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The Initiation of Interstate Armed Conflicts and Military Rule

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Abstract. This study examines the relationship between military rule and the initiation of interstate wars. The prevailing view in academic literature holds that the involvement of the military in political power increases the frequency of armed conflicts between states. This paper aims to empirically test whether military governments are indeed more likely to initiate interstate wars compared to other types of autocracies, and to assess the validity of the claim that military dictatorships are more prone than military regimes to initiating interstate armed conflicts and wars. To this end, a list of armed interstate conflicts from 1946 to 2007 was compiled, and the initiator states were categorized by their political regime type to identify potential correlations. Conflict data were drawn from the Correlates of War project. For the purpose of this study, a list of 38 interstate conflicts occurring between 1946 and 2007 was compiled, and the political regime type of each conflict initiator was identified. The findings suggest that, in general, authoritarian regimes initiate more interstate conflicts than democracies. Compared to other types of autocracy, military rule does not rank first in the initiation of interstate wars; instead, it is typically preceded by personalist dictatorships. The study distinguishes between military dictatorships and military regimes. A military dictatorship is a form of military rule in which the head of state or president is a career military officer who comes to power through the overthrow of a civilian government—i.e., via a military coup. Its key distinction from a military regime lies in the absence of a collegial governing body. A military regime represents a more institutionalized form of military rule. It has been established that military dictatorships initiate wars and armed interstate conflicts more frequently than military regimes, a difference attributed to the presence of checks and balances in the form of a military government junta acting as a collegial authority. The initiation of international conflict by military authorities coincides with the existence of a territorial dispute between the states involved. The findings of this study significantly contribute to understanding the escalation and potential resolution of international conflicts.

Key words: international conflicts, war, authoritarianism, military regimes, military dictatorships, territorial dispute, conflict initiator, type of political regime, militarism

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Инициирование межгосударственных вооруженных конфликтов и военное правление

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Аннотация. Исследование посвящено взаимосвязи военного правления и инициирования межгосударственных войн. В научной литературе преобладает мнение, что власть военных в политике приводит к росту количества вооруженных конфликтов между странами. Цель работы — эмпирически проверить, действительно ли военные правительства чаще начинают межгосударственные войны по сравнению с другими видами автократий, и насколько верно, что военные диктатуры чаще, чем военные режимы, иницируют межгосударственные вооруженные конфликты и войны. Для этого был составлен список вооруженных межгосударственных конфликтов с 1946 по 2007 г., а также сопоставлены государства — инициаторы войн с типами их политических режимов с целью установления взаимосвязи. Источником данных по войнам стали данные проекта «Корреляты войны». Для достижения цели данного исследования был составлен список из 38 межгосударственных конфликтов с 1946 по 2007 г., а также определен тип политического режима инициатора войны. Выявлено, что авторитарные режимы в целом иницируют больше межгосударственных конфликтов, чем демократии. В сравнении с другими видами автократий военное правление не занимает первое место по инициированию межгосударственных войн, пропуская вперед, как правило, персоналистскую диктатуру. В исследовании проводится различие между военными диктатурами и военными режимами. Военная диктатура — это один из видов военного правления, при котором главой государства / президентом является кадровый военный, офицер, пришедший к власти в результате свержения гражданского правительства, то есть военного переворота. Принципиальное отличие от военного режима состоит в отсутствии коллегиального органа управления. Военный режим — это более институционализированная форма военного правления. Установлено, что военные диктатуры действительно чаще, чем военные режимы, иницируют войны и вооруженные межгосударственные конфликты, что обусловлено наличием системы «сдержек и противовесов» в форме существования института военной правительственной хунты как коллегиального органа власти. Развязывание международного конфликта военными во власти совпадает с наличием территориального спора между странами. Результаты данного исследования имеют большое значение для понимания того, как международные конфликты могут распространяться и каким образом они могут быть урегулированы.

