Strong Horse or Paper Tiger? Assessing the Reputational Effects of War Fighting

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Political Science in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation examines whether war has reputational consequences by analyzing the conditions under which third party actors are more or less likely to challenge combatants after the war is over. I develop a theory of reputational effects that emphasizes how information generated during wartime interacts with expectations and the characteristics of third party states to determine when war outcomes influence the decision making of potential challengers. I test this theory against competing explanations using three methodological approaches. First, I analyze the effect that the outcomes of conventional wars have on the initiation of militarized disputes using cross-national time series data from 1816-2004. Second, I use process tracing to assess whether the decision making by Japan and Germany after the Winter War and the Soviet Union, Egypt, and Cuba after Vietnam is consistent with the causal logic of my theory. Finally, I combine qualitative historiography with time series intervention analysis to assess whether the Vietnam War increased or decreased the number of challenges initiated against the United States. I find that the reputational effects of revealed effectiveness are quite broad, but are most pronounced when the fighting environment is similar. Combatants that perform poorly on the battlefield are more likely to be challenged by their potential adversaries, especially when those adversaries expect to fight them in an environment that is similar to the past war. On the other hand, the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance are much more limited. The statistical analysis found that information about the combatant’s willingness to suffer costs only influenced very weak challengers, while the case studies found that it only influenced the behavior of states that were concerned about issues that were similar to those over which the past was fought. When the issues at stake were similar, weak challengers were more emboldened than strong challengers but weak challengers with different issues at stake did not alter their behavior.
Dedication

To Ian and Noah.
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Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the support of my colleagues, family, and friends. I would like to thank the members of my committee, Peter Feaver, Chris Gelpi, Alexander Downes, Scott de Marchi, and Mark Crescenzi, for their guidance and advice throughout the entire process. I especially want to thank Alex Downes for his mentorship in the early stages of the project and Peter Feaver for close readings of draft chapters later on. I also want to thank Resa Cochran for proofreading the entire manuscript. Feedback I received at the Journey’s in World Politics Conference, the Triangle Institute for Security Studies New Faces Conference, Duke’s Graduate Student Colloquium, and the Security Peace and Conflict Workshop greatly improved the dissertation. I would especially like to thank Allan Dafoe and the participants of the Berkley Conference on Reputation. Our discussions influenced the way I think about reputation and the way I decided to test CET. Jon and Lesley Backus, John Cox, Mike and Susan Cahill, Corey Baker, Harriet Baker, and Marvie McNabb helped me maintain my sanity and my sense of balance during graduate school: thank you for making the past six and half years fun, despite all the hard work. My parents instilled a love of learning in me at an early age and I want to thank them and the rest of my family for their love and encouragement. I also want to thank my mom, Resa, and Allyssa for helping take care of Ian and Noah during the final stretch. Most of all I want to thank Dave: your love and support sustained me throughout this process. I could not have done any of this without your love, encouragement, and good humor.
Chapter 1: War Fighting and Reputation Formation

In 1965, President Johnson and his closest advisors debated whether or not to increase America’s commitment to Vietnam in order to counter the Vietcong’s advances in the South. Undersecretary of State George Ball was one of the staunchest opponents of escalation within the administration. He argued that the US would not be able to secure victory in Indochina and that the reputational consequences of defeat would be worse than the reputational consequences of backing down without a fight.

Ball: I think a long protracted war will disclose our weakness, not our strength.
President: But George, wouldn’t all these countries say that Uncle Sam was a paper tiger, wouldn’t we lose credibility breaking the word of three presidents, if we did as you have proposed? It would seem to be an irreparable blow. But I gather you don’t think so.
Ball: No, sir. The worse blow would be that the mightiest power on earth is unable to defeat a handful of guerillas (quoted in Khong 1992, 126-127).

Later, during the Nixon administration, similar reasoning was used to justify maintaining America’s commitment to Vietnam. Nixon argued that the US had to stay in Vietnam because “the cause of peace might not survive the damage that would be done to other nations’ confidence in our reliability” (quoted in Press 2005, 2). Although America had shown its willingness to fight to stop communism in Southeast Asia, if it did not secure victory there, its allies and enemies would doubt its willingness and ability to fight elsewhere. Similar arguments were made to justify remaining in Iraq. The 2005 National Strategy for Victory in Iraq stated that failure would call “into question American credibility and commitment in the region and the world. Our friends and foes alike would doubt our staying power, and this would damage our efforts to counter other security threats and to advance other economic and political interests worldwide” (National Security Council 2005, 9).
Both the Nixon and Bush administrations assumed that defeat would have reputational consequences. Losing in Iraq and Vietnam would endanger the United States’ ability to deter threats and pursue US national interests because America’s opponents would see it as unresolved. There is also an implicit assumption that if the United States could achieve victory, even if it was a costly victory, it could salvage its reputation. The goal of this dissertation is to evaluate these assumptions by assessing the reputational consequences of war fighting more generally. Specifically, this dissertation will investigate when third party actors change their beliefs about the military effectiveness or resolve of war participants based on information revealed during the course of a war and its resolution. It will also examine the conditions under which these altered beliefs make them more or less likely to challenge the combatants militarily.

Studying how third party states treat combatants after the war is over will help leaders weigh the reputational costs of backing down during a crisis with the costs of possibly exposing their military ineffectiveness. Schelling argues that a reputation for resolve is “one of the few things worth fighting over. Few parts of the world are intrinsically worth the risk of serious war by themselves . . . but defending them or running risks to protect them may preserve one’s commitments to action in other parts of the world and at later times” (Schelling 1966, 124). America did not lose 58,209 of its men to save South Vietnam but to convince the Soviets that the United States was willing to fight to stop communism in other parts of the world. Under this logic, states should never back down once a threat has been issued. The cost of appearing unresolved is greater than the risk of war, because it invites future challenges. If fighting demonstrates resolve regardless of war outcome, it may be worth fighting under trying conditions in order to deter future challenges. But if losing a war or fighting a costly war
encourages future challenges, then fighting to save “face” or to enhance the state’s reputation does not make sense.

Knowing the reputational effects of war losses will also inform debates about whether countries should stay the course when they are involved in a costly war. The quotes above suggest that leaders often remain committed to winning a war even after the costs of the war have exceeded the benefits because they are concerned about their country’s reputation. If losses encourage future challenges, then a sustained commitment or even escalation is a wise policy. However, if other states do not change their behavior after observing a defeat, then under some circumstances it might be better to cut one’s losses. Alternatively, if staying the course in the face of high costs demonstrates resolve, it might be better to remain committed even if the prospects for victory are slim.

Theses questions are particularly relevant to the United States today as it withdraws the remaining troops from Iraq and considers withdrawing from Afghanistan. Did US failure to mount a successful counterinsurgency campaign in the first three years of its involvement in Iraq damage its reputation for military effectiveness? Has the success of the surge mitigated any degradation in its reputation that it suffered in the early years of the conflict? If America’s withdrawal ultimately precipitates a return to violence in Iraq, will other nations and non-state actors be more willing to challenge the United States because it was unable to achieve its political goal, or will the effectiveness it demonstrated on the battlefield forestall those challenges? Are the reputational benefits of the surge contingent upon America’s ability to prosecute a successful counterinsurgency campaign outside the Iraqi theater in Afghanistan? Has staying the course in both conflicts, despite high costs, improved the United States’
reputation for resolve, or has the decline in public support for both conflicts damaged that reputation? Understanding the reputational consequences of war outcomes will help answer these very pertinent questions.

In addition, this dissertation will contribute to the international relations literature on reputation. Most of the literature focuses on whether having a reputation for resolve increases a state’s coercive leverage (Huth and Russet 1984; Huth 1988; Mercer 1996; Press 2005; Crescenzi 2007; Sechser 2007; Wolford 2007). These studies are devoted to understanding whether threats issued by states that have backed down in the past are discounted, making potential adversaries more willing to challenge states that have a reputation for lacking resolve. Threats are credible when the adversary believes that their opponent has the will to carry out the threat and the ability to do so. The literature on resolve links a state’s past actions to the first requirement.

A new type of reputation is needed to connect prior behavior to adversary beliefs about the second requirement: a state’s military capability. I call this a state’s reputation for effectiveness. The relevant information is gleaned, not from prior bargaining behavior, but from the outcomes of wars that the state has previously fought. Although this type of reputation has received much less scholarly attention, it is necessary to understanding how a state’s prior behavior influences the credibility of its threats. Having a reputation for resolve may increase the probability that a deterrent or compellent threat will succeed, but if a state does not have a reputation for being able to fight effectively, even believable threats may be ignored.

For this second type of reputation, the relevant information is generated during wars, not during the crisis bargaining that precedes wars. Thus, we must evaluate whether the outcomes of past wars influence the efficacy of military threats. Focusing on
this new independent variable will push our understanding of reputation and coercion in a number of ways. Most obviously, it will enable us to evaluate whether having a reputation for military effectiveness matters. Does abysmal performance on the battlefield invite challenges by potential adversaries?

Analyzing the effect of war outcomes on crisis bargaining will also solve two problems that complicate current studies of resolve. In many studies, resolve is treated as a dichotomous variable. Countries are either a highly resolved type or a weakly resolved type. It is more useful to think about resolve as a continuous variable that measures a state’s willingness to suffer costs in pursuit of its political aims. Some states, like the United States in Somalia, might be cost averse—unwilling to tolerate any loss of life to accomplish their goals. Others, like Japan during WWII, might be cost acceptant—willing to endure huge losses to achieve their objectives. Most states in most situations fall somewhere in the middle of this continuum: they are willing to suffer some costs but their tolerance is not unlimited. Studies acknowledge that, theoretically, resolve is a continuous variable, but they are forced to treat it as a dichotomous variable in their empirical analysis because they focus on crisis behavior. States either back down when they are threatened or they stand firm. While it is possible to infer that standing firm signals a willingness to suffer at least some costs and backing down signals reluctance to even risk suffering costs, these actions provide no information about the location of each state’s cost tolerance threshold. The highly resolved state might be standing its ground because it believes that its adversary can only inflict limited costs. This “resolved” state might be cost sensitive but have a low estimate of the costs involved. Similarly the “weak” state might be willing to tolerate some costs to achieve its aims, but it believes that the damage its adversary would inflict would be very high. Looking at war
outcomes, rather than crisis behavior, partially solves this problem. States engaged in war actually suffer costs in pursuit of their war aims. The state’s decision to continue fighting as costs accumulate generates information about its cost threshold. Leaders who lose a war after suffering low losses reveal a high sensitivity to costs while leaders who fight on, despite rising costs, demonstrate that they are more willing to suffer in order to achieve their preferred outcome. Analyzing the effect of past war outcomes on crisis bargaining provides a number of continuous variables—the duration of the war, the casualties suffered, the amount of money spent—that more closely capture the way resolve can vary theoretically.

Using crisis behavior to analyze resolve is also complicated by the fact that bluffing is prevalent in crisis situations (Guisinger and Smith 2002; Sartori 2002). If a country backs down when threatened, inferring that it has weak resolve is probably valid. Alternatively, if a country stands firm when threatened and war ensues because the adversary carries out its threat, inferring that the country has high resolve is probably valid. The problem arises when a country stands firm in the face of a threat and its adversary backs down. It is unclear whether the country was highly resolved or just bluffing. Should other states update their beliefs about that country’s resolve? Looking at war outcomes rather than crisis behavior circumvents this problem because it is very difficult to bluff during a war. A state can either win battles or it cannot; it either suffers casualties or it does not. The state cannot pretend to be effective militarily when it does not have the ability to win battles, and because the state is actually suffering costs in pursuit of its aims, the resolve it demonstrates by fighting cannot be a bluff.

Understanding the reputational effects of war outcomes will also enhance our understanding of the nature of power in international relations. In the realist tradition,
power is normally defined in terms of the quantity of a state’s material resources, both military and civilian. Power is measured by the number of tanks, planes, and soldiers a country has at its disposal, as well as the size of its economy, its natural resource endowment, and its population. Charles Glaser (1994-1995) critiques this operationalization of power, arguing that “this formulation is problematic . . . [because] states should assess their military requirements in terms of their ability to perform necessary military missions”(53). Although the quantity of material resources is an important component of power, a country’s ability to prosecute successful military campaigns is a function of numerous other factors including technology, strategy, civil-military relations, and regime type (Biddle and Zirkle 1996; Reiter and Stam 2002; Biddle 2004; Castillo 2006). By studying how states evaluate the wartime performance of potential rivals, this dissertation will demonstrate how these more subtle elements of power influence the relations between states.

Thus, using war outcomes as an independent variable to assess whether reputation matters in military crises has the potential to improve our understanding of reputation and power in international relations and to inform policy debates about whether to get involved in, or stay committed to, wars for reputational reasons. Below I develop a theory of reputational effects that emphasizes how specific information interacts with the characteristics of third party states to determine when war outcomes prompt behavioral change in potential challengers. I then outline the competing explanations found in the current literature on reputation, deterrence, and compellence. Finally, I describe the methods I will employ to test my theory against existing theories.
Contextual Expectations Theory

Consider the situation in which two states fight a war and a third state observes the outcome of that war and decides whether to challenge either of the combatants. The key question of this dissertation is whether the information generated during the war about the military effectiveness and resolve of the combatants influences the third state’s decision to challenge them after the war is over. My theory, which I refer to as Contextual Expectations Theory (CET), posits that information that contradicts prior beliefs and is relevant to third parties will influence behavior. The type of information generated during the war interacts with the physical fighting environment, the balance of power, and the issues at stake to determine the relevance of that information.

Expectations are important because information that reinforces previously held beliefs will not prompt challengers to change their beliefs and thus will not lead to behavioral change. Context is important because the relevance of new information depends on the relationship between the combatant and its potential challenger.

CET conceives of reputational effects as the result of a four stage process that links war outcomes to third party decisions. Figure 1 models the basic process:

**Figure 1.1: Basic Process of Reputation Formation**

State A and B fight a war. This generates information about States A and B. Under certain conditions, third party states use this information to update their beliefs about
State A and State B. In some situations these new beliefs prompt the third party state to alter its behavior.

Contextual Expectations Theory links war outcomes to challenger behavior by answering the following questions about each step in the process. First, what information is generated during the course of a war and its resolution? Second, when will this information change the beliefs of third parties? Finally, when will changed beliefs prompt behavioral changes? The remainder of this section is devoted to answering each of these questions.

**War Outcomes and Information**

Wars generate information about both the military effectiveness and the resolve of the combatants. Specifically, fighting reveals information about the skill at which the respective militaries use their material capabilities to achieve favorable battle outcomes and the willingness of the two nations to suffer costs in pursuit of their war aims. All of these things contribute to the ultimate outcome of the war, and all of these things are important dimensions of military power that are not easily observable outside of war.

In the statistical literature on conflict, material capability is usually measured by looking at the number of soldiers a country has, its military spending, and occasionally the economic resources it can bring to bear during wartime. These proxies only capture one dimension of military power: the quantity of material resources a country has at its disposal. This is obviously an important dimension. The number of soldiers, tanks, planes, guns, and bombs a country has can provide it with a military advantage (Mearshimer 2001; Desch 2002). This dimension of military power also has the added benefit of being relatively easy to observe during peacetime.
Although fighting a war might provide some additional information on the quantity of a state’s material power, this is less important than the information it can provide on how effectively a state uses its material capabilities—a dimension of military power that is not observable except during wars. I refer to this type of information as skill. At the most basic level, skill refers to the ability of the military to use its weapons. Can it effectively fly its planes, shoot its missiles, and fire its guns? Skill also refers to the way in which a state fights and the effectiveness of its tactics and operational concepts.

In conventional wars, fighting can reveal the ability of both sides to implement modern system tactics and operations (Biddle 2004). Modern system tactics include cover, concealment, dispersion, small unit independent maneuver, and combined arms. These tactics make it possible for combatants to avoid the firepower that an enemy can bring to bear on massed concentrations of troops. At the operational level, the modern system enables armies to take advantage of depth, reserves, and differential troop concentration. This makes it possible for attackers to capitalize on the varying levels of local forces to break through enemy lines while buying time for defenders to respond to these types of attacks. Biddle argues that an army employing the modern system will almost always defeat a non-modern opponent. If true, knowing whether a country can implement the modern system would be integral to assessing its military effectiveness.

The second type of information that is revealed during a war is information on the willingness of a country to suffer costs in pursuit of its goals. I refer to this cost sensitivity as will. Regardless of the outcome, being involved in a war demonstrates that the leaders of a nation are willing to at least risk suffering costs to achieve their goals. The progression of the war and its ultimate outcome reveal information about their willingness to suffer actual costs. Leaders who lose a war after suffering low casualties
reveal a high sensitivity to costs while leaders who fight on despite rising costs (whether they ultimately win or lose) demonstrate that they are willing to suffer in order to achieve their preferred outcome. Cost sensitivity may be a function of an individual leader’s cost tolerance, the broader society’s willingness to bear the costs, or some combination of both. Gil Merom (2003) argues that democracies lose small wars because their society is unwilling to stomach the costs of protracted conflict or to acquiesce to escalating levels of violence. Although leaders with high cost tolerances might be able to ignore society in the short term, in the long term democratic leaders take into account society’s preferences and are thus forced to end the war without securing victory. Whether cost tolerance is a function of society, state leaders, or both, it plays an important role in determining war outcomes. Furthermore, there is some evidence that other countries pay attention to what war reveals about a state’s cost tolerance. Sechser (2007) argues that although Finland lost the Winter War, its willingness to continue fighting despite high costs and dim prospects for victory demonstrated the strength of its political will. Press (2005) argues that the lesson of Somalia and Beirut was that the US was cost sensitive. Americans were not militarily defeated in these situations; they lost because they could not stomach the casualties. A range of our potential adversaries—from Saddam Hussein to Osama Bin Laden—noted this sensitivity to costs and inferred that the US lacked political will.

In some cases, distinguishing between effectiveness and cost tolerance is difficult because both factors interact to determine war outcomes. For example, a country that is quickly defeated because its military is ineffective may not be given the opportunity to demonstrate its willingness to suffer costs. In the 2003 Iraq War, Saddam Hussein’s military fought for less than a month and suffered 9,200 casualties before the US toppled
the Ba’ath regime. It is likely Hussein would have been willing to suffer more casualties and continue fighting the Americans, but he did not have the capabilities to do so. On the other hand, countries that are highly cost sensitive may not be able to adopt effective strategies if those strategies involve exposing their troops to increased dangers. The new population security strategy the Bush administration adopted in Iraq in 2007 would probably not have worked without the concomitant surge in US forces. Had America’s sensitivity to costs prevented the additional commitment of troops, its military effectiveness would have been degraded. These cases demonstrate that skill and will are often intimately linked.

However, for most wars it is possible to make valid inferences about at least one of these factors, and in many cases it is possible to make inferences about both. In the example above, the 2003 Iraq War generated information about the Iraqi military’s ineffectiveness even though that ineffectiveness made it impossible to make inferences about Iraqi will. In Operation Restore Hope, the US demonstrated a low cost tolerance by withdrawing from Somalia after suffering only 29 combat deaths even though that withdrawal limited the information that was generated about America’s military effectiveness. Had the US withdrawn from Iraq in 2006 due to concerns over rising casualties, it would have demonstrated that it had a low cost tolerance. The US performance up to that point would have also generated information about its ineffectiveness at counterinsurgency operations, even if the ability of the American military to improve its effectiveness was hamstrung by American sensitivity to cost. Thus, the distinction between skill and will is not merely a theoretical construct. Even in situations where they are related, it is possible to make separate inferences about the military effectiveness and cost tolerance of countries engaged in war.
Thus, the process of fighting and the ultimate outcome of war provide information on how skillfully a state employs its military resources, which has bearing on how militarily effective that state is. It also provides information on the willingness of a nation to stomach the costs of war, which has bearing on the resolve of that state.

**Changing Perceptions: Information and Prior Expectations**

When will third party states actually use information about skill and will to update their beliefs about the combatants’ effectiveness and resolve? Contextual Expectations Theory claims that information will only prompt third party states to change their beliefs if that information is unexpected. If a weak country loses to a powerful country or suffers high costs during the war, this generates no new information. Other South American countries probably did not change their beliefs about Panama’s military effectiveness after it was defeated by the United States because no one expected Panama to win. On the other hand, if a powerful country loses a war to much weaker foe or suffers higher costs than expected, other states might downgrade their perceptions of that country’s ability to fight effectively.

The logic is similar to the argument made by Michael Tomz (2007) in the context of international finance. He claims that reputations only form when states act contrary to their perceived type. If a country always pays back its loans, continuing to make timely payments does not generate new information and creditors will not change the way they treat that state. They will only alter their behavior and the terms of their loans if the country defaults. Alternatively, if a country is usually delinquent on its payments, defaulting on its loans will not hurt the country’s reputation but timely repayment will improve it (Tomz 2007). The same is probably true of perceived military effectiveness. Information generated during the course of a war will only lead to changed perceptions.
if that information runs contrary to prior expectations. Because changed perceptions are a prerequisite for behavioral change, only unexpected information will have behavioral implications. This leads to our first set of hypotheses:

**H1A:** If the information generated over the course of a war reveals that a combatant is more (less) skilled at fighting or is more (less) willing to suffer costs than expected, prospective challengers will consider the combatant more (less) militarily effective or resolved.

**H1B:** Any information generated over the course of the war that is consistent with the challenger’s prior expectations will not lead them to update their assessment of the combatant’s resolve or military effectiveness.

**Behavioral Change: Context Matters**

I have argued that war generates information about the combatants’ skill and willingness to suffer costs. When this information is unexpected, it can lead to changes in third party perceptions of the combatants’ resolve and military effectiveness. Changes in perception have the potential to lead to changes in behavior, but they do not always do so. This section addresses the conditions under which belief change prompts behavioral change. In particular, I will explore when new information makes third parties more or less likely to challenge the combatants. A challenge can take many forms. It can involve initiating a crisis, making demands, ignoring deterrent threats, resisting compellent threats, adopting bullying or bellicose bargaining strategies, or implementing threatening policies.

Contextual Expectations Theory posits that behavioral change is more likely if the information is relevant to the particular challenger. Relevance is a function of the type of information generated, the environment the challenger expects to fight in if the combatant does not make concessions, the issues at stake, and the power of the combatant relative to the challenger.
The environment in which the challenger expects to fight determines whether new beliefs about the combatant’s skills will lead to behavioral change. The skills required to successfully prosecute a military campaign differ depending on a number of environmental factors including terrain, climate, and demography. The tactics that enable an army to take and hold densely covered forest will be different than those required to take and hold mountainous terrain, while the defense of open plains or cultivated land will differ from the defense of urban areas. The ease of movement and supply, the ability of troops to take cover, the relative utility of direct and indirect fire weapons, the optimal size of military units, and the ratio of artillery, infantry, and armor are heavily influenced by the geographic features of the battle space (Clausewitz 1976, 348-349, 417-452, 537-540, 543; Winters et al 1998; Collins 1998; Doyle and Bennet 2002; Stephenson 2003). Militaries that fight well in one environment “normally function less well elsewhere until they complete time-consuming and costly transitions. They must become familiar with the new topography, climatic conditions, and social systems, modify their techniques, and tailor weapons, equipment, clothing, and supply to suit the situation” (Collins 1998, 6). Potential challengers are aware that the military effectiveness of the combatants is partially determined by these environmental conditions. Thus, they should take into account environmental similarities and differences when considering whether to use new information about the combatant’s skill when deciding whether to make challenge. CET expects that belligerents who reveal a low level of skill during war are more likely to be challenged by potential adversaries who would fight them in an environment similar to the one in which they just fought. Conversely, belligerents who reveal a high level of skill are less likely to be challenged by these same adversaries.
HS: Unexpected information about skill should be more likely to lead to behavioral change if the prospective fighting environment is similar to the environment in which a potential war would be fought.

While environmental factors influence the relevance of information about skill, I argue that political factors influence the relevance of information about will. Whether potential challengers use new information about the combatants’ cost tolerance depends on the issues involved. Issue contingency takes into account the fact that resolve is in part issue specific. A given country may be willing to suffer an incredible amount of costs in the pursuit of some goals and less willing to suffer costs in the pursuit of others. If the issue in dispute between the potential challenger and the combatant is similar to the issue over which the war was fought, updated beliefs about the combatant’s will to fight will prompt behavioral change.

The relative power of the challenger compared to the combatant should also influence whether new information about the political and military will of the combatant effects challenger behavior. Weak challengers rarely expect to defeat more powerful adversaries militarily. Rather, they opt for strategies that inflict costs on their more powerful foes in the hope that they can outlast them in a coercive contest. Their only hope of victory is their ability to inflict more costs on the opponent than it can tolerate. Thus, the will of the combatant becomes decisive. As the challenger becomes stronger relative to the combatant, will becomes less decisive because the challenger can hope to gain a decisive victory on the battlefield. Thus, information about the combatant’s cost sensitivity becomes less relevant.

HW1: Unexpected information about will is more likely to lead to behavioral change if the issues in dispute are similar to the issues over which the war was fought.

HW2: Unexpected information about will is more likely to lead to behavioral change as the challenger becomes weaker relative to the combatant.
Figure 1.2 summarizes the main arguments made by Contextual Expectations Theory about the process by which war fighting can influence the behavior of third party states that might consider challenging the combatants in the future.

Figure 1.2: Contextual Expectations Theory

**Competing Hypotheses**

Although no one has looked specifically at the question of whether war outcomes influence the decision of third party states to challenge the combatants, the literature on cognitive bias, deterrence and compellence, and reputation suggest a number of alternative hypotheses.

The political psychology literature on cognitive and motivated biases suggests that new information is unlikely to change the preexisting beliefs of third parties, and thus is unlikely to lead to behavioral change. In his discussion of the cognitive bias literature, Jervis explains that “international experiences do not affect statesmen’s perceptions. Instead analogies are seized upon only to bolster pre-existing beliefs and preferences” (Jervis 1976, 217). People see what they expect to see and thus when they are faced with new information that seems to contradict their earlier beliefs they engage in a variety of defensive measures that make it unnecessary for them to change their beliefs. They ignore information, they discredit its source, and they seek out new information to provide additional support for their pre-existing beliefs. They also divide
their belief system into small components so that when they accept new information they only have to update peripheral beliefs. The take away from this literature is that when faced with new information “people change as little of their attitude structure as possible” (Jervis 1976, 291).

The literature on learning in international relations also suggests that the beliefs of third parties are unlikely to change because vicarious learning rarely occurs (Levy 1994). Dan Reiter’s analysis of learning in the context of alliances leads him to the conclusion that “while states draw heavily on their own individual experiences, they pay little attention to those of other states” (Reiter 1996, 204). Yuen Foong Kong (1992) finds that the decision makers in the United States paid little attention to the lessons that could be drawn from the French experience in Vietnam despite the fact that the French Indochina War yielded valuable information about the resources, tactics, and resolve of the North Vietnamese. He claims that few policy makers had knowledge of or took interest in the French experience. One exception was George Ball who lamented, “It was useless for me to point out the meaning of the French experience; they thought that experience without relevance” (quoted in Khong 1992, 170). Thus the political psychology and learning literature suggest our first alternative hypothesis.

H2: The information generated over the course of the war about the combatants will have no impact on prospective challengers’ assessment of either combatants’ military capability or resolve. Thus, it will not influence the likelihood of future challenges.

An alternative view is offered by the rationalist literature on deterrence and compellence. This literature implies that prospective challengers will use information revealed during the course of a war to evaluate the credibility of implicit and explicit threats. When deciding whether to ignore an adversary’s threats, the challenger considers whether their adversary is willing to carry out the threat. One of the factors
challengers use in their analysis is their adversary’s reputation. Schelling (1966) argues that all commitments are interdependent and that carrying through on one threat enhances the credibility of future threats. Huth (1988) claims, “The potential attacker, however, may also draw on the past behavior of the defender in international confrontations to help determine the defender’s willingness to risk armed conflict or to concede under coercive pressure” (431). These studies primarily focus on the past behavior of defenders in crisis bargaining. However, the same logic should apply to information revealed in the defenders’ past wars.

Todd Sechser (2007) makes this argument explicitly. He claims that a state’s involvement in past wars will increase the prospective challenger’s assessment of that state’s resolve. By fighting, a state demonstrates its “general value for the costs of war—namely, its tolerance for casualties, wartime expenditures, and perhaps the destruction of civilian assets . . . This information [is] applicable to future crises in which military options are considered, even if those crises center around different issues” (Sechser 2007, 39). Sechser maintains that this is the reason that weak states often fight much stronger opponents. Their hope is that by fighting they will demonstrate their resolve and thus deter future incursions. While Sechser focuses on dyadic relationships, Crescenzi (2007) argues that states can learn about the resolve of their opponents by observing their interactions with others. He explains that extra-dyadic events are “a valuable source of information about intentions, reputation, and credibility of one’s dyadic counterpart. States use other states as proxies to get a sense of what their dyadic partner would do in situations such as a crisis” (Crescenzi 2007, 386). Being willing to fight in one situation generates information about a state’s willingness to fight more generally.
Although the deterrence and compellence literature focuses on how challengers use the past behavior of their opponents to update their beliefs about the resolve of those opponents, the logic should also apply to information about military effectiveness. The exclusive focus on resolve is probably due to the fact that the literature has focused only on past crisis bargaining behavior, which does not involve actual fighting and thus cannot reveal information about military effectiveness. However, the literature suggests that the military capabilities of the defending state are associated with general deterrence success (Huth and Russet 1984; Huth 1988; Fearon 1994). As the defending state gets more powerful, the costs of war for the challenger increase. If war occurs, the defender is better able to punish the challenger and to deny the challenger the ability to achieve its aims on the battlefield. In statistical tests, military capability is normally proxied by the quantity of military resources a state possesses, but there is nothing in the literature that suggests that this is the only relevant information. Since these models assume that challengers look at the past actions of the defender to evaluate resolve, it seems logical that they would also use the defender’s past wartime experiences to evaluate its ability to implement punishment and denial strategies effectively. This leads to a second competing hypothesis:

**H3:** If the information generated over the course reveals that a combatant is (un)skilled at fighting or is (not) willing to suffer costs, prospective challengers will consider the combatant (less) militarily effective or resolved, which will make them (more) less likely to issue a challenge.

A third argument is offered by Daryl Press’s (2005) Current Calculus Theory, which suggests that other nations will use wartime information to update their beliefs about a country’s military capability but that they will not use the past behavior of a county to inform their beliefs about that country’s resolve. He argues that keeping commitments should not be conflated with fighting effectively. It is possible for states to
get a reputation for effectiveness but not for resolve (Press 2005, 157). Past actions do not provide information on resolve because every issue is different and in high stakes situations decision makers forgo heuristic shortcuts that use past behavior to gauge resolve in favor of evaluating the interests at stake in the current situation. This is consistent with Ann Sartori’s (2002) argument about the importance of honesty in diplomatic transactions: “The crucial information—how much the state values the disputed issue—varies from one dispute to the next. Whether or not a state has the will to fight depends on what the issues are and so must be communicated anew through the use of diplomacy” (136). Since a state’s willingness to fight is issue contingent, being willing to fight or suffer costs over issue X has no bearing on a state’s willingness to fight or suffer costs over issue Y. Because military skill has direct bearing on battlefield effectives while information about a combatant’s willingness to suffer costs has bearing on that state’s resolve, Current Calculus Theory suggests that challengers should only update their beliefs about combatants when faced with information about skill. No changes are expected if the war reveals information about the combatants’ will.

**H4A:** If the information generated over the course reveals that a state is (un)skilled at fighting, prospective challengers will consider the combatant more (less) militarily effective, and will be less (more) willing to issue a challenge.

**H4B:** Information regarding a state’s willingness to suffer costs will have no bearing on the beliefs about the combatant’s resolve and thus will have no effect on the likelihood of a challenge.

Mercer (1996) makes a different conditional argument. He draws on the motivated bias and in-group/out-group literature to argue that whether new information will be used to update a challenger’s beliefs depends on whether that information is viewed favorably or unfavorably. He argues that outcomes only lead to belief change if the third party state attributes that outcome to the dispositional characteristics of the combatants rather than to situational factors. The type of
attribution made depends on one’s desires and whether the combatants are part of the third party state’s in-group. People use dispositional attributions to interpret undesirable out-group behavior and situational attributions to interpret desirable out-group behavior. Because potential adversaries are in the out-group, information about weak resolve and ineffectiveness is desirable and the opposite is undesirable. Thus, when the information generated by a war suggests that a potential foe is an effective or resolved fighter, this information is used to update their beliefs. Conversely, information that reflects poorly on the competency or resolve of a potential foe will be attributed to the situation and beliefs will not change. Mercer explains, “We are likely to think that our adversary’s retreats reflect not an irresolute character, but an untenable situation.” Conversely, an adversary’s success will reflect its power, not the favorable situation in which it was fighting (Mercer 1996, 45). His attributional theory of reputation formation suggests our final competing hypothesis:

**H5A:** If the information generated over the course of the war reveals that a combatant is skilled at fighting, or is willing to suffer costs, prospective challengers will consider the combatant more militarily effective or resolved and will be less likely to issue a challenge.

**H5B:** Information that reveals a lack of skill at fighting or an unwillingness to suffer costs will have no impact on the prospective challenger’s assessment of the combatant’s military capability or resolve because it will be attributed to situational factors.

Table 1.1 summarizes the hypotheses derived from Contextual Expectations Theory and the competing hypotheses derived from the extant literature.
Table 1.1: Competing Hypotheses on Whether War Outcomes Will Influence Challenger Behavior by Type of Information Revealed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Information</th>
<th>Contextual Expectations Theory</th>
<th>Bias and Learning</th>
<th>Rationalist</th>
<th>Current Calculus</th>
<th>Attributional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>IF: Contrary to Prior Expectations (H1) Environment is Similar (HS)</td>
<td>No (H2)</td>
<td>Yes (H3)</td>
<td>Yes (H4A)</td>
<td>High Skill (HA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>IF: Contrary to Prior Expectations (H1) Issues are Similar (HW1) Challengers are Weaker (HW2)</td>
<td>No (H2)</td>
<td>Yes (H3)</td>
<td>No (H4B)</td>
<td>High Will (H5A)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Methodology**

I test the above hypotheses using three different methodological approaches. First, I analyze the effect that the outcomes of interstate wars have on the initiation of militarized disputes by state actors using cross-national time series data from 1816-2004. Second, I use process tracing to assess whether the Soviet Union’s performance in the Winter War influenced the decision making of Japan and Germany during World War II, and whether the US performance in Vietnam influenced the behavior of the Soviet Union, Egypt, and Cuba during the Angola Crisis and October War. For the Vietnam case, I also combine qualitative historiography with time series methods to assess...
whether the total number of challenges initiated against the United States rose after the Vietnam War.

**Cross-National Time Series Analysis**

In my first two empirical chapters I test CET and competing hypotheses using cross-national time series data on war outcomes and militarized dispute (MID) initiation from 1816-2004 to determine whether information generated during interstate wars about the combatants’ military effectiveness and cost tolerance influences the probability that the combatants will be targeted in a MID. I use the combatants’ loss exchange ratio (LER) as a proxy for their skill and the number of casualties suffered as a proxy for revealed cost tolerance. To account for expectations, I use the standard models of interstate war outcomes to predict LER and casualty numbers for each combatant. I then create two new variables which measure the difference between the expected values and the actual values for each independent variable.

I test the conditional predictions of CET by interacting LER and casualty numbers with variables that measure environmental similarity, issue similarity proxied by region, and power asymmetry. A high LER, which reflects a high level of skill, should decrease the likelihood of being targeted in a MID in states where the environment is similar. The effect of skill should be constant across issue areas and power asymmetries. On the other hand, high casualties, which reflect a high cost tolerance, should decrease the likelihood that the combatant is targeted by weak actors and by actors in the region where the past war was fought. Environmental similarity, however, should not change this negative relationship.
Case Selection

The second half of the dissertation consists of case studies of the Soviet Union’s performance in the Winter War and the United States’ performance in Vietnam. These cases were chosen to maximize variation on the information generated during each war and on the characteristics of potential challengers observing the combatants.

The Winter War was chosen because Russia revealed an unexpectedly low level of skill, despite the fact that it ultimately won the war. To evaluate the conditional hypotheses with respect to skill, a combatant was needed who faced potential challengers contemplating fighting in different types of environments. Russia operates in two geopolitical environments—Europe and Asia. The geography and demography of these two regions within Russia differ considerably. Broad plains and gently rolling hills characterize European Russia. The terrain of Eastern Russia is much more rugged with the Ural and Caucasus Mountains dominating the landscape. Although dense forests cover both regions, Eastern Russia also has coastal lowlands and marshes near its Pacific shoreline. The existence of the Pacific Ocean on its eastern border also differentiates Eastern Russia from Western Russia. Finally, European Russia is much more densely populated and urbanized than the eastern part of the country. Russia had ongoing disputes with countries in both regions and the potential challengers in these regions had to plan for very different types of war. This makes it possible to test how environmental differences influenced the ways in which challengers used information about Russia’s military effectiveness.

Vietnam was chosen as a case where the US unexpectedly revealed a lack of will. According to CET, the contextual variables that make will relevant are power asymmetry and issue similarity. To assess these conditional hypotheses, a combatant
was needed that had many potential challengers at differing levels of power concerned with many different types of issues. As a superpower, the US met this requirement. Potential challengers included great powers, like the Soviet Union, and weak powers, like Cuba. In addition, the US had geopolitical disputes with countries all over the globe, ranging from stopping the spread of communism to ensuring the free flow of oil.

**Qualitative Process Tracing**

I begin each case study by using the war’s historiography to characterize the information revealed about each combatant’s skill at fighting and its willingness to suffer costs. This is followed by in-depth process tracing of the decision making of two to three of the combatant’s potential adversaries to assess whether those actors used information generated during each war when deciding whether to initiate a challenge. I identify potential challengers that were not major participants in the wars, but who had ongoing disputes with the relevant combatants. I then select actors whose characteristics varied across the contextual variables identified by CET. In the chapters on the Winter War, I examine whether Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan used information generated during that war when deciding whether to challenge Russia during World War II. These two countries operated in two different theaters and provide a way of testing how the physical environment in which both planned to operate influenced the way they used information about Russia’s military effectiveness. In the chapters on Vietnam, I investigate how the Soviet Union and Cuba used information from the Vietnam War in their decision making about whether to intervene in Angola, and how the Soviet Union and Egypt used the Vietnam War in their decision making about what actions to take in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. These two cases maximize variation on the two contextual
variables of interest. The issues at stake vary for the United States across the two conflicts—Angola concerned the spread of communism in Africa while the Arab-Israeli War concerned US influence in a region whose natural resources made it geopolitically important. Comparing the Soviet Union’s response to Cuba’s and Egypt’s allows me to test whether the balance of power mattered.

Relying primarily on secondary sources, I reconstruct the decision making of these actors in the aftermath of each war to assess whether they considered challenging the combatants, and if so whether they considered the wartime performance of the combatants in making that decision. How did the actors interpret the information generated during the war? Did that information run contrary to their expectations or reinforce existing beliefs? Do the actors focus on information generated about will and skill rather than the overall outcome of the war? Do they take context into account when using this information? When discussing the cost tolerance of the combatant do the actors consider how similar their dispute is to the dispute over which the war was fought? When discussing information about skill do they consider the environment in which they intend to fight? Using process tracing to answer these questions enables me to assess whether the postwar decision making of each actor is consistent with the causal logic of CET.

**Intervention Analysis**

The Vietnam case study suggested that some of the indicators used in the cross-national time series analysis of the reputational consequences of will were lacking. To compensate for the weaknesses of these indicators, I conduct an additional quantitative test to assess the reputational effects of the Vietnam War across a large range of actors. Using CET and the historiography of the Vietnam War, I predict which types of actors
are most likely to change their behavior in light of the information revealed during the 
war. I then construct different sets of time series which measure the annual number of 
military challenges initiated against the United States, varying the location of the 
challenge, the relative power of third party state actors, and the issues involved. I then 
employ intervention analysis using these different time series to assess whether the 
annual number of military challenges initiated against the United States changed after 
the Vietnam War. If CET is correct, the Vietnam War should increase the number of 
challenges initiated against the US by weak states and communist countries.¹

Although each of these methods has its weaknesses, together they provide a 
rigorous test of Contextual Expectations Theory. The large N statistical analysis 
establishes whether the predictions of CET hold for multiple actors and multiple wars 
across a long period of time, while systematically controlling for confounding factors. 
The case studies provide me with detailed information on the key independent and 
contextual variables identified as important by CET. Process tracing allows me to assess 
whether the causal mechanisms specified by CET are operative. Finally, the intervention 
analysis enables me to leverage the precision of the case studies in identifying what 
information was generated during the war to test whether the war influenced the 
behavior of many different types of potential challengers.

Plan of the Dissertation

This dissertation proceeds as follows. In chapters 2 and 3 I describe the statistical tests 
that I employ to test the effect that war outcomes have on the likelihood that combatants

¹ I do not conduct a similar analysis of the Winter War for two reasons. First, its temporal proximity to 
World War II makes it impossible to parse out the different effects of these two wars. Second, the case 
studies of the Winter War suggested that the indicators used in the large N statistical analysis of skill were 
good approximations of the concepts being tested, making additional statistical tests unnecessary.
will be targeted by state actors in militarized disputes. Before beginning the case studies, I include a short introduction on the role that case studies play in multi-method inquiry and the different types of qualitative evidence that can be used to evaluate hypotheses. I then begin the case studies in chapter 4 with a detailed discussion of Russia’s performance during the Winter War. This is followed by chapter 5, which investigates the reputational consequences of the Winter War by examining Japanese and German decision making in World War II. In chapter 6, I evaluate the United States’ performance during the Vietnam War. This is followed by an analysis of the reputational consequences of America’s defeat. Chapter 7 looks at Soviet and Cuban decision making in Angola, while chapter 8 deals with Soviet and Egyptian decision making in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. I summarize my findings in chapter 9 and discuss the theoretical and policy implications of these findings, with specific emphasis on the likely reputational consequences of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.
Part 1: Statistical Tests of Contextual Expectations Theory
Chapter 2: The Reputational Consequences of Skill, Military Effectiveness and Militarized Dispute Initiation

Contextual Expectations Theory posits that countries that fight more effectively than expected will be less likely to be challenged by third party states. It further specifies that the reputational effects of skill are likely to be most pronounced if the environment in which a potential challenger expects to fight is similar to the environment in which the previous war was fought. This chapter evaluates these hypotheses using data on militarized dispute initiation and war outcomes from 1816-2004. While relying on large-N statistical tests forces me to use proxies for the key variables identified by CET, it also enables me to test whether the predictions of CET hold for many countries over a large period of time while systematically controlling for other factors that might influence challenger behavior.

States are continually assessing the challenges and opportunities confronting them in the international system, especially those posed by other states. If there is a war in the system, other states that are politically linked to the combatants watch the conflict and draw inferences. If a state performs skillfully, perhaps defeating its foe more rapidly or at lower cost than expected, its adversaries will upgrade their assessment of the military capabilities of that state. This will make them less willing to challenge the combatant in a variety of ways. If they were contemplating resorting to force to resolve outstanding issues, they may be less willing to do so because they fear that they will be unable to achieve their own battlefield objectives at a reasonable cost against a skilled opponent. They may also be more responsive to compellent threats issued by the combatant because they fear that standing firm might precipitate a conflict in which they would be at a disadvantage militarily. Similarly, they may make fewer demands on the
combatant and adopt conciliatory bargaining strategies during negotiations to avoid the possibility that diplomatic disputes could escalate into armed conflict. Thus, performing better than expected on the battlefield should not only improve the combatant’s ability to deter its adversaries, but also enable it to more easily secure its preferred outcome in its relations with other states.

When a state performs less skillfully than expected during wartime, failing to achieve its battlefield objectives, or only doing so after long and costly battles, the opposite happens. Its adversaries downgrade their assessment of the military capabilities of that state and become more willing to issue diplomatic and military challenges. Noting the combatant’s military weakness, they may opt to initiate a war because they believe that their objectives are achievable and the likely costs of war low. Also because they are less fearful of the possibility of war, they will be more willing to adopt policies that threaten the vital interests of the combatant.

The extent to which third party states are deterred by skillful battlefield performance and emboldened by incompetence depends on the environment in which the combatant fought its most recent war. Potential adversaries know that skills required to fight in one environment are not necessarily transferable to other environments. Thus, a military that demonstrates its prowess in mechanized warfare on relatively open terrain will not necessarily be effective at urban combat, and a military that gets bogged down in its enemy’s mountains, may nonetheless prove adept at fighting in the desert or on the open plains. Because of this, information generated about the combatant’s military skill will be most relevant to potential challengers who expect to fight the combatant in an environment that is similar to the environment in which the previous war was fought.
To test these predictions in a large N setting, I would ideally have access to precise data on the willingness of each state to challenge their dyadic counterparts, detailed information on the efficacy of the tactics, operations, and basic skills of all the countries that fought a war during the time period under investigation. I would also have accurate measurements of third party states’ expectations about the outcome of each war, and a variety of environmental statistics that could be compared to assess environmental similarity across multiple dimensions. However, because of the breadth of this statistical analysis and the subjective nature of some of the ideas being tested, that data is not always available.

For example, a country’s willingness to issue a challenge cannot be measured because it is not observable. Consequently I am forced to look at behavior. Do states actually take actions that challenge the interests of others? Because data on low level diplomatic challenges is limited, I focus on highly visible challenges: militarized disputes. Looking at disputes that involve the threat of force or the use of force enables me to assess whether a combatant’s performance in a previous war influences the behavior of states in situations where the possibility of armed conflict is high. These situations, though rare, are precisely the situations in which information about military skill is most relevant.

Quantifying skill is also difficult because most assessments of effectiveness are qualitative: Does the military exploit its breakthroughs? Does it engage in defense in depth or does it keep all of its forces at the frontline? Do its troops use cover and camouflage to conceal their movements and protect themselves from enemy fire? How well integrated are the various branches of military service? Indicators that are quantifiable—like the accuracy of artillery fire—are not collected by all of the
combatants and may not be publically available, even if governments have collected them. I get around this problem by looking at an indirect measure of skill. Countries that employ modern system tactics and operational concepts and skillfully handle their weapons should be able to protect their own troops while simultaneously killing their enemies. Because of this, they should suffer fewer casualties than their enemies. Looking at the ratio of casualties suffered compared to casualties inflicted thus provides a quantitative measure of skill that can be collected for all of the combatants with relative ease because casualty figures for most of the wars in the analysis are readily available.

Measuring third party expectations poses a bigger problem because, like states’ willingness to issue military challenges, they are unobservable. Rather than collecting data on how each country expected the combatants to perform, I have to estimate expectations using information that was available to third parties prior to the onset of war. The most important information in this regard is the material balance of power. Weak countries are not expected to be able to outperform their more powerful foes on the battlefield because they do not have the resources to adequately train or equip their soldiers. Thus, when they lose to more powerful adversaries, information about their relative lack of skill will not prompt their adversaries to reevaluate their military effectiveness. For example, Argentina’s inability to hold the Falkland Islands against British forces probably did not prompt its South American neighbors to downgrade their assessment of Argentina’s military because no one expected them to win. On the other hand, weak states that perform skillfully and are able to vanquish or at least inflict heavy losses on their more powerful foes may convince potential challengers that they will be formidable adversaries despite their material weakness. The opposite holds for powerful countries whose manpower, monetary, and material resources should enable
them to easily defeat their weaker adversaries. Only when they perform poorly against their weak foes will information about their effectiveness have reputational consequences. Thus, America’s defeat in Vietnam should be unexpected while its victory over Grenada should not. Relying on data that measures the material resources of the combatants, I predict war outcomes and use these predictions as a proxy variable for third party expectations. If potential challengers use material power to inform their prior expectations, this variable should provide a decent approximation of those expectations.

Collecting data on environmental similarity is easier than measuring expectations, but it is still complicated by two factors. First, the unit of analysis for these tests is dyadic and the location of the war is recorded at the country level. Thus statistics on environmental characteristics are aggregate figures for the country where the war took place and where a likely conflict would occur. This can mask important variation within countries. For example, about 15% of Russia’s territory is mountainous, which makes it seem as if mountain warfare would not be particularly relevant to challengers considering attacking Russia. This is probably true of Russia’s European adversaries who would most likely fight in the rolling plains of the steppe. It is not true of many of Russia’s Asian rivals who would probably have to fight in the Sayan Mountain range along the Mongolian border or the volcanic peaks of the Kamchatka Peninsula. Environmental indicators for the war are also recorded at the country level. So in 1991, the US is recorded as fighting in urban terrain because more than 70% of Iraq’s population resides in cities. While the 2003 war with Iraq yielded information about the Unites States’ proficiency at urban combat, the 1991 conflict did not because the US avoided major population centers and fought mostly in the deserts surrounding those cities. The second issue with measuring similarity is that many different environmental
factors affect military operations: terrain, weather, vegetation, drainage, level of urbanization, demography, soils, infrastructure, climate, size, waterways, etc. Due to data availability for the time period under consideration, I focus on only two elements of the environment—terrain and level of urbanization.

Because I use country level data and focus on only two elements of the environment, some countries are coded as similar despite large differences. For example, the Korean War environment is coded as similar to the environments of Norway, Lebanon, Iran, Greece, and Peru because of their mountainous terrain, while the Kosovo War environment is coded as similar to the environments of Taiwan, Qatar, the Congo, Cuba, and Poland due to their level of urbanization. Although this is not ideal, the low similarity threshold should bias my results against finding that LER has a more pronounced effect in “similar” environments. If the potential fighting environments of challengers that are coded as “similar” and “different” are both sufficiently different from the fighting environment of the target’s past war, there should be no measurable difference in the effect that revealed skill has on challenger behavior across these two categories. This creates a more rigorous test for CET by making it less likely that I will find support for the environmental similarity hypothesis.

I had to make similar decisions when selecting proxies for the other contextual factors and control variables used in the analysis, all of which are discussed in more detail below. Most of the indicators map quite well onto the concepts they are measuring. The one exception is issue similarity, which is difficult to measure ex ante because the issues at stake between two countries are only observable after a conflict has arisen. I use region to proxy for issue similarity because the interests at stake in most conflicts are at least partly determined by the geopolitical environment in which the
actors are operating. Iraq’s attack on Kuwait threatened the United States, partially because it occurred in the Middle East—a region whose natural resources make it economically important. Similarly, the chaos in Sudan did not prompt a US intervention because the geopolitical ramifications of the civil war were limited and the US did not have vital interests in the region. The issues at stake in any given dispute obviously involve much more than regional dynamics, but the difficulty of observing the issues at stake in latent conflicts makes finding a more precise measure of issue similarity very difficult in a large N setting. The bluntness of this indicator has more implications for the results of chapter three’s analysis of the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance than the results of this chapter, but it is nonetheless a limitation of the statistical tests I employ.

As mentioned before, most of the variables in my analysis are good representations of the concepts I am trying to measure. The imprecision of some of the indicators, such as issue similarity and expectations, is unavoidable given the breadth and temporal span of the analysis. Despite the weakness of these indicators, the statistical tests undertaken in this chapter and chapter three are nonetheless valuable. They allow me to test the predictions of CET and competing theories of reputation formation across a wide range of cases while systematically controlling for other factors that influence challenger behavior. In addition, the compromises I make in terms of variable validity tend to bias my results against finding reputational effects, creating a more rigorous test for CET. Thus, we should be fairly confident in any results that confirm the predictions of Contextual Expectations Theory. Below I provide a more detailed discussion of the data and the statistical methods I use to analyze the
reputational effects of revealed skill and then present the results of the statistical analysis.

Data and Methods

I use a logit estimator to test whether the battlefield performance of the combatants in their previous wars influences the probability that they will be targeted in a militarized dispute (MID). The unit of analysis is the directed dyad year and the dataset includes all politically relevant dyads from 1816-2004. Dyads are considered politically relevant if they are contiguous or if they include at least one major power. Minor powers that are not contiguous are excluded from the analysis because they are less likely to have disputes that could prompt an escalation to violence and do not usually possess the material resources to project power beyond their borders (Starr 1978; Siverson and Starr 1991, Lemke and Reed 2001). A directed dyad design is employed because MID occurrence, which is the conflict indicator that can be measured at the dyadic level, does not provide information on which country initiated the conflict.

Dependent Variable: Dispute Target

The dependent variable, Dispute Target, is a dummy variable that indicates whether State B was targeted in a militarized dispute by State A in a given year.¹ This data is taken from the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MIDs) Dataset which defines a MID as a dispute in which at least one state threatened to use force, made a show of force, or actually used force to achieve its political aims (Ghosen and Bennet 2003; Ghosen et al 2004). I focus on lower level militarized disputes rather than new wars.

¹This operationalization is identical to the more widely used dispute initiation variable, which measures whether State A initiated a dispute against State B. Since the purpose of this chapter is to assess whether combatants are targeted after fighting a war, I frame the variable in terms of the target’s identity rather than the initiator’s.
because information from previous wars is available prior to dispute onset. That information is likely to influence whether the dispute is initiated but not necessarily whether the initial dispute escalates to war—a decision which is more likely to be determined by new information revealed during the crisis (Fearon 1994).

**Explanatory Variables: Revealed Skill**

My primary independent variable is State B’s loss exchange ratio (*LER*) from its most recent interstate war. A LER is the ratio of enemy forces killed to friendly forces killed.\(^2\) A 4:1 ratio (*LER* = 4) signifies that for every soldier lost during the war, the military was able to kill four enemy combatants. Conversely a ratio of 1:4 (LER=0.25) signifies that the military was only able to kill one enemy combatant for every four casualties it suffered. Militaries that are able to destroy enemy forces while protecting their own are considered more skilled than militaries who cannot destroy enemy forces or who can only do so at a high cost to themselves. *LER* is a direct measure of this ability, particularly in conventional wars where adoption of the modern system enables combatants to reduce their exposure to the enemy’s firepower while achieving battlefield objectives (Biddle 2004; Biddle and Long 2004). Admittedly, *LER* is not the best proxy for skill in guerrilla wars because counterinsurgents can kill lots of guerrillas at low costs to themselves without exerting meaningful control over contested territory. Although a few of the interstate wars included in this analysis involve guerrilla activity, they all include some conventional battles. Thus, the *LER* can be thought of as measuring how effective the combatant was in conventional combat in its most recent

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\(^2\) LER is traditionally defined as friendly forces killed: enemy forces killed. Using that definition was semantically confusing because a high LER was correlated with a low level of skill. I use the reciprocal of the more traditional measure so that a high LER corresponds to a high skill level.
interstate war. High LERs reveal a high level of skill and should be associated with a decreased likelihood of being targeted in a MID.

Data on war participation is taken from the Correlates of War (COW) dataset (Sarkees 2000), supplemented with data from Reiter and Stam (2002) and Downes (2009). The world wars, the Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf War have been disaggregated into multiple conflicts (Reiter and Stam 2002; Downes 2009). Minor participants from multilateral wars have been excluded from the analysis.

The loss exchange ratio for each participant is then constructed using casualty data from the above sources. For bilateral wars, computing the LER is straightforward. I divide enemy casualties by the casualties suffered by the participant. For multilateral wars, computing the LER is more complicated because COW only includes the aggregate number of casualties for each nation, not how many casualties were inflicted on that nation by each of its enemies. Thus, I am only able to calculate allied LER by dividing enemy casualties by friendly casualties (including casualties suffered by the participants’ allies). Using this construction, wartime allies will all have the same LER except when the war has been disaggregated into multiple conflicts. For example, in World War II Greece has its own LER against Germany/Italy but the US and the UK will have the same LER against Germany/Italy because they both participated in the Western Allies versus Germany conflict. Assigning one LER to all allies presumes that they all exhibit the same level of military effectiveness during the war. This is obviously

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3 World War I is broken into four conflicts: Central Powers vs Western Allies, Central Powers vs. Russia, Central Powers vs. Romania, and Central Powers vs Serbia. World War II is broken into seven conflicts: Germany vs Norway, Germany vs France, Germany vs. Western Allies, Germany and Italy vs Greece, Germany vs Yugoslavia, Germany vs Russia, and Western Allies vs. Japan. The Vietnam War is broken into two conflicts: United States and South Vietnam versus North Vietnam (65-73) and South Vietnam vs North Vietnam (73-75). The Persian Gulf War is broken into two conflicts: Iraq versus Kuwait, and the United States versus Iraq.

4 Participants are considered minor if they suffered less than 10% of the total casualties.
not the case in many of the multilateral wars studied here. Taking the Greek campaign in World War II as an example, Germany intervened in the conflict precisely because Italy performed so poorly. It was the effectiveness of the German military that enabled the Axis to prevail, and their victory was won despite Italy’s blunderings. Yet, in this dataset they are both assigned an LER of .5. In multilateral wars, then, I am essentially testing whether information about the alliance’s military effectiveness effects how challengers treat the individual combatants. Does Italy benefit from information generated about the effectiveness of its partnership with Germany? Does Germany suffer any reputational costs since the Axis performance in the Greek campaign was not as stellar as it would have been if Germany had handled the war on its own? Thus, the reputational effects of revealed effectiveness are still being tested, but in multilateral conflicts the unit of analysis is the alliance rather than the combatant. This is not ideal, but the available data on casualties makes it impossible to disaggregate the military effectiveness of alliances.

Because LER is a ratio and is not distributed normally, with roughly half the observations falling between 0 and 1 and the other half ranging from 1 to 500, I take the log of LER. This creates a normally distributed variable that ranges from -5.5 to 5.5. I then add a constant to make it positive so that I can interact it with other variables to test the conditional hypotheses of Contextual Expectations Theory. This prevents cases where LER equals 1 (and the log of LER equals 0) from being pooled with cases where the conditioning variable is 0. The negative association between LER and dispute targeting should be unaffected by these transformations. For the discussion of results, I translate the numbers back to their original format. This merely aids in interpreting the substantive effects of changes in LER.
Figure 2.1 shows the distribution of LERs for all combatants in interstate wars from 1816 to 2004. The scale is log adjusted.

**Figure 2.1: Distribution of LERs for Combatants in Interstate Wars from 1816-2004**

The lower end of the spectrum includes Iraq in the Persian Gulf War which killed 1 enemy soldier for every 91 friendly casualties suffered (LER = .011), Egypt in the Six Days War which killed 1 enemy soldier killed for every 20 friendly casualties suffered (LER = .05), and Japan in the Pacific Theater in WWII which killed 1 enemy soldier for every 12 friendly casualties suffered (LER = .08). At the other end of distribution is the US in the Persian Gulf (LER = 90.9) and the Major Combat Phase of the Wars in Afghanistan (LER = 250) and Iraq (LER = 62.5). The center of the distribution includes the combatants of the war between Ethiopia (LER = 1) and Eritrea (LER = 1), the Second Kashmir War (LER = 1.17 for India and LER = .858 for Pakistan) and the Russian theatre of World War I (LER = 1.02 for Russia and LER = .979 for Central Powers).
**Explanatory Variables: Revealed Skill Relative to Expectations**

To evaluate whether reputational effects are contingent upon prior expectations I use the standard model of war outcomes in the international relations literature to predict a combatant’s LER and then compare this prediction with the combatant’s actual LER. I then create a new variable $\text{LER}_{\text{dif}}$, which is defined as the Log (Actual LER) – Log (Expected LER). The $\text{LER}_{\text{dif}}$ for belligerents who perform better than expected will be positive and will increase in size. The $\text{LER}_{\text{dif}}$ for belligerents who perform worse than expected will be negative. Thus as $\text{LER}_{\text{dif}}$ rises—and countries perform better relative to expectations—the likelihood that they will be targeted in a MID should decrease.

I begin by modeling the log of each combatant’s LER using regression analysis. Most of the literature on military effectiveness focuses on aggregate outcomes—whether the state won the war, agreed to a draw, or lost the war (Stam 1999; Reed and Clark 2000; Reiter and Stam 2002; Reed and Clark 2003; Rotte and Schmidt 2003; Choi 2004; Desch 2008; Downes 2009). A notable exception is Biddle and Long’s (2004) analysis of battlefield performance, which uses the loss exchange ratio of each battle as the key dependent variable. No analysis of belligerents’ overall LER for each war has been conducted. However, there are theoretical reasons to believe that variables identified in the literature as being important predictors of war outcomes and battle level effectiveness should provide a good baseline model for each war participant’s overall LER.

The primary factor I use to predict military effectiveness is the material resources available to each combatant (Mearshimer 2001; Desch 2008). Belligerents with more soldiers who are better equipped with modern weapons are thought to be able to more effectively kill the enemy, thereby driving their LER up. Biddle and Long (2004) control
for material resources by including the ratio of troops for each battle as well as the prevalence of tanks, ground attack aircraft, and artillery. This data is not available at the war level and so analyses of aggregate war outcomes often use the Correlates of War CINC score, which aggregates the power resources of a state including military spending, military personnel, population, iron and steel production, and energy consumption to create a power index (Singer et al 1972). Wealthy, populous countries that maintain large militaries and devote large amounts of monetary resources to the military should be better able to send well trained soldiers with more advanced weaponry to the battlefield. I control for Military Power by including the combatant’s CINC score divided by the sum of the CINC score for all war participants. I also include a second power variable to measure Allied Military Power, which is defined as the sum of the CINC scores of the combatant’s allies divided by the CINC score of all war participants.

The second variable I include in my analysis is Regime type. Reiter and Stam (2002) explicitly argue that democracies should be more effective at fighting on the battlefield because their soldiers show more initiative and have higher morale. Furthermore, because promotions in democracies are based on merit, democratic militaries have better leaders and are more effective at running complex organizations. Thus, they have better logistical systems, more accurate intelligence, and use their technology more efficiently (Reiter and Stam 1998; Reiter and Stam 2002, 58-83). Biddle and Long (2004) include regime type in their analysis of battlefield LERs and find that democracies are more likely to have a favorable LER than other types of regimes.\(^5\) I

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\(^5\) This effect disappears when other characteristics such as a state’s civil-military relations, its human capital, and its culture are controlled for.
measure Regime type using the Polity IV dataset to create a scale from 1, most autocratic, to 21, most democratic (Jaggers and Marshall 2009).\(^6\)

War initiators are more likely to be skilled fighters, and thus have better LERs, for two reasons. First, they know the war is coming because they have planned it and are able to prepare their troops to fight a specific enemy in a specific locale. Targets should not be as well prepared since they are likely to become aware of impending combat much later than the initiator. Second, initiators choose their opponents and thus can opt to fight weak enemies. Since LER is a relative measure of skill, if initiators choose to fight enemies they know to be weak, they should be more effective than target states who do not get to choose who they fight. Thus, I include a dummy variable, Initiation, which is coded as one if the participant initiated the conflict. This data is taken from Correlates of War (Sarkees 2000), Reiter and Stam(2002), and Downes(2009). Democracies are thought to be particularly adept at choosing wars they can win because the electoral process creates political incentives for leaders to choose wisely (Bueno de Mesquita et al 2002; Reiter and Stam 2002). To control for the fact that the advantages of war initiation may be particularly pronounced for democratic combatants, I include an interactive term, Regime X Initiation.

I use these variables to predict the log of the LER for each combatant in all the interstate wars from 1816 to 2004.\(^7\) Because LERs for war participants are not

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\(^6\)I added 11 to Polity’s raw score to make the variable positive.

\(^7\)I also used more extensive models that looked at civil military relations, measured by the number of coups each participant had suffered in the past five years, and the level of education in each country. Both factors are thought to improve a state’s ability to fight effectively (Biddle and Zirkle 1996; Biddle and Long 2004; Biddle 2004). This data was not available for all wars and so I was unable to create expectations variables for all the wars. When these alternative models are used to create the expectations variables, and the cases with missing data excluded, the results do not change.
independent, I used robust standard errors clustered on each conflict. The results are reported in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: OLS Regression of Log (LER) of War Participants, 1816-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military Power</td>
<td>-0.739</td>
<td>0.449</td>
<td>0.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Military Power</td>
<td>-0.338</td>
<td>0.490</td>
<td>0.493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiator</td>
<td>-0.857</td>
<td>0.303</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime*Initiator</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.186</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N                     | 240         | \( R^2 \)      | 0.220   |

Surprisingly, the power variables are insignificant, but the variables measuring regime and initiation are significant and in the expected direction. Democracies and war initiators achieve more favorable loss exchange ratios. The overall model fit is not very good, accounting for only 22% of the variation in revealed skill. The poor fit suggests that my model leaves out important predictors of military effectiveness. However, this may not be problematic because I am less interested in predicting skill than in measuring how countries perform relative to expectations. If the model is a decent approximation of how other nations predict war outcomes, the poor fit merely suggests that the wartime performance of combatants is often unexpected. The residuals from this model should still be a decent measure of skill relative to expectations. If the model is not a good approximation of how other nations predict outcomes then the residuals should be a very noisy measure of skill relative to expectations. This should make it

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8 The model fit using the more complete models was only slightly better when the coup variable was included (\( R^2 = .27 \)).
more difficult to find a statistically significant relationship between the \( LER_{dif} \) variable and MID initiation, creating a more rigorous test for CET.

As mentioned above, I use the regression model in Table 2.1 to predict the log of the LER for each combatant and then take the Log (Actual LER) - Log (Predicted LER) to create the \( LER_{dif} \) variable, which measures each combatant’s skill relative to expectations. \( LER_{dif} \) is equivalent to the residuals from the model reported in Table 2.1. The new variable is normally distributed with a mean of 0. Roughly 35% of the observations fall between -.25 and .25 and could be considered expected outcomes. The rest of the observations are unexpected by varying degrees. Countries that did much better than expected include countries that were expected to win, like the US in the Persian Gulf War (LER=90.9, \( LER_{dif}=3.00 \)); countries that were expected to lose but prevailed, like Germany in the Franco Prussian War (LER=3.4, \( LER_{dif}=1.75 \)); and countries that lost but performed well on the battlefield, like Finland in the Winter War (LER=7, \( LER_{dif}=2.3 \)). Countries that did much worse than expected include countries that were expected to lose but performed more poorly than expected, like Egypt in the Six Days War (LER=.05, \( LER_{dif}=-2.5 \)); countries that were expected to win but who could not achieve victory on the battlefield, like China in the Russo-Chinese War (LER=.06, \( LER_{dif}=-2.2 \)); and countries that won but performed poorly, like Turkey in the Cyprus War (LER=.5, \( LER_{dif}=-2.2 \)). Countries that did about as expected include winners like the United Kingdom in the Anglo Persian War (LER=3.0, \( LER_{dif}=-.05 \)), losers like Thailand in the First Franco Thai War (LER=.33, \( LER_{dif}=.02 \), and countries who agreed to a draw, like Honduras in the Third Central American War (LER=.67, \( LER_{dif}=-.01 \)).
As with the raw LER variable, I add a constant to LERdif to make it positive for the logit analysis with interactive terms. However, when discussing the substantive results, I translate the numbers back to their original format to aid in interpretation.

**Non War Fighters**

My analysis includes cases where LER and LERdif are missing because the target state has not fought a war. This includes all years for states that have never participated in a war (like Luxemburg, Albania, and Ghana) and the years prior to war-fighting states’ first recorded war (like the United States from 1816-1848, Yugoslavia from 1878-1912, and Uganda from 1962-1980). In these situations I code LER as 0 and then include a No War dummy variable to account for the fact that in these cases no information on LER is available.⁹

**Conditional Hypotheses: Contextual Variables**

Contextual Expectations Theory predicts that information generated during wartime interacts with context to determine whether potential challengers alter their behavior. The relevant contextual variables depend on the type of information generated during the war. Information about skill is relevant to challengers who believe that the environment in which they could potentially fight the combatant is similar to the environment in which the past war was fought. Thus, variables that measure environmental similarity are expected to mediate the effect that skill has on the probability that a combatant is targeted in a MID. On the other hand, the relevance of information about will depends on the issues at stake and the relative power of the combatant compared to potential challengers. While these variables are expected to

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⁹To test whether my results are affected by arbitrarily assigning a 0 LER to these cases, I reran the analysis excluding non-war fighters. The results are unchanged.
influence the effect that a combatant’s cost tolerance has on the probability of being targeted in a MID, they should have no effect on skill.

I use data on terrain and population distribution to measure environmental similarity. For the political variables, I use geographic location as a proxy for issue similarity and Correlates of War CINC scores to measure relative power. I then multiply these variables with LER and LERdif to test whether the reputational effect of skill is contingent on the environmental or political context.

**Environmental Context: Terrain Similarity**

One of the factors that potential challengers might use to judge environmental similarity is terrain. As discussed earlier, countries that fight effectively in open plains may be less adept at prosecuting military campaigns in uncultivated jungles and swamps; and those who can mount a successful operation in the mountains may not be competent at desert warfare. For this analysis, I focus on one aspect of the physical environmental: the percentage of mountainous terrain (Fearon and Laiten 2003). Mountain warfare poses unique challenges to combatants because maneuver is restricted, changes in elevation create positional advantages and disadvantages, and caves, crevasses, outcroppings, and ridges limit visibility and provide natural protective cover that are unavailable or must be constructed in other environments.

