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What is This?
Connecting the Dots: Dispute Resolution and Escalation in a World of Entangled Territorial Claims

Molly M. Melin¹ and Alexandru Grigorescu¹

Abstract
We explore states’ decisions to escalate disputes over their territorial claims or settle them peacefully. We complement existing arguments by accounting for the fact that states are often simultaneously entangled in multiple territorial claims. We build on previous scholarship in positing that two states involved in a territorial dispute will act based on information they glean from each other’s reputation for dealing with claims with other states and their recent actions involving disputes with other states. Because states know that their actions will impact their adversaries’ calculations, the existence of multiple ongoing territorial claims will act as a deterrent from any type of action to resolve the dispute, whether militarized or peaceful. Our hypotheses therefore consider the impact of the number of states’ other territorial claims as well as the number of their adversaries’ claims. Tests using the Issue Correlates of War data support our arguments.

Keywords
conflict processes, territory, networks

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Consider the following two cases. After decades of disputes with Spain over a series of small territories in the Mediterranean, Morocco deployed a handful of troops in 2002 to Perejil, an uninhabited island off its coast over which it has consistently claimed sovereignty. Spain responded within a week, sending an armed commando to take control of the island and capture six Moroccan troops stationed there (Wool-dridge 2002).

Around the same time, Romania and Ukraine jointly agreed to take their claims over Snake Island and its surrounding territorial waters to the International Court of Justice. Both sides accepted the Court’s 2009 decision (Euronews 2009).

The two territories at the center of these claims are very similar. They are both tiny islands, with areas of about 0.15 km$^2$. Besides questionable economic value derived from surrounding territorial waters, neither is considered particularly important for the countries involved. Perejil is uninhabited, while Snake Island has a population of fewer than 100, primarily frontier guards and their families.

Why did the two pairs of states decide to deal with these apparently similar territorial claims in such very different ways? Why did Romania and Ukraine resolve their dispute peacefully while Morocco and Spain resorted to force and continue to dispute ownership of the territory? These are important questions because, although the territories seem insignificant, there have been many historical examples of “small” contentious territorial issues escalating into full-blown interstate wars.

This article joins the rapidly developing literature exploring the factors that impact states’ decisions to engage in militarized disputes over their territorial claims or settle them peacefully. While scholarship has advanced our understanding of how states deal with their disputes and has generated important policy recommendations, it has yet to offer a more complete assessment of the important role context plays in decisions involving territorial claims.

We assess how a state’s entanglement in multiple simultaneous territorial claims affects its calculations regarding one such dispute. We do not claim to offer an entirely new approach to the above topic. After all, the conflict literature has for some time either directly or indirectly argued that developments across dyads of states are not independent (e.g., Schrodt and Mintz 1988; Crescenzi 2007). This research adds (1) a structured analysis of the various ways in which such dyads impact each other, (2) a nuanced explanation of the deterrent effect that the simple existence of such networks of disputes has on states’ calculations, and (3) an extension of several arguments from the literature focusing on militarized conflict to questions related to peaceful resolution of disputes.

We derive several arguments from existing scholarship emphasizing the role of reputations, based on actions states have taken in the past, over long period, as well as from those focusing on states’ interpretations of very recent actions of their adversaries. Both types of arguments lead to specific expectations regarding the impact of linkages among territorial claims. Based on the logic of these arguments, we also suggest that a state’s entanglement in multiple territorial claims will have a deterrent effect on its actions regarding each dispute. Specifically, we posit that
when two states are involved in a territorial dispute, additional simultaneous claims with other states (what we dub “first-order claims”) will adversely affect their incentives to resolve that specific dispute peacefully or by force. We also suggest that the number of claims in which the two states’ adversaries are involved (their “second-order claims”) will have an inverse effect on their calculations from first-order claims. Simply put, these three sets of arguments suggest that the likelihood of two claimants resolving their dispute forcefully or peacefully is affected by their mutual observations of (1) the other’s pattern of past actions in disputes with other states (2) the other state’s most recent actions in disputes with other states, and (3) by their expectations of each other’s future actions based on their entanglement in other disputes.

We test our hypotheses using data for territorial claims between 1946 and 2002. We control for factors that have already been discussed in the literature as affecting states’ decisions with regard to resolving territorial claims: their relative power, levels of democracy, dispute salience, security ties, recent conflict history, the “landed” nature of the disputed territory, power shifts, and domestic instability. Even when controlling for such factors, we find support for our main hypotheses. We conclude that the literature’s traditional approach of treating disputes in isolation needs to be complemented with analyses accounting for the network-like character of territorial claims. We then discuss the policy implications of our findings.

Dispute Linkages

We return to our earlier examples of the Moroccan–Spanish and Romanian–Ukrainian territorial disputes. We suggest that an important difference between the two cases is that while Romania and Ukraine hardly have any other ongoing claims, both Morocco and Spain are caught in a “web” of such claims that alter their calculations in their dispute over Perejil. Indeed, Perejil is considered part of Ceuta that, along with Melilla, is a Spanish enclave on mainland Morocco. More importantly, the two countries have also disputed Western Sahara since the 1970s. Morocco’s claims were part of its “Greater Morocco” policy, which also called for including parts of Algeria and all of Mauritania in its territory (Burgis 2009, 196).

Spain is also involved in additional territorial disputes. In fact, because of Morocco’s claims over Ceuta and Melilla, Spain must be careful how it portrays the issue of Gibraltar to the international community (Caruana 1999). It has worked in multilateral settings with Argentina to alter the existing principle of self-determination as applied to nonself-governing territories, such as Gibraltar and the Falklands, by including an exception in cases “where there is dispute to the clause of self-determination” (House of Commons 2008). Not surprisingly, Spain supported Argentina during the 1982 Falklands War and was the only Western country to abstain on UN Security Council Resolution 502 demanding Argentina’s withdrawal from the Falklands (Gold 2002).

The Falklands case highlights that ongoing and dormant territorial claims may be strongly connected, even for the United Kingdom. When seeking to resolve an
existing dispute, the United Kingdom must consider how that alters adversaries’
calculations on other claims. It too makes great efforts in discerning between Hong
Kong, which was handed over to China in 1997, and Gibraltar, which it does not
want to relinquish to Spain (Gold 2002). The discussion of this “network” of dis-
putes could be extended if we were to also consider that other countries have
claims with the eight states mentioned earlier. These examples are not unique.
Many states are involved in similar networks of territorial claims. Should our stud-
ies treat such disputes independent of each other? Alternatively, does the simple
existence of a dispute between states A and C impact calculations regarding the
use of force or peaceful resolution between A and B? The previous examples sug-
gest that by neglecting such linkages we overlook important aspects of the dispute
at hand. We therefore ask what are the mechanisms “linking” territorial disputes
to each other in states’ calculations regarding escalating or resolving one such
dispute?