Ключевые слова: международные конфликты, война, авторитаризм, военные режимы, военные диктатуры, территориальный спор, инициатор конфликта, тип политического режима, милитаризм

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Introduction

One of the pioneers in the study of armed conflict, Quincy Wright, observed that war is viewed from fundamentally opposed perspectives: for some, it is a plague that must be eradicated; for others, a crime that ought to be punished; and for yet others,

an anachronism that no longer serves any purpose (Wright, 1942, pp. 1–3). Historical experience demonstrates that wars and military conflicts have constituted an integral feature of human history. According to scholars, between 1816 and 1997, there were 401 wars, including 79 interstate and 214 civil wars. The number of interstate wars peaked in the period

1870–1899 (Sarkees, Wayman & Singer, 2003, p. 60). Despite a long-term trend indicating a decline in the number and proportion of conflicts between states (Stepanova, 2020, p. 27), interstate wars continue to occur in the twenty-first century.

In political science and international relations, there are several approaches that seek to explain the initiation of interstate conflicts. Existing explanations are conventionally divided into three broad categories: foreign policy (system-level), political-economic, and domestic political explanations (Sushentsov, 2010).

Regarding explanations grounded in systemic or international factors, several principal causes of war initiation may be identified.

First, the outbreak of war is associated with ‘false optimism,’ when a state’s political and military leadership becomes captive to excessively optimistic expectations, for example, a miscalculation of the costs of war or the belief in a relatively easy and swift victory (Van Evera, 1999).

Second, alliances influence the likelihood of militarized conflict. While some scholars argue that military alliances do not constitute one of the principal causes of wars involving great powers (Levy, 1981), others maintain that the effect depends on the type of alliance: defensive alliances exert a restraining influence, while offensive alliances have an inciting effect, increasing a state’s confidence in its ability to succeed through aggression (Leeds, 2003).

Third, dissatisfaction with international status constitutes an important factor affecting the probability of war initiation. States experiencing a deficit of status within the international community are more likely to initiate conflict (Renshon, 2017).

Fourth, military conflict may arise from territorial disputes. War is more likely

to be initiated by a state for which the disputed territory possesses significant intrinsic value (Diehl & Goertz, 2002).

Turning to political-economic explanations, some scholars contend that states possessing substantial oil reserves participate in militarized interstate disputes are more frequently involved in militarized interstate disputes than those lacking such resources (Hendrix, 2017). Moreover, oil-producing states led by revolutionary leaders are considerably more aggressive than other types of states (Colgan, 2010).

Domestic political factors also shape the decision to initiate armed conflict.

First, wars are initiated by states that expect the anticipated benefits to outweigh the costs. A leader is more inclined to initiate an interstate conflict when they conclude that the expected benefits for their winning coalition than the associated costs (de Mesquita & Lalman, 1992).

Second, a leader’s decision to initiate an international conflict is influenced by considerations of political survival. A ruler who anticipates violent removal from office is more likely to initiate conflict (Chiozza & Goemans, 2011).

Finally, war may be initiated when the ruling elite comes to believe its own mobilizing propaganda and security-related myths (Snyder, 1991).

One of the most significant domestic political factors in explaining states’ propensity for international conflict is regime type. The academic literature generally maintains that authoritarian regimes are more prone to initiating international conflict than democracies (Reiter & Stam, 2003). It should be noted that several typologies of authoritarian regimes have been proposed (Golosov, 2019). Some scholars distinguish monarchies, military

regimes, no-party regimes, single-party regimes and limited multi-party regimes (Hadenius & Teorell, 2007; Wahman, Teorell & Hadenius, 2013), while others differentiate between monarchical, military and civilian dictatorships (Cheibub, Gandhi & Vreeland, 2010). Paul Brooker, in turn, identifies monarchical, personalist, military and single-party rule (Brooker, 2013).

The aim of this article is to address the following research question: are military regimes more aggressive in the international arena than other types of authoritarian regimes, as suggested in the academic literature?

The literature review indicates that collegial dictatorships, including military regimes, are in fact more restrained in initiating military conflicts (Krasnov, 2023). This article extends this line of research and contributes to the study of the relationship between regime type and its level of aggressiveness in the international arena.

Military Regimes through the Lens of Militarism Theory

The prevailing view in the scholarly literature holds that authoritarian regimes reliant upon military institutions are more likely to initiate interstate conflicts than other varieties of authoritarian rule (Sechser, 2004; White, 2021). This proposition is grounded in the theory of militarism and generally presupposes a specific set of beliefs and values characteristic of authoritarian states that:

- emphasise the use of force and the threat of violence as the most appropriate and effective means of resolving problems,
- regard war and preparation for war as normal and desirable forms of social activity,
- privilege military institutions over civilian ones and infuse civilian decision-making

processes with a military ethos (Albrecht, 1980; Kraska, 2007, p. 503; Mann, 1987, p. 35).