I use data on mountainous terrain to generate variables that indicated whether the dyad’s relevant location and the target’s recent war location fell in the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth quintile of the overall distribution of percentage of mountainous terrain. I then create two dummy variables: Similar Terrain is coded as one if the

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10 The relevant location for major power dyads and non-major power dyads is the target state. The relevant location for mixed dyads is the non-major power.
quintile of the directed dyad’s relevant location is the same quintile as the location of the target’s most recent war;\textsuperscript{11} Different Terrain is coded as one if the dyads relevant location is different from the quintile of the location of the target’s most recent war. The excluded category is dyads where the target state has never fought a war. I then multiply both dummy variables by $LER$ and $LER_{dif}$.\textsuperscript{12} These skill variables should have a more pronounced effect in cases where the relevant terrain for the dyad is similar to the terrain of the location of the target’s most recent war.

**Environmental Context: Population Distribution**

The demographic landscape can be as important as the geographic landscape in influencing the effectiveness of military operations. Particularly important is whether the population is principally located in cities or is widely dispersed throughout the country because urban warfare poses unique challenges (Glen 1996; Peters 1996; Rosenau 1997; Press 1999; Desch 2001). Urban terrain is characterized by a high degree of density and structural heterogeneity. Unlike other military operations, urban warfare is “profoundly vertical, reaching up into towers of steel and cement and downward into sewers, subway lines, road tunnels, communications tunnels, and the like” (Peters 1996). These challenges force military organizations to adapt the weapons they use and the tactics they employ. For example, “tank main gun tubes are not always able to depress or elevate sufficient[ly] to engage targets in cellars or on upper floors. Attack helicopters find it difficult to

\textsuperscript{11} When wars were fought in multiple locations, terrain similarity is coded as one if the terrain of the relevant location for the dyad is similar to any of the locations where the war was fought.

\textsuperscript{12} Because states that have not fought a war do not have an LER, a separate $LER$ term is not included in the model. This constitutive term would be perfectly collinear with the excluded category—making it impossible to include the three other dummy variables in the analysis. In addition, including the variable would be problematic since it would be measuring the effect of LER in a situation where the LER does not exist.
coordinate their missile launch location . . . Radio ranges are drastically reduced. Global positioning systems may not function due to building screening effects” (Glen 1996, 9).

Infantry plays a more prominent role than in other types of combat, smaller units are needed to carry out the necessary operational tasks, and indirect fire weapons, such as artillery, are not as useful as direct fire weapons because line of sight is often limited.

Potential challengers are aware of the distinctive characteristics of urban warfare and thus should compare the level of urbanization that the belligerent fought in to the level of urbanization they expect to fight in when evaluating environmental similarity. If the degree of urbanization is similar they should be more likely to consider information about the combatant’s revealed military effectiveness when deciding whether to challenge the combatant militarily.

I construct variables to account for similarity in the level of urbanization in the same way I constructed the terrain similarity variables. Using the Correlates of War data on urban population, I identify whether each country and war location was in the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth quintile of the overall distribution of percentage of population residing in urban areas.13 I then create two dummy variables: Similar Urbanization is coded as one if the quintile of the directed dyads relevant location is the same quintile as the location of the target’s most recent war; Different Urbanization is coded as one if the quintiles of the dyad’s relevant location and the target’s recent war are different. Once again, the excluded category is non-war participants. I interact these dummy variables with LER and LERdif. The magnitude of the negative effect of the two skill variables should be larger when the distribution of the urban population is similar.

13 Urban areas are defined as cities with a population of over 100,000 inhabitants.
Political Context: Issue Similarity

Contextual Expectations Theory claims that the political context should be irrelevant for potential challengers who are faced with new information about the combatants’ skill at fighting. While the issues at stake and the balance of power should condition the effect that will has on the decision making of potential challengers, they should not influence the effect of skill.

As discussed above, measuring the similarity of the issues over which past wars were fought with issues that potential challengers are considering fighting over is particularly difficult, because in cases where no threat was issued there is no indicator of what a potential conflict might be fought over. To deal with this, I use a very rough proxy of issue similarity that is observable during peacetime for all dyads: region. The issues at stake in a given war might be in part driven by the geo-political importance of that region for the combatants. If this is so, information about a state’s willingness to suffer costs in pursuit of its aims in that region might not be relevant to its willingness to suffer costs in pursuit of its aims in other regions where the geo-political context is different. For example, the United States’ willingness to suffer costs in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War might not have been a good indication of its willingness to defend Western Europe. Likewise, US willingness to suffer costs in Africa during Operation Restore Hope in Somalia—a region generally considered of peripheral importance to US security—is probably very different from its willingness to suffer costs in the Middle East—a region whose natural resources and strategic location make it more vital to US interests. On the other hand, the United States’ ability to fight in one region should still have bearing on its ability to fight in other regions. How skillfully the US conducted urban operations in Mogadishu might provide valuable information
about how successful it would be in the streets of Baghdad or Tehran, and its ability to fight in the jungles of Vietnam was probably relevant to its ability to fight in the rainforests of Central and South America.

To test these predictions I create two dummy variables. The COW dataset includes information on the location of each war and the MIDs dataset includes information on which region is relevant to each dyad.\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Same Region} is coded as one if the target’s most recent war was fought in a region that is relevant to the dyad. \textit{Different Region} is coded as one if the war was not fought in a region that is relevant to the dyad. Non-war fighters are the excluded category in these models. The region dummy variables are multiplied by LER and LERdif. If CET is correct, the negative effect of these two variables should hold for all dyads regardless of whether the relevant region is the same or different.

\textbf{Political Context: Relative Power}

As with issue similarity, the relative power of the potential challenger vis-à-vis the combatants should influence the relevance of information about will but should have no effect on the relevance of information about skill. I measure \textit{Relative Power} by taking the CINC score of the potential challenger (State A) and dividing it by the CINC score of the potential challenger and target (State A + State B). Low numbers correspond to challengers that are weaker than the target and high numbers correspond to challengers that are stronger than the target. This variable is multiplied by the \textit{LER} and \textit{LERdif} variables to assess whether the balance of power influences the effect of revealed skill on

\textsuperscript{14} There are five regions—Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The relevant region is the location of the countries if they are adjacent. If the dyad involves a great power, the relevant region is the location of the non-great power, since only the great power has the ability to project its forces outside of its region.
the probability that the combatants are targeted in a MID. According to CET, all challengers, regardless of the balance of power, should be less likely to target countries that demonstrated a high level of skill in their most recent war.

**Robustness Checks: The Persistence and Scope of Reputational Effects**

In addition to the contextual variables discussed above, I also interact LER and $LER_d$ with a time variable and a series of outcome dummy variables. The Time variable counts the number of years that have elapsed since the target’s most recent war. By multiplying time by the skill variables, I can test how long the reputational effects of revealed effectiveness last. The outcome dummy variables designate whether the target’s most recent war ended in a Win, Draw, or Loss (Reiter and Stam 2002; Downes 2009). I interact both skill variables with these three dummy variables to assess whether the reputational effects of revealed skill depend on the overall outcome of the war. Does revealing a high level of skill still matter even if the combatant ultimately lost the war? Does revealing a low level of skill damage the combatant’s reputation if it still manages to achieve its political goals?

**Control Variables**

In addition to the explanatory variables, I include a number of control variables that are associated with MID initiation. First, I include the Military Balance variable discussed above, which is defined as the CINC score of the initiator divided by the sum of the CINC score of the initiator and target. This variable should be positively associated with

---

15 I also tested the persistence of reputational effects by limiting the analysis to wars that took place in the last 5, 10, or 20 years. The results are unchanged.
dispute initiation because countries that are stronger than their dyadic partner should be better able to issue a challenge.

Second, I include the *Distance* between the two countries in the dyad. Countries that are closer together are more likely to have serious disputes and are better able to carry out their military threats (Bremer 1992). This variable should be negatively associated with dispute initiation.

*Joint Democracy*, which is the product of the Polity scores of both countries in the dyad plus a constant to make them positive, is included to control for the fact that democracies rarely fight each other (Maoz and Russet 1993; Rousseau et al 1996). This variable should decrease the probability of dispute initiation. I also include the square of this variable, *Joint Democracy Squared*, to account for a potential curvilinear relationship between conflict initiation and regime type due to the fact that anocracies may be particularly likely to initiate MIDs (Mansfield and Snyder 1995; Goemans 2000).

A dummy variable measuring whether the two countries are involved in an *Alliance* is included, with the expectation that allies will rarely initiate MIDs against one another (Leeds 2003). This data is taken from the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions Dataset (Leeds et al 2002). An additional variable which measures the similarity of the alliance portfolios of the two states is also included. *Similar Alliance Portfolios* might signify common interests between states that would make disputes less likely.

Because trade is thought to reduce the likelihood of interstate conflict, I include a *Trade* variable that measures the volume of trade between both countries (O’Neil and Russet 1999). Data on trade flows is taken from Barbieri’s Bilateral Trade dataset.
(Barbieri et al 2009). This variable should be negatively correlated with dispute initiation.

Finally, I include the spline of Peace Years with five knots. These variables should be negatively correlated with dispute initiation because the longer two countries have been at peace the more likely they are to remain at peace. Conversely, those who have been in a militarized dispute recently are more likely to have competing interests that will bring them into conflict again. Using the spline transformation is a more flexible way of dealing with temporal dependence than using a straightforward counter variable (Beck et al 1998).

**Statistical Analysis**

I begin by looking at the effect that revealed military effectiveness has on MID targeting in general and then discuss how the relevant contextual variables condition the reputational consequences of revealed skill.

**Reputation and Skill**

My analysis provides strong evidence that battlefield performance has reputational consequences. Combatants that perform well on the battlefield or do better than expected are less likely to be targeted in militarized disputes after the war is over, while combatants that do poorly or worse than expected are at a higher risk of being targeted. Table 2.2 reports the results from the logit analysis for both skill and skill relative to expectations.

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16 I experimented with a number of transformations of the Peace Years variable and the five knot spline yielded the best predictions.
Table 2.2: Logit Estimation of the Impact of Revealed Battlefield Skill from the Most Recent War on the Likelihood of Being Targeted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline Model</th>
<th>Relative to Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>M2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LER</td>
<td></td>
<td>LER*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LER</td>
<td>-0.124***</td>
<td>-0.130***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LER* Win</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LER* Draw</td>
<td>-0.210***</td>
<td>-0.177***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LER* Lose</td>
<td>-0.313***</td>
<td>-0.354***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LER* Time</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No War</td>
<td>-1.316***</td>
<td>-1.360***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.154</td>
<td>0.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win</td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td>0.348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draw</td>
<td>2.237***</td>
<td>1.797***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>2.192***</td>
<td>2.222***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MilBal</td>
<td>0.755***</td>
<td>0.849***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>-0.002***</td>
<td>-0.003***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>0.220***</td>
<td>0.215***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Score</td>
<td>0.163</td>
<td>0.166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Models 3 and 6 both time and the peace year’s spline are included in the analysis. Time measures the number of years that have elapsed since the target last fought a war with anyone. Peace years measure the number of years that have elapsed since the target and the initiator were involved in a MID. They are not collinear and so can both be included in the model.
Looking at Model 1, we see that, as predicted, the LER variable is negative and statistically significant. A rising LER, which corresponds to a rising skill level, reduces the likelihood that a country will be targeted in a MID. Table 2.3 provides the substantive effects of changes in revealed skill level.18

A country that is able to achieve a battlefield LER of 4 is .14% less likely to be targeted in a MID than a country whose LER was 1 and .25% less likely to be targeted

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18 Substantive effects are generated using CLARIFY (Tomz et al 2001). Categorical control variables are set to their modes and continuous control variables are set to their means. Thus changes in probability are generated for dyads where the challenger accounts for 30% of dyadic military power, the countries are not allied and are located 3,421 miles away from each other, have a joint democracy score of 136 and an S-Score of .731, traded 1.3 million dollars’ worth of goods in the previous year, and have been at peace for 31 years.
than a country whose LER was only .25. A change of .25% may seem substantively small but the baseline probability of being targeted is only 1.22%, thus a decrease of .25% is equivalent to a 20% reduction in the baseline probability.

Table 2.3: Impact of Skill on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in LER</th>
<th>Change in Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.25 to 1</td>
<td>-.137***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 4</td>
<td>-.114***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.25 to 4</td>
<td>-.251***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No War to Low Skill (LER=.25)</td>
<td>.431**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No War to Average Skill (LER=1)</td>
<td>.294***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No War to High Skill (LER=4)</td>
<td>.181***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The no war dummy variable is also negative in all of the models, suggesting that fighting a war increases the risk of being targeted in a MID regardless of how well the combatants perform on the battlefield. This could be due to a number of factors. One possible explanation is that wars generate information, which reduces uncertainty, making challengers more likely to act. Observing a state’s fighting tactics and operational concepts enable future challengers to adapt their own tactics in ways that either take advantage of revealed weaknesses or neutralize revealed strengths. This knowledge might embolden challengers even if the state performed well. Alternatively, war participants may be more likely to be targeted because wars weaken the combatants. All wars involve the destruction of material and human resources and so all states are weaker in the aftermath of a war than they would have been if they had avoided conflict. Potential challengers may act to take advantage of what may be a temporary weakness, even if the war demonstrated the combatant’s effectiveness on the battlefield. A third possibility is that non-war fighting states neither threaten nor provide meaningful opportunities to other states in the system. Their innocuous position
in the system makes them simultaneously less likely to have ever fought a war and less likely to be targeted in a MID. The exclusion of non-politically relevant dyads from the analysis should have partially solved this problem but it may not have entirely alleviated it.

So all combatants are more likely to be targeted in a MID when compared with countries that have not fought a war. However, the increased risk is more pronounced for countries that performed poorly than for those that performed well. A country that fought a war with an LER of 1 is .43% more likely to be targeted in a MID than a country that has never fought a war, while a country that achieved an LER of 4 is only .18% more likely to be targeted.

Figure 2.2 shows the relationship between revealed skill and MID targeting graphically.

![Figure 2.2: Impact of Skill on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID](image)

As LER rises and countries perform more skillfully on the battlefield the probability of being targeted decreases. A country that does very poorly (like Egypt in the Six Days War with an LER of .053) has a 1% chance of being targeted in a MID, while a country
who does very well (USA in the Second World War’s Pacific theater with an LER of 12.5) has only a .5% chance of being targeted.

A similar pattern emerges when expectations are taken into account in Model 4. \( \text{LERdif} \) is negative and statistically significant, suggesting that as countries perform better than expected, they are less likely to be targeted in a MID. Table 2.4 shows how the probability of being targeted changes as \( \text{LERdif} \) changes.

**Table 2.4: Impact of Skill Relative to Expectations on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in LERdif</th>
<th>Change in Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to -2 (Expected to Worse)</td>
<td>.290***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 2 (Expected to Better)</td>
<td>-.203***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 to 2 (Worse to Better)</td>
<td>-.493***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No War to Worse (-2)</td>
<td>.571***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No War to Expected (0)</td>
<td>.281***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No War to Better (2)</td>
<td>0.078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A combatant that does better than expected (\( \text{LERdif}=2 \)) is .20% less likely to be targeted in a MID than one who does as expected (\( \text{LERdif}=0 \)) and .49% less likely to be targeted than one who does worse than expected (\( \text{LERdif}=-2 \)). A combatant that does worse than expected (\( \text{LERdif}=-2 \)) is .29% more likely to be targeted in a MID than one who does as expected.

As with the raw skill variable, the \( \text{LERdif} \) variable mitigates the positive effect that participating in a war has on MID targeting. All combatants are more likely to be targeted in a MID compared to states that have not participated in a war, but this increased risk is lessened as countries perform better relative to expectations. A country that has done worse than expected (\( \text{LERdif}=-2 \)) is .57% more likely to be targeted in a
MID than a country that has not participated in a war, while a country that has performed as expected (LERdif=0) is .28% more likely to be targeted. A country that does better than expected is only .07% more likely to be targeted and this effect is no longer statistically significant. In fact, states that perform better than expected are the only combatants that are not at a higher risk of being targeted relative to non-war fighters.

Figure 2.3 shows this relationship graphically.

![Figure 2.3: Impact of Skill Relative to Expectations on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID](image)

As LERdif rises and countries perform better relative to expectations, the probability of being targeted in a MID falls. A country that does worse than expected, like France in the Franco Prussian War (LERdif= -1.7), has a .90% chance of being targeted. A country who performs as expected, like India in the Kargil War (LERdif= -.01), has a .69% chance of being targeted in a MID. A country who does better than expected, like the US in the Persian Gulf War (LERdif=2.6), has a .44% chance of being targeted in a MID.
Reputation and Aggregate Outcomes

Models 2 and 5 in Table 2.2 show that the reputational effects of skill depend on the ultimate outcome of the war. LER and LERdif are negative and statistically significant only when the combatant has lost the war or agreed to a draw. In these cases, performing well on the battlefield reduces the likelihood that the combatant will be targeted in a MID. In cases where the combatant was able to secure victory, battlefield performance does not have a statistically significant effect on MID targeting. Table 2.5 shows the substantive effects of changes in LER and LERdif by outcome.

Table 2.5: Impact of Changing Levels of Skill on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by War Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>LER from .25 to 4</th>
<th>LERdif from -2 to 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wins</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draws</td>
<td>-0.581***</td>
<td>-0.622***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losses</td>
<td>-0.424***</td>
<td>-0.742***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Going from an LER of .25 to an LER of 4 reduces the probability of being targeted in a MID by .42% for war losers and by .58% for combatants that agreed to a draw. Going from doing worse than expected (LERdif=-2) to doing better than expected (LERdif=2) reduces the probability of being targeted by .74% for war losers and by .62% for those that end in a draw. Similar changes in LER and LERdif do not have a statistically significant effect on the probability of being targeted for war winners.

The results from Models 2 and 5 in Table 2.2 also indicate that war outcomes have a direct effect on the probability of being targeted in a MID. Combatants that do not achieve their objectives or who agree to a draw are more likely to be targeted than countries that do not participate in wars. However, combatants that emerge victorious are not at a higher risk of being targeted. Thus, the negative effect of skill mitigates the
tendency of combatants that lose or agree to a draw to be targeted at a higher rate. Skill has no such effect on war winners because they are not more likely to be targeted in the first place. This relationship can be seen graphically in Figures 2.4 and 2.5.

![Figure 2.4: Impact of Skill on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by War Outcome](image1)

![Figure 2.5: Impact of Skill Relative to Expectations on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by War Outcome](image2)

In both graphs, combatants that fight poorly or perform worse than expected are very likely to be targeted in a MID if the war ended in a draw or a loss. The probability
of being targeted decreases as the combatant’s skill increases. A country that loses a war and performs badly on the battlefield, like Yemen in the Saudi Yemeni War (LER=.05) has a 1.12% chance of being targeted in a MID while a country that loses but performs well like Germany in on the Eastern Front (LER= 2.1) has only a .3% chance of being targeted. The probability of war winners being targeted remains roughly the same, regardless of skill. So a country, like Turkey in the Franco Turkish War, that does poorly (LER=.14) but ends up winning has a .6% chance of being targeted, while a country that wins and does really well like the US in Persian Gulf (LER=90) has a .69% chance of being targeted, neither of which is statistically different from the baseline .4% chance of being targeted for non-war participants.

Reputation and Time

The reputational effects of revealed military effectiveness persist for long after the war is over. Models 3 and 5 in Table 2.2 show that LER and LERdif have a negative effect on MID targeting. The interactive term is positive, but not statistically significant. Figure 2.6 shows how the effect of LER and LERdif vary over time, using the results from these models.
Figure 2.6: Impact of Changes in Skill on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID over Time

Changing LER from .25 to 4 reduces the probability of MID targeting by .26% in the year after the war is over. As time progresses this negative effect lessens but only by a small amount. Sixty years after the war is over, the negative effect of LER is still .21%. A similar pattern emerges when we look at skill relative to expectations. In the year after the war, changing LERdif from -2 to 2 reduces the likelihood of MID targeting by .50%. Sixty years later the same change in skill reduces the likelihood of MID targeting by .47%. The negative effect becomes statistically insignificant after 80 years for LER and after 100 years for LERdif. For most countries, a new war is fought and new information on skill is generated long before the reputational effects of the earlier war are drowned out.\(^{19}\) This suggests that the reputational consequences of performing poorly are long lived and can last more than a generation if new information is not generated in another conflict.

\(^{19}\) 50% of the countries fight a new war within 5 years, 75% fight a new war within 20 years, 90% within 50 years. For these cases the time variable begins again after the new war. Thus for the majority of observations the time variable is less than 50.
Reputation and Skill: Environmental Context

As predicted by CET, the reputational consequences of revealed military effectiveness are more pronounced when the terrain and the distribution of the population are similar.

Table 2.6 shows the results of the logit estimations that employ interactive terms to test CET’s conditional hypotheses with respect to environmental context.

Table 2.6: Logit Estimation of the Impact of Revealed Skill from the Most Recent War on the Likelihood of Being Targeted in a MID by Environmental Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Terrain</th>
<th>Urbanization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M7 Baseline</td>
<td>M8 Relative to Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LER</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Context</td>
<td>-0.137***</td>
<td>-0.190***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Context</td>
<td>-0.040</td>
<td>-0.103*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Same Context</strong></td>
<td>1.437***</td>
<td>1.623***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.172</td>
<td>0.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Different Context</strong></td>
<td>0.624*</td>
<td>0.940***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.327</td>
<td>0.328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MilBal</strong></td>
<td>0.746***</td>
<td>0.766***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distance</strong></td>
<td>-0.0002***</td>
<td>-0.0003***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alliance</strong></td>
<td>0.229***</td>
<td>0.231***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S Score</strong></td>
<td>-0.171</td>
<td>-0.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.164</td>
<td>0.164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joint Dem</strong></td>
<td>0.004***</td>
<td>0.004***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joint Dem Squared</strong></td>
<td>-0.00001***</td>
<td>-0.00001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bilateral Trade</strong></td>
<td>0.003**</td>
<td>0.003**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peace Years 1</strong></td>
<td>-0.417***</td>
<td>-0.416***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peace Years 2</td>
<td>Peace Years 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.034*</td>
<td>-0.035*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.050***</td>
<td>-0.049***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-2.616***</td>
<td>-2.605***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>0.181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N             | 112062       | 112062       | 112062       | 112062       |
| Psuedo R2     | 0.1871       | 0.188        | 0.188        | 0.1882       |

* p<.1; ** p<.05; ***p<.01

Models 7 and 8 estimate how terrain similarity influences the effect of skill and skill relative to expectations on the probability of being targeted in a MID. LER*Same Terrain and LERdif*Same Terrain are negative and statistically significant suggesting that combatants that perform well on the battlefield or do better than expected are less likely to be targeted by countries that expect to fight the combatant in similar terrain.

LER*Different Terrain and LERdif*Different Terrain are also negative, but the magnitude of the effect is smaller and, in the case of LER, the effect is not statistically significant.

Figure 2.7 shows how the substantive effects of skill and skill relative to expectations depend on terrain similarity.
Figure 2.7: Impact of Changes in Skill on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by Terrain Similarity

Going from an LER of .25 to 4 reduces the likelihood of being targeted by .13% when the relevant terrain is similar to the target’s most recent war. When the terrain is different, the changing LER has no statistically significant effect on the likelihood of being targeted in a MID. When expectations are taken into account, the reputational consequences are broader. Combatants that go from doing worse than expected (LERdif=-2) to better than expected (LERdif=2) are less likely to be targeted in a MID regardless of how similar the terrain is. However, the magnitude of the effect is larger when the terrain is similar, reducing the probability of being targeted by .27% in similar terrain and .08% in different terrain.

Figures 2.8 and 2.9 show how terrain similarity conditions the effect of skill and skill relative to expectations on the probability of MID targeting.
As LER rises in Figure 2.8 and the combatant reveals a higher level of skill, the probability of being targeted by third party states with terrain that is similar to the combatant’s most recent war decreases from .82% to .16%, while the probability of being targeted by states with different terrain stays roughly the same, decreasing from .33% to .24%.

Looking at skill relative to expectations in Figure 2.9, the probability of being targeted decreases as LERdif rises and combatants do better than expected. This is true for similar terrain and different terrain but the effect is much larger for the former where the probability of being targeted goes from 1% to .15%. For different terrain the probability falls from .5% to .17%, a significant change but not as big as the change for similar terrain.
A similar pattern emerges when we look at how similarity in the level of urbanization influences the likelihood of MID targeting. Model 9 in Table 2.6 shows the effect that revealed skill has on the probability of MID targeting. LER*Same Urbanization is negative and statistically significant as predicted by CET. LER*Different Urbanization is also negative and statistically significant but its magnitude is smaller. The same is true of Model 10, which looks at skill relative to expectations. Both of the interactive terms are negative and statistically significant but the absolute value of the LERdif*Same Urbanization coefficient is larger than the LERdif*Different Urbanization term.

Figure 2.10 shows how changes in the revealed military effectiveness of a combatant influences the probability that it will be targeted in a MID by third party states depending on the similarity in the level of urbanization.
Belligerents that go from an LER of .25 to 4 are .18% less likely to be targeted by states where the distribution of the population in the relevant location is similar to the distribution of the population in the belligerent’s most recent war. They are only .06% less likely to be targeted by states where the distribution of the population is different. The results are similar when expectations are taken into account. Combatants that go from doing worse than expected (LERdif=−2) to doing better than expected (LERdif=2) are .33% less likely to be targeted by countries where the distribution of the population is similar and .12% less likely to be targeted by countries where the distribution of the population is different.

Figures 2.11 and 2.12 show how the probability of being targeted falls as LER and LERdif rise. The slopes of the lines for the same level of urbanization are larger than the slopes of lines for different levels of urbanization, suggesting the effect is more pronounced when the distribution of the population is similar.
The results of the analysis demonstrate that although the reputational consequences of military effectiveness are quite broad they are still conditioned by environmental similarity. Combatants that do not perform well on the battlefield or do worse than expected are more likely to be targeted by potential challengers that would
potentially fight the combatant in similar terrain or in countries where the level of urbanization is similar to the urbanization of the combatant’s most recent war.

**Reputational and Skill: Political Context**

For the most part, the results of my analysis on the conditioning effect of region and balance of power support CET’s prediction that the reputational consequences of skill are not influenced by political factors. The negative effect of skill is constant across multiple power configurations but there is some difference across regions—although this difference is small. The negative effect of skill relative to expectations is constant across both regions and multiple power configurations. Table 2.7 reports the results of the analysis of the interactive effect of skill and the relevant political variables.

**Table 2.7: Logit Estimation of the Impact of Revealed Skill from Most Recent War on the Likelihood of Being Targeted in a MID Depending on Political Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Military Balance</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M11 Baseline</td>
<td>M12 Relative to Expectations</td>
<td>M13 Baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.164***</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>-0.231***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LER*Same Region</td>
<td>-0.123***</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>-0.163***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LER* Different Region</td>
<td>-0.084*</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>-0.185***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LER*Milbal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.105***</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.126***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No War</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-1.126***</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>-1.327***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Region</td>
<td>1.340***</td>
<td>0.177</td>
<td>1.461***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Region</td>
<td>0.875***</td>
<td>0.334</td>
<td>1.348***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MilBal</td>
<td>0.706***</td>
<td>0.728***</td>
<td>0.243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Models 11 and 12, I test whether regional similarity changes the effect that revealed skill has on the probability of being targeted in a dispute. In both models, the effect of LER and LERdif are negative and statistically significant when they are interacted with the Same Region and Different Region dummy variables. However, the magnitude of the LER*Different Region is smaller than the LER*Same Region variable, suggesting that the reputational consequences of information about skill are more
pronounced in regions where the war occurred. When expectations are taken into account, the differences across regions disappear: the magnitude of both of the LERdif interactive terms are similar.

This pattern becomes obvious when the substantive effects of LER and LERdif across regions are examined in Figure 2.13. A change in LER from .25 to 4 reduces the probability of being targeted in a MID by potential challengers in the relevant region by .13% and by challengers in different regions by .07%. Changing LERdif from -2 to 2 decreases the probability by .51% in the same region and .47% in different regions.

Looking at the relationship graphically in Figures 2.14 and 2.15, we see that LER and LERdif are inversely related to the probability of being targeted in a MID in both the same region where the war occurred and in different regions.
When the effect of skill is examined in Figure 2.14, the slope for the same region line is bigger than for the different region line, suggesting that the effect of increasing skill is more pronounced in the region where the war was fought.

In Figure 2.15 the slopes are the same, suggesting that although combatants are more likely to be targeted by potential challengers in the region where the war was fought, the
effect that unexpected information about skill has on those challengers is constant across regions.

The fact that unexpected information about skill has a constant effect across regions in Model 12 and Figure 2.15 is consistent with the predictions of CET. However, the differences across regions that we see in Model 11 and Figure 2.14 are not consistent with CET’s issue similarity hypothesis. If regional differences capture differences in the issues at stake for potential challengers, then the effect that information about skill has on challenger behavior should be constant across regions. However, as discussed earlier, region is a very blunt indicator of issue similarity and it is possible that regional differences capture not only variations in the issues at stake, but also variations in the fighting environment, since geographic location influences a variety of environmental factors including climate, vegetation, and drainage. If this is the case, the reputational consequences of information about skill should be more pronounced when challengers are located in the region where the target’s past war was fought. Unfortunately, disaggregating the political and environmental effects of region is impossible in a cross-national setting. However, the case studies and the intervention analysis conducted in part 2 provide a better test of the issue similarity hypotheses, using variables that do not overlap with environmental factors.

The other political variable in my analysis, balance of power, does not suffer from a potential overlap with environmental factors and the results are more definitely in support of CET’s hypotheses. Models 13 and 14 in Table 2.7 report the results of this analysis. Unlike the other models, the interactive term is a continuous variable, so the statistical significance of the skill variables cannot be easily interpreted from the logit coefficients and standard errors reported in Table 2.7. Below I use CLARIFY to evaluate
the substantive effects and statistical significance of LER and LERdif as the Balance of Power varies across its range. Figure 2.16 reports the results of these simulations.

![Figure 2.16: Impact of Changes in Skill on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by Balance of Power](image)

The negative effects of LER and LERdif are statistically significant regardless of the relative power of the initiator. In addition, the magnitude of both variables remains roughly constant. Changing LER from .25 to 4 decreases the likelihood of a challenge by about .3% for initiators at all levels of power. The effect of changing LERdif from -2 to 2 becomes slightly more pronounced as the initiator becomes more powerful, but the change is negligible, going from a reduction of .60% to a reduction of .67% when the balance of power variable goes from its minimum to its maximum.

Figure 2.17 and 2.18 shows the relationship between revealed skill, the balance of power, and the probability of MID targeting graphically.
Although the graphs demonstrate that countries are more likely to initiate MIDs when they are more powerful than the target state, the slope of all three lines is the same. This suggests that changes in LER and LERdif have the same effect on the probability of MID targeting regardless of how powerful the potential challenger is. As combatants perform more skillfully on the battlefield (LER increases) or do better than expected (LERdif
increases), the likelihood of being targeted by both strong, weak, and equally matched challengers decreases.

Thus, for the most part, the reputational consequences of battlefield performance are unaffected by the political context. Revealing a high level of skill or doing better than expected on the battlefield reduces the likelihood that a country will be targeted in a MID regardless of the issues at stake or the relative power of potential challengers.

**Summary of Results and Theoretical Implications**

Battlefield performance has reputational consequences and the conditions under which those consequences are most pronounced are consistent with the predictions of Contextual Expectations Theory. Combatants that fight effectively are better able to deter third party states from challenging them militarily, while combatants that fight poorly embolden their potential enemies, making them more likely to be targeted in militarized disputes. These patterns of behavior hold regardless of variations in the environmental or political context, suggesting that the reputational effects of revealed skill are quite broad.

As expected by CET, these effects are most pronounced when the terrain and level of urbanization that the challenger expects to fight in are similar to the environment in which the target state fought its most recent war. However, the combatant’s battlefield performance still has reputational repercussions even when the terrain or demography of the challenger’s prospective fighting environment differs from the combatant’s past war. Although the conditioning effects of environmental similarities are marginal—affecting the magnitude of those effects, not their existence—the fact that I found larger effects in similar environments should be taken as strong evidence in favor of CET given the low threshold for similarity that I employed.
For the most part, political factors, such as the geopolitical importance of the region where the war was fought and the relative power of the potential challenger, influence neither the existence nor the magnitude of the reputational effects of revealed skill. The fact that only the environmental context mattered supports CET’s assertion that information interacts with context in very specific ways. The relevance of information about a combatant’s military effectiveness depends on the environment in which it conducted military operations. Consequently, environmental factors affect the relevance of that information. Since the issues at stake and the relative power of potential challengers have little bearing on battlefield effectiveness, they have no effect on the conditions under which that information will have reputational effects.

Expectations matter but they are not as important as CET predicts. States that perform worse than expected are more likely to be challenged; those that perform better than expected are less likely to be challenged. However, wartime performance matters even when expectations are not controlled for. This may be due to the roughness of the model I used to approximate prior expectations. The model did not account for much of the variation in loss exchange ratios across different combatants, so the residuals used in the analysis were very similar to raw LER variables—hence, the similarity in the results. The case studies in part 2 should provide another test of CET’s expectations hypothesis using more precise data on third party expectations. They should also enable me to gauge whether the model is a good approximation of the way third party states arrive at their prior expectations. If the model is valid, the similarity in the results of the baseline model and the model that controls for expectations may be due to the fact that the outcomes of most wars are unexpected. If that is the case, prior expectations may still play an important role in determining the conditions under which wars have
reputational consequences, even if controlling for them does not dramatically increase the predictive power of the statistical models.

In terms of the competing hypotheses, my analysis provides some support for the rationalist model and Current Calculus Theory but runs contrary to the predictions of the bias and learning literature and Mercer’s attributional theory. The bias and learning literature predicts that war will have no reputational repercussions because people rarely update their beliefs or engage in vicarious learning. However, my analysis demonstrates that information about the combatants’ battlefield effectiveness influences how likely they are to be targeted in militarized disputes after the war is over. Thus, this information has reputational consequences. Mercer’s attributional theory predicts that information about a high level of skill should make challenges less likely, but that information about a lack of skill should have no effect. I find that revealing a high level of skill does make challenges less likely but that revealing a lack of skill also influences behavior, making challenges more likely. This suggests that, contrary to Mercer’s prediction, both desirable and undesirable information can have reputational consequences.

Like CET, the rationalist literature and Current Calculus Theory predicted that information generated about combatants’ skill will influence challenger behavior. Unlike CET, they did not emphasize the importance of expectations or context. The fact that skill had reputational effects when expectations were unaccounted for provides support for these simpler theories. On the other hand, the analysis did suggest that context is important: the reputational consequences of revealed skill were more pronounced when the relevant fighting environment for the dyad was similar to the fighting environment of the target’s most recent war. However, the reputational consequences of information
about skill are quite broad, and, although the fighting environment affected the magnitude of those consequences, it was not determinative.

This chapter’s analysis of the reputational effects of revealed skill thus provides varying levels of support for CET, the baseline reputational model, and Current Calculus. The following chapter provides similar tests of the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance, which will enable me to further adjudicate between these competing theories of reputation formation.
Chapter 3: The Reputational Consequences of Will, Revealed Cost Tolerance and Militarized Dispute Initiation

Chapter 2 demonstrated that wartime information about a country’s fighting ability influences the behavior of its potential adversaries. Countries that perform skillfully on the battlefield are less likely to be challenged militarily, while those that perform poorly are more likely to be challenged. However, wars reveal more than information about the combatants’ proficiency at fighting. They also reveal information about the willingness of the combatants to suffer costs.

Contextual Expectations Theory claims that the reputational consequences of information about a combatant’s cost tolerance will be different from the reputational consequences of fighting effectively. Belligerents who suffer high numbers of casualties during a war demonstrate their willingness to suffer costs in pursuit of their political aims, making future challenges less likely. The reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance should be most pronounced when the issues at stake for potential challengers are similar to the issues over which the target’s past war was fought and when potential challengers are substantially weaker than the combatant. Unlike information about skill, the environment in which the belligerent fought should have no bearing on the relevance of information about a combatant’s cost tolerance.

Wars are costly enterprises. People are killed. Military, and at times, civilian assets are destroyed. Money is spent on arming, feeding, and transporting troops to and from war zones. Industrial production is often diverted from civilian enterprises to enable the country to produce weapons. Food and fuel are sometimes rationed to ensure the military’s needs are met. As wars progress, political leaders must continually reevaluate whether their wartime objectives are worth the inevitable loss of life and
expenditure of resources that accompany armed conflict. Once the costs of fighting have exceeded the benefits that would accrue to the victor, leaders must decide whether to extricate their countries from the war, even if doing so will result in defeat.

States not party to the conflict observe these decisions and make inferences about the willingness of the combatants to suffer costs in pursuit of their wartime objectives. In this way, wars provide potential adversaries with information about the relative ease or difficulty with which the combatants can be coerced. Countries that give up after suffering few casualties are presumed to be relatively weak targets. A low cost tolerance may invite future challenges by potential adversaries who believe that they can achieve their own objectives by inflicting, or threatening to inflict, limited costs on the combatant. They may be more willing to initiate an armed conflict or make demands that could precipitate armed conflict because they believe that they have the ability to outlast their opponents on the battlefield. Conversely, combatants that demonstrate a willingness to suffer high costs during war, by sending more troops to the battlefield or diverting civilian resources to make up for military shortfalls, may enhance their deterrent capabilities. Their potential adversaries may forgo military solutions to diplomatic disputes because they do not believe they have the ability or the willingness to inflict the costs necessary to induce the combatant to surrender. They may also be more willing to comply with the combatant’s compellent threats and less willing to adopt threatening policies because they fear diplomatic disputes could escalate into a protracted and costly war.

Because a combatant’s willingness to suffer costs in any given conflict is partially determined by the benefits that would accrue to the victor, information about the combatant’s cost tolerance is, in part, issue specific. Potential adversaries should take
this into consideration when deciding whether to issue a challenge. So when the United States withdrew its military forces from Somalia after the death of 19 rangers in the Battle of Mogadishu, the information it revealed about its cost tolerance was probably most relevant to state, and perhaps non-state, actors considering violating international human rights. The primary objective of the US mission was humanitarian: ensure the safe delivery of food to Somalia’s civilian population. The decision to withdraw troops after one costly incident reflected the fact that the US was not willing to suffer many costs in pursuit of these types of humanitarian objectives. Other nations and sub-national armed groups that were engaged in or were planning to engage in similar activities, such as the competing factions in Rwanda or the Taliban in Afghanistan, may have decided that US warnings about the repercussions of untoward behavior were bluffs. The United States was not willing to endanger the lives of its soldiers to achieve humanitarian objectives, and if it did commit its military forces, it could be easily defeated by killing a few of its servicemen. On the other hand, information from the Somalia operation should not have emboldened actors who considered adopting policies that threatened US allies or its economic interests because America’s cost tolerance with respect to those objectives may have been much more robust. Similar assessments of issue similarity should affect the conditions under which potential challengers use wartime information about any combatant’s willingness to suffer costs.

In addition, information about the combatants’ cost tolerance will be particularly relevant to weak challengers. This is because weak challengers do not have the resources to prevail on the battlefield against their more powerful foes. Consequently, they adopt military strategies that specifically aim at raising the costs of war to an intolerable level, hoping that their enemy will concede defeat rather than stomach additional losses. As
challengers become stronger, they opt for denial strategies that target the military capabilities of their opponents. Because they can hope to defeat their adversaries militarily, information about the cost tolerance of those adversaries becomes less decisive. Consequently, wartime information about that cost tolerance is less likely to influence their decisions.

This chapter tests these hypotheses about the reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance against competing explanations using data on war outcomes and MID initiation from 1816-2004. As with the tests from the previous chapter, I have to rely on imperfect indicators to measure the relevant concepts. The primary difference between this chapter and chapter 2 is the explanatory variable. Chapter 2 focused on skill. This chapter focuses on will. Unlike military effectiveness, a state’s willingness to suffer costs is unobservable, and hence more difficult to measure. I address this problem by measuring the costs actually suffered during the conflict. Suffered costs may not be a perfect indicator of the willingness to suffer costs because states may achieve victory before their cost tolerance threshold is reached, or they may face difficulties extricating themselves from the conflict after that threshold has been passed. However, a country’s willingness to suffer costs directly influences the costs it actually suffers during wartime. States with low cost tolerances may fight in ways that limit the human and material costs of the war, prioritizing force protection and the economizing of resources over mission achievement. They may also concede defeat earlier than more resilient adversaries. States with high cost tolerances may be more willing to adopt strategies that place their soldiers at risk. They are also more likely to continue fighting in the face of high losses. Remaining committed to the war over a long period of time inevitably
increases the casualties suffered and the resources expended. Thus, a combatant’s willingness to suffer costs is closely related to the costs it actually suffers during war.

I use the combatant’s casualty figures to measure these costs. Although this only captures the human costs of the war, those costs are probably the most salient to potential adversaries. When designing their military strategies, challengers can directly affect the casualties suffered by their foe but can only indirectly affect other costs, such as the money spent on, or material resource devoted to, the war effort. While some states also have the capability to drive up costs by directly targeting their enemy’s civilians or civilian infrastructure, many do not. Concentrating on casualties as my primary indicator of costs enables me to focus on the one variable that is easily manipulated by most of the combatants’ potential challengers.

As in the previous chapter, I deal with prior expectations by focusing on power. I use information available to third party states prior to the conflict to make predictions about their likely expectations because their actual expectations are unobservable. I focus on power as the primary factor informing those expectations because of the emphasis it receives in the international relations literature. Strong, powerful countries should be more willing to suffer costs than their smaller and weaker counterparts. They have more monetary and material resources at their disposal. They also tend to have large militaries and large civilian populations from which they can draw reserve forces if casualties accumulate too quickly. Thus, when a powerful nation loses to a weak nation after suffering limited costs, this is considered unexpected because the powerful nation had the resources to prevail. Alternatively, when a weak nation admits defeat against a more powerful adversary after suffering limited costs, this is considered
expected because the manpower and material resources it had at its disposal were more limited.

The other variables used in this chapter are identical to those employed in the previous chapter, the most important of which are issue similarity and relative power. These two variables are used to test CET’s hypotheses about the conditioning effect that issue similarity and power asymmetry have on the reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance. The Correlates of War’s CINC score, which I use to test the power asymmetry hypotheses, is a good measure of relative power. It aggregates multiple dimensions of power, including the size of the armed forces, military spending, total population, urban population, iron and steel production, and energy consumption, to create an overall power index. Most of these factors directly or indirectly contribute to the ability of a state to prevail on the battlefield. Countries with large populations and large armies that spend large amounts of money on training and equipping their military should be better prepared for battle. Urban population, iron and steel production, and energy consumption are all associated with industrialization, which should be associated with a country’s ability to produce the weapons and transport equipment needed for battlefield success. In addition, urbanization is linked to higher levels of education, which is also related to battlefield success. The power asymmetry hypothesis predicts that as a state’s ability to impose its will on the battlefield by militarily defeating its adversaries increases, the relevance of information about the cost tolerance of those adversaries decreases. By measuring multiple factors that contribute to a state’s ability to prevail on the battlefield, the CINC score enables me to test this hypothesis.
The variable I use to test the issue similarity hypothesis is more problematic. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I use region as a rough proxy for issue similarity because the issues at stake in a conflict are partly driven by the geopolitical importance of the region where the conflict occurs. Although the issues at stake in any given conflict obviously involve more than regional dynamics, measuring similarity along other dimensions is difficult because the specific issues at stake in those conflicts are only observable after the conflict has been initiated. A variable was needed that could measure issue similarity prior to dispute onset for all dyads, including those where no conflict occurred. The regional dummy variable meets this criterion, but it is nonetheless a very rough indicator of issue similarity. As such, results from the tests of CET’s issue similarity hypothesis should be interpreted with care.

Although the statistical methods employed in this chapter rely on imperfect indicators to measure the key concepts identified by CET, they are valuable because they enable me to assess the reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance across a large range of cases while systematically controlling for confounding factors. Below I provide more details on those methods and present the results of my statistical analysis. I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical implications of my findings.

Data and Methods

The methods I use to evaluate the reputational effects of will are similar to those used to evaluate the reputational effects of skill in chapter 2. I employ a logit estimator to test whether the revealed cost tolerance of combatants influences the probability that they will be targeted in a militarized dispute (MID) after the war is over. I use a directed dyad research design with \textit{MID Target} as my dependent variable (Ghosen and Bennet
2003; Ghosen, Palmer, and Bremer 2004). As in Chapter 2, the dataset includes all politically relevant dyads from 1816-2004.

The primary difference between my research design for this chapter and the one I employed in the previous chapter is the relevant explanatory variable. Rather than focusing on the combatant’s LER from its most recent war, I focus on the number of casualties the combatant suffered. Using casualties to measure a combatant’s willingness to suffer costs is complicated by the fact that information revealed about cost tolerance is censored for war winners. Inferring that the cost tolerance of belligerents who give up or agree to a draw after suffering high numbers of casualties is greater than those who give up after suffering only a few casualties is valid. However, this inference is not valid for war winners because belligerents who suffer a small number of casualties in a victorious campaign may have been willing to suffer more but were not required to do so.

To deal with this censorship problem I interact the casualty variables with outcome dummy variables. This enables the effect of casualties to vary across different war outcomes. However, it also makes it difficult to evaluate CET’s conditional hypotheses because the casualty-outcome interactions must be interacted with the relevant contextual variables. This is complicated because the correct way to specify the triple interactions differs depending on whether the contextual variables can be measured for all dyads or only dyads where the target has participated in a war.

Below I describe the casualty variables, provide a more detailed discussion of the censorship problem and its solution, and explain how I specify the triple interactive models that test CET’s conditional hypotheses.

1 More detailed information about this variable can be found in chapter 2, 36-37.
Explanatory Variables: Revealed Will

I use the log of Casualties suffered in State B’s most recent war as a proxy for will. Contextual Expectations Theory defines will as a state’s sensitivity to costs. Casualties are perhaps the most tangible cost nations suffer during war. When executing a war, political leaders must decide whether their war aims are worth the lives of the servicemen and women who are fighting for their country. Countries that suffer high casualties during the course of a war reveal a high cost tolerance. This tolerance should signal a high level of resolve. Thus, an increase in casualties suffered should decrease the probability of being targeted in a dispute.

For this analysis, Casualties are defined as the number of soldiers killed in action. It does not include wounded soldiers or soldiers killed as a result of disease or harsh environmental conditions. As with LER, I take the log of casualties to make its distribution more normal. Data on war participation and casualties is taken from COW (Sarkees 2000), Reiter and Stam (2002), and Downes (2009).²

Figure 3.1 shows the distribution of the casualty variable. Casualties suffered range from the US in Kosovo, which suffered 0 casualties, to Russia on World War II’s Eastern Front, which suffered 7.5 million casualties.³ The average number of casualties suffered is 7,244 (Log=3.86), about the number suffered by Spain in the First Moroccan War (7,020) and Belgium in WWII (7,500). The standard deviation is quite large (1.32) so that the 368 casualties Israel suffered in the War of Attrition (Log=2.56) and the 152,000

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² As in chapter 2, large multilateral conflicts are disaggregated into their constituent parts and minor participants are excluded from the analysis.
³ The log of 0 does not exist, so I assign the Kosovo case a value of .001 (which would be equivalent to the US suffering 1.002 casualties). Thus the range of the log (casualties) variable goes from .001 to 6.87.
casualties France suffered in the Franco-Prussian War (Log = 5.18) are within one standard deviation of the mean.

![Graph showing distribution of casualties suffered](image)

**Figure 3.1: Distribution of Casualties Suffered**

**Explanatory Variables: Revealed Will Relative to Expectations**

As in Chapter 2, I draw on the standard models of war outcomes to test whether the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance depend upon prior expectations. Specifically, I use the variables identified in the literature on war outcomes to model the casualties suffered by each war participant. I then predict the number of casualties each participant should have suffered and subtract this from the actual number of casualties suffered. This new variable, \( \text{CasualtiesDif} \), measures how many additional casualties the combatant suffered compared to what the model predicted. \( \text{CasualtiesDif} \) will be positive for combatants that suffered more casualties than expected and will be negative for combatants that suffered fewer casualties than expected. Combatants that reveal a higher cost tolerance by suffering more casualties than expected should be less likely to be targeted in a MID. Thus, \( \text{CasualtiesDif} \) should be inversely related to \( \text{Mid Targeting} \).
I begin by modeling the log of casualties suffered for each combatant using regression analysis. As with battlefield effectiveness, the empirical literature on war costs is limited, so I focus on the variables identified in the literature on war outcomes to model casualties suffered. There are good theoretical reasons to expect that these variables would be decent predictors of wartime casualties in addition to being good predictors of aggregate outcomes.

The primary variable I use to predict casualties is the relative Military Power of the combatant. For the reasons discussed in chapter 2, countries with more material resources at their disposal should be better able to limit their own casualties. They can provide more advanced weapons that offer better protection against enemy fire. They have more money to spend on training, which may enable their soldiers to reduce the number of casualties suffered. In recent times, wealthier and more powerful countries have also had access to superior medical care, which has drastically reduced the number of wounded soldiers who eventually die. I control for Military Power by including the CINC score of the combatant divided by the CINC score of all war participants in the regression analysis. I also control for Allied Military Power, which is defined as the CINC score of the combatant’s allies divided by the CINC score of all combatants. CINC scores are taken from the Correlates of War database on National Military Capabilities (Singer et al 1972). Both variables should be negatively correlated with the number of casualties suffered.

The second variable I use to predict casualties is Regime Type. Democracies should suffer fewer casualties than other types of regimes for a number of reasons. The qualities that make them more effective fighters—such as superior leadership, increased initiative, efficient logistical systems, accurate intelligence acquisition and assessment,
and higher levels of competency when operating advanced weapons systems—should also enable them to limit the number of casualties they suffer on the battlefield (Reiter and Stam 1998, Reiter and Stam 2002). In addition, democracies might be less cost tolerant than their autocratic counterparts because democratic leaders are accountable to the public who may withdraw support for military operations as the death toll rises. Studies of US public opinion suggest that, at least under some circumstances, democratic publics are sensitive to rising casualties and that this sensitivity has electoral consequences (Mueller 1971; Jentleson 1992; Burk 1999; Eichenburg 2005; Feaver et al 2009; Garner et al 2003; Karol and Miguel 2007; Grose and Oppenheimer 2007; Kriner and Shen 2007). I use the Polity IV database to create a variable that ranges from 1 (most autocratic) to 21 (most democratic) in order to control for the regime type of the combatant (Jaggers and Marshal 2009). This variable should be negatively associated with casualties suffered.

I also include a variable to indicate whether the combatant initiated the war. As discussed in chapter 2, initiators have more time to prepare for combat, which may increase their soldiers’ ability to defend themselves in battle. They also have the luxury of picking fights with weak opponents who may be less able to inflict casualties on them. Furthermore, a nation’s cost tolerance in wars of choice may be less robust than in wars of necessity. Since the targeted state is often fighting to protect their homeland, they are probably more willing to suffer casualties than initiators, who may be fighting to secure less vital interests. Data on initiation is taken from the Correlates of War (Sarkees 2000), Reiter and Stam (2002), and Downes (2009).

4 I add 11 to Polity’s score to make the variable positive.
The differences between targets and initiators may be especially pronounced for democracies. Electoral accountability creates additional incentives for democratic initiators to choose their wars wisely (Reiter and Stam 2002). In addition, democratic publics may be more averse to rising casualties in wars that they initiate than in wars where they are targeted. Feaver, Gelpi, and Reifler (2009) found that individuals are more sensitive to casualties when they do not believe that the war was justified. Since defense of the homeland is usually seen as justified, the public should be more willing to tolerate rising costs when they are the target of an attack. To account for this I include an interactive term, Regime*Initiation, with the expectation that the negative effect of regime type will be more pronounced for initiators.

I also control for size of the combatants’ Population and the number of Military Personnel they possess. Countries with large populations and large militaries can afford to suffer more casualties than less populous countries or countries that have not invested in their militaries. As casualties accumulate, leaders of small countries may have to worry about the demographic consequences of war losses or their potential vulnerability to future challenges if the majority of the military is killed. Larger countries can suffer more casualties without risking their economic health or endangering their future ability to protect themselves from predation. Data on population and the number of military personnel is taken from the Correlates of War National Military Capabilities Database (Singer et al 1972). I use the log of both variables.

Finally, I include a term for war participants that are not primary parties to the initial conflict. Countries that join the conflict only to support their allies or to share in the spoils of victory may be less willing to risk their soldiers’ lives than countries that are fighting to protect their own interests. Joiner is a dummy variables coded as one for war
participants that entered the conflict after initial hostilities began. This data is taken from Downes (2009).

I use ordinary least squares regression analysis with robust standard errors clustered on conflict to predict the log of casualties suffered by each belligerent. Results are reported in Table 3.1 below.

As predicted, countries that are more powerful and have more powerful allies suffer fewer casualties. While Regime and Initiation are insignificant, the interactive term is negative and significant, suggesting that democratic initiators tend to suffer fewer casualties. Regime type has no effect on the number of casualties suffered for targets. As expected, countries that have larger militaries are likely to suffer higher number of casualties although, surprisingly, Population does not have a statistically significant effect on the number of casualties suffered. This could be due to the fact that Population and Military Personnel are highly collinear, with Military Personnel accounting for 74% of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military Power</td>
<td>-1.088</td>
<td>0.265</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Military Power</td>
<td>-0.659</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>0.184</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>0.334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime*Initiation</td>
<td>-0.057</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log (Population)</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log (Military Personnel)</td>
<td>0.281</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joiner</td>
<td>-0.264</td>
<td>0.240</td>
<td>0.274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.269</td>
<td>0.620</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust errors clustered on conflict
variation in total Population. Finally, countries that join the conflict after initial hostilities have commenced do not tend to suffer fewer casualties than other types of combatants.

The overall model fit is not very good, accounting for only 26% of the variation in casualties suffered. As discussed in chapter 2, this is not problematic because I am more interested in accounting for expectations than in accurately predicting the number of casualties suffered. If the model is a decent approximation of the factors that other states use to predict casualties then poor fit merely suggests that information on cost tolerance is often unexpected. If the model is not a good estimate of prior expectations, then the new variable should be noisy, making it more difficult to find a statistically significant relationship between this variable and Mid Targeting.

I use the model reported in Table 3.1 to predict the log of casualties suffered for each belligerent. I then subtract this value from the log of the actual number of casualties suffered. The resulting variable, CasualtiesDif, is equivalent to the residuals from the model reported above. Negative values denote combatants that suffered fewer casualties than expected, while positive values indicate combatants that suffered more casualties than expected. Since combatants that suffer more casualties than expected reveal a higher cost tolerance than expected, this variable should be inversely related to Mid Targeting. Thus, suffering more casualties than expected should decrease the probability that the belligerent is targeted in a MID after the war.

The mean of CasualtiesDif is -.006; roughly 20% of the observations fall between -.25 and .25 and could be considered expected outcomes. The rest of the observations are unexpected by varying degrees. Countries that suffered many fewer casualties than

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5 When population is included without the military personnel variable it has a positive and statistically significant effect on the number of casualties suffered. However, the model fit is not as good as the model that includes both terms.
expected include the United States, which was expected to suffer 677 casualties in Kosovo but suffered none \((\text{CasualtiesDif} = -2.8)\), Russia, which was expected to suffer 22,500 casualties in the Russo-Chinese War but only suffered 242 \((\text{CasualtiesDif} = -1.9)\), and Israel, which suffered 348 casualties in the War of Attrition but was expected to suffer 13,000 \((\text{CasualtiesDif} = -1.55)\). Countries that suffered more casualties than expected include Russia on the Eastern front, which was expected to suffer 49,000 casualties but suffered 7.5 million \((\text{CasualtiesDif} = 2.18)\), the US in Vietnam, which was expected to suffer 580 casualties but suffered 58,183 \((\text{CasualtiesDif} = 2)\), Iran, which was expected to suffer 7,200 casualties in the Iran-Iraq War but suffered 500,000 \((\text{CasualtiesDif} = 1.8)\), and Japan, which was expected to suffer 27,000 casualties in the Pacific theater of WWII but actually suffered 124,000 \((\text{CasualtiesDif} = 1.65)\). Combatants that suffered about as many casualties as expected include Austria Hungary, which was expected to suffer 10,381 casualties in the Wars of Italian Unification but suffered 12,500 \((\text{CasualtiesDif} = .08)\), Egypt, which was expected to suffer 5,334 casualties in the October War but suffered 5,000 \((\text{CasualtiesDif} = -.02)\), and Honduras, which suffered 300 casualties in the Fourth Central American War when they were expected to suffer 332 \((\text{CasualtiesDif} = -.04)\).

**War Outcomes and Censoring**

Using casualties as a measure of cost tolerance is complicated by the fact that, depending on the outcome of the war, this information can be censored. If a state suffers high casualties, it reveals a high level of resolve regardless of the outcome. However, if a state suffers low casualties, the inference made regarding the resolve or cost tolerance of the state depends on the outcome. States that lose wars or settle for a draw despite suffering low casualties reveal a high sensitivity to cost. In these cases, suffering small
numbers of casualties should be associated with an increased probability of being targeted in a MID. However, victorious states might suffer low casualties because they were very effective militarily or because their foe was not resolved. They might have been willing to suffer more costs had it been necessary. In these cases, low levels of casualties should not be associated with an increased likelihood of being targeted in a dispute.

I address this problem by interacting the Casualties and CasualtiesDif variables with three outcome dummy variables that denote whether the combatant won the war, lost the war, or agreed to a draw.⁶ All three dummy variables—Win, Lose, and Draw—and the interactive terms—Win*Casualties, Draw*Casualties, and Lose*Casualties—are included in the analysis.⁷ The excluded category is targets that have never fought a war. Because targets that have never fought a war have not suffered any casualties, the constitutive Casualties term is not included in the analysis since it would be measuring the effect of casualties in a situation where they do not exist. In addition, including the term in the analysis would be problematic because it is perfectly collinear with the excluded non-war term and thus cannot be included in a model that includes the three outcome dummy variables.

This construction allows us to interpret the interactive casualty terms directly. The coefficients for Draw*Casualties and Lose*Casualties should be negative and statistically significant because combatants that reveal a high cost tolerance by suffering large numbers of casualties in losing wars or in stalemates should be less likely to be targeted in a MID than those who reveal a low cost tolerance by giving up after only

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⁶ This data is taken from Correlates of War (Sarkees 2000), Reiter and Stam (2002), and Downes (2009).
⁷ In the discussion of the interactive terms I use the Casualties variable to describe model specification. The same applies to the models where the primary explanatory variable is CasualtiesDif.
suffering a small number of casualties. The Win*Casualties term should not be statistically significant because of the censorship problem discussed above.

**Conditional Hypotheses: Contextual Variables and Interactive Effects**

In order to test the conditional hypotheses of CET, the casualty and outcome interactions need to be interacted with the environmental and political contextual variables described in the previous chapter. The correct way to specify these models depends on whether the contextual variable is a dummy or a continuous variable and whether that variable can be measured for all dyads or only dyads where the target has fought a war. Below I describe each of the contextual variables and the correct way to specify the triple interactive terms.

**Time**: Continuous Variable for Dyads with War Fighting Target

To test how long the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance persist once a war has ended I interact the casualty and outcome variables with a Time variable that counts the number of years that have elapsed since the target’s most recent war. Time is a continuous variable that is only measured for dyads where the target has fought a war.

The model that tests the longevity of the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance includes the three outcome dummy variables, the outcome dummy variables multiplied by Time, the outcome dummy variables multiplied by Casualties, and the outcome dummy variables multiplied by Casualties and Time. The Time and Casualties constitutive terms are not included in the analysis, nor is the Time*Casualties term. These three terms would be measuring the effect that Casualties and Time have on dyads where the target has not fought a war. Since those targets have not suffered any casualties and no time has elapsed since their most recent war, including the terms is not justified theoretically. Furthermore it is analytically impossible to include them in the analysis.
because all three terms are perfectly collinear with the excluded non-war category and cannot be included in a model that includes the three outcome dummy variables.

Because Time is a continuous variable, the statistical significance of the interactions in the model cannot be interpreted directly from the regression analysis. Therefore, I rely on CLARIFY to evaluate the statistical significance of the effect that Casualties have on Mid Targeting for different outcomes over time (Tomz et al 2001). I expect that the reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance will diminish over time, but have no a priori expectations about how long those reputational effects will persist.

**Terrain Similarity: Dummy Variables for Dyads with War Fighting Target**

To test whether the reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance are constant across environmental factors as predicted by CET, I interact the outcome and casualty variables with terrain similarity and urbanization variables. The terrain similarity dummy variables designate whether the percentage of mountainous terrain in the relevant location for the dyad is in the same quintile as the percentage of mountainous terrain in the location of the target’s most recent war. Similar Terrain is coded as one if the quintiles are the same and Different Terrain is coded as one if the quintiles are different. These two dummy variables are only coded for dyads where the target has fought a war.

To specify the model I multiply both terrain dummy variables by the outcome dummy variables to create six new dummy variables: Win in Similar Terrain, Win in Different Terrain, Draw in Similar Terrain, Draw in Different Terrain, Lose in Similar Terrain, Lose in Different Terrain.

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8 For a more detailed description of this variable see chapter 2, 48-49. Data on mountainous terrain is taken from Fearon and Laiten (2003).
and Lose in Different Terrain. All six dummy variables are included in the model, with the excluded category being the non-war fighting targets. I then interact these six outcome/terrain dummies with the Casualties variables. Again, the constitutive Casualties term is excluded because it would be measuring the effect of casualties for non-war fighters and would be perfectly collinear with the excluded term.

The sign and statistical significance of the casualty interactions can be derived directly from the regression results. CET hypothesizes that the reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance will be constant across environmental differences. Thus I expect the coefficients for LoseSimilarTerrain* Casualties, LoseDifferentTerrain* Casualties, DrawSimilarTerrain* Casualties, and DrawDifferentTerrain* Casualties to all be negative and statistically significant. I also expect the magnitude of the coefficients to be similar across terrain types.

Urbanization: Dummy Variables for Dyads with War Fighting Targets

The other environmental factor that I use to test CET’s conditional hypotheses is the percentage of population residing in urban areas. I use the Correlates of War data on population to construct two dummy variables: Similar Urbanization is coded as one if the percentage of people living in urban areas in the dyad’s relevant location is in the same quintile as the percentage of people living in urban areas in the location of the target’s most recent war. Different Urbanization is coded as one if the quintiles are different.⁹

As with the terrain similarity variable I multiply both urbanization variables by the outcome variables to create six new dummy variables: Win in Similar Urbanization, Win in Different Urbanization, Draw in Similar Urbanization, Draw in Different Urbanization,

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⁹ For a more detailed description of this variable see chapter 2, 49-51.
Lose in Similar Urbanization, and Lose in Different Urbanization. Again, non-war fighters are the excluded category. I multiply the Casualties variable with these six dummy variables and include the dummies and the interactive terms in the model. I exclude the constitutive Casualties term for the reasons discussed above.

The results of this analysis can be interpreted in the same way as the results from the terrain similarity models. The negative effect of rising casualties should be operative for losers and combatants that agree to a draw in both similar and different levels of urbanization.

**Regional Similarity: Dummy Variables for Dyads with War Fighting Target**

While CET predicts that the environmental context will not influence the relevance of information about the combatant’s cost tolerance, it expects that the political context will. In particular, CET posits that information about cost tolerance will be relevant when the issues at stake for the potential challenger are similar to the issues over which the target’s past war was fought. As discussed earlier, I use region as a very rough proxy for issue similarity because the issues at stake in a given conflict are partially determined by the geopolitical importance of the region where the war is fought. Although region is an imperfect measure of similarity, it has the benefit of being observable prior to dispute onset. A more precise measure of similarity is difficult to construct because the issues over which countries fight are typically only observable after a dispute has been initiated.
I use data on war location to create two regional dummy variables that designate whether the target’s most recent war was fought in the relevant region for each dyad.\textsuperscript{10} As with the terrain and urbanization models, I use these variables to create a series of six outcome dummy variables: \textit{Win in Same Region}, \textit{Win in Different Region}, \textit{Draw in Same Region}, \textit{Draw in Different Region}, \textit{Lose in Same Region}, and \textit{Lose in Different Region}. These variables are then multiplied by the \textit{Casualties} variable. The dummy variables and the interactive terms are included in the model, but the constitutive \textit{Casualties} term is not.

If CET is correct, the coefficients for \textit{LoseSameRegion*Casualties} and \textit{DrawSameRegion*Casualties} should be negative and statistically significant because combatants that reveal a high cost tolerance should be less likely to be challenged by potential adversaries in the region where they fought the war. The coefficients for \textit{LoseDifferentRegion*Casualties} and \textit{DrawDifferentRegion*Casualties} may also be negative but should be smaller in magnitude and may not be statistically significant. Because of the censorship problem discussed above, I have no prior expectations about the sign or significance of \textit{WinSameRegion*Casualties} or \textit{WinDifferentRegion*Casualties} variables.

**Balance of Power: Continuous Variable for All Dyads**

CET also predicts that the relevance of information about combatants’ cost tolerance will be a function of the strength of potential challengers. Weak challengers will be especially likely to use information about a combatant’s willingness to suffer costs because they rely more heavily on the balance of resolve to prevail than other types of challengers do. I test this hypothesis by interacting the casualty and outcome variables with a variable that measures the relative power of the dispute initiator.

\textsuperscript{10}A more detailed description of this variable is available in chapter 2, 51-60. Data is taken from the Correlates of War (Sarkees 2000) and Militarized Disputes datasets (Ghosen and Palmer 2003; Ghosen et al 2004).
Military Balance is measured by dividing the potential challenger’s CINC score by the combined CINC scores of the potential challenger and target.\textsuperscript{11} When Military Balance is less than .5, the challenger is weaker than the combatant; when it is greater than .5, the challenger is stronger than the combatant.

Unlike the other contextual variables, Military Balance can be measured for all dyads, not just those dyads in which the target has fought a war. To test whether weak challengers are more likely to target combatants that reveal a low cost tolerance, I multiply Military Balance by the outcome dummy variables and the interactive casualty terms. The model includes the outcome dummy variables, the Military Balance variable, the outcome dummies multiplied by the Military Balance variable, the outcome dummies multiplied by Casualties, and the outcome dummies multiplied by Casualties and Military Balance. The Casualties and Casualties*Military Balance terms are omitted from the analysis. The former would measure the effect of casualties for non-war fighters when the Military Balance was zero; the latter would measure the joint effect of casualties and military balance for non-war fighting targets. Since those targets have not suffered any casualties these variables should not be included in the analysis. They are also perfectly collinear with the excluded non-war fighters term and so cannot be included in a model that also includes the three outcome dummy variables.\textsuperscript{12}

Because Military Balance is a continuous variable, the sign and statistical significance of the interactive terms cannot be interpreted easily from the results of the logistics analysis. As with the time model, I run simulations using CLARIFY to assess

\textsuperscript{11} This data is taken from the Correlates of War National Military Capabilities Dataset (Singer et al 1972). More details about the components of the CINC score can be found in chapter 3, 86.

\textsuperscript{12} This model is very similar to the model which tests how long the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance persist. The primary difference is that this model includes the Military Balance term, while the time model excludes the constitutive Time term. This is because Military Balance can be measured for non-war fighters while Time cannot.
the statistical significance of the effect that rising casualties have on MID Targeting as the Military Balance changes for war winners, losers, and those that agree to a draw (Tomz et al 2001). If CET is correct, the negative effect of rising casualties for losers and those agreeing to a draw should be most pronounced when the challenger is much weaker than the target.

**Control Variables**

In addition to the casualty and contextual variables previously mentioned, the analysis includes all of the control variables discussed in chapter 2.\(^{13}\) All of the models include the Military Balance variable, discussed above, which should be negatively correlated with MID Targeting because weak challengers should be less likely to initiate disputes. The models also control for the Distance between the potential challengers and the target state, with the expectation that disputes are more likely between states that are located nearby. Joint Democracy controls for the fact that democracies rarely fight each other, while Joint Democracy Squared controls for the increased bellicosity of anocratic regimes. I include a variable that is coded as one if the two states are Allies and an additional variable that measures the Similarity of Alliance Portfolios. Allies and states that are allied with the same third parties should be more likely to share common interests and less likely to fight. I also include a variable which measures the volume of Trade between the two countries, with the expectation that countries that trade with each other are less likely to fight one another. Finally, the five-knot-spline of Peace Years is included in the analysis to control for duration dependence. Countries that have fought recently are more likely to fight than countries that have been at peace for a long period of time.