Our answer starts from a basic assumption in the conflict literature, that adver-
saries glean information from each other’s actions in disputes with third parties and
use such information for calculations involving the dispute at hand. In other words,
when state A decides on whether and how to deal with its territorial dispute with
state B, it interprets B’s past and present actions, seeking information about B’s
intentions. We add to this argument another layers continuing this logic: B is aware
that A is seeking to understand its intentions based on the actions it takes. Similarly,
A is aware that B is scrutinizing its “moves,” to uncover information about its own
intentions. Both A and B may therefore be deterred from taking such actions in the
first place, to avoid imparting important information.

The preceding arguments are relevant even when discussing only interactions
between the two states, treating them completely in isolation from their other dis-
putes. Yet, we suggest that calculations of states that have ongoing disputes with
multiple other states will be affected by the previous logics even more. That is
because state B will be able to glean information from A’s past and present actions
in other disputes and not just from their own dyadic past and present interactions.
Moreover, A will consider how its present actions in its dispute with B will affect
its other ongoing disputes and not just its interaction with B.

The following sections discuss the above three basic arguments, emphasizing the
relevance of (1) past actions, (2) present (or very recent) actions, and (3) potential
future repercussions of actions of states involved in a territorial dispute. As men-
tioned, the first two arguments are gleaned from the existing literature while the third
constitutes an original argument (that is the major contribution of this paper) by
extending the logic of the first two.

**Past Actions (Reputation) Arguments Linking Disputes**

Much of the extant literature on dispute linkages is based on the concept of reputa-
tion. This scholarship has debated for some time the question of whether past actions
of state A in its military confrontations with state C will offer state B any information about what to expect for its own relationship with A. Precisely because A believes that its actions in dispute A–C might be used by B to glean information on how to best deal with dispute A–B, A “cares” about the reputation it develops over time. In fact, the deterrence literature is based on the assumption that A will seek military action against C (even if the costs of such action taken in isolation appear to exceed the benefits) because it wants to deter C (and B) from taking similar actions. This literature makes several important distinctions that are pertinent to our study.

A first such distinction is between arguments that explain states’ decisions to escalate their disputes and those explaining peaceful resolution. While we suggest most arguments from the richer literature focusing on conflict are “exportable” to the discussion of peaceful resolutions, we also expect that the linkages between disputes will not be identical when involving the two different outcomes as the two actions do not assume the exact same logic (e.g., Huth 1996; Fravel 2008). This is primarily due to the fact that military disputes are much more costly than peaceful resolutions. States have difficulties carrying on simultaneous (or even rapidly consecutive) militarized disputes but can conduct simultaneous peaceful negotiations. In fact, states that have multiple territorial disputes need to be wary about their multiple adversaries joining forces and jointly initiating militarized actions against them. Such logic is not present (or, at least, not evident) in calculations involving peaceful resolutions. We therefore test two separate models, describing the likelihood that states will (1) escalate their dispute and (2) seek peaceful resolution.

A second distinction is between the types of actions for which a state develops a reputation. Huth argues that when analyzing the concept of reputation, one of the main questions we need to address is “reputation for what?” The literature shows that, indeed, it is important to identify what types of actions a reputation is based on and what type of reputation is being developed (Huth 1997a, 75; also Sartori 2002, 123). We build on this argument, suggesting states can develop “belligerent” reputations, based on their penchant for becoming involved in military disputes over territories or “peaceful” reputations, based on their records of peaceful resolution attempts. Indeed, scholarship offers evidence that in dyadic disputes, past militarized conflict “begets” militarized actions and peaceful behavior “begets” peaceful actions (Crescenzi and Enterline 2001). We therefore expect disputes involving challengers or targets that historically dealt with territorial disputes through force to be more likely to escalate. Conversely, we expect disputes involving challengers or targets that historically sought to resolve other disputes peacefully to be more likely to experience attempts at peaceful resolution in the present. The expectations are based on two assumptions: that states have persistent domestic or external reasons to embrace such bellicose or peaceful solutions to disputes, and (possibly related to the first assumption) that they purposefully seek to establish either reputation.

A third distinction is between the relevance of the actions of a challenger and those of a target. Some of the existing literature emphasizes only the actions of
challengers as useful for understanding the likelihood for conflict escalation or dispute resolution (Huth 1996). After all, targets are expected to have fewer benefits (and fairly equal costs) from altering the status quo, either through military actions or through peaceful resolution (Copeland 1997). But this assumption does not preclude targets from seeking to resolve such disputes, especially through peaceful resolution (where the expected costs are lower than in cases of military solutions to the conflict). Moreover, as we consider not just dyads but also the connection between such dyads and the rest of the network, it is expected that the identity of the state (challenger or target) providing the link to other disputes is relevant. We therefore test arguments involving both the challenger and the target within a dispute.

The preceding considerations involving countries’ reputations, gleaned from the existing literature, lead to the following hypotheses regarding disputes linkages:

\( H_1 \): Dispute contexts in which the challenger/target has been involved, over time, in many militarized conflicts are more likely to escalate than those in which the challenger/target has been involved in few (or no) such conflicts.

\( H'_1 \): Disputes contexts in which the challenger/target has been involved in many attempts of peaceful dispute resolution are more likely to experience attempts of peaceful resolution than those in which the challenger/target was involved in few (or no) such attempts.

**Recent Actions (Signals) Arguments Linking Disputes**

Some of the literature on reputation has distinguished between a state’s reputation developed over long periods and the one based only on its very recent actions (Huth and Russett 1984; Huth 1988). For the sake of clarity, we only refer to reputational arguments as those built on long-standing patterns of behavior. We consider the arguments that link disputes through the very recent actions of states to be based on a different logic and, implicitly, to result in different expectations. Such recent actions, we suggest, are interpreted by states as “signals” revealing pertinent information about current conditions influencing a state’s cost–benefit calculations rather than its predilections for a certain type of action (as reputation arguments imply).

Fravel’s (2008) study of China offers a useful example of such arguments. He posits that a state involved in a territorial dispute can adopt three possible strategies: delay (maintaining territorial claims through public declarations but not following through with use of force or concessions), cooperation (dropping territorial claims), or escalation (using force or threats to seize territory). In most cases, states adopt the delaying strategy as the other options are more costly and involve greater uncertainty. For a state to move toward a cooperation or escalation strategy, some factors, either internal or external, must alter the status quo.