In the present study, militarism is understood as the tendency of a country's military apparatus (comprising the armed forces and associated paramilitary, intelligence and bureaucratic institutions) to extend progressively broader control over the lives and behavior of its citizens. In this context, military values (centralization of authority, hierarchical organization, discipline, conformism, belligerence and xenophobia) come increasingly to dominate national culture, education, the media and religion (Klare, 1980, p. 34).

Militarism manifests itself in several forms:

- the enhanced role of military institutions in both domestic and international affairs (Ross, 1987, p. 563),
- the allocation of a substantial share of financial resources to military purposes (Thee, 1980, p. 12),
- militaristic patterns of behaviour in social, economic and political life (Beer, 1981, p. 12),
- military intervention in and control over domestic politics, accompanied by an excessive emphasis on the importance of the armed forces (Varas, 1985, pp. 26–27),
- a pronounced reliance on violence in the resolution of conflicts (Van Tuyll, 1994, p. 519).

Furthermore, scholars argue that military elites propagate a number of core misconceptions or myths that can contribute to the outbreak of war. These include exaggerating hostility on the part of other states, portraying the international environment as populated by aggressive adversaries and unreliable allies; depicting the world as readily conquerable while downplaying the obstacles to aggression; viewing security as attainable only through assertive or aggressive action; overstating the advantages of striking first and the existence of 'windows of opportunity'

for preventive war; exaggerating the benefits of conquest while underestimating the challenges associated with victory; and discounting the economic and political costs of war.¹

These theoretical propositions are supported by empirical evidence. According to B. Lai and D. Slater, military regimes are more likely to initiate conflict than single-party regimes owing to differences in their foundational institutions. Possessing weaker internal institutional resources, leaders of military regimes frequently resort to foreign policy as a means of securing loyalty and consolidating their authority (Lai & Slater, 2006). Other scholars contend that military regimes are more inclined to employ force because they operate in more hostile external environments. Military rule is more likely to emerge and persist in states confronted with external territorial threats (Kim, 2018). Horowitz and Stam demonstrate that state leaders with prior military service but lacking combat experience are significantly more likely to initiate militarized disputes and wars than those who have experienced combat (Horowitz & Stam, 2012).

Military Rule: Conceptualization and Working Hypotheses

In this study, following B. Geddes, military rule is divided into two types: military dictatorship and a regime governed by a junta, that is, a small group of military officers (Geddes, Frantz & Wright, 2014). Military regimes are understood as a form of military rule in which the state is governed by a governmental military junta, namely, a temporary, unconstitutional and collegial governing body composed, as a rule, of career military officers who have come to power through a coup d'état.

Drawing on the contemporary literature (Ajisebiyawo & Onoyemeakpo, 2021; Battera, 2021; Crouch, 2024), several distinguishing characteristics of military regimes may be identified.

First, military regimes are headed by governmental military juntas, that is, informal governing bodies not provided for in the country's constitutional framework.

Second, the governmental military junta constitutes a temporary government. For example, the Military Council of Georgia, established after the overthrow of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, governed the state from 6 January to 10 March 1992. The National Council for Democracy, headed by Chairman General Gilbert Diendéré, served as the ruling cabinet of Burkina Faso's military junta from 17 to 23 September 2015. However, it is important to emphasize that political history provides cases that deviate from this general pattern. A notable exception is Burma (Myanmar), where supreme authority was concentrated in the hands of members of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) from 1988 to 1997, and subsequently the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) from 1997 to 2011. In Ethiopia, the Provisional Military Administrative Council ('the Derg') remained in power from 1974 to 1987. As a rule, however, periods of military rule are relatively short-lived, averaging three to five years, after which power is transferred to a civilian government (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011).