\(^{13}\) See chapter 2, 53-55 for a more detailed discussion of these variables and their sources.
Statistical Analysis

The results of the statistical analysis suggest that the reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance are quite limited. Demonstrating resolve by continuing to suffer casualties in a costly war only deters challengers who are much weaker than the combatant. In most other circumstances, suffering high numbers of casualties actually increases the likelihood of being targeted in a militarized dispute. Below I present the results of this analysis in more detail.

Reputation and Will

My analysis of the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance—in the aggregate and overtime—suggests that, contrary to the expectations of CET, countries that demonstrate a high cost tolerance by suffering casualties in pursuit of their war aims are not less likely to be targeted in a MID. Table 3.2 reports the results of the logistics analysis.

Table 3.2: Logit Estimation of the Impact of Revealed Cost Tolerance from Most Recent War on the Likelihood of Being Targeted in A MID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Baseline Model</th>
<th>Relative To Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M1 Casualties</td>
<td>M2 Casualties*Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win</td>
<td>0.864***</td>
<td>0.897***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.180</td>
<td>0.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draw</td>
<td>-0.227</td>
<td>0.355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.202</td>
<td>0.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>-0.077</td>
<td>-0.936***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>0.291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win*Casualties</td>
<td>-0.106**</td>
<td>-0.147**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draw*Casualties</td>
<td>0.271***</td>
<td>0.175***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose*Casualties</td>
<td>0.147***</td>
<td>0.396***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win*Time</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draw*Time</td>
<td>-0.037***</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose*Time</td>
<td>0.029***</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win<em>Casualties</em>Time</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draw<em>Casualties</em>Time</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose<em>Casualties</em>Time</td>
<td>-0.009***</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Balance</td>
<td>0.936***</td>
<td>0.939***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.090</td>
<td>0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>-0.0003***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.239***</td>
<td>0.251***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.156</td>
<td>-0.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Score</td>
<td>0.004***</td>
<td>0.004***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Dem</td>
<td>-0.00001***</td>
<td>-0.00001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Dem</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squared</td>
<td>-0.416***</td>
<td>-0.412***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Years 1</td>
<td>-0.033*</td>
<td>-0.037**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Years 2</td>
<td>-0.049***</td>
<td>-0.047***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Years 3</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Years 4</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Years 5</td>
<td>-2.753***</td>
<td>-2.768***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.181</td>
<td>1.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 112062</td>
<td>112062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2</td>
<td>0.1883</td>
<td>0.1906</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .1 ** p < .05 *** p < .01
In Model 1, the effect of casualties for war losers and combatants who agreed to a draw is actually positive. Suffering more casualties increases the likelihood of future challenges. Combatants who suffer 10,000 casualties are .12% more likely to be targeted than combatants that suffered 1,000 casualties if they agreed to a draw and are .05% more likely to be targeted if they lost the war.\textsuperscript{14} Rising casualties only have a negative effect on Mid Targeting for war winners. This is surprising because these are the cases where inferring cost tolerance from casualties suffered is problematic because of the censorship issue discussed earlier. Suffering 10,000 casualties compared to 1,000 casualties decreases the likelihood of being targeted by .04% for war winners. Contrary to the predictions of CET, suffering high costs in a losing war, or even a war that ends in a draw, does not decrease the probability of future challenges by impressing third party states with the resolve of the combatant.

Figure 3.2 plots the relationship between rising casualties and the probability of being targeted in a MID for each war outcome. As casualties rise, the probability of being targeted declines for combatants who won, as evidenced by the negative slope of the blue line. The positive slopes for the red and green lines show how increases in casualties for combatants that lose or agree to a draw actually increase. It appears that revealed cost tolerance only matters if the state ultimately wins the war. Suffering casualties has no reputational benefits if victory cannot be secured. In fact, suffering high costs in a losing war appears to invite future challenges.

\textsuperscript{14} Substantive effects are generated using CLARIFY with categorical control variables set to their mode and continuous control variables set to their mean. Thus, changes in probability are generated for dyads where the challenger accounts for 30\% of dyadic military power, the countries are not allied, are located 3,421 miles apart, have a joint democracy score of 136 and an S-Score of .731, traded 1.3 million dollars worth of goods in the previous year, and have been at peace for 31 years.
When expectations are taken into account in Model 3 of Table 3.2, the negative effect of rising casualties for war winners and the positive effect of rising casualties for war losers disappears. On the other hand, the positive effect of rising casualties for combatants who agree to a draw is actually larger in this model. Combatants who suffer an order of magnitude more casualties than expected ($\text{Casualties Dif} = 1$) are .29% more likely to be targeted than combatants who agree to a draw after suffering an order of magnitude fewer casualties than expected ($\text{Casualties Dif} = -1$).

In Figure 3.3, we see that as $\text{Casualties Dif}$ rises and combatants suffer more casualties than expected, the probability of them being targeted in a MID increases for combatants who agree to a draw but stays the same for both war winners and war losers.
Reputation and Time

Models 2 and 4 in Table 3.2 were designed to measure how the effect of rising casualties changes over time. Because the baseline models did not find any evidence of reputational effects, these models cannot test the persistence of those effects. However, they can tell us how long the positive of effect of rising casualties for war losers and combatants who agree to a draw last.

Because Time is a continuous variable, I rely on simulations to evaluate the statistical significance of the casualty variables over time. Table 3.3 reports how changes in the number of casualties suffered, and the number of casualties suffered relative to expectations, influence the probability of the combatant being targeted in a MID one year, 10 years, and 20 years after the completion of the war.

Table 3.3: Effect of Changing Cost Tolerance on the Probability of Being Targeted in a MID Over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in Casualties</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>1 Year</th>
<th>10 Years</th>
<th>20 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casualties from 1,000 to 10,000</td>
<td>Wins</td>
<td>-0.077**</td>
<td>-0.069**</td>
<td>-0.060**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Draws</td>
<td>.172**</td>
<td>.191**</td>
<td>.203**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As would be expected, the negative effect of Casualties and CasualtiesDif for war winners and the positive effect of these variables for war losers decline over time but do so very slowly. Surprisingly, the positive effect of these variables for combatants who agree to a draw actually increases over time. Suffering 10,000 casualties compared to 1,000 casualties increases the likelihood of being targeted in a MID by .17% in the year following the war and by .20% twenty years later.

**Reputation and Will: Environmental Context**

CET predicts that the environmental context will not influence the reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance. I test this hypothesis using data on terrain similarity and urbanization. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 3.4 below.

**Table 3.4: Logit Estimation of the Impact of Revealed Cost Tolerance from Most Recent War on the Likelihood of Being Targeted in a MID Depending on Environmental Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Terrain</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Lose Different Context</td>
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<tr>
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|                                | N                      | 112062                      | 111894                           | 112062                         | 111894                           |
|                                | Psuedo R2              | 0.1896                      | 0.1878                           | 0.1892                         | 0.1875                           |

* p < .1 ** p < .05 *** p < .01
Model 5 in Table 3.4 shows how TerrainSimilarity influences the effect that Casualties has on MidTargeting, and Figure 3.4 reports the substantive effects of these changes by showing how the probability of being targeted in a militarized dispute changes as the number of casualties suffered rises from 1,000 to 10,000 across similar and different terrain.

![Change in Probability of Being Targeted](image)

**Figure 3.4: Impact of Suffering 10,000 Casualties Compared to 1,000 Casualties on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID Depending on Terrain**

Although the effect of rising casualties on MID Targeting is constant across both similar and different terrains, there is still no evidence of a reputational effect of revealed cost tolerance. Rising casualties only decrease the likelihood of MID Targeting for war winners and this effect is statistically insignificant in both similar and different terrain. War losers and those who agree to a draw do not deter future challenges by demonstrating a willingness to suffer high costs. In fact, rising casualties increase the probability that those combatants will be targeted in a militarized dispute regardless of terrain.

A similar pattern emerges when expectations are taken into account. Figure 3.5 uses the estimates from Model 6 in Table 3.4 to show how the probability of being
targeted in a MID changes as $\text{CasualtiesDif}$ goes from -1 to 1 for dyads where the relevant terrain is similar to the combatant’s past war and dyads where the relevant terrain is different.

**Figure 3.5: Impact of Suffering an Order of Magnitude More Casualties than Expected on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID Depending on Terrain**

The only difference between Model 5 and Model 6 is that the insignificant effect of rising casualties for war winners in similar terrain reverses signs and the positive effect for war losers in similar terrain becomes insignificant. Demonstrating a higher cost tolerance than expected does not deter future challengers for war losers and combatants that agree to a draw regardless of how similar the relevant terrain is to combatant’s past war. Suffering more casualties than expected either has no effect on the probability of being targeted for war losers or actually increases the risk of being targeted for combatants that agree to a draw.

When the urbanization variables are used to measure environmental similarity in Models 7 and 8, differences emerge in the effect that rising casualties have on MID Targeting. However, there is not a consistent pattern across different war outcomes. In Model 7, the negative effect of rising casualties for war winners is more pronounced.
when the level of urbanization is similar; the positive effect for stalemated wars is more pronounced when the level of urbanization is different; and the effect for war losers changes signs when the similarity in the level of urbanization changes.

Figure 3.6 illustrates these relationships graphically by showing how the probability of being targeted changes as combatants go from suffering 1,000 casualties to 10,000 casualties depending on war outcome and the level of urbanization.

![Figure 3.6: Impact of Suffering 10,000 Casualties Compared to 1,000 Casualties on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by Distribution of Population](image)

War winners who suffer 10,000 casualties are .05% less likely to be targeted in a MID than winners who suffer 1,000 casualties if the level of urbanization the challenger expects to fight in is the same as the level of urbanization of the target’s most recent war. If the level of urbanization is different, the higher revealed cost tolerance has no statistically significant effect. In contrast, combatants who suffer 10,000 casualties before agreeing to a draw are .14% more likely to be targeted in a MID than combatants who agree to a draw after suffering 1,000 casualties if the level of urbanization is different. When the level of urbanization is similar, the positive effect is less pronounced, increasing the likelihood of **MID Targeting** by only .09%. War losers who suffer 10,000 casualties...
casualties compared to 1,000 casualties are .07% more likely to be targeted in a MID when the level of urbanization is the same and .04% less likely to be targeted when the level of urbanization is different. The latter effect is not statistically significant.

The results are similar when prior expectations are accounted for in Model 8. The effect of suffering more casualties than expected for war winners when the level of urbanization is similar remains negative but becomes statistically insignificant. When the level of urbanization is different, the relationship remains statistically insignificant but the coefficient switches. The positive effect of increasing the number of casualties suffered relative to expectations for combatants that agree to a draw is again more pronounced when the level of urbanization is different. In fact, the effect is smaller in magnitude and insignificant when the level of urbanization is the same. For war losers, the differences across potential fighting environments become more blatant. When the level of urbanization is similar, suffering more casualties than expected increases the likelihood of being targeted in a MID. When the level of urbanization is different, suffering more casualties than expected decreases the likelihood of being targeted. The magnitude of both effects is larger than in Model 7, and both are statistically significant.

These relationships between changes in casualties relative to expectations and the probability of being targeted in MID across different levels of urbanization can be seen graphically in Figure 3.7.
Figure 3.7: Impact of Suffering an Order of Magnitude More Casualties than Expected on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by Distribution of Population

As CasualtiesDif goes from -1 to 1 and combatants go from suffering an order of magnitude fewer casualties than expected to an order of magnitude more casualties than expected, the probability of war winners being targeted in a MID does not change by a statistically significant amount. Neither does the probability for combatants that agree to a draw when the level of urbanization is similar. However, when the level of urbanization is different, these combatants are .37% more likely to be targeted.

Combatants that suffer more casualties than expected in a losing war are .14% more likely to be targeted in a MID than combatants that suffer fewer casualties than expected if the level of urbanization is similar. They are .15% less likely to be targeted if the level of urbanization is different.

The forgoing analyses provide very little support for Contextual Expectations Theory. As expected, similarity in the physical terrain did not influence the effect that rising casualties had on Mid Targeting. However, the demographic terrain did, but in an inconsistent way. The environment the challenger expects to fight in should be irrelevant to their evaluation of the combatant’s revealed cost tolerance, so it is
surprising that the negative effect of rising casualties for war winners is more pronounced and statistically significant when the level of urbanization is similar. It is even more surprising that the positive effect of rising casualties for combatants that agree to a draw is more pronounced when the level of urbanization is different, and that the effect on war losers differs in direction, not only in magnitude, depending on the similarity in the levels of urbanization. It is unclear why war outcomes change the way similarity in the levels of urbanization influences the effect that revealed cost tolerance has on the probability of *MID Targeting*.

One finding that does emerge from the results of the models discussed above is that, regardless of environmental context, demonstrating resolve by suffering casualties does not yield reputational benefits. In most circumstances, combatants that agree to a draw or surrender to the enemy after suffering high numbers of casualties are more likely to be targeted in a MID than combatants that do so after suffering lower numbers of casualties.

**Reputation and Will: Political Context**

Revealed cost tolerance may appear to have no reputational consequences because information about a combatant’s willingness to suffer costs is only relevant under certain political conditions. If CET is correct and revealed cost tolerance only influences challenger behavior when the issues are similar or when the challenger is much weaker than the combatant, the estimates of the effect of casualties in the models discussed above may be biased. Models 1-8 may mask the reputational consequences of rising casualties by pooling the effect of casualties in situations where information on will is irrelevant with situations where information on will influences challenger
decisions. Table 3.5 reports the results of the models that include the political variables identified by CET: issue similarity and balance of power.

Table 3.5: Logit Estimation of the Impact of Revealed Cost Tolerance from Most Recent War on the Likelihood of Being Targeted in a MID Depending on Political Context

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<tr>
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* p < .1 ** p < .05 *** p < .01

In Models 9 and 10, region is used as a proxy for issue similarity to test whether combatants that demonstrate a willingness to suffer costs in pursuit of their battlefield objectives are less likely to be targeted by challengers whose disputes with the combatant are similar to the disputes the combatant had with their wartime enemy. When the casualties term is interacted with the regional dummy variables, no consistent pattern emerges. Like the urbanization interactions in Models 7 and 8, the conditioning effect that the regional variable has on the casualties depends on the outcome of the war.

Figure 3.8 uses the results from Model 9 to show how the probability of being targeted in a MID changes as combatants demonstrate a higher level of resolve by suffering 10,000 casualties compared to 1,000 casualties depending on the outcome and location of the war. Increasing casualties in a winning war decreases the probability of being targeted in the same region that the war was fought. However, increasing casualties in a war that ends in a draw only has a statistically significant effect in regions outside of the one in which the war was fought. The effect is positive, increasing the likelihood of a challenge by .16%. In wars where the combatant lost, increasing casualties increases the probability of being targeted in the region in which the war was fought, but decreases the probability in other regions.
Figure 3.8: Impact of Suffering 10,000 Casualties Compared to 1,000 Casualties on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by Region

Similar results are seen in Figure 3.9 which uses the results from Model 10 to compare combatants that suffered an order of magnitude fewer casualties than expected to combatants that suffered an order of magnitude more casualties than expected ($\text{CasualtiesDif}$ goes from -1 to 1).

Figure 3.9: Impact of Suffering an Order of Magnitude More Casualties than Expected on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by Region
When expectations are accounted for, the effect of rising casualties for war winners in the region where the war was fought remains negative but becomes statistically insignificant. The effect in other regions reverses signs but remains statistically indistinguishable from 0. The effect of suffering more casualties than expected for combatants that agree to a draw is the same as the effect of increasing the raw number of casualties suffered: the positive effect is only statistically significant in regions other than the one in which the war was fought. The magnitude of the effect is larger, with combatants that suffered an order of magnitude more casualties than expected being .40% more likely to be targeted than combatants that suffered an order of magnitude fewer casualties than expected. For war losers, the only difference between the baseline model and the model that takes expectations into account is the insignificant effect of rising casualties in the region where the war was fought. In other regions, suffering more casualties than expected lowers the combatant’s probability of being targeted by .26% compared to combatants that suffer fewer casualties than expected.

While the differences across regions are consistent with CET for combatants who won, the differences across regions for combatants who lost or agreed to a draw are not. For draws, it is unclear why the casualties would only have a significant effect outside the region where the war was fought. It is even more perplexing that the effect of rising casualties on war losers would be the opposite inside and outside of the region in which the war was fought.

Moving on to CET’s second conditional hypotheses, I test whether information about will has a larger impact on the behavior of potential challengers who are weaker than the combatant by interacting the casualty variables with the Military Balance variable in Models 11 and 12. Because Military Balance is a continuous variable, I rely on
simulations to assess how the sign and statistical significance of the casualties variables change as the balance of power shifts. If CET is correct, the reputational effect of combatants’ revealed cost tolerance should be most pronounced for weak challengers.

Figures 3.10 and 3.11 show how changes in the number of casualties suffered and the number of casualties suffered relative to expectations change the probability of the combatants being targeted in a militarized dispute as war outcome and the relative power of the challengers varies. Weak challengers account for 10% of the military power in the dyadic relationship, equal challengers account for 50%, and strong challengers account for 90%.

Figure 3.10: Impact of Suffering 10,000 Casualties Compared to 1,000 Casualties by Strength of Potential Challenger
Figure 3.11: Impact of Suffering an Order of Magnitude More Casualties than Expected on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by Strength of Challenger

The results are strongly supportive of Contextual Expectations Theory’s power asymmetry hypothesis. As predicted, information about the combatant’s cost tolerance has the expected effect on weak challengers for combatants that lost a war. Suffering higher costs in pursuit of their war aims makes it less likely that weak challengers will initiate a militarized dispute against them. Combatants that lose after suffering 10,000 casualties are 15% less likely to be targeted in a MID by weaker challengers than combatants that lose after suffering 1,000 casualties. Furthermore, war losers that suffer an order of magnitude more casualties than expected are .39% less likely to be targeted in a MID by weak actors than war losers that suffer an order of magnitude fewer casualties than expected.

The relationship between the strength of the potential challenger and the effect that revealed cost tolerance has on the probability of dispute targeting for war losers can be seen graphically in Figures 3.12 and 3.13.
Figure 3.12: Impact of Suffering 10,000 Casualties Compared to 1,000 Casualties on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by Relative Power of the Challenger for War Losers

Figure 3.12 shows how the probability of being targeted changes when the number of casualties suffered in a losing war increases from 1,000 to 10,000 depending on the relative strength of the potential challenger. When the challenger is very weak, accounting for less than 15% of the military power in the dyadic relationship, this increased willingness to suffer costs makes it less likely that the challenger will initiate a conflict. The effect becomes less pronounced as the challenger becomes stronger relative to the combatant, ultimately reversing signs. Challengers who are equal to the target or stronger are actually more likely to target the combatant as casualties rise, despite the fact that the combatant revealed a willingness to suffer high costs.

Figure 3.13 plots the same relationship for war losers that suffer an order of magnitude more casualties than expected compared to those that suffer an order of magnitude fewer casualties than expected. The pattern is similar, although the negative reputational effect of revealed cost tolerance holds for challengers that account for up to 30% of the military power in the dyad.
Figure 3.13: Impact of Suffering an Order of Magnitude More Casualties than Expected for War Losers on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by Balance of Power

Another way to visualize the relationship between these three variables is to examine how the probability of dispute initiation by a weak challenger changes as casualties rise. Figure 3.14 depicts this relationship graphically for combatants that recently lost a war.

Figure 3.14: Impact of Casualties Suffered in Losing War on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by a Weak Challenger
Combatants that lost despite suffering low casualties had a fairly high likelihood of being challenged by weaker states—1 to 1.5% if less than 1000 casualties were suffered. By giving up, despite suffering low costs, these combatants revealed that they had a fairly low cost tolerance. As the combatant suffers more casualties the probability of being targeted by weaker opponents decreases, presumably because the combatant reveals a higher cost threshold.

A similar pattern emerges in Figure 3.15, which looks at how the probability of being targeted in a dispute by weak actors changes as the number of casualties suffered in a losing war rises relative to the number of casualties that were expected.

![Figure 3.15: Impact of Casualties Relative to Expectations for War Losers on Probability of Being Targeted in a MID by a Weak Challenger](image)

Combatants who lost despite suffering fewer casualties than expected (negative numbers on the horizontal scale) are more likely to be challenged compared to those who lost but suffered more casualties than expected. This is consistent with a reputational effect since combatants that give up while suffering fewer casualties reveal a lower cost tolerance, while those that suffer more casualties reveal a higher cost tolerance. Since weak challengers rely almost entirely on the balance of resolve to
achieve their political goals, this information about willingness to suffer costs is particularly relevant to them.

The pattern documented in Figures 3.12-3.15 does not hold for combatants that won or agreed to a draw. For war winners, this may be due to the fact that casualties suffered only provide a floor estimate of cost tolerance because of the censorship problem discussed earlier. Suffering low numbers of casualties in victorious campaigns does not provide any information on whether the combatant would have been willing to suffer more. It is less clear why the relationship would not hold for combatants that agree to a draw.

The analysis of the political variables suggests that, in most circumstances, demonstrating resolve by suffering casualties in pursuit of wartime goals does not yield reputational benefits. An important exception is when the combatant faces weak challengers. In these situations, suffering a small number of casualties or suffering fewer than expected in a losing war increases the likelihood of being targeted in a militarized dispute. War losers that demonstrate a high willingness to suffer costs are less likely to be targeted by weak challengers.

**Summary of Results**

The forgoing analysis provides only limited support for Contextual Expectations Theory. Revealed cost tolerance has very few reputational consequences even when prior expectations are controlled for. For the most part, however, information interacts with context in the ways expected by CET. Environmental factors do not change the effect that rising casualties have on the combatant’s likelihood of being targeted in a MID. Furthermore, the only situation in which revealed cost tolerance has reputational effects is one predicted by CET: Weak challengers that are especially sensitive to
information about will are less likely to target combatants that reveal a high cost tolerance by suffering large numbers of casualties. However, contrary to the predictions of CET, the consequences of revealed cost tolerance are not more salient in the region where the war was fought, suggesting that issue similarity may not be an important conditioning factor. The lack of results could be reflective of the fact that cost tolerance is not issue specific, as some scholars have claimed, but it could also be due to the fact that region is a very rough a proxy for issue similarity.

In terms of the competing explanations, the results from this chapter provide some support for the bias and learning literature, which predicts that information about cost tolerance will not have reputational consequences because people rarely update their beliefs or engage in vicarious learning. For the most part, suffering high numbers of casualties did not deter future challenges. However, this literature cannot account for the fact that there are reputational benefits of revealing a high cost tolerance when combatants face weak challengers. It also cannot account for the robust reputational consequences of revealed effectiveness that were documented in the previous chapter.

Compared to the findings from the previous chapter, the findings from this chapter provide less support for hypotheses generated from the rationalist literature, which predicted that information about will would influence challenger behavior regardless of prior expectations or context. These theories cannot account for the fact that the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance only emerged when weak actors considered challenging combatants that had lost. This suggests that context is more important than the rationalist literature would expect.

The results from this chapter also provide no support for Mercer’s attributional theory. His theory predicts that revealing a high cost tolerance will deter potential
challengers, while revealing a low cost tolerance will have no effect on the behavior of potential challengers. I actually found that, in most circumstances, revealing a high cost tolerance by suffering casualties increases the probability of being targeted in a MID.

On the other hand, my analysis of the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance provides partial support for Current Calculus Theory, especially when combined with the findings from the previous chapter. As predicted, combatants that performed poorly on the battlefield were more likely to be challenged than those who fought more effectively, but combatants that revealed a low cost tolerance by giving up after suffering small numbers of casualties were not more likely to be challenged in most situations. When the combatants agreed to a draw, revealing a low cost tolerance by suffering fewer casualties actually decreased the probability that they would be targeted. The same pattern emerged for combatants that lost a war when the relative power of the challenger was not accounted for. This may suggest that information about skill has reputational effects, while information about cost tolerance does not. This is precisely the prediction that flows from the logic of Current Calculus Theory. However, the fact that weak challengers consider information about the losing combatants’ willingness to suffer costs suggests that there are some circumstances under which information about resolve has reputational effects. Current Calculus Theory cannot explain the existence of reputational effects in these situations because it is insensitive to the importance of context in mediating the reputational consequences of war.

This chapter’s statistical analysis also generated a number of results that cannot be explained by any of the reputational theories discussed in chapter 1. First, war winners that suffer low numbers of casualties are less likely to be targeted in militarized disputes than war winners that suffer high numbers of casualties. This cannot be due to
reputational effects because using casualties suffered to draw inferences about the cost tolerance of war winners is problematic. As discussed earlier, war winners may have been willing to suffer more casualties to attain their goals but they did not need to because they were able to achieve victory before their cost tolerance threshold was reached. Thus, the negative relationship between casualties suffered and dispute targeting for war winners must be a function of other factors. One possibility is that casualties might be measuring the scale of the war, rather than the combatant’s sensitivity to costs. War winners that suffer low numbers of casualties might just be winning small wars that potential challengers are not paying attention to. On the other hand, high casualty conflicts might fundamentally change the power dynamics of the international system. Winners of these conflicts might emerge considerably more powerful than they were prior to the conflict, making it less likely that third party states will challenge them.

This explanation would be consistent with the second anomalous finding I uncovered. In most situations, when combatants lose or agree to a draw, the accumulation of casualties increases the likelihood of a challenge despite the fact that states that suffer high casualties reveal a high cost tolerance. If states that lose high casualty conflicts emerge drastically weakened from the fighting, they might invite future challenges by adversaries seeking to take advantage of their postwar weakness. The relative power of weak challengers might preclude them from capitalizing on this vulnerability since the combatant may still be stronger even after accounting for war losses. These challengers would be less concerned with the destruction of the combatant’s material resources than its willingness to suffer costs.
Another possibility is that combatants that suffer high casualties during a war suffer from war weariness after the war. Faced with the stark reality of war and exhausted by the loss of life and the expenditure of its material resources, the combatant adopts policies designed to avoid future wars. It takes care not to threaten other states and it adopts conciliatory bargaining strategies in order to prevent diplomatic disputes from escalating into armed conflict. Potential challengers note these policy changes and try to take advantage of the combatant’s timorous attitudes toward militarized conflict. They make increased demands on the combatant and adopt recalcitrant bargaining strategies because they believe that the combatant will back down due to its desire to avoid another war. They may also be more willing to initiate war because they believe the combatant will surrender early on rather than suffer large numbers of casualties again. This would explain why combatants that suffer high casualties in a losing or stalemated war are more likely to be targeted in a MID than those who suffer few casualties. However, it does not explain why this pattern does not hold for war winners, who should be equally susceptible to wartime fatigue. In fact, the primary example of war weariness given in the literature is the victors from World War I. In their haste to avoid another World War, they appeased Hitler at Munich, acquiescing to Nazi occupation of Sudetenland thereby encouraging Hitler to continue his expansionist policies.

A final possibility is that a reputational process is still at play, but casualties suffered does not accurately capture information about the combatant’s cost tolerance. The models employed in this analysis assume that states that give up after suffering low casualties reveal a low cost tolerance, that war winners that suffer low casualties reveal no information about their cost tolerance, and that all states that suffer high casualties
reveal a high cost tolerance. The first assumption is probably valid: states that give up after suffering low losses are probably highly sensitive to war’s costs. The second assumption may not be; war winners that suffer low casualties may fight in a way that generates information about their cost tolerance even if they achieve victory before their cost threshold is reached. The case of the US in Kosovo is instructive. The Americans prevailed over the Serbs without suffering any casualties by spending a lot of resources on force protection, by following strict rules of engagement that limited the risk that the United States’ military forces were exposed to, and by refusing to send in ground forces. Potential challengers may have used this information to infer that the US was cost sensitive. Thus, war winners may suffer reputational consequences for fighting in ways that highlight their own sensitivity to costs. The third assumption about the robust cost tolerance of all states that suffer high casualties may also be problematic. Withdrawal from a conflict can be difficult, especially if the other side refuses to negotiate. Withdrawal may also be unpalatable to domestic political audiences or may be complicated by the logistical difficulties of removing troops from a war zone. Thus, a country may continue fighting after its cost tolerance threshold has been reached. These countries may remain committed to the war, but take steps to limit the costs of that war. Like war winners, countries that remain committed to costly wars may still demonstrate their cost sensitivity by fighting in ways that reduce their exposure to war’s costs.

Chapters 6-8 in part 2 allow me to test CET’s predictions about the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance in a qualitative setting. The case study of Vietnam provides more detailed information on how third party states assess cost tolerance, which will enable me to evaluate the validity of the casualties variable. By examining the decision making of three of the United States adversaries in the aftermath of Vietnam, I
can also assess whether their decisions were driven by reputational effects, by a desire to take advantage of a military whose material and human assets had been depleted over the course of the war, or by the war weariness that plagued American society after Vietnam. The case studies also provide more detailed information on the issues at stake in Vietnam and in the conflicts that followed in its aftermath. By testing CET’s issue similarity hypothesis with more precise data, I can evaluate whether the regional patterns I uncovered in this chapter are due to the bluntness of the regional variable or are reflective of the fact that information about cost tolerance is not issue specific.
Part 2: Case Studies of Contextual Expectations Theory
Statistical tests enable researchers to evaluate hypotheses by assessing whether the relationship between two or more variables is consistent with the researcher’s predictions. These tests establish correlation across a large number of cases. However, even advanced statistical techniques that correct for the bias arising from different inferential problems such as endogeneity, non-random selection, and interdependence across units, cannot establish whether the causal mechanism specified by the research is driving the relationship because that mechanism is unobservable. In addition, the validity of statistical tests depends on the quality of the data being used. If the variables used in the analysis are poorly measured or only weakly related to the theoretical concept being tested, then the conclusions of that analysis may be suspect.

The Role of Case Studies

Using case studies to supplement statistical analyses can compensate for some of these problems. First, case studies can provide an additional observational test of the relevant hypotheses with more precise variables. The goal of these types of tests is similar to the goal of large N statistical analysis—to establish a relationship between two or more relevant variables (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). These studies examine the behavior of specific actors in specific situations to establish whether their actions are consistent with the theory’s predictions. Because only a few cases are examined, the relevant variables can be measured with much more precision. Consequently, the researcher can be more confident in the conclusions drawn from these tests. However, the generalizability of these conclusions will be limited. When used in isolation, this is a
severe limitation of qualitative work, but when used in a multi-method setting, these studies can be used to validate the findings of a large N analysis. The key question is whether the results are consistent when better data is leveraged to test the same hypothesis in a small set of cases.

Case studies can also complement large N statistical tests by providing information on the quality of the variables and data used in the quantitative analysis. An in depth study of one case can provide a number of different ways to measure the key concepts of interest and the case can be chosen to insure that the accuracy and precision of these different measurements is high. These measurements can then be compared to the proxy variables used to measure the same concepts in the large N study. In this way the case study can be used to assess whether the variables used in the large N study are reasonable approximations of the concepts of interest.

Finally, cases studies enable researchers to test whether the causal mechanism specified by the theory is operative. The studies go beyond establishing correlation between two variables to assess whether movement in the relevant independent variables actually causes movement in the dependent variable for the reasons specified by the theory. Determining whether the specified causal mechanism is driving the results in one case enables quantitative researchers to identify whether false positives might be driving the results of the larger analysis.

**Types of Evidence**

Three types of evidence can be used to conduct all three of these qualitative tests: interviews, primary source materials, and secondary histories. The usefulness of these different types of evidence depends on which test is being employed. If the case study is being employed as an observational test to establish correlation between a set of
variables, secondary historical work is probably sufficient. The key question is whether the actions taken are consistent with the theory’s predictions. The secondary literature can usually provide a thorough overview of what happened. Additional archival materials and interviews might be useful supplements, but they are likely to reveal only a small portion of what occurred. The utility of interviews may be limited because most individuals are only knowledgeable about the subset of events in which they actually participated, there are often incentives for individuals to lie or omit important details, and memories fade with the passage of time. Comparing interview accounts to the documentary record and framing questions in ways that minimize people’s incentives to misrepresent can compensate for some of these weaknesses, but they are weaknesses nonetheless. Primary source documents may also have limited utility because most of them deal with very specific issues that may not be pertinent to the larger question at hand. They may also provide only a partial account of what occurred. Ideally the secondary literature takes into account the weaknesses and potential biases of these primary source materials when synthesizing them to develop an overview of events. Thus, relying on that literature makes sense when the researcher is primarily interested in establishing what happened in a given case.

The type of qualitative evidence that is most useful for assessing the quality of key variables depends on what the researcher is trying to measure. If the key concepts involve objective things like trade or casualties, the secondary historical literature and archival documents will be the most useful. Governments, industries, and other organizations often collect data and issue reports on a variety of topics that might be useful when assessing whether the proxy variables used in the statistical analysis are consistent with the micro-level indicators used in those reports. Archives are full of
primary source materials with this information, and the secondary literature often aggregates this material and sometimes provides detailed descriptions of it. Interviews will be less helpful for this type of analysis because it is unlikely that individuals will be able to recall the detailed information recorded in the primary source documents.

On the other hand, if the key concepts involve subjective ideas or perceptions, like soft power or shared norms, interviews will be more useful. Only the individuals involved in the relevant decisions can attest to whether they thought that a given country was liberal or the United States’ economic system was worth emulating. The main weakness with using interviews is that people’s memories and perceptions of the past might be influenced by current circumstances. Archival materials deal with this time inconsistency problem—the primary documents record what individuals thought when the relevant events were occurring. However, these sources often suffer from strategic misrepresentation. There is nothing to guarantee that the true views of the actors will be recorded in the written record. The secondary literature can be useful here in terms of integrating evidence from both interviews and archival materials while being sensitive to the potential for bias.

When case studies are used to establish causality, all three types of evidence can be useful. Interviewing the individuals that participated in the decision making process has the potential to yield valuable information because only they know what motivated them to take certain actions. They can be asked pointed questions about these motivations and the relative importance of different factors in the decision making process. There is no guarantee, however, that they will tell the truth. There are often incentives to lie or omit details if those details shine an unfavorable light on the individual involved. In addition, the passage of time might erode people’s memories
and current perceptions of past events might influence their interpretation of their previous actions and decisions.

Alternatively, researchers can use primary source documents to reconstruct the decision making process and thereby determine what motivated the key players. The written record provides clues as to what people thought at the time. However, not everything important is written down and so only looking at the documents might create an inaccurate picture of the decision making process. In addition, documents are generated for specific audiences and the content of those documents is often strategically designed to influence the behavior of others. Because of this, they cannot always be interpreted as a true representation of the relevant actors’ beliefs and motivations.

The secondary literature can be useful because the histories that make up this literature synthesize interviews and archival evidence to create a broad picture of what occurred, while taking into account the biases and problems discussed above. The problem with relying exclusively on the secondary literature is that the historians’ own views may influence their conclusions and, like interviews, contemporary events and perspectives might color their analysis. In addition, historians may omit details related to the question at hand because it was not relevant to the question that motivated their own research.

**The Role of Case Studies in Testing CET**

The following chapters consist of case studies on the reputational effects of two wars. First, I examine the effect that the Soviet performance in the Winter War had on German and Japanese decision making during World War II. Then I examine the effect that the US performance in Vietnam had on Soviet, Cuban, and Egyptian decision making during the Angola crisis and the October War. These case studies are designed
to complement the statistical analysis performed in chapters 2 and 3 by providing information on the quality of the variables used in the large N studies, providing additional observation tests of the theory, and by enabling me to assess whether the causal mechanisms specified by CET were operative in these cases.

**Case Selection**

These cases were chosen to maximize variation on the independent and conditioning variables identified as important by Contextual Expectations Theory. To examine the reputational effects of revealing a low level of skill, I needed a combatant who performed worse than expected and could potentially be challenged by actors operating in different types of terrain. The Soviet Union in the Winter War met these requirements and Germany and Japan were selected as the Soviet’s potential adversaries because of the environmental differences in their potential theaters of war. I examine the US in Vietnam to study the reputational effects of revealing an unexpectedly low level of will because I needed a combatant who had different types of disputes with actors of various power configurations across the globe. The Angolan Civil War and the October War in the Middle East were chosen because they involved different types of issues. The decision making of the Soviet Union was compared with Cuba in the former case and Egypt in the latter in order to assess the conditioning effect of power asymmetries.

**Evidence**

All of these case studies were needed to test CET because I needed to vary wartime information, observer terrain, observer interests, and observer power to analyze whether the conditioning variables operated as predicted. Because of the breadth of my analysis, I rely primarily on secondary histories supplemented with some primary
sources. For the World War II case, I had access to the war diaries of Halder and Goebbels, copies of Hitler’s war directives, documents from the archives of the German Foreign Office, the memoirs of Halder, Speer, and Gudieron, official notes from the Japanese Liaison meetings and Imperial Conferences, the documents issued after these conferences, the diary of Lord Kido, and variety of speeches, correspondence, and memorandum collected by Chihiro (1980). For the Cold War cases, I had access to some correspondence between the Soviets and their third world patrons courtesy of the Cold War History project, Isrealyan’s memoirs about Soviet decision making during the October War, and the memoirs of Gamasy, Sadat, Shazly, and Heikal. My access to additional primary resources is limited by their availability: Cuban and Egyptian archives are not open to academics. Some scholars have circumvented this problem by using the archival records of these countries’ allies. For example, Hal Brands (2010) used East Germany’s archives to gain insight into Cuba’s foreign policy during the Cold War. These documents primarily consist of correspondence between the Cubans and their Eastern European allies. Because these allies were not involved in Angola, these documents are less relevant to the case analyzed here. My access to interviews is primarily limited by the time period under consideration and also by language barriers. Relying primarily on secondary histories for my qualitative evidence has a number of consequences for the conclusions I can draw from my analysis.

Assessing the Validity of the Proxy Variables

In terms of assessing the validity of the variables used in the large N analysis, relying on the secondary history is, for the most part, sufficient. The secondary history has a lot of information on the battlefield effectiveness of the USSR in the Winter War and the US in the Vietnam. Most sources reach similar conclusions on the level of
effectiveness and present a great deal of information to support their conclusions. This makes it relatively easy to compare the LER variables used in the statistical analysis to the more nuanced, qualitative assessment of skill found in the literature. Compared to skill, will is a more subjective concept and so access to interviews or primary source documents is more important. However, in both cases the secondary literature is quite good in recording the overall impression that other states had of the combatants’ cost tolerance at the end of the war. Quotes from various government and military leaders, as well as after action-reports from third party militaries are cited in the literature to support the conclusions that are reached. In addition, there is general agreement among various sources about the information generated about both states’ revealed will, which makes me more confident in using the literature to compare the information generated about each state’s revealed cost tolerance with the casualties variables used in the large N analysis.

The secondary literature also provides adequate information on the contextual variables identified as important by CET. For environmental similarity, the military histories provide detailed information on the physical and social terrain of all the wars being analyzed. Much information is also provided on the military and economic resources the combatants and their potential adversaries had at their disposal. The detailed pictures of power and terrain that emerge from the secondary literature offer an adequate point of reference by which to compare the proxy variables with a qualitative assessment of these two contextual factors. Although issue similarity is more subjective than power or terrain, the secondary histories provide a wealth of information on the issues at stake for the participants in all of the wars being considered. Because the literature focuses so much attention on the question of the underlying causes of the wars
being analyzed, often quoting military and political leaders and important documents at length, my lack of access to interviews or the archival record does not detract from my ability to compare a qualitative assessment of issue similarity to the variables used in the statistical analysis.

The secondary literature is weak in terms of providing information on the prior expectations of third party states. The histories provide a few statements by political and military leaders about the expected course of the Vietnam and Winter Wars, but for the most part only an overall evaluation is given and not much evidence is marshaled to back up those evaluations. This is more problematic for the Vietnam War than for the Winter War because in the latter there is at least consensus among the historians about what the prior expectations were. For Vietnam, different conclusions are drawn about these expectations and it is difficult to adjudicate between conflicting claims because of the dearth of evidence presented.

Having access to interviews or primary source documents would probably make evaluating my expectations variable easier, but the sources quoted by secondary historians suggest that there would still be problems with this type of evidence. First, the utility of interviews would probably be influenced by the fact that the subjects now know the outcome of both wars. For example, in the aftermath of World War II most of the German generals claimed that they knew that invading Russia was a lost cause. However, an analysis of the documents suggests that most of them were optimistic at the time because of Germany’s victory over France in 1939.

Second, there are strategic incentives to misrepresent one’s expectations that could undermine the validity of both interviews and documents. For example, after the October War the Egyptians claimed that they only had limited aims because they knew
that the Israelis could not be beaten. However, they had a big incentive to make those claims because to admit otherwise was to admit defeat. By claiming they had low expectations in the aftermath of the war, they can recast the ultimate outcome as a victory, or at least a draw, rather than a loss. Looking at the documents might allay the problem of hindsight, but strategic misrepresentation remains a problem. For example, prior to Vietnam the United States’ allies who did not want the US to get involved told the US that its chances for victory were slim, while its allies that wanted it to be involved told them the opposite. Thus, although having access to interviews or primary source materials might improve my analysis of prior expectations, there is no guarantee that these types of evidence would yield a more accurate picture of the actual expectations of third parties. That being said, my reliance on the secondary histories does limit my ability to assess the validity of my large N expectations proxy variable. However, it is not clear that having access to other types of evidence would remedy that problem.

**Additional Observational Tests**

Relying on the secondary literature is less problematic in terms of using the case studies as an additional observational test of the theory. The key question in terms of this test is whether the adversaries of the USSR and the US were more willing to challenge them after the Winter and Vietnam wars, respectively. These tests require information on the performance of both states in their respective wars and on the behavior of specific adversaries in the foreign policy crises that followed those wars. The secondary literature provides detailed information on both the performance of the combatants and the key actions and decisions of their adversaries in the postwar crises.
Tracing Causality

My limited access to interviews and other primary source documents has the biggest impact on my ability to assess whether the causal mechanism identified by CET is operative. Ideally, I would comb through the decision making documents of the various states looking for references to Vietnam and the Winter War and to the United States’ lack of will and the Soviet’s lack of skill. Instead, I have to rely primarily on general histories of World War II, the October War, and the Angola crisis. Some of the secondary sources are quite good in terms of quoting primary source documents and interviews, and a few have full text references to important documents. This is especially true for Germany in World War II and the USSR in both Angola and the October War. That, combined with the primary source documents I was able to access, create a decent record by which to examine the decision making of Germany, Japan, and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet Union. The memoirs of Egyptian leaders offer a smaller record by which to examine Egyptian decision making, and there is virtually no primary source record of Cuban decision making in Angola.

Relying on secondary sources and a small set of primary sources is not too problematic for the cases where I find evidence of reputational effects. If the few primary source materials I can access, or the secondary sources whose primary questions do not revolve around reputational effects, mention the importance of Vietnam or the Winter War in driving key decisions, I can be reasonably certain that the reputational effects of those wars mattered, at least at the margins. It is more problematic for cases where I do not find evidence of reputational effects because it is possible that the lack of evidence stems from the dearth of documents or the fact that the historians were not specifically looking for those reputational effects when they
examined the primary source record. This creates a more rigorous test for cases like Germany in WWII and Cuba in Angola, where CET predicts that there will be strong reputational effects. It is more problematic for cases like Japan in WWII and the USSR in the October War, where CET predicts no reputational effects. Here the lack of evidence could be due to a correct prediction or a lack of access to the relevant material.

Fortunately, my access to primary source documents in Japan is quite good—I have notes from all the foreign policy liaison and imperial conferences where wartime policy was discussed. Isrealyan’s first person account of Soviet decision making during the October War also partially alleviates this problem since he was present at all of the Politburo meetings and took part in creating the relevant documentation for the war.

The effect of using this type of evidence on the intermediate cases of Egypt in the October War and the USSR in Angola, where CET predicts weak reputational effects, depends on my ultimate conclusions. Evidence for reputational effects should be seen as fairly strong given the types of materials I am able to access. A lack of evidence, on the other hand, should be carefully evaluated. This is especially true for Soviet decision making in Angola where I rely almost exclusively on secondary source materials. For the Egyptians, I at least have access to the memoirs of the major political and military figures who participated in the dispute.

Although there are limitations to the inferences I can make using the evidence I have at my disposal, I believe that conducting these case studies is nonetheless valuable. Given the limitations of the statistical analysis in determining causality and the bluntness of the indicators used for expectations, terrain, and issue similarity, harnessing some qualitative evidence to examine the quality of those proxy variables, to test CET’s hypotheses with more nuanced data, and to trace causality in a small number
of cases will provide a more rigorous test of CET than the statistical analysis could achieve on its own.

**Plan for Part 2**

Each section of part 2 begins with a war chapter. In this chapter, I evaluate the combatant’s performance during the war to assess what information was generated about its military effectiveness and cost tolerance. I then compare this information to the expectations of third parties prior to the war to determine whether the information generated was unexpected. Using this information, I derive predictions about the likely reputational consequences based on CET and the rival theories laid out in chapter 1. I conclude with an assessment of what the cases reveal about the skill and will variables I used in my statistical analysis: LER and Casualties.

Because the Vietnam case suggests that casualties may not be the best proxy for revealed cost tolerance, I conclude that case with an intervention analysis to determine the effect that Vietnam had on a wide range of challengers. This quantitative case study enables me to leverage the information provided by my qualitative analysis of the United States’ performance during the Vietnam War with the generalizability of a statistical test. I do not conduct a similar analysis of the Winter War because the timing of the war makes it impossible to parse out the different effects of the Winter War and World War II. However, because my analysis suggests that the LER proxy is quite good, the need for additional statistical tests is less pressing.

Each war chapter is followed by one or more chapters on the consequences of that war. These chapters begin by identifying the relevant contextual characteristics of the combatants’ potential adversaries to generate predictions about their likely behavior vis-à-vis the US and the USSR. I then compare these predictions to the actual behavior of
those adversaries in the relevant crises. This is followed by in-depth process tracing of
the decision making of those adversaries. I examine the importance of the contextual
variables identified by CET to assess whether they condition the behavior of the
adversaries in the ways predicted by the theory. I then discuss what the case reveals
about the quality of the proxy variables used in the statistical analysis for the relevant
contextual factors. I conclude with an overall assessment of the validity of CET and its
rival theories based on the different qualitative tests.
Chapter 4: What the Winter War Revealed about the Soviet Union’s Skill and Will

In late November of 1939, the Soviet Union attacked Finland. The power disparity between the two combatants was so great that both the combatants and outside observers expected Finland’s resistance to quickly collapse. However, the Finns held out for more than three months and inflicted terrible losses on their opponent. Although the Soviet Union ultimately prevailed in the conflict, the difficulty it faced on the Finnish battlefields revealed the extent to which Stalin’s purges had degraded the effectiveness of the Red Army.

The goal of this chapter is to assess what information was generated about the military effectiveness and cost tolerance of the Soviet Union during its Winter War with Finland. This information will then be used in the following chapter to assess whether the Soviet Union’s performance in the Winter War had reputational consequences. I begin by providing a short summary of the causes of the war and its eventual outcome. I then use the historiography of the war to provide a detailed analysis of the effectiveness of the USSR’s operations, tactics, and basic soldiering skills. This is followed by a similar analysis of the Soviet Union’s revealed cost tolerance. I examine whether this information is unexpected by looking at the power disparity between the two combatants, the prewar planning of the combatants, and statements by outside observers. The next section draws on Contextual Expectations Theory to predict what the reputational consequences of the Winter War would be, given the information generated and the specific context in which the war was fought. I conclude my discussion of the Winter War by assessing whether loss exchange ratios, casualties, and
the material balance of power are valid proxies for skill, will, and prior expectations in this particular case.

**Summary of the War**

Leningrad was the Soviet Union’s second largest city and was a politically important symbol of the Russian Revolution. It is located in northwestern Russia along the shores of the Gulf of Finland and in 1939 it was also only 20 miles from the Finnish border. Fearing eventual expansion of the European War to its own borders, the leaders of the Soviet Union sought to reduce the strategic vulnerability of Russia’s second city by making demands on their small Nordic neighbor. In 1938 Soviet diplomats approached Finland and requested that the border on the Karelian Isthmus be moved back, out of the range of heavy artillery. They also requested a lease of the Hanko Peninsula and a transfer of the Gulf Islands to Soviet ownership. Possession of the peninsula and the islands would ensure that the USSR could close the Gulf of Finland and prevent naval bombardment of Leningrad. Finally they asked for a mutual assistance pact which would pledge Russian military assistance to Finland if an outside power attacked Finland. This would enable Russia to fight potential enemies on Finnish, rather than Russian, soil.

Finland refused these demands in order to maintain its neutrality and ability to defend itself. Moving the border back on the Isthmus would rob Finland of the defensive fortifications that protected it from a Russian invasion, and leasing Hanko would leave armed Soviet soldiers on Finnish territory with easy access to the heart of the country. It would also prevent Finland from defending the gulf. Agreeing to a mutual defense pact would compromise Finnish neutrality, which Finnish leaders believed was key to national survival given the turbulent political-military situation in
Europe. Finally, their previous history with Russia and the Soviet Union’s subjugation of the other Baltic States made the Finns question whether making concessions now would lead to future demands and eventual erosion of their national sovereignty. For this reason, they were unwilling to compromise on even non-vital issues, such as possession of the Gulf Islands. Negotiations between the two countries continued throughout 1938 and into 1939, with each side only willing to make minor concessions. In November of 1939, the negotiations broke down for a final time and the Soviet Union decided to obtain its demands by force.\footnote{For more on pre-war negotiations see Upton 1974, chapter 2.} On November 26\textsuperscript{th}, it staged a border incident on the Karelian Isthmus, announced the abrogation of its non-aggression treaty with Finland, and prepared for war.

The Soviet Union planned for a four-pronged attack against its Finnish neighbor. It dedicated the eight infantry divisions and four tank brigades of the 7\textsuperscript{th} Army to the main assault, which would take place across the Karelian Isthmus. The 8\textsuperscript{th} Army, equipped with seven infantry divisions and one tank brigade, would attack just to the north of Lake Ladoga. The goal of this offensive was two-fold. The Soviets hoped to divert Finnish forces from the main assault and to outflank the Mannerheim line, the series of defensive fortifications the Finns had constructed on the Karelian Isthmus. Further north along the Russian-Finnish Border, five divisions of the 9\textsuperscript{th} Army would attack the midsection of the country and attempt to split Finland in two. Finally, the 14\textsuperscript{th} Army would attack in the far north with two divisions in an attempt to seize the port of Petsamo. This would prevent allied countries from staging an intervention via Finland’s only arctic port. The Soviet Union’s plans and the disposition of the Soviet and Finnish Forces at the beginning of the war are depicted below in Figures 4.1 and 4.2.
Figure 4.1: Soviet Plan of Attack for Winter War, December 1939

Figure 4.2: Soviet Plan of Attack on Karelian Isthmus, December 1939
In the first few days of the war, the Russians were quite successful. On the Isthmus the 7th Army pushed covering troops back to the Mannerheim line, and North of Lake Ladoga the Soviets succeeded in capturing the key towns of Tolvajärvi and Suomussalmi. These initial gains were due to a number of factors. First, Marshall Mannerheim and his chief of staff disagreed about the role the covering troops should play. Mannerheim wanted them to engage the Russians in open battle, while General Österman preferred to keep all forces behind the Mannerheim line. This disagreement resulted in uneven deployment of the covering forces. Consequently, in some areas the covering troops fought well and inflicted heavy costs on the Russians. In other areas, they retreated without offering any opposition (Trotter 1991, 70). Second, many Finnish soldiers had never seen tanks before and had not trained to fight against them. The sight of Russian armor advancing towards them prompted some units to retreat without much resistance. The Russians were able to advance through that territory against virtually no opposition (Trotter 1991, 71). By December 6th, all Finnish forces on the Karelian Isthmus had retreated behind the Mannerheim line.

Because Finland had not expected the Soviets to deploy many forces along the border, there were very few troops stationed North of Lake Ladoga—only two divisions directly north of the lake to prevent an outflanking maneuver and a few small patrol units to guard the remainder of the 560 mile border along the Russian frontier. These small units fought fiercely, but were unable to prevent the Soviet divisions from the 8th and 9th Armies from advancing into Finnish territory. Similarly, the 14th Army encountered little resistance in its attack on Petsamo. Although the Finns had expected an attack on Petsamo, they had limited resources in terms of manpower and weaponry and decided to prioritize other fronts.
When the Finns pulled back to the Mannerheim Line on the Isthmus and deployed their scarce reserve forces to Lake Ladoga and the northern wilderness, the Russian offensive ground to a halt. Throughout December, the 7th Army launched repeated assaults on the Mannerheim Line but they were unable to breakthrough. North of Lake Ladoga, Finnish Forces strengthened by a reserve division defeated the Russians in a major battle to retake Tolvajärvi. After their victory, they went on to expel the Russians from their positions in Kotisaari and Ägläjärvi as well. By the end of December, they had succeeded in pushing all of the active Soviet divisions north of Lake Ladoga back to the Russian frontier, where they remained for the rest of the war. Further north, the Finns virtually annihilated the 163rd Russian Infantry Division in the battle of Suomussalmi. They then took advantage of Finland’s forest, the winter weather, and the sparse infrastructure to trap other road bound Russian divisions operating on this front. Their attacks crippled the 44th Division on Raate Road, eventually forcing it to retreat. Most of the other divisions refused to retreat and were subsequently destroyed by the Finns who attacked the flanks of the long Russian columns, breaking them into smaller units that could be dismantled or placed under siege. The threat to the midsection of the country was effectively neutralized. The Finns did not attempt to recapture Petsamo, but the small forces stationed in the arctic and the early onset of winter prevented the 14th Army from moving south after securing the strategic port.

Faced with these setbacks and staggering levels of casualties, the Soviet Union temporarily suspended its operations and undertook a major review of its wartime policies. Soviet military leaders decided to forgo offensives in the frontier areas and focused on breaking through the Mannerheim Line on the Karelian Isthmus. They reformed their doctrine, adopted an ambitious training program, used air and ground
reconnaissance to develop a detailed picture of Finnish defenses, and sent an additional twenty divisions to Isthmus. In February, they began a massive assault on the Mannerheim Line that eventually succeeded in breaking through Finnish defenses at Lähde Road in the Summa Sector on February 12th. With their manpower and ammunition running dangerously low, the Finns sought to negotiate with the Russians. During the negotiations the fighting continued. The Finns retreated to an intermediate defensive line on February 16th, which they defended until February 26th when the Russians broke through again. They then retreated to their rear defensive positions and prepared to defend the key city of Viipuri against the Red Army. Despite huge losses and the massive onslaught of Russian forces, the Finns remained in possession of Viipuri and the rear defensive line remained unbroken when Russian and Finnish negotiators agreed to peace terms on March 3, 1940.

In the end Russia prevailed. Finland was forced to cede the Rybachi Peninsula, the Gulf Islands, and the whole of the Karelian Isthmus, including Viipuri, to the Soviet Union. It also agreed to a 30 year lease of the Hanko Peninsula and the construction of a Soviet naval base on the peninsula. Finally, Finland was forced to sign a mutual defense pact and a trade agreement with the Soviet Union and to permit the construction of a railroad across Finland that connected Russia’s Murmask Railroad to Sweden. The only concession it received was the return of Petsamo. The Finns, however, had succeeded in maintaining their independence. Despite the ultimate success of the Russian war effort, the Winter War revealed many of the weaknesses of the Russian military. The next two sections provide an in depth analysis of what information the war generated about both the military effectiveness and the cost tolerance of the Soviet Union.
**Soviet Skill: Assessing Military Effectiveness**

The goal of this section is to analyze the military effectiveness of the Soviet Union during the Winter War. Because the Soviet Union adopted numerous tactical and operational reforms during the war and its performance in the latter stages of the war improved, I evaluate its performance in each stage separately. Overall, I find that the Soviet Union performed poorly at the operational and tactical level and even in terms of basic soldiering skills. This was particularly true in the early stages of the war. The Soviet Union attempted to address many of its weaknesses in January and its effectiveness during the February offensives on the Isthmus was much improved. However, many problems still remained in terms of force employment and tactical proficiency.

**Soviet Effectiveness in the First Stage of the Winter War: December-January**

During the first stage of the Winter War, a lack of discipline and basic training degraded the Soviet Union’s military effectiveness, while numerous operational and tactical errors limited its ability to leverage its superior resources against the Finnish defenders.

**Strategic and Operational Effectiveness**

The Soviets’ overall war plan prevented them from capitalizing on their vast numerical superiority by widely dispersing their forces. At the beginning of the war they had twenty-three divisions compared to Finland’s twelve. Because offensive operations usually require more manpower than defensive operations, a minimum of a three to one ratio is normally required for effective offensives. Successful offensive operations thus involve concentrating forces to take advantage of local numerical
superiority to achieve a breakthrough (Biddle 2004, 40-42). The Soviet Union did the opposite of this, dividing its forces into four armies and spreading those forces along the entire Russia-Finnish Border. Rather than concentrating most of their forces in the area intended for breakthrough, the Soviets opted for a “wide front” war with eight divisions assigned to the Isthmus, seven to Lake Ladoga, five to the midsection of the country, and two to the far North. They believed that dispersing their forces in this way would compel the Finns to divert scarce resources away from the Isthmus, making breakthrough in that sector easier. Although it succeeded in forcing the Finns to send their reserve forces to Lake Ladoga and the northern wilderness, it also prevented the Russians from achieving a sufficiently favorable troop ratio for a successful offensive. The Soviets acknowledged this in their postwar assessments. They concluded that a “narrow front war” was preferable to a “wide front war” (Van Dyke 1997, 194).

The failure to concentrate their forces had the largest ramifications for their operations on the Karelian Isthmus, where they attempted to storm a prepared defensive line against well dug in defenders. Although they planned to conduct their major offensive in this region, the Soviets assigned less than half their troops to this front—only eight divisions. Because Finland had anticipated a major assault against the Mannerheim line, it had assigned six divisions to defend the Isthmus. Thus, the troop ratio in the major theatre of the war was only 1.7:1. The decision to disperse forces had direct effects on the outcome of their operations on the Isthmus. For example, their initial assault on Taipale failed in part because they had insufficient artillery support (Edwards 2008, 125). This was just poor planning given the 5:1 advantage the Soviets

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2 Russian divisions, which consisted of 18,000 men, were larger than Finnish divisions, which consisted of 14,200 men. Thus, the ratio of divisions committed is not exactly equal to the manpower ratio.
enjoyed in terms of both heavy and light artillery. The USSR also dispersed the forces it had within this theater, embarking on a series of outflanking maneuvers rather than concentrating its forces for a penetrating attack. As expected, these offensives failed to expel the Finnish defenders from their positions. The Soviets eventually concluded that “the fortifications making up the Mannerheim line could not be outflanked, that individual DOTs [dolgovremennye ognevye tochki, permanent fire points] had to be isolated and assaulted directly,” (Van Dyke 1997, 63) and that their forces needed to be concentrated to do so.

The other major operational flaw in the Soviet offensives on the Karelian Isthmus was their failure to prepare for or exploit their breakthroughs. If attacking forces that breakthrough enemy lines do not pursue the defenders or begin to destroy the defensive infrastructure set up by their enemy immediately, the defenders can regroup or call in reserve forces to expel the attackers (Biddle 2004, 40-42). This is precisely what happened on the Mannerheim Line during December. Because Finnish anti-tank methods were very primitive, tanks were often able to breakthrough the Mannerheim Line. However, the Russians did not pursue defenders or begin destroying Finnish trench works or fortifications. In fact, they normally retreated before infantry arrived to secure the new positions (Sprague 2010, 96-97). This puzzled Mannerheim, who described these breakthroughs in his memoir: “Tanks would charge full tilt at the Finns, break through, then simply mill about like herds of oxen, waiting for someone to tell them what to do next” (quoted in Trotter 1991, 206). This happened repeatedly at the initial attacks on Viipuri, Lähde, and Summa (Chew 1971, 63; Engle and Paananen 1992, 69). The Soviet failure to exploit these breakthroughs was cited by Mannerheim as one of the primary reasons for the Soviet difficulties on the Isthmus (Mannerheim 1954, 367).
In the battles around Lake Ladoga and in the northern frontier where Russian forces fought mobile Finnish reserve forces as they attempted to penetrate deep into Finnish territory, local concentration of forces and exploitation of the breakthrough was less of an issue. Because Finland had not expected the Russians to attack along the frontier in mass, they had not committed many troops to defend these areas. Consequently, north of Lake Ladoga where the Finns only committed two divisions, the Russians enjoyed more than a 4:1 advantage in terms of manpower. They also had an armored brigade at their disposal, while the Finns had no armor, nor any anti-tank units. In the northern frontier, the Russians sent five divisions to the midsection of the country and two additional divisions to the far north. Countering these divisions were small patrol units, totaling 16,000 men. Thus, in these two sectors the Soviets enjoyed more than a 7:1 advantage.

However, they were unable to take advantage of their numerical superiority in these regions because their highly mechanized forces were ill suited for operations in the heavily wooded terrain of the northern frontier. The density of the forests and the sparse infrastructure forced the Russians to adopt a “road strategy” that doomed their operations in these theaters (Trotter 1991, 38; Engle and Paananen 1992, 86; Tillotsen 1996, 135; Sprague 2010, 96). The 9th Army divided its forces into columns and began advancing into Finnish territory along three of the major roads in the region. The narrow roads made it impossible for them to assault Finnish positions with more than a fraction of their troops located at the very front of the column (Tillotsen 1996, 143). In addition, because the Soviets were unable to maneuver in the dense forest that surrounded the roads, the long columns were vulnerable to flank attacks by the mobile Finns who used skis to traverse through the forests. The Finns would conduct road cutting operations
and encircle portions of the Russian columns, forming mottis. They would attack the smaller, more vulnerable mottis with their mobile troops and place the larger mottis under siege, allowing hunger and cold to do the job for them. The roads on which the Soviets advanced thus

became frozen graveyards as Finnish patrols fighting singly or in small groups, began surprising their [Russian] camp sites with deadly strikes . . . They slashed at the sides of the spearheads in full confidence that their adversaries could only release small forces at a time for actual battle (Engle and Paananen 1992, 86).

The failure of both the 8th and 9th Armies was attributed to the adoption of a road strategy. The Russian Chief of Staff reported that the units of the 9th Army, “saturated by technology (especially artillery and transport vehicles) are incapable of maneuver and combat in this theatre: they are burdened and chained down by technology which can only go by road” (quoted in Van Dyke 1997, 88). The commander of the 8th Army issued a similar report to Moscow, which stated that his forces were

trying desperately to follow the specific orders issued by the Main Military Soviet to annihilate the enemy with encirclement operations. . . . [but] the forested terrain, deep snow, and the lack of ski troops to maintain mobility in these conditions confined the 8th Army to a ‘road strategy’ whereas the Finns were in a perfect position to practice annihilation tactics on the road bound Red Army troops (quoted in Van Dyke 1997, 84).

Mannerheim also thought that the Russians’ inability to fight off road was their Achilles heel: “our adversaries advanced in columns separated by miles of inhospitable wilds and were unable to cooperate with each other. The wooded country did not permit the enemy to take advantage of his numerical and material superiority” (Mannerheim 1954, 332).

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3 Motti is a Finnish word that literally refers to pieces of chopped up wood. During the Winter War, it came to represent the tactic of breaking up road bound forces into smaller and smaller defensive enclaves that could then be destroyed or placed under siege.
The perils of adopting a road strategy and the destructive capacity of the Finns’ motti tactics were apparent in the famous battle for Raate Road in which the Finns severely damaged the 44th Infantry Division, eventually forcing it to retreat to the Russian frontier. The 44th had been sent to relieve the beleaguered forces of the 163rd Division at Suomussalmi. To prevent the 44th from entering the battle, the Finns constructed a roadblock on Raate Road a few miles south of the besieged village. Because Russian motorized equipment was road bound, it was impossible “to bring more than a fraction of its abundant firepower to bear on the Finns at the roadblock” (Chew 1981, 20). Consequently, “a vast traffic jam was formed consisting of thousands of vehicles, horses, and men packed onto a single carriageway of unmetalled [sic] road” (Edwards 2008, 159). Thus, one roadblock was able to halt the advance of the 44th and prevent it from relieving the 163rd. Once Suomussalmi had been recaptured, the Finns began motti operations against the road bound 44th, conducting a series of road cutting maneuvers to break the long column into smaller enclaves. They then attacked these mottis, inflicting high casualties and preventing resupply of food or other materials. The surviving forces of the 44th were forced to retreat on January 6th in the face of subzero temperatures and imminent starvation (Upton 1974, 87; Chew 1981, 17-23; Trotter 1991, 162-166; Engle and Paananen 1992, 101; Edwards 2008, 165).

The other problem with Red Army operations in the Lake Ladoga and frontier regions was their rigid adherence to a doctrine that did not permit tactical withdrawals. Tactical withdraw and counterattack are the pillars of modern defensive operations in conventional wars (Biddle 2004, 46-48). Withdrawing gives the defender time to regroup, augment its forces with reserve units, and retake lost territory in counterattacks. However, when the Finns attacked Russian columns, the Soviets seldom
withdrew because their doctrine forbade it (Engle and Paananen 1992, 109). Rather than forcing a withdrawal, Finnish flank attacks “made the Russians form the fateful mottis in which so many of them subsequently died” (Tillotsen 1996, 147). If they had withdrawn and prepared a counterattack they would have had access to food and shelter, and would have had more mobility with which to fight the Finns. Refusing to yield ground left the Russian units trapped with no resupply, limited rations, and an inability to maneuver outside their small defensive enclaves. Thus, the Russian doctrine “that no ground gained could be relinquished left them hopelessly vulnerable to being cut off and destroyed in detail” (Tillotsen 1996, 147). It made motti warfare possible and deadly for the road bound Russians.

The Soviets’ rigid adherence to a doctrine that repeatedly proved ineffectual was largely a function of the Red Army’s dual command system, which required that every military order be approved by political commissars (Clark 1966, 66; Van Dyke 1997, 44; Edwards 2008, 189). This made it virtually impossible for commanders to adapt to the changing battlefield environment. Mannerheim saw this as a major weakness and specifically attributed the success of Finland’s motti operations to the inflexibility that the dual command system imposed on the Soviet officer corps:

That every order must first be approved by the political leaders led to delay and confusion, not to speak of lessening of initiative and fear of responsibility. The fact that surrounded units refused to surrender in spite of cold and hunger was largely due to the political commissars (quoted in Engle and Paananen 1992, 145).

Thus, the dual command system “at one stroke, destroyed the independence of a senior officer” (Edwards 2008, 189). Rather than revising ineffectual operational plans, these officers “took refuge in standard doctrine and the stultifying requirement to have their plans ratified by a senior commander and political commissar. In consequence, almost
every move had lost its point by the time it had been mulled over and put into practice” (Tillotsen 1996, 147).

**Tactical Effectiveness**

In addition to the operational problems discussed above, the tactics employed by the Red Army in all theatres of battle were deficient in a number of ways. The infantry deployed in mass and failed to use basic cover and conceal techniques to guard against enemy fire. Very little camouflage was used and the rigid hierarchical command structure inhibited independent maneuver and initiative. Furthermore, the movements of the various arms of the military were not coordinated, which negated the potential effectiveness of artillery fire and close air support operations, making both the infantry and armor vulnerable to Finnish defensive tactics.

The biggest tactical weakness of the Soviets was their tendency to launch massive infantry assaults. Rather than breaking up infantry into small units that could use the wooded terrain to conceal their movements, the Russians sent large groups of infantry to attack Finnish positions out in the open. These infantrymen were easily targeted by Finnish machine gunners. The attacking units suffered high casualties without ever threatening the Finnish forces that were defending their positions (Clark 1966, 64; Upton 1974, 58; Trotter 1991, 36; Tillotsen 1996, 24; Mannerheim 1954, 367).

The tendency to attack in mass was most pronounced on the Isthmus, where Soviet troops attempted to break through the Mannerheim line by sending waves of massive troop formations at the Finnish defenses. Even before reaching the Mannerheim line, this tactic proved costly for the Russians whose advances against the disorganized covering troops proceeded very slowly and at great cost despite a 10:1 Russian advantage in manpower (Upton 1974, 64-65). Likewise, the Red Army soldiers who
marched on Viipuri in December failed to employ basic cover and concealment tactics and were consequently “mown down in droves” while crossing prepared Finnish grounds (Edwards 2008, 192). A similar offensive in the Summa Sector met the same fate. Initially intended as a feint attack, the operation proved extremely costly for the Russians whose massed infantry battalions “advanced in tight formation—almost in parade ground manner—making hapless targets for Finnish machine guns. These childish tactics employed again and again during the December battles, resulted in senseless slaughter” (Chew 1971, 63). The Soviet forces, “without cover and uncamouflaged,” advanced in the face of “murderously accurate Finnish machine-gun, mortar, and field artillery fire on the carefully plotted ground of the Koukunnimi peninsula” (Edwards 2008, 192). The results were catastrophic for the Russians and resulted in very heavy casualties (Mannerheim 1954, 343).

