partial determinant of conflict between Georgia and Russia. Two reasons explain the lesser confidence of this second claim. First, there are many important historical and geopolitical determinants of the conflict between Georgia and Russia, and it is not possible to gauge the precise impact of the causal factor identified

117. At the May 1996 CFE negotiations in Vienna, Russia was permitted to exceed limitations on armaments that it could deploy in its southern flank zone. Georgia had been prepared to trade part of its CFE quota to Moscow in exchange for desperately needed Russian hardware. When Russia was allowed to exceed previous zone limits, the Georgians were left empty-handed.

118. Author interviews March 1998 and April 1998.

119. *Georgian Military Chronicle*, December 1994, 3.

120. *Army and Society in Georgia*, December 1996, 14.

here. In other words, this analysis cannot prove that if other determinants of Georgian-Russian hostilities had been absent, counterbalancing would have been sufficient to generate conflict.<sup>121</sup> Second, no smoking-gun evidence, such as a secret memo that would prove beyond doubt that Shevardnadze provoked conflict with Moscow in order to drive a wedge between the Army and the Border Guard, has been uncovered. Rather, the case here is made indirectly by arguing that the regime was highly motivated to foment military divisiveness, that a serious rivalry did in fact divide the Army and the Border Guard, that conflict with Russia was an important cause of that rivalry, that other factors do not appear to be sufficient for explaining that rivalry, and that other factors do not seem to be sufficient for explaining the intensification of Georgian-Russian hostilities.<sup>122</sup>

#### A GENERALIZABLE DOMESTIC THEORY OF CONFLICT

**T**HIS ARTICLE argued that when the risk of a coup d'état is high, leaders tend to divide their armed forces into multiple organizations that check and balance each other. Furthermore, vulnerable leaders may engage in international conflict to create interservice rivalries among their own forces, especially when leaders believe they can control the costs of engagement and when other strategies for promoting interservice rivalries are unavailable or expected to be ineffective. Direct support was offered for these arguments in both crossnational analyses and in a case study of Georgia following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The aim of the argument presented here has been to develop a generalizable theory linking domestic pressures—the threat of a coup and leaders' strategies to prevent one—to international outcomes. Twenty years ago, Keohane encouraged scholars to seek "better theories of domestic politics . . . so that the gap between the external and internal environments can be bridged in a

121. There are many important determinants of Georgian-Russian conflict, including memories of Russian and Soviet imperialism as well as Moscow's military intervention in support of Abkhazian separatists. This discussion is not intended to minimize the importance of these or other factors. Yet even though these other factors influenced bilateral relations, the persistence of Georgian-Russian conflict since 1993 probably was in part a result of Georgian civil-military relations.

122. It is important to acknowledge the presence of endogeneity or backward causation in the Georgian case. In particular, the conflict with Russia was a partial cause of coup risk. Even though Russians helped plan at least one attempted coup, however, Georgian-Russian conflict was not the critical determinant of regime vulnerability. In other words, even if the Russians never helped sponsor a coup in Tbilisi, coup risk still would have been high in Georgia, because background causes of coups (weak civil society and low legitimacy) were present.

systematic way.”<sup>123</sup> Levy, who has compiled one of the most comprehensive reviews of the literature to date, suggests that better theories require “additional analysis of the causal mechanism through which aggressive foreign behavior advances the domestic political interests of decisionmakers.”<sup>124</sup> This study has responded to this gap in the literature by developing an account that links one important aspect of domestic politics—civil-military relations—to international outcomes. Much more research is needed to determine the conditions under which leaders may engage in international conflict in order to create and inflame domestic divisiveness. That said, this study has shown that while the rally-around-the-flag hypothesis may be valid in some cases, in others the literature’s emphasis on cohesion as the object of dispute involvement may be misplaced.

123. Robert O. Keohane, *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 191.

124. Levy, “The Diversionary Theory of War,” 283; Robert H. Jackson, review of Joel S. Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue, *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, in *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 2 (June 1995): 520.

Copyright of Security Studies is the property of Taylor & Francis Ltd. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

Copyright of Security Studies is the property of Taylor & Francis Ltd. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.