Third, the governmental military junta is a collegial body rather than a system of personal rule, as in a military dictatorship, which constitutes a fundamental distinction. At the apex of a military regime stands a group of individuals, reflecting a certain degree of political institutionalization. For instance, from 22 May 2014 to July 2019 Thailand was governed by the National Council for Peace

¹ Evera S.V. Militarism // Massachusetts Institute of Technology. 2001. URL: <https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/5534/militarism.pdf> (accessed: 18.12.2024).

and Order (NCPO); in Portugal the Revolutionary Council operated between 1975 and 1982; in Georgia the Military Council functioned from 6 January to 10 March 1992; and in Chad the Transitional Military Council ruled from April 2021 to October 2022. The chairman of a governmental military junta is regarded as the *de facto* head of state. The president of a country under a military regime should not be classified as a dictator if a dictator is defined as a political leader whose authority is, in practice, unconstrained by other institutions (Gandhi & Zakharov, 2016). Rather, he may be characterized as *primus inter pares*. Members of the governmental military junta, in turn, function as veto players, that is, political actors capable of blocking the chairman's decisions (Tsebelis, 2002). This institutional arrangement is reflected, *inter alia*, in the relatively short tenure of *de facto* presidents. For example, in Argentina two military leaders held office between 21 September 1955 and 1 May 1958, and three leaders (Generals Juan Carlos Onganía, Roberto Marcelo Levingston and Alejandro Lanusse) ruled between 28 June 1966 and 25 May 1973.

Fourth, military regimes are typically established following the organization and execution of a military coup. A coup d'état is generally defined as the seizure of power by a small dissident group that removes the incumbent government without mass mobilization and without the support of the armed forces as a whole (Luttwak, 2019). More specifically, a military coup involves the violent overthrow or replacement of the existing government by a small group of military officers (Hebditch & Connor, 2005). As a rule, members of a future governmental military junta carry out the coup and depose the incumbent head of state. According to the typology of interim governments developed

by Shain and Linz, a governmental military junta may be classified as a revolutionary provisional government, in which the previous regime has been overthrown and authority rests with those who carried out its removal (Shain & Linz, 1995). Nonetheless, certain exceptions exist. For example, in Poland, amid mass demonstrations organized by the Solidarity movement led by Lech Wałęsa, the First Secretary of the ruling party Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law and established the Military Council of National Salvation, which governed the country from 1981 to 1983.²

Fifth, military coups are typically carried out against a background of political instability and political and/or economic crisis. A notable example is the aforementioned National Council for Peace and Order, which emerged from the military coup of 22 May 2014 in Thailand amid the political crisis of 2013–2014. Similarly, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt was formed following the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak in the context of mass protests during the Arab Spring.

Sixth, the stated objective of those organizing a military coup and establishing a governmental military junta is the stabilization of the socio-political situation and a return to 'normality.' This intention is often reflected in the official titles of such bodies. For example, the Republic of Korea was governed from 1961 to 1963 by the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction; Portugal (from 26 April 1974 to 14 March 1975) by the National Salvation Junta; and Nicaragua (from 17 July 1979 to 10 January 1985) by the Junta of National Reconstruction.

Finally, members of governmental military juntas are typically career military officers occupying senior ranks. The Revolutionary Council in Portugal (1975–1982), for instance,

² This Day in History: 1981 — Martial Law Introduced in Poland // EurAsia Daily. December 13, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2017/12/13/etot-den-v-istorii-1981-god-v-polshe-vvedeno-voennoe-polozhenie?ysclid=mlixxc8fj401232158> (accessed: 18.12.2024).

included the President of the Republic, the Chief and Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, and the chiefs of staff of the army, navy and air force, among others. The Revolutionary Council in Algeria, headed by Colonel Houari Boumédiène, consisted of 26 members, the overwhelming majority of whom were officers of the Algerian National People's Army associated with the Oujda group.

Military regimes must be distinguished from military dictatorships. A military dictatorship is a form of military rule in which the head of state or president is a career military officer who has come to power through the overthrow of a civilian government, that is, via a military coup. In other words, accession to power occurs through an unconstitutional mechanism. The principal distinction between a military dictatorship and a military regime lies in the absence of a collegial governing body. In this respect, a military regime represents a more institutionalised form of military rule.

On the basis of the foregoing theoretical considerations, the following working hypotheses may be formulated:

H1: Military governments are more likely to initiate interstate wars than other types of autocracy.

H2: Military dictatorships are more likely to initiate interstate military conflicts and wars than military regimes governed by juntas.

Data Sources

In order to test the working hypotheses, it is first necessary to determine the list of interstate military conflicts to be analyzed.

This study relies on data from the Correlates of War (COW)³ project for two principal reasons.

First, this dataset provides a comprehensive list of wars beginning in 1816.