Perhaps the best illustration of the folly of these massed infantry tactics is the repeated assaults on Taipale. In early December, the Soviet Forces bombarded the Mannerheim line at Taipale with artillery fire and then began an infantry assault across the frozen the ice of one of Lake Ladoga’s tributaries. Moving on the open ice with no camouflage, the infantrymen were easily targeted by Finnish artillery (Mannerheim 1954, 342; Chew 1971, 62). They continued to attack in mass across the open ice, “stubbornly refusing to change any of their tactics, in spite of weather, terrain, and murderous crossfire” (Engle and Paananen 1992, 68). The losses were so horrendous that an entirely new division had to be brought in for the second round of attacks. However, the second division employed the same mass infantry tactics and met a similar fate, “leaving the snow dotted with 300 or 400 casualties and the burning hulks of eighteen tanks” (Trotter 1991, 77). A few days later a third infantry division arrived to aid the
Russians, but “the newly arrived Red infantry performed poorly . . . They panicked under shell fire, and in attack after attack they were seen milling around under the bombardment like a herd of sheep” (Trotter 1991, 77). On Christmas Day, a fourth division attacked Taipale, but again their troops moved without cover into prepared ground where overlapping fields of Finnish fire doomed their assault. All four divisions “failed to breach the Finnish defenses at Taipale . . . and were mowed down to the last man despite the Finns’ scarcity of automatic firearms” (Sprague 2010, 105).

Mass infantry assaults were also ineffective in the battles for the towns and villages north of Lake Ladoga and in the frontier region. The 122nd commander described a mass attack against a Finnish village near Salla:

Twice their ranks were decimated by deadly small arms fire from close range as they charged in the open across a frozen lake. By the time the second advance had been routed, all but 39 of the more than 100 men in his company had fallen. Yet the battalion commissar, who took charge when the commander was wounded, ordered a third frontal assault a few minutes later. When the attack met is predictable fate, several hundred men, more than two thirds of the battalion, lay dead or wounded on the ice (Chew 1971, 73).

In the Battle of Koalla, the Red Army “came barreling straight down the highway, a column of tanks firing on the move, with infantry formation dimly in view straggling behind them. The tanks clattered right into the cross hairs of waiting Finnish gunners” (Trotter 1991, 128). When the initial attacks failed, the Russians sent in more divisions to no effect.

One of the reasons that the Russians opted for mass infantry attacks was that their hierarchical leadership structure inhibited small unit independent maneuver by requiring strict adherence to accepted doctrine. Lower level commanders “did not understand how to fight effectively in small units. Regimental commanders went before the troops to lead the charge and took unusually high numbers of casualties” (Sprague 2010, 193). Mannerheim noted that although Russian infantrymen were brave, they
lacked initiative. He described them as mass fighters “incapable of independent action when out of contact with [their] officers or comrades” (Mannerheim 1954, 367). This inflexibility plagued the entire chain of command. Even upper level leadership “was brittle, sluggish, and marked by a rigid adherence to primitive tactics” (Trotter 1991, 37). Soviet commanders “fought according to the rulebooks and there seemed to be no deviation, even when the situation called for it” (Engle and Paananen, 69). Mannerheim specifically attributed the Russian losses at Taipale to this “obstinate adherence to the original operational plan” and the unwillingness of lower level commanders “to adapt [that plan] to the requirements of time and space” (Mannerheim 1954, 342-343).

The repeated mass attacks which resulted from the rigidity of the Soviet command structure were extremely costly because the Russians did not camouflage their troops or their weaponry. This made attacking divisions especially vulnerable to Finnish artillery and infantry fire (Sprague 2010, 196). They did not paint their equipment white, and they donned khaki uniforms and helmets—making them easy targets for the well-hidden Finns (Trotter 1991, 79). Failure to use adequate camouflage also made it easier for the Finns to locate Russian forces and execute their counterattacks. At night, smoke from Russian kitchens and campfires gave Soviet positions away and made them easy targets for snipers and raiding parties (Trotter 1991, 146; Engle and Paananen 1992, 79). In one raid against a Russian regiment stationed along the road between Lake Tolvajärvi and Ägläjärvi, a Finnish patrol of less than 140 men ambushed a series of Russian battalions clustered around big bonfires. They killed nearly all of the men in the first battalion and left the soldiers of the second and third battalions shooting at each other as they slipped quietly away into the darkness of the forests (Trotter 1991, 106-107). During the day, Russian positions were revealed by tank
tracks, uncamouflaged artillery batteries, and the discolored snow that turned black after cannons had been fired (Engle and Paananen 1992, 79). This enabled the Finns to predict and prepare for Russian offensives and to launch counter attacks against Russian units that had not adequately prepared their own defenses.

The other major deficiency in Soviet tactics was their inability to conduct combined arms operations. There was hardly any coordination between artillery, infantry, and armor—not to mention air power (Upton 1974, 57). In his memoirs, Mannerheim compared Russian combined arms tactics “with a badly conducted orchestra, in which the instruments were played out of time. Division after division was thrown against our positions, but the cooperation between the different arms remained bad” (Mannerheim 1954, 350). Soviet commanders came to a similar conclusion. Marshal Biriuzov admitted, “insufficient attention was paid to questions of cooperation among different branches and services of the armed forces under rapidly changing conditions” (Engle and Paananen 1992, 146). The official Soviet military assessment at the end of December concluded that “inadequate training in the combined arms tactics of breakthrough” was the primary cause of the Red Army’s failure on the Isthmus (quoted in Van Dyke 1997, 104).

The lack of coordination was apparent even in the preparatory stages of Russian assaults. For example, the commander of the 44th Infantry Division moved his armor and artillery units to the front by rail, while the infantry traveled behind on foot. Consequently, the infantry was unable to carry out reconnaissance or road security missions to protect the tanks or artillery from ambushes, and the tanks and artillery were unable to provide cover or suppressive fire for the infantry when their flanks were attacked during the Finns road cutting operations (Van Dyke 1997; Edwards 2008). A
Red Army soldier who survived the failed Summa offensive described the inadequacy of the command’s planning in the run up to the attack: “All units were intermingled, and it was quite impossible to elucidate who, how, or in what order units were to carry out their duties . . . There was incredible chaos” (quoted in Van Dyke 1997, 75).

There were two primary flaws in Russian combined arms tactics. First, the artillery did not coordinate with advancing infantry or armor. Artillery conducted preparatory bombardments but did not provide suppressive fire for advancing infantry units. The artillery barrage did not advance in step with the main assault and, in some cases, infantry had to push forward “through curtains of friendly shell fire in order to close with Finnish positions” (Trotter 1991, 206). A captured Russian commander attributed the failure of the second offensive in the Taipale Sector to the fact that Russian forces advanced without any artillery support (Van Dyke 1997, 75). The 138th Division attempted a similar attack in the Summa Sector without artillery preparation or covering fire and was easily repelled by the Finns (Edwards 2008, 194). In another offensive in the same sector, Russian engineers, who had gone ahead of main force to clear the ground of anti-tank barriers, were killed by their own artillery fire. Both the Finns and the Soviets cited examples like these in their postwar assessments, concluding that one of the key weaknesses of the Red Army was the lack of coordination between advancing divisions and their artillery support (Mannerheim 1954, 350; Van Dyke 1997, 201).

The coordination between armor and infantry was also very poor. In many cases, “tanks might advance, open fire, and return to their starting point before the infantry had even begun to move” (Mannerheim 1954, 350). By racing ahead of the infantry, the tanks offered no protective cover or fire to their ground troops (Trotter 1991, 83). In addition, they became vulnerable to Finnish anti-tank tactics that could only be executed
at close range. Finland’s primary means of countering the armored beasts was by throwing a bottle filled with gasoline—the infamous Molotov cocktails—into the turrets of the tanks. To do so they had to approach the tanks at very close range. If the Russian infantry had advanced with their tanks, this tactic would not have worked because the infantry could have prevented the Finns from even approaching (Upton 1975, 65). This would have been devastating for the Finns, who had only 100 anti-tank Bofor guns available for their entire army.

Thus, the early “breakthroughs were not effectively exploited because infantry did not follow them [the tanks] closely or willingly, and this rendered the tanks vulnerable to close range attack with Molotov cocktails, draw mines, and explosive clusters” (Chew 1971, 63). The Finns’ defensive plan “would not have worked if Soviet tank/infantry tactics had not been such a botch. Coordination between the two arms was virtually nil: they attacked together, in the same direction, but that was all” (Trotter 1991, 80). The initial attacks on the Summa (Upton 1974, 69) and Viipuri (Engle and Paananen 1992, 69) Sectors of the Mannerheim line suffered from the same problem. The tanks broke through the enemy line without infantry support. When the infantry finally arrived in large masses, the Finns mowed them down. The tanks then either retreated or were disabled in the evening by Finnish anti-tank crews.

The Soviets were much more proficient in defensive tactics than in offensive ones. They fought fiercely when defending conquered territory and used the terrain to their advantage, often inflicting heavy losses on the Finns during their counterattacks. In his memoirs, Mannerheim praised “the Russians’ phenomenal ability to dig themselves in . . . It seemed second nature with them and they were masters of engineering” (Mannerheim 1954, 367). For example, in the lead up to the famous battle of
Suomussalmi, an advancing Finnish column was repelled by Russian Forces at Hulkanioniemi farm before it eventually broke through (Chew 1971, 106). During the fighting in the city itself, “Russian machine gunners had to be pried out of cellar fortresses one by one by close and dangerous work with grenades and Suomis” (Trotter 1991, 161). The savagery with which the battle for the city was fought demonstrated that although the overall command and control of the Russian divisions was chaotic, “its soldiers could still fight. Time after time the Russians held off determined attacks . . . The Russians were hungry and cold, but they had tanks; they were appallingly led, but the tenacity of the individual Russian soldier seemed to know few bounds” (Edwards 2008, 161). During the battle for Tolvajärvi, the 139th Division “stubbornly contested every favorable terrain feature along its line of march” (Chew 1971, 50). Although the Finns succeeded in expelling them from Tolvajärvi, their victory was costly because, “once dug in, the Russians proved themselves to be stubborn fighters, and the Finns always suffered more losses when attacking under those conditions” (Trotter 1991, 117). Soviet forces defended the roads leading up to Ägläjärvi so successfully that the Finns opted to outflank the major road when attacking the city (Trotter 1991, 119). In the battle for the city, Russian soldiers took advantage of the “barns, cellars, houses, inns, and any other cover the village provided. These he stubbornly defended with automatic weapons, which took a terrible toll on the attackers” (Chew 1971, 55).

The 54th Infantry Division operating in the frontier region proved exceptionally skilled at defensive tactics. Unlike the other divisions in the region which were chopped up into many small mottis that were vulnerable to Finnish attacks, it remained largely intact. The Finns were only able to divide its forces into thirds. To defend these large mottis, the 54th built fortified bunkers to protect its field artillery and mortars, dug
trenches, and set up barbed wire obstacles around the motti. It also used suppressive fire to enable its infantry to clear away the forest immediately surrounding the mottis. This created a “dead zone” which prevented the Finns from using the woods to conceal their movements prior to attacks. These defensive measures ensured the security of the division until the end of the war (Mannerheim 1954, 349; Upton 1974, 88; Trotter 1991, 174-175). Although they were never able to resume their offensive, they did not have to retreat and they remained intact as a coherent unit.

The defensive strength of even the smaller mottis prevented the Finns from redeploying their forces to the Isthmus, where they were sorely needed. Many of the forces trapped in the mottis created defensive structures with tanks making up the outer circle and field artillery and mortars stationed behind them. The Soviets “showed some ingenuity in constructing these positions. Often rings of tanks were dug in deep and were virtually impervious to Finnish artillery fire” (Upton 1974, 84). When the mottis were attacked, the Russian defenders fought ferociously. In one attack on a motti near Haukila farm, “Russian defenses proved very strong, and the most the battalion could do was tighten its grip on the south side of the road” (Trotter 1991, 165-166). An attack on a motti near Eskola faced similarly stiff resistance, and was only destroyed after four days of vicious fighting (Trotter 1991, 165-166). Thus, although the position of these divisions on the map “looked hopeless... the fanatical resistance of the troops inside each of the eleven mottis upset every Finnish timetable. The tenacity with which the Russians defended themselves soon earned the grudging admiration of the Finns” (Trotter 1991, 137).

Despite the tenacity with which individual Russian soldiers fought while on the defensive and their “phenomenal ability to dig themselves in” (Mannerheim 367), their
defensive tactics suffered from two weaknesses. First, they did not adequately camouflage their men or their positions as discussed earlier. This made it easier for the Finns to target Russian forces. Second, when the Russians were forced to retreat, they did not proceed in an orderly fashion, and they failed to use cover and concealment techniques to minimize their losses. Thus, the same defenders who fought so fiercely in the battle of Suomussalmi fled from the city in mass across the open ice. Because they were not camouflaged, they made easy targets for the Finnish infantry who had just recaptured the village (Edwards 2007, 160-161). Hundreds perished on the ice as Finnish machine gunners took down the masses of Soviet soldiers that “formed into long columns and began to shamble away [from Suomussalmi] to the north-east across the ice of Lake Kiantajärvi” (Tillotsen 1996, 141).

**Basic Soldiering: Technical Skills, Discipline, and Winter Weather**

The first phase of the Winter War demonstrated that in addition to deficiencies in their operational concepts and tactics, the Soviet military suffered from a lack of basic soldiering skills and discipline. Furthermore, they were entirely unprepared for combat in arctic conditions.

In terms of basic soldiering, the accuracy of the artillery was particularly problematic. The Soviet military “mistakenly assumed that unorganized artillery fire would be enough to destroy the morale of the Finnish Army. For this reason, no provisions had been made for the organization of observation points to correct artillery fire and verify the destruction of targets” (Van Dyke 1997, 112). Consequently, the Russians adopted the quadrant method of fire, which merely bombarded a certain sector with massive amounts of artillery. These bombardments did little to destroy key Finnish fortifications and often led to high friendly casualties. Furthermore, because the
artillery “tended to fire in a rigid fixed pattern, and plainly preferred shooting over open sights,” Finnish forces manning unfortified positions could predict the location of the bombardments and take counter measures to limit their casualties (Upton 1974, 58).

During one Finnish counterattack on the Isthmus, the Finns used an antiquated Tsarist field cannon to fire on Russian positions. The Russians responded with heavy artillery fire which lasted for days. Eventually they hit the gun, but it cost them more than 10,000 mortar rounds to neutralize one weapon (Engle and Paananen 1992, 73). During the 7th Army’s repeated offensives against the Mannheim line in December, artillery support from the south had to be suspended because of the high level of friendly casualties it was inflicting (Van Dyke 1997, 55). Further north in the Lake Ladoga theatre, the 44th Division’s artillery was of little use during the road cutting operations at Raate Road because their guns were too highly placed to angle downward towards the attacking Finns (Chew 1981, 24).

The accuracy of the infantry was also wanting. Mannerheim found that “their musketry with automatic arms and rifles was very poor” (Mannerheim 1954, 368). One Finnish soldier wrote home about the Russians ability to use a new weapon they introduced in January: “Our boys call it the Russian coffee grinder because it looks as though they pour buckets of bullets into a machine gun and grind out shots. Their aim is very bad and only a few times was anybody wounded” (quoted in Engle and Paananen 1992, 77). During the Finnish attack on Ägläjärvi, the Finns suffered very few casualties despite advancing across the open ice because “Russian fire, though heavy, was mostly wild” (Trotter 1991, 120). The Finns also took advantage of the inaccuracy of Russian infantry to expedite the depletion of the mottis’ ammunition reserves. The Finns found that a few well-aimed shots by their snipers would provoke a torrent of fire from the
trapped Russians that “did nothing but churn snow and chew up tree branches. So many tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition were burned up on January second and third that even the more powerful mottis were thereafter forced to ration their fire” (Trotter 1991, 165).

The basic skills of the Soviet Navy were also lacking during the Winter War. For example, the first submarine to try to pass through the shallow South Kvarken Straights to the Gulf of Bothnia “chose to make the passage fully submerged and the submarine touched the bottom several times” (Van Dyke 1997, 90) resulting in damage to the vessel. The only soviet battleship used in the conflict breached a sandbar outside Taipalen Bay during the first days of the war (Van Dyke 1997). In another instance, a Soviet battleship mistakenly attacked a Swedish merchant ship they thought was a Finnish naval ship. Their failure to sink the unarmed vessel prompted Hitler to sardonically offer German assistance to the Soviet War effort: “You can’t even sink an unarmed ship? Maybe you need some help from us” (quoted in Sprague 2010, 196)?

The Navy’s main role in the gulf was the shelling of Finland’s coastal batteries. Two Russian destroyers fired at Finnish batteries on Uto Island, but disengaged after only ten minutes when a Finnish shell hit one of the destroyers (Trotter 1992, 56). On another occasion, Russian ships shelled the coastal batteries on Hanko “with no particular accuracy” (Edwards 2008, 126). Naval activity on Lake Ladoga proved equally lacking. The naval units operating in these waters tended to bombard a general area rather than firing on specific Finnish targets, and at times even these area bombings failed to land in the specified area. For example, when two torpedo boats fired on Finnish batteries at Jarisevänniemi Point in early December, most of their ammunition “landed in the water of the Taipalen Bay” (Van Dyke 1997, 66).
The Russian Air Force also performed poorly during the Winter War. Many planes were damaged or destroyed in accidents that could have easily been avoided with proper training and preparation (Van Dyke 1997, 67). One pilot “flew his long range bomber into a bomb depot during takeoff. He destroyed the bomber and its crew,” killed 3 people on the ground, injured 29, and damaged seven airplanes on the runway (Van Dyke 1997, 67). A captured Russian pilot admitted that he “had misunderstood his pilots signal to release the bomb load and had bailed out instead” (Engle and Paananen 1992, 57). In terms of air-to-air combat, the Russians were unable to capitalize on their superior numbers and technological sophistication because of their lack of training. They did not know how to use cloud cover for protection and flew horizontally against intended targets which hampered their accuracy (Sprague 2010). Their large formations were vulnerable to attack by Finnish fighters as well as ground based anti-aircraft guns (Tillotsen 1996,160). Lack of communication also resulted in a number of friendly kills (Van Dyke 1997, 67). These mistakes were reflected in the kill ratio of the air-to-air campaign. The Finns shot down 240 Soviet planes while the Soviets only managed to kill 62 (Trotter 1991, 191; Engle and Paananen 1992, 62). The Russians also lost an additional 300 planes to anti-aircraft gunners (Trotter 1991, 192).

The primary task of the Air Force was to conduct strategic bombing of economic and military targets in the heart of Finland, as well as to terrorize the civilian population by bombing large cities. In terms of the former targets, the Air Force bombers lacked accuracy and so were unable to make a dent in Finland’s economy or war production facilities. For example, one attack on a Finnish airfield was described by observers as “all

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4 Aircraft losses only include confirmed kills, those planes that were downed on Finnish territory. If likely kills, planes reported damaged that made it back to Russia’s territory, are included, then the number jumps to more than 800.
noise and nuisance . . . thanks to the poor aim of the Russian bombardiers. Most of the bombs landed outside the field’s perimeter and only one building was slightly damaged” (Engle and Paananen 1992, 57). In another attack on Finnish Coastal defenses, the medium range bombers were never able to locate the target area (Van Dyke 1997, 47). A Soviet commander acknowledged that during one sortie “eighty [planes were] sent to destroy a bridge . . . [but] only one bomb actually struck the target” (Sprague 2010, 194). During the bombing of Helsinki, their accuracy was also dismal. Bombs aimed at the harbor “fell harmlessly into the water,” and the aerial attack on the main railroad junction “failed to get a single hit” despite the lack of resistance and ideal weather conditions (Trotter 1991, 48).

The Soviet Air Force’s lack of accuracy was particularly problematic during close air support missions because their bombs often landed on Soviet troops. Russian pilots accidentally strafed their own troops during attacks on Suur-Tiutärsaari Island (Van Dyke 1997), during the 139th and 75th Divisions’ offensives north of Lake Ladoga (Tillotsen 1996, 131), and during the battle of Tolvajarvi (Engle and Paananen 1992, 92). Because “the Red Army had to depend on free fall bombing” their close air support missions “turned out to be at least as hazardous for the Red Army as it was for the Finns” (Tillotsen 1996, 154).

The lack of basic soldiering skills in all three arms of the military was primarily a function of inadequate training. The Finns found that “many of the [Russian] captives were functionally untrained, an observation supported by later comments from defectors and the testament of letters recovered” (Edwards 2008, 170). The Soviet postwar analysis also pointed to “defective training as a key factor” in the military’s poor performance in the early months of the war (Upton 1974, 57). In fact, one study
found that “at the start of the war, a stunning 47 percent did not know how to handle the weapons they were issued” (Sprague 2010, 106). This was partially due to the inadequacy of the Soviet Union’s training programs, but it was also due to the fact that “Stalin did not deem it necessary to assign first rate units to the campaign; consequently, many ill trained reservists were used, some of whom—by their own admission—knew little more than how to fire a rifle” (Chew 1971, 21-22).

The Russian forces also suffered from insubordination problems and a lack of basic military discipline. Captured Soviet prisoners reported that “there had been cases of refusal to advance, both in the infantry and in armored units, and a number of death sentences had been carried out” (Mannerheim 1954, 344). An intercepted radio transmission revealed similar problems. The 662nd Regiment Commander admitted that troop control was damaging combat efficiency because “the reserve officers cannot handle their men” (Chew 1971, 999). Things had gotten so bad that one of the political commissars had been murdered by his own troops (Edwards 2008, 155). The lack of discipline had a number of consequences. First, the Russians often responded to Finnish surprise attacks by panicking and firing wildly at their opponents, rather than waiting for orders which would have enabled them to better defend their positions. For example, when a Finnish ski battalion attacked the 139th Division north of Lake Ladoga, “the alarmed Red Army soldiers responded somewhat wildly. As the Finns withdrew at 5am, the Russian soldiers were heard to be shooting at each other, and were to do so for much of the rest of the long night” (181). Similar responses to harassment operations against the 44th Division on Raate Road prompted the Finns to use their snipers to provoke massive responses from the besieged mottis in order to expedite the depletion of Russian ammunition from the encircled groups (Edwards 2008, 165).
The chaos in which the Russians retreated from their positions was another manifestation of the lack of soldierly discipline. Rather than retreat in an orderly manner, using the terrain to provide their troops with cover, the Soviet forces often retreated in a wild, haphazard manner. Consequently, their casualties were very high. For example, when the Finns attacked one of the mottis of the 9th Army in early January by bombarding them with artillery and infiltrating their interior, the Russians panicked: “They screamed and ran in every direction . . . the hapless men rushed by the hundreds like a tidal wave towards the southeast” leaving their weapons behind (Engle and Paananen 1992, 112). The mass retreats across the ice at Suomussalmi, recounted earlier, were also a function of the larger discipline problem.

Perhaps the most famous instance of the lack of discipline undermining Russian combat efficacy is the “Sausage War” (Chew 1971, 39; Trotter 1991, 109; Engle and Paananen 1992, 90; Edwards 2008, 182). In this skirmish, a Russian battalion launched a counterattack during the battle of Tolvajärvi. They managed to break through Finnish lines but came upon a Finnish field kitchen with sausage stew cooking on the hot stoves. Rather than follow their orders and continue to pursue the retreating Finns, they paused to eat the stew, giving the Finns time to regroup and launch their own counterattack. All of the soldiers in this battalion were killed, some with sausage stew still warm in their mouths.

The final problem plaguing Russian combat operations during the first stages of the Winter War was their lack of preparedness for the cold weather. The average winter temperature in Finland is -14°F but the winter of 1939-1940 was the coldest in over a hundred years, with temperatures dipping below -40°F. In such temperatures “the Red Army soldier’s weapons froze, his food froze, his hands and feet froze . . . If he touched
the barrel of his rifle with his bare hand, then pulled it away, he left his own blood” (Engle and Paananen 1992, 43). Because the Soviet high command believed that the war would only last a few weeks, they did not provide their soldiers with adequate winter clothing. They had no warming tents or dugouts and could not use campfires because they made easy targets for Finnish snipers (Engle and Paananen 1992) Consequently, frostbite took a great toll on the Russian soldiers, disabling almost as many men as combat did (Trotter 1991). Once the Soviets realized that the war was not going to end quickly, they provided their soldiers with winter gear, however the new clothing proved bulky and hampered movement. Even the new shoes failed to prevent the onset of frostbite (Sprague 2010, 196). The Russians also failed to provide adequate rations for the troops, who needed nutritious, high calorie meals to function effectively in the freezing temperatures. The Red Army’s “fare of black bread and unsweetened tea were simply not enough to keep men going” (Trotter 1991, 145). The bitter cold also compromised their weapons. The gun oil for their rifles and the grease in the artillery’s firing mechanisms froze. Tanks and other motor vehicles had to be run constantly to keeping them from freezing. This led to huge supply problems as the mechanized army quickly ran out of fuel.

Maneuvering large forces in these conditions was also difficult. Communications were severed by snowstorms. Tanks and other heavy equipment tended to get stuck in the snow, making them vulnerable targets when the Finns attacked the flanks of Soviet columns. The cold winter and heavy snowfall was particularly debilitating for the mobility of the Russian infantry because they did not know how to ski. Although the Soviets had provided manuals with instruction for ski combat, they had not provided most units with any actual skis (Trotter 1991, 147). Furthermore, the manuals were
unrealistic. For example, they had instructions for bayonet fighting on skis and advised troops to launch grenades while standing on their skis—both utterly impossible (Sprague 2010). The infantry in the few units that received skis could hardly depend on the manuals to teach them how to maneuver, much less fight on them.

Thus, the first stages of the Winter War demonstrated serious flaws in the Soviets’ operational concepts and tactics. It also revealed that a lack of training had led to serious deficiencies in technical skills, that insubordination and discipline problems were wreaking havoc among many Russians units, and that the Red Army was materially unprepared for combat in winter conditions.

**Soviet Effectiveness in the Second Stage of the Winter War: January-March**

After the lack of success and the high casualty rates of December, the Soviet high command called a temporary halt in operations during January. During the ensuing lull, they instituted a number of reforms that were aimed at improving the combat efficiency of their forces. Their renewed offensive in February of 1940 was much improved. However, given the difficulty of implementing extensive reforms in such a short period of time, serious problems at both the operational and tactical levels continued to hinder the Red Army’s performance.

**January Reforms**

The Soviet high command decided in early January to send more troops to the Finnish front and to make the Finnish War the responsibility of the larger Soviet Military, not just the Leningrad Military District. They sent an additional 25 divisions and more than 600,000 new troops to the Finnish border, bringing the total number of divisions to 45. The Politburo replaced Voroshilov with Semyon Timoshenko as the
Commander and Chief of the newly created North Western Front and made Georgi Zhukov the new Chief of Staff. Under Timoshenko’s leadership, the Russians conducted extensive air and ground reconnaissance missions to obtain more detailed information about Finnish defensive fortifications and field positions. By the time of the renewed offensive, they had pinpointed the location of more than three fourths of the bunkers in the forward zone and around forty percent of those in the rear.

Timoshenko also instituted a number of doctrinal changes designed to correct many of the operational and tactical issues that hindered Red Army operations in December. At the operational level, he abandoned the “wide front” war in favor of a “narrow front.” He decided to concentrate most the Russian forces on the Isthmus, where they could take advantage of the better infrastructure and more open terrain. Within this theater, they would further concentrate available forces in the sector designated for breakthrough: the Viipuri Gateway (Chew 1971, 141; Van Dyke 1997, 104-108). A total of 25 divisions, 8 armored brigades, and 17 artillery regiments were assigned to the Isthmus in the lead up to the February offensive. Thus, the Russians were able to use their superior numbers to achieve a more favorable local balance of forces ratio compared to the December battles. They now enjoyed a 4:1 superiority in terms of infantry and a 20-30:1 advantage in terms of artillery due to the depletion Finnish ammunition (Van Dyke 1997, 137). In the Viipuri Gateway their advantage was even more pronounced with 9 infantry divisions, 5 tank brigades, and a machine gun division stationed in the designated breakthrough sector.

These troops were given explicit instructions to exploit any breakthrough in the Finnish line of defenses. These new breakthrough operations “consisted first of piercing the Mannerheim Line with an armored wedge, then systematically expanding the initial
puncture, and after that simply continuing to send fresh waves of troops and vehicles against the entire sector until the defenders caved in” (Trotter 1991, 206). If a group achieved breakthrough, they were instructed to move along the enemies flanks and attack the Finns’ defensive positions from the rear to enable other forces to achieve breakthrough as well (Van Dyke 1997, 116). Thus, the two primary operational flaws in the Russians’ December attacks on the Isthmus were identified and steps were taken to correct them.

At the tactical level, Timoshenko placed a big emphasis on combined arms operations. Artillery was instructed to provide suppressive fire for reconnaissance missions and attacking infantry (Van Dyke 1997, 110). In addition, forward observers were attached to infantry units to help coordinate artillery fire (Trotter 1991, 208; Van Dyke 1997, 112).

The new plan for assaulting the Mannerheim line called for close cooperation between artillery, armor, and infantry. An initial artillery barrage would provide cover, while combined armed units would assemble at jumping off points thirty minutes prior to the attack. The artillery would then begin to move forward, followed by a team of engineers that would clear away any remaining obstacles. The first wave of troops would then attack, with the aim of locating the gaps in the Finns’ field of fire. The second wave of troops would use this information to destroy the fire points identified by the first group. Finally, a “storm group” consisting of an infantry platoon, a machine gun platoon, a few mortars, snipers, tanks, and engineers would blow up any hardened fortifications while mortar and artillery fire suppressed Finnish counter fire (Van Dyke 1997, 115).
The new doctrine also emphasized the need to use more sophisticated cover and concealment tactics. Reconnaissance patrols were conducted at night, and engineers were instructed to camouflage Soviet weaponry and to dig trenches close to Finnish fortifications so that infantry could advance towards enemy defenses without being seen. There were also attempts to decentralize the command structure so that smaller units could take advantage of emerging opportunities on the battlefield. The political commissars were abolished and regimental commanders were given more freedom to act independently (Van Dyke 1997; Edwards 2008, 241-245). Finally, the newly deployed soldiers were given appropriate cold weather clothing when they left for the Finnish battlefields.

The fresh soldiers were able to practice these new battlefield tactics during extensive training exercises that were carried out behind the Russian lines during the latter part of January. Timoshenko had a replica of the Mannerheim Line built so that the different units could practice combined arms operations. Storm groups practiced attacking concrete fortifications in a variety of scenarios, including night operations (Van Dyke 1997, 137). Combined arms exercises gave infantry, artillery, and tanks experience coordinating their movements (Chew 1971, 141). In addition, there were training exercises for motorists, machine gunners, and snipers to instruct them on how to use their weapons in freezing temperatures (Van Dyke 1997, 137). Finally, Timoshenko ordered a number of demonstration operations against the actual Mannerheim line so that lower level commanders could gain experience leading their troops independently (Van Dyke 1997, 147). In the month long lull, these training programs could only partially remedy the Red Army’s deficiencies at combined arms operations. Nonetheless, they were an important step in the right direction.
The doctrinal changes coupled with the influx of new troops and the new training program had the potential to greatly improve the Red Army’s combat performance. However, their overall plan still focused on mass attacks and wearing the enemy down in a grinding battle of attrition. The Russians would win because they enjoyed “overwhelming superiority of numbers” (Tillotsen 1996, 168). The new tactics and operational concepts merely enabled them to take advantage of this superiority. Underpinning Timoshenko’s operational plan “was a savage but simple truth. Russian units could be rotated when casualties, exhaustion, or depleted supplies lessened their performance. Finnish units could not” (Trotter 1991, 214). General Michael Solov’ev summarized the logic behind the Russian offensive:

In a frontal attack no enemy or combination of enemies can hope to compare with us. By making a succession of direct attacks we shall compel him to lose blood, in other word[sic] to lose something he has less of than we have. Of course we shall have enormous losses too, but in war one has to count not one’s own losses but those of the enemy. Even if we lose more men than the enemy, we must view it dispassionately (quoted in Edwards 2008, 236).

In fact, Timoshenko planned for very high Russian casualties. Before accepting his appointment as Commander and Chief of the North Western Front he asked Stalin to “promise that he would not be held personally responsible for the butchers bill that would be presented after the successful campaign” (Trotter 1991, 205). Stalin acquiesced.

**The February Offensive**

On February 1, massive artillery bombardments of the Finnish lines began. The bombardments were conducted intermittently to allow for demonstration exercises and to create confusion about the timing of Russia’s actual offensive. On February 6th, the offensive finally began with the 7th Army attacking the Viipuri Gateway and the new 13th Army attacking the northeastern portion of the Isthmus. After fierce fighting, the 123rd Rifle Division broke through at Summa, and subsequent operations forced the Finns to
retreat to their intermediate defensive position on February 16th. These fortifications were much weaker than the original Mannerheim Line and breakthrough was again achieved on February 26th. At this point, the Finns retreated to the rear line and prepared to defend Viipuri. Despite weak defensive positions and the almost complete depletion of their ammunition, the Finns were able to defend their rear line until the ceasefire on March 3rd.

The fighting during these offensive operations revealed that the combat proficiency of the Red Army was much improved. However, given the inherent difficulty of reforming an army in a limited amount of time, it was inevitable that serious problems still existed. At the operational level, the decision to concentrate Soviet forces in the Summa Sector and the new emphasis on exploiting the breakthrough paid dividends. When the 123rd attacked the Mannerheim line at Summa, “the defenders fought bravely, but were unable to prevent the tanks from rolling over their trenches as the Russian infantry poured through the breaks” (Engle and Paananen 1992, 125). After the breakthrough, infantry and tanks moved along the Finnish flanks attacking their defensive positions from the rear. The increasing mass of Russian troops attacking the line combined with these flank attacks to force the Finns to retreat or to risk encirclement by Russian forces (Engle and Paananen 1992, 136). Local superiority and having an operational plan established to exploit breakthroughs enabled the Soviets to achieve their ultimate goal of breaking the Mannerheim line.

At the tactical level, Russian combined arms operations were also improved. Artillery bombardments were now used to suppress Finnish counter-fire. This enabled Russian infantry and armor to approach Finnish defenses unmolested. The artillery fire was also much more deadly for the Finns because the Russians’ accuracy had increased
due to improvements in communication. The advancing infantry was “able to call down and critically correct previously inaccurate fire by means of the field telephone cables that now trailed back to the guns” (Edwards 2008, 246). The 51st Rifle Division, which conducted follow up operations in the Summa Sector after the 123rd broke through, successfully pursued the retreating Finns “by using well-coordinated infantry support artillery . . . [They were] able to suppress any Finnish machine gun and mortar fire found in its path” (Van Dyke 1997, 168).

The improved coordination between tanks and infantry proved even more deadly for the Finns who could no longer counter the movements of Soviet tanks using their improvised anti-tank devices (Mannerheim 1954, 369; Chew 1971, 146; Upton 1974, 113; Edwards 2008, 246-247). By protecting the advancing tanks, Russian infantry “made it suicidal to send out antitank squads armed with hand-thrown missiles” or Molotov cocktails (Trotter 1991, 215). With very few Bofor anti-tank guns left in their arsenal, this cooperation left the Finns at the mercy of the advancing tanks. During the breakthrough at Lähde Road, Russian tanks pierced the Mannerheim line as the Finns made “frenzied efforts” to counterattack, but “this time Soviet infantry accompanied the armor, protecting it from the grenades and Molotov cocktails of the commandos. The massive tank onslaught was terrifying to witness” (Chew 1971, 158).

The coordination between tanks and infantry also protected Russian foot soldiers. During attacks on Finnish fortified positions, tanks provided protective cover to the storm groups that laid the explosives designed to destroy the bunkers and prevented the Finns from launching counterattacks using their own suppressive fire (Van Dyke 1997, 144). During the final assault on Viipuri, the tanks “shelter[ed] infantry crossing the ice, provide[ed] offshore covering fire when the infantry tried to land,
tow[ed] men and supplies in armored sledges, and . . . blocked the Finnish defenders by cruising around them on the ice and cutting their communications” (Upton 1974, 119).

Despite these improvements, a number of weaknesses still remained in Russian tactics and in their force employment at the operational level. The primary weakness was the continued use of mass infantry attacks to storm the Mannerheim Line. Mannerheim described the slaughter of Russian troops that resulted from the February offensives in his memoirs:

As the Russians spared neither their infantry nor their amour, their losses assumed terrible proportions. There were occasions when several regiments were crowded together in a small area forming a compact, immobile mass with which our artillery concentration played havoc (Mannerheim 1954, 353).

During the demonstration attacks on Hatjallhti and Muolla in early February, the Russian infantry advanced “in massive waves, testing the Finn’s defenses . . . This activity continued for days as fresh Russian troops passed through the carnage of entire divisions which had preceded them” (Engle and Paananen 1992, 122). During the main assault on February 6th, “the infantry assembled, approached, and charged in the open. Whole battalions advanced in dense, cheering columns into which Finnish machine gunners poured streams of bullets, with sickening effects” (Trotter 1991, 215). Russian casualties were horrendous, with “thousands of dead Russians [left] lay[ing] in front of the Finnish dugouts while fresh troops charged over the frozen bodies” (Engle and Paananen 1992, 123). In the Summa Sector, the first attacks were “repelled when Finnish artillery decimated the closely jammed infantry formations. The defenders hoped that those extremely heavy losses . . . would bring these engagements to a halt, but the very next day fresh forces” arrived to continue the assault (Chew 1971, 146). Perhaps the most deadly mass attack was conducted during the final days of the war as Russian infantry
advanced over the ice to attack Viipuri. The Russian troops made easy targets for both the Finnish Air Force and artillery (Chew 1971, 159). Despite high losses,

wave after wave of Soviet assault troops were massacred on the open ice. A regiment marching in closed formation from the Island of Hogland against the mainland was torn to pieces by fire from costal batteries, and bodies literally piled up in front of the Finnish position on the Western beach. Yet the Russians kept coming (Jakobson 1961, 248).

The continued use of these mass assaults was in part driven by the overall strategic plan of the Russians, which involved using their superior numbers to prevail in a war of attrition. It was also a function of the failure to decentralize command. Although a few of the division commanders involved in the early demonstration exercises were able to effectively lead their troops and destroy Finnish fortifications, most were not (Van Dyke 1997, 144-147). Timoshenko “knew from personal inspections at the front and reports from his Operations Department that corps and division staffs were still not in touch with the pulse of battle at regimental level” (Van Dyke 1997, 167). This, combined with continued communication problems during the initial attacks on Lähde road, prompted Timoshenko to abandon the experiment in directive control (Van Dyke 1997, 159).

Another problem was that, although the Russians had begun to camouflage their soldiers and weapons, their use of advanced cover and concealment tactics was still limited. Infantry now wore white and the frontline artillery was camouflaged, but the armor was not (Chew 1971, 142). This made them vulnerable to Finnish artillery fire when they approached sectors that still had ammunition. For example, when the tanks began advancing toward Viipurii over the frozen gulf, Finnish coastal batteries easily took them out (Edwards 2008). In other instances, uneven implementation of new rules led to entire groups being inadequately camouflaged. For example, “Soviet aerial photo
reconnaissance of the 7th Army’s own positions revealed that its newly deployed artillery batteries were not being camouflaged” (Van Dyke 1997, 111). Although an order instructing all division commanders to camouflage their positions was immediately issued, new photographs taken February 1st revealed that the artillery batteries in the Summa region remained uncovered.

In addition, the Russians still experienced some difficulties implementing combined arms tactics. This was part of the reason for the failure of some of the initial demonstration attacks in early February. In one of the attacks, suppressive fire was not conducted for a long enough interval to enable the storm groups to approach Finnish fortifications (Van Dyke 1997, 145). In another attack, tanks fired on their own infantry and abandoned the storm groups before the DOT had been destroyed (Van Dyke 1997, 147). Similar problems emerged during the main assault on the Isthmus. The 100th Rifle Division’s assault on the shores of Lake Summajärvi was unsuccessful because the Soviets did not use enough suppressive fire to neutralize Finnish artillery (Van Dyke 1997, 151). The 50th Rifle Corps’ operations against the Kämärä-Viipuri Railroad failed for similar reasons (Van Dyke 1997, 162-163). At the battle for Muolla Church, the tanks breached the line without their supporting infantry. As in the December battles, the Finns merely waited for the infantry attack, took them down, and then set about disabling the tanks (Trotter 1991, 223). Even the 123rd Division, which had been successful in breaking through the Mannerheim line using quite sophisticated combined arms tactics, reverted to old habits when it attacked the intermediate defensive line in mid-February (Mannerheim 1954, 357; Edwards 2008, 257). Adequate artillery preparation was not undertaken and armor advanced well ahead of the infantry, leading to the loss of more than 50 tanks and high casualties among the infantry (Trotter 1991,
These losses prompted Timoshenko to temporarily suspend the offensive and send fresh reserves to continue the assault (Chew 1971, 167). Cooperation between artillery and infantry also remained a problem. For example, during the attack on the rear line in late February, failure to coordinate artillery fire led to an entire Russian battalion being taken out by their own field guns (Trotter 1991, 245; Engle and Paananen 1992, 129).

The final problem with Russian operations during February was the Russian hesitancy to fully exploit their breakthroughs. As mentioned earlier, the exploitation and pursuit phase of their offensive operations was much improved, but lack of initiative still prevented the Russians from fully capitalizing on their breakthroughs. For example, after the initial breakthrough in the Summa Sector, the main road to Viipuri lay basically undefended. But after consolidating their position behind the Russian line, the 123rd paused to regroup and wait for other units to catch up. This gave the Finns time to conduct an orderly retreat and prepare for the defense of the intermediate line and Viipuri (Trotter 1991, 231). One of the Finnish generals acknowledged that within a few hours the Russians could have overrun both the Lähde road junction and the better road at the Kämärä railroad station. From Lähde they could have fanned out on a road behind the Summa front and also behind the entire 1st Division, with “catastrophic consequences” for the defenders.” (Chew 1971, 158-159)

A similar thing happened on February 15th when a mobile group captured the Lähde road junction. They did not exploit the opportunity to take Kämärä Station, which was only defended by a battalion of Finns. Instead, they halted their assault and did not even attempt to encircle Finnish forces. By the time the Russians attacked on February 16th, the Finnish forces had dug in at the intermediate defensive line (Chew 1971, 165).
Despite these remaining problems, the Russians succeeded in breaking through enemy lines and forcing the Finns to retreat. The dire military situation brought the Finns to the negotiating table and forced them into accepting huge concessions. Although the Russians did not capture Viipuri or pierce the rear defensive line, it is likely they would have done so in a matter of days had the fighting continued. Although the January reforms and the improvements in both operational planning and tactical execution contributed to Russia’s success, attrition was key to their ultimate victory. The Finns simply did not have the manpower or the weapons to continue fighting (Tillotsen 1996, 162; Upton 1974, 112).

At the beginning of February, all of the Finnish reserve forces had been committed. Mannerheim lamented the untenable situation his troops faced: “The front had become extended and all available troops were already under fire and were, moreover, exhausted . . . In the main theatre of war, where our troops had almost reached breaking point, a retreat seemed inevitable” (Mannerheim 1954, 364-365). These beleaguered Finnish troops had to continue fighting everyday against fresh Russian divisions who were rotated in and out of the combat zones (Chew 1971, 145). The numbers just could not be overcome. For example, at the battle of Killer Hill, an entire Russian regiment of 4,000 attacked a Finnish platoon of just 32 soldiers. The Finns were able to defend the hill for a short time, but had no hope of holding the territory in the face of such a large attacking force (Engle and Paananen 1992, 138). In late February, General Henricks sent a report to Mannerheim that stated:

The present state of the Army is such that continued military operations can lead to nothing but further debilitation and fresh losses of territory. In support of my view I set forth the loss of personnel which has occurred and which is still going on. The battle strength of battalions is reported now generally to be below 250 men, with the aggregate daily casualties rising into the thousands (Chew 1971, 186).
The lack of reserve forces made it impossible for the Finns to compensate for their own losses by sending new forces to the front. They could not “fill the gaps in their lines because so many had been killed on their way to the breakthrough” (Engle and Paananen 1992, 138).

The shortage in ammunition was almost more problematic than the shortage in manpower. Artillery ammunition was so scarce that the Finns were ordered to only fire on battalion sized targets that posed a major threat to the integrity of the Finnish defenses and could not be taken out with small arms fire (Trotter 1991, 214, 219; Engle and Paananen 1992, 131; Sprague 2010, 100). One of the lower level commanders that received this order reported that it “was one of the bitterest of the many impalpable orders he had to issue during those grim days. The enemy was forming up for mass attacks out in the open, presenting targets that were the stuff of an artillerist’s dream,” but the Finns could not attack (Trotter 1991, 219). The lack of ammunition had tangible results. The 100th Division’s attack on Summajarvi was successful because the Finns guarding it ran out of ammo and retreated (Van Dyke 1997, 160). The quartermaster of the Finnish 5th Division lamented, “the tactical situation in and of itself is not hopeless! Only the means to deal with it was lacking! If only we had some heavy weapons” (Trotter 1991, 230). The Finns simply did not have the weapons or the men to continue the fight, so they acquiesced to Russia’s draconian demands and ended the war.

**Summary of Information Revealed about Russia’s Skill During the Winter War**

Although Russia made some initial advances into Finnish territory during the first days of the war, its success was largely due to the paucity of Finnish troops guarding the frontier region. The first two months of combat revealed huge deficiencies
in the effectiveness of Soviet forces. On the Karelian Isthmus they failed to concentrate their forces to take advantage of their superior numbers, and they did not successfully exploit their breakthroughs. In the frontier region, the adoption of a road strategy left the Red Army’s armored columns vulnerable to flank attacks by Finland’s more mobile forces. In addition, their refusal to retreat made it impossible for them to launch counterattacks and enabled the Finns to chop up Soviet forces into small units that could be destroyed or placed under siege. At the tactical level, mass infantry attacks and poor combined arms operations resulted in heavy casualties and numerous defeats for the Russians in all theatres. Lack of training and unpreparedness of the winter weather further undermined Russian combat performance. In January, the Russians attempted to resolve many of these problems by replacing their leaders, revising their doctrine, and implementing new training programs. These reforms dramatically improved Russian performance during the February offensive, especially in terms of their ability to exploit their breakthroughs and conduct combined operations. Although big deficiencies remained in terms of their battlefield effectiveness, they were able to leverage their superior material resources to finally defeat the Finns. However, the improvements the Russians made in their battlefield effectiveness were not enough to salvage the Red Army’s reputation.

Third party observers worldwide commented on the lack of skill exhibited by the Russian military during the war. The German General Staff’s report on the performance of the Red Army during the war concluded that the “Russian ‘mass’ is no match for an army with modern equipment and superior leadership” (quoted in Edwards 2008, 208). Mussolini noted that the Winter War had shown that Russia was “not a power but a weakness” (quoted in Jakobson 1961, 219). Churchill commented that
the war exposed “the military incapacity of the Red Army and Red Air Force. Many illusions about Soviet Russia have been dispelled in these few fierce weeks of fighting” (quoted in Edwards 2008, 223). The British Military Journal reported that “the vaunted worth of the Russian Army has proven to be a myth” (quoted in Chew 1971, 212). An American correspondent reporting from Stockholm noted that the Winter War demonstrated the narrow applicability of the Red Army’s operational doctrine to open, easily traversed terrain (quoted in Van Dyke 1997, 191). Other western observers, including the French and the Swiss drew similar conclusions “about the myth of the Red Army’s power” (Chew 1971, 76). Thus, despite the reforms adopted in January, the improved performance of its forces in February, and its ultimate victory over its Finnish opponent in March, most foreign observers looked at the Russian battlefield performance during the Winter War and concluded that they were a relatively ineffective fighting force (Jakobson 1961, 174; Chew 1971, 75; Upton 1974, 91; Edwards 2008, 13-14).

**Soviet Will: Assessing Cost Tolerance**

While the Winter War revealed a lack of skill, it also demonstrated that the Soviet Union was willing to tolerate very high losses to achieve its political aims. The use of mass infantry attacks and Russian willingness to send division after division against Finnish defenses reflected a very high cost tolerance among Soviet military and political leaders. During the December assaults on the Mannerheim line, the infantry used their own bodies to clear mines and other anti-personnel obstacles in the forward defense areas (Trotter 1991, 83; Edwards 2008, 118). Mannerheim described how the “Russians would advance in close formation, singing and even hand in hand, against the Finnish minefield, apparently indifferent to the explosions and the accurate fire of the defenders.
The fatalistic submission which characterized the infantry was astonishing” (Mannerheim 1954, 368). Once the mines were cleared the infantry attacked in mass, with no protection from Finnish fire.

   During the initial assault on Taipale, discussed above, four separate divisions were sent across the ice to attack Finnish fortifications. With no cover from Finnish artillery or small arms fire, division after division fell as casualties mounted. One attack launched “during this period, lasted just under an hour, left 1,000 dead and twenty seven burning tanks strewn on the ice” (Trotter 1991, 78). Despite these losses “the attacks continued, establishing another trait that would prove characteristic of all the Mannerheim Line battles: The Russian’s willingness to take needless, hideous losses and still keep coming” (Trotter 1991, 77-78). These futile mass attacks were undertaken all along the Mannerheim line. A company commander from the 122nd Division stationed in the Summa Sector described with frustration the higher command’s unwillingness to alter battle plans in the face of devastating casualties:

   Of the more than 100 men of my company who went into the first attack, only 38 returned after the second had failed. All of us worried and wondered: what happens now? As if in answer to our question, the battalion commander [announced] . . . ‘Comrades our attack was unsuccessful; the division commander has just given me the order personally—in seven minutes we attack again (quoted in Trotter 1991, 83).

   During February, the wave attacks continued, with more troops committed to each successive wave. As casualties mounted, the Russians demonstrated that they were “willing to accept staggering losses to reach their objectives . . . No matter how many men and vehicles were lost, the attacks would be repeated, in each division’s assigned sector, three, four, five times each day” (Trotter 1991, 215). Soviet commanders ignored the mounting casualties as they ordered the attacks to continue; an attacking unit might
“lose 500 or more men in a minor sector on one day, only to renew the assault with fresh troops the next morning” (Chew 1971, 148).

Russian willingness to suffer casualties was also reflected in their unwillingness to surrender, even when the tactical situation was desperate. During the battles of Suomusalim and Raate Road, “thousands had fought to the last bullet, taking cover behind the stacked, frozen bodies and severed limbs of their dead comrades” (Edwards 2008, 168). At a roadblock west of Lake Heitajärvi, 200 Russians dug in and fought the Finnish forces that were closing on Tolvajärvi. The fighting was so intense and the determination of the Russian defenders so fierce that only two Russian officers survived the battle (Trotter 1991, 118). The cost tolerance of individual Russian units was demonstrated repeatedly during the motti battles of the frontier region. For example, when the Finns finally overran one small motti in the Lemanti East enclave, they found over 2,000 corpses. Only about 100 soldiers surrendered (Chew 1971, 173). In another trapped Uomma motti, the two remaining Russians refused to surrender even though 83 of their 85 men were dead or wounded (Trotter 1991, 137).

The fatalistic mass attacks and the unwillingness of Russian units to surrender led to very high casualties. Although the true figure may never be known, the official Soviet estimate at the time reported 48,745 soldiers killed and 158,863 wounded (Van Dyke 1997, 191). In his memoirs, Krushchev claims that the reported statistics underestimated the true casualties, which he put at one million men, one thousand airplanes, and twenty three hundred tanks (Engle and Paananen 1992, 143). Finnish historians estimate the Russians suffered between 230,000 and 270,000 dead and 200,000 - 300,000 wounded (Trotter 1991, 263). Regardless of which figure one uses, the total number of casualties suffered by the Russians was very high. This reflected their robust
cost tolerance and the fact that they fought in a way that showed little regard for loss of life or material resources.

**Was the Soviet Performance During the Winter War Unexpected?**

At the start of the Winter War, Russia was a great power and enjoyed a huge material advantage over its tiny Nordic neighbor. The initial invasion force consisted of 450,000 men, 23 Infantry divisions, 2000 tanks, and 1000 aircraft (Van Dyke 1997, 39-40). This was about one forth of the standing Russian Army, which consisted of more than 1.8 million men and 138 infantry divisions. The Russians also had access to an additional pool of manpower in the form of its 80 reserve divisions, which could augment the standing army by several million men (Sprague 2010, 41). After the failure of the December offensives, the Soviet high command drew from both its standing army and its reserve forces to send and additional 25 divisions to the Finnish border. In the end, over 1.2 million Russians fought the Finns during the Winter War (Upton 1974).

On the other hand, Finland had only 295,000 troops and 12 divisions at its disposal (Tillotsen 1996, 127; Van Dyke 1997, 40). Furthermore, with a total population of only 3.8 million people, the Finnish had no reserve forces with which to fall back on if their standing army suffered high losses. In addition, they suffered from a limited supply of advanced weaponry due to budget cuts in the 1930s. Each division had only 250 sub machine guns, 116 regular machine guns, 18 mortars, and 36 short-range artillery guns from World War I. There were no tanks, no anti-aircraft guns, and only 100 anti-tank guns for the entire country (Upton 1974, 52-54). The ammunition available for these weapons was also limited. Mannerheim estimated that at the start of the war, the Finns had two months of rifle and machine gun ammo and less than twenty five
days of artillery ammunition (Mannerheim 1954, 324). In fact, the “Russians could afford to fire more shells of a single caliber, on a single day, than were contained in the entire Finnish reserves” (Trotter 1991, 44).

The one advantage that the Finns possessed was that they were fighting in familiar territory that heavily favored the defense. However, despite the comparisons with the Maginot and Siegfried Lines, the rumors that circulated about the impregnability of Mannerheim line were largely exaggerated. The Russians disseminated these rumors to explain their initial lack of success, and the Finns tried to use the rumors to increase the Russians own fears and to convince the Western allies that foreign intervention could make a difference. In reality, the Mannerheim line consisted of little more than a series of concrete bunkers protected by barbed wire, land mines, and other anti-personnel obstacles (Engle and Paananen 1992, 63-64; Trotter 1991, 63-65). There was heavy artillery stationed on both flanks of the line, but only limited artillery support behind the line (Chew 1971, 61). After a visit to Finland during the summer of 1939, Britain’s military attaché reported that “even the line of defense at Summa, some 20 miles south of Viipuri, lacked a coherent fortified system: it consisted only of a number of strong points, in front of which were erected portions of anti-tank obstacles and barbed wire” (Nevikavi 1976, 46). Reports by the French attaché from the same visit described the Finnish defenses “as rather modest” (Nevikavi 1976, 46). Thus, while the natural obstacles along the Finnish frontier and the fortifications erected on the

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3 The exact number of bunkers and their relative strength is still debated. Mannerheim says there were 66 strong points, but 40 were not fully reinforced. General Öhquist claims there were 93 strong points, but 49 were not very good. The Russians claim that they captured 300 forts during the war. The discrepancy in these numbers seems to be a function of how the participants classified a fortification. Mannerheim only included concrete bunkers in his analysis, while Öhquist included forts made out earth and logs. It is unclear what the Russian definition of fort included.
Isthmus would enable the small Finnish forces to mount a vigorous defense of their country, they were not so formidable as to entirely offset the overwhelming numerical superiority enjoyed by the Russians.

The asymmetry in the balance of power between Russia and Finland led almost everyone to believe that Russia would easily overrun Finland’s small armed forces. Most of the military and political leaders of both combatants, as well as third party observers, assumed that the war would result in a one-sided victory for the Soviets. The Russians clearly believed that the war would be easily won. The success of the Soviet intervention in Poland and superiority of the Russian military, both in terms of raw numbers and the technological sophistication of its weaponry, made Stalin confident that victory would be secured quickly at a relatively low cost (Chew 1971, 2; Edwards 2008, 1992; Sprague 2010, 159). Stalin expected that after “A few Soviet bombs, a few tanks, [and] a few propaganda leaflets—the unpopular bourgeois government of the Finnish White Guards would topple . . . Within a few days Soviet forces would enter Helsinki to sign a peace treaty with a Finnish Soviet Government” (Chew 1971, 2). Most of the political and military leaders who surrounded Stalin agreed. Nikita Khurushchev claims that during the meeting in which the decision to go to war was made, “no one in the room even voiced the possibility that the war would be anything other than a walkover . . . ‘We would fire one shot and the Finns would put up their hands and surrender. Or so we thought’” (quoted in Trotter 1991, 21). Kirrill Meretskov, Commander of the Leningrad Military district, “anticipated no real difficulties with the Finnish campaign” (Engle and Paananen 1992, 4). He thought the Russian Army was unbeatable, as the experience in Poland had just proven (Edwards 2008, 96). Vice Admiral I. I. Azarov noted that even after the devastating defeats in December, the military was slow to acknowledge the
“fighting skill” of the Finnish soldiers because the idea of an easy victory was “so rooted” in the minds of the Russian leaders (quoted in Engle and Paananen 1992, 70).

There were a few dissenters who voiced doubts about the ease of a Russian victory. Notably, General Shaposhnikov, Chief of the General Staff, was pessimistic about the chances for a rapid victory due to the heavily wooded terrain and the imminent onset of winter (Chew 1971, 2; Trotter 1991, 34). However, Stalin dismissed the general’s reports, “treating it almost like a joke,” and assigned the entire Finnish operation to the Leningrad military district (Trotter 1991, 34).

Russian expectations for an easy victory are reflected in their operational plans. They planned for an attack that would last three weeks at the longest and was likely to be over in only a matter of days (Upton 1974, 152; Engle and Paananen 1992, 1; Van Dyke 1997, 21). The Deputy Commissar for Defense ordered his artillery “to prepare for maximum twelve days of warfare” (Chew 1971, 20). The Deputy Commissar for Foreign affairs told the French Ambassador that the Red Army would occupy Helsinki “in four or five days” (quoted in Chew 1971, 20). Soviet diplomats gave an American correspondent similar estimates for the expected duration of the war, claiming that “in three days it will be all over” (quoted in Jakobson 1961, 168). The Finns found propaganda leaflets on fallen soldiers and Russian prisoners which stated that “the war would end on Stalin’s birthday,” December 18th, just a couple weeks after the initiation of hostilities (Sprague 2010, 108).

Their confidence in their ability to quickly overrun Finnish defenses was also reflected in their larger strategic goals. Initially they planned on the complete conquest of the country and the installation of a new puppet regime. Russians troops were ordered to advance all the way to the Swedish border but were warned not to violate
that border (Mannerheim 1954, 328-329; Jakobson 1961, 158; Chew 1971, 20; Sprague 2010, 40). After capturing the border town of Terijoki during the first days of the war, they installed a communist government led by Finnish exile, Otter Kuusinen. They refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Finnish government in Helsinki or to enter into negotiations with them. It was not until January, when the reality of the difficulties on the ground sank in, that they agreed to negotiate with the actual Finnish government (Jakobson 1961, 167-168).

The Finns were also dubious of their chances for success. During the pre-war negotiations, Mannerheim repeatedly implored the politicians to compromise with the Russians because he believed that Finland was not adequately prepared for war (Mannerheim, 1954, 300-301). In October 1938 he issued a report to the government on the state of the Finnish military. It reported that

> Finland’s field army would have to be thrown against the enemy completely without protection against armour and aircraft, supported by artillery weak in both quality and quantity and to a great degree lacking in individual equipment. When one realizes the equipment and arms of the presumptive enemy [Russia], the situation of the Army appears even more hopeless. The same can be said of the Navy and Air Force. In a word, the armed forces must at present be described as totally unfitted for war (Mannerheim 1954, 296).

After issuing the report, he argued vehemently of the need to fund various modernization and training programs in the armed forces, but none of his recommended programs were instituted or funded. Thus, when negotiations threatened to breakdown in the fall of 1939, the Finnish military was still unprepared for a war. Mannerheim remembers pressuring the diplomats to back down: “I urged that we must strive for a compromise, since we all knew that we were not prepared to meet an attack by a Great Power . . . The government did not possess any army such as their foreign policy required” (Mannerheim 1954, 314).
He argued that the Finns should agree to lease Suursarri to the Russians because the Finnish Army was not prepared to fight. He told the politicians, “the task of actually fighting the Russians was at present completely beyond the abilities of the Finnish Army” (quoted in Edwards 2008, 52). When later opportunities for compromise availed themselves, he reiterated his stance, telling them, “You absolutely must come to an agreement. The Army cannot fight” (quoted in Edwards 2008, 100). General Österman shared the Marshall’s views on this matter. When asked his opinion about risking war with the Russians, he replied simply that “without the slightest doubt we shall lose a war” (quoted in Upton 1974, 36).

The international community was almost unanimous in its belief that the Russians would prevail over their Finnish neighbors with ease. In most countries, “Finland’s fight was written off in advance as no more than an heroic gesture, a romantic act of defiance, a reckless refusal to face the cold facts of modern warfare, or simply national suicide” (Jakobson 1961, 173). In fact, most countries did not even contemplate sending material assistance to the Finns because “the defenders’ chances were at first considered so slight that the only way of giving support considered worthwhile was statements to satisfy public opinion” (Nevikavi 1976, 159).

When the Finns turned to Germany for support during pre-war negotiations, Hitler urged them to acquiesce to the Soviet Union’s demands because he “was confident that Finland would yield to necessity and come to terms rather than fight a

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* The Finns opted for war, despite these gloomy predictions, because they believed that losing a war was preferable to relinquishing their sovereignty without a fight. If they compromised with the Russians now, the Russians could keep coming back the bargaining table to demand more. If they fought, they could perhaps limit their future losses by convincing the Soviets that coercing the Finns would be too costly even if they lost the current war (Sescher 2007, 152-177). Nonetheless, they knew that victory was impossible and even mounting a tough defense would be very difficult.
hopeless war” (Upton 1974, 25). Most of the “foreign military attachés in Helsinki believed that the Finns would fight stoutly, but in the face of the on paper odds, most of them wrote off Finnish resistance as a heroic gesture that could not possibly stave off defeat for longer than a week or two” (Trotter 1991, 40). In Britain “the general and logical assumption was that the Red Army would roll over the Finns in a vast khaki tide, and present the impotent Allied cause with yet another fait accompli” (Edwards 2008, 136). After observing Finnish exercises in the summer of the 1939, Britain’s military attaché wrote a report, stating

Finland would be taking a very great risk if she allowed herself to get involved in war against any major power. The training and experience of the Higher Commanders appears to leave much to be desired; the equipment and armament of units is in a very bad condition and the only hopeful feature appears to be the natural difficulties of the country (quoted in Nevikavi 1976, 45-46).

The French prime minister believed that the “the Finnish Army” would be “swept aside,” and that this would endanger the iron ore fields which were so central to the western war (Edwards 2008, 146). Most American military and political leaders “expected Finland to capitulate in a matter of days” (Schwartz 1960, 28). The American Undersecretary of State, Summer Welles, predicted that the Russians would “mop up Finland as soon as the lakes freeze[sic]” (Schwartz 1960, 16).

In all of these countries, there were a few people who thought that Russia would have a difficult time in a war with Finland. A few French officers and one British military attaché argued that the purges had degraded the efficiency of the Russian military (Nevikavi 1976, 36). Others, like the German Foreign Minister to Finland, Wipert von Blücher, a few of the British Chiefs of Staff, and even Hitler noted the difficulty that the rough Finnish terrain and the cold weather could cause for Russian operations (Sprague 2010, 44; Nevaki 1976, 33; Jakobson 1961, 189). However, the
conclusions drawn by most observers dismissed these factors. As the British Foreign Office argued, “Had the Russians not always proved the best winter fighters in the past,” even in difficult terrain (Nevikavi 1976, 47)? The actions of these governments reflected the latter sentiments. None of them gave or even promised substantial military aid until Finland had proven itself on the battlefield. There was no reason to waste precious military resources on a losing cause, and most expected that Finland’s fight would be a losing cause.

Thus, Russia’s performance during the Winter War was indeed unexpected. The Russians, the Finns, and most third party observers believed that the Russians would quickly defeat their small Finnish neighbor.

The Winter War, Contextual Expectations Theory, and the Predicted Reputational Consequences of the War

The Winter War revealed that although the Soviet Union had a very high cost tolerance, its military was not very effective. In the terms of Contextual Expectations Theory, the Soviet Union revealed a low level of skill and a high level of will. When the prior expectations of both the combatants and outside observers were examined, the information revealed about the effectiveness of the Red Army appears to have been unexpected. Most believed that the material resources of the Soviet Union would enable them to easily defeat the Finns at a very low cost to themselves. Because the war was expected to be a one-sided victory for the Russians, very little discussion revolved around their expected cost tolerance. The Soviets had no need for a robust cost tolerance because they would win before their cost threshold was even approached. Thus, the information about the lack of skill displayed by the Russians was the primary unexpected information generated during the war. The information regarding their high
cost tolerance, generated at the same time, was of secondary importance in terms of prior expectations. In the aftermath of the war, many third party observers commented on Russia’s surprising lack of skill. I found no records of statements about Russia’s will or cost tolerance by these same observers.

CET predicts that unexpected information about skill will have reputational consequences. Combatants that perform worse than expected on the battlefield will be more likely to be challenged by their potential rivals. Furthermore, these reputational consequences should be most pronounced for potential adversaries that expect to fight in an environment similar to that in which the most recent war was fought. Thus, if Contextual Expectations Theory is correct, Russia’s poor performance in the Winter War should have emboldened Russia’s enemies, particularly those who planned to fight the Red Army in an environment that was similar to the Karelian Isthmus or the Finnish frontier.

There were two aspects of the combat environment during the Winter War that were likely to be considered by third party states when they assessed the relevance of the information generated during the Winter War about Russia’s skill. First, the weather played a key role in limiting the effectiveness of the Red Army. As discussed earlier, the Russians were unprepared for Finland’s frigid temperatures. Soviet soldiers did not have adequate food or clothing, which had a detrimental impact on their morale and fighting capacity. Furthermore, the ability of the Red Army to maneuver was limited by the heavy snowfall. This complicated battlefield tactics as well as logistical support. In addition, many of the weapons the Soviets possessed did not function properly in the arctic temperatures because the lubricating oil froze. Given the added difficulties the Russians faced because of the arctic climate, it is likely that adversaries contemplating
winter warfare with the Russians would be particularly emboldened by Russia’s poor performance in the Winter War.

The second environmental factor that hindered Russian performance during the Winter War was the terrain on which they fought. During the war, the Russians fought in two very different environments. On the Finnish frontier, the dense forests of pine, spruce, and birch coupled with the lack road infrastructure limited the maneuverability of Russia’s mechanized forces and hindered horizontal communication between units. It forced them to adopt the road strategy that doomed so many of their divisions to being chopped into mottis and destroyed by the Finns. The terrain on the Karelian Isthmus was much more open. Most of the forests had been plowed to make room for the numerous potato and wheat fields that dotted the countryside, and the remaining forests were much less dense than those in the Northern wilderness. There were almost no hills and very few rock formations to build permanent fortifications. The primary natural obstacles on the Isthmus were the lakes, rivers, and marshes scattered throughout the countryside. Initially these water formations forced Russia to concentrate its assaults in a few key sectors of the Isthmus where the Mannerheim line had been most heavily fortified. However, once these waterways froze, the Russians were able to maneuver as they would in open countryside. Because the Russians operated in both environments and performed poorly in both environments, CET would predict that Russian rivals that expected to fight the Red Army in either forested or semi-open terrain would be particularly sensitive to the information the Winter War revealed about the lack of Soviet skill.

The next chapter tests these predictions against those of rival reputational theories by examining whether the Germans and the Japanese considered the Russian
performance during the Winter War when deciding whether to challenge Russia during World War II.

**The Winter War and the Validity of Quantitative Variables**

Before beginning my analysis of World War II, it is important to assess what the Winter War case study can tell us about the validity of the quantitative analyses performed in chapters 2 and 3. In those chapters, I tested Contextual Expectations Theory using statistical models and employed proxy variables to measure skill, will, and prior expectations. In particular, I used the overall loss exchange ratio to measure skill, the number of casualties suffered to measure will, and the balance of power plus a series of other control variables to generate predictions about prior expectations. My qualitative analysis of the Winter War suggests that, in this case, these proxy variables are very good representations of the concepts I am trying to measure.