According to Fravel, the main internal factors leading to a state’s shift in position on a territorial claim are domestic threats to the government’s (or leader’s) political
survival. One body of literature (e.g., Levy 1989; Smith 1996) suggests that when such threats emerge, governments may seek to escalate disputes as ways to develop external “diversions” and, implicitly, to gain domestic support. Others suggest that under the same conditions of internal instability, states will seek cooperation with potential external adversaries and initiate peaceful resolutions to balance the internal threats to their survival (David 1991).

External threats are usually the result of a decline in a state’s power. Once more, the literature suggests two possible reactions to such external threats. One body of scholarship argues that when a state is declining in power it is likely to lash out and use force against a potential adversary before it is not too late (Gilpin 1983; Copeland 2001). Others suggest the state will increase efforts to resolve the dispute peacefully while it still has some bargaining leverage (e.g., Fravel 2008).

Based on these arguments, is it relevant for state B (involved in a territorial dispute with A) that A has recently sought a peaceful agreement or that it has used force over a territory with C? After all, B can observe virtually all of these aforementioned factors. It can assess whether A’s power is waning, whether A is facing internal instability, and whether A and C have stronger security ties. While all of these factors are potentially relevant for B, it does not necessarily need to deduce them from A’s willingness to resolve its dispute with C peacefully or from its decision to use force against C. It can assess them on its own. It can also assess the systemic factors (such as a shift in great power balance or the emergence of international institutions facilitating dispute resolution) that may have led to this outcome. Moreover, it can determine the factors that led to this outcome but that are not relevant for its relationship with A: the changes in C’s power, in C’s internal instability, or in the salience of the disputed territory between A and C. Finally, B should also be able to assess whether A’s relationship with C is sufficiently similar to its own relationship with A and, implicitly, whether it is relevant enough for it to glean any useful information for its own purposes from interactions between A and C (Crescenzi 2007).

What developments surrounding dispute A–C do for B’s calculations regarding dispute A–B is simply to confirm that a change has taken place inducing A to become involved in an attempt to resolve peacefully or by force one of its other disputes. In a world of limited information and actors adopting cognitive shortcuts, such a signal is important. That is because, in practice, it is difficult for B to discern whether the changes that led to peaceful resolution or use of force between A and C are indeed due to a change in A (and therefore relevant for B’s dispute with A) or are specific only to dyad A–C. B might interpret this action correctly or not. For this reason, we suggest that very recent actions of state A toward state C (whether military or peaceful in nature) can trigger a reaction of state B toward A that is independent of the actual internal and external changes that A may have experienced.

The preceding arguments lead to several expectations. They suggest that its other adversaries may (rightly or not) interpret a state’s involvement in peaceful resolution of one of its disputes as important information about domestic or external changes. The interpretation of these changes can, in turn, impact decisions to seek peaceful
resolution to a dispute or to use force. Conversely, a state’s decision to use force in one dispute may alter its adversaries’ calculations regarding the use of force or peaceful resolution of other disputes. In other words, as opposed to the reputation arguments that link only past bellicose behavior to current bellicose decisions and past peaceful behavior to past peaceful decisions, very recent actions/signaling arguments are broader, leading to expectations that “cross over” from one type of behavior to another. That is because instability in state A, that initially led to an escalation of A’s conflict with C, can be followed by an escalation or a peaceful resolution to A’s dispute with B. Conversely, such instability can first lead to a peaceful resolution of the dispute between A and C and then to escalation or peaceful resolution of the dispute between A and B.

These arguments lead to the following hypotheses:

\[ H_2: \] Disputes in which the challenger/target has been involved recently in a militarized conflict are more likely to escalate than are those in which the challenger/target was not involved in such conflicts.

\[ H_3: \] Disputes in which the challenger/target has been involved recently in an attempt to resolve a dispute peacefully are more likely to escalate than are those in which the challenger/target was not involved in such attempts.

\[ H'_2: \] Disputes in which the challenger/target has been involved recently in a militarized conflict are more likely to experience attempts of peaceful resolution of the dispute than are those in which the challenger/target was not involved in such attempts.

\[ H'_3: \] Disputes in which the challenger/target has been involved recently in an attempt to resolve a dispute peacefully are more likely to experience attempts of peaceful resolution of another dispute than are those in which the challenger/target was not involved in such a conflict.

To test the independent effect of such actions in one dispute on decisions in another dispute we must control for the other aforementioned factors that can lead states to such peaceful resolution or escalation both in the first dispute and in the second one. Specifically, we need to control for instances of domestic instability and for changes in the state’s power considered by Fravel as developments sparking peaceful or military actions in the first place.

**Future Expectations (Deterrent Effects) Arguments**

This section argues that the linkages between multiple disputes are not just based on the reputations their adversaries develop from past actions or the information gleaned from very recent actions, but can also result from purely “future oriented” calculations. We suggest that the existence of multiple ongoing disputes constitutes, in and of itself, a deterrent for any state to resolve one such dispute either peacefully or by force.

This argument starts from the previous one suggesting that state B will likely (sometimes incorrectly) interpret state A’s recent actions toward C as signs that
A is experiencing domestic or external threats. We continue this argument by suggesting that A is aware that B might (incorrectly) interpret its actions toward C as signs of internal or external weakness. In many cases, A will therefore avoid initiating militarized conflict or seeking peaceful resolution with C in the first place, for fear of endangering the status quo in its ongoing disputes with B or other states. This suggests that the simple existence of one territorial dispute can act as a deterrent for solving (peacefully or by force) other “linked” territorial disputes. The logic implies that the more territorial disputes two states are directly involved in (that we dub “first-order disputes”), the less likely they will escalate their dispute or seek peaceful resolution. In other words, states involved in multiple territorial disputes face a “logjam” that makes it difficult for them to resolve any of their disputes. This makes them cautious, preferring the status quo to dispute resolution.

Some first-order claims are, in turn, connected to many more additional claims (what we dub “second-order claims”) than others. We suggest that the number of second-order territorial claims (that the two states’ rivals are involved in) will also have an impact on the likelihood that two states will seek to resolve that particular dispute peacefully or by force. To explain this argument, Figure 1 offers a set of fictional interconnected disputes with dyad A–B at the center. We include all other disputes in which A and B are directly involved (first-order claims, represented with dotted lines) and those in which their adversaries are involved (second-order claims). When considering
its dispute with B, A accounts for the potential impact of its sole first-order dispute (A–X). Similarly, B considers its first-order disputes B–Y and B–Z.