Second, and most importantly for the purposes of this research, the project identifies the initiator of each interstate conflict.

The dataset includes 38 interstate wars in the period 1946–2007.

The project defines an interstate war as one in which a territorial state that qualifies as a member of the interstate system engages in war with another member of that system. An interstate war is characterized by sustained combat involving regular armed forces on both sides and at least 1,000 battle-related fatalities among all system members involved (Small & Singer, 1982, p. 56).

It is essential to distinguish interstate war from a militarised interstate dispute (MID), which encompasses historical cases in which the threat, display or use of military force by one state, short of war, is explicitly directed against the government, official representatives, official forces, property or territory of another state (Jones, Bremer & Singer, 1996, p. 163). Small and Singer define the initiator of a war as the conflict party (state) whose forces carried out the first substantial attack, in terms of troop engagement, against the opponent's armed forces or territory (Small & Singer, 1982, p. 194).

Information on the political regimes of states that initiated wars and conflicts between 1946 and 2007 is drawn from three major datasets: the dataset compiled by Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland (2010); the dataset developed by Geddes, Wright and Frantz;⁴ and the Polity IV project of the Center for Systemic Peace, which covers 167 countries for the period 1946–2013.⁵ These

³ COW War Data, 1816–2007 (v4.0) // The Correlates of War Project. URL: <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/cow-war/> (accessed: 18.12.2024).

⁴ Autocratic Regime Data. URL: <https://sites.psu.edu/dictators/> (accessed: 18.12.2024).

⁵ Polity IV Individual Country Regime Trends, 1946–2013 // Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2013. URL: <https://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm> (accessed: 18.12.2024).

sources were selected because they provide systematic historical data on regime types over an extended temporal horizon.

It should be noted that the aforementioned datasets extend only to the mid-2010s. One might therefore conclude that the most recent two decades fall outside the scope of the present study. Such a conclusion would be incorrect. During this period, states under military rule did not initiate any interstate conflicts, although several interstate wars

have occurred since the early 2020s (for example, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, initiated by Azerbaijan, whose political regime is classified as authoritarian rather than military).

Research Findings

This section presents the relationship between the initiator of an interstate conflict and the type of its political regime (Table 1).

Table 1. Types of Political Regimes and the Initiation of Interstate Wars and Conflicts

Databases					
Polity IV		Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland		Geddes, Wright and Frantz	
Political regime	%	Political regime	%	Political regime	%
Democracy	29	Parliamentary	17	Democracy	32
Open Anocracy	15	Semipresidential democracy	2	Party-based regimes	29
Closed Anocracy	1	Presidential democracy	14	Personalist regimes	18
Автократия	55	Civilian dictators	36	Military regimes	16
		Military dictatorship	26	Monarchical regimes:	5
		Monarchs	5		

Source: compiled by R.S. Mukhametov based on: (Cheibub, Gandhi & Vreeland, 2010); Polity IV Individual Country Regime Trends, 1946–2013 // Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2013. URL: <https://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm> (accessed: 18.12.2024).; Autocratic Regime Data. URL: <https://sites.psu.edu/dictators/> (accessed: 18.12.2024).

As Table 1 indicates, authoritarian regimes as a whole initiate the majority of interstate conflicts. According to the Polity IV dataset, autocracies account for more than half of all cases. Under the typology of political regimes developed by Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland, authoritarian regimes initiate 67 per cent of wars (a figure obtained by aggregating the shares of civilian and military dictatorships as well as monarchies), while under the classification proposed by Geddes, Wright and Frantz the corresponding proportion amounts to 68 per cent (the combined share of personalist, military and monarchical regimes). These statistical findings are consistent with the conclusions of earlier studies (Peceny & Butler, 2004; Weeks, 2014).

With regard to military rule, Table 1 demonstrates that, in comparison with other types of authoritarian regimes, this category does not rank first in terms of initiating interstate wars, thereby refuting the first hypothesis. According to the regime typology of Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland, military dictatorship occupies second place (26 per cent), behind civilian dictatorship (36 per cent).

If one turns to the classification of Geddes, Wright and Frantz, military regimes rank third (16 per cent), trailing party-based regimes (29 per cent) and personalist regimes (18 per cent) in the initiation of wars. These findings challenge the prevailing view in the scholarly literature that military rule represents the most aggressive form of autocracy in the international arena. The present result is not unique. A similar conclusion was reached

by Andreski, who argued that under military rule coercive capacity is directed primarily against domestic opponents rather than external adversaries. In other words, the more frequently the armed

forces are employed internally, the less capable they become of waging external war (Andreski, 1980). Table 2 presents the list of interstate wars and conflicts initiated by states under military rule.