**Skill and Loss Exchange Ratios**

Above I found that the Soviet Union revealed a low level of skill during the Winter War. According to my quantitative predictions, this low level of skill should translate into a low LER. Although the Finnish casualties were precisely recorded by their government, with 24,923 killed and 43,557 wounded, there is still debate about the exact number of Russians killed in the conflict. Most historians reject the official Russian figure released at the end of the war of 48,557 killed and 159,000 wounded. Even Russian historians and politicians admit that the real number was much higher. The best estimates made by Finnish Historians put the number of Russians killed at somewhere between 230,000 - 270,000 with an additional 200,000 - 300,000 wounded. If those figures

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7 For details about various estimates of Russian casualties see Trotter (1991, 263)
are used, Russia’s overall loss exchange ratio for the Winter War would be between .09 and .11. So for every Finn killed, the Russians lost approximately 10 of their own. Thus the low level of skill they exhibited on the battlefield is reflected in a low overall LER.

The Loss Exchange Ratios for specific battles were also very low. In the battle for Ägläjärvi seven Russians were killed for every one Finn, an LER of .14 (Edwards 2008, 168). During the battle for Tolvajarvi, the Russians lost 4,000 dead while the Finns only lost 630, an LER of .15 (Chew 1971, 58; Trotter 1991, 121; Tillotsen 1996, 134). In the Suomussalmi and Raate Road battles, the Finns lost 900 killed while the Russians lost more than 27,500, an LER of .03 (Trotter 1991, 166). During the destruction of Mylly Motti, eight Finns died while killing more than five hundred Russians for an LER of less than .02. When the Russians assaulted Killer Hill during their attack on Koalla in January, they lost 400 soldiers but were only able to kill 28 Finns, an LER of .07 (Trotter 1991, 30). Thus, there appears to be a correlation between the lack of skill and low loss exchange ratios for both battles and the overall war in this case.

In addition, my analysis of Soviet skill during the Winter War demonstrates how the specific tactical and operational deficiencies of the Red Army caused their LER to go down by increasing their own casualties and making it difficult for them to inflict casualties on their opponent. At the operational level, their refusal to employ tactical retreats in the motti battles of the frontier region led to entire divisions being entirely wiped out by Finnish flank attacks and starvation sieges. At the same time, the adoption of a road strategy in the northern wilderness and the failure of the Russians to concentrate their forces on the Isthmus made it difficult for them to inflict casualties on the Finns. At the tactical level, Russian infantrymen were easy targets for Finnish snipers and machine gunners because they advanced in mass and used no cover or concealment
measures to hide their approach. Furthermore, because they were not proficient in combined arms operations, tanks failed to protect the infantry from the deadly Finnish cross-fire and infantry failed to protect the tanks from the Finn’s improvised anti-tank measures, resulting in high casualties for both types of units. The inaccurate firing by the artillery, the Air Force, and the infantry meant that relatively few Finns were killed during the bombardments. Thus, the force employment problems that afflicted the Red Army increased their own casualties and decreased the number of casualties they could inflict on the Finns, driving their loss exchange ratio down.

The one counterargument to this assessment is that the Russians were launching an offensive war on terrain that heavily favored the defense. Thus, the low LERs were a result not of a lack of skill, but of the offensive nature of their operations and the type of terrain in which they were operating. Although this is partially true, Russia’s low loss ratios are probably, in part, a function of the difficulties of undertaking offensive operations in such inhospitable terrain, two facts suggest that their lack of battlefield skill was the primary contributor to their low loss ratios. First, the overall .10 (1 Finn killed: 10 Russians killed) is much lower than the standard .33 (1 defender killed: 3 attackers killed) handicap given to offensive forces. Second, even when the Russians were on the defensive, as in the battles of Suomussalmi and Toljavari, they performed poorly, achieving LERs of less than .2 in both cases. The virtual destruction of most of the mottis also suggests that lack of skill was critical in sealing the Russian’s fate. Thus, in this case LER seems to be a reasonable proxy for Russia’s lack of skill on the battlefield.
Will and Casualties

My analysis of Soviet will suggested that the Winter War revealed that the USSR had a very high cost tolerance. This cost tolerance was indeed reflected in the high number of casualties suffered by the Russians during the war with Finland. Even if the USSR’s official casualty statistics of 48,557 killed and 159,000 are accepted at face value, the total number of casualties suffered is quite high. If the more realistic figures cited by historians or the very high figures referenced by Khrushchev are used, then correlation between the high cost tolerance of the Soviet Union during this conflict and the high numbers of casualties suffered becomes even stronger.

Furthermore, the Russians fought in a way that showed little respect for the lives of their soldiers. As discussed above, infantrymen marched into mine fields to clear them of mines and other anti-personnel obstacles with their bodies. Mass attacks on fortified positions were undertaken repeatedly, with no efforts made to conceal or protect the advancing infantry that were mowed down by Finnish machine gunners as they approached. Although divisions suffered horrendous casualties during these assaults, the upper level commanders merely repeated these attacks with fresh divisions, making no attempt to alter the tactics to limit their own casualties. When encircled, most Russian units refused to surrender or retreat, preferring to fight to the last man if required. As a result, many Russian divisions were entirely wiped out during the mottobattles in the frontier region. In fact, the overall Soviet strategy was designed to leverage Russia’s demographic advantages. The Russians knew that the Finns had limited manpower reserves and could not hold out against Russia’s superior numbers, even if they were able to inflict high casualties on the Red Army.
Thus, the high casualties Russia suffered during the Winter War were a direct consequence of the high cost tolerance of Soviet leaders. The Red Army planned for and fought the war in a way that demonstrated their willingness to suffer high casualties in pursuit of battlefield objectives. At no time during the campaign did concern for mounting casualties alter their battlefield plans or objectives.

**Expectations and Power**

As discussed above, balance of power considerations would predict an easy Russian victory over the Finns. The Russians had vastly superior resources in terms of both manpower and weaponry, both in the immediate theatre of operations and in their larger arsenal. If power is the primary predictor of battlefield outcomes, then the Russians should have been able to annihilate the poorly armed Finns. This prediction is consistent with the predictions made by almost everyone involved in the Winter War. Both the combatants and outside observers expected Russia to easily prevail over the ill equipped Finns. Thus, the balance of power prediction is at least consistent with the expectations voiced by most observers to the conflict.

In addition, these observers often pointed to the asymmetry in power when justifying their own predictions about the likely outcome. Chew (1971) ascribes Soviet “overconfidence” to “their apparent military superiority” (21). Sprague (2010) reports that “the massive numbers of tanks and soldiers and several thousand bombers and fighters that the Russians possessed reinforced their [the Soviet’s] belief that they were more than prepared to take out the Finnish nation before Christmas 1939” (190). After tabulating the number of men and weapons available to each belligerent, the British War Office concluded, “there was little doubt that the Soviet Union would be able to use its superior manpower and material, regardless of physical impediments. In numbers its
superiority was tremendous . . . [The Finns] were far inferior to corresponding Red Army units in equipment and manpower” (quoted in Nevikavi 1976, 47). In fact, most foreign military attachés dismissed the possibility of tough Finnish resistance based on balance of forces considerations (Trotter 1991, 40). This suggests that the material balance of power was used to inform prior expectations and is a reasonable proxy for those expectations.

Although power considerations played a big role in informing people’s prior expectations in this conflict, another important factor that was repeatedly referenced by observers was the Red Army’s effectiveness in previous conflicts. The Soviet performance in Poland the previous summer and their victory over the Japanese in Nomonhan were mentioned by multiple observers. The Soviet Union had defeated Poland, “a nation with eight times the population of Finland, in a matter of days . . . at a cost of only 737 fatalities” (Chew 1971, 2-3). The “carpet bagging of Eastern Poland” during the summer of 1939 made the possibility of a Finnish victory seem remote (Edwards 2008, 272). When the Finns recalled “the Nazi-Soviet Blitzkrieg in Poland three months earlier . . . [They] doubted the possibility of successful resistance. There was even loose talk of Russian tanks breaching the main defenses and reaching Viipuri in two days” (Chew 1971, 20). The Soviet Union’s victory over the Japanese at Nomonhan reinforced beliefs about the military capability of the USSR. The Japanese were thought to be a very good army, and the ease with which the Red Army defeated them in the summer of 1939 increased the prestige of the Soviet military (Tillotsen 1996, 122). In fact, the Russians were so confident in their ability to easily defeat the Finns in part because the leader of the Leningrad military district had “delivered a very competent victory over the Imperial Japanese Army the previous September” as commander of the Red
Army during the Nomonhan War (Edwards, 16). These references to Poland and Nomonhan suggest that an additional factor consistently played into prior expectations—the combatants’ performance in recent conflicts. Although balance of power considerations still proved to be a good proxy in this case, these statements suggest that the expectations variable could be strengthened by including a measure of the combatants’ prior performance in predicting the likely outcome of a conflict.

Thus, my analysis of the Winter War suggests that all three proxy variables employed in the quantitative analysis—loss exchange ratios for skill, casualties for will, and the material balance of power for expectations—are good representations of the concepts I am trying to measure.

Now that the validity of those measures has been established and the information generated during the Winter War about Russia’s skill and will has been described in detail, I turn to the reputational consequences of that war by examining German and Japanese decision making during World War II.
Chapter 5: German and Japanese Decisions in World War II, Assessing the Winter War’s Reputational Costs

At the end of the Winter War the Soviet Union had ongoing disputes with a number of different countries, including Germany, Japan, Britain, and a number of its smaller Baltic and Eastern European neighbors. Thus, the potential reputational consequences of the Winter War were quite broad. In this chapter, I focus on the decision making of Germany and Japan because the differences in their prospective fighting environments enable me to test one of the key predictions of CET: that information about combatants’ military effectiveness will be most relevant to potential challengers who plan to fight in terrain that is similar to the terrain in which the previous war was fought.

I begin this chapter by reviewing the information generated about the Soviet Union during the Winter War. I then outline the different predictions that the competing theories make regarding the likely reputational consequences of the war for German and Japanese decision making. After reviewing the evidence I will be using throughout the chapter, I delve into the two cases. I begin with an overview of the conflict between the Soviet Union and each country. This is followed by a description of their assessment of the Winter War, a detailed account of the actions taken vis-à-vis the Soviet Union after the Winter War, and an in-depth analysis of their decision making. After completing the case studies, I assess how well each theory fared in terms of predicting the behavior of the relevant actors. I conclude by comparing the findings of the case studies to the statistical analysis, with a special emphasis on what the case studies reveal about the reliability of the large N indicators.
The Reputational Costs of the Winter War: Competing Predictions

Two different types of evidence are leveraged to test the competing models of reputation formation in this case. First, the actions of the Soviet Union’s adversaries are assessed: Do the relevant actors choose to challenge the USSR? Do they engage in conflictual or conciliatory behavior? Do they adopt hard or soft bargaining behavior when negotiating over sensitive issues? Do they respond to threats from the USSR by backing down or standing firm? Second, the decision making of each adversary is analyzed to determine what factors motivated their behavior. According to the different theories, what should the decision making process look like? Below I outline the predictions each theory makes about the behavior and the decision making process of Germany and Japan.

Contextual Expectations Theory’s Predictions

As discussed in chapter 4, the Winter War revealed the USSR’s lack of skill. The Soviets revealed a low level of competency in fighting at both the tactical and operational level. Although they simultaneously revealed a very high cost tolerance, this fact was less important to postwar assessments made by third party states. Most relevant observers focused on the Soviets’ ineptness on the battlefield, rather than on their willingness to sustain high levels of casualties to achieve their wartime objectives. The USSR’s lack of battlefield skill was, for the most part, unexpected, although there were some indications of the weakness in the Soviet military prior to the onset of hostilities.

Given this information, CET predicts that Germany will be more willing to challenge the USSR after the Winter War, but that Japan’s behavior vis-à-vis the USSR will be unaltered because of the differences in their prospective fighting environments. The Germans planned to fight the Soviet Union in terrain that was very similar to the terrain in which the Soviets had fought the Finns. Like the Karelian Ithmus, Russia’s
western frontier is dotted with numerous waterways, lakes, rivers, and marshes. The Pripet Marshes bisect the border with more than 30,000 square miles of lakes, swamps, ponds, and other streams (Klink 1998, 260; Mossier 2010, 91) The Dvina, Dnepr, Don, and Volga rivers wind through Russian territory, restricting troop movements in much the same way that the Taipale and Neva rivers do in Finland. North of the marshes is heavily wooded terrain that, like the Finnish Frontier, is sparsely inhabited with very poor infrastructure (Leach 1973, 250; Mossier 2010, 94). In fact, the Germans predicted that the terrain would force the Russians to fight on the roads, just as the terrain in northern Finland had (Blau 1955, 7 quoting the Marcks Plan). The terrain south of marshes was similar to the Isthmus. As in the North, it was sparsely inhabited with few roads, but was only partially forested with dry grasslands in the prairie stretching over rolling plains that resembled the cultivated fields of the Isthmus. In this region, as on the Isthmus, large scale military maneuvers were possible (Leach 1973, 250; Mossier 2010, 98).

The primary difference between European Russia and Asian Russia is that the latter is much more mountainous. The Salayan and Atlay mountains stretch across the Mongolian Border, while the Baikal Mountains form the southern edge of the Central Siberian plateau. Further north lay the Stanavoy mountains and a string of volcanic peaks that run from Kamchatka through the Kuril Islands into Japan. Like European Russia, the topography is varied with the arctic tundra in the north giving way to the forested taiga and eventually the rolling grasslands of the steppe in the south. Unlike European Russia, it also contains lowlands along the Pacific coast and a series of mountainous islands near the Sea of Japan. The Japanese would most likely fight the Soviets in the mountains and grasslands of the Manchurian border, along the Pacific coast, or on the contested Kuril and Sahkalin Islands. Mountain, naval, and amphibious warfare would likely play a much greater role in a conflict between Japan and the Soviet Union than it did in the war between Finland and the USSR.
In terms of process tracing, CET would expect Germany’s assessment of the Winter War to focus on the Soviet’s battlefield performance and to give some indication that the lack of skill revealed during the war was unexpected. When deciding on how to treat the Soviet Union after the war, CET would expect that German decision makers would mention the Finnish War in justifying decisions to go to war, that the Soviet lack of skill would be a key motivating factor in their decisions, and that the Finnish War would be given as evidence of that lack of skill. There should also be some evidence that they consider terrain when applying the lessons of the Winter War; they should either explicitly compare their prospective theatre of war to Finland’s or they should discuss Russia’s weakness in operating in terrain that is similar to Finland’s, even if they don’t mention it by name. Japanese decision-makers may not even mention the Winter War because it is assumed to be irrelevant due to the differences in terrain. However, if the Soviet performance in the Winter War is mentioned, information about their fighting abilities should be dismissed as irrelevant because of terrain considerations.

**Alternative Hypotheses**

The rationalist model predicts that both Germany and Japan would be more willing to challenge the USSR after the Winter War, both in terms of initiating conflicts and in terms of standing firm against Soviet threats. Like CET, it predicts that their assessment of the Winter War should focus on the Soviets’ fighting ability. Unlike CET, there may not be evidence that the Soviet performance was unexpected. Leaders of both countries should mention the Soviets’ lack of skill in justifying their decisions, and the Winter War should be given as evidence of this lack of skill. Compared to CET, there will be less evidence of sensitivity to the impact of terrain on the applicability of the lessons drawn from the Winter War.

The bias and learning literature predicts that the Winter War will have no impact on the behavior of Germany or Japan. Assessments of the Soviet performance in the
Winter War will primarily reflect the preconceptions of both states about the Soviets’ fighting abilities. If either state engages in conflictual behavior, there will be no mention of the Winter War or what it revealed about the Red Army’s fighting ability.

Mercer’s attributional theory predicts either no change in the behavior of Japan and Germany or a decreased willingness to challenge the Soviet Union due to what the Winter War revealed about the USSR’s cost tolerance. This is because, in both cases, the Soviet Union is in the out-group. A low level of revealed skill is desirable to the Soviets’ enemies and so will be attributed to the situation, while a high level of will is undesirable and to will be attributed to the disposition of the USSR. Thus, only the information about a high cost tolerance will have reputational effects. If this theory is correct, both countries’ assessments of the Winter War will focus on the Soviet Union’s revealed cost tolerance. Decisions to adopt conciliatory postures towards the USSR or to back down when threatened should be motivated by the USSR’s robust cost tolerance. Furthermore, the Winter War should be given as evidence of this cost tolerance. There should be very little sensitivity to terrain, and any mention of the Soviet’s lack of fighting ability should be attributed to situational factors.

Current Calculus predicts that both Japan and Germany should engage in more conflictual behavior after the Winter War. The assessment of Soviet performance in the Winter War should focus on their military effectiveness, and there will not necessarily be evidence that this information was unexpected. Both countries should mention the Red Army’s lack of skill when deciding to initiate conflicts with the USSR, and the Winter War should be given as evidence of that lack of skill. There will not be much evidence that decision makers in either country were sensitive to how their prospective fighting environments differed from Finland’s.

Table 5.1 summarizes the types of evidence that would confirm the different theories.
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<th>Theory</th>
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Winter War given as example of high cost tolerance

Winter War not mentioned as example of lack of skill
Types of Evidence

In order to test these competing hypotheses, I leverage a few different types of evidence. I rely primarily on secondary histories of the Second World War to analyze the behavior of Germany and Japan with respect to the Soviet Union. In terms of process tracing, I also rely heavily on the secondary literature, which provides a wealth of direct quotes from the key decision makers and large excerpts from a number of important planning documents. I also have access to a number of primary source materials. For the German case, I had access to Hitler’s War Directives and documents from the Archives of the German Foreign office. Army Chief of Staff General Halder’s War Diary provides detailed notes on various upper level meetings and the Army General Staff’s preparations for War on the Eastern Front. It reads more like a transcript of these meetings and of the General’s daily dealings than like a diary; his opinion of the different events and decisions is rarely noted. The diary of Joseph Goebbels, the Third Reich’s propaganda minister and Hitler’s confidant, provides insight into Goebbels’ impression of Hitler’s thoughts in the run up to Barbarossa. The memoirs of Chief of Staff Halder, General Hanz Gudieron, and Albert Speer, Hitler’s architect and close friend, provide additional insight into the motivations of leading Nazi leaders. These last sources should be read with caution given the incentive for Nazi leaders to recast themselves and their positions in the aftermath of Germany’s defeat (Groehler 1993, 48; Stahel 2009, 5). Supplementing the secondary history with these primary source materials provides a very detailed picture of the decision making in Germany on the eve of Barbarossa.

For Japan, I had access to the diary of Lord Kido, keeper of the Privy Seal from 1940-1945. Kido served as the Emperor’s chief advisor and as the liaison between the emperor and the Cabinet. He had access to the key decision makers in Japan during
World War II and was present when most of the major decisions were made. Chihiro (1980) provides the full text of many of the documents he uses in his analysis of Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, including key speeches, memorandums, and correspondence between the two countries. The most useful source is Ike’s transcription of notes from the Liaison Meetings and Imperial Conferences from 1940-1941 (Ike 1967). It is during these daily meetings that the key wartime decisions were made, including the decision to head south rather than attack the Soviet Union. The meetings consisted of Cabinet representatives including the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the War Minister, the Navy Minister, and the Army and Navy Chiefs and Vice Chiefs of Staff. The decisions of the Liaison conferences were then ratified during Imperial Conferences, which were attended by the Emperor and the President of the Privy Council. The detailed notes are probably taken from someone representing the Army Chief of Staff and include direct quotes from the debates, the transcriber’s summary of the discussion, and marginal notes made by the transcriber during the meeting. Ike’s (1967) translation of these materials also includes translator notes that were added for clarification. If the Winter War influenced the decision making of Japanese leaders, it should be referenced during these meetings.

Germany and the Decision to Launch Operation Barbarossa

My analysis of German decision making from 1940 until the launch of Operation Barbarossa in the summer of 1941 suggests that the Winter War had reputational consequences. The German assessment of the Winter War focused on the operational weaknesses of the Soviet military, although it is not entirely clear whether this information was unexpected given the purges of the 1930s. The behavior of Germany after the Winter War is consistent with a reputational story. In the summer of 1940, it began challenging Russia diplomatically and adopting recalcitrant bargaining strategies in negotiations over outstanding issues. Most significantly, the Germans decided to
invade the Soviet Union in 1940 and carried out that decision in 1941 when they launched Operation Barbarossa. My analysis of the decision making process that led to the invasion provides further evidence of reputational effects. It demonstrates that Germany’s evaluation of Russia’s fighting ability was decisive in prompting Germany to launch Barbarossa and that the Soviet performance in the Winter War contributed to Germany’s assessment of the Red Army’s fighting ability.

**The German Assessment of the Winter War**

The German military carefully studied the Soviet performance in the Winter War and concluded that the war had revealed serious deficiencies in the fighting abilities of the Red Army. Midway through the war, in December of 1939, the German General Staff issued a report on the Soviets’ dismal performance:

In quantity a giant military instrument. Commitment of the ‘mass’—organization, equipment, and means of leadership unsatisfactory. Principles of leadership good—leadership itself, however, too young, and inexperienced. Communications systems bad; transportation bad—troops not very uniform—no personalities. Simple soldier, good natured, quite satisfied with very little—Fighting qualities in a heavy fight, dubious (quoted in Edwards 2008, 208).

In October of 1940, the Department for Foreign Armies East of the Army General Staff issued a more formal report on the Red Army’s performance in the Finno-Russian War. The report concluded that the “lack of initiative and stereotyped operations resulted in losses at the beginning of the war,” and that the “accumulation of large numbers of troops on the Karelian Isthmus led to supply difficulties” (quoted in Klink 1998, 223). It focused particular attention on the inability of the Soviet forces to conduct combined arms operations, noting that “there was a lack of cooperation between the various branches, especially in artillery support for advancing infantry and in artillery barrages” (quoted in Klink 1998, 223). It concluded that the Red Army’s reliance on “mass employment” led to a failure to “assess correctly the effect and applicability of the different branches” (quoted in Klink 1998, 223). It attributed the Soviet victory “to the numerical inferiority of the Finns and the ample supply of new attacking divisions,”
nothing that the repeated “attacks in deep waves resulted in heavy losses” (quoted in Klink 1998, 233).

The effect that the Winter War had on German perceptions of Soviet strength is also seen in the way intelligence reports change after the conclusion of the war. In 1938, Kostring, Germany’s military attaché to the Soviet Union, reported that the purges had damaged the Soviets’ operational abilities, but he concluded that “there is no sign that the Army is no longer a major factor in any warlike conflict” (quoted in Hillgruber 1997, 178). By 1940, he had reversed this conclusion, arguing that the Russian military would not regain its military prowess for years. He cited the incompetence of the Red Army’s performance “against collapsing Poland and little Finland” as evidence of the Soviets’ weakness (quoted in Hillgruber 1997).

Goebbels’s (1982) diary entries reveal that the Soviet performance in the Winter War also affected the opinions of political leaders in the Third Reich. On January 5th, 1940 he noted, “The Russians are making absolutely no progress in Finland. The Red Army really does seem to be of very little military worth” (87). In late January, even as the Soviet Union was beginning to turn the tide, he wrote “the Finnish campaign, and particularly its failure, has done Russia a lot of harm” (101). His comments suggest that Hitler shared his assessment. On January 25th he wrote, “Midday with the Fürher . . . we discuss the Russian question. The Russians are showing increasing loyalty to us. They have every reason. They cannot get out of the Finnish business . . . they have made serious tactical mistakes” (103). General Halder, the Chief of the Army, seemed to share these views. He scribbled the following in his own diary after an intelligence update about the war: “Russian Armaments—Obsolete material; what is new is copied from foreign nations. Command mechanical! Lack of intellectual caliber” (quoted in Chew 1971, 213).

Although German leaders were aware of the steps Russia was taking to resolve the operational problems revealed during the Winter War, they estimated that it would
take the USSR years to improve their performance. Klink (1998) cites the German military attaché’s “Situation Report on the Soviet Union in Finland,” which concluded that the Soviet military was “a gigantic war-machine which was about to remedy any shortcomings revealed during those operations” (232). The Foreign Armies East report issued in March of 1940 noted, “the Red Army was not fully equal to modern requirements, but had recognized its shortcoming and drawn conclusions from many lessons it had learnt[sic]” (quoted in Klink 1998, 233). The report specifically mentioned the new training programs Russia had adopted and the abolishment of the political commissars (Klink 1998, 233-234; Halder Diary Volume IV, 200). However, the report predicted that it would take years, if not decades, for these reforms to bear fruit (Klink 1998, 235). The military attaché in Moscow issued a similar report in August of 1940 which detailed the improvements that had been made since the end of the war, but concluded that the Red Army would not fully recover from the effects of the purge for another 4 to 5 years (Halder Diary Volume IV, 182).

Was it Unexpected?

The evidence regarding whether this information on the Red Army’s lack of skill was unexpected is mixed. On one hand, the Russians had vastly more military resources at their disposal than did the tiny Finnish Nation. General Guderian, of the Second Panzer Group, noted that the outcome of the Finnish war was probably a forgone conclusion because the “Russians possess the strongest army in the world, numerically and in terms of the modernity of its weapons and equipment . . . Russia has ample raw materials, and a mighty armament industry has been set up in the depths of that vast empire” (quoted in Stahel 2009, 144). The on paper odds prompted Hitler to describe the Finnish position in the lead up to the Winter War as “hopeless” (Upton 1974, 25). The German military attaché thought that a war with the Soviet Union would leave Finland with nothing “but a tale of heroism” (quoted in Jakobson 1961, 140-141). In his Diary, Goebbels makes a similar comment after Molotov’s speech, writing that “Finland
intends to resist and is threatening to break off negotiations. But it will do the Finns no good” (Goebbels 1982, 37).

On the other hand, the German General Staff and Nazi leadership made a number of references to the weakness of the Red Army prior to the Winter War. On November 11, 1939 Goebbels wrote in his diary, “Russia’s Army is not worth much. Badly led and even more poorly armed. We do not need their military aid” (Goebbels 1982, 46). A month later, on December 4th, he wrote, “the war continues. But Russia, as expected, is not making especially swift progress. Her Army is not much good” (59). According to Goebbels, Hitler shared his opinion of the Red Army, which was heavily influenced by his racist views of the Slavic people. On November 14, 1939 he wrote:

With the Führer. He makes more assertions about the catastrophic state of the Russian Army. It is scarcely battleworthy [sic] . . . It is probably that the low intelligence level of the average Russian makes the use of modern weapons impossible . . . In Russia there is no private initiative anymore . . . This evil penetrates throughout the country and makes it incapable of using its strength in the correct way” (Goebbels 1982, 48).

Hitler’s poor impression of the Soviet military was a function not only of his racist views, but also the purges (Robertson 1989, 367) and Russia’s inadequate performance in Poland (Reinhardt 1992, 19 n. 49). Many of the prominent figures in the German military establishment shared Hitler’s opinion and they “saw proof of their own views in the problems encountered by the Red Army in the winter campaign against Finland” (Reinhardt 1992, 9).

Thus, the historical record suggests that key figures in the German military and political establishment believed that the Russian Army was weak prior to the Winter War. At the same time there is evidence to suggest that these same people, including Hitler, believed that the Russians would easily overrun the Finns. The discrepancy may be due to strategic misrepresentation on the part of the individuals quoted above. Hitler may have told the Finns their situation was hopeless because he did not want to provide them with aid, since this would inevitably undermine his alliance with Russia. Alternatively, it may suggest that although the overall German impression of the
Russian military was poor prior to the Winter War, the level of incompetence revealed during the war was surprising. The Germans may have expected the Russian military to perform well against a small country like Finland, despite its weaknesses. If this is the case, the scale of the problems that plagued Red Army operations in the Winter War could be considered unexpected and thus would have the potential to influence the behavior of Germany after the war.

**German Behavior After the Winter War**

German-Russian relations in 1939 were at a high point. The two countries had signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August. The pact included a trade agreement and a non-aggression clause. It also contained secret provisions in which Stalin and Hitler divided Europe into spheres of influence, which the other would respect. Germany stood by as Russia moved into the Baltic countries and refused to aid Finland when Russia attacked in November due to Hitler’s desire to avoid endangering the fragile alliance. Russia provided raw materials to sustain Germany’s war industry and Germany provided armaments to Russia. However, beginning in 1940, just after the conclusion of the Winter War, Germany’s behavior began to change. It challenged Russia on a number of sensitive diplomatic issues, adopted bellicose bargaining strategies during negotiations on outstanding issues, and in the summer of 1940, it began planning for war.

**Diplomatic Challenges**

Germany made a number of decisions in the latter half of 1940 and the first half of 1941 that threatened Russia diplomatically. In August of 1940, the Germans reached an agreement with Finland that allowed German troops transit through Finland on their way to Norway. A trade agreement was also reached in which Germany provided the Finns arms in exchange for nickel. The Germans also agreed to protect Petsamo if Finland was invaded (Förster 1998, 43). Since Russia was Finland’s primary enemy, this
action was almost certainly directed against them, and the Russians considered it as a violation of the spheres of influence provisions in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Molotov brought this up when he visited Berlin in November of 1940, but the Germans ignored his protestations, eventually stationing two mountain divisions within Finland.

In September of 1940, Germany responded to Russian encroachments in Bessabaria and Bukovina by signing an agreement with Romania, guaranteeing her security and promising to dispatch troops. Like its agreements with Finland, this violated the Molotov-Ribberntrop Pact since the secret provisions assigned Romania to Russia's sphere of influence and specifically stated that Germany had no interests at stake in the region. September also saw the signing of the Tripartite Pact, which stipulated that Germany, Italy, and Japan would cooperate in establishing a new world order and provide aid if any of the signatories were attacked by a third power. The agreement specifically excluded the Soviet Union, and the Germans tried to assure Russia that it was directed against the Anglo-American alliance. Russia was nonetheless threatened (Waddington 1994). Soviet misgivings turned out to be justified. At the time the pact was signed, Germany had already begun to prepare for war against Russia.

In 1941, the Russians offered to guarantee Bulgaria’s security. Germany encouraged Bulgaria to reject this offer, and then offered to send its own troops to guarantee Bulgaria’s borders. When Russia became aware of negotiations between Germany and Bulgaria it warned that the USSR “will consider the appearance of any foreign armed forces in the territory of Bulgaria and of the Straits as a violation of the security interests of the USSR” (quoted in Weinberg 1972, 153). The Germans basically ignored this warning, telling Molotov in late January, “German troops would march through Bulgaria if and when this seemed to Germany to be necessary to prevent the English from gaining a foothold in Greece” (quoted in Weinberg 1972, 153). In February, Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact, and in March Germany sent troops to Bulgaria in
preparation for the invasion of Greece. Although Molotov protested these actions “in very determined language” (Weinberg 1972, 153), they took no further actions.

**Negotiating Behavior**

At the same time, Germany became much more recalcitrant during negotiations with the Soviet Union. Although Lithuania was originally assigned to the German sphere of influence, Berlin had agreed to transfer the country to Russia’s sphere of influence to compensate the Russians for the loss Lublin and Eastern Warsaw during the invasion of Poland in September of 1939. However, when Russia moved to occupy Lithuania in the spring of 1940, Berlin demanded monetary compensation and negotiated hard to get the full price for their lost territory. Eventually, Russia paid Germany 7.5 million in gold for rights to occupy land the Germans had already acknowledged was part of the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence (Weinberg 1994).

When Molotov visited Berlin in November of 1940, he made a number of demands on the Third Reich. He wanted Germany to acquiesce to the deployment of Russian troops to Bulgaria and the stationing of Russian bases in the Bosporus, Dardanelles, and Danube. He also demanded the withdrawal of German troops from Finland. Germany rejected all of these demands and also objected to Russia’s plans to annex the Baltic countries (Weinberg 1972, 144; Weinberg 1994, 200-201; Brokemeyer 2004, 17-18). After the visit, Molotov adopted a more conciliatory attitude and offered to become part of the Tripartite Pact. Germany did not even respond to the offer (Weinberg 1994).

**Decision to Launch Barbarossa**

Germany’s treatment of Russia during these negotiations and its actions in Finland, Bulgaria, and Romania were a consequence of a much larger decision made in Berlin in 1940: Hitler had decided to invade the Soviet Union.
There is debate over exactly when Hitler decided to launch Operation Barbarossa, the code name for the planned invasion of the Soviet Union. There is some evidence that Hitler was thinking of turning east, even before the fall of France. General Alfred Jodl, Albert Speer, and General Rundstedt all mention various comments Hitler made in the early summer of 1940 which suggested that he was considering an invasion of Russia. On July 21st, Hitler met with Halder and other OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres or Army High Command) officials to discuss a potential invasion and asked Halder to look into developing plans for an offensive to be launched in the fall of 1940 (Halder Volume IV, 126-129; Leach 1973, 64-65; Förster 1998; Stahel 2009, 34-35). Less than two weeks later, on July 31, 1940 Hitler informed the Wehrmacht that he had decided to invade the Soviet Union (Leach 1973; Stahel 2009, 37). Although he initially pushed for a fall offensive, he decided to postpone the attack until the following spring. This would give the Luftwaffe time to secure air superiority over the British Isles in order to clear the way for a potential invasion of Britain. He ordered plans drawn up, but he delayed making a firm decision on the date until the outcome of the Battle of Britain had been decided (Leach 1973, 75).

This decision had a number of immediate consequences for German foreign policy. Rather than reducing the size of the Army, as it originally planned after the fall of France, the size of the Army was increased to 180 divisions. The Germans began moving troops to their eastern borders and initiated “Buildup East” to solve some of the expected logistical problems associated with a potential invasion. They began improving the railway and communications infrastructure in eastern Germany and drew up plans to move the Werhmacht’s headquarters to East Prussia. Industrial production was reoriented away from the needs of the Navy and Air Force towards the needs of the Army, and the Germans began stockpiling weapons for the upcoming war. On the diplomatic front, Germany worked to solve the Romanian-Hungarian dispute, guaranteed new borders with Italy, and began resisting Soviet encroachments in Finland.
and Romania. It also deployed troops to Norway to defend against the seizure of Petsamo.

The documents from the July 31st meeting and the subsequent changes in German military and foreign policy have prompted a number of scholars to claim that the key decision to invade was made at or just prior to the meeting. Others, however, claim that the meeting merely represented the first step in a process that could ultimately be reversed. They note that a number of plans were being developed concurrently, including the invasion of Britain and a possible expansion of operations in the Mediterranean. In fact, Halder’s war diary pays much more attention to the preparations being made for the invasion of Britain in the fall of 1940 than to those undertaken for Operation Barbarossa. At the time, both General Halder and General Brauchitsch assumed that Hitler wanted plans drawn up so that an invasion of Russia could be considered as one of many options for the deployment of German forces in the spring of 1941 (Leach 1973, 70). Although initial operational plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union were developed in August of 1940, it was not until late September, when the invasion of England was cancelled due to the Luftwaffe’s inability to gain air superiority over the British Isles, that the Wehrmacht began focusing their energies on Barbarossa.

By the time of Molotov’s visit to Berlin in November of 1940, Hitler’s intention to move forward with Operation Barbarossa had largely solidified. Prior to Molotov’s arrival, Hitler issued Directive 18 which stated, “Regardless of what results these discussion will have[sic], all preparations for the East which have already been orally ordered, are to be continued” (quoted in Zapantis 1987, 212). During the visit, Molotov made a number of demands that reinforced Hitler’s belief that the differences between the two countries were irreconcilable (Mangenheimer 2002, 47; Brookemeyer 2004, 9). Their competing ambitions in Eastern Europe made conflict inevitable. Shortly after the visit, he set the date of attack for May 1941.
On December 5th, the revised plans for an attack were presented to Hitler. After taking his comments on the relative importance of Leningrad and Ukraine into consideration, a draft directive was drawn up on December 12th. The directive was finalized on December 17th and on December 18th, “Directive 21: Case Barbarossa” was issued. It stated, “The German Armed Forces must be prepared, even before the conclusion of the war against England, to crush Soviet Russia in a rapid campaign” (quoted in Trevor-Roper 1966, 93).

With the issuing of Directive 21, preparations for war began in earnest. In January the deployment directive for Barbarossa was released, and in March Hitler met with his Generals to discuss the special nature of war on the Eastern Front. This would be total war, more brutal and more encompassing than any of the campaigns Germany had fought thus far. The operation was initially planned for May, but a coup in Yugoslavia prompted German intervention in Italy’s Balkans campaign in early April. The start date for Barbarossa was moved back until June 22nd to allow additional time for German units to be rotated back to the Eastern Front. The first three waves of German troops moved to Poland and East Prussia in mid-May, and the final contingent of forces arrived on June 3rd. One June 22nd, 1941, the Germans attacked the Soviet Union.

**Process Tracing: The Decision to Launch Barbarossa**

As predicted by CET, the behavior of Germany after the conclusion of the Winter War became more conflictual. The Germans began ignoring the central provisions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, challenged Russia on a number of important diplomatic issues, adopted bellicose bargaining strategies during negotiations, and ultimately decided to invade. The decision to attack the Soviet Union was the most consequential.

A number of historians have attributed this momentous decision to the Soviet Union’s poor performance in the Winter War. Edwards (2008) questioned whether Operation Barbarossa would have been possible if the Winter War had ended differently.
for the Soviet Union (11). Trotter (1991) argued that “the immediate military consequences of the war were played out fifteen months later, when the Germans opened Operation Barbarossa” (264). Engle and Paananen (1992) reached a similar conclusion, claiming “had the Soviet Union not appeared so unfavorable, Hitler would hardly have underestimated the potential of the Russians to the extent that he did” (144-145). The Russian performance in the Winter War helped “to make the idea of the attack [against the Soviet Union] seem a more practical proposition—it was possible for the Germans to plan in all seriousness to destroy the Red Army . . . in a single summer campaign” (Upton 1974, 160).

The goal of this section is to use the secondary historical record and primary documents to assess these claims and to establish whether the Winter War actually influenced Germany’s decision to launch Operation Barbarossa. Because the decision to invade the Soviet Union was the most consequential for German-Russian relations, and because it represented the most direct challenge Germany made against Russia in the aftermath of the Winter War, I focus solely on decisions related to Barbarossa.

**Why the Germans Went to War**

A number of factors contributed to Germany’s decision to attack the Soviet Union. First, Hitler believed that defeating Russia would convince Britain to acquiesce to German designs in Europe. Robbed of its last potential ally, England would give up the fight and acknowledge Germany’s preeminent position in Europe (Weinberg 1994, 179; Megargee 2000; Mawdsley 2005; Lukacs 2006, 27, 35; Baker 2009, 15; Müller 2009, 31-33). The failure of the Luftwaffe to achieve air superiority over Britain had brought the conflict between Germany and Britain to a standstill. Unable to launch an invasion across the British Isles, Hitler was desperate to find another way of pressuring Britain into accepting Germany’s continental victories. Hitler mentioned this factor during the July 21st meeting where he first asked Halder to develop plans for a German invasion (Stahel 2009, 34) and it was the centerpiece of the argument he used to justify his
decision to the General Staff on July 31st. Halder’s diary entry from that day quotes Hitler as saying, “Britain’s hope lies in Russia . . . Russia is the factor on which Britain is relying the most . . . Decision: Russia’s destruction must therefore be made a part of this struggle” (Halder Volume IV, 144).

Germany was also worried about Russia’s growing territorial ambitions (Clark 1985, 91; Lukacs 2006, 26; Stahel 2009, 34; Mossier 2010, 81). Its incursions into Romania were particularly troubling. The Soviet occupation of Bessabaria jeopardized German access to Romania’s oil resources and its annexation of Bukovina went beyond the spheres of influence delineated in the secret provisions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Germans believed that their conflicting territorial aims made war inevitable, and they launched Operation Barbarossa to take advantage of Russia’s weakness because they believed that Russia would only get stronger (Cecil 1975, 168; Groehler 1993, 50-51; Förster 1998, 27; Mangenheimer 2002; Müller 2009, 3; Mossier 2001, 82). Hitler famously argued, “The Russian Armed forces were indeed a clay colossus without a head, but their future development could not be safely predicted” (quoted in Leach 1973, 94).

After the war, General Reichert from Army Group Center explained that Hitler “knew that the conflict was necessary, and that he was in a more favorable position if he launched an attack first” (quoted in Rees 2000, 37).¹

Germany, and Hitler in particular, was motivated by more than strategic considerations. Conquering Russia would provide Germany with Lebensraum, or “living space,” the room it needed to establish its racist empire (Leach 1973, 11-12, 63; Cecil 1975, chapter 2; Weinberg 1994, 179; Mawdsley 2005; Lukacs 2006, 8-9; Müller 2009, 19; Baker 2009, 11, 16). In his memoirs, Halder describes Hitler’s war aim as

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¹ It is important to note that these sources do not suggest that Hitler launched the war as a preemptive attempt to forestall an imminent attack by Russia. There was no immediate threat from Russia, except in Romania and Finland (Förster 1997, 121, 128). Postwar claims that the invasion was prompted by the Soviet build up are probably false, since the Germans only became aware of this buildup after the decision for war had been made (Magenheim 2002, 57). See Baker (2009) for a more detailed critique of Germany’s preventive and preemptive motivations for war.
“the final elimination of Russia as a European power and the annexation of large parts of her territory as settlements of his Vok ohne Raum – ‘People without breathing space’” (Halder 1950,40). Hitler’s ideological goals in the east can be traced back to Mein Kampf, where he talked about the need to defeat the Soviet Union in order to create space for German colonists to move into Eastern Europe (Baker 2009, 16; Stahel 2009, 96; Evans 2009). In a 1933 speech, made shortly after his ascension to power, Hitler argued that the primary purpose of the Wehrmacht was for “conquering new Lebensraum in the East and ruthlessly Germanizing it” (quoted in Stahel 2009, 96). Russia was the perfect place to secure this living space because it possessed the natural resources Germany needed to expand (Weinberg 1994, 179; Brookemeyer 2004, 9; Baker 2009, 11; Stahel 2009, 103), and because its Slavic inhabitants were racially inferior and corrupted by communism. These ideological motivations not only underpinned Hitler’s decision to attack the Soviet Union, but also influenced the way that war would be conducted. He specifically planned for “a war of extermination” in which no distinction between combatants and civilians would be made, the Slavic race would be destroyed, and the threat of Jewish-Bolshevism would be extinguished (Leach 1973, 12; Cecil 1975, chapter 10-11; Stahel 2009, 96).

**Did German Assessment of Soviet Skill Contribute to the Decision?**

The desire for Lebensraum and concern over Russia’s growing territorial ambitions explain why Hitler and other Nazi leaders decided to attack Russia, but they do not explain why they launched the attack in the summer of 1941. Nazi beliefs about the evils of communism, their desire for living space in the east, and their worry over Russia’s expansion are evident as early as the 1930s. Yet Hitler did not decide to invade Russia until 1940 and did not actually launch the attack until 1941. While the timing of the attack is partially explained by Germany’s failure to win the air war over Britain in the fall of 1940, the decision to invade in the summer of 1941 was taken because the
Germans believed that at that time Russia’s military weakness made a German victory inevitable.

When Hitler told Mussolini of his plans, he wrote, “As far as the war in the East is concerned, Duce, it will surely be difficult, but I do not entertain a second’s doubt as to its great success” (quoted in Baker 2009, 110-111). General Paulus remembered that the General Staff had “complete confidence” in the prospects of their victory (quoted in Kirchubel 2004, 14). A memorandum sent from the Reich Foreign Minister to the Japanese in March of 1941 asserted, “Germany was certain that a campaign against Russia would end in the absolute victory of German arms and the total crushing of the Russian Army and the Russian state” (Sontage and Beddie 1948, 285). Marck’s original operational plan made the assumption of victory explicit. It stated, “The Red Army . . . after some fighting, would soon succumb to the superiority of the German troops and their officers” (quoted in Klink 1998, 263). Similarly, “Lossberg’s plan never questioned the ability of the Wehrmacht to achieve victory and concerned itself only with the best method of achieving that end” (Stahel 2009, 50).

The secondary historical literature emphasizes how Germany’s optimism about the prospects for victory contributed to the decision to launch Barbarossa. Cecil (1975) argued that Hitler believed “that Germany should take advantage of Russia’s weakness, since victory would be quick and relatively easy” (168). Stahel (2009) claims that although Hitler and Halder disagreed on the details of the invasion, they both agreed “that Barbarossa would represent another stirring triumph of German arms. They foresaw the achievement of everything that was hoped for” (104). In fact, the entire “professional military staff, were almost unanimous in their rosy view of the invasion’s projected results” (Kirchubel 2004, 8). In December of 1940, none of the key decision makers “had any doubts about being able to conquer the Soviet Union in a Blitzkrieg and reach the Volga-Arkhangelsk line within a few weeks” (Förster 1998, 127).
German confidence in victory grew out of their beliefs about Russia’s weakness. Hitler’s disdain for Russia’s military capabilities is evident in a multitude of comments he made throughout the planning of Barbarossa. In the summer of 1940, he told General Jodl and Keital that, compared to the invasion of France, “a campaign against Russia would be like a child’s game in a sandbox” (quoted in Speer 1970, 173). After receiving a briefing on the updated plans for the invasion, Hitler commented, “The Russian people are inferior. Their Army is without leadership . . . By the spring our leadership, equipment, and troops will visibly be at their zenith, the Russians at an unmistakable nadir” (quoted in Förster 1998, 127). In January of 1941, Hitler described the Red Army as “headless clay colossus” and told Rundstedt, “You have only to kick in the door, and the whole rotten structure will come tumbling down” (quoted in Clark 1985, 43). He later commented to Halder, that the Russians “lacked any kind of technical ability” (quoted in Cecil 1975, 51).

The senior military and political leaders of the Third Reich shared Hitler’s views of the Russian military. In June of 1940, Goebbels (1982) noted in his Diary: “I estimate the fighting capacity of the Russians even lower than does the Führer” (414). General Halder made a similar entry in his diary later that year: “The Russian Officer Corps is exceptionally bad. It creates a far worse impression than in 1933. It will take Russia 20 years before she will be able to reach the old level” (quoted Zhillin 1970, 217). In February, he presented Hitler with a report on Russia’s strength which specifically stated that although the “mechanized divisions the Red Army had quantitative superiority, the German Army [had] qualitative [superiority]. The Russian artillery, though numerically strong, was considered relatively ineffective” (quoted in Blau 1955, 30). At a January 9th meeting with Hitler, General Jodl predicted that “The Russian colossus will prove to be a pig’s bladder, prick it and it will burst” (quoted in Stahel 2009, 73). In a memo dated 28 July 1940, Chief of Staff of the Naval War Command, Admiral Fricke concluded that “The Russian armed forces can be regarded as far inferior
to our battle hardened troops” (quoted in Hillgruber 1997, 177). Chief of the Army, General Brachitsch estimated that only half of the Soviet divisions “had any fighting ability” (quoted in Clark 1985, 74). In General Gudieron’s memoirs, he claimed that the General Staff’s support for Barbarossa was primarily a factor of their “underestimate[sic] of the Russian as an enemy” (Gudieron 1952, 151). The German military attaché in Moscow reported that the Red Army “was not capable of mobile warfare on a grand scale,” and that the Russian military “would still be inferior in effectiveness to the German Army, even if it had a numerical superiority of two or three to one” (quoted in Seaton 1971, 45).

The intelligence community provided the General Staff with a number of reports on the strength of the Red Army, all of which emphasized the qualitative inferiority of the Russian military machine (Clark 1985). These reports “vastly underestimated the USSR’s military potential, including the number of units available, the quantity and quality of the equipment, and the skill and flexibility of the officer corps” (Megargee 2000, 113). Foreign Armies East, the department charged with collecting intelligence on the Soviet Union, issued a report in October of 1940 which concluded that although “time and space” favored Russia, the Red Army could not successfully conduct a “war of movement on a large scale” (quoted in Megargee 2000, 112). A report issued a few months later on January 1, 1941 came to a similar conclusion:

The strength of the Red Army is based upon its great mass and the number of its weapons, the simplicity, the toughness and the courage of the soldier. It finds another accomplice in the vast and undeveloped land. The weakness lies in the inefficiency of leaders of all levels, in their adherence to models, in the lack of training, which does not satisfy modern standards, and in the lack of organization, which is obvious in all areas (quoted in Groehler 1993, 54).

These findings were reiterated in another report, issued just two weeks later. This report focused on the weaknesses of Soviet weaponry, the lack of training and doctrinal development, the Soviets’ inability to conduct mobile operations, and the poor quality of the Soviet officer corps, which it described as “clumsy, unwilling to make decisions or accept responsibilities, and too methodical” (quoted in Megargee 2002, 112). At the same
time, Germany’s Official Secret Handbook on the Armed Forces of the USSR, issued in January 1941, described the Russian military as “unsuited for modern warfare and incapable of decisive resistance against a well commanded, well equipped force” (quoted in Hillgruber 1998, 180).

As preparations for Barbarossa continued in the spring of 1941, new intelligence reports continued to emphasize Russia’s military ineffectiveness. These analyses “confirmed the impression, shared through the upper circles of the Wehrmacht, that the Soviet Union was still a backward land with a large, but clumsy army, lacking modern equipment, training, and above all leadership” (Stahel 2009, 143). Foreign Armies East’s May report increased their estimate of the size of the Russian military but disparaged the leadership and described the mechanized units “as substantially inferior to the Germans,” the combined arms divisions as “wretched, slapped together material,” and the Russian artillery as “of small value” (quoted in Clark 1985, 88).

The planning documents associated with Barbarossa were based on these intelligence analyses and consequently their recommendations assumed that Russian forces were militarily ineffective. One of the assumptions underlying Marck’s initial plan was “the inferiority of the Russians in trained men, as well as in material” (Cecil 1975, 117). His plan “contained not a trace of pessimism or doubt that the USSR could be speedily defeated by the qualitatively and quantitatively superior German forces” (Clark 1985, 68). Lossberg’s study, conducted at the same time by the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht or High Command of the Armed Forces), made similar assumptions. The study concluded that the Russians would not be able to use their reserves to mount a defense in depth because “the Russian command is so clumsy, its use of the Russian railway system so insufficient, that any regrouping will lead to great problems” (quoted in Hillgruber 1997, 174). He also explicitly rejected the possibility of German preparations prompting a preemptive attack by Russia because “neither the leadership nor the troops are capable of this” (quoted in Leach 1973, 256). Both plans assumed that
the Russians did not possess “the operational skill to conduct a fighting withdrawal” (Megargee 2000, 105). They saw Russia’s quantitative superiority as more than offset “by the assumed inability of the Red Army command to withdraw major formations from rapid seizure by the swiftly advancing German spearheads of attack” (Klink 1998, 274). Likewise, the war games conducted by General Paulus in the fall of 1940 assumed that Russian forces were “inferior in armor, artillery, and particularly, in the air” (quoted in Leach 1973, 105). Consequently, Paulus concluded that the Marcks and Lossberg plans were operationally feasible.

Studies conducted by the Luftwaffe and German Navy made similar assumptions. Col Schmidt, Chief of the Luftwaffe’s Operational Staff’s Intelligence Department, “assessed the Russian Air Force as not very strong and outdated, the anti-aircraft artillery as ‘exceedingly mediocre’” (Boog 1998, 340). The Luftwaffe was confident that it could secure air superiority over Russia, despite Russia’s nearly 3:1 numerical edge, because of deficiencies in training and “the cumbersome nature of operational command” (Boog 1998, 349-350). Their February briefings to Hitler emphasized the inability of Russian pilots to fly at night or in bad weather, the lack of cooperation between fighters and bombers, and the inflexibility of the operational level leadership (Halder Vol. VI, 3). The Navy’s assessment of Russian forces also dismissed their numeric superiority, arguing that the “decisive aspect of the performance of the Russian Navy will presumably be the fact that its command is rigid and inflexible, that there is no willingness to take responsibility, and that no personal initiative need be expected” (quoted in Klink 1998b, 381 quote).

The overwhelming evidence of Germany’s belief in the qualitative inferiority of the Russian forces has led most historians to conclude that the German assessment of Soviet skill was one of the most important factors leading to Hitler’s decision to invade. Leach (1973) concludes, “the main factor was probably Hitler’s desire to take advantage of the military weakness of the Soviet Union before the Russian leaders could modernize
their forces” (82). Clark (1985) reaches a similar conclusion, writing that “the
underestimates of Soviet strength and the inflated belief in the power of one hundred
German divisions to storm Russia in four to six weeks had much to do with influencing
Hitler’s ultimate decision to begin his campaign in the East” (64). Reinhardt (1992)
argues that the timing of the campaign reflected the fact that the Werhmacht “had
reached the peak of military leadership and ability and could not have been better
armed, and that Russia was at an unmistakably low ebb. It was a question of taking this
opportunity and striking in time” (5). Magenheimer’s (2002) review of the literature
found that “historians . . . are unanimous in their opinion that this obvious
underestimation of the Soviet armed forces was an important factor in the attack plans
of the German military command” (61).² In fact, Hitler is alleged to have admitted that
he would not have attacked the Soviet Union had he possessed a more realistic
assessment of their strength (Seaton 1971, 49; Mangenheimer 2002, 63). As early as
August 1941, Goebbels wrote in his diary that Germany might “actually have recoiled
from attacking the now pressing question of the East and Bolshevism” had they known
about the Soviet Union’s military strength (quoted in Mangenheimer 2002, 63).

The presumed weakness of the Soviets was juxtaposed against a string of
German victories that reinforced Germany’s belief in its ability to conquer the USSR. The
lightening victory over France and the successful campaigns against Yugoslavia and
Greece made Germans confident in their ability to vanquish the Russians with relative
ease (Seaton 1971, 117; Cecil 1975; Zapantis 1987, 67; Weinberg 1993, 317-318; Chapman
1994, 168; Kroener 1997, 139; Reinhardt 1992, 11; Rees 2000, 16; Stahel 2009, 44-45). The
fall of France had an especially profound effect on the German psyche. General
Gudieron writes that the success of the French campaign had “so befuddled the minds
of our supreme commanders that they had eliminated the word impossible from their

vocabulary. All the men of the OKW and the OKH with whom I spoke evinced an unshakable optimism and were quite impervious to criticism or objections” (Gudieron 1952, 142-143). General Blumentritt makes a similar point in his memoirs arguing, “After his spectacular victories in Poland, Norway, France, and the Balkans, Hitler became convinced that he could crush the Red Army as easily as he had defeated his other enemies” (quoted in Zhillin 1970, 115).

The overconfidence that pervaded the Wehrmacht following France’s fall may suggest that the decision to launch Operation Barbarossa was driven by German beliefs about their own military prowess, not by their beliefs about Russia’s ineffectiveness. However, the evidence indicates that both factors influenced German decisions. The victories on the Western Front did not prompt Germany to dismiss the difficulties of fighting Britain or the United States because those countries were considered more powerful than France. On the other hand, because Russia was seen as much weaker than France, the success of Germany’s blitzkrieg had a particularly pronounced effect on the High Command’s beliefs about their prospects for victory in a war against the Soviet Union. Reinhardt (1992) writes that it was “widely assumed that Russia could be conquered more easily than France, and consequently that a campaign in the East did not entail great risks” (8). This was because “in comparison with the French Army, which the Germans had defeated with such apparent ease, the Soviets seemed an easy target” (Megargee 2000, 111). Memories from WWI made the comparison between France and Russia especially pointed. In that war, Russia collapsed against the German onslaught while France fought on for more than four years and exacted a heavy toll on Germany’s military forces. The Germans believed that “if the might of the French Army, which had stopped the Germans in the last war, could be crushed in six weeks . . . victory in the East would take hardly any time at all” (Weinberg 1994, 179).

The German belief in Russia’s lack of military skill is apparent, not only from the comments of military leaders and the text of their intelligence reports and planning
documents, but also in the way they went about planning the campaign. Hardly any objections were made about the operational feasibility of Operation Barbarossa. Rather, the presumed success of the operation was often used to justify ignoring other concerns that were brought up during the course of planning the campaign. Germany’s low opinion of the Russian military is also evident in the assumptions they made about the likely timing of the campaign and the goals they set on the Eastern Front.

The German General Staff never really questioned the feasibility of the operational plan because they believed that the Russians were so weak. Rather, the objections they raised focused on the strategic implications of Russia’s defeat (Seaton 1971, 49; Leach 1973, 83; Megargee 2000, 103-104; Stahel 2009, 75). General Halder, General Brachitsch, and Admiral Raeder doubted that defeating Russia would neutralize the threat from Britain (Sontag and Beddie 1948, 333-334; Halder Volume V, 98; Seaton 1971, 37; Cecil 1975; Megargee 2000, 103; Stahel 2009, 75), and a number of generals questioned the wisdom of fighting a two front war (Leach 1973, 14, 192; Stahel 2009, 37, 75; Megargee 2000, 103). The former objection was ignored, and the latter dismissed because the Germans believed that they could defeat the incompetent Russians so quickly (Leach 1973, 192).

The OKH plan predicted that the Red Army would be defeated in 4-5 months (Kroener 1997, 141). The Marcks Plan thought that Germany’s “attacking armies would achieve a swift and decisive victory” in 10-17 weeks (quoted in Hillgruber 1997, 173). During the November and December war game exercises, it was concluded that the Soviets could be defeated in 8-10 weeks (Blau 1955, 20). General Brauchitsch predicted that the “massive frontier battles” would only last four weeks (quoted in Stahel 2009, 63). One the eve of the war, Goebbels noted in his diary that “The Führer estimates that the operation will take four months, I reckon on fewer. Bolshevism will collapse like a house of cards” (Goebbels 1982,414). In his memoirs, Halder claims that Hitler thought the operation would take even less time: Leningrad would fall in 6 weeks, Russia would
seek peace at 8 weeks, and the Germans would be home in time for Christmas (Halder 1950, 42).³

The incompetence of the Russians and the expected rapidity of the victory led the Germans to overlook potential problems in the areas of logistics, supply, and personnel. The Quartermaster, General Thomas raised logistical questions about the ability of the Germans to supply the military over such large distances, particularly since the road and rail infrastructure in the border regions was underdeveloped (Reese 2000, 29). However, these problems were dismissed as insignificant since the Germans planned to completely destroy the Red Army in the first stage of the war (Schüler 1997, 208). The campaign was expected to be over before logistical concerns could hamper military operations (Baker 2009, 22).

Assumptions of a short campaign with light casualties also drove the personnel policies of the Third Reich in the run up to the war (Kroener 1997, 143; Klink 1998, 317). In his March meeting with the generals, Hitler mentioned that success had to be achieved early on because no additional reserve troops would be activated (Leach 1973, 162). Halder mentioned this decision in his war diary, writing that he was not too worried about the lack of reserve forces. There was no need to call the 22-year-old age group early because casualties were expected to be light, and the campaign was expected to be complete by October (Halder Volume VI, 125-126). Thus, the Germans had only 385,000 reserve troops available at the start of the campaign. The next available cohort could not be called up until November, which meant that they would not be trained and ready for combat until late December or January (Klink 1998, 317).

A similar logic was used to dismiss concerns about Germany’s ability to produce enough weapons to supply the war effort. Keitel, Jodl, and Fromm all voiced concerns

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³ The Germans were not the only ones who thought Russia would collapse relatively quickly. In Britain, the Secret Service thought the Russian war effort would crumble in only 10 days. Ambassador Cripps gave the Russians 1 month, and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff predicted a German victory in 6 weeks. In the US, the Secretary of the Navy predicted a 6-8 week campaign, while the Secretary of War thought it would take 1-3 months for the Germans to defeat the Russians.
about the economic consequences of the war, and General Thomas issued multiple studies on the weakness of the German economy (Leach 1973, 135, 143-150). Before the war even started, Germany was experiencing shortages of steel, non-ferrous metals, and rubber. There was only a two-month supply of fuel, and it was not clear whether German industrial production could handle the increased demand for weapons and ammunition. No steps were taken to address these problems because the German General Staff “thought they could afford to risk the evident shortfall in armaments for the Army and the critical situation for replacements, because losses of personnel and material in Barbarossa were not expected to be above average” (Förster 1997, 125). Only an additional month’s supply of weapons and equipment were ordered (Kroener 1997, 141). Nazi leaders believed they could protect the civilian economy from the vagaries of war, and thus limited the extent to which civilian economic resources were diverted into the armaments production. In fact, “no specific armaments projects were developed with the Soviet Union in mind because it was always assumed that that war would be quick and easy” (Weinberg 1993, 312). Army leaders believed “that the success of the initial attack would be so great, that the problems of supplying the subsequent operations would disappear” (Leach 1973, 143).

More generally, Hitler and the German General Staff dismissed warnings about the potential power Russia could bring to bear in a protracted campaign because they believed they could defeat the Red Army in matter of weeks, or at most months. Marck’s initial plan mentioned the economic difficulties the Germans would face if the Russians were not defeated in the first stage of the operations or if they refused to give battle and retreated into the interior of the country (Klink 1998). Field Marshall Bock told the General Staff “that he had no doubt that the Russians would be defeated if they chose to give battle. But he questioned whether it would be possible to force the Russians to make peace” (Leach 1973, 142). In a memo issued on the 28 April 1941, Secretary of State Weizäcker wrote, “I take it as a matter of course that we shall advance victoriously to
Moscow and beyond that. I doubt very much, however, whether we shall be able to turn to account what we have won in the face of the well known passive resistance of the Slavs” (Sontag and Beddie 1948, 333). Hitler and the General Staff dismissed these concerns, just as they had dismissed Köstring’s reports on the economic and political strength of Russia (Gudieron 1952, 151). They believed that Germany did not need to worry about fighting a protracted war because they assumed that the German military would crush the Red Army “before the Soviets could utilize the vast resources of the Soviet Union” to mount a resistance (Baker 2009, 24). In fact, they did not even create contingency plans for how to proceed if the Russian military did not collapse after the initial assault (Groehler 1992, 53; Baker 2009). They were so confident in their ability to defeat the Russians within a few months, that provisions for winter clothing were only made for the small fraction of troops that would be involved in the postwar occupation (Halder 1950, 42; Gudieron 1952, 151; Cecil 1975, 147; Weinberg 1994).

The Germans’ low regard for the Russian military is also reflected in the ambitious goals they set for the operation. After his June 22nd meeting with Hitler, Halder noted the following in his war diary:

The Führer has been given the following information . . . Object: To crush Russian Army or slice as much Russian territory as is necessary to bar enemy air raids on Berlin and Silesian industries. It is desirable to penetrate far enough to enable our Air Force to smash Russia’s strategic areas . . . Political Aims: Ukrainian State, Federation of Baltic States, White Russia-Finland (Volume IV, 128)

At the July 31st meeting where he announced his intention to invade the Soviet Union to the General Staff, Hitler’s aims were even more grandiose. He specified that the “attack achieves its purpose only if the Russian state can be shattered to its roots with one blow. Holding part of the country alone will not do” (quoted in Halder Volume IV, 145). The Deployment Directive issued in December set forth similarly ambitious goals: “The bulk of the Russian Army stationed in Western Russia will be destroyed by daring operations led by deeply penetrating armored spearheads” (quoted in Trevor-Roper 1966, 94). It called for the destruction of the Red Army, the capture of Leningrad, Moscow, and
Kieve, and the construction of a barrier against Asiatic Russia on the Volga-Archangel line (Trevor-Roper 1966, 93-94). The goals set forth in the deployment directive reflect “the overarching conviction of complete confidence in the coming campaign. The Soviet armies, in spite of their size, were believed to be . . . utterly inferior to the Wehrmacht” (Stahel 2009, 79).

The Germans were so confident in their ability to defeat the Red Army that they began planning follow up operations even before Barbarossa began. These included naval and air actions against the US and Britain (Weinberg 1993, 322), the invasion of India, the subjugation of Turkey, and attacks on British interests in Iraq and Egypt (Zhillin 1970, 172; Seaton 1971, 41; Stahel 2009, 145). They also opted to eschew the help of their Italian and Japanese allies. They announced their intention to invade the Soviet Union just hours before the start of Operation Barbarossa, and they actually rejected Japan’s unofficial offer to help, urging them to attack in the direction of Singapore instead (Leach 1973, 178-179; Cecil 1975, 134). Hitler justified the decision to go it alone by arguing that Germany did not need allied aid because it could easily defeat the Soviet Union on its own (Leach 1973, 162).

Thus, my analysis of German decision making suggests that German beliefs about the Red Army’s lack of military skill were pervasive throughout the planning of Operation Barbarossa. They contributed to the decision to launch the campaign, influenced the operational goals set by the German High Command, and affected the logistical, economic, and personnel policies adopted prior to the war.

Was the Winter War a Key Factor in the German Assessment of Soviet Skill?

The Red Army was seen as lacking military skill for a number of reasons, one of which was its performance in the Winter War. Real time military intelligence was difficult to collect in the USSR (Seaton 1971, chapter 3; Leach 1973, 255; Weinberg 1994, 189; Megargee 2000, 111). The Soviet Union limited foreigners’ access to the country, and internal security guards patrolled the border. There were firm laws restricting
movement within the country, and citizens were required to carry their identity papers with them at all times. The military attaché to Russia commented on these security measures, exclaiming that “it would be easier for an Arab in flowing burnous[sic] to walk unnoticed through Berlin, than for a foreign agent to pass through Russia” (quoted in Leach 1973, 91). In addition, the size of the country limited the utility of aerial reconnaissance, since Germany did not possess long-range planes. Signals intelligence was limited to 300 km from the border and was not very useful because Germany had not deciphered Russia’s secret codes.

The lack of intelligence forced Germany to rely heavily on the performance of the Red Army in previous conflicts to assess the USSR’s military capabilities. The Strategic Survey, conducted by the Operations Division of Foreign Armies East in October of 1940, cited the Red Army’s poor performance in Finland in the winter of 1939 when arguing that the military potential of the Soviet Union was quite low (Blau 1955, 14-15). Köstring’s reports on the quality of the Soviet military became more critical following the Red Army’s actions against Finland (Hillgruber 1997, 179). Similarly, the Luftwaffe’s General Staff justified their optimistic assessment of the outcome of the Eastern campaign by citing “what seemed a poor performance by the Soviet Army and Air Force in the Finnish-Russian Winter War of 1939-40” (Boog 1998, 339). Thus, the intelligence departments tried to ground their assumptions of the superiority of the Wehrmacht by relying upon known Soviet military performance, and the war with Finland during the winter of 1939-1940 was seen as a key indicator of Soviet potential . . . The Red Army had indeed performed poorly during its war with Finland, especially in its handling of armor and artillery units. It suffered grievous casualties as it failed to maneuver properly and supply its troops, and its failure to manage properly the battlefield was obvious to the intelligence serves of the Wehrmacht (Baker 2009, 24).

In his memoirs, Speer (1970) mentioned that “the failure of the Soviet offensive against Finland” confirmed Hitler’s views “that the Russians were weak and poorly organized” (169). Halder makes a similar comment in his memoirs, arguing that “the incompetent
Soviet performance in the 1939-1940 Winter War against Finland” convinced Hitler and the General Staff of the Red Army’s weakness (quoted in Slavinskii 2004, 46)

Most historians have concluded that the Soviet performance in the Winter War influenced German perceptions of the Red Army’s skill. Reese (2000) writes that “the inability of the Red Army to crush the puny Finns” confirmed Germany’s belief in its “own innate superiority” and made the General Staff “optimistic about the conflict ahead” (26-27, 29). Weinberger (1997) cites Goebbels in claiming that the “initial setbacks suffered by the Soviet Union in the Russo-Finnish War only served to reinforce Hitler’s belief that the Soviet Union was incapable of defending itself” (179). Seaton (1971) reached a similar conclusion arguing, “the German assessment of the Red Army was influenced by the knowledge that its more able and experienced commanders had been purged in 1937 and by its inadequate performance in the Winter War against the Finns” (47). Magenheimer (2002) claims that “the deficiencies and weaknesses that had become apparent during the Soviet-Finnish Winter War of 1939-1940” confirmed German beliefs about the inferiority of the Russians (61). Leach cites Halder and the OKW War diary in arguing that “the inept leadership displayed in the Winter War against Finland” convinced the Germans that the purges had devastated the military capabilities of the Red Army (Leach 1973, 92). In this way, “the Red Army’s lamentable performance in the 1939-1940 war with Finland” led to underestimation of Soviet strength (Clark 1985, 74). The Germans had carefully studied the Russian invasion of Finland and were not impressed (Megargee 2000, 111). Rather the “indecisive Red Army, which had produced anything other than convincing military efforts in Poland and Finland . . . played a large part in the conviction that Germany’s technical and command level superiority would lead to a swift and decisive victory” (Hillgruber 1997, 184).

The importance of the Winter War in influencing German decisions can be seen in the fact that the specific weaknesses mentioned by the German military were precisely those weaknesses revealed during the Finnish campaign. One of the key
operational deficiencies of the Winter War was Russia’s policy of not allowing for tactical withdrawals. The Germans observed this and assumed that the Russians would fight them in the border regions, rather than withdraw to the interior of the country (Mossier 2010; Stahel 2009, 48). Both the Marcks and Lossberg plans assumed that the Red Army would be unable and unwilling to “withdraw major formations from rapid seizure by the swiftly advancing German spearheads of attack. It was assumed therefore that it would be possible to smash the bulk of the Red Army as soon as the Dnieper-Dvina line was reached” (Klink 1998, 274).