The second-order claims of the two countries of the original A–B dyad are the ones in which A and B’s adversaries are directly involved. They are represented with dashed lines in Figure 1. Overall, our example includes three first-order claims (two for A and one for B) that directly influence decisions involving dispute A–B and twelve second-order claims (seven for A and five for B) that indirectly influence the decisions involving dispute A–B.

In this example, we do not expect state A to consider the ramifications of solving its dispute with X in the same way that it considers those involving its dispute with B. X has more other claims to consider. Therefore, X’s calculations with regard to all of its other claims will not be influenced too much by what A does in dispute A–B. Conversely, when A is considering its claim with B, it will hardly take into account the ripple effects of its actions on dispute A–X, knowing that X’s hands are tied due to the large number of other claims it needs to consider.

For example, based on previous arguments regarding first-order claims, when Ukraine considered dealing with its dispute over Snake Island with Romania it likely accounted for the impact that resolving this claim would have on its ongoing territorial claim with Russia over the Kerch Strait and Sea of Azov. Ordinarily, such first-order claims would induce Ukraine to be more careful in dealing with its dispute with Romania peacefully or by force for fear that this may be interpreted as a sign of weakness and therefore limit the country’s negotiating position with Russia. Yet, Russia has fourteen other ongoing claims (Central Intelligence Agency 2011). Based on the previous logic of first-order claims, we infer that Russia is unlikely to act on the claim with Ukraine because it is involved in so many disputes simultaneously that it fears its actions toward Ukraine would offer its other adversaries information it does not want to reveal. As Ukraine is aware of this logic, when dealing with Romania it will treat its claim with Russia almost as if it did not exist. In other words, Ukraine’s fourteen second-order claims (between Russia and all of Russia’s adversaries other than Ukraine) dampen the impact that its first-order claim (between Russia and Ukraine) has on its calculations in its dispute with Romania. In the end, Ukraine viewed its territorial claim to Snake Island as virtually isolated from its other claims and was therefore more likely to accept peaceful resolution without fearing its influence on its dispute with Russia. This example and the preceding discussion suggest that the number of second-order claims will have a reverse effect from that of first-order claims.5

These arguments lead to another set of hypotheses:

\( H_4: \) Disputes in which the challenger/target has many first-order claims are less likely to escalate than are those in which the challenger/target is involved in few first-order claims.

\( H_5: \) Disputes in which the challenger/target has many second-order claims are more likely to escalate than are those in which the challenger/target has few second-order claims.
Disputes in which the challenger/target has many first-order claims are less likely to attempts at peaceful resolution than are those in which the challenger/target is involved in few first-order claims.

Disputes in which the challenger/target has many second-order claims are more likely to attempts at peaceful resolution than are those in which the challenger/target is involved in few second-order claims.

Table 1 organizes our hypotheses based on distinctions (1) between the three major arguments discussed (emphasizing past actions, very recent actions, and future-oriented deterrent effects) and (2) between arguments explaining escalation and those explaining peaceful resolution.

In addition, the hypotheses focusing on recent actions distinguish between signals based on military action and those based on attempts at peaceful resolution of disputes. The deterrent effects hypotheses also distinguish between the effects of first- and second-order disputes. Our tests control for the factors already discussed in the literature as impacting states’ decisions to escalate or resolve peacefully a dispute (Huth 1997b). As democratic dyads are shown to be more likely to settle conflicts peacefully, we control for the influence regime type has on settlement attempts (Dixon 1993, 1994; Mitchell 2002; Crescenzi et al. 2011). The presence of security ties can also affect conflict dynamics. Alliances have been shown to indicate bilateral satisfaction with the status quo (Lemke and Reed 1996), reflect common interests (Bueno de Mesquita 1981), and signal beliefs about the likelihood and

Table 1. Hypotheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of argument</th>
<th>Additional distinctions</th>
<th>Model I: dependent variable is dispute escalation</th>
<th>Model II: dependent variable is involvement in peaceful attempt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Reputation” arguments: Past actions in other disputes offer information about present intentions in given dispute</td>
<td></td>
<td>$H_1$</td>
<td>$H'_1$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Recent Actions as signals” arguments: very recent actions in other disputes offer information about intentions in given dispute</td>
<td>Signals are of militarized action</td>
<td>$H_2$</td>
<td>$H'_2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signals are of peaceful resolution</td>
<td></td>
<td>$H_3$</td>
<td>$H'_3$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Deterrent effect” arguments: simple existence of other disputes has a priori effect on intentions in given dispute</td>
<td>First-order disputes</td>
<td>$H_4$</td>
<td>$H'_4$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-order disputes</td>
<td></td>
<td>$H_5$</td>
<td>$H'_5$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$H'_4$: Disputes in which the challenger/target has many first-order claims are less likely to attempts at peaceful resolution than are those in which the challenger/target is involved in few first-order claims.

$H'_5$: Disputes in which the challenger/target has many second-order claims are more likely to attempts at peaceful resolution than are those in which the challenger/target is involved in few second-order claims.

Table 1 organizes our hypotheses based on distinctions (1) between the three major arguments discussed (emphasizing past actions, very recent actions, and future-oriented deterrent effects) and (2) between arguments explaining escalation and those explaining peaceful resolution.
nature of future conflict (Morrow 1999). Disputants are also more likely to employ peaceful resolution in situations of power parity due to uncertainty (Fearon 1995; Werner 2000; Reiter 2003). We also account for the patterns of conflict in the dyad, as states with a long history of disputes toward each other are more likely to escalate conflict (Huth 1996), making peaceful resolution less likely. Since claims that involve territory have been shown to be more likely than maritime and river claims to result in militarization (Lektzian, Prins, and Souva 2010) and more difficult to negotiate over (Hensel 2001; Hensel and Mitchell 2005), we control for conflicts over landed territory. Finally, the literature argues states are less likely to solve salient claims peacefully because they want to maintain control over outcomes and are therefore more likely to deal with them using force (Hensel 2001; Mitchell and Hensel 2007).