Table 2. Interstate Conflicts Initiated by States under Military Rule

The name of the war	Participants in the war	The initiator State	The political regime of the initiator State (Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland / Geddes, Wright and Frantz)
The Korean War, 1950–1953	South Korea, USA vs. North Korea, China	North Korea	Military dictatorship / Personalist regimes
The Second Kashmir War, 1965	Pakistan vs. India	Pakistan	Military dictatorship / Military regimes
The Second Lao War, 1968–1973	North Vietnam vs. Cambodia, South Vietnam, USA	North Vietnam	Military dictatorship / Party-based regimes
The War of the Communist Coalition, 1970–1971	North Vietnam vs. Cambodia, South Vietnam, USA	North Vietnam	Military dictatorship / Party-based regimes
The War of Attrition, 1969–1970	Israel vs. Egypt	Egypt	Military dictatorship / Military regimes
The Football War, 1969	El Salvador vs. Honduras	El Salvador	Military dictatorship / Military regimes
The Third Indo-Pakistani War / Bangladesh's 1971 War of Independence	India vs. Pakistan	Pakistan	Civilian dictators / Military regimes
The 1973 Yom Kippur War	Israel vs. Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria	Egypt	Military dictatorship / Personalist regimes
		Syria	Military dictatorship / Military regimes
The Ogaden War, 1977–1978	Ethiopia vs. Somalia	Somalia	Military dictatorship / Personalist regimes
The Uganda—Tanzania War, 1978–1979	Tanzania vs. Uganda	Uganda	Military dictatorship / Personalist regimes
The Falklands War, 1982	Great Britain vs. Argentina	Argentina	Military dictatorship / Military regimes

Source: (Sarkees & Wayman, 2010).

Table 2 lists eleven wars and conflicts whose initiating states were classified by various datasets as cases of military rule. In five instances (Pakistan 1965, Egypt 1969, El Salvador, Syria and Argentina), there is consensus regarding regime type. The remaining cases exhibit discrepancies. In light of the conceptualisation of military rule proposed above, it appears necessary to revise this list.

In our view, El Salvador should be excluded from the category of military regimes. The country's political history between 1931 and

1982 was characterised by alternation between military (or military-civilian) and party-based regimes. From 2 to 4 December 1931, the state was governed by a military junta (the Civic Directorate), composed of twelve officers. Between 1933 and 1945, a single-party regime operated under the National Party of the Fatherland. The Revolutionary Council of Government (a collegial military-civilian body) ruled from 14 December 1948 to 14 September 1950. From 26 October 1960

to 25 January 1961, the country was governed by a junta composed of military and civilian members, followed by a Military-Civic Directorate from 25 January 1961 to 25 January 1962. The period 1962–1979 was marked by a quasi-multiparty system dominated by a hegemonic party (the National Conciliation Party). Finally, the Revolutionary Government Junta (again a military-civilian body) governed from 15 October 1979 to 2 May 1982.

The president of El Salvador during the 1969 Football War was Fidel Sánchez Hernández (1967–1972), representing the National Conciliation Party. Importantly, he was elected in direct elections with 54.4 per cent of the vote (Nohlen, 2005, p. 276). Based on the theoretical criteria outlined above, the period of Sánchez Hernández's presidency is more appropriately classified as a party-based regime rather than a military regime or military dictatorship.

Conversely, the list of military regimes should be supplemented by Uganda, which during the Uganda–Tanzania War constituted a classic military dictatorship under President Idi Amin (January, 25 1971 — April 11, 1979). Amin came to power in the 1971 military coup that overthrew President Milton Obote. During his rule, soldiers were appointed to senior governmental positions and state corporations, and civilian ministers were required to observe military protocol.

Accordingly, the cases of military dictatorship include Pakistan in 1965 (Ayub Khan), Egypt (under Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat), Syria (Hafez al-Assad), and Uganda (Idi Amin). Among all the cases examined, only one instance involved a military regime (In the sense of a collegial junta) initiating an interstate conflict: the Falklands War of 1982, launched by Argentina during the 'presidency' of Lieutenant General Leopoldo Galtieri (December 22, 1981 — June 18, 1982).