The January report from Foreign Armies East focused on Russia’s inability to conduct combined arms operations, a problem that had plagued the Red Army in its war against Finland. The report stated, “Because of inadequate combat training and training in cooperation with other branches, it [the Red Army] was incapable of conducting a modern war of movement with far ranging operations by compact formations” (quoted in Klink 1998, 236). The spring intelligence reports made the same assumptions, characterizing the Soviet combined arms divisions as “wretched, slapped together material” (Clark 1985, 88). The Luftwaffe’s studies also noted the lack of cooperation between the different branches. They mentioned that the Russian Air Force’s coordination with ground forces was poorly managed (Boog 1998, 349) and that cooperation between fighters and bombers was limited (Halder VI, 3).

The inaccuracy of Russia’s artillery and its inability to coordinate its fire with ground forces, seen repeatedly in the assaults on the Mannerheim Line and Lake Ladoga, led Halder to conclude that “The Russian artillery, though numerically strong, was considered relatively ineffective” (quoted in Blau 1955, 30). Similarly, the May estimates from Foreign Armies East characterized the Russian artillery as “of small value” (quoted in Clark 1985, 88).

The fate of the road bound Soviet divisions in the Finnish wilderness raised questions about the ability of the Soviets to mount a war of movement. Both the October
and the January reports from Foreign Armies East brought up this weakness, noting that
the Red Army could not successfully conduct a “war of movement on a large scale”
(Megargee 2000,112). These reports claimed that Russia’s training program was
“inadequate for the requirements of flexible, mobile warfare” (Leach 1973, 200).

The lack of flexibility within the Red Army’s leadership and the strict adherence
to military doctrine during the Winter War was looked at with particular disdain by the
German military. The postwar reports from Finland concluded “the Soviet mass is no
match for an army with superior leadership” (quoted in Reese 2000, 28). The Strategic
Survey on Russia’s capabilities conducted in October of 1940 concluded that “Russian
leadership was certainly below the German average, particularly in making quick
decisions in a war of movement” (Blau 1955, 15). Similarly, Germany’s Official Secret
Handbook on the Armed Forces of the USSR stated that the weakness of the Red Army
“lies in the slow-wittedness of the commanders at all levels, the reliance upon
stereotyped models, the fact that the training is not up to modern standards, the fear of
responsibility and the lack of organization in all fields” (quoted in Hillgruber 1997, 180).
A memo from General Blumentritt to the General Staff in May of 1941 emphasized the
same thing: “The junior commanders are mechanical, have no initiative and are quite
inflexible. . . . Their senior commanders have always been inferior to ours, because they
are hesitant, distrustful and unimaginative” (quoted in Reinhardt 1992, 9). It was
precisely these factors that inhibited small unit independent maneuvers during the war
with Finland, and it was one of the key problems that Timoshenko was unable to solve
during his January reforms.

The Winter War was not the only evidence that the Germans used to assess the
military effectiveness of the Red Army. They also cited the Russian performance in
Poland and World War I. In the First World War, the Russians had proven that they
were militarily ineffective (Cecil 1975, 123; Clark 1985, 74; Reinhardt 1992, 9), and more
recent Soviet military activities in Poland had done little to reverse the poor impression
they made on Germany soldiers. The Germans who served in Poland were unimpressed by the performance of their Soviet ally (Seaton 1971, 44; Cecil 1975, 123; Groehler 1993, 58), and their reports influenced the opinions of Germany’s top military leaders (Clark 1985, 43; Reinhardt 192, 9). In his memoirs, Albert Speer remembered that reports from Poland suggested that much of the Soviet equipment was obsolete. He wrote, “Hitler must have listened to this piece of intelligence with the keenest interest, for there after he repeatedly cited this report as evidence that the Russians were weak and poorly organized” (Speer 1970, 169). Goebbels’ (1982) diary records his reaction after hearing a briefing on the Soviet forces in Poland: “Shocking report from Lvov on how the Soviet Russians are behaving . . . The troops are ill-trained and poorly armed. The true face of Bolshevism” (94).

Another factor that influenced Germany’s assessment of Russia’s military abilities was Stalin’s purge of the officer corps in the 1930s (Leach 1973, 92; Cecil 1975, 123; Clark 1985, 74; Boog 1998, 337; Megargee 2000, 111; Evans 2009, 161; Baker 2009, 24). Köstring reported on the effect of the purges in 1937, writing that Stalin “has weakened the Army itself for a long time. Not even the most pessimistic observer had foreseen that he would do this . . . To sum up the consequences of all events: The Soviet Union will fall from the level of world power it has reached” (quoted in Hillgruber 1997, 178). The purges were specifically cited in the October Strategic survey “as evidence of the vulnerability of the Soviet Union” (Blau 1955, 14), and although they were not mentioned in the other intelligence reports, most historians agree that they influenced Hitler and the General Staff’s opinion of Russia’s military. Hitler “believed that the Soviet military machine was so riddled with Communism, insecurity, suspicion, and informers, and so demoralized by the purges that it could not function properly” (Clark 1985, 43). The General Staff was “of the opinion that, because of the drain in personnel Stalin had caused among the officer corps of the Red Army . . . the Soviet armed forces had been decapitated and were thus incapable of waging a serious offensive war”
Although the Germans assumed that the purges had degraded the military effectiveness of the Red Army, it was not until the Winter War and the Soviet intervention in Poland that they saw the negative effects of the purge first hand.

Finally, racism played a role in the German assessment of the Soviet military (Leach 1973, 92; Cecil 1975, 17, 122; Clark 1985, 74; Groehler 1993, 53; Weinberg 1994, 189; Megargee 2000, 110; Stahel 2009, 51; Evans 2009, 161). Nazi beliefs in the inferiority of the Slavic races made the German leaders much more receptive to information about the incompetence of the Red Army. Hitler, in particular, believed that “the seizure of living space in the East would by itself be quite easy because the land there was inhabited by inferior Slavs ruled by even less competent Jews” (Weinberg 1993, 311). Many of his generals shared his opinions. Stahel (2009) writes that the “the General Staff’s exuberant self-confidence toward the eastern campaign . . . reflected long held prejudices of a racial and cultural kind” (44-45). Förster (1998) agrees, arguing that Germany’s low opinion of the Soviet military was partially due to “a sense of cultural superiority vis-à-vis the Slav world, and an anti-Bolshevik estimation of the enemy, coloured by a latent anti-Semitism” (Förster 1998, 27). General Blumentritt’s report to the Chief of Staff is illustrative of the pervasive effects of racism within the Army. His memo argued, “The history of all Russian wars show that the Russian, as an ill educated half Asiatic fighter, thinks and feels differently” (quoted in Hillgruber 1997, 182). Official military reports were also colored by racism. A December 1940 intelligence analysis remarked that although the Soviets were improving their weaponry, “the application and diversification of this equipment remains doubtful because [the Russian is a] fundamentally stolid man of low intelligence” (quoted in Groehler 1993, 54). Germany’s Official Secret Handbook on the Armed Forces of the USSR described the “Russian national character” as being characterized by “slow-wittedness, schematism[sic], fear of responsibility of taking decisions” (quoted in Hillgruber 1997, 180).
The strength of these prejudices has led some scholars to conclude that the Germans would have reached the same conclusions about the relative weakness of the Soviet Union regardless of the evidence (Weinberg 1994, 189). However, the Germans did acknowledge that the USSR had instituted reforms to remedy the problems that arose during the Winter War, and they predicted that those reforms would improve the fighting ability of the Red Army. They just thought that it would take many years for those improvements to come to fruition. Köstring’s March 1940 report concluded that the Red Army possessed “a gigantic war-machine which was about to remedy any shortcomings revealed” during the Winter War and Poland (quoted in Klink 1998, 239). However his September report emphasized that although the quality of the Soviet Military was improving, he believed it would take four to five years before it fully recovered (Cecil 1975, 119-120). The Department of Foreign Armies East report on the Winter War noted the reforms adopted by the Soviets in the aftermath of the War, including the abolition of the political commissars and the reestablishment of the General Corps. It noted that “the Red Army seemed to be making a huge effort to transform itself into a first rate modern force, equipped with up to date military technology,” but it predicted that this process would take years to complete (Klink 1998, 234). Halder’s diary specifically mentioned that the abolition of the political commissars and the new training program would likely raise the combat proficiency of the Red Army (Halder Volume IV, 159, 200). In fact, Germany’s decision to launch the war in 1941 was in part driven by the belief that Russia’s weakness was temporary. As discussed earlier, they felt they had to strike quickly before Russia was able to regain her strength (Cecil 1975, 168; Groehler 1993, 50-51; Föster 1998, 27; Mangenheimer 2002; Müller 2009, 3; Mossier 2001, 82).

In addition, most intelligence reports acknowledged that the Russian military had some strengths. For example, the January report from Foreign Armies East noted the “toughness and courage of its [the Soviet Union’s] soldiers” (quoted in Stahel 2009,
71), but it concluded that this was more than offset by the Red Army’s lack of training and weak leadership. Similarly, Halder mentioned that although the Soviet Air Force was not proficient at night or blind flying, “fighter and bombers [are] good while in formation” (Halder Volume VI, 3). These comments and the fact that most of the General Staff believed that the USSR could remedy its shortcomings in the long term suggest that the racial prejudices of Germany’s military leaders were not so ingrained that they made the German assessment of the Soviet Union’s weak military potential a forgone conclusion.

Thus, the Winter War was not the only factor that led German decision makers to conclude that the Soviet military was an ineffective fighting force. The racial prejudices of Germany’s top leaders influenced their assessment of the Soviet military and probably made them more receptive to information about the lack of skill in the Red Army. The Russians had performed poorly in WWI, and the Germans predicted their fighting ability had been further degraded as a result of Stalin’s purges. They got a glimpse of the effect of the purges when working with the Soviet military in Poland, but it was not until the Winter War that they saw just how ineffective the Red Army had become.

**What Role did Environmental Factors Play in German Decision Making?**

There is not much explicit evidence to suggest that the Germans used information from the Winter War because the terrain they expected to fight the Soviets in was similar to Finland’s terrain. Environmental concerns affected their planning, but were not referenced when the Winter War was mentioned. For example, rather than focusing on the Russians’ inability to cope with the frigid temperatures during the Winter War, they drew lessons about the difficulties of winter combat in general. They actually wanted to avoid fighting Russia in the winter, despite the fact that the Finnish war revealed that the Russians were not especially prepared for winter combat (Mossier 2010, 86). This is one of the reasons why Hitler decided to delay the invasion until the
spring of 1941 (Cecil 1975, 76; Weinberg 1993, 322). It is also one of the reasons they planned for a rapid campaign. Marcks’ plan specifically mentioned that “climatic conditions from the outset dictated a limited period of operations and a need for the greatest possible speed in all operations” (Klink 1998, 262).

In terms of the terrain, they did not deduce that the Russians would fight poorly in the Pripet Marshes because they fought poorly in Finland’s marshlands. Rather they concluded that the marshes made offensive military operations difficult (Klink 1998, 287). This prompted them to avoid the Pripet Marshes by sending two separate army groups around the wetland area. During the debate over whether to attack north or south of the marshes, advocates for the southern strategy did not mention the difficulties the Russians faced when operating on the Ithmus. They argued that the plains of Ukraine “lacked the natural and man-made features that favored the defenders over the attackers, offering instead vast open stretches in which to maneuver the large mechanized units that now dominated warfare” (Mossier 2010, 98). Although advocates of the northern strategy did not specifically compare the terrain to the wooded area along the Finnish frontier, they did mention that the lack of roads would make it harder for Russia to send in reserves or retreat (Mossier 2010, Glantz 2001, 15), two of the key problems that hampered Russian operations in the motti battles in the Finnish wilderness. In the end, the Germans decided to send forces along both routes.

Thus, there is very little evidence that the Germans were sensitive to the fact that the Finnish terrain limited the effectiveness of Red Army operations during the Winter War. I found no explicit comparisons between Finland’s terrain and the terrain on the Eastern Front in Germany’s assessment of the Soviet Union’s military skill. Environmental concerns mainly affected the planning of Barbarossa in terms of how Russia’s terrain would influence the effectiveness of German forces. This does not mean that terrain similarity did not matter. Comparisons could have been made prior to the generation of the relevant documents, and information about the Winter War included
precisely because Finnish terrain was similar to the terrain of European Russia. Alternatively, the similarity in terrain may have been considered common knowledge by the decision makers and intelligence analysts, and thus not explicitly mentioned during the planning process. The fact that Germany used information from the Winter War to justify their assessment of Soviet skill in the run up to Operation Barbarossa is certainly consistent with the fact that the terrain was objectively similar. However, the process tracing evidence explicitly linking terrain similarity to German decisions is weak.

**Summary**

My analysis of Germany’s decision making after the Winter War suggests that Russia’s poor performance in that conflict had reputational consequences. German assessments of the Winter War focused on the Soviets’ lack of skill during the war, and German behavior in the aftermath of the war became more conflictual. They challenged Russia on a number of diplomatic issues, adopted bellicose bargaining strategies during negotiations, and ultimately decided to attack the Soviet Union. The decision to launch Operation Barbarossa was largely driven by German leaders’ beliefs about the Soviets’ lack of military effectiveness. These beliefs were influenced by a number of factors, including Russian performance during the Winter War. There was not much explicit evidence that sensitivity to similarities across terrain affected the way in which Germany applied the lessons of the Winter War to its own operations. Rather, environmental concerns were discussed with regards to how the Russian terrain would affect its own military operations.

**Japan and the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact**

There is not much evidence that the Winter War had reputational consequences for the Soviet Union in their relations with Japan during World War II. There were no official postwar assessments of the Winter War conducted by the Japanese, so it is not
clear whether they were even paying attention to the conflict, and if they were, what
lessons were drawn. Unlike Germany, their behavior towards Russia after the
conclusion of the Winter War was largely conciliatory. They sought a neutrality pact
with the USSR and offered concessions to secure that neutrality pact. Although they
prepared for a potential war against Russia in the immediate aftermath of Barbarossa,
they did not take advantage of the Soviet Union’s temporary vulnerability by launching
their own attack. My analysis of the decision making process during this time finds very
few references to the Soviet lack of military skill. On the contrary, it seems the Japanese
saw the Soviet Union as a formidable opponent. There is no mention of the Winter War
in any of the documents I reviewed or in the secondary literature on Soviet-Japanese
relations during World War II. This suggests that the Japanese were not particularly
emboldened by the Soviet performance during the Winter War.

Japanese Assessment of the Winter War

I found no records of an official postwar assessment of the Soviet performance
during the Winter War, and I was unable to uncover any comments by Japanese officials
that mentioned the Winter War specifically. Thus, it is unclear whether the Japanese
were even aware of how poorly the Soviet military had performed against Finland. This
is problematic for CET because the theory assumes that all potential adversaries
evaluate information generated during war. They then decide if that information is
relevant to their specific situation. If Japan was not even aware of the war, how could it
evaluate its relevance? One possible explanation is that the evaluation of relevance
occurred prior to the generation of wartime information. The Japanese may have
ignored information from the Winter War from the onset because they did not see that
conflict as relevant to their relationship with the Soviet Union. Because the war was not
considered relevant, no further steps were taken to evaluate information generated
during the conflict. Alternatively, the evaluation of relevance may have taken place
outside the official policy making process, in informal discussions or even just within
the minds of Japanese leaders. These leaders may have had access to unofficial
information from the Winter War from foreign media sources, but because that
information was not deemed relevant, no official assessment was conducted and leaders
did not bother to publicly comment on the outcome of the conflict. If this was the case,
the official documents I had access to would not necessarily contain information about
Japan’s postwar assessment, and the secondary literature would be unlikely to cover it
because the Winter War was not seen as important to Japanese leaders.

If they were aware of the Winter War, it is likely that Japanese leaders would
have considered the Red Army’s dismal performance unexpected. In 1938 and 1939,
Japan’s Kwantung Army fought two border wars against Soviet forces in Mongolia, and
they performed well in both conflicts. The Changkugeng Incident, fought in August of
1938, ended in draw but was very costly for both sides (Ikuhiko 1976, 140-157; Coox
1992, 34;). In Nomohan, the Soviets launched a major offensive, which succeeded in
routing the Japanese forces (Coox 1992, 34-35; Ikuhiko 1976, 157-175). Due to their
“superiority in tanks and artillery, [the Soviets] all but annihilated the 23rd Division, the
nucleus of Kwantung Army’s newly formed 6th Army” (Coox 1992, 17). With air
supremacy lost and much of their Army destroyed, the Japanese signed an armistice in
mid-September. These two battles led the Japanese to conclude that Red Army was
highly skilled. Thus, it is likely that they would have been surprised at the inept
performance of the Soviets in Finland. Thus, the information generated during the
Winter War would have had the potential to influence Japanese decisions.

**Japanese Behavior After the Winter War**

Russia and Japan had a number of ongoing diplomatic disputes at the time of the
Winter War. There were disagreements over Japan’s oil and mineral rights on Sakhalin,
the ownership of the Chinese Eastern Railway, and fishing rights in Russia’s territorial
waters. The Soviet Union was the primary provider of military aid to China, which the Japanese had been fighting for almost three years. Japan refused to recognize the Soviet supported Mongolian state, while Russia refused to recognize Manchukuo, Japan’s puppet state. There were also repeated incidents along the Mongolia-Manchukuo border (Ikuhiko 1976, 133-175). Despite these ongoing disputes, Japan’s treatment of Russia following the Winter War was largely conciliatory.

**Seeking the Neutrality Pact**

Starting in the fall of 1939, Japan began focusing its attention on improving relations with the USSR (Chihiro 1980, 27). A tentative agreement was reached on fisheries and final payments were made for the Chinese Eastern Railway. The two states also agreed to set up a commission for the demarcation of the border near Nomonhan. However, the issue of Soviet aid to China and Mongolian incursions into Manchukuo remained pressing issues. The Abe Cabinet was open to the idea of a non-aggression pact if the Soviets proposed it, but they saw resolution of the China and Manchukuo issues as precondition for negotiations (Chihiro 1980, 27-28). Initially, the Yonai Cabinet, which came to power in January of 1940, continued these policies. It considered “A nonaggression treaty is a matter for the distant future and is not very useful” (Chihiro 1980 quoting Foreign Minister Arita Hachiro, 30).

During the summer of 1940, however, Japan began to reconsider this policy. In July, it decided to offer the Soviet Union a neutrality agreement in exchange for cessation of aid to China and other concessions. The Soviets responded to the Japanese offer by explaining that they accepted the proposal in principle, but they were not willing to give up mining rights in Sakhalin. Their official response did not mention China, and Molotov denied that they were providing aid to the Chinese (Chihiro 1980, 42). Unwilling to accept Russia’s terms regarding oil concessions in Sakhalin, the Japanese called off negotiations in August.
In October of 1940, Japan revisited the issue of a non-aggression agreement with the Soviet Union. In developing a strategy for approaching the Russians, the Japanese decided that they were willing to make a number of concessions to secure an agreement including the establishment of a commission for the settlement of border disputes, the recognition of the communist government in Mongolia, and the abandonment of their fishing claims. They continued to demand a cessation of aid to China but wanted to delay questions over the Sakhalin concessions until after an agreement was reached. General Tatekawa Yoshitsugu presented Molotov with the Japanese proposal on October 30th. It did not specify the concessions Japan was willing to make, but rather focused on the benefits of a non-aggression pact. It suggested that other issues could be worked out after the non-aggression pact was signed. In November, Molotov responded with a counteroffer, which proposed the adoption of a neutrality treaty. However, he maintained that Russia would require liquidation of Japan’s oil and coal concessions in northern Sakhalin. They offered the Japanese compensation for their investments and a guarantee of 100,000 tons of oil for five years. The Japanese responded that they were not willing to liquidate the oil concessions and offered to purchase northern Sakhalin from the Russians. Molotov rejected this offer and negotiations ended.

In March of 1941, the Japanese decided to reopen negotiations during Foreign Minister Matsuoka’s trip to Europe. In preparing for the negotiations, the Japanese decided that they were willing to make further concessions to secure a non-aggression agreement (Butow 1961, 206). They would compromise on the fisheries issue, and they would liquidate their oil concessions in Sakhalin if Russia agreed to provide them with 1.5 million tons oil over the next five years (Butow 1961, 201). Matsuoka opened negotiations by proposing a non-aggression pact that would last for 10 years if the Soviet Union agreed to stop providing military aid to China. He argued that the question of oil concessions in Sakhalin could wait until after an agreement was reached. The Soviets responded that a non-aggression pact was not possible, given the number of
ongoing territorial disputes the USSR had with Japan. However, they would agree to a neutrality pact that would last five years. They were not willing to negotiate on aid to China and wanted to resolve the question of the Sakhalin concessions before the conclusion of the pact (Chihiro 1980, 78-79; Slavinskii 2004, 42). After days of painstaking negotiations, Matsuoka agreed to nearly all of the Soviet Union’s demands. The two countries would sign a neutrality pact that would last five years. The duration of the agreement would be automatically extended to ten years unless one of the parties notified the other at the five year point. Matsuoka dropped the demand that the USSR cease its aid to China. He also signed a letter stating Japan’s intention to liquidate concessions within several months of the ratification of the treaty (Slavinskii 2004, 40-50). The only Soviet concession was a pledge “to respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of Manchukuo” (Haslam 1992, 130). With these issues worked out, the neutrality pact was signed between the two countries on April 13, 1941.

Japan’s decision to seek a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and its willingness to agree to Soviet terms in order to achieve an agreement reflect the conciliatory mood of the Japanese with respect to the Soviet Union in early 1941.

**Wartime Decisions: Japanese Reaction to Barbarossa**

In the 1930s Japan had developed plans for a potential war against the USSR as a way to safeguard against Soviet involvement in their war against China and as a way to solve numerous territorial disputes (Ikuhiko 1977, 132; Slavinskii 2004). These plans had been put on hold after the Chankufeng and Nomonhan incidents, but Operation Barbarossa created an opportunity for Japan to revisit its plans. With its forces diverted to the European theater, Russia’s position in Asia was especially vulnerable. Japan could use this opportunity to conquer contested territory and counter the communist threat to Asia. However, the Japanese ultimately decided against war.

Matsuko conducted the neutrality pact under the assumption that relations with the USSR would develop “in such a way that there would be no quarrels between
Germany and the USSR” (Slavinskïi 2004, 40), and was thus surprised when he learned of German plans to attack the Soviet Union in early June. On June 5th, 1940 the Japanese Ambassador to Germany, Hiroshi Oshima, reported on a meeting with Hitler and Ribbentrop where they had implied that war with the Soviet Union was likely in the near future. A Liaison Conference was convened to discuss Oshima’s telegram on June 7th. There was a debate over whether there would actually be a war and some discussion of how to respond in the event the Germans invaded the USSR. However, no firm decision was made since most of the military officials did not think that war was likely (Ike 1967, 46-47).

After the invasion, a series of coordinating committee and liaison conferences were held to discuss the Japanese response.¹ There were basically three different positions advocated by different factions within the government. First, there were those led by Foreign Minister Matsuoka who advocated attacking the Soviets. Proponents of this approach also included the General Staff Operations Division, General Yamashita, Privy Council President Hara Yoshimichi, Minister of the Interior Hiranuma, and Prince Asaka. Matsuoka was the most vocal advocate of an attack. He argued that the German-Soviet war created an opportunity for Japan to acquire contested territory in Asiatic Russia, including Sakhalin and the Kamchatka Peninsula. However, Germany would not take long to defeat the Soviets, and if Japan did not get involved at the outset, it would forgo this opportunity (Ike 1967, 34th Liaison Conference June 27, 1941, 65; Chihiro 1980, 94-97). Matsuoka warned, “unless one enters the tiger’s den, one cannot get the tiger’s cub” (quoted in Lensen 1972, 23). Hara made a similar argument during

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¹ Coordinating committee conferences involved military officials, usually only the General Staff and the War Ministry. During these meetings the military decided on what its official recommendations would be. Liaison Conferences included the Army and Navy Chiefs and Vice Chiefs of Staff as well as cabinet representatives including the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, War Minister, Navy Minister, and occasionally others such as the Finance Minister. These meetings were where the key decisions were made. The Imperial Conference included the Liaison Conference attendees, the President of the Privy Council, and the Emperor. These were normally pro forma meetings where the decisions of the Liaison Conferences were ratified.
the Imperial Conference, exclaiming that Barbarossa presented “Japan with a golden opportunity such as comes only once in a thousand years” (quoted in Chihiro 1980, 101).

The opposing view argued that the German-Soviet war freed Japan’s rear and created an opportunity to divert resources to the more important southern campaigns. War with the Soviet Union should be avoided until Japan had conquered its neighbors in the Pacific. The Navy was the most vehement advocate of this approach, but proponents also included the Army Ministry’s Military Affairs Section and Ambassador Oshima (Hatano and Asasa 1989, 398; Krebs 1997, 547).

Most of the participants in these meetings took a middle course and advocated postponing the decision (Krebs 1997, 550). Japan should prepare for war with the Soviet Union, but wait to see how the war developed before making a final decision. Advocates of this strategy included War Minister Tojo, Minister for Home Affairs Hiranuma Kiishiro, Army Chief of Staff General Sugiyama, the Military Section of the Army Ministry, and the War Guidance Office of the General Staff. Tojo famously argued that Japan should only act after “the Soviet Union is ready to fall to the ground like a ripe persimmon at Japan’s feet” (quoted in Slavinskii 2004, 65). Sugiyama made a similar argument after noting the present state of the Kwantung Army:

The Supreme Command must get ready; we cannot decide now whether or not we will strike. It will take forty to fifty days to get the Kwantung Army ready. It will take additional time to organize our present forces for war and get them ready to take the offensive. The German-Soviet situation should be clarified by then. If conditions are good we will fight (quoted in Ike 1967, 34th Liaison Conference, June 27, 1941, 67).

On June 23rd and 24th, the Army Ministry and the General Staff met to decide the military’s recommended course of action. After much debate, they ultimately decided to recommend preparing for war and waiting to see how the situation developed. They submitted their “Outline of National Policies in View of the Changing Situation” to the Cabinet on the 24th. It stated that

Japan should not intervene for the time being, but should continue its military preparations against the Soviet Union in secrecy . . . Should the German-Soviet
War develop extremely favorably for Japan, the northern problem should be solved through the exercise of military power (quoted in Chihiro 1980, 90).

A Liaison Conference was convened on June 25th to consider the military’s proposal. Matsuoka argued vehemently in favor of attacking the Soviet Union immediately, but the conference ultimately decided to adopt the military’s preferred policy of wait and see. The Imperial Conference met on July 2nd, and formally ratified the decision to continue war in the south while preparing for war in the north (Ike 1967, transcriber summary, 77).

The question of war with the Soviets would be reconsidered once the preparations for war were complete (Chihiro 1980, 101). It was decided that one of three conditions had to be met in order for Japan to invade the Soviet Union. First, Japan would attack if the German invasion caused the collapse of the Soviet regime (Young 1968, 286; Chihiro 1980, 102; Krebs 1997, 551). Japan would also move against Soviet forces if the USSR moved the core of their Far Eastern Army to the European Theatre (Young 1968, 286). The Japanese wanted to enjoy a 2:1 ratio of forces, and so decided they would only attack if the Soviet Air Force was reduced by two thirds and its ground forces by half (Chihiro 1980, 102). Japan would also consider attacking the USSR if the Soviets entered into an alliance with the United States directed against Japan (Slavinskii 2004, 40).

After Germany’s early victories, the Japanese told the Germans that they would enter the war as soon as possible and that they planned to launch an attack in early August (Drechslet 1993, 40). However, by late July the German advance had slowed and it was clear that conditions were not ripe for an attack. The General Staff’s War Diary noted that the “Stalin regime is proving unexpectedly resilient. There has also been no movement of Soviet Far Eastern forces . . . The probability that the war will end with the conclusion of the present German operation is diminishing” (quoted in Chihiro 1980, 106).
On August 4th the Coordinating Committee met to reconsider Japanese-Soviet relations. During this conference, the military decided to postpone the decision until the spring of 1942 (Chihiro 1980, 106; Drechsler 1993, 40). This would give the Germans time to weaken the Red Army, while also preventing Japan from becoming involved in a war during Siberia’s harsh winter. It was also decided that Japan would formally inform Russia of its decision to remain neutral, provided the Soviet Union did the same with respect to the Pacific War (Ike 1967, 115; Krebs 1997, 553; Slavinskii 2004, 68). On September 6th the Imperial Conference formally ratified the decision to remain neutral (Ike 1967, 158-159; Krebs 1997, 553; Slavinskii 204, 68). If the situation improved by the spring of 1942, they would reconsider resorting to the use of force against the Soviets. However, by the end of September it was clear that the German Blitzkrieg had failed. In early October, Japan informed Germany of its new policy. It would not be able to enter the Russian War until at least 1942, and it recommended that Germany seek peace before the onset of winter (Krebs 1997, 555-556).

Planning for war against the United States began that same month. When the Japanese decided to launch the attack on Pearl Harbor, it also decided to delay plans for an invasion of the Soviet Union indefinitely. During the October 24-25 Liaison Conferences, Japan’s leaders discussed how the decision to attack the United States would affect their relations with Moscow. The military and foreign ministry agreed that “there will be no aggressive action [against the USSR] after the beginning of war” (quoted in Ike 1967, 189). At the Imperial Conference on November 5th the Japanese formally decided to attack Pearl Harbor and to forgo an attack on the Soviet Union. “The Foreign and Domestic Implementation of the Essentials for Carrying out the Empire’s Policies” adopted at the conference specifically stated, “In case Germany demands that we participate in the war against the Soviet Union, we will respond that we do not intend to join the war for the time being” (quoted in Ike 1967, 242). Following that
decision, the Liaison Conference drafted a proposal for “Hastening the End of the War against the United States” which stipulated,

The Empire will endeavor to the utmost to prevent the outbreak of a war with the Soviet Union while we are engaged in military operations in the South. We will keep in mind the possibilities of arranging a peace between Germany and the Soviet Union, depending on the wishes of these two countries, and bringing the Soviet Union within the Axis camp; of improving Japanese-Soviet relations (quoted in Ike 1967, 248-249)

The Imperial Conference ratified this document on December 1, 1941. Since the fortunes of both the German and Japanese military declined as the war went on, the decision to attack the Soviet Union was not broached again.

**Process Tracing: Seeking the Neutrality Pact**

My analysis of Japan’s decision to seek a neutrality pact with the Soviet Union suggests that the Winter War did not prompt it to adopt this conciliatory policy. Not only was the Winter War never mentioned, there were hardly any references to the military ineffectiveness of the Soviet Union.

**Why the Japanese Sought a Neutrality Pact**

German victories in Western Europe created opportunities for Japan to expand southward into the areas previously colonized by France, Belgium, and Britain. In order to take advantage of this opportunity, Japan needed to secure its rear so that it would not have to fight a two front war. A neutrality agreement provided this security (Chihiro 1980, 81; Hatano and Asada 1989, 387-390; Haslam 1992, 140-141; Weinberg 1994, 166-167; Slavinskii 2004, 18-19). On June 19, 1940 the Japanese Ambassador to Germany Kurusu Saburo commented, “Japan is coming to realize more and more that her future lies in the south and that the foe in the north must be turned into a friend” (quoted in Chihiro 1980, 41). During the first phase of neutrality negotiations in August of 1940, Togo argued that if Japan decided to use force in the south, circumstances make it unavoidable then we should follow Germany’s example. Last fall Germany adopted the policy of ‘throwing away a sprat to catch a whale’. It abandoned its political position in the Baltic States to advance in western and northern Europe. To conclude a political agreement [with the USSR]
is a necessity from the point of view of Japan’s long term interests (quoted in Chihiro 1980, 46)

In October of 1940, the Foreign Ministry issued a statement which argued that “a no-war, no-aggression relationship must be definitely established between Japan and the Soviet Union” before Japan could begin its “southern advance” (quoted in Chihiro 1980, 51).

In addition, the neutrality pact assured Japan that it would not be inadvertently pulled into a war with the Soviet Union by its German or Italian allies. Matsuoka had initially envisioned expanding the Tripartite Pact to include the Soviet Union. He hoped to use Japan’s friendship with Germany to strengthen their relationship with the USSR. However, when Germany’s intentions regarding the Soviet Union became clear, Japan felt that it needed a neutrality pact with the Soviets to avoid being entangled in a war due to its commitment to the Tripartite Pact. Ribbentrop’s hints that Germany was preparing for a war with the USSR during Matsuoka’s visit in March of 1941 convinced the Foreign Minister that a neutrality pact was essential and made him more willing to offer the Soviet Union concessions to secure it (Slavinskii 2004, 38).

Did Perceptions of Soviet Skill Influence their Decisions?

I found hardly any references to the Red Army’s military effectiveness in the policy documents or recollections of the participants, and none of the secondary sources mention it as an important factor in the decisions leading up to the neutrality treaty. The one reference I found focuses on the Soviets’ possession of skill. Kido (1984) noted in his diary on December 3, 1940, “Soviet Russia is at present in a most favorable position and the less she maneuvers the more profitable she will be. Under the circumstances, she is rather haughty, and it is believed she will not accept our proposal for negotiations so easily” (150). If the poor Soviet performance in the Winter War had influenced Japanese perceptions of the Red Army’s military effectiveness, the Soviets should have been seen
as weak and not strong. On the contrary, the one reference to the Soviet’s military potential focused on their strength.

Did the Winter War Influence Perceptions of Soviet Strength?

The only mention of the Winter War in the primary documents or secondary literature was Chihiro (1980). He claims that the Soviets changed their policy vis-à-vis Japan and were more open to rapprochement after the Winter War due to souring relations with the West. The Japanese responded to these changes, but did not directly mention the Winter War in terms of seeking the neutrality agreement or negotiating the terms.

The secondary literature does claim that Soviet performance at Changkufeng and Nomonhan influenced Japan’s decision to seek the neutrality agreement. These two wars convinced the Japanese to revise their estimates of the Red Army’s military effectiveness upwards (Ikuhiko 1976, 175; Coox 1992, 42). They experienced firsthand “the unexpected military strength of the Soviet Union” (Krebs 1997, 544). These battles “shattered all confidence in the fighting power of Kwantung Army. The quality of Soviet Forces in the Far East exceeded that of the Japanese” (Haslam 1992, 141). A review of Japan’s military posture after Changkufeng showed its weakness in terms of fighting a two front war (Butow 1961, 127) and convinced the Japanese that they would be better off to focus on their southern strategy. Early in 1939 the military published “a number of articles which reflected the subtle change which had been taking place in military thinking—a change which stemmed, in part, from the reappraisal of strategy caused by the recent defeat by the Russians at Changukfeng, Lake Khassan . . . Japan’s future lay in the South” (quoted in Butow 1961, 137). The defeat of “Japanese forces at Khalkhin-Gol[Nomonhan] in August and September of 1939” further convinced the Japanese that “the northern option [was] too expensive a choice,” and prompted them to focus their wartime planning on the South (Haslam 1992, 163).
Their desire to move south and to avoid a two front war prompted them to adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards the Soviets. In this way, Changkufeng and Nomonhand indirectly contributed to the decision to seek a neutrality pact (Hatano and Asada 1989, 386; Slavinskiï 2004, 16). The Japanese defeat at “Nomonhan paradoxically turned relations back on a more friendly course . . . It impressed on the Japanese that diplomatic measures might be less costly and more effective in resolving questions at issue between the two powers” (Lenson 1972, 2). Nomonhan was especially significant “because a profound sense of defeat was infused in the Japanese military and because subsequent policies towards the USSR were much affected . . . This was the road that led to the important neutrality pact concluded by Matsuoka Yosuke in 1941” (Coox 1976, 123).

Thus, I found no evidence of the Soviet performance in the Winter War influencing the Japanese leaders’ decision to seek a neutrality pact. They were much more affected by their own experience with the Soviets earlier in the year at Changkufeng and Nomonhan. There was no mention of the Winter War or the Soviet lack of military effectiveness. On the contrary, because Japan viewed the Soviet military as strong and effective, it wanted to avoid another armed conflict. Consequently, it sought a neutrality treaty with the USSR and offered significant concessions to bring the Soviets on board.

**Process Tracing: Decision to Avoid War with Soviet Union**

My analysis of Japanese decision making after the launch of Barbarossa found no evidence that the Soviet performance in the Winter War influenced Japanese leaders. As with the neutrality pact, the Japanese continued to believe that the Red Army possessed significant strength and skill. No mention of the Winter War appears in the primary documents or secondary histories.
Why did the Japanese not attack the Soviet Union?

The Japanese had expansionist objectives in both the north and the south. In the north they coveted territory controlled by the Soviets including Northern Sakhalin, the Kamachta Peninsula, and the Kurile Isles. They also wanted to expand their influence in Manchuria. In the south, they wanted to gain control of the European powers’ former colonial possessions, including Korea, Indochina, and the Philippines. However, they knew that they did not have the resources to fight a two front war, and so opted for the southern strategy. In June of 1941, the General Staff and the Admiralty began to study the question of where to deploy their military forces. They agreed “that a military thrust towards South East Asia would continue to take preference. Only a minority within the armed forces favored Japan’s participation in an attack on the Soviet Union; however they all shared the conviction that Japan must avoid at all costs becoming involved in a war on two fronts” (Krebs 1997, 548). At the Imperial Conference on September 6th, the military leaders justified their decision to forgo an attack on the Soviet Union by arguing, “While we are militarily engaged in the South, we should do our best in the North to prevent the war from developing into a two front operation” (quoted in Ike 1967,158).

So the more pertinent question is not why the Japanese refrained from attacking the Soviet Union, but why they decided on military operations in the south instead. One of the key contributing factors was that the southern strategy offered Japan access to needed raw materials (Hatano and Asada 1989, 384; Slavinskii 2004, 80). The need for oil and other energy resources had become especially acute after the United States enacted an economic embargo on Japan (Hatano and Asada 1989, 400). As one Japanese general officer put it, “We went to war with the United States and deferred the hostilities against the Soviet Union because our stock of raw materials were being used up” (quoted in Coox 1992, 41). In addition, the Soviet Union seemed like a more formidable opponent than the western European nations who were being bludgeoned by the German Army.
The General Staff and the Imperial General Headquarters did not think that the
Kwantang Army was ready to fight the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 (Slavinskii
2004, 65).

**Did Perceptions of Soviet Skill Influence their Decisions?**

There are not many references to the Red Army’s lack of military effectiveness
during the deliberations over how to respond to Barbarossa. When the Red Army is
mentioned, it was presumed to be an effective fighting force. Butow (1961) noted that
the desire to attack the Soviet Union was there, but the Japanese did not believe they had
the capability to do so (22). The “officers of the military attaché section repeatedly
warned that the Soviet military forces must not be underestimated” (Lensen 1972, 106).

**Did the Winter War Influence Perceptions of Soviet Strength?**

There is no evidence that the Winter War influenced Japanese perceptions of
Soviet strength during their deliberations over whether to attack the USSR after
Barbarossa. On the contrary, the Soviets continued to be viewed as a formidable foe
despite their poor performance in Finland. Even those, like Matsuoka, who were strong
advocates of attacking the Soviet Union, failed to mention the Red Army’s lack of skill in
the Winter War.

However, there are references to Changkufeng and Nomonhan influencing
Japan’s decision makers in the secondary literature. Slavinskii (2004) argues that Japan’s
defeats in these two wars were one of the reasons Japan adopted a southern strategy
(197). The United States and Britain “seemed a less formidable adversary than the USSR,
which had already shown its strength at Lake Khasan and Khalkhin Gol” (Slavinskii
2004, 80). Chapman (1994) makes a similar claim arguing, “the bloody nose given to the
Japanese Army in Outer Mongolia discouraged its appetite for a two front assault on
Soviet territory . . . [and served] to divert Japanese expansionism more firmly to a
southward course” (163). Mawdsley (2009) argues that the Red Army’s performance in
Mongolia strengthened the Soviet Union’s deterrent posture (16). Japan had no doubt about “the credibility of the Soviet determination to defend every inch of territory” (Chapman 1994, 164). The Japanese military was “painfully torn between their strong desire to attack the homeland of Bolshevism—long held to be the most formidable enemy of the Empire—and an even stronger fear of defeat, as at Nomonhan two years earlier” (Young 1968, 294). Coxx (1992) argues that although “everyone spoke of oil, there is one crucial unspoken reason why the Japanese Army, when fortune beckoned in mid 1941, recoiled from war with Russia so soon, and that is the Kwantung Army’s failure against Zhukov at Nomonhan in 1939” (42). Zhukov himself attributed Japanese reticence in 1941 to this failure:

> It was important for the Japanese to find whether we were capable of fighting them, and the outcome of the fighting subsequently determined this more or less restrained conduct with the start of our war against the Germans. I feel that if at Nomonhan their affairs would have gone successfully, they would have initiated an offensive against us” (quoted in Coxx 1992, 42)

Thus, it seems that their own experience fighting the Soviets influenced their decision to move southward instead of north, while the Red Army’s poor performance during the Winter War does not appear to have affected their decisions.

The relative importance of Nomonhan and Changkufeng compared to the Winter War suggests that fighting ineptly in one theater might have limited reputational consequences in another theater when there is a contemporaneous and more salient counter-instance available to the audience. If salience is partially determined by environmental similarities, then CET retains its explanatory power in these situations. Nomonhan and Changkufeng were fought around the same time as the Winter War, and they were fought in terrain that was not merely similar to the terrain in which the Japanese would fight the Soviets; they were fought on the terrain in which the Japanese would fight the Soviets. The Red Army’s performance in Mongolia was thus much more indicative of how it would fare against the Japanese than its performance in Finland. If environmental similarities do not determine salience, then the absence of a salient
counter example is a ceteris paribus condition for CET, one that was not met in the Japanese case. Not many countries are involved in multiple wars at the same time, and as long as salience can be assessed prior to an evaluation of these wars’ reputational consequences, this ceteris paribus condition should not undermine the predictive power of CET in most cases. It is likely that salience is largely determined by a country’s level of involvement in a conflict and its geographic proximity to the war zone. Since both of these factors are observable prior to the conclusion of a war, an a priori evaluation of the ceteris paribus condition should be possible.

**Process Tracing: Why the Winter War Did Not Matter**

Because the Winter War is not mentioned in the primary documents or secondary histories, it is unclear why the Japanese did not use information generated during that war about the Soviets’ military capabilities to inform their decisions during WWII. The only reference to environmental factors during the deliberations was Japan’s sensitivity to the weather. They knew their own effectiveness would be crippled by the Siberian winter and so needed to launch operations by September. Mongolia’s terrain was not explicitly compared to Finland’s, but it is possible that these comparisons were made and information on the Winter War dismissed prior to the key decision making conferences. The primary documents I have access to mainly relate to Japanese decision making during 1941. If the relevance of the Winter War was dismissed before that, I would not necessarily find any evidence regarding the reason for that dismissal in the documents I have at my disposal. The secondary literature covers a larger time frame, but if the Winter War was not important to Japanese decision makers, historians are not likely to have covered the Japanese reaction to the war or the reasons why they saw the war as irrelevant to Soviet-Japanese relations.

Although the documents and histories to which I have access provide good evidence that the Winter War was not used by Japanese decision makers to justify their
decisions to agree to a neutrality pact with the Soviet Union and to honor that pact after Barbarossa, they do not provide good evidence about why information from the war was not used. CET might be correct in attributing the lack of reputational effects to differences in Japan’s prospective fighting environment. However, it is equally plausible that other factors led Japan to dismiss information from the Winter War. One plausible alternative explanation is that Japan’s very recent direct experience with the Soviet military at Changkufeng and Nomonhan overwhelmed the information generated about the Red Army during the Finnish conflict. Unfortunately, my sources do not allow me to adjudicate between these two explanations. The most I can claim is that Japanese behavior and the lack of references to the Winter War during the major policy conferences are consistent with the predictions of CET. I cannot assess whether environmental differences explain the lack of reputational consequences in this case.

Summary

The evidence suggests that the Winter War did not have reputational consequences for the Soviet Union in its relations with the Japanese during the Second World War. The Japanese were not emboldened by the Red Army’s poor performance against Finland. In fact, they adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the Soviets in 1940 and 1941. They sought a neutrality pact with the USSR and offered substantial concessions to secure Soviet participation. When the German’s launched Operation Barbarossa in the summer of 1941, the Japanese prepared for war but ultimately honored the neutrality pact. My analysis of Japanese decision making in the lead up to the neutrality pact and during high-level deliberations following Barbarossa found no evidence of reputational effects. The Soviets were thought to have a powerful, effective military and no mention was made of the Winter War.
Operation Barbarossa, Soviet-Japanese Neutrality, and Contextual Expectations Theory

My examination of German and Japanese decision making during World War II suggests that the Winter War did have reputational consequences for the Soviet Union. The lack of skill the Red Army displayed during the Winter War helped convince the Germans that they could easily defeat the Russians. This belief contributed to their decision to attack the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. However, the USSR’s performance in the Winter War did not influence Japanese decisions during World War II, suggesting that the reputational consequences of that war were confined to the European theatre.

Contextual Expectations Theory correctly predicted that the Soviet performance in the Winter War would affect their relations with Germany, but not Japan. However, my analysis suggests that prior expectations may not be as important as the theory predicts. The evidence regarding Germany’s assessment of the war was mixed. Although some statements by German leaders suggest that they expected the Soviet Union to easily crush the Finns, there is well-documented evidence which demonstrates that the Germans had a low opinion of the Russian military prior to the Winter War. If the lack of skill displayed by the Soviet military was surprising to the Germans, it was only in the magnitude of its incompetence. Despite the fact that the Winter War reinforced the racial prejudices held by the Nazi party and was consistent with the military’s evaluation of the Red Army’s worth after Stalin’s purges, the incompetence demonstrated by the Russians on the Finnish battlefields was often given as proof of the relative weakness of the Soviet Union. Nearly all the secondary histories agree that this played an important role in convincing the Germans that Operation Barbarossa was feasible.

Because of the Japanese defeats at Nomonhan and Changkufeng, the Soviet lack of skill in the Winter War would probably have been surprising to Japanese decision-making.
makers. If expectations were really important, we might expect this information to have
a more profound effect in the Japanese case. The Winter War, however, was not even
mentioned during Japanese deliberations over the neutrality agreement or in the
wartime planning following Barbarossa. The Soviet performance in both Nomonhan and
Changkufeng was mentioned, and there is some indication that the outcome of these
wars was unexpected because of Stalin’s purges and Japan’s previous experiences with
the Red Army along the border. Coox (1992) claims that until 1939 the Japanese expected
to be able to “fight and win” against their numerically superior foe because of the
“bloody Stalinist purges that were decimating the Red Army leadership” (30-31). The
Soviet military was “judged to be weak in nearly every respect except manpower and
the number of long range bombers” (Coox 1992, 30). The fierce fighting at Changkufeng
and their crushing victory at Nomonhan was in stark contrast to these prior conceptions.
The fact that these two conflicts influenced Japanese decisions in the subsequent years is
consistent with the predictions of CET.

In terms of its terrain similarity hypothesis, CET correctly predicted that the
Winter War would influence the decision making of Germany, which planned on
fighting the USSR in terrain that was similar to the Finnish Frontier and Karelian
Isthmus, and not Japan, which would have fought the USSR in more mountainous
terrain with fewer forests or on the oceans bordering both countries. However, the
process tracing did not demonstrate the importance of terrain in terms of making the
information relevant to the key decision makers. Because Japanese decision makers
never mentioned the Winter War, it was unclear why information from that war was not
considered during discussions of Japanese-Soviet relations. In addition, the Germans did
not explicitly compare the terrain of Finland with Russia’s western frontier, so it is
unclear whether their assessment of the fighting ability of the Red Army was terrain
specific.

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In terms of the competing hypotheses, the baseline rationalist model and Current Calculus Theory receive some support. They both predicted far reaching reputational effects and can thus account for the behavior and decision making calculus of Germany, but not Japan. However, both theories place less emphasis on the importance of prior expectations in mediating the reputational consequences of wartime information. My process tracing of the German case suggests that expectations may not play as important of a role as CET predicts. The Japanese case did not yield enough information to evaluate these predications. However, the fact that both theories incorrectly predicted a change in Soviet-Japanese relations after the Winter War suggests that their insensitivity to context may be a significant weakness.

The bias and learning literature also receives some support from my analysis. They correctly predict that the Winter War would have no effect on Japanese decision making. Japan’s focus on Nomonhan and Changkufeng, rather than on the Winter War, also supports the idea that direct experiences have a greater impact than vicarious ones. In addition, the fact that the Japanese ignored the Winter War when it contradicted their beliefs about the strength of the Soviet military supports the claim that decision makers will discard evidence that does not fit with their preexisting beliefs. However, the fact that unexpected victories in Nomonhan and Changkufeng influenced Japanese decision making casts doubt on these same theories.

The German case also provides some micro-level evidence in support of these theories. As predicted, German leaders used the Winter War to provide additional evidence in support of their preexisting beliefs, and they did not use information that contradicted those beliefs. Hitler and his military and political advisors had information about the reforms the Soviet initiated after the conclusion of the Winter War (Cecil 1975) and about the Soviet Union’s stellar performance against Japan in Nomonhan and Changkufeng (Cecil 1975, 121, 124; Reinhardt 1992, 18; Megargee 2000,114). Their evaluation of Soviet capabilities in the Winter War “overlooked the fact that, initially,
only the Russian military district of Leningrad had taken part, whereas the Red Army had succeed in crushing the Japanese 6th Army in Mongolia in a large-scale battle” (Reinhardt 1992, 9). However, as discussed earlier, there is evidence that the Germans were not entirely blind to information that suggested the Soviet military had potential. They acknowledged that the reforms instituted after the Winter War would improve the Red Army’s capabilities, but they believed that these changes would take years to take effect. In fact, it was partially German fear over the difficulty of fighting the Red Army in the future that prompted them to invade during the summer of 1941 when the Soviet military was still perceived to be weak. In addition, the fact that the Winter War had reputational consequences for Germany is not consistent with the aggregate predictions of this body of theories.

Mercer’s attributional theory receives almost no support from my analysis. He correctly predicts the lack of reputational consequences in Japan but cannot account for the presence of those consequences in Germany. He can also not account for the fact that neither the Germans, nor the Japanese, mentioned Soviet cost tolerance in their assessment of the Winter War or in their decision making in 1940 and 1941.

Table 5.2 provides a summary of how the different theories fared in terms of their predictions about German and Japanese decision making in World War II. CET is the only theory to correctly predict the behavior of both the Germans and the Japanese. It also does a decent job at predicting whether the Winter War influenced the decision making process in these two countries. Its primary weakness is that expectations play a less important role than predicted and the evidence regarding the importance of terrain in the process tracing portion of the study is weak. However, the competing theories fare much more poorly. While they can account for the behavior and decision making of one actor, they cannot explain why the other actor behaved the way it did.
Table 5.2: Evidence Regarding the Reputational Consequences of the Winter War for Germany and Japan

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<td>Some evidence that information was expected</td>
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<td>Diplomatic challenges in Baltic and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>Winter War influences German beliefs about Soviet lack of skill</td>
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<td>Hard negotiating behavior</td>
<td>Specific weaknesses of Soviet military in Winter War mentioned by German leaders</td>
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The Reputational Effects of Skill: A Multi-Method Analysis

How do the results of this case study compare to the statistical analysis of the reputational consequences of information about combatants’ military effectiveness. Importantly, both found evidence of reputational effects. In addition, both studies suggested that expectations were not as important as CET predicted. The statistical analysis found evidence of reputational effects even when prior expectations were not controlled for. Similarly, in the German case I found that the Winter War had reputational consequences even though the Soviet military’s performance during that war was consistent with the preexisting beliefs of the Nazi leadership. Both studies also found evidence to support CET’s predictions about the importance of context. The statistical analysis found that the reputational effects of revealed skill were more pronounced when the environment was similar, and my analysis of World War II found that only Germany, the country that planned to fight the Soviet Union in terrain similar to Finland’s, considered information about the Winter War when deciding whether to challenge the USSR. The primary difference between the two analyses is that the case study suggests that there will be no reputational effects for third parties when the terrain is different, while the statistical tests suggest that there will be reputational effects but they will be less pronounced. I have more confidence in the statistical results, both because they are probabilistic and based on data from more than 200 conflicts and because the process tracing evidence about German and Japanese sensitivity to terrain similarity was weak.

In terms of the validity of the proxy variables used in the statistical analysis, this case study suggested that those variables are adequate representations of the concepts I am trying to measure. In the statistical analysis, the dependent variable was militarized
dispute initiation. The case study suggests that challenges can take the form of a militarized dispute, as was the case in Operation Barbarossa. However, challenges can also take the form of threatening diplomatic activity, such as the German decision to sign the Tripartite Pact or export arms to Finland. On the flip side, conciliatory behavior not only includes decisions to refrain from military actions but also active decisions to seek better relations with one’s foe. Information generated during wars about the combatants has the potential not only to influence the military decisions of third party states, but also lower level diplomatic decisions.

In assessing the validity of the statistical model of expectations, this chapter demonstrated that other factors besides the material balance of power inform expectations—notably the civil military relations of the combatants. Stalin’s purges prompted both the Germans and the Japanese to doubt the effectiveness of the Soviet military. The Germans were also influenced by their racial prejudices, but this is a factor that is probably idiosyncratic to this case given the Nazis’ ideological beliefs. However, the balance of power still mattered. Despite the purges and the Nazis’ belief in the inferiority of the Slavic races, most German observers believed that the Soviet Union would easily defeat the Finns because of its numerical superiority. This suggests that although the measure of power used in the statistical analysis misses some of the factors that inform prior expectations, its emphasis on material power is not misplaced.

Finally, this chapter suggests that the mountainous terrain variable used in the statistical analysis captured only one aspect of the fighting environment. One of the differences between European and Asiatic Russia is the presence of mountainous terrain. However, other differences included water barriers, the denseness of the forest, and the availability of roads and other transport infrastructure. Climate also influenced the fighting ability of the Red Army and the wartime planning of both the Japanese and the
Germans. However, because neither country’s leaders made explicit comparisons between the Russian terrain and the Finnish terrain, this case does not shed light on which characteristics of the environment the decision makers thought relevant. The percentage of mountainous terrain was certainly one aspect of the objective differences in the terrain between the prospective fighting environments of the Germans and the Japanese, but it was not the only one.

Thus, this case study complements the statistical analysis in a number of ways. It suggests that the variables used in the large N study are reasonable approximations of the concepts being tested. The behavior of the Germans and the Japanese were consistent with the predictions of Contextual Expectations Theory and the findings of the statistical chapter. The Winter War had reputational effects for the country that expected to fight the Soviets in terrain similar to that of Finland’s. The process tracing demonstrated that the Winter War impacted the decision makers in the way specified by the theory, although it cast doubt on the importance of expectations as a mediating factor. It did not provide enough information on leaders’ perceptions of terrain similarity to thoroughly test that hypothesis. Thus, the two methods suggest that there are broad reputational consequences for fighting ineptly. The following chapters assess whether there are similar consequences for revealing a low cost tolerance.
Chapter 6: What the Vietnam War Revealed about the United States’ Skill and Will

The Vietnam War was largely fought for reputational reasons. If South Vietnam fell to communism, it was believed that other nations in Southeast Asia would quickly follow suit, including Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, Malaysia, Burma, and perhaps even the Philippines. In addition, the prestige of the United States would suffer a serious blow. Its allies and enemies would doubt its willingness to defend the free world against communist incursions. In August 1965, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara argued that if the US abandoned Vietnam to the communists “we would then have to be prepared to cope with the same kind of aggression in other parts of the world . . . the confidence of small nations in America’s pledge of support will be weakened, and many of them, in widely separated areas of the world will feel unsafe” (quoted in Lewey 1978, 425). General Maxwell Taylor put it more succinctly in 1964: “If we leave Vietnam with our tail between our legs, the consequences of this defeat in the rest of Asia, Africa, and Latin America would be disastrous” (quoted in Karnow 1983, 415).

To forestall these eventualities and to protect its ally, President Johnson decided to send combat forces into South Vietnam in March of 1965. Over the next seven years, more than three million Americans served in the Southeast Asian Theater. The United States spent $150 billion dollars to fund its war effort and equip its ally. Despite this massive commitment of personnel and material resources, the US was unsuccessful in preventing the communists from taking over South Vietnam by force. In January of 1972, Nixon signed the Paris Peace Accords, which allowed North Vietnamese troops to remain in the South while committing to a full withdrawal of US forces. Just three years later, in the spring of 1975, the North Vietnamese Army conquered South Vietnam and installed a communist government.
The reputational consequences of America’s defeat in Vietnam have been hotly debated. Some maintain that the fears of the Johnson administration were unfounded because the reputational consequences of US failure were limited. Only two dominoes fell in the aftermath of Vietnam: Laos and Cambodia (Moss 1990, 371-372; Arnold 1991, 389; Isaacs 1997, 176; Bantz 1998, 229). Others argue that the reputational consequences were quite broad. Not only did Laos and Cambodia fall to communism, but many of the United State’s Asian allies began to accommodate China (Record 2002, Rodman 2002). The Thais adopted a policy of neutrality and asked the United States’ military forces stationed in Thailand to leave (Kislenko 2003), and Indonesia adopted a more conciliatory policy towards its communist neighbors (Lewey 1978, 427). Moyar (2006) admits that the fallout in 1975, when South Vietnam finally fell, was limited but claims that this was in part due to America’s intervention. Had America allowed North Vietnam to conquer the South in 1965, the repercussions would have been much greater because many of the countries in the region, including Thailand, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, and Burma, were dealing with serious communist challenges. America’s willingness to fight in Indochina encouraged them to resist these incursions and bought time for them to consolidate their power so that in 1975 they were in a much less precarious position. McCann (2006) makes a similar argument, but claims that the damage of withdraw in 1965 would have been even more far reaching, affecting the outcome of anti-communist struggles in Bolivia, Guatemala, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic.

In order to evaluate these competing claims, we need to identify and characterize the information generated during the war about the military effectiveness and cost tolerance of the United States. That is the goal of this chapter. I begin by analyzing the effectiveness of the tactics and operational concepts employed by the US military during the Vietnam War. I then discuss what inferences were drawn about its willingness to suffer costs during the conflict. In the next section, I evaluate the statements made by the
allies of the US and the DRV to assess whether the US defeat in Vietnam was unexpected. I then use this information to generate predictions about the likely reputational costs of the war in Vietnam using Contextual Expectations Theory. This is followed by an assessment of the validity of the quantitative variables used in chapter 3. Because this assessment suggests that using casualties as a proxy for will may be problematic, I conduct an additional statistical test to evaluate the reputational consequences of Vietnam across a wide range of actors. The intervention analysis I conduct enables me to test whether the number of challenges initiated against the US and its allies rose after the Vietnam War. This test complements the qualitative tests in chapters 7 and 8 by combining the precision of the historical analysis conducted in this chapter with time series methods to test for reputational effects. I conclude with a summary of these results.

**US Skill: Assessing Military Effectiveness**

Evaluating the effectiveness of US operations in Vietnam is complicated by the fact that the conflict involved a mixture of conventional and counterinsurgency warfare.¹ An ongoing guerrilla war, fought primarily by the South Vietnamese Communists—known as the Vietcong (VC) by Americans—was punctuated by conventional military offensives prosecuted by North Vietnamese and VC main force units. In the mountainous region, North Vietnamese Army (NVA) main force units fought conventional battles with the Americans and the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN). In the populous delta region, where territorial control was more contested, communist forces focused on guerrilla warfare, emphasizing small unit ambushes and terrorism. In the cities, which were primarily under South Vietnamese control, the communists

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¹The nature of combat in Vietnam remains controversial. Some scholars, most notably Col. Harry Summers, argue that Vietnam was a conventional war of aggression in which the guerrilla conflict took a back seat (Summers 1984, chapter 8; Hess 2009, chapter 4) Others, like Andrew Krepinevich, assert that the primary military problem was the South Vietnamese insurgency. North Vietnamese conventional forces were only used to distract the Americans and the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) from the real war (Krepinevich 1986, chapter 6; Hess 2009, chapter 5).
concentrated primarily on building their political infrastructure (Kolko 1985, 140 and 184). Because the communists employed both conventional and guerrilla tactics, I evaluate America’s skill at prosecuting the two types of warfare separately. The conventional wisdom on Vietnam maintains that though the US was effective at conventional operations, its energies were misdirected and it lost the war because it was unable to neutralize the insurgency in the South. My analysis suggests that this assessment ignores important changes that were instituted in the latter half of the war. Although America’s counterinsurgency strategy was deeply flawed during the first few years of the conflict, changes instituted under General Abram’s tenure drastically improved its proficiency at unconventional combat.

**Skill: Conventional War**

The US proved extraordinarily effective in conventional battles with NVA and VC main force units. The US achieved its battlefield objectives in almost all of these engagements, inflicting high casualties on the enemy while limiting its own losses. These engagements revealed that US military units were able to successfully implement conventional tactics. For example, Operation Starlight was an amphibious assault launched against a VC stronghold in the Van Tuong Peninsula. It demonstrated the ability of US marines to employ the modern system, using suppressive fire, combined arms, and dispersion to attack fortified enemy positions (Lewey 1978, 54-55). After a week of heavy fighting, the US defeated the VC, killing an estimated 688 soldiers at a loss of only 45 Americans killed.\(^2\) Even if we use the 109 weapons captured to estimate the loss exchange ratio for the battle, the Americans achieved a very favorable LER of

\(^2\) The casualty figures for individual battles vary by source. In addition, casualty statistics for communist forces are often unreliable due to numerous issues, including the difficulty of identifying combatants and noncombatants in battles involving the VC and the tendency of American units to inflate the body count for organizational reasons. Even taking into account the problems with casualty statistics, the relative numbers suggest that the loss exchange ratio heavily favored the United States in almost all conventional battles they fought. For a more detailed discussion of problems with statistics on enemy casualties see Lewey (1978, 78-82).
In Operation THAYER II the 1st Calvary killed an estimated 1,757 NVA and VC soldiers, while limiting their losses to 242 killed in action (Lewey 1978, 59). In another battle, the US Army successfully drove NVA units out of Ia Drang Valley in Operation Silver Bayonet, inflicting 1,000-2,000 casualties on communist forces, with a loss of only 200-300 Americans killed (Karnow 1983, 494; Krepenevich 1986, 189).

The US also performed well when caught on the defensive. A 1965 North Vietnamese offensive in Pleiku designed to split South Vietnam in two was repelled by the US Army, which only lost 300 soldiers while inflicting 1,300 casualties on the enemy (Lewey 1978). A similar offensive near the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in 1966 was defended by Marines who maintained control of Khe San at a loss of 155 men. They killed over 940 North Vietnamese regulars in the battle (Lewey 1978, 67).

Perhaps one of the most striking tactical defensive successes of the Vietnam War was the infamous 1968 Tet Offensive. In early 1968, the North Vietnamese and VC main units launched a surprise attack against multiple cities in the south, including Saigon and 36 of the 44 provincial capitals. Most attackers were successfully repelled in a couple days, the defense of Saigon and Hue being the primary exceptions. Fighting lasted a few weeks in Saigon and more than a month in Hue, but allied forces eventually prevailed. Over the course of the TET offensive, the US and South Vietnamese Army killed many VC fighters and badly damaged North Vietnamese main force units. Between 37,000-50,000 NVA and VC were killed, while the US and their South Vietnamese Allies lost between 3,000-5,000 killed in action.\(^5\)

\(^3\) I use the standard 3:1 (weapons:soldier) ratio to estimate North Vietnamese losses.
\(^4\) Although these LERs may not seem impressive when compared to the United States’ performance in recent conflicts, they reveal a military that was quite effective for the time. Its LERs were better than its overall LER for Korea (4:1) and World War II (2:1), Israel in the 1948 Palestinian War (1.7:1), the Soviets in the Hungarian War (4:1), and the Chinese in the 1962 Sino-Indian War (3:1).
\(^5\) Lewey and Krepenevich estimate that 37,000 Communist forces were killed and 6,000 were captured (Lewey 1978, 76; Krepinevich 1986, 239). Hess puts the NVA/VC figure at 40,000 with 1,100 Americans and 2,300 South Vietnamese killed (Hess 2009, 155). Karnow, supplementing official statistics with interview evidence from Hanoi, estimated that the communists inflicted 2,000 casualties on the Americans and 4,000 on the South Vietnamese while suffering 50,000 battle deaths (Karnow 1983, 547).
The Communist Party in North Vietnam initially saw Tet as a military failure. The North Vietnamese Politburo acknowledged that the Tet Offensive “did not meet any of the basic requirements that had been set for it” (Kolko 1985, 329). They had failed to lead a general uprising in the South, had not retained any of their initial advances into the cities, and had lost many of their best fighters. Kolko explains:

> Although the [Communist] Revolution could replace its lost numbers, there was no question that it could not, and did not compensate for its qualitative sacrifices. For its greatest toll of dead was among its most experienced southern political and military cadres, both urban and rural (Kolko 1985, 327).

As this quote suggests, the losses among the Vietcong were particularly pronounced because many clandestine operatives surfaced in the belief that a general uprising would follow the offensive. Furthermore, those who were not killed during the battles were identified and targeted by the US and ARVN forces after Tet (Summers 1984, 137; Sorely 1999, 94).

Despite the fact that most US engagements were successful, there were a number of tactical weaknesses exploited by communist forces. First, the US fought in large units, often at the battalion or division level, and frequently engaged in preparatory fire by artillery and aircraft prior to beginning an operation. This alerted communist forces to US plans, preventing them from gaining the tactical initiative and enabling the enemy to evade US forces (Lewey 1978, 60). A second problem was that the communist forces adapted their tactics to minimize the effects of US firepower. In particular, they engaged in close combat so that the US could not employ their artillery and airpower without risking friendly casualties (Kolko 1985, 185; Karnow 1983, 477; Krepinevich 1986, 201).

There were bigger problems at the operational and strategic levels, especially during Westmoreland’s tenure as commander of Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). The military strategy adopted by Westmoreland during the initial years of the War was attrition. The goal was to destroy the enemy’s forces—killing high numbers of VC and NVA fighters, in the hope that the Communist Party in North Vietnam would
give up its quest to unify Vietnam under a communist umbrella. The primary means of achieving this was search and destroy missions, in which US and ARVN units, usually operating at the battalion level, would search out the communist main force units and then “pile on as many troops as were available, supported by close air support, artillery, and even B-52 strikes, to kill as many of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese as possible” (Nagl 2002, 54).

Using search and destroy missions to attrite the enemy was problematic for a number of reasons. First, the concept of attrition was fundamentally flawed and reflected an underestimation of the enemy’s resolve. The enemy could replace losses, even if those losses were very high. Every year 200,000 additional North Vietnamese became eligible for the draft (Hess 2009, 90). Westmoreland estimated that in 1967 the communists could infiltrate 8,400 soldiers from North Vietnam and recruit 3,500 new guerrillas in South Vietnam every month (Lewey 1978, 84). This reserve of manpower and the willingness of the North Vietnamese to suffer high levels of casualties made it very unlikely that an attrition strategy would succeed. As General Vo Nguyen Giap famously stated, “You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours. But even at those odds, you will lose and I will win” (Karnow 1983, 549).

Because the communists did not have to defend any territory and because they were more familiar with the terrain, they were able to decide when and where actual engagements would be fought. One of the strategic goals of the communists was to keep US forces dispersed throughout the countryside and away from population centers. Because the US sent its large battalions out “searching” for the enemy, the communists could lead the US to terrain that was both favorable to the NVA and strategically unimportant so that tactical losses would not have a detrimental effect on their overall war effort (Kolko 1985, 183; Lewey 1978, 67). This left the population centers vulnerable to insurgent activities as the VC and NVA main units led “the Army on a wild goose
chase inland drawing MACV’s maneuver battalions away from the people they were purportedly protecting” (Krepinevich 1986, 180).

In addition to enabling the enemy to select the location of most battles, the search and destroy mission concept yielded the initiative to the enemy because the communist forces could choose when to engage and disengage. A 1967 assessment of the war prepared for McNamara emphasized this weakness. The analysis stated:

The VC/NVA started shooting in over 90% of the company sized fights. Over 80% began with a well-organized enemy attack. Since their losses rise and fall with their choice of whether or not to fight, they can probably hold their losses to about 2,000 a week regardless of our force levels (Lewey 1978, 83).

This problem was compounded by the fact that America’s emphasis on high technology and large formations required the US to develop a sophisticated logistics network and long supply chains. This pinned down forces that were needed to defend US bases and logistics outposts, while providing communist forces with additional opportunities to take the initiative by attacking these facilities (Lewey 1978, 175).