Empirical Tests and Results

Data and Measures

Our analysis examines the decision to address a territorial claim. We employ Hensel’s (2001, 13) definition of a territorial claim as a dispute in which “official representatives of at least one state make explicit statements claiming sovereignty over a piece of territory that is claimed or administered by another state.” We analyze cases drawn from the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) data, which include all disputed territorial claims in the Americas and Western Europe from 1816 to 2001 (Hensel et al. 2008). To identify claims, we employ the ICOW claim data, wherein a separate claim is coded for each distinct piece of territory, river, or maritime zone for each state (Hensel 2001). The temporal domain of our study is 1946 to 2001, and the unit of analysis is settlement attempt—dyadic claim—year. This captures annual information on each dyadic claim and attempts to settle each claim, thereby enabling the examination of settlement behavior over time. All models are robust logistic regressions clustered by the dyadic claim year, thereby accounting for the nonindependence of events and avoiding problems of serial correlation.

Outcome Variables

We consider two states settlement methods as dependent variables:

Conflict escalation is a dichotomous measure of the states’ decision to initiate a militarized dispute over the claim (Hensel et al. 2008), thereby attempting to settle the issue militarily.

Peaceful attempt is a dichotomous measure of the states’ decision to take part in a peaceful settlement attempt (Hensel et al. 2008).

“Deterrent Effect” Measures.

First-order challenger/target claims is the number of simultaneous claims each claimant has (excluding the claim under consideration).
**Second-order challenger/target claims** is the number of simultaneous claims that each state’s adversaries have (excluding those of the adversary in the dispute at hand).\(^7\)

**“Reputation” Measures.**

**Challenger/target peaceful reputation** captures a claimant’s long-term reputation for peaceful management by measuring the proportion of the number of challenger/target peaceful attempts with outside states (excluding the attempts involving the dyad at hand) to the number of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) since the end of World War II (WWII), coded according to the ICOW data (Hensel et al. 2008).\(^8\) We introduce a one-year lag to ensure the attempt occurred before the observation.

**Challenger/target bellicose reputation** captures a claimant’s long-term reputation for conflict escalation by measuring the proportion of the number of MIDs with outside states (excluding the MIDs within the dyad at hand) to the number of challenger/target peaceful attempts since the end of WWII, coded according to the ICOW data (Hensel et al. 2008). We introduce a one-year lag to ensure the attempt precedes the observation.

**“Recent Signals” Measures.**

**Challenger/target recent peaceful attempt** captures recent peaceful efforts to settle other claims by including a dummy variable of the presence or absence of challenger/target peaceful attempts to resolve other claims in the previous year (excluding attempts to resolve the dispute at hand). This measure is coded using the ICOW data (Hensel et al. 2008). To ensure the recent attempt is “relevant,” we interact the variable with a measure of the foreign policy similarity between the noninvolved disputant and the outside state, captured with the dyad’s \(S\) score (Signorino and Ritter 1999).\(^9\)

**Challenger/target recent militarized attempt** captures recent militarized attempts to settle a separate claims by including a dummy variable of the presence or absence of challenger/target militarized attempts to resolve other claims in the previous year (excluding attempts to resolve the dispute at hand) using the ICOW data (Hensel et al. 2008). This measure is also interacted with \(S\) score of the noninvolved disputant and the outside state.\(^10\)

**Control Variables.**

**Challenger/target domestic instability** is a one-year lag of the presence or absence of a domestic event, coded with the Cross National Time Series data (Banks and Wilson 2012). Events include assassinations, general strikes, guerilla warfare, government crises, purges, riots, revolutions, and antigovernment demonstrations.
Challenger/target power shift employs the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) scores to account for the claimants’ relative power (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972) by coding changes in the challenger/target’s CINC score from the previous year.

Democratic dyad is a dummy variable capturing the similarity of claimants’ Polity IV democracy scores for the dyadic year (Marshall and Jaggers 2004). Dyads in which both countries score six or higher on the Polity IV scale are coded 1; all others are coded 0.

Security ties is a dummy variable that accounts for the presence of a formal alliance between the claimants in a given year, measured according to the Alliance Applications and Provisions data (Leeds et al. 2002). These data define alliances as formal agreements “among independent states to cooperate militarily in the face of potential or realized military conflict” (Leeds 2005, 4).

Relative power employs the CINC scores to assess the claimants’ relative power (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972). This measure is calculated by dividing the stronger state’s CINC score by the weaker state’s score.

Conflict history counts the number of recent full-scale Correlates of War interstate wars between these two actors over this claim, weighted by recency. We employ the ICOW measure of recent wars, which weights an event in the year before the current observation a value of 1.0, with earlier events decreasing by 10 percent each year (Hensel et al. 2008).

Landed territory is a dummy variable measuring if the claim involved a land rather than a maritime or river issue. It is coded using ICOW data, which differentiates among claims based on issue types (Hensel et al. 2008).

Salience is the ICOW salience index, which reports the highest salience for the dyadic claim (Hensel et al. 2008).

Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows the results of a logistics regression of the deterrent effect, reputation, recent signals, and control variables on dispute escalation (model I) and peaceful attempts at resolving a conflict (model II). Model I finds that first-order claims (target and challenger), second-order claims (target and challenger), target bellicose reputation, challenger bellicose reputation, target recent militarized attempts, challenger domestic instability, target power shift, relative power, conflict history, and salience significantly affect the likelihood of conflict escalation. Model II shows that first-order claims (challenger and target), second-order claims (challenger and target), target peaceful reputation, challenger peaceful attempts, challenger domestic instability, democratic dyad, relative power, conflict history, and salience significantly affect the
likelihood of experiencing peaceful attempts to resolve a conflict. Table 3 includes the predicted probabilities based on these results.

**"Deterrent Effects" Findings**

We find substantial and robust support for our arguments about the "deterrent effects" of first- and second-order disputes; the existence of other disputes affects