In 1976, following a military coup that overthrew President Isabel Perón, power

in Argentina was transferred to a military junta (March 29, 1976 — December 10, 1983). During this period, six heads of state succeeded one another (from Jorge Videla to Reynaldo Bignone), all of whom were commanders-in-chief of the army. More broadly, the country was governed successively by four military juntas, each composed of the heads of the three branches of the Argentine Armed Forces.

Argentina's initiation of the Falklands War is frequently interpreted as a paradigmatic case of diversionary war (Morgan & Anderson, 1999). The essence of such a conflict is captured by the well-known phrase attributed to the Russian Imperial Minister of the Interior Vyacheslav Plehve: "We need a small victorious war to avert revolution." According to diversionary theory, unpopular leaders generate foreign policy crises in order to divert public attention from domestic discontent and consolidate their political position through the 'rally round the flag' effect. In other words, certain armed conflicts stem not from fundamental clashes of interests between states, but from adverse domestic conditions, such as economic difficulties or political unrest (Tir & Jasinski, 2008).

Scholars have identified two principal mechanisms underpinning diversionary conflict. The first is the 'rally round the flag' effect, whereby external threats and international crises increase the domestic popularity of political leaders. The second emphasizes the opportunity to demonstrate leadership competence: victory in an international conflict may restore domestic support and secure political survival (Mukhametov, 2022).

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, it may be concluded that military dictatorships initiate wars and armed interstate conflicts more frequently than military regimes governed by juntas, thereby confirming the second hypothesis. At the same time, it is necessary to consider potential alternative explanations

and their implications for the robustness of the study's conclusions. In this case, a salient factor is the presence of territorial disputes, defined as disagreements between two or more states over sovereignty concerning a specific territory (Forsberg, 1996). Research demonstrates that territory constitutes a persistent source of conflict (Vasquez & Valeriano, 2008). Argentina and the United Kingdom disputed sovereignty over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands. Disagreements over the Kashmir region (Jammu and Kashmir) led to three Indo-Pakistani wars (1947–1949, 1965 and 1971). The War of Attrition and the Yom Kippur War were initiated by Egypt and Syria, respectively, in an effort to regain territories occupied by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War. Idi Amin likewise contested the border with Tanzania, asserting that the Kagera Salient should be transferred to Uganda (although this may have served as a pretext rather than a primary cause). Empirical studies indicate that territorial disputes are more likely to escalate into war than other types of disputes, such as those concerning policy or regime issues (Vasquez & Henahan, 2001).

Conclusion

The present study sought to identify the most aggressive or belligerent type of authoritarian regime in the international arena. The prevailing view in the academic literature maintains that autocracies reliant upon military institutions are more likely to initiate interstate conflicts than other varieties of authoritarian rule. To assess this claim, the study compiled a list of armed interstate conflicts between 1946 and 2007 and systematically matched the initiating state with the type of its political regime.

The analysis yields three principal findings.

First, authoritarian regimes as a whole initiate more interstate conflicts than democracies.

Second, Hypothesis 1 ('Military governments are more likely to initiate interstate wars than other types of autocracy') is not supported. In comparison with other forms of autocracy, military rule does not occupy first place in the initiation of interstate wars. Rather, it is typically surpassed by personalist dictatorship, characterized by the concentration of power in the hands of a single leader unconstrained by effective institutional checks. These leaders are more capable of adopting adventurist foreign policy decisions while simultaneously instrumentalizing external conflicts as a means of domestic legitimation—diverting attention from internal political problems and reinforcing the image of a 'strong leader.'

Third, Hypothesis 2 ('Military dictatorships are more likely to initiate interstate military conflicts and wars than military regimes governed by juntas') receives the empirical confirmation. The findings indicate that military dictatorships indeed initiate wars and armed interstate conflicts more frequently than military regimes operating as collegial juntas. In such collegial arrangements, professional officers function as veto players who rationally assess the costs of external aggression and often prefer to direct coercive capacity towards internal control rather than external expansion.

Finally, in all cases in which military rule initiated a war or armed conflict against another state, the presence of a territorial dispute was observed. This suggests that territorial contention constitutes a necessary, though not necessarily sufficient, condition for the escalation of interstate conflict under military rule.

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