The biggest problem with search and destroy missions was that US military victories did not have a lasting effect because US forces did not remain in the area after the communists had been defeated. The enemy often disengaged, waited for the US to leave, and then reoccupied the territory. Operation Thayer, described above, was launched to expel communist forces from Binh Dinh Province only one year after Operation Masher had successfully “driven the enemy from the coastal plain” (Nagl 2002, 155). The US had left the province shortly after the conclusion of Masher, assuming that, having won the battle, the South Vietnamese would establish a functioning government in the region. This was not the case, and the enemy they had just defeated filled the power vacuum left by the United States in the aftermath of Masher.

The US military also tried to use conventional forces to interdict enemy supplies. Interdiction involved air and ground components. Ground forces were used to detect and destroy enemy base camps. Although the US was often successful in destroying
enemy supplies and fortifications, the long-term effectiveness of these operations was limited by the fact that the US did not normally remain in the area after completing the operation. For example, in Operation Cedar Falls, US forces confiscated large quantities of munitions, uniforms, documents, and food. Communist bunkers and a large network of underground tunnels were destroyed, but the VC forces began to rebuild just a few weeks after the successful conclusion of the mission (Lewey 1978, 64-67; Krepinevich 1986, 190-192). Although the destruction of the enemy’s material resources probably damaged its ability to fight in the short term, the long-term effects were more ephemeral.

The air interdiction campaign focused on preventing the North from sending resources to the South. Although this campaign was effective tactically—the US Air Force destroyed a large amount of material—tactical success did not translate into strategic effectiveness. The primary problem was that most of the war was supplied from within the South, so bombing the North was not particularly effective. In addition, while infiltration via the DMZ was part of the logistical system, the Communists primarily used a system of trails in Cambodia and Laos to move goods to the South. Thus, focusing on movement across the DMZ could only have a limited impact. Strategic interdiction, which attempted to cripple the war making capacity of the North Vietnamese, was unsuccessful because a large percentage of their war material came from China and the Soviet Union (Pape 1996, chapter 6; Lewey 1978, 381-385 and 394; Kolko 1985, 186-190; Hess 2009, 86).

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6 Air power was also employed to punish the enemy by going after the North’s industrial infrastructure in the hope that the pain inflicted on their society would destroy their will to fight. This strategy was ineffective because the North was highly resolved and because it was an agricultural society that was not vulnerable to strategic bombing. In addition, the North Vietnamese developed numerous countermeasures that could limit the pain their population had to endure. This strategy may have even been counterproductive because in many areas the heavy bombing stoked North Vietnamese nationalism (Pape 1996, chapter 6; Lewey 1978, 394; Karon 1983, 473).

7 Kolko (1985) estimated that nearly 70% of war supplies came from the South (190).
Many of the flaws in these operational concepts were solved in the aftermath of the Tet offensive when General Creighton Abrams took command of MACV. The most important change that Abrams made was his abandonment of search and destroy missions. Rather than using the Army and Marines to search for the communist main forces, they were used to provide a defensive perimeter around population centers. While this may have enabled communist forces to better control the timing of attacks, it ensured that they had to engage US forces if they wanted access to the population. This enabled the US to pick the location of the attacks and prevented US forces from fighting for strategically irrelevant ground. Abrams also directed the Army to use small units to patrol and search for the enemy within the defensive perimeter. When communist forces penetrated the perimeter, these small units would engage them and call in larger units to aid in the fighting.

As a result of these changes, the mini Tet offensives, launched in the spring and summer of 1968, were much less effective at penetrating the cities than the initial offensive had been. Out of the 27 communist battalions that were launched in the May offensive, only nine made it into the cities and these nine were defeated within a week (Sorely 1999, 24). During the third offensive, launched in August of 1968, no enemy ground forces were able to penetrate the cities. Instead the communist forces had to rely on mortar and rocket attacks, and even these petered out in a number of weeks (Sorely 1999, chapter 2-3).

Another major improvement in US conventional operations was the adoption of a clear and hold strategy, which ensured that once the US military or ARVN had routed communist forces from an area, residual forces were left behind to prevent the enemy from re-infiltrating. Thus, tactical victories could have long-term effects. One example of this new concept was the battle in the A Shau Valley in 1969. The A Shau Valley was a major communist staging area where supplies sent down the Ho Chi Min Trail were stored in preparation for future enemy offensives. The ten day operation was successful,
although costly. The US captured large amounts of enemy supplies and forced the enemy to abandon its fortified locations. Although the tactics used in the operation were similar to early operations—and they were successful—the key difference was that the US remained in the A Shau valley until 1972 when all US forces were withdrawn from Vietnam. Thus, unlike earlier operations, the tactical success yielded a long-term benefit of preventing the enemy from using the valley to stage major attacks (Sorely 1999, 140-141).

Abrams’s interdiction campaign was also more successful than early interdiction efforts. The increased efficacy of these operations was a function of two things: change in the force structure and strategy of the communists, and a willingness to go after communist sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia. Because the VC lost so many men during the Tet offensive and the accelerated pacification program launched in its aftermath, communist forces relied much more heavily on personnel and material from the North, which made the communist war effort more vulnerable to interdiction. Additionally, the communists began to emphasize conventional offensives due to the weakness of the VC guerrillas. These conventional battles required more material resources, which further increased the communists’ vulnerability to interdiction efforts.\(^8\)

In 1970 Nixon authorized operations in Cambodia and in 1971 the South Vietnamese, with US air and logistical support, launched similar operations in Laos. Although these operations did not eliminate all enemy supplies, they greatly reduced the material available to the VC. The CIA estimated that 9,000 out of 67,000 tons of supplies reached South Vietnam in 1971, merely 14\% of input compared to 40\% the year before (Sorely 1999, 262). This reduction in supply had the desired strategic effect: it reduced communist operations in the South. The CIA estimated that after the Cambodian and Laotian operations, “large scale enemy operations in South Vietnam for

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\(^8\) For a discussion of the increased efficacy of air interdiction, particularly the Linebacker campaigns, see Pape (1996, chapter 6) and Lewey (1978, 410-411).
the remainder of 1971 were probably impossible . . . Hanoi would have to undertake a major resupply campaign before any offensive could be launched” (Sorely 1999, 262).

As predicted, there were no spring offensives in 1970 or 1971.

Overall, the US demonstrated a high ability to prosecute conventional tactics in engagements with North Vietnamese and Vietcong main force units. The loss exchange ratio in most battles provides evidence of their tactical skill. Even given the deficiencies of search and destroy and attrition in the early years, the number of VC and NVA main unit attacks declined from 9.7 a month in 1965 to 1.3 per month in 1966. While flawed, these operations were still successful at damaging the conventional enemy. After the US corrected the main flaws in its operational concepts, it became even more lethal against main force units. Importantly, that lethality had long-term effects. The success of the US is evidenced by the fact that it took the North Vietnamese more than two years to rebuild their military after the US withdrew in 1973.

**Skill: Counterinsurgency and Guerrilla War**

During the early years of the Vietnam War, the US military attempted to deal with the threat posed by the Vietcong guerrillas in much the same way that it dealt with the threat posed by NVA and VC main units. It tried to kill as many guerrillas as possible. Two primary strategies were employed to rid guerrillas from infiltrated hamlets and villages: cordon and search operations and the creation of free-fire zones. Both of these strategies were problematic.

In cordon and search operations, South Vietnamese hamlets and villages suspected of providing a safe haven for VC were searched for guerrillas. Those who were found were captured or killed if they resisted arrest. These operations had very little lasting effect on any given village because no one remained in the villages to ensure that the communists did not re-infiltrate once US forces had left (Lewey 1978, 70). This made it unlikely that the village people would cooperate with US forces in identifying
VC operatives in the first place. There was no long-term incentive to work with the US and in many cases there was a disincentive because villagers who cooperated would be punished by the VC after the US had left (Lewey 1978, 88). The way these operations were conducted also alienated villagers. Once US forces had completed their search, “the villagers would be turned loose. Their homes had been wrecked, their chickens killed, their rice confiscated—and if they weren’t pro Vietcong before we [the Americans] got there, they sure as hell were by the time we left” (Karnow 1983, 482).

The US also used conventional firepower in the form or artillery and aerial bombing to attack villages thought to be VC safe havens. This tactic was used in two circumstances: first, when US forces received fire from a village and second, after the US had created a free-fire area by evacuating civilians. Retaliation was problematic because the VC were intermingled with civilian villagers, who often bore the brunt of US firepower. Free-fire zones created their own problems both because they were never entirely free of civilians and because the prior evacuations warned the VC that the US was about to launch an operation (Krepenevich 1986, 81). More generally, the indiscriminate use of firepower alienated the population (Nagl 2002, Krepenevich 1986). Furthermore, the Vietcong used the American tendency to rely on indiscriminate retaliatory fire to their advantage. They often fired at US forces from the safety of villages in order to provoke a massive response that they could use for propaganda purposes (Lewey 1978, 50 and 102). This tactic worked because villagers normally blamed the US and ARVN for the destruction of their homes and the deaths of their neighbors (Krepenevich 1986, 199).

In addition, the US failed to provide adequate security for the population, which enabled the Vietcong to coerce villagers into providing logistical and material support to
the communists (Lewey 1978, 63 and 86). The relegation of population security was problematic because most Vietnamese were primarily “concerned with their personal survival . . . The need for the majority of peasants to decide whom to support presented itself less often than the daily need to choose ways of surviving” (Kolko 1985, 136). Because the Vietcong was a constant presence in many villages and maintained its ability to punish peasants who defected, the failure of the US and the South Vietnamese government to protect the people ensured that most would, at the very least, passively support the communists.

In terms of aiding the South Vietnamese government in its attempt to gain the allegiance of the people, the US effort was inadequate. A number of civic action programs were attempted. The US built roads, schools, and hospitals. They helped fund the Revolutionary Development Program, Agrovilles, and Land Development Centers. However, these efforts were not successful at winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people for a number of reasons. First, as alluded to earlier, because the allegiance of the peasants was primarily a function of a basic survival calculus and no one provided for security, they had to at least passively support the VC to survive (Krepinevich 1986, 216). A second problem with the civic action programs was that they did not address the fundamental issue of land reform, which was the issue that provided the VC with the most political leverage. The VC instituted de facto land reform in the areas they controlled, redistributing land from the wealthy landowners who had

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9 There were areas of the country in which US military forces adopted a counterinsurgency strategy that focused on population security, but those tactics were not adopted more widely despite their success. In the first corps tactical zone (I CTZ), US marines formed Combined Action Platoons (CAPs). They worked with the local paramilitary Popular Forces to provide population security, conducted small unit patrols around the villages, set ambushes to disrupt guerrilla activities, and instituted a number of civic action programs. Importantly, they maintained a long-term presence in the village, enabling them to collect accurate intelligence on the VC infrastructure (Krepenevich 1986, 173). As a result, the security in Marine run areas of I CTZ was much higher than in the rest of the country. The MACV security score for CAP hamlets was nearly double the security score of the average hamlet (Lewey 1978, 117; Krepinevich 1986, 174). A 1967 survey of America’s strategy in Vietnam found that the number of VC controlled villages had increased everywhere except for the area of the I CTZ run by the Marines. The report noted that CAPs were “the only successful American project of any kind whatsoever in Vietnam” (Nagl 2002, 157). However, the CAP concept was not adopted by other units because it was seen as unduly defensive (Krepinevich 1986, 175).
either abandoned their land or had been coerced into giving it away by the VC. The ability of the peasants to retain their land was thus a function of whether the VC retained its political power in the region (Kolko 1985, 130). Without adopting land reform itself, it was very difficult for the South Vietnamese government to compete politically with the VC. The success of the civic action programs was also hampered by corruption within the South Vietnamese government at national and local levels (Kolko 1985, chapter 18). All of these factors, combined with the damaging effects of cordon and search and the use of indiscriminate fire power, made it very unlikely that the hearts and minds campaign would win over the population.

Thus, the American counterinsurgency strategy was not successful during the early years of the Vietnam War. Although main force attacks decreased after the introduction of US troops, small scale enemy attacks on the population, the ARVN, and US troop installations increased by 150% from 1965-1966 (Krepenevich 1986, 188). While the US focused on the conventional war, “chasing the enemy in fruitless attempts to drive up insurgent casualties, it had not provided a shield for pacification, as Westmoreland contended, but had actually left the population exposed to the guerrillas” (Krepenevich 1986, 188). McNamara commented on the decline in security in 1966:

> Compared to two or four years ago, enemy full time regional forces and part time guerilla forces are larger; attacks, terrorism and sabotage have increased in scope and intensity . . . the VC political infrastructure thrives in most of the country . . . full security exists nowhere, not even behind US Marines lines and in Saigon (quoted Lewey 1978, 78).

The US began taking steps to improve its counterinsurgency operations as early as 1967, but a major shift in US strategy did not occur until mid-1968 when General Abrams took command of MACV and instituted an accelerated pacification campaign, correcting many of the flaws in its previous strategy. The US began operating in smaller units, patrolling the area around the cities and villages to prevent VC movement near the population centers. More VC were killed at lower cost to US and South Vietnamese forces in these small unit engagements than had been in the larger conventional battles.
of earlier years. Additionally, because US troops operated close to the villages and cities, it made it much more difficult for surviving guerrillas to operate.

The most important shift in US policy with regards to anti-guerrilla activity was the adoption of the Phung Hoang, or the Phoenix program, which was an intelligence operation designed to destroy the Vietcong infrastructure by capturing both political and military operatives (Lewey 1978, Moyar 1997). The Phoenix program was successful in neutralizing many lower level Vietcong and this had a profound impact on the communist movement in the South. The dismantling of lower level cadres not only neutralized specific operatives but also led to a “general exhaustion and lowering of morale that began to permeate the local NLF [VC] forces. With these came the declining willingness of peasants to take so many risks to help, let alone to volunteer their children to fight” (Kolko 1985, 397). Communist forces were keenly aware of the danger that Phoenix posed to the Vietcong. North Vietnamese General Tran Do characterized the program as “extremely destructive” (Karnow 1983, 617). Vietcong leader Nguyen Thi Dihn admitted, “We never feared a division of troops, but the infiltration of a couple guys [by Phoenix] into our ranks created tremendous difficulties for us” (Karnow 1983, 617). There were problems with the Phoenix Program—local corruption made it possible for some operatives to buy their way out of jail time—but the program was much more successful than past efforts had been at dismantling the Vietcong infrastructure (Karnow 1983, Krepenevich 1986, Moyar 1997).

Rather than relegating population security to the margins of US strategy, Abrams made it the centerpiece. He explained that the “strategic thrust” of his one war plan was “to provide meaningful continuing security for the Vietnamese people in expanding areas of increasingly effective civil authority” (Nagl 2002, 171). The primary vehicle used to improve population security was the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) Program, which was instituted prior to Abrams’ assumption of command but was better resourced and expanded during his tenure.
CORDS focused on developing the revolutionary and popular forces (RFs and PFs). These local paramilitary forces had strong ties to the community, which gave them an information advantage that the US and even the ARVN did not possess. The US trained these forces to focus on small unit actions, such as patrol and ambush. Local knowledge combined with these new tactics increased their lethality. Although they were only 2-4% of total South Vietnamese forces they accounted for 12-30% of VC kills (Sorely 1999, 73). These local forces worked with US advisory teams to protect the population and provide security for the civilians from AID, State, and the South Vietnamese Government that ran the civic action programs. These civil-military teams were often very successful at pacifying VC strongholds. The number of security incidents decreased, more villagers began cooperating with the South Vietnamese and US forces, and they were able to capture more VC documents and supplies.

Another major innovation in US population security strategy was the move from search and destroy to clear and hold. Once the US military had cleared a village or Hamlet of VC, they remained in the village to protect the people. They only moved out after local forces had been adequately trained to maintain security in the village. This improved security increased the number of VC defectors. The success rate of the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) Program, designed to co-opt VC operatives, began to climb as soon as the US adopted clear and hold. There were more than 5,000 new defectors in the second half of 1968, with 3,000 in December alone. Lt. General Davidson made the connection between this improvement and clear and hold explicit, explaining, “Our Chieu Hoi rate goes up not as a result of sweeps but as a result of getting in an area and staying in it” (Sorely 1999, 76).

In terms of winning the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese population, the new strategy made it possible for the current civic action programs to make a dent. Because people were not as worried about their personal safety, they could begin to appreciate the positive improvements to their communities. Although the US could not
fully undo the damage that earlier tactics had inflicted by relying too heavily on indiscriminate firepower and depopulation, it was no longer making those problems worse. The US also finally convinced South Vietnam to pursue land reform, the most salient political issue for peasants once basic security had been established. Thieu’s introduction of the “Land to the Tiller” program redistributed the land holdings of large plantation owners to the peasants who actually worked the land. While de-facto redistribution by the VC prior to this policy limited its impact on the livelihood of many peasants, the South Vietnamese adoption of this program empowered peasants to shift their loyalty to the government without worrying that their land would be confiscated as a result of government victory (Sorely 1999, 194).

These changes eventually improved the security situation in South Vietnam. By 1969 sixty three percent of the population was estimated to be living in secure hamlets and 92% living in relatively secure hamlets (Sorely 1999, 167). By 1971 the number of security incidents had fallen dramatically. The country was characterized by bustling marketplaces, the expansion of primary and secondary education to rural areas, and the return of refugees to their homes (Lewey 1978, 170). There was also a reduction in the amount of VC taxes collected and the number of guerrillas they were able to recruit (Sorely 1999, 233). By 1972 the North Vietnamese Main Force Units were almost the only threat to the South Vietnamese government. During the Easter Offensive, Lt Col John Vann commented, “There is very little assistance being provided in I, II, and III Corps by the local forces, and the enemy’s infrastructure plays hardly any role at all” (Sorely 1999, 223).

The Communists in North Vietnam were very aware of what was, for them, a deteriorating situation. A captured North Vietnamese directive written in 1971 detailed the problems the Vietcong faced:

During the past two years the US and puppet focused their efforts on pacifying and encroaching upon rural areas . . . They strengthened puppet forces . . . and established an outpost network and espionage and Peoples Self Defense Force
Organization in many hamlets and villages. . . As a result they caused many difficulties to and inflicted losses on friendly forces (Sorely 1999, 275).

Although improvements to security were felt in most of the country, there were still provinces where the VC retained a political and military presence.\textsuperscript{10} Still, important gains were made in terms of defeating the Vietcong guerrilla movement.\textsuperscript{11}

Initially the US was not very effective at countering the guerrilla threat in South Vietnam. Population security was effectively ignored and decisions at the operational and strategic levels undermined attempts by the South Vietnamese government to win the support and allegiance of the population. However, most of these problems were corrected in the later years of the war after General Abrams took over as commander of MACV. Many argue that these changes were too little too late, but the evidence showed that remarkable progress was made and that the guerrilla threat had subsided in much of the country by the time the US left in 1972. Even though there were still pockets of guerrilla resistance in parts of the country, the ability of the US to conduct a successful counterinsurgency campaign was much improved.

\textbf{US Will: Assessing Cost Tolerance}

The US paid a high price for its intervention in Vietnam. Fifty-eight thousand two hundred and twenty Americans lost their lives during the war and more than one hundred and fifty thousand were wounded (Department of Defense 2009). In terms of monetary costs, the US had to raise $150 billion dollars in additional taxes to pay for the war. Despite the fact that the US was willing to put so many resources into defending its Southeast Asian ally from Communist enemies, the conclusion that was drawn by many was that the US lacked resolve.

\textsuperscript{10} Lewey (1978) identified 10 provinces out of 44 where guerrilla activity and terrorist attacks remained a problem in 1971 (190).

\textsuperscript{11} Some have argued that US success in the latter years of the conflict was due to the residual effects of Westmoreland’s policies and the weakness of the VC after Tet (Kolko 1985). This argument ignores the fact that the Abrams’ strategy enabled the US to take advantage of VC weakness to prevent the reemergence of the guerrilla threat. It is likely, given the fundamental flaws of Westmoreland’s counterinsurgency strategy, the VC would have been able to rebuild to a much greater extent if the US had not changed the way it approached counterinsurgency.
This inference was probably driven by three observations. First, the US failed in its objective of preserving a non-communist South Vietnam, despite the fact that it was militarily effective. In fact, the US began to reduce its war aims in Vietnam after delivering a crushing defeat to NVA and VC forces in repelling the TET offensive. In addition, favorable battlefield conditions existed when the US deescalated and ultimately left Vietnam, suggesting that the US lost the war because it was not willing to stay the course. Despite progress made on the battlefield and in the villages, the US agreed to an asymmetric peace accord, which allowed the North Vietnamese to remain in the South, while the US pulled its remaining troops out of the country.

Second, concern for the public’s cost tolerance seemed to drive the major decisions in Vietnam. The Pentagon Papers explicitly stated that “domestic resource constraints with all of their political and social repercussions, not strategic or tactical military considerations in Vietnam were to dictate American war policy” after the Tet Offensive (Merom 2003). The decline in public support after Tet prompted Johnson’s initial decision to begin drawing down US forces in the country. This is why Tet is often seen as a strategic failure, despite the fact that it was tactically successful. Gary Hess argues that “the domestic reaction to the Tet Offensive limited Johnson’s options. Continuing the war at pre-Tet levels or expanding the war ran considerable political risks” (Hess 2009, 171). Although Johnson decided not to run for reelection, thereby reducing his own political risks, the domestic opposition to the war influenced his decision to set the groundwork for eventual troop withdrawals. The Communist Party in North Vietnam recognized the importance of this shift. Kolko summarizes the North Vietnamese reaction to the domestic repercussions of Tet: “The Johnson administration lost its will, and in warfare that was, as the Revolution saw it, decisive” (Kolko 185, 33).

Nixon’s decision to eventually pull out all US military from Vietnam, despite the fact he only wanted a limited withdrawal and had envisioned leaving a Korea type contingent to enforce the eventual peace agreement, was also driven by domestic
pressures. Merom writes that “domestic protest eventually forced Nixon to pull the troops out of Vietnam down to the last soldier . . . [Public pressure] did not develop because of doubts concerning the attainability of the war objectives but rather because of doubts concerning the morality of the war and, even more so, concerning the necessity to risk one’s life in it” (Merom 2003, 237).

Political considerations concerning the public’s willingness to bear costs in pursuit of US goals in Vietnam also had a direct effect on personnel policies during the war. Johnson decided not to call up the reserves for fear that full mobilization would not be supported by the public and would undermine his Great Society Program domestically. This decision reduced the experience and expertise of those deploying to Vietnam. The 12 month rotation cycle made it difficult for new soldiers to gain adequate experience. This was particularly problematic on the pacification front where local knowledge and contacts took time to develop. Despite the problems with this deployment schedule, it remained US policy because lengthening the tours would have been, as Westmoreland noted, “politically impossible” (Merom 2003, 235). The way the troop drawdown progressed also reflected domestic political imperatives and a heightened sensitivity to costs. The Nixon administration decided to bring home troops depending on how long they had served in Vietnam. This system satisfied the equity concerns of the public while ensuring that the most experienced soldiers left Vietnam first. The system also required the military to dismantle existing units and reorganize new ones made up of the leftover forces. This was highly disruptive to military operations throughout the country (Sorely 1999, 129). In addition, the drawdown needed to happen more quickly than either the President or the military would have preferred because Congress was unwilling to appropriate sufficient funds. This expedited schedule required the South Vietnamese to take on more responsibility in a shorter amount of time than was originally planned (Sorely 1999, 176).
Furthermore, the willingness of the Nixon administration to agree to the terms of the Paris Peace Accords reflected an acknowledgement that the US public was not willing to bear any more costs to achieve a non-communist South Vietnam. The US essentially agreed to unilateral withdrawal, allowing the North Vietnamese to stay in the South, because the US was going to withdraw regardless. As Karnow (1983) writes, “The real pressure on the Nixon administration to reach a settlement in Vietnam came from the American public, which by that time wanted peace at almost any price” (23). The subsequent decisions to defund military activity in the region (including the airpower that Nixon promised would be used if the North Vietnamese violated the accord) and to cut off all economic assistance to South Vietnam also revealed that Congress was not willing to bear additional economic costs to save the US ally.

Although third party states were not privy to the internal deliberations of the Johnson and Nixon administrations, the visibility of the anti-war movement in the US and media coverage of the domestic debate raging in Washington provided ample evidence that both administrations were under severe pressure to limit the costs of the war. In addition, by emphasizing how their actions would limit further casualties, the wartime speeches of both Presidents demonstrated the extent to which concern over the wars costs influenced their decisions.

The anti-war movement in the United States staged numerous demonstrations and protests. Many of these protests involved hundreds of thousands of people and took place in highly visible locales such as the White House, the Pentagon, and the streets of major American cities. For example, on April 15, 1967, more than 400,000 protesters marched from Central Park to the UN, while 100,000 of their compatriots demonstrated on the streets of San Francisco. A few months later, in October of 1967, more than 100,000 people protested on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and later marched on the Pentagon. The National Moratorium Anti-War demonstrations in October of 1969 were the largest of the war. Millions of Americans took the day off of work to participate in
local protests and more than half a million people marched on DC. These protestors chanted slogans and carried signs that reflected their general opposition to the war (“Make Love, Not War”), their disgust with the costs of the war (“Hey, Hey LBJ, How Many Kids have You Killed Today”), their own unwillingness to bear the burden of those costs (“Hell No, We Won’t Go”), and their belief that the US would ultimately lose (“Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Min, the NLF is Going to Win”) (Small et al 1992).

The size of the protests attracted the attention of the media, as did the violence that sometimes accompanied them. In two of the early 1965 protests, people set themselves on fire, emulating the Buddhist Monks in Vietnam who had protested their own government’s policies. In April of 1967, a protest at the University of Berkley deteriorated into a riot that was caught on film and aired on televisions in the US and throughout the world. During the 1968 Democratic National Convention, more than 23,000 police and national guardsmen were called in to contain the demonstrators. The clashes between the police and the protestors were reported on nationwide, as many of the journalists covering the convention got caught up in the violence. Most famously, national guardsmen at Kent State shot four students protesting the bombing of Cambodia in 1971. Their deaths sparked additional protests over both the bombing and the government’s response to the demonstrations.

In addition to covering the protests, the media also reported on the Congressional debate over Vietnam, which often revolved around the projected costs of the war. For example, an editorial published in the New York Times on October 22, 1967 read:

A mood of discontent brought on by the Vietnam War spread over Washington last week . . . The discontent began welling up weeks ago. Perhaps it was the rising casualties in Vietnam, perhaps it was growing distress over the costs of the war . . . Perhaps it was a weariness with a war that seemed to have no end.

The editorial went on to describe how the shifting mood of the public “intensified” the debate on Capitol Hill, which it predicted would eventually force the administration to
halt the bombing of North Vietnam. It claimed, “Political pressures are working on the Administration in forcing reconsideration of its opposition to a bombing halt . . . [despite the fact that] there is little hope within the Administration that a bombing suspension would lead Hanoi to the negotiating table.” In another *New York Times* article published on July 29, 1965, E.W. Kenworthy revealed the importance of political factors in driving Johnson’s decision to forgo calling up the reserves. He attributed the President’s decision to the fact that he “had become increasingly sensitive to the possible political effects of a reserve call up, the assumption by United States forces of the main burden of the fighting, and a big rise in casualties.” It then described Congress’s warm reception of the President’s policy, noting that many congressmen “were beginning to get heavy flak from families that would be affected by a reserve call up.”

There were also reports on how the public’s disaffection with the war had prompted Congress to resist the Administration’s policies. John Finney wrote in a *New York Times* article published on October 12, 1969 that:

The signs of political agitation are everywhere—in the rush of Senators and Representatives to introduce resolutions designed to disengage the United States from Vietnam, in the unsubtle competition for time before the television cameras to explain these proposals, in plans for an unusual all night vigil of the House of Representatives on Oct 14 as a symbolic protest against the war, in a new round of hearings set by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as well as in the pronouncedly defensive reaction of the White House to all this rash of activity.

The article attributed these Congressional actions to the national moratorium anti-war demonstrations and a public opinion shift “from patience to impatience with the Nixon’s administration’s policy on Vietnam.” Another *New York Times* article, written a few days later on October 19, 1969 by Anthony Hartley, attributed the reassertion of Congress’s oversight responsibilities to the public’s growing “antimilitarism.” These articles are representative of the media coverage of the politics of the war, which emphasized the extent to which public disillusionment with the war constrained policy makers in Washington.
The statements of these policy makers, and particularly Presidents Johnson and Nixon, provided further evidence of the degree to which concerns about the war’s costs drove US decisions during Vietnam. In Johnson’s 1968 withdrawal speech, he emphasizes the cost of continued conflict before announcing his offer to undergo a unilateral ceasefire:

Tragically, this is also clear: Many men—on both sides of the struggle—will be lost. A nation that has already suffered 20 years of warfare will suffer once again. Armies on both sides will take new casualties. And the war will go on. There is no need for this to be so. There is no need to delay the talks that could bring an end to this long and this bloody war (Johnson, Address to the Nation Announcing Steps to Limit the War in Vietnam, 1968).

He explains that purpose of the ceasefire is “to bring about a reduction in the level of violence that now exists. It is to save the lives of brave men—and to save the lives of innocent women and children” (Johnson, Address to the Nation Announcing Steps to Limit the War in Vietnam, 1968). He then comments on the divisiveness that has plagued the country, noting that it jeopardizes “the progress of the American people and the hope and the prospect of peace for all people.” He warns Americans to “guard against divisiveness” and announces that he will not seek reelection in order to prevent the presidency from becoming “involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year.” Two important inferences can be made from this speech. First: the costs of the war prompted Johnson to deescalate the conflict. Second, the unpopularity of the war led him to take the unprecedented step of not running for a second term.

Similar inferences about concerns over the costs of the war can be drawn from Johnson’s October announcement about the bombing halt. After announcing his decision, he tells the public, “The Joint Chiefs of Staff, all military men, have assured me . . . that in their military judgment this action should be taken now, and this action would not result in any increase in American casualties.” He goes onto explain, “I believe that my responsibilities to the brave men—our men—who bear the burden of battle in South Vietnam tonight, and my duty to seek an honorable settlement of the war, required me to recognize and required me to act without delay. I have acted
tonight” (Johnson, Address to the Nation Announcing His Decision to Halt the Bombing of North Vietnam, 1968).

Most of President Nixon’s speeches are more circumspect. He acknowledges the growing opposition to the war and the public’s concerns about the costs, but he argues that remaining committed to Vietnam is necessary and will lead to fewer lives lost for the sake of peace. His “Silent Majority” speech is indicative of his style. He states, “I want to end the war to save the lives of those brave young men in Vietnam. But I want to end it in a way which will increase the chance that their younger brothers and their sons will not have to fight in some future Vietnam someplace in the world.” Nixon then emphasizes how his policy of Vietnamization has decreased America’s footprint in Vietnam and has led to fewer casualties:

After 5 years of Americans going into Vietnam, we are finally bringing American men home. By December 15, over 60,000 men will have been withdrawn from South Vietnam, including 20 percent of all of our combat forces . . . Most important--United States casualties have declined during the last 2 months to the lowest point in 3 years (Nixon 1969).

Like Johnson’s, Nixon’s speeches imply that the desire to minimize casualties is a driving factor in his wartime decisions. Even escalatory actions are justified by referring the effect they will have on US casualties. In April 1970, he justified attacking Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia by arguing that “the lives of Americans remaining in Vietnam after our next withdrawal of 150,000 would be gravely threatened” if no action was taken. He then specified the reasons behind his decision:

A majority of the American people, a majority of you listening to me, are for the withdrawal of our forces from Vietnam. The action I have taken tonight is indispensable for the continuing success of that withdrawal program. A majority of the American people want to end this war rather than to have it drag on interminably. The action I have taken tonight will serve that purpose. A majority of the American people want to keep the casualties of our brave men in Vietnam at an absolute minimum. The action I take tonight is essential if we are to accomplish that goal. We take this action not for the purpose of expanding the war into Cambodia but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam (Nixon 1970).

He uses similar logic to justify accelerating of the rate of troop withdrawals in 1971. He states, “One American dying in combat is one too many . . . Every action taken by this
Administration, every decision made, has . . . reduced American involvement. They have drastically reduced our casualties” (Nixon 1971).

Although these speeches were primarily written for domestic consumption, the emphasis that both presidents placed on the war’s costs provided evidence to the intentional community, and even to Hanoi, that concerns about the desire to avoid costs was of paramount importance. This combined with the media coverage of the domestic debate and the visibility of the protest movement provided the international community with ample evidence of the extent to which America’s cost tolerance limited its ability to successfully prosecute the war.

Finally, inferences of weak US resolve were probably driven by the fact that important figures in the United States and North Vietnam viewed the lack of public support as a key American weakness. The communist strategy in North Vietnam specifically targeted the public’s willingness to stomach the costs of war. General Giap explained that “we were not strong enough to drive a half million American troops out of Vietnam, but that wasn’t our aim. We sought to break the will of the American government to continue the conflict” (Karnow 1983, 20). Col Bui Tin elaborated on how the American domestic scene influenced decision making in the NVA: “Everyday our leadership would listen to world news over the radio at 9am to follow the growth of the American antiwar movement. Visits to Hanoi by people like Jane Fonda and former Attorney General Ramsey Clark and ministers gave us confidence that we should hold on in the face of battlefield reverses” (Sorely 1999, 93). Despite the military failure of the 1969 spring offensive, a captured enemy document revealed that the offensive was considered a “significant success” because “it boosted the anti-war movement in the US, which seriously affected the American plan of aggression” (quoted in Sorely 1999, 114). Karnow describes the war as a “race between, on the one hand, the development of a viable South Vietnam, and, on the other, a gradual loss in public support, or even tolerance, for the war among Americans at home. The Communists were betting that
America’s patience would wear thin” (Karnow 1983, 519). In the end, their bet turned out to be correct.

Military and civilian leaders in the US also saw public tolerance for the war as limiting American options. McGeorge Bundy’s assessment after visiting Vietnam in 1965 was that America’s greatest weakness was “a widespread belief that we do not have the will and force and patience and determination to take the necessary action and stay the course” (Karnow 1983, 428). In 1967, he reaffirmed this point noting that “the war’s principal battleground was in domestic opinion” (Merom 2003, 235). After the Tet Offensive, Johnson acknowledged that “the weakest chink in our armor is American public opinion. Our people won’t stand firm in the face of heavy losses, and they can bring down the government” (Karnow 1983, 495). In 1970, Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor noted that America’s ability to remain in Vietnam was not a function of the military situation on the ground. It was driven “in large measure by two things: One our casualty rates and secondly our costs” (Sorely 1999, 214). Abrams highlighted the link between communist operations and American public opinion in explaining why the North Vietnamese launched a conventional offensive in the spring of 1971 despite being in an inferior position:

You go to the weakest thing in the whole set up, the will of the American people and the will of the American government. And if they can capture Bet Het or Knotum City for a week, and maybe Cam Lo, and threaten Quang Tri, the press and will say Vietnamization has failed. And the last few remaining members of Congress who support continuing economic assistance would have lost their faith. So I think that is what it [the Easter Offensive] is aimed at (Sorely 1999, 352).

Thus, both US and Vietnamese observers identified the American public’s will as decisive in determining the outcome of the war.

In the end, America’s defeat in Vietnam was largely attributed to a lack of will that was primarily driven by the public’s cost tolerance threshold being exceeded. South Vietnam’s ambassador to the US warned, “Small nations must be wary of the Americans, since US policies shift quickly as domestic politics and public opinion
change” (Karnow 1983, 25). Public disillusionment with the war “gradually eroded the resolve of the administration and strengthened the morale of the Vietnamese Communists, whose leaders closely followed developments on the American scene. The war was eventually lost because it became unsustainable at home” (Merom 2003, 236). Thus, despite the fact that America suffered very large human and economic costs in pursuit of its war aims in Vietnam, the failure of the US to achieve those aims was not ascribed to a lack of military effectiveness but rather to lack of political will.

**Was US Defeat in Vietnam Unexpected?**

The Vietnam War pitted the wealthiest and most militarily powerful country in the world against a poor, third world country that had just gained independence. In 1965, the US had a population of almost 200 million, a gross domestic product of 154 billion dollars, and it spent more than $8 billion dollars on defense (Government Printing Office 2004).12 North Vietnam had a population of less than 40 million, a GDP of less than 2 billion (Groningen Growth and Development Center 2010)13, and it spent less than $500,000 a year on defense (Singer et al 1978). Judging by its superiority in material resources, the United States should have won. It had more men, more money, and more sophisticated technology than its beleaguered foe. Thus, if expectations are primarily informed by relative power considerations, then the North Vietnamese victory over the US would be considered unexpected. The fact that postwar commentary often emphasized the power disparity between the belligerents supports this contention. Brown (1991) argues that “the defeat of the US in Vietnam gave hear to revolutionary movements thoughout the world. It illustrated that the weak could defeat the mighty” (276). McCann (2006) claims that the US inability “to fight a ‘fourth rate’ North Vietnamese military confirmed Mao’s ‘paper tiger’ charge” (148).

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12 GDP and military spending are in 1965 dollars.
13 The GGDC reports GDP in 1990 dollars. I converted these figures into 1965 dollars to make them comparable to the US figures.
Evaluating the actual expectations of the international community is difficult because the internal military and political assessments that third party states conducted on the likely outcome of the war have not been published. I have to rely primarily on public statements made by the United States’ and North Vietnam’s allies, both of which have incentives to misrepresent their true beliefs about the likely outcome of the war. The wartime records of the US and Vietnam also contain some references to statements these allies made in private, but these references are scarce and may also suffer from strategic misrepresentation. Despite these weaknesses, an examination of these statements reveals that the expected outcome of the Vietnam War was more complicated than a simple balance of power analysis would suggest.

Some states believed that the US could defeat North Vietnam but others had serious reservations. Most of the United States’ allies were “doubtful that even the introduction of major American fighting forces would bring long term success” (Logevall 2003, 175-176). They were not necessarily worried about the capacity of the US military to stabilize the battlefield, but they were concerned about the US ability to bolster the Saigon government (Logevall 2003, 94 and 176). France was the most outspoken of the US allies, having recently lost its own war in Indochina (Gaiduk 1996, 77; Logevall 2003, 180). Charles de Gaulle argued, “The United States cannot win this war. No matter how far they push it in the future, they will lose it” (quoted in Olson and Roberts 1991, 136). The British were also skeptical of the US involvement in Vietnam, although their warnings and criticism were more muted than their French counterparts. They doubted whether Rolling Thunder and the subsequent commitment of troops would be successful (Logevall 2003, 181-182). The prime minister “argued that the war was a dead end and that Johnson should stop the bombing and seek a negotiated settlement” (Olson and Roberts 1991, 136). Canada sided with the European allies. Its foreign minister urged the US to agree to a political settlement rather than pursue “a costly and unwinnable war” (quoted in Logevall 2003, 186). Worried about the fragility
of the Saigon regime, Japan “pointed to the futility of what Washington sought to achieve. Much as France had failed earlier, the United States would fail now” (Logevall 2003, 189-190).

However, some US allies were more optimistic, especially Australia. Rather than focusing on the French experience at Dien Bien Phu, they compared the US position in Vietnam to Malaya, “where Australian troops had helped to defeat the Communist Bandits” (Edwards 2003, 224). They argued that the US could win at a reasonable cost and they were willing to help the US prevent a communist takeover. The Germans also thought it might be possible for the US to reverse communist gains, but only with a massive commitment of troops (Logevall 2003, 184).

Unsurprisingly, the public statements of the DRV’s main allies—China and the Soviet Union—emphasized the likelihood of American defeat. In 1965, Mao publicly predicted that “the United States would accept defeat in Vietnam within two years” (quoted in Papp 1981, 48). Chinese General Lin Pao argued that “the more the US escalated the war to avoid defeat, ‘the heavier will be its fall and the more disastrous its defeat.’ This defeat would have the same effect as a chain reaction, with other ‘rural’ parts of the world seeing that ‘US imperialism can be defeated,’ and ‘what the Vietnamese people can do, [others] can do too’” (quoted in Papp 1981, 77). The Soviets issued a statement 10 days after Rolling Thunder began, claiming that “American aggression . . . will invariably bring increasing rebuff and will ultimately suffer a disgraceful defeat” (quoted in Papp 1981, 67).

However, in Soviet deliberations with North Vietnam, they were less optimistic. In 1965, Kosygin met with Hanoi to urge them not to take “actions which might provoke US retaliation,” arguing that they should “not underestimate US determination to prevent a Communist victory in the South” (Gaiduk 1996, 28). Westad (2005) argues that at the onset of the war “neither Moscow nor Beijing thought that Hanoi could win militarily against the Americans” (185). It was not until late 1966 that they began to
update “their estimates of North Vietnam’s endurance, the Communist’s fighting abilities in the South, and the Johnson administration’s political ability to increase the intensity of US warfare” (Westad 2005, 189).

So the historical evidence is mixed with regards to whether the US defeat in Vietnam was expected or unexpected. On the one hand, many US allies doubted whether the US could succeed in Indochina, but these statements seem driven, in part, by motivated bias. These same allies doubted the strategic importance of Southeast Asia. Logevall (2003) presents the strongest evidence about European skepticism but he also acknowledges that many of these “allied leaders also possessed doubts that the outcome of the war really mattered to western security” (93). Britain, France, and Canada voiced doubts about US prospects for victory, but they had reason to do so. They did not think it was an important theater in the Cold War, and they did not want the US to get involved. On the other hand, Australia was concerned about the spread of communism in Asia and wanted to ensure that the US remained actively involved in the region. Thus, they argued that a US intervention could succeed. The expectations of US adversaries are also difficult to pinpoint. Publicly they warn the US that they will fail at the hands of communist revolutionaries, but in private they are more pessimistic about Hanoi’s prospects for victory.

I cannot definitely say that the US defeat in Vietnam was unexpected, especially given the French defeat a decade earlier and the hesitations voiced by some of the United States’ allies. However, the power asymmetry between the US and the DRV, as well as the private doubts voiced by Soviet and Chinese authorities to leaders in Hanoi prior to the escalation decisions of 1965, suggests that US failure in Vietnam may have had the potential to alter the beliefs of at least a few of America’s adversaries. Thus, the information revealed during the war about the cost tolerance of the United States could have reputational consequences for these actors.
The Vietnam War, Contextual Expectations Theory, and the Predicted Reputational Consequences of the War

The US intervened in Vietnam in part to enhance the credibility of its promise to protect its allies from Communist aggression. However, the US ultimately failed to stop the spread of Communism to South Vietnam. What were the international consequences of this failure?

Contextual Expectations Theory posits that the reputational consequences of war outcomes are a function of the type of information generated during the war. In this case, the war revealed that the US military was effective at fighting both conventional and guerrilla wars, although competency in the latter did not develop until the second half of the war. More importantly, the war revealed that the American public’s cost tolerance had the potential to limit the ability of the US to wield its military power. Although the US demonstrated resolve in its initial decision to get involved in Vietnam, its failure to accomplish its mission despite the progress it had made on both the conventional battlefield and in the pacification campaign demonstrated that it was not resolved enough. Declining public support for the war, highly visible public protests, and wartime decisions that appeared to be driven by domestic political concerns about the war’s costs led third party states to conclude that America’s Achilles’ heel was the public’s sensitivity to casualties. This information about America’s cost tolerance and its ultimate failure in Vietnam could be considered unexpected if one focuses on the relative military capabilities of the belligerents and on the private statements some US adversaries made to Hanoi prior to escalation.

Thus, the Vietnam War revealed new information about the United States’ willingness to suffer costs. Contextual Expectations Theory predicts that information about will should influence the decision calculus of those challengers whose dispute involves issues that are similar to the issues over which the previous war was fought. The Vietnam War was primarily fought to stop the spread of communism in Asia. As
discussed above, the administration believed that North Vietnamese conquest of South Vietnam would enhance Red China’s influence in the region and ultimately result in a number of Southeast Asian states falling to communism. The war was fought to prevent these eventualities. The United States fought two enemies during the war: the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese. Their struggle against the former was framed in terms of preserving the freedom of the South Vietnamese government, their struggle against the latter in terms of protecting the independence of that government. Thus, information about the United States’ cost tolerance in Vietnam should be relevant to both state and non-state actors seeking to spread communism, either through conquest or internal subversion. That information should also be relevant to state actors, who like the North Vietnamese, provide material support to communist insurgencies.

Contextual Expectations Theory also predicts that the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance should be more pronounced when challengers are weaker. Thus, although information about the United States’ willingness to suffer costs may have influenced the behavior of its peer competitor, the Soviet Union, it should have a greater affect on smaller countries that did not have the ability to compete with the United States militarily. These predictions are tested with time series methods later in this chapter and in case studies of the Angolan Crisis and the October War in chapters 7 and 8.

**The Vietnam War and the Validity of Quantitative Variables**

Before testing the predictions of CET, I want to examine what the Vietnam War reveals about the validity of the proxy variables used in the quantitative tests in chapters 2 and 3, particularly the indicators of skill, will, and prior expectations. In those chapters I used the loss exchange ratio to measure skill, casualties to measure will, and a model that relied heavily on the balance of power to measure expectations. Unlike the Winter
War, the Vietnam case suggests that there are some problems with these indicators, especially the casualties variable.

**Skill and Loss Exchange Ratios**

As expected, the Vietnam War reveals that LERs are a decent indicator of conventional skill but are an inadequate representation of counterinsurgency skill. In the dataset, the US in Vietnam is assigned an LER of 2.241. This is probably an underestimation of the conventional skill of the US military because it is pooled with the skill of the ARVN, who tended to suffer more casualties and kill fewer enemy forces than their American allies. In addition, it does not include Vietcong killed by either army, and thus underestimates the number of enemy killed.

In most of the conventional battles, the US was able to achieve LERs of around 6:1. Using the most conservative estimates of North Vietnamese casualties, the US LER in Operation Starlight was 6:1, Operation Silver Bayonette 3:1, Operation Thayer 7:1, Battle of Pleiku 4:1, Battle of Khe San 6:1, and the Tet Offensive 7:1. When higher estimates of the North Vietnamese casualties are used to calculate the ratios, America’s LER is much higher—nearly 10:1 for Operation Silver Bayonette and more than 16:1 for the Tet Offensive.

These numbers are good approximations of the effectiveness of the United States conventional tactics, which brought heavy firepower to bear on the enemy in combined operations. They also reflect some of the operational flaws that plagued US operations. For example, US reliance on large battalion maneuvers probably lowered the United States LERs for most battles. Reliance on these large units made it harder for the Americans to conceal their movements and easier for the enemy to target US forces, thereby driving their own casualty rates higher. In fact, America’s LER improved during Abram’s tenure as he put more emphasis on small unit patrols and ambushes, which were both easier to conceal and more effective at forcing the enemy to give battle. Thus,
America’s overall LER would have been even higher had it not suffered from some of the operational deficiencies discussed early. However, the LER figures do not capture all of America’s operational weaknesses, especially America’s tendency to leave conquered territory unguarded after the battles were over. These decisions did not degrade battlefield effectiveness, but they limited strategic effectiveness and thus had no effect on the military’s LER. Despite this, America’s LER for the Vietnam War captures most of the strengths and weaknesses of the conventional war, and reflected America’s skill at prosecuting that war.

America’s LERs were not, however, good indications of their skill at counterinsurgency. In the early years of the conflict, their reliance on heavy firepower led to high numbers of Vietcong casualties, which increased their LER. However, as discussed earlier, these tactics alienated the civilian population, increasing the likelihood that they would cooperate with the Vietcong. In addition, they did not enable the US or its allies to exert meaningful control over contested territory. Their high LERs do no reflect that insecurity of the population or the ineffectiveness of their hearts and mind campaigns. The improvements Abram’s made to America’s counterinsurgency efforts, in particular the Phoenix program and his emphasis on population security, proved effective but did little to increase America’s LER. Fewer Vietcong were killed: the Phoenix program focused on imprisoning communist operatives, not killing them, and the CORDS program decreased the number of security incidents which drove American and Vietcong casualties down at the same time.

The problems with using LER as an indicator of skill in counterinsurgency campaigns is not surprising. As mentioned in chapter 2, LER was chosen as an indicator of conventional skill and this chapter’s assessment of America’s performance in Vietnam suggests that it does a fairly good job of capturing conventional skill in this case—particularly at the tactical level. All of the wars included in the analyses in chapter 2 and 3 involve conventional combat. Only 14 involve counterinsurgency operations, and in
most of these conflicts they take a back seat to the conventional battles. Thus, the limitations of the LER variables revealed in this chapter do not undermine the findings of the statistical analysis. However, they do suggest that the findings regarding skill should be applied only to conventional wars.

**Will and Casualties**

This chapter suggests that the casualties variable used in chapter 3 may be problematic. The US suffered a high number of casualties during the conflict: 58,220 killed and more than 150,000 wounded. Despite suffering these casualties, many countries concluded that the US lost in Vietnam because of its sensitivity to the rising costs of war. They arrived at this conclusion because the US descaled the conflict and ultimately withdrew under favorable battlefield conditions and because concerns about costs seemed to drive many of America’s wartime policies. This suggested that the United States had the capabilities to win but chose to end the conflict because of concerns about costs. Thus, my analysis of America’s cost tolerance in the Vietnam War implies that casualties may not be a good indicator of a nation’s willingness to suffer costs. While it’s probably true that nations that give up after suffering few casualties demonstrate a low cost tolerance, it’s not clear what inference can be drawn about those who give up after suffering higher costs. They may remain committed to the war, while simultaneously taking steps to reduce their costs. The way they fight, and the conditions under which they surrender, may be more indicative of their cost tolerance than the number of their soldiers killed in action.

**Expectations and Power**

Balance of power considerations would predict a lopsided victory for the United States. It was wealthier and more populous than North Vietnam and its defense expenditures were nearly 300 times that of its communist enemy. Yet, not everybody assumed the US would win the war. Many of its allies voiced doubts about its ability to
defeat the Vietcong and their North Vietnamese patron. The public statements of its major adversaries, the USSR and China, also emphasized the likelihood of US defeat. As discussed earlier, the reliability of these statements may be suspect given the incentives of both America’s allies and enemies to misrepresent their true beliefs for strategic reasons. Nonetheless, they suggest that the power disparity between North Vietnam and the US did not make the outcome of their conflict a forgone conclusion, the way the disparity between Finland and the Soviet Union did. The reasons for this are unclear. The one factor that was repeatedly given as evidence of the difficulties the US would face in Vietnam by the war’s opponents was France’s defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. If the Vietminh could defeat the French, then perhaps the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese could defeat the Americans. Reliance on the past performance of the combatants to predict the outcome of the war is consistent with what I found in the Winter War, where third party observers used Russia’s performance in Poland and Mongolia to predict a speedy victory over the Finns. This suggests that the model I use to measure expectations in chapters 2 and 3 could be improved by including variables that measure the performance of the combatants in previous wars. More generally, the case suggests that material power may not be the primary means by which third party states arrive at their beliefs about wars’ likely outcomes. This may explain why the explanatory power of the models that control for expectations in chapters 2 and 3 do not outperform the simpler models.

**Time Series Analysis: Did the US Face More Challenges After Its Defeat in Vietnam?**

In the next two chapters I test CET’s predictions about the reputational consequences of the Vietnam War by examining the behavior of the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Egypt during the Angola Crisis and the October War. The case studies enable me to test CET’s predictions using detailed data on challenger behavior. They also allow me to assess the degree to which the causal mechanisms specified by CET explain variations in
that behavior by providing insight into the decision making process of America’s adversaries. However, those findings are not necessarily generalizable across wars or across challengers. Because of this limitation, the case studies are designed to complement the large N analysis conducted in chapter 3.

However, this chapter revealed that the primary explanatory variable used in chapter 3 was problematic and thus the results of that chapter cannot really be used to assess the generalizability of my findings in chapters 7 and 8. To compensate for this, I conduct an additional statistical test of the reputational consequences of the Vietnam War. In particular, I use time series methods to assess whether the number of challenges against the US and its allies rose in the aftermath of Vietnam. If the US defeat in the Vietnam War entailed reputational costs then it should face additional challenges after it withdrew from the conflict. These tests do not trace causality, but they are generalizable across challengers and thus, complement the qualitative tests conducted in chapters 7 and 8.

There is a wealth of anecdotal evidence that the number of challenges initiated against the US and its allies increased after the American withdrawal from Vietnam. Rodman (2002) cites Soviet involvement in Angola, Ethiopia, Yemen, and Afghanistan arguing that “the five years after 1975 were a period in which American credibility collapsed, and this contributed to a time of global instability” (18). Record (2002) claims that “the fall of Indochina in 1975 resulted in a geopolitical catastrophe for the United States—a worldwide Marxist-Leninst revolutionary wave and discernable bandwagoning with the Soviet Union by frightened American allies and neutral countries in the mid-1970s” (439). Westad (2005) explains that “Hanoi’s military and political success against the US . . . created a revolutionary resurgence in Southeast Asia. . . Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines all saw revolutionary upswings led by such groups in the wake of the North Vietnamese offensives” (Westad 2005, 191). However, little systematic work has been done to document whether the pattern of challenges after
Vietnam differed from the pattern of challenges before Vietnam. This section seeks to do that using time series methods.

**Method: Intervention Analysis**

I employ time series intervention analysis to assess whether the number of challenges initiated against the US increased after Vietnam and to test the predictions of Contextual Expectations Theory. I begin by constructing a number of different time series, which count the number of challenges initiated against the US and its allies for every year from 1816 to 2001. Each series differs in either the characteristics of the challenger, the issue in dispute, or the location of the challenge. I begin by analyzing three aggregate series: the total number of militarized disputes initiated against the United States, the total number of militarized disputes initiated against US Allies, and the total number of civil wars initiated against US allies. The latter series is included because non-state challengers may also update their beliefs about combatants in the aftermath of interstate wars. They are relevant because they are generally much weaker than states, and so offer an additional test of the power asymmetry hypothesis. Data on dispute initiation are taken from the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) Dataset (Ghosen et al 2003). Data on US Alliances was taken from the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) Dataset (Leeds et al 2002). Data on civil war initiation are taken from the Correlates of War Intra-State Dataset (Sarkees 2000).

Second, I examine regional time series, which consist of five sets of time series for Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas. Each set includes the three series described above: the number of challenges initiated against the US by states in each region, the number of challenges initiated against US allies in each region, and the number of civil wars initiated against US allies in each region. Data on regional locations is taken from the Correlates of War.

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14 Only countries that were involved in a defensive alliance with the United States were included when the time series was constructed.
I then look at the issue series, which consists of five sets of time series. The first two sets are defined using the characteristics of the challenger. The Communist set measures the number of direct challenges made against the US and its allies by communist countries. The Soviet Allies set focuses on challenges made by the USSR or its allies, as defined by ATOP.\textsuperscript{15} The last three sets are defined using the MID dataset’s coding for revisionist type. The MID dataset codes the “revisionist” aims of the two sides. Specifically, they code whether either side wants to alter the status quo by 1) acquiring the enemy’s territory; 2) forcing the other side to reform its domestic regime; or 3) compelling the other side to modify either their foreign or domestic policies.\textsuperscript{16} Using this data I coded whether each MID involved disputes over territory, regime type, or policy.\textsuperscript{17} I then aggregated the data to create the time series sets, which count the number of challenges initiated against the US and its allies that involve disputes over the different issue types.

Finally, I create the power series which includes three sets: great powers, defined as states whose aggregate power resources account for more than ten percent of the total resources in the system; medium powers, defined as states whose power resources account for one to ten percent of the total; and small powers, defined as states whose power resources account for less than one percent. Each set includes two of the series described above: direct challenges made against the US and challenges made against US allies. I measure power resources using the CINC scores from the Correlates of War National Military Capabilities Dataset (Singer et al 1972). CINC scores aggregate the power resources of a state including military spending, military personnel, population, iron and steel production, and energy consumption to create a power index that measures the percent of total system resources held by a given state. In my analysis

\textsuperscript{15} All alliance types were included for this estimation, not just defensive alliances.

\textsuperscript{16} They also include a residual other category which I do not use in this analysis.

\textsuperscript{17} The original coding scheme uses the country-dispute level of analysis. My scheme translates this to the dispute level of analysis by coding an issue area as 1 if either participant had a certain type of revisionist goal.
of these series, I will also refer to the aggregate civil war series, which looks at the prevalence of challenges made against US allies by non-state actors, which are generally much weaker than state actors.

For all of these times series I conducted a number of diagnostic tests and ARIMA models to assess the temporal dependence of each series. I found that all of them were characterized by an autoregressive structure, although the number of relevant lags differed for each series. None of them had a moving average component and they did not need to be differenced to satisfy stationarity requirements. After determining the appropriate structure, I ran each series with two intervention dummy variables and the appropriate autoregressive lags. The primary variable of interests was coded as one for the years after the US withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973. The other dummy variable is coded as one from 1945 till 1989 to control for the effects of the Cold War. One would expect that the US loss in Vietnam would lead to an increased number of challenges under certain circumstances. Thus the post-Vietnam intervention variable should be positive and statistically significant if there are reputational effects.

Predictions

As discussed above, Contextual Expectations Theory hypothesizes that war losses resulting from a lack of will should increase the likelihood of challenges when the potential challenger’s dispute with the US revolves around issues that are similar to those over which the war was just fought. A number of proxies are used for issue similarity in this context. The most indirect proxy is region. The Vietnam War was fought in Asia and US willingness to withdraw from a war in that region without achieving its war aims might have been interpreted by regional actors as a signal that the US willingness to suffer costs for geopolitical gains in Asia was limited. This is a very rough proxy, but if Contextual Expectations Theory is correct, we would expect
challenges in the post-Vietnam era to increase in the Asia series but not necessarily in the other regional series.

The second issue similarity proxy uses the revisionist type series. The Vietnam War was fought to prevent South Vietnam from becoming communist and so qualifies as involving a regime dispute with the US wanting to preserve the existing regime in Vietnam and the North Vietnamese wanting to change the regime. In fact, North Vietnam is coded as having revisionist regime aims in the MIDs data. Thus, Contextual Expectations Theory would predict an increase in the number of regime dispute challenges in the post-Vietnam era. In addition, the US saw the Vietnam War as an instance of territorial aggression by the North Vietnamese (Summers 1984, 22), and thus it could also be seen at a territorial dispute. If this is the case, territorial challenges should also increase after the withdrawal of US troops. The one issue series in which we should not see an increase is the policy series.

Finally, I use challenges initiated by communist countries or countries aligned with the Soviet Union to proxy for issue similarity. The ultimate goal of the US was to halt communist aggression in South Vietnam. This is also what the US worried the most about when deciding to intervene in and withdraw from Vietnam. If the key issue was the spread of communism and the US proved irresolute in the long term, the states who would be most influenced by this information would be communist countries. Thus, Contextual Expectations Theory would predict that challenges initiated by communist countries and Soviet allies would increase after Vietnam.

The issue similarity hypothesis also generates a prediction for differences within the sets of series. Specifically the effect of the Vietnam War should be more pronounced when looking at challenges initiated against US allies compared to challenges initiated directly against the United States. The United States was not directly threatened with communism or territorial expansion in Vietnam—its ally was. Thus, we might expect
potential challengers to infer that US resolve was weak with respect to defending its allies, but not necessarily in defending itself.

The second relevant hypothesis derived from Contextual Expectations Theory posits that the decision making calculus of weaker challengers will be more affected by information about will than its stronger counterparts are because weak states rely solely on superior willpower to prevail. In terms of the time series analysis, this suggests that the Vietnam War should have the most pronounced effect in the civil war series and in the small power series. The positive effect of the Vietnam intervention should be statistically significant in these series and larger than the effect in the Middle and Great Power series, which may also be significant.

Table 6.1 summarizes the predictions of Contextual Expectations Theory with regard to the Vietnam case. The aggregate predictions are considered indeterminate because the theory predicts that the likelihood of challenges would increase in only a subset of countries. While this increase may be enough to influence the entire series, there is no reason to expect that it definitely would do so.

### Table 6.1: Predictions of Relevant Time Series Based on Contextual Expectations Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Series</th>
<th>Type of Target</th>
<th>Prediction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Countries</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US Ally MID</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US Ally Civil War</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Time Series</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Increase (Because of Power)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Europe, Asia, Middle East, Africa, Americas)</td>
<td>US Ally MID</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US Ally Civil War</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power (Great, Middle, and Small)</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Biggest Increase in Small Powers, then Middle Powers, then Great Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US Ally MID</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Countries and Russian Allies</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US Ally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Countries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues (Territory, Regime, Policy)</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Increase in Territory and Regime but not Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US Allies MID</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of the alternative theories discussed earlier, the bias and learning literature predicts that there will be no change because learning rarely occurs and people interpret new information in ways that support their pre-existing beliefs. Current Calculus Theory also predicts no change because information regarding the willingness of a state to suffer costs in pursuit of its war aims is not used to make decisions in crisis situations. The rationalist model predicts that there should be reputational consequences for losing a war regardless of the type of information generated during the war. This theory predicts that there should be an increase in challenges made after the US loss, but it does not expect that the magnitude of the increase will vary in any systematic way across types of countries.

**Results**

Looking at Table 6.2, which describes the results of the intervention analysis for the aggregate time series, we can see that the null hypothesis is clearly rejected. The number of challenges initiated against the US and its allies increased after Vietnam. The number of civil wars initiated against US allies also increased.

**Table 6.2: Overall Time Series of Challenges Made Against US and Allies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>Allies MIDs</th>
<th>Allies Civil War</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-Vietnam</td>
<td>.413***</td>
<td>6.500***</td>
<td>.216***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.165)</td>
<td>(.977)</td>
<td>(.062)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>1.234***</td>
<td>5.35***</td>
<td>.566***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.161)</td>
<td>(1.042)</td>
<td>(.082)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.287*</td>
<td>.454</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.149)</td>
<td>(1.360)</td>
<td>(.079)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR 1</td>
<td>.201***</td>
<td>.468***</td>
<td>.196***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.073)</td>
<td>(.029)</td>
<td>(.049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.153***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.052)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.189***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.050)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.139***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.051)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.118**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.059)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of comparing the substantive effects, it is important to keep in mind the baseline probability of each event. The average number of direct challenges to the US during the period under evaluation is .65, so in a decade, 6-7 challenges would be initiated against the United States. After Vietnam, the number of direct challenges increased by .413 per year meaning in a given decade the US would experience an additional 4 challenges—an increase of more than 60% relative to the baseline frequency. An additional 6-7 challenges a year were made against US Allies, an increase of more than 250%. One to two additional civil wars a decade were initiated against US allies, an increase of roughly 110%. Thus, the substantive effect of the Vietnam War on civil wars and MIDs initiated against US allies is larger, relative to the baseline frequency, than the effect on direct targeting of the United States.

While this table provides some evidence that there were reputational consequences to the Vietnam War, it does not enable us to test the information-contingent hypotheses generated by Contextual Expectations Theory. To do that we need to look at the region, issue, and power time series sets. We begin by evaluating the issue-specific hypothesis, first looking at the regional series.

The results of the regional time series presented in Table 6.3 do not provide evidence in support of the issue similarity hypothesis. There is an increase in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sigma</th>
<th>.815*** (.024)</th>
<th>3.106*** (.087)</th>
<th>.409*** (.014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>461.781</td>
<td>959.802</td>
<td>214.185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>477.9106</td>
<td>975.9306</td>
<td>243.216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses; * p<.1, ** p<.05, ***p<.01
number of militarized disputes initiated against US allies in every region except Asia.\textsuperscript{18}

Only the civil war series in Asia is significant.

\textsuperscript{18} There is not a civil war Africa series because there were no civil wars initiated against US allies during the time period under investigation.
Table 6.3: Regional Time Series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th></th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Allies MIDs</td>
<td>Allies Civil</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>War</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Vietnam</td>
<td>-.066</td>
<td>.246***</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>1.813**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.407)</td>
<td>(.051)</td>
<td>(.115)</td>
<td>(.844)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>.318** (.092)</td>
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Standard errors in parentheses; * p<.1, ** p<.05, ***p<.01
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Standard errors in parentheses; * p<.1, ** p<.05, ***p<.01
Looking at the issue time series in Table 6.4, we get mixed results. As expected by Contextual Expectations Theory, there was an increase in the number of territorial and regime disputes initiated against US allies. However, there was also an increase in the number of policy disputes initiated against the US and its allies. Table 6.4 also shows an increase in the number of communist initiated interstate disputes worldwide as well as an increase in disputes initiated by the USSR and its allies, both in general and in disputes that specifically targeted US allies. The latter trends are particularly significant because the most important issue for the US in Vietnam was stopping communist aggression. The data suggest that its failure to do so in Vietnam increased the number of disputes initiated by communist block countries. After Vietnam there were 1 to 2 additional communist initiated disputes worldwide every year, an increase of almost 100% compared to the baseline average. The number of disputes initiated by Russian allies increased by 180%, with as many as 9 additional challenges made a year. Russian allies also increased the number of disputes initiated against US allies, with an additional 1 to 2 disputes a year on average, an increase of more than 250%. The results of this analysis suggest that US failure in Vietnam emboldened precisely the potential challengers who were most interested in the issue at hand: those seeking to spread communism. This finding supports Contextual Expectations Theory and validates the fears of policy makers who worried about the international repercussions of failure in Vietnam.

The fact that direct challenges against the US did not rise is not problematic for Contextual Expectations Theory since the threat of communism was directed against an ally during the war, not against the US directly. The theory would thus expect potential challengers to consider the resolve of the US in Vietnam when contemplating dispute initiation against US allies, but not necessarily the US directly. However, the fact that policy-related challenges against the US and its allies rose in the aftermath of Vietnam suggests that the reputational consequences of failure in this context extended beyond the issues at stake during the war.
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Standard errors in parentheses; * p<.1, ** p<.05, ***p<.01
The second prediction made by Contextual Expectations Theory is that information about will has a more pronounced effect on weaker actors. The findings presented in Table 6.5 generally support this hypothesis. The effect of Vietnam on the initiation of disputes by great powers against the US and its allies is insignificant. However, dispute initiation by middle and small powers as well as non-state actors in a civil war context are all positive and significant.

Although there is variation in the relative power of these actors vis-à-vis the United States, they are all much weaker than the US and so they would be expected to be particularly sensitive to information about US willingness to suffer costs during war. According to these models, the number of disputes initiated against the US would rise by about 3 per decade for middle powers and 1 to 2 for small powers. The number of disputes initiated against US allies would increase by 2 a year for middle powers and 3 for small powers. There would also be an average of 2 additional civil wars initiated against US allies every decade in the post-Vietnam era.

Looking at both the absolute increases and the increases relative to baseline frequencies, we see that the relationship between reputational effects and the relative power of the challenger is not strictly linear. In terms of the relative changes, the effect of Vietnam is largest for middle powers, then small powers, and then non-state actors. However, the differences between these three groups, who are all much weaker than the US, and the great power group are notable. Perhaps the relationship follows a step function rather than a linear decline, with states below a certain threshold being particularly attentive to information about will. Variation below that threshold may then be determined by other factors.
Table 6.5: Power Time Series

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Standard errors in parentheses;* p<.1, ** p<.05, ***p<.01
Summary of Time Series Results

The time series analysis provides partial support for Contextual Expectations Theory, which posited two hypotheses regarding when wartime information about cost tolerance will increase the number of challenges initiated against the defeated state. Contextual Expectations Theory predicted that there would be an increase in the number of disputes involving the issue over which the war was fought and that there would be an increase in the number of disputes initiated by actors that were weaker than the combatant. On the issue-specific hypothesis, I found that the number of disputes initiated by communist countries and by the USSR and its allies increased after Vietnam. However, the war resulted in an increased number of disputes in other issue areas as well, including policy disputes. The effect of the war also transcended regions. In fact, the number of disputes initiated against US allies increased in every region except Asia. The results suggest that the rationalist hypothesis may be correct—the reputational consequences of war outcomes might not be issue dependent but rather widespread, as many of the policy makers in the Johnson and Nixon Administration feared.

Although the reputational effects of the war did not appear to be issue contingent, they did seem to be a function of the relative power of potential challengers. There was no effect on dispute initiation by great power actors but there was an increase in disputes initiated by weaker actors against US allies. Although the effect did not appear to be linear, this finding suggests that the reputational consequences of the war were limited to those states that did not pose a very big threat to the US or its allies according to traditional measures of capability.