### Table 2. Logistics Regression of Dispute Escalation and Peaceful Attempts, 1946–2001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model I: involvement in dispute escalation</th>
<th>Model II: involvement in peaceful attempt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;Deterrent Effect&quot;</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-order target claims</td>
<td>$-0.5164^{***}$ (0.1343)</td>
<td>$-0.4576^{***}$ (0.1075)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-order target claims</td>
<td>$0.0495^{***}$ (0.0102)</td>
<td>$0.0314^{***}$ (0.0077)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-order challenger claims</td>
<td>$-0.5865^{***}$ (0.1638)</td>
<td>$-0.6811^{***}$ (0.1359)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-order challenger claims</td>
<td>$0.0444^{***}$ (0.0068)</td>
<td>$0.0472^{***}$ (0.0090)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;Reputation&quot;</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target peaceful reputation</td>
<td></td>
<td>$0.0695^{***}$ (0.0264)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger peaceful reputation</td>
<td></td>
<td>$0.0218$ (0.0201)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target bellicose reputation</td>
<td>$0.8046^{**}$ (0.3176)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger bellicose reputation</td>
<td>$0.8046^{**}$ (0.3176)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;Recent Signals&quot;</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target recent peaceful action</td>
<td>$-0.3029$ (0.2425)</td>
<td>$0.0218$ (0.0201)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger recent peaceful action</td>
<td>$0.3925$ (0.2711)</td>
<td>$0.4864^{**}$ (0.1936)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target recent militarized attempt</td>
<td>$0.7790^*$ (0.4598)</td>
<td>$-0.3499$ (0.2648)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger recent militarized attempt</td>
<td>$0.1285$ (0.3160)</td>
<td>$-0.0318$ (0.2676)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target domestic instability</td>
<td>$0.0122$ (0.0095)</td>
<td>$0.0021$ (0.0065)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger domestic instability</td>
<td>$0.0142^*$ (0.0083)</td>
<td>$0.0260^{***}$ (0.0062)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target power shift</td>
<td>$-37.7666^*$ (22.8235)</td>
<td>$-9.7908$ (10.3271)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger power shift</td>
<td>$-37.0354$ (29.7345)</td>
<td>$-23.7611$ (20.7976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic dyad</td>
<td>$0.1976$ (0.2573)</td>
<td>$0.3466^*$ (0.1816)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security ties</td>
<td>$0.2435$ (0.3693)</td>
<td>$0.2713$ (0.2071)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative power</td>
<td>$0.0003^{**}$ (0.0001)</td>
<td>$0.0003^{***}$ (0.0001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict history</td>
<td>$1.0609^{**}$ (0.5242)</td>
<td>$2.8545^{***}$ (1.0515)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landed territory</td>
<td>$0.2265$ (0.3045)</td>
<td>$0.1969$ (0.2128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td>$0.0405^*$ (0.0230)</td>
<td>$0.0494^{***}$ (0.0173)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>$-3.5071^{***}$ (0.2868)</td>
<td>$-2.0015^{***}$ (0.2513)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>$4,575$</td>
<td>$4,575$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE/PPC</td>
<td>$0.127/938$</td>
<td>$0.133/816$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
<td>$0.1455$</td>
<td>$0.1415$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log likelihood</td>
<td>$-948.48068$</td>
<td>$-2021.1015$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: PRE/PPC = Proportional reduction in error/percentage predicted correctly. Robust standard errors clustered on dyadic claim year in parentheses.  
$p < .10. ^{*}p < .05. ^{***}p < .01.$

likelihood of experiencing peaceful attempts to resolve a conflict. Table 3 includes the predicted probabilities based on these results.

**“Deterrent Effects” Findings**

We find substantial and robust support for our arguments about the “deterrent effects” of first- and second-order disputes; the existence of other disputes affects
Table 3. Predicted Probabilities.

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Involvement in dispute escalation</th>
<th>Uninvolved in dispute escalation</th>
<th>Involved in peaceful attempt</th>
<th>Uninvolved in peaceful attempt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Deterrent Effect”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-order target claims</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.148</td>
<td>.852</td>
<td>.374</td>
<td>.626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change (%): -100.00</td>
<td>17.25</td>
<td>-99.47</td>
<td>59.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-order target claims</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.010</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change (%): 3910.00</td>
<td>-39.43</td>
<td>673.77</td>
<td>-43.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-order challenger claims</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.175</td>
<td>.825</td>
<td>.555</td>
<td>.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change (%): -100.00</td>
<td>21.09</td>
<td>-100.00</td>
<td>124.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-order challenger claims</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.011</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change (%): 5618.18</td>
<td>-62.59</td>
<td>1797.87</td>
<td>-88.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Reputation”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target peaceful reputation</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.099</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>Maximum: 0.299</td>
<td>.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target bellicose reputation</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.023</td>
<td>.976</td>
<td>Maximum: 0.073</td>
<td>.926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger bellicose reputation</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.023</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>Maximum: .124</td>
<td>.876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Recent Signals”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger recent peaceful attempt</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.099</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td>Maximum: 0.299</td>
<td>.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target recent militarized action</td>
<td>Minimum: 0.012</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>Maximum: 0.054</td>
<td>.946</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```
states’ attempts to resolve the current claim. Disputes in which target and challenger states have more first-order claims are both less likely to include peaceful attempts at resolving claims and less likely to escalate. For each additional first-order target claim, the log odds of whether a dispute escalates decreased by 0.5164, the odds decreased by 0.597, and the probability decreased by almost 100 percent; the log odds of whether a dispute experiences an attempt of peaceful resolution decreased by 0.4576, or a 0.633 decrease in the odds and a 99 percent decrease in the probability. For each additional first-order challenger claim, the log odds of whether a dispute escalates decreased by 0.5865, the odds decreased by 0.556, and the probability decreased by 100 percent; the log odds of whether a dispute experiences an attempt of peaceful resolution decreased by 0.6811, a 0.506 decrease in the odds of a peaceful attempt, and a 100 percent decrease in probability.

Table 3. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement in dispute escalation</th>
<th>Uninvolved in dispute escalation</th>
<th>Involved in peaceful attempt</th>
<th>Uninvolved in peaceful attempt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger domestic instability</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.923</td>
<td>.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change (%)</td>
<td>234.78</td>
<td>-5.53</td>
<td>451.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target power shift</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.794</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.992</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change (%)</td>
<td>-96.12</td>
<td>24.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic dyad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change (%)</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.864</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative power</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>.614</td>
<td>.386</td>
<td>.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change (%)</td>
<td>2569.57</td>
<td>-60.49</td>
<td>832.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict history</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.902</td>
<td>.759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change (%)</td>
<td>326.09</td>
<td>-7.68</td>
<td>682.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.993</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>.492</td>
<td>.507</td>
<td>.837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change (%)</td>
<td>8100.00</td>
<td>-48.94</td>
<td>5131.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Only statistically significant results from Table 1 are shown here. All other variables are held at their means, except democratic dyad, security ties, and landed territory, which are held at 0.
We also find, as hypothesized, that disputes in which target and challenger states have more second-order claims are both more likely to escalate and experience attempts of peaceful resolution. For each additional second-order claim of a target state, the log odds of whether the dispute escalates increased by a factor of 0.0495, the odds increase by 1.051, and the probability by 3.910 percent: the log odds of whether a dispute experienced an attempt of peaceful resolution increased by a factor of 0.0314, the odds of peaceful resolution attempt increased by 1.032, and the probability increase by 673 percent. For each additional second-order claim of a challenger state, the log odds of whether the dispute escalates increased by a factor of 0.0444, the odds of escalating the dispute increase by 1.045, and the probability by 1,797 percent; the log odds of whether a dispute experienced an attempt of peaceful resolution increased by a factor of 0.0472, a 1.048 increase in the odds and 1,797 percent increase in probability.

“Reputation” Findings

Our results also provide support for the theory that past actions in other disputes offer information about present intentions and, implicitly, affect decisions. Disputes in which states have peaceful reputations are more likely to experience peaceful attempts of resolving a claim; disputes in which states have bellicose reputations are more likely to escalate. Each increase in the target’s ratio of MIDs to peaceful attempts increases the log odds of escalating the dispute by a factor of 0.8046, the likelihood or odds by 2.236, and the probability by 217 percent; the odds of experiencing a peaceful resolution attempt increase by 1.072, the log odds increase by a factor of 0.0695, and the probability increases by 202 percent. Each increase in the challenger’s ratio of MIDs to peaceful attempts increases the log odds of escalating a dispute increases by a factor of 0.8046, the likelihood or odds of escalation by 2.236, and the probability by 439 percent. Disputes in which challengers have peaceful reputations are more likely to experience attempts of peaceful settlement as well, although this finding is not statistically significant.

“Recent Signals” Findings

The tests offer mixed results for the roles recent signals play in settlement attempts. Certain recent actions in other disputes affect settlement efforts. A dispute is slightly more likely to escalate if the target was recently involved in a militarized attempt to settle a separate claim. Recent military attempts to resolve another dispute by a target state increase the log odds of the dispute escalating by 0.7790, the likelihood by 2.179, and the probability by 350 percent. Recent signals are also only slight predictors of peaceful settlement attempts. As hypothesized, in model II, recent challenger peaceful attempts increase the likelihood that the dispute experiences a peaceful attempt to resolve the claim, increasing the log odds of experiencing a peaceful attempt by a factor of 0.4864, the odds by 1.626, and the probability by 202 percent.
Controls

Our tests also control for factors discussed in the literature. In line with the diversionary theory of war arguments, challenger domestic instability significantly increases log odds of dispute escalation by a factor of 0.0142, odds by 1.014, and probability by 234 percent. Also as expected, challenger domestic instability causes an increase in the log odds of a peaceful resolution attempt by a factor of 0.026, a 1.026 increase in the odds, and a 451 percent increase in the probability. A decrease in a target’s power increases the likelihood of a dispute escalating by $3.964 \times 10^{-17}$ odds and the probability by 96 percent. As others have also shown, democratic dyads are more likely to settle their conflicts peacefully (Dixon 1993). The log odds of a peaceful resolution attempt increase by 0.3466 if the dyad is democratic, the likelihood increases by 1.414, and the probability increases by 37 percent. We also find additional support for the finding that disputants are more likely to employ peaceful resolutions in situations of power polarity due to uncertainty (Reiter 2003). Increases in relative power (and polarity) led to an increase in the odds ratio by a factor of 0.0003, or a 1.0003 increase of in the odds and 832 percent increase in probability, of a peaceful attempt. However, states are also more likely to address the issue militarily, with increases in relative power (and polarity) increasing the log odds by a factor of 0.0003, the odds by 1.0003, and probability by 2,569 percent. Also in contrast to previous research (Huth 1996), we find that a conflict history leads to an increase in the odds ratio of involvement in peaceful attempts by 2.8545, a 17.366 increase in the odds, and a 682 percent increase in the probability. However, in line with previous research (Huth 1996), we find that a history of conflict makes dispute escalation more likely, with each additional war leading to an increase in the log odds by 1.0609, an increase of 2.889 in the odds, and a 326 percent increase in the probability. Finally, we confirm that more salient disputes are both more likely to be addressed peacefully, with each increase in salience leading to a 0.0494 increase in the log odds, a 1.051 increase in the odds, and a 5,131 percent increase in the probability, and more likely to be addressed militarily, with each increase in salience increasing the odds of escalation by 0.0405, the odds by 1.041, and the probability by 8,100 percent.

Conclusion

This study investigated the factors that influence states’ decisions of whether to use force or seek peaceful resolution to resolve a territorial claim. We asked why states’ decisions in one dispute would be influenced by their involvement in other ongoing disputes. We offered a number of hypotheses based on existing scholarship and added several original ones.

The first set of hypotheses considered the impact of long-standing reputations, which are based on actions states had taken in their interactions with all of their adversaries, on the state’s likelihood of seeking an escalation or peaceful resolution of a current dispute. We found support for three of the four “reputational” hypotheses. Indeed, reputations
for past bellicose behavior of both the target and the challenger increase the likelihood that the dispute between the two states will escalate. Yet, in the model estimating the likelihood that two states will seek peaceful resolution to their dispute, we found that only the target’s penchant for resolving its disputes peacefully has an impact on the decisions of the dispute at hand. The challenger’s reputation for peaceful resolution does not appear to have such an impact. This finding is not that surprising. After all, it is only necessary for one state (either the challenger or the target) to consider using force beneficial for the dispute to escalate. Yet, both sides need to acquiesce to peaceful negotiations over a disputed territory before talks can begin. In most cases, challengers (that have less to lose initiating such talks as they do not control the disputed territory) are more likely to find negotiations acceptable than targets (that are, implicitly, making concessions on the dispute even by accepting to open up talks). Therefore, challengers’ intentions (reflected in their past actions) are not as relevant as those of targets when it comes to peaceful settlement attempts.

We find little support for arguments involving very recent actions of states (interpreted as signals). Indeed, the results indicate that dyads in which the target was recently involved in a militarized dispute are more likely to escalate their dispute. Also, dyads in which the challenger was recently involved in a peaceful resolution are more likely to seek a peaceful resolution to their dispute. It is important to note that these hypotheses are based on the interpretations of recent actors’ actions, rather than their penchant for such actions (as in the case of reputation arguments). What that means is that, in model I, there is support for the argument that the challenger gains information from recent target involvement in a militarized dispute. Therefore, it is the challenger’s calculation that is being altered by the target’s recent action. This is important because challengers have traditionally been seen as the principal initiators of militarized disputes over territory (Huth 1997b). Even when the costs of military conflict are the same for the target and challenger, we expect the potential benefits to be greater for the challenger (that does not control the territory) than for the target (that controls it). Therefore, it is not surprising that the challenger’s observations of the target (and its subsequent actions based on such observations) have an impact on the outcome but the targets do not.

One should note an additional explanation for this finding. The fact that a dispute may escalate very quickly after the target becomes involved in militarized actions with other states can be interpreted simply as an opportunistic reaction of the challenger that sees itself more likely to succeed in gaining the territory through force when the target is engaged in another simultaneous (or even rapidly successive) costly conflict. This argument is, of course, in tune with the broad literature focusing on balancing. As mentioned earlier, the logic at the heart of balancing behavior is expected to differ when we focus on peaceful resolution rather than on conflict.

Conversely, the finding that dyads in which the challenger was recently involved in a peaceful resolution are indeed more likely to attempt peaceful resolution suggests, as mentioned above, that the target’s decisions are key when it comes to the peaceful resolution of a dispute. Therefore, it is relevant that the target observes a recent attempt
on the part of the challenger to resolve another dispute peacefully. It may indeed lead the target to conclude that the challenger is in a weak position and that this is one of its best opportunities to resolve the dispute without making too many concessions.

Yet, the apparent support for these two hypotheses needs to be interpreted with caution. Perhaps an even more important finding here is that most (six of the eight) hypotheses regarding the recent actions of states in other disputes are not supported by the tests. This lack of significance may be interpreted in several ways. First, it may suggest that, indeed, states faced with identical “signals” may choose just as well to seek to escalate a conflict or to resolve it peacefully.

Second, this may show that states’ observations and calculations are more accurate than we speculated. As a reminder, when developing these hypotheses, we posited that states are likely to “read more” into their adversary’s recent actions than they should. After all, as we suggested, recent actions of their adversaries should not contribute too much more to the information they already have about them. They can observe virtually all domestic and external factors that are likely to have led to such actions. Therefore, the lack of support of these hypotheses may simply be a reflection of the little additional impact such actions have.

Third, and most important, the lack of support for these hypotheses may stem from the fact that states that are involved in multiple disputes avoid reacting to such signals by escalating or seeking peaceful resolution of a claim for fear of their actions being interpreted in a way that leads to unwanted actions. Indeed, the most important conclusions of this study derive from the very strong support that all of the “deterrence” arguments found in our tests. We found that the number of a state’s first-order disputes has a deterrent effect on its resolving one specific dispute either by force or peacefully. This was true both for challengers and for targets.

These findings have potentially useful practical implications. On one hand, they suggest optimistically that, once a state resolves one of its territorial disputes peacefully (and thus reduces the number of first-order disputes), it becomes more likely to resolve others peacefully, in a “cascade” effect. On the other hand, we should be wary because our results also suggest that the reduced number of first-order disputes may also increase the chances of states seeking to resolve other disputes militarily.

The policy implication of these findings is that states need to communicate very clearly to others how and why the dispute that they are resolving is indeed “different” than others and thus attempt to resolve some of these disputes peacefully by “disentangling” them from the rest of the network. An example of such a strategy is the one used by the United Kingdom when it explained that its decision to give up Hong Kong to China should not be interpreted as a signal, that is, was also willing to give up Gibraltar, suggesting that the latter was much more “British” than the former (Gold 2002, 24).

Our arguments regarding second-order claims were also supported. This is particularly important in distinguishing our approach from extant literature that has, at most, considered only the impact of first-order claims (e.g., Huth 1996). Therefore, while we are not the first to consider the importance of states’ simultaneous involvements in
multiple disputes, our findings further the understanding of the “network-like” linkages between disputes.

We should also note that many of the control variables were significant in our models. Previous conflicts and power disparity indeed affect current choices. In addition, decisions to seek peaceful resolution depend on the democratic nature of the dyad and the salience of the territory.

Most important, we should reiterate that the numbers of a state’s first- and second-order claims, our key dependent variables, are strong predictors of its willingness to solve a dispute peacefully or by force even when controlling for the above factors that the literature has already discussed. This last observation leads to what may be the most important analytical conclusion of this study: traditional “monadic” or “dyadic” approaches to the study of conflict and conflict resolution may effectively be complemented by a network analysis approach (Maoz et al. 2006). This argument does not necessarily imply an endorsement of a certain methodological approach to the study of conflict and conflict resolution. It does, however, imply that we should consider with greater care how our studies simplify the world in isolating disputes and dispute resolution from other simultaneously unfolding relations and that additional approaches may offer important insights for understanding real-world developments.

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Notes
1. We use the terms claim and dispute interchangeably.
2. A somewhat similar argument has been made with regard to governments’ calculations in dealing with multiple disaffected minority groups within a state (Walter 2003). Specifically, it is argued that governments avoid negotiations with one minority group, so that they do not offer the other groups information regarding their intentions.
3. This argument can be understood as deriving from the broader assumption that states have incentives not to reveal any of their “private information” regarding their capabilities and
intentions (Fearon 1995). Indeed, any action A takes toward C may reveal something about its capabilities and intentions to B.

4. Our arguments could be extended to higher orders of claims. Yet, for sake of clarity, we limit our tests to only the first two orders. Moreover, we expect that the further removed such claims are from the main one, the more complex calculations are and the less likely it is that countries consider them when making decisions.

5. This logic is similar to the ones considering how characteristics of the “enemy of my enemy” have an inverse effect on states’ calculations than characteristics of “my enemy” (Maoz et al. 2007).

6. We also tested our models between 1919 and 2002 with similar results. A state’s decision to address a dispute peacefully is not a product of the temporal domain. We restrict our analysis to the post–World War II era, however, in keeping with other literature.

7. By doing so, we ensure the measures of first- and second-order claims are capturing different aspects of the claimants’ “interconnectedness.” The measures are correlated at .76. Running separate models as a robustness test generates similar findings.

8. In order to distinguish as clearly as possible between “Reputation” and “Recent Actions,” we developed a measure of reputation based on all of A’s territorial claims since 1945, rather than adopting an arbitrary cutoff for the past ten or twenty years.

9. This captures Crescenzi’s (2007) argument that states consider not only the presence of peaceful attempts but also the identity and similarity of their adversary’s other adversaries. A state might not consider a peaceful attempt with a dissimilar state as having implications for their claim. We also tested an interaction of the variable with the relative democracy score of the challenger/target and the challenger/target’s recent adversary. The relationship remains positive, but the interaction term was not significant, likely due to missing data.

10. The same robustness checks, interactions of foreign policy similarity, and relative democracy were performed on the militarized attempts variables, generating similar results.

References