The findings from the intervention analysis suggest that the US faced more military challenges in the wake of its defeat in Vietnam. However, these statistical techniques cannot provide evidence about whether the actors who initiated these
challenges actually considered US withdrawal from Vietnam during pre-crisis deliberations. In the next two chapters, I investigate the decision making of US adversaries in the Angolan Civil War and the 1973 Arab-Israeli War in order to determine whether, in those two cases, the statistical correlation is driven by the causal mechanisms identified by CET.
Chapter 7: Soviet and Cuban Decision Making in Angola, Assessing Vietnam’s Reputational Costs

This chapter analyzes whether the US performance in Vietnam influenced Soviet and Cuban decision making during the Angolan Civil War. The outcome of that war affected the United States because one of the groups that was vying for power was a Marxist organization backed by the Soviet Union. Though the locale of the conflict differed from the Vietnam War, the stakes were similar: the spread of communism in the third world. Studying the behavior of the Soviet Union and Cuba in this conflict enables me to assess whether the Vietnam War had reputational consequences in a dispute that revolved around issues similar to those over which the war was fought. Furthermore, I can test Contextual Expectations Theory’s power asymmetry hypothesis by comparing the behavior of the Cubans and Soviets to analyze whether their differing material capabilities affected the extent to which they used information from Vietnam to inform their decisions.

I begin this chapter by using Contextual Expectations Theory and the other theories of reputation formation to make competing predictions about the likely behavior of Cuba and the Soviet Union during the Angola Crisis. After discussing the types of evidence I will use to evaluate these predictions, I review the events that occurred during the civil war that preceded Angola’s independence, emphasizing how US, Soviet, and Cuban decisions influenced the outcome of the conflict. I then provide a more detailed examination of Soviet and Cuban decision making during the conflict. First, I layout their assessment of the US performance in Vietnam. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of their behavior during the Angola Crisis. What escalatory steps did they take during the crisis and how did they respond to US threats? Finally, I examine their decision making to assess whether the American withdrawal from Vietnam
influenced their actions. I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical implications of my findings.

**The Reputational Costs of the Vietnam War: Competing Predictions**

As with the Winter War, two different types of evidence are used to adjudicate between the competing theories of reputation formation. First, I look at behavior. What does each theory predict about the actions of the Soviet Union and Cuba during the crisis. Should their behavior be conflictual or conciliatory? What types of bargaining behavior should they adopt? How should they respond to US threats? Second, I use process tracing to examine their decision making process. According to each theory, what types of factors should influence their decisions? Below, I outline the predictions that CET and the alternative theories of reputation formation make about the behavior of America’s adversaries during the Angolan Civil War.

**Contextual Expectations Theory**

In the previous chapter I found that the Vietnam War revealed unexpected information about the United States’ cost tolerance. CET predicts that this type of information will be most relevant when the issues at stake for potential challengers are similar to the issues over which the previous war was fought. It also predicts that this information will be most relevant to weak challengers because they rely on the balance of resolve to prevail in military disputes.

Thus, according to CET, Vietnam should have a very pronounced effect on Cuban decision making during the Angola Crisis. The issues at stake are similar and Cuba should be especially sensitive to information about the United States’ willingness to suffer costs because it is much weaker than the US. Cuba’s assessment of the Vietnam War should focus on America’s cost tolerance, and there should be some indication that
this information was unexpected. Its behavior during the Angolan civil war should reflect an increased willingness to challenge the United States. It should be more willing to adopt threatening policies and should give little head to US warnings about the repercussions of those policies. Cuban leaders should justify their decisions by referencing America’s low cost tolerance and their withdrawal from Vietnam in particular. They should mention the similarity of the Angolan and Vietnamese conflicts and use this similarity to justify applying the lessons of Vietnam to the current conflict.

CET’s predictions with regard to the behavior of the Soviet Union are less definitive. On the one hand, the issues at stake in Vietnam and Angola are similar. On the other hand, the Soviet Union is a peer competitor of the United States and consequently should be less concerned about its cost tolerance. Thus, the predicted reputational consequences of Vietnam for Soviet decision making can only be made in reference to the reputational consequences for Cuban decision making. Since the issues at stake are held constant when comparisons between the two states are made, power asymmetry is the only relevant conditioning variable. Because the Soviet Union is more powerful than Cuba, the reputational effects of the Vietnam War in this case should be less pronounced. Its assessment of the Vietnam War should still focus on the cost tolerance of the United States, but its behavior during the Angolan crisis should be less conflictual than its Cuban ally. It should be more cautious about challenging the United States and more responsive to US threats. Although it may still reference the cost tolerance of the United States in justifying conflictual behavior, it should place more emphasis on the material capabilities of the United States than does Cuba. To the extent that the Soviet Union does reference American cost tolerance to justify its decisions, Vietnam should still be given as an example of American weakness and the issues at stake in Vietnam should be compared to the issues at stake in Angola.
**Alternative Hypotheses**

The baseline rationalist model predicts that there will be reputational consequences for the Vietnam War, but that these consequences will not be a function of the issues at stake or the relative power of the challenger. Thus both the Soviet Union and Cuba should focus on the cost tolerance of the United States in their postwar assessments. Both should be more willing to challenge the US during the Angolan Crisis and should justify their decisions by referring to the United States’ low cost tolerance and their withdrawal from Vietnam. There will not necessarily be explicit comparisons made between the issues at stake in Angola and Vietnam, and the Soviet Union’s behavior will not necessarily be more conciliatory than Cuba’s. In addition, there may not be any evidence to suggest that the information about US cost tolerance generated during the Vietnam War was unexpected.

Mercer’s attributional theory also predicts that there will be reputational effects, but in the opposite direction. His theory claims that postwar assessments of the US performance in Vietnam will focus on the effectiveness of the American military because America is in the out-group and its adversaries see information about effectiveness as undesirable. Any discussion of cost tolerance will be attributed to situational factors, peculiar to the Vietnam War. During the Angola crisis, references to the US possession of skill may be used to justify the adoption of conciliatory behavior, but no mention should be made of the United States’ cost tolerance or resolve.

The other two theories predict that the Vietnam War will have no reputational effects, but for different reasons. The bias and learning literature argues that the reputational consequences will be limited because vicarious learning is rare and states do not update their beliefs when faced with information that contradicts prior expectations. Current Calculus Theory predicts that there will be no reputational effects
because resolve is issue specific and leaders use the interests at stake in the current conflict to assess resolve in high stakes foreign policy crises. Any references to US cost tolerance in postwar assessments will focus on the specifics of the Vietnam conflict. Neither Cuba nor the Soviet Union will use the Vietnam War to justify their decisions during the Angola Crisis. Any mention of cost tolerance in the deliberations during the Angola crisis should focus on the issues at stake in Angola. Table 7.1 summarizes the predictions the various theories make about the behavior and decision making process of America’s adversaries during the Angolan Crisis.

Types of Evidence

I primarily rely on the secondary historical literature to test these hypotheses. In the Cuban case this is required because their archives have not been opened to Western scholars. The one exception is Peiro Glejeses (1995, 2002) who was given access to Cuban archives and has interviewed several Cuban decision makers regarding their involvement in Angola. His book and his article in the Cold War International History Project Bulletin are thus both valuable sources. Unfortunately, they only cover Cuba’s initial decision to send an advisory team to Angola. They do not deal with the more momentous decision to launch Operation Carlotta and send a large contingent of combat troops to Angola in November of 1975. Another important source is Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s semi-official history of Cuba’s involvement, which was sanctioned by Havana and published in 1976. This source covers the entire operation, including the launching of Operation Carlotta. These three sources and the rest of the secondary literature provide detailed information on the actions taken by the Cubans during the
Table 7.1: Competing Predictions About the Reputational Consequences of the Vietnam War for the Angola Crisis

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crisis. However, because these historians have limited access to Cuban archives and policy makers, their books provide less information about the Cuban decision making process. Still, they provide some insight into that process, and any evidence they have uncovered about the effect of Vietnam on Cuban decisions should be taken as strong evidence in favor of reputational affects given the limited data they could access.

The sources covering the Soviet Union’s involvement in Angola are much better. They analyze both the actions and the motivations of the USSR using a variety of primary sources including Soviet press releases, archival documents, and interviews. I had access to some of these documents through the Cold War International History Project. Most of these documents consist of correspondence between the USSR and the MPLA and Cuba or memorandum about conversations Soviet ambassadors had with representatives from Havana and Luanda. Unfortunately, although these documents provide insight into Soviet decisions, they are not the types of documents where I am most likely to find references to Vietnam. Those references are more likely to be found in documents that record the internal deliberations of the Soviet government, since it is during those deliberations that the Soviets most likely assessed the risks of intervention. Thus, my analysis of the reputational consequences of Vietnam must primarily rely on the historical literature’s assessment of those deliberations. As with the Cuban evidence, reliance on these sources makes it less likely that I will find references to Vietnam. Thus, any references I do uncover should be considered as strong evidence in favor of reputational effects.

**Overview of the Angolan Conflict**

After General Antonio de Spinola overthrew the Caetano regime in Portugal in 1974, the new government adopted a policy of rapid decolonization of Portugal’s overseas possessions. At the time of the coup there were three rival liberation
movements vying for power in Angola: the Movimento Poplar de Lertacao de Angola (MPLA), the Frente Nacional de Lertacao de Angola (FNLA), and the Unaio Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola(UNITA). The MPLA, led by Agostino Neto, was a Marxist organization that was popular among urban intellectuals, metizos, assimilados, and the Mbundu tribe. Their primary power base within Angola was the capital city of Luanda, and they enjoyed external support from Congo-Brazzaville, Tanzania, Zambia, and Soviet block countries. The FNLA was led by Holden Roberto and had its primary base of support in Northern Angola among the Bankongo people. It had close ties to Zaire, which provided the FNLA with funding, an external sanctuary, and military aid. The FNLA also received aid from the US and China. UNITA, which was led by Jonas Savimbi, had very little external backing, but was supported by Angola’s most populous ethnic group, the Ovimbundu of South Central Angola. These three groups were bitter adversaries and had spent as much time fighting each other as they had fighting the Portuguese in the decades prior to independence.

In January of 1975, Portugal negotiated a power sharing agreement with the rival factions to pave the way for eventual independence and the withdrawal of Portuguese troops. The Alvor Accords established a transitional government made up of representatives from the three groups and provided for the integration of their fighting forces into a combined Angolan military. The accords set November 11th as the date for independence and stipulated that elections would be held in October of 1975. Unfortunately the truce engendered by the Alvor Accords was short lived. In late January, political competition degenerated into armed conflict. Initially, the FNLA, benefiting from training and military hardware provided by Zaire, had the advantage and made inroads into the MPLA’s stronghold in Luanda. However, the MPLA reversed their losses later that spring using weapons sent by the Soviets in late March. By May of
1975 they had expelled both the FNLA and UNITA from Luanda and gone on the offensive. In June, Zaire sent two army units to help the FNLA to little effect. The MPLA advance continued, benefiting from an additional increase in Soviet aid beginning in July. By the end of August, the MPLA controlled Luanda, 12 of the 16 provincial capitals, and most of the ports.

However, a number of factors combined in late August and early September to enable the FNLA and UNITA to halt the MPLA offensive. First, their declining military fortunes prompted Roberto and Savimbi to ally against the MPLA. More importantly, military aid authorized by the US in July finally reached the FNLA and UNITA. In addition, two more Zairian battalions were sent to aid the FNLA in September. This increase in foreign aid enabled a joint FNLA/UNITA offensive to not only stop the MPLA advance, but to begin reversing their losses.

With their military gains in jeopardy, the MPLA requested additional assistance from their Soviet and Cuban allies. The Soviets continued to provide weapons and the Cubans agreed to send a contingent of around 500 advisors to help train MPLA recruits. The result was an uneasy stalemate that arose in early October with the MPLA in control of Central Angola, and the FNLA and UNITA forces in control of the northern and southern regions of the country, respectively.

That stalemate ended and the course of the war drastically changed when South Africa launched a full-scale invasion on October 24. Pretoria wanted to prevent the MPLA from coming to power in order to limit Soviet influence in Southern African and to ensure that Angola would not be used as a staging ground for the Southwest Peoples Organization (SWAPO) attacks into Namibia. Their involvement in the conflict began in August of 1975 when small South African units entered Southern Angola to secure the Cunene River Hydro-electric Complex and to pursue SWAPO guerrillas across the
border. However, the October 24th invasion represented a major escalation: South Africa sent two columns of troops including armored cars, trucks, planes, helicopters, and tanks. By November, their joint offensive with UNITA and the FNLA’s renewed offensive in the North had succeeded in expelling the MPLA from all but three of Angola’s provinces. On November 6, they captured Lobitia—the only remaining MPLA stronghold except for Luanda. They then prepared to take the capital.

Faced with impending defeat, the MPLA looked to its communist allies for help. The Cubans responded immediately, agreeing to send a contingent of more than 10,000 combat troops. They airlifted 650 special forces personnel to Luanda to help the MPLA defend the city and to buy time for the larger contingent of regular forces to arrive by sea. The Soviets drastically increased weapons deliveries to the MPLA, sending a large quantity of sophisticated weapons, including surface to surface missiles. They also increased their naval presence in west African waters and agreed to help the Cubans airlift troops and supplies to the MPLA. With the help of Cuban combat forces, the MPLA was able to halt the FNLA and South African offensives and defend Luanda.

On November 11, the date set for Independence by the Alvor Accords, no party was firmly in control of the country. Nevertheless, the Portuguese withdrew from Angola transferring power to the “people of Angola” rather than to any specific liberation movement. Both sides declared independence later that day, setting up rival governments in Luanda and Huambo. Fierce fighting continued throughout November and December, but as greater numbers of Cuban troops began arriving to fight with the MPLA, the tide began to turn against the FNLA-UNITA-South African alliance. After the possibility of US aid was removed by the passage of the Tunney and Clark amendments in the US Congress in late December, South Africa decided to withdraw
their troops rather than increase their commitment to counter the Cuban escalation. By February, the MPLA and Cuba had defeated the remaining FNLA and UNITA forces.

Thus, Soviet military aid and Cuban intervention enabled the Marxist MPLA to defeat the US backed FNLA and UNITA and ensured that post-independence Angola would fall into the communist sphere of influence. Both Soviet and Cuban involvement in Angola were unprecedented in terms of the scope of their activities. The quantity of weapons provided by the Soviets and the direct participation of Cuban combat troops represented a major change in both countries’ approach to national liberation movements (Stevens 1976, 44). The following documents whether these policy changes and the increased willingness of both countries to use military means in the third world were influenced by the US failure in Vietnam.

**Cuba and the Decision to Launch Operation Carlotta**

Cuban behavior during the Angolan crisis is consistent with the predictions of CET. Castro’s speeches suggest that Cuba attributed the US failure in Vietnam to a lack of political will and to American domestic opposition to the war. After the fall of Saigon, they took a number of steps that threatened US interests in Angola. Most importantly, they sent combat troops to aid the MPLA in its war against the US backed FNLA and UNITA. While the US did not directly threaten military action against Cuba during the crisis, American warnings about the deterioration of relations between the two countries had little effect on Cuba’s policies. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that Cuba was willing to intervene in Angola because it did not believe that its intervention would elicit a response from the US, in part because of America’s withdrawal from Vietnam.

**Cuban Assessment of the Vietnam War**

Because access to Cuba’s archives is limited, I must rely on the public pronouncements of Havana’s leaders to deduce what inferences those leaders drew
about the US in the wake of its defeat. Castro’s speeches after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1973 and the ultimate defeat of South Vietnam in April of 1975 suggest that he attributed the victory to the superior will of the North Vietnamese people. Although he does not specifically mention US cost tolerance in these speeches, his focus on the resolve of the North Vietnamese suggests that he saw will, not skill, as the decisive factor in the conflict. During a Visit to Vietnam in September of 1973, Castro exclaimed,

The Vietnamese people have set for the world a miraculous example of revolutionary spirit and fighting will . . . You have proved that a brave and heroic nation, though militarily weak, can never be defeated in its revolutionary undertaking . . . [The US] has come to realize that it cannot crush the will of a revolutionary people (Castro, Remarks at Quan Binh Rally, 1973, italics added).

Later, during the same trip, he noted that although “the Vietnamese territory has received more bombs than any other part of the world . . . its morale has never collapsed” (Castro, Le Duan Address Hanoi Banquet, 1973). In a speech given at a Vietnam solidarity rally in 1974, Castro stated that the efforts of the US military “proved to no avail. The massive use of aviation, the use of B52s were useless in the face of the staunch, determined will of the Vietnamese people’s will to resist.” He went on to attribute the US defeat to the “invincibility” of the Vietnamese people, which “lies in their stanchness, valor, and extraordinary spirit for sacrifice” (Castro 1974). His focus on the “spirit,” “morale,” and above all the “will” of the Vietnamese people suggest that he saw their willingness to continue to struggle despite the tolls of the war as key to their victory. Implicitly, this suggests that the lack of will in the US was the key to its defeat.

Castro’s speeches also suggest that he was aware of the domestic constraints on the United States’ conduct of the war and partially attributed the Vietnamese victory to these constraints. At the solidarity rally mentioned above, he noted that “the support of millions of US citizens who protested and even shed their blood condemning the genocide in Vietnam—condemned the imperialist war” to failure. He went on to
emphasize how “the struggle of the Vietnamese people shook the society in the land of imperialism. The struggle of the Vietnamese awoke the conscience of the people of the United States” (Castro 1974). He made similar comments during his trip to Vietnam in 1973, arguing, “The Vietnamese people’s heroic struggle has seriously influenced the United States itself, because a great part of the US people became aware of the true nature of imperialism . . . Right in the heart of the United States these people struggled for the cause of peace” (Castro, Welcome to the Cuban Delegation to the Liberated Area of South Vietnam, 1973). These comments reflect that Castro was not only aware of the domestic political turmoil that the Vietnam War engendered in the United States, but that he also, at least partially, attributed its failure to domestic opposition to the war. As he reminded listeners at the Sixth Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries, “It can never be forgotten what an important role was played by the people of the United States . . . in ending the criminal imperialist war against Vietnam” (Castro 1979).

Although these speeches only provide indirect evidence about the inferences that were drawn by Cuba’s leadership in the aftermath of Vietnam, they suggest that Cuba attributed US failure not to a lack of military effectiveness, but to a lack of political will and to the growth of domestic opposition to the war. It is difficult to assess whether this information was unexpected. In his speeches, Castro constantly stressed the disparities in power between the US and Vietnam. At the Le Duan Banquet, he characterized the communist victory as “miraculous” and argued that “only by making acquaintance with the Vietnamese people can one understand their victory over imperialism, understand why such a small and poor people has been able to resist, then defeat the imperialist aggression with all its military, technological, and economic potential” (Castro, Le Duan Address Hanoi Banquet, 1973). He made similar comments during the 1974 Solidarity Rally, exclaiming, “All the equipment, all the material resources—economic and
human—of imperialism were unable to conquer the heroic Vietnamese people” (Castro 1974). Castro’s emphasis on relative weakness of the Vietnamese in military terms may suggest that he viewed the US defeat as unexpected. On the other hand, he also emphasized the inevitability of revolutionary movements overcoming imperialism, precisely because of the willingness of the working class people to fight and die for their freedom. Seen through the prism of communism’s traditional view of the struggle between revolution and capitalism, the US lack of will and its ultimate defeat may not have been unexpected. Nonetheless, it is possible that the information generated about US cost tolerance during the Vietnam War affected Cuba’s subsequent foreign policy decisions by convincing Havana that the weak could defeat the mighty. The next two sections test whether that is the case.

**Cuban Behavior During the Angola Crisis**

CET predicts that Cuba should have been more willing to challenge the United States after Vietnam because of the information the war revealed about America’s cost tolerance. Cuba should have adopted policies that threatened the United States and should have been more willing to stand firm in the face of US warnings about the dangers of those policies. My analysis of Cuban behavior during the Angolan conflict supports this contention. Not only did they send material assistance and advisors to help train the MPLA, they also sent combat troops to help ensure an MPLA victory. This was an unprecedented action, and represented a major escalation in Cuba’s support for revolutionary movements in the third world.

Cuba began providing military assistance to the MPLA in 1965 and, unlike Soviet aid which fluctuated with the MPLA’s internal power struggles, Havana’s support was uninterrupted (Leogrande 1980). Much of the early literature on Cuba’s intervention claimed that Cuba sent military advisors to Angola as early as April 1975
However, the more recent historiography, which has benefited from access to Cuban archival sources, asserts that Cuba’s initial involvement in the spring of 1975 was quite limited.\(^1\) The decision to set up an advisory mission was not made until August and instructors did not begin arriving until late September (Glejeses 1996, Glejeses 2002; George 2005).\(^2\)

In October of 1974, Neto asked Cuba to send five advisors to help set up training centers for the MPLA in Angola. Castro agreed to send a team to assess the situation on the ground. They arrived in late December of 1974 and toured Angola in January. They returned to Havana with a report that included a request from Neto for $100,000 to help transport weapons from Tanzania. No action was taken, and when Neto repeated the request in May of 1975, the Cubans demurred again, agreeing only to send 10-12 advisors to the Congo.

As greater amounts of Soviet aid began arriving in Luanda in the summer of 1975, the MPLA struggled to use the advanced weaponry. After Moscow refused to send advisors, the MPLA looked to the Cubans. In early August, they sent another request to Havana, asking for 100 advisors to help train new recruits. This time Cuba responded in the affirmative. They immediately sent the $100,000 that Neto had requested in the spring and offered to send 480 advisors to help the MPLA set up four different training centers in Delatando, Benguela, Saurime, and Cabinda. Central Committee Member Jorge Risquet Valdes, who headed Cuba’s mission to Angola, explained why, after avoiding a commitment, they decided to provide more assistance than was requested:

\(^1\) It is also consistent with Cuba’s semi-official history of their involvement, written by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in 1976 and published by the Washington Post in 1977.

\(^2\) See Glejeses (2002) for a rebuttal of the early literature’s claim that 230 Cuban advisors arrived in April 1975. Legume and Hodges (1976) cites 2 newspaper articles one of which cannot be located and the other’s assertions are based on statements by US officials. All of the other works cite Legume and Hodges and each other. Glejeses notes that the evidence he provides is based on hundreds of Cuban documents, which show that the Cuban advisors did not arrive until much later.
“If we were going to send our men, we had to send enough to fulfill the mission and to defend themselves, because too small a group would simply have been overwhelmed” (quoted in Glejeses 1996, 9).

These instructors set sail for Angola early in September and began arriving in Angola later that month. While these advisors were not combat troops, they were given permission to help their students defend the training centers (Glejeses 2002). Given the battlefield reverses the MPLA began experiencing in September, it was inevitable that some of them would eventually fight beside their trainees. Marquez’s semi-official account of the Cuban military mission emphasizes this point. He wrote that the changing battlefield conditions forced the Cuban instructors “to abandon classes and face up to the invaders with their trainee soldiers, to whom they gave instruction between the battles. Even the doctors revived their military skills and went off to the trenches” (Marquez 1977, 3).

While the MPLA and their Cuban advisors held their ground throughout most of November, the launch of the South African invasion on October 24th dramatically changed the situation. The combined South African-UNITA offensive threatened to completely overrun MPLA positions in the South, including the Benguela training center which was attacked on November 3. Faced with potential encirclement and the collapse of the MPLA’s defenses, Neto made a desperate request for more troops on November 4th. Havana decided immediately to take a major escalatory decision: they would send combat troops to Angola. Castro explained how the South African invasion forced their hand: “We had to choose: either withdraw the instructors and abandon Angola, or send in the Special Forces” (quoted in Glejeses 2002, 305).

Although the decision to send combat troops was officially taken on November 5th, there is some debate about whether the actual decision was made earlier. Guimares
(1998) claims that the decision must have been made prior to November because the logistical difficulties of staging a major intervention could not be resolved in two days, the time that elapsed between November 5th and November 7th when the first contingent of special forces were airlifted to Luanda. Klinghoffer (1980) argues that Havana started laying the groundwork for a major intervention as early as July. He notes that during this time Cuba requested docking privileges in Luanda and conducted war exercises in Cuba that resembled an “Angola style war” (111). A number of sources note that the Chairman and Chiefs of Staff of the Cuban military were all relieved of their posts in late August and early September and only returned to their official duties after the MPLA had solidified their victory in the spring of 1976. The conjecture is that they were put in charge of the Angola campaign in the interim (Guimares 1998; Porter 1985; George 2005). Even Glejeses (2002) acknowledges that the Cubans drew up transportation plans and queried the Soviets about their willingness to provide transport assistance for Cuban combat forces in August.

Although there is ample evidence to suggest that Cuba began laying the groundwork for a major intervention earlier in the year, the decision to launch Operation Carlotta, as their intervention was code named, was only after Neto’s November 4th request for aid. The operation began with an airlift of 650 Special Forces troops on November 7th. These forces were given the task of halting the South African offensive and defending Luanda until more reinforcements could arrive. Three ships of additional combat troops set sail for Angola around the same time, but they only began arriving on November 27th. The Cubans continued sending troops using their own transportation as well as Soviet airlift. Eventually more than 36,000 Cuban combat troops served in Angola (Leogrande 1980, 20). This was a huge commitment for such a small country. Cuba’s standing army stood at 90,000 with 70,000 in ready reserve. Even taking into
account the 26,500 personnel in the Navy and Air Force, their commitment to Angola involved almost 20% of their military (Klinghoffer 1981). This commitment paid off. With Cuba’s help, the MPLA was able to defend Luanda, hold off the South Africans, and defeat the FNLA in the North. Once South Africa decided to retreat, they were also able to defeat UNITA’s residual forces and solidify their control over the country.

After the Cubans launched Operation Carlotta and combat troops began pouring into Luanda, the US issued a number of veiled threats to try to get Havana to back down. However, unlike the warnings that were issued to the Soviets, these threats never implied that the US might respond militarily and, for the most part, were delivered very late in the game. On November 24, Kissinger warned that Cuba “was jeopardizing a normalization of relations with the United States” (Klinghoffer 1980, 93). On December 21, President Ford claimed that Cuban action in Angola would prevent the countries from improving their relations. Kissinger repeated these sentiments on December 23, explicitly making Cuban withdrawal from Angola a precondition for negotiations on other issues. These general threats to US-Cuban relations did little to influence Cuban behavior. Mallin (1995) reports that State Department discussions with the Cubans in November “did not have any noticeable affect” (554). After Kissinger’s December speech, Castro explained to reporters that the fate of the MPLA was more important to Cuba than potential trade with the United States (Klinghoffer 1980). Furthermore, even when the Soviets suspended their airlift in early December, the Cubans persisted, taking fairly drastic measures to keep troops flowing into Angola (Glejeses 2002, 333). For example, they retrofitted their Britanias with more fuel tanks to increase their range so that they could make the cross-Atlantic flight (Marquez 1977; Glejeses 2002, 368). This enabled the Cubans to launch four separate airlift operations during the Soviet halt via Guyana and the Azores.
The lack of a Cuban response to US threats is not surprising given their timing and the failure of the US to even hint at a potential military response. Why did the Americans not respond more vigorously to the Cuban intervention? The US reaction was surprising, especially when compared to its response to the Soviet’s more limited involvement in the conflict. Cuba was more active in Angola and was much weaker than the USSR; it would have been logical to focus America’s diplomatic pressure on Havana rather than Moscow. The US did not do so because it assumed that the Soviets were calling the shots (Klinghoffer 1980, 119). In his memoirs, Kissinger explains, “At the time, we thought he [Castro] was operating as a Soviet surrogate. We could not image that he would act so provocatively so far from home unless he was pressured by Moscow to repay the Soviet Union for its military and economic support” (quoted in Glejeses 2002, 307). The Americans thought the Cubans were Russian proxies and so tried to stop the flow of troops by putting pressure on the Soviets. This misperception of the situation prevented the US from directly dealing with the Cuban intervention.

**Process Tracing: The Effect of Vietnam on Cuban Decision Making During the Angola Crisis**

Despite the fact that the United States did not explicitly threaten to respond to the Cuban intervention, it is likely that the Cubans considered the potential US reaction when deciding whether to launch Operation Carlotta. Although they had sent military advisors to Guinea, Tanzania, Guiana-Bissau, and Mozambique without eliciting a US response, they had never committed combat troops to an African country. Such brash action had the potential to provoke the United States.

The historical evidence suggests that the Cubans thought a US response was unlikely, in part because of the United States’ decision to withdraw from Vietnam. Marquez’s account of Cuban decision making notes that:
The possibility that the United States would intervene openly, instead of through mercenaries and South Africa as it had done until then, was undoubtedly one of the most disturbing unknowns. However, a rapid analysis of the following factors suggested that Washington would at least think several times before going ahead. The United States was just emerging from the Vietnam debacle and the Watergate scandal with a president whom no one had elected (Marquez 1977, 4).

Glejeses’ (2002) interview with Risquet corroborates this evidence; Risquet claims that they “considered a US military response (in Angola or Cuba) to the dispatch of Cuban troops unlikely” because of “the recent US debacle in Vietnam” (306). Leogrande (1980) argues that this is because Cuba’s leaders saw the domestic constraints that had led to the United States’ defeat in Vietnam operating in Angola. Cuban policy makers thought that the US was unlikely to “respond militarily in Angola or against Cuba directly . . . because of the domestic political climate in the United States. Having just extricated itself from Vietnam, the United States was not likely to have much stomach for a new foreign intervention” (29). Similarly, Domínguez (1989) claims that Cuba’s decision to intervene was heavily influenced by international factors that made the operation “less reckless” (132). He specifically cites the humiliation the US suffered during the fall of Saigon, noting that Neto’s request was propitiously timed to coincide with “the United States defeat in Vietnam . . . [and the emergence of] US domestic opinion [that] was strongly opposed to new military engagements in the Third World” (152). Klinghoffer (1980) comes to a similar conclusion, arguing, “Cuba believed that its actions in Angola did not run the risk of a major American response. The defeat in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal would deter the United States from any large-scale involvement” (116).

Cuba probably used information from Vietnam to justify its decision to intervene because it saw similarities between the issues at stake in Vietnam and Angola. They argued that Angola was an opportunity to “create more Vietnams” and stressed the potential for revolutionary movements to overthrow imperialist regimes by comparing
the MPLA to the Vietcong (Domínguez 1989, Guimares 1998). However, the inferences the Cubans drew about US resolve were not limited to revolutionary movements or the third world. America’s withdrawal from Vietnam convinced them that, not only was the US unlikely to use force to oppose the MPLA in Angola, but the US also no longer posed a direct threat to Cuba itself. This enabled them to send a large contingent of their military to Africa because they no longer needed those troops to defend the homeland. Erisman (1985) explains that Cuba’s policies in Africa were facilitated by “the reduced danger that the United States posed to the Revolution. Not only had Washington finally reconciled itself to the Castro regime’s existence, but its predicament in Southeast Asia in the early 1970s, coupled with the American public’s growing disenchantment with overseas adventures, precluded any serious confrontation with Havana” (42). Leogrande (1980) similarly claims that America’s defeat in Vietnam reduced the threat that the US posed to Cuba, enabling it to adopt a more active policy in Africa (7). Klinghoffer (1980) argues that the “growing unlikelihood of an American intervention” enabled troops reserved for the defense of the island to be sent to fight alongside the MPLA, far from Cuba’s shores (116). Thus, the US failure in Vietnam influenced Havana’s beliefs about the willingness of the Americans to use force in a variety of circumstances, not just those that mirrored Vietnam. These beliefs made them more willing to intervene in Angola.

My claim is not that US withdrawal from Vietnam caused the Cubans to intervene in Angola, or even that it was the most important factor in their decision. Rather, my more limited claim is that the US failure in Vietnam made the Cubans more likely to intervene by affecting their beliefs about the likelihood of US response. A number of other factors undoubtedly influenced their decision to get involved including a genuine desire to spread the revolution in Africa, to emerge as a leader of the third
world, and to be seen as a global supporter of communism (Leogrande 1980; Klinghoffer 1980; Dominguez 1989; Guimares 1998). Their ability to launch the intervention was made possible by an economic recovery propelled by rising sugar prices and internal reforms, and by the development of a professionalized military (Dominguez 1978). For the most part, these factors can operate without detracting from the validity of my argument.

However, I do need to consider the possibility that Cuba’s decisions were taken at the behest of the Soviet Union, as alleged by US policy makers at the time. If they agreed to send combat troops after being pressured by the USSR, the relevant risk calculation would not be Havana’s but Moscow’s, and Cuba’s beliefs about the likelihood of a US response would be less important. At the time of the Angola crisis, Kissinger and other American officials argued that the Cubans were operating as Soviet proxy forces in Angola. As noted earlier, this is why the US concentrated its diplomatic efforts on changing Soviet, not Cuban, behavior. However, it is now clear that this was not the case. Evidence from both the USSR and Cuba suggests that the decision to launch Operation Carlotta was an independent action taken by Cuba. In a 1976 speech delivered on the anniversary of the Bay of Pigs, Castro emphasized, “Cuba alone bears the responsibility for making that decision. The USSR never requested that a single Cuban be sent to that country. The USSR is extraordinarily respectful and careful in its relations with Cuba. A decision of that nature could only be made by our own party” (quoted in Porter 1985, 169). Castro repeated these sentiments in a speech delivered later that year, claiming that “Cuba’s decision was made absolutely under its own responsibility” (quoted in Bender 1978, 95). Soviet officials involved in the Angola crisis tell a similar story. Ambassador Dobrynin explained, “It was the Cubans and not us who had initially interfered by sending their own military forces to back the MPLA, on their
own initiative and without consulting us” (quoted in Guimares 1998, 151). When asked during an interview how the Soviets convinced the Cubans to send troops, Soviet Diplomat Vasily Kuznetsov replied, “the idea for the large scale military operation had originated in Havana, not Moscow” (quoted in Gunn 1990, 160). Thus, most of the historical evidence suggests that the decision to launch Operation Carlotta was “a sovereign and independent act by Cuba; the Soviet Union was informed not before, but after the decision was made” (Shearman 1987, 40). In fact, there is more evidence to suggest that Soviet policy was influenced by Havana’s Angola decisions than the other way around. Since Cuba’s decision was made independently of the Soviet Union’s preferences, its assessment of the potential US response to its actions remains relevant.

**Soviet Aid to the MPLA during the Angola Conflict**

My analysis of Soviet behavior and decision making during the Angola Civil War suggests that, as predicted by CET, the USSR was more wary of challenging the United States than was its Cuban ally. The Soviets took a number of escalatory steps during 1975, repeatedly increasing the amount military aid they provided to the MPLA. However, they also refused to directly participate in training or combat and were hesitant to help Havana with its deployment of combat troops. In addition, this case study suggests that, although the American failure in Vietnam prompted the Soviets to doubt the willingness of the US to counter their involvement in Angola, they refrained from taking major escalatory actions until the possibility of a US military response was removed by passage of the Tuney-Clark Amendment in the US Congress.

**Soviet Assessment of the Vietnam War**

Official statements and Soviet media coverage of the end of the Vietnam War attributed the DRV’s victory to the resolve of the Vietnamese people. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee’s official message to North
Vietnam after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords stated that “the courage, steadfastness and selflessness of the glorious sons and daughters of the Vietnamese people in the North and the South of the country . . . [provide] convincing proof that in our days no force is capable of breaking the will of a people that is fighting for its inalienable rights” (Izvestia, 28 January 1973). A similar statement delivered to the South Vietnamese Provisional authority stressed, “the success that has been achieved in Vietnam became possible above all thanks to the selfless valor, steadfastness and will for victory and the heroic and selfless efforts of the entire Vietnamese people” (Pravda, 28 January 1973). An article in International Affairs, a journal of the Foreign Ministry of the Soviet Union, proclaimed, “The signing of the Agreement was above all the logical outcome of the Vietnamese people’s selfless and courageous struggle, their fortitude and will for victory.” The victory of the DRV “forcefully demonstrated that it is no longer possible for anyone to break the will of a people fighting for its inherent rights” (Sergyev 1974, 18). B. Vasilyev reiterated this point in an Izvestia article, published on May 5, 1975 after the fall of Saigon. He wrote that the triumph of communism in Indochina was due to the “thousands of courageous sons and daughters of the heroic Vietnamese people who displayed exceptional courage, selfless heroism and an unbending will in the struggle for independence.” These sentiments are representative of the Soviet Union’s media coverage of the war. Of the 300 articles Zimmerman and Axelrod (1981) examined, more than half attributed the DRV’s victory to the will and courage of the Vietnamese. This was true for the general press, as well as the military journals Kommunist and Kommunist Vooruchennykh Sili (15). Thus, the Soviets emphasized the importance of will, not military effectiveness, in determining the outcome of the Vietnam War.
In addition, there is evidence to suggest that the USSR believed that domestic opposition to the Vietnam War in the United States contributed to its defeat. Georgy Arbatrov, the Director of the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute on the USA, noted in a Kommunist article published in February 1973 that “the long and bloody war in Vietnam . . . has exacerbated the internal struggle to such a degree that it has made very diverse strata of the public and even many representatives of the ruling class understand and admit” that further resistance was futile. An International Affairs article published around the same time specifically focused on the antiwar protests, arguing that “a broad antiwar movement developed in the USA itself, and the US Government was compelled to reckon with it” (Khomenko 1973, 17). Another article published after the fall of Saigon explained how a “large section of the American public launched a mass scale movement of protests against military escalation in Vietnam.” The article argued that this anti-war movement forced the government “to end their intervention and to accept a political settlement” (Trofimenko 1975, 37-38). An Izvestia article, published on April 23, 1975, cited the New York Times in making a similar argument. It claimed that the US failure to intervene in support of the “puppet government” was due to the fact that “the American public and the press are resolutely opposed to further military support for the Saigon regime.” Again, Zimmerman and an Axelrod’s (1981) analysis suggest that these views are representative of the lessons of Vietnam mentioned by the media. They found that most of the articles that mentioned US weakness focused on domestic disunity and domestic costs of the intervention. This suggests that the Soviet Union saw the US defeat in Vietnam as largely driven by political constraints arising from domestic opposition to the war. This is consistent with my assertion in the previous chapter that the Johnson and Nixon administrations’ concern over the political costs of the war was noted by
foreign observers and contributed to their assessments of the United States’ cost tolerance.

It is unclear whether this information and the US defeat in Vietnam was considered unexpected by Soviet observers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, their public statements prior to the war predicted that the US would fail in Vietnam, but their private statements to Hanoi stressed the difficulties of fighting the United States. Some of their postwar statements suggest that the Vietnamese victory was notable because of the material superiority enjoyed by the Americans. The CPSU statement sent to the “liberated areas” of South Vietnam in 1973 applauded the victory of the communist forces that had prevailed, “despite the use of large armed forces and enormous material outlays [used] by the aggressors” (*Pravda*, 28 January 1973). In July of 1973, Kosygin emphasized the heroism of the Vietnamese in defeating the Americans, “despite the fact that an interventionist army of millions, outfitted with all kinds of weapons was brought to bear against Vietnam” (*Pravda*, 14 July 1973). Similarly, an *International Affairs* article published in 1974 reported that the war demonstrated that “even the strongest power of the Western world, with all its military, economic, scientific and technical might, proved to be unable to overcome the resistance of the Vietnamese people” (*Zhurkin* 1974, 95). Although this emphasis on power asymmetry may indicate that the Soviets were surprised by the US defeat in Vietnam, other statements which focus on the inevitability of the triumph of socialism over the forces of capitalism suggest otherwise. In a speech given in October 1975, Secretary Brezhnev articulated “the lessons of Vietnam,” which demonstrated “the all conquering power of Marxist Leninist ideas . . . the enormous importance of the consistently internationalist policy of the ruling Communist party, and . . . the invincibility of a people who are waging a struggle for a rightful cause” (*Brezhnev* 1975, 7) An *International Affairs* article published earlier that year made a
similar point, arguing that the Vietnam War “demonstrated the invincibility and might of the present revolutionary and national liberation movements. They have once again confirmed the indisputable truth that the imperialist policy . . . is inevitably doomed” (Sergeyev 1975, 48). These public statements about the inevitability of US defeat may reflect the Soviet Union’s ideological precepts more than its actual beliefs about the outcome of the war. Their warnings to Hanoi in 1965 certainly indicate that they did not see a Vietnamese victory as inevitable, even if they thought it was possible. These warnings and their emphasis on the material balance of power in the aftermath of the war suggest that information about US cost tolerance in Vietnam may have been somewhat unexpected and thus had the potential to affect subsequent Soviet decisions. The following sections evaluate whether this was the case in Angola by looking at Soviet actions during the crisis and the decisions that underpinned those actions.

**Soviet Behavior During the Angola Crisis**

A mixture of opportunism and caution characterized the Soviet Union’s policies during the Angola civil war. Although they took a number of escalatory steps during 1975, they were careful not to unduly provoke the Americans. Soviet support for the MPLA began in the 1960s but waxed and waned in response to factional infighting within the MPLA. They first began to increase their aid after the Portuguese Coup in 1974 in response to Chinese support for the FNLA. Publicly they hailed the Alvor Accords and stressed the importance of forming a coalition government. However, the Soviets also increased weapons delivery to the MPLA in order to hedge against a possible collapse of the agreement.

In response to Neto’s request for more aid, they ramped up weapons deliveries in March of 1975, sending aid directly to Angola rather than sending it via a third party in Congo or Tanzania. Bennet (1999) estimated that the USSR sent around $6 million a
month in military aid from March-July. Klinghoffer (1980) puts the total amount of aid for the same time period at $30 million. Considering that they had spent $54 million total over that past 11 years, this represented a major increase (Klinghoffer 1980).

The MPLA had difficulty taking advantage of this military aid because most of the MPLA recruits did not know how to use the advanced weaponry that the Soviets provided. To remedy this problem, Neto asked Moscow to send advisors and specialists to help train MPLA recruits in July of 1975. The Soviets refused because they feared that their direct involvement would prompt a western response (Klinghoffer 1980, Gartoff 1985, 508). However, they did agree to send a few advisors to Brazzaville and once again to increase the level of their material aid. Klinghoffer (1980) estimates that from August to Independence the Soviets sent around $80 million in military aid. Bennet (1999) claims that they sent an estimated $23 million a month from July to November of 1975, significantly more than they had sent in the spring and early summer.

In August, the Cubans inquired whether the USSR would help them transport combat troops to Luanda to aid the MPLA. They also repeated Neto’s request for advisors to help train MPLA soldiers in Soviet weaponry. The Soviet Union refused on both accounts. They were worried that Cuban actions would be attributed to them and that direct involvement of their own troops or Cuban combat troops would prompt an American response (Gunn 1992, Westad 1996). Thus, they did not assist Cuba in transporting the initial contingent of advisors that were sent to Angola in late September.

As the date set for independence approached and the MPLA found itself in dire straits with South African and UNITA forces approaching from the South and the FNLA advancing from the North, NETO once again requested help from Angola’s communist allies. It was at this point that the Soviet Union made its major escalatory decision. First,
it drastically increased the amount of weaponry it was sending to Angola. Klinghoffer (1980) estimates that the Soviet Union sent more than $190 million in military aid from independence until the defeat of the FNLA and UNITA in February. Bennett (1999) puts the number at $235 million for the same time period. Either way, it was more than double the amount they sent from July until November and greater than the total amount of aid sent since they began supporting the MPLA in the early 1960s. The quality of the weapons they provided also changed. They sent their more sophisticated weapons systems, including the MIG 17 fighter aircraft, T-34 and T-54 tanks, 122 mm Kaytusha Rocket launchers, P76 amphibious vehicles, armored reconnaissance vehicles, gunships, heavy artillery, and helicopters.

This quantitative and qualitative increase in the level of aid was accompanied by a major change in policy—they agreed to help the Cubans transport combat troops to Angola. The exact timing of this decision remains controversial. Kaplan (1981) and Valenta (1978) claim that the Soviets took steps in late September and early October to lay the groundwork for a full scale intervention, citing an agreement reached with Congo’s President that provided the Soviets with landing rights in Brazzaville for planes carrying Cuban combat troops. However, much of the literature suggests that the Soviets were not supportive of Cuba’s interventionist plans until much later. Westad (2005) claims that the Soviets agreed to help the Cubans transport troops after independence in early November. At this time they began taking preparatory measures by sending some advisors to Brazzaville and increasing their naval presence in Angolan waters. While pinpointing the decision is difficult, most historians agree that the Soviets began transporting Cuban troops on November 11 after the MPLA declared Angola independent (Valenta 1980; Kaplan 1981; Gartoff 1985; Orme 1992; Gunn 1992; Westad
Regardless of the exact timing, agreeing to help the Cubans transport combat troops to Angola represented a major policy change. They had refused a similar request in August and had demurred in early discussions with the Cubans about direct intervention due to concern about America’s potential reaction.

As the Soviets predicted in August, these actions elicited a stern response from the United States, which until then had remained largely silent on the issue of Soviet involvement in Angola. Kissinger met with Ambassador Dobryin multiple times in November to discuss the situation. He also began making public statements that implied that Soviet actions in Angola were threatening East-West relations. On November 10, he warned that the joint USSR-Cuban intervention was “a serious matter” and that “as far as the Soviet Union is concerned, not compatible with the spirit of relaxation of tensions” (quoted in Gartoff 1985, 521). He repeated the concerns on November 24, exclaiming that America “cannot be indifferent while an outside power embarks upon an interventionist policy—so distant from its homeland and so removed from traditional Russian interests” (quoted in Orme 1992, 112). He warned that the “continuation of an interventionist policy must inevitably threaten other relationships between the two powers” (quoted in Gartoff 1985, 521). Although no explicit military threats were made, on December 9th President Ford met with Ambassador Dobryin and warned that a continuation of Moscow’s policies in Angola could lead to an East-West “confrontation.” Unlike Kissinger’s public statements about Angola damaging the US-Soviet relationship, this had an immediate effect. The Soviets decided to halt their airlift of supplies and Cuban troops. It was not until Congressional votes blocking US military aid to Angola

3 One important exception is Glejeses (1996, 2002) who claims that the Soviets did not help with the transport of Cuban troops until late December when the US had succeed in blocking landing rights for Cuba at Barbados and other refueling stations.

4 September 23 was the first time a US official publicly mentioned Soviet involvement in Angola. Although the statement criticized “extra-continental” involvement in the crisis, it did not threaten a US response (Gartoff 1985, 521).
removed any possibility of US action in late December that the Soviets resumed their airlift.

The USSR was also responsive to US threats about Soviet naval deployments off the Angolan Coast. One of the steps the Soviets took in November to prepare for the Cuban intervention was to increase their naval presence in Angolan waters, sending an Alligator class landing ship, a Kotlin class guided missile destroyer, a Krestal guided missile cruiser, and a companion oil refueler to the coast. Ford publicly warned the Soviets that the US viewed these naval deployments with “grave concern” (Kaplan 1981, 588-589, Bennet 1999, 16). The Soviets promptly denied that their ships were in the area, and then moved them north to the Gulf of Guinea.

Thus, although Moscow made several escalatory moves during the Angolan civil war, their responsiveness to American warnings suggests that their policies were specifically crafted to avoid a confrontation with the United States. This is further evidenced by their initial unwillingness to help Cuba transport combat troops and their staunch refusal to send Soviet advisors to Angola. Steven’s (1976) analysis of Soviet decision makes precisely this point. He argues that “before becoming deeply involved in the Federal Government cause, Soviet leaders made sure that the assistance they were prepared to offer would not be met by severe Western reprisals” (Stevens 1976, 146). Westad (1996) claims this is why they refused “to transport the Cuban troops or to send Soviet officers to serve with the Cubans in Angola. The Soviet General Staff opposed any participation in the Cuban operation, and even the KGB . . . warned against the effects of a direct Soviet intervention on US-Soviet relations” (26). Concern about an American response was also why the Soviets tried to dissuade the Cubans from intervening on their own. The Soviets believed that the Cubans did not appreciate “how even a Cuban intervention could upset great power relations, since the Ford Administration would see
Cuba’s forces as proxies for Soviet interests” (Westad 1996, 25). Guimares (1998) argues that this is why they did not increase their aid to the MPLA until after the Portuguese Coup. He explains that Portuguese membership in NATO meant that arming the MPLA would risk confrontation with the West, and so it was not until after the coup that the risk of confrontation diminished enough to enable them to escalate their aid (161-163). This concern over the possible repercussions of an Angolan intervention for US-Soviet relations is consistent with CET’s predictions that Soviet behavior should be less confrontational than Cuba’s.

**Process Tracing: Soviet Decision Making During the Angola Crisis**

So why did the Soviets adopt policies that they thought might provoke an American response when they clearly wanted to avoid a confrontation with the US over Angola? The literature suggests that by November the Soviets had reached the conclusion that a US reaction was unlikely. Kaplan (1981) writes, “The Soviet Union did not anticipate any serious American military intervention in Angola that could have brought the two superpowers into a military confrontation harmful to détente” (596). Klinghoffer (1981) claims that although the Soviets considered American policies in Angola, “the American factor did not greatly affect Soviet motivation during the Angolan War” (112). Westad (1996) argues that experts in Moscow thought the US would protest Soviet policies in Angola but would also refrain from staging a major intervention to counter those policies (25). Katsikas (1982) explains this assessment by emphasizing the low level of importance the US attributed to Africa arguing, “The Soviets perceived correctly that Angola and Ethiopia, being outside America’s sphere of influence, were low-risk ventures and precluded military confrontation with the United States” (17). Valenta (1978) attributes Soviet estimations to the lack of an American response to initial Soviet increases in aid in March and July of 1975: “The failure of the
United States to react strongly (at least initially) to Soviet probes of American attitudes merely served to encourage the Soviet leadership to believe that the United States was unlikely to make a major issue of the Angola situation” (23).

The key question with respect to testing Contextual Expectations Theory is whether or not Moscow’s assessment of America’s likely response to Soviet initiatives in Angola was influenced by the US failure in Vietnam. Did the lack of will the US demonstrated in Vietnam make the Soviets doubt US willingness to intervene in Angola? Most of the literature suggests that it did. Valenta (1980) claims that Moscow thought that the risk of a US response to its support for the MPLA was “fairly low,” concluding that “the Vietnam debacle of April 1975 . . . would prevent the United States from making a major issue of Angola” (108). Orme (1992) argues that “the strongest influence on Soviet perceptions [of America’s likely response to Soviet policies in Angola] was exercised not by events in Africa, but those in Southeast Asia. . . The way the American commitment to Vietnam was liquidated from 1973 through 1975 brought to realization some of the worst fears of those, like Henry Kissinger, who feared the consequence of a disorderly retreat by the United States more than the loss of South Vietnam itself” (113). Porter (1985) claims:

A massive Soviet-Cuban intervention in sub-Saharan Africa would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier and highly improbable even a year earlier, before Saigon fell. But Hanoi’s conquest of the south . . . created the very condition that made the USSR’s involvement in the Angolan conflict both feasible and ultimately successful (147).

When Karen Brutents, a Candidate Member of the CPSU and Deputy Head of the International Department during the Angolan Crisis, was asked why the Soviets got involved in Angola, he explained that “Vietnam played its role . . . it made the Cubans and our military men more brash” (Westad 1995, 46).

Although the Soviet Union’s analysis of US intentions in Angola was influenced by the US failure in Vietnam, it was also influenced by the way the US reacted to its own
defeat. Soviet decision makers were keenly aware that Vietnam had made both the public and the US Congress wary of military adventures in the third world. They expected that the American response to Soviet moves in Angola would be constrained by these actors. Martin (1992) argues that the Soviet Union’s November escalation decisions were taken after Moscow “correctly assessed that the American public would not support any involvement which resembled another Vietnam” (710). Klinghoffer’s (1980) analysis is consistent with this interpretation. He writes that the Soviets were not concerned about a potential American response because “they were aware of executive-legislative differences over the conduct of the war and of post-Vietnam isolationist public mentality” (98-99). A Kremlin official interviewed about the Soviet-Cuban intervention explained that the Soviets finally acquiesced to Cuban requests for assistance because “they believed that the United States was too tied up by internal politics to do anything about it” (quoted in Orme 1992, 114). Guimares (1998) claims that the Kremlin decided to intervene in Angola because they “anticipated that, after Vietnam, a war weary American people and a vindictive Congress would effectively paralyze the US administration’s ability to go beyond covert operations” (174). Likewise, Valenta (1978) found that the Soviets “were aware of the domestic constraints under which US policy makers were operating after the Vietnam debacle of 1975. Indeed the Soviets viewed the outcome in Vietnam . . . as having far-reaching effects on the mood of the American public and US Congress” (22). This led them to conclude that they “could escalate the intervention in support of the MPLA without serious risk of US retaliation” (23). The fact the United States did not respond publicly to the Soviet’s increase in military aid in March and July seemed to confirm the Soviet’s assessment of America’s ability to respond, given the domestic political climate (Valenta 1980, 108).
Although US withdrawal from Vietnam and the domestic upheaval that ensued after the withdrawal made the Soviets believe that US intervention in Angola was unlikely, they did not rule out the possibility entirely. This is why they gradually increased their aid to the MPLA, and also why they remained responsive to American threats. Stephens (1976) argues that the Soviets increased their aid incrementally so that “support for the MPLA [could be balanced] against the risks of open confrontation with the West. In the event the Americans, still under the influence of Vietnam, chose not to confront Moscow, Soviet assistance could, without danger, be increased to a level sufficient to assure the MPLA of victory” (146). Orme (1992) claims that “official Soviet commentators writing in June of 1975 found that ‘the Vietnam tragedy had provided a serious lesson’ . . . But they were not so confident that they were willing to dismiss the possibility of a firmer US response altogether as the pause in December shows” (114-115).

The decision to halt their airlift in response to US threats suggested that if the US had responded in force, the Soviet Union would have backed down. However, the passage of the Clark-Tuney amendment, which banned the provision of American aid to any military or paramilitary groups in Angola, confirmed their predictions that domestic politics would prevent the US from responding to Soviet escalation. This amendment passed the Senate on December 19th. The Soviets resumed their airlift operations and the provision of aid to the MPLA on December 24th. Kissinger lambasted the decision during a Congressional hearing in 1976: “After the Senate vote to block any further aid to Angola the Cubans more than doubled their forces and Soviet military aid was resumed on an even larger scale” (quotes in Stevens 1976, 142). Valenta (1980) argues that the Senate vote “convinced Soviet leaders that the domestic constraints on US policy makers were so formidable that the USSR had nothing to worry about from the American
quarter” (115). Gartoff (1985) similarly claims that the “Soviets no longer saw any need for restraint” after the passage of the amendments (516). Moscow’s “assessment of US public and congressional opinion in the aftermath of Vietnam was justified” (Kaplan 1981, 596). Passage of the Tunney amendment “removed any possible Soviet hesitation about expanding its military intervention” (Kaplan 1981, 596).

Thus, post-Vietnam domestic politics in the United States clearly played a big role in convincing the Soviet Union that the US would not respond to their actions in Angola. This influenced their decision to aid the MPLA and provide logistical support for the Cuban intervention. However, it is not clear the domestic politics explanation can be delinked from a reputational explanation. This is because the Soviet Union attributed US lack of will in Vietnam to domestic politics and saw the same factors that constrained the US in Vietnam operating in Angola. Arkady Shevchenko, a Soviet diplomat who later defected to the West, explained, “After the fall of Saigon, I and many other Soviet observers were deeply surprised by America’s acceptance of this final humiliation. Others, especially the party ideologues, were elated. They saw in Vietnam proof of the decay they long claimed was sapping Western strength and will” (Orme 1992, 114). As discussed above, Zimmerman and Axelrod’s (1981) analysis of Soviet news commentary found that the primary lesson Moscow drew from Vietnam was that the US lacked resolve in fighting national liberation movements. Of the articles they reviewed, most attributed this lack of will to “domestic disunity” and concern about domestic costs (22). Orme (1992) found that after the fall of Saigon Soviet observers concluded, “Sentiments in favor of the USA’s noninvolvement in new military conflict abroad . . . are growing stronger in Congress and throughout the country” (114). The Congressional decisions to cut off funding for South Vietnam were specifically cited as evidence that the United States would not intervene in Angola. When asked about why Moscow did not think its
involvement in Angola would prompt a US response, Kraminov mentioned the "political instability which prompted Congress to assert its rights in the foreign policy arena, as seen by the cutting off of military aid to South Vietnam" (quoted in Valenta 1978, 22). The Soviets looked at the "Congressional role in cutting off military aid to South Vietnam and Cambodia during the spring of 1975" and concluded that similar pressures would forestall a US reaction to an increase in Soviet funding for the MPLA (Valenta 1980, 108). Thus, disaggregating a domestic politics explanation from a reputational explanation is difficult. On one hand, the Soviets used information about how domestic politics had constrained the US in Vietnam to make inferences about how the US would act in Angola. On the other hand, they also believed that the American experience in Vietnam changed domestic politics in the US, giving them a freer hand to intervene in the third world. Both factors worked in tandem during the Angola crisis to convince the Soviets that the United States would not respond to their escalations.

Thus, I find some evidence that the lack of will the US revealed in Vietnam influenced Soviet decision making during the Angola crisis. This is consistent with Contextual Expectations Theory’s predictions because the Soviets believed that both Vietnam and Angola involved the viability of national liberation movements in the third world. The issues at stake were similar and so information about US willingness to suffer costs in Vietnam was relevant to information about its willingness to fight in Angola. Zimmerman and Axelrod (1981) found that the Soviets drew the conclusion that “the victory in Vietnam encourages optimism about future national liberation struggles” (15). Hopf’s (1990) assessment of the lessons the Soviets drew from the US withdrawal from Vietnam emphasized the narrow applicability of those lessons. He found that “there were no Soviet inferences about reduced US credibility in areas of strategic interest to the United States . . . However, the success of the Indochinese national
liberation movements were seen as inspirations to other such movements elsewhere in the world” (30). Orme (1992) similarly found that the US withdrawal from Vietnam was “a major factor in the revival of optimism among Soviet commentators in the prospects for ‘national liberation’ and Soviet activism in the third world” (113). Politburo member Mikhail Suslov specifically argued that the “victories” of the “national liberation movement in the struggle against imperialism in Vietnam . . . [was] changing the correlation of forces in favor of socialism” (quoted in Bennet 1999, 133). These beliefs about the viability of national liberation movements and the inability of the US to counter them were directly applicable to the MPLA’s struggle for independence and Soviet support for that struggle (Guimares 1998). Papp’s (1978) analysis of Soviet news and academic writings found that Moscow primarily justified its intervention in Angola in terms of “Soviet devotion to the ‘just struggle of the people against colonialism and neocolonialism’” (quoting Pravda, 35).

Again, my argument is not that the US withdrawal from Vietnam was the only, or even the most important factor in Soviet decision making during the Angola crisis. Other factors such as bureaucratic politics (Valenta 1980), a desire to counter Chinese influence in Africa (Valenta 1978; Kempton 1989), and concern about the legitimacy of its policies in the eyes of African leaders (Bennet 1999, Westad 2005) played a key role in motivating Moscow’s actions. My claim is that the US failure in Vietnam made Moscow more willing to intervene in Angola because they believed that the risk of US retaliation was low. I also argue that the risk was not negligible, and that Soviets were very careful to avoid provoking America, despite their belief that a US response was unlikely.

To assess the validity of this claim I need to address three potential counterarguments. First, some scholars claim that the USSR was pulled into Vietnam by Cuba and that it would not have chosen to escalate in the absence of the Cuban
intervention. If this is true, then Soviet beliefs about Vietnam were largely irrelevant because the decision to escalate was not their own. Second, there is a debate over the importance of détente in Moscow’s cost-benefit calculus. If the USSR showed restraint because it was worried about the damaging effects of its actions on détente and not about a potential American military response, then the second half of my argument about the residual credibility of US threats is inaccurate. Finally, there is some evidence that the Soviets believed the US would not intervene because of the balances of forces at the strategic level. If this is true, material resources rather than the reputational consequences of Vietnam might be driving Soviet decision making.

A number of Soviet policymakers involved in the Angola decisions have emphasized the role that Cuba’s policies played in shaping their own. Georgi Korienko, a top Foreign Ministry official during the crisis commented that “Soviet leaders were not informed in advance” of Cuba’s decision to send combat troops to Angola. After finding out, they “sent a telegram to Havana to try to stop the development. When the deployment went ahead, however, Soviet leaders felt that they could not idly stand by and let Cuban soldiers die in Angola, so they gave in to urgent Cuban requests for military aid” (Bennet 1999, 155). When asked why the Cubans became involved in Angola, Karen Brutents answered: “You should maybe not be asking us. Maybe you should ask Fidel—Fidel said it was their own decision—as far as a I know our political leadership as a group didn’t know about the Cuban plans . . . They didn’t ask us because they knew that we would not answer positively” (quoted in Westad 1995, 35). He goes onto explain that Cuban decisions “narrowed” the viable policy options left to the Soviets. They had to intervene or lose face. Gunn (1992) makes this argument explicit in her analysis of Soviet-Cuban relations during the crisis. She claims that the “Soviet Union had not carefully decided to test Washington’s will in Angola” (51). Rather
Cuba’s intervention “placed the Soviet leadership in a difficult position. Moscow could either refuse to provide arms and logistical support and thereby appear weak and ineffectual or agree . . . Left to their own initiative, the Soviets would probably have been far more circumspect in Angola” (49). While there is ample evidence to suggest that the Cubans were a major factor in the Soviet’s decisions, the relationship between the two countries was such that Havana could never dictate policy to Moscow. The Cubans needed Russian weaponry and Russian transport assistance in order to intervene effectively in Angola. Their fait accompli may have created pressure on Soviet leaders to escalate their level of involvement, but the Soviets could have still limited that involvement. Had they believed that the US would respond in force to their escalation, they probably would have done just that. The fact that they suspended the airlift of Cuban troops in December despite Havana’s protests suggests that Soviet perceptions of American intentions influenced Soviet decisions even after Cuba’s actions were accounted for.

Above I argued that the Soviets showed constraint because they could not entirely rule out the possibility of a US response to a major escalation. A number of authors claim that the USSR exercised caution, not because of fears of a military response, but rather because they did not want to jeopardize the benefits of détente (Kaplan 1981; Shearman 1987; Westad 1996). However, Kissinger and Ford mentioned détente multiple times in November, warning that Soviet actions in Angola were “not compatible with a relaxation of tensions” (quoted in Bennet 1999, 158). These warnings had no effect until Ford mentioned the possibility of a military confrontation. In addition, threats made after the Clark-Tuney amendment had removed the possibility of a US military response were ineffectual. Kissinger issued general warnings about how Soviet actions were harming détente throughout December and January, specifically
alluding to grain sales and the outcome of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) talks (Gartoff 1985; Orme 1992; Bennet 1999). Despite this, the Soviets continued to aid the MPLA and actually further increased their aid in February to ensure an MPLA victory. Furthermore, they refused to discuss Angola at SALT negotiations in January, and they explicitly argued that détente would not constrain their third world policies (Bennet 1999). This suggests that concern about détente did not play a large role in Moscow’s decision making during the Angola crisis.

The final factor influencing Soviet policies toward Angola that needs to be considered is the balance of power. Perhaps it was not Vietnam but rather the emergence of nuclear parity that led the Soviets to conclude that the US would not respond to their escalations. During a conference on the USSR’s policy toward southern Africa in the 1970’s, Russian scholar Alexander Chubarain explained why the Soviets were willing to get involved outside their traditional sphere of influence: “We felt maybe for the first time in our history that we could be involved, not only in Europe, we could be involved in Africa, too. It was immediately after the announcement about nuclear parity between us and United States” (quoted in Westad 1995, 42). Guimares’ (1998) analysis of communist interventions in Africa reaches a similar conclusion. He claims, “Soviet policy in general emerged with two main priorities: the pursuit of strategic parity with the United States and activism in the Third World. The former was the number one priority and, it was argued, necessary to achieve success in the latter” (163). Herman’s (1985) examination of the changes in Soviet perceptions of the US found that in the 1970’s the Soviets perceived a decline in American Power. However this decline derived not from “a lack of American will or decadence. . . but rather from the development of a counter-power” (80). Although much of the historiography points to the importance of the global balance of power, and specifically the strategic balance of
power, in motivating the Soviet’s third world policy, there is very little specific evidence that it influenced decision making in Angola. None of the histories I read mention the nuclear balance. Almost all of them mention Vietnam and domestic politics. This is not to suggest that the nuclear balance did not matter. It may have influenced policy in subtle ways by allowing the issue of an intervention in Angola to be discussed at all. However, the lack of discussion about strategic parity during the escalatory decisions of 1975 suggests that Soviet analysis of US intentions during the crisis were more influenced by Vietnam and domestic politics than balance of power considerations.

**Conclusion**

So what do Cuba and Soviet decision making during the Angola crisis reveal about the validity of Contextual Expectations Theory? First, US failure in Vietnam had reputational consequences as predicted by CET. The United States revealed a lack of will in withdrawing from Vietnam and this made both the Soviet Union and Cuba question America’s willingness to counter their escalations in Angola. In assessing the likelihood of an American response, both countries also considered the domestic repercussions of Vietnam within the United States. Because they attributed US weakness in Vietnam to domestic constraints, the continued Congressional and public opposition to US involvement in third world conflicts reinforced their beliefs about America’s willingness to intervene in Angola.

Second, issue similarity clearly influenced Soviet decision making. After Vietnam, Moscow drew inferences about the United States’ ability and willingness to counter the spread of national liberation movements in the third world. Because they viewed the MPLA as a national liberation movement, US failure in Vietnam was relevant to their decisions in Angola. The Cubans also emphasized similarities between Vietnam and Angola. However, the inferences the Cubans drew about US resolve were
not limited to revolutionary movements or the third world. America’s withdrawal from Vietnam convinced them that not only was the US unlikely to use force to oppose the MPLA in Angola, but that it no longer posed a direct threat to Cuba itself. Thus, the US failure in Vietnam influenced Havana’s beliefs about the willingness of the Americans to use force in a variety of circumstances.

When Cuban and Soviet actions during the Angola crisis are compared, the importance of relative power as a conditioning variable becomes apparent. CET predicts that weak actors will be more influenced by information about will than strong actors that focus more heavily on balance of power considerations. While I found that US failure in Vietnam influenced both Soviet and Cuban decisions, I also found that the Soviets were much more worried about provoking the United States than their Cuban comrades. They refused Cuba’s initial request for transport assistance in August of 1975 because they feared the US response. Furthermore, when Ford made veiled threats about Angola leading to a possible confrontation between the US and the USSR, the Soviets halted their airlift of supplies and Cuban combat troops until the Clark-Tuney amendment undermined the US threat. The USSR also refused to send advisors or combat troops to Angola. On the other hand, the Cubans sent a huge contingent of combat troops to Angola and continued with their airlift in December despite US threats. Their actions suggest that they were much less worried about a possible American response than were the Soviets.

The evidence also suggests that the Cubans thought the lessons of Vietnam were applicable to a wider variety of scenarios than did the Soviets. The Cubans thought US withdrawal from Vietnam made it less likely that the it would respond militarily to revolutionary movements in third world countries and less likely to invade Cuba itself. While the Soviets thought Vietnam made America less likely to intervene to counter
national liberation movements in the third world, there is no evidence that they made any inferences about American resolve regarding areas of “strategic importance” to the United States (Hopf 1990). Thus, the greater brazenness of Cuban actions and the wider range of circumstances to which they applied the lessons of Vietnam suggest that the Vietnam War had a greater impact on their decisions than on Soviet decisions, as predicted by CET.

In addition, there is some evidence that Soviet decisions were in part influenced by balance of power considerations. As mentioned earlier, a number of authors argue that the Soviets were more willing to intervene in the third world, and in Angola in particular, because of the emergence of nuclear parity. I argued that the evidence suggested that this factor was not nearly as important as the Soviet assessment of Vietnam and America’s domestic politics. This runs contrary to CET’s assertions that stronger powers will focus more on power asymmetries than on information about will. In this case, Soviet beliefs about US willingness to get involved were more important than balance of power considerations because the Soviets never intended to send troops to Angola. There was no possibility that their troops would fight the Americans, even if the US chose to respond. Had that been a possibility, I believe that balance of power considerations would have played a larger role. Since direct intervention was not on the table, Soviet assessment of America’s will became more important. However, the evidence still suggests that balance of power considerations influenced Soviet decision making at the margins. This contrasts starkly with Cuban decision making, where there is no evidence that Havana ever considered its relative power position vis-à-vis the US, even though it actually sent combat troops.

This case study does suggest that CET’s emphasis on expectations may be misplaced. The evidence regarding whether the Soviets or the Cubans thought the
outcome of the Vietnam War was unexpected is weak. Their public statements prior to the war and their postwar statements on the inevitable victories of national liberation movements suggest that the US defeat was not unexpected. Yet the war had reputational effects. This may be due to the fact that expectations are not important. However, it may also be due to the fact that the sources I have do not enable me to accurately assess the prior expectations of America’s adversaries. As discussed above, there was some evidence that the Soviets and Cubans thought the US defeat was unexpected given the power disparity between America and Vietnam and the Soviet Union’s private warnings to Hanoi prior to the war. This evidence is not very strong, but it suggests that the information generated during the war may have been unexpected. Thus, it is difficult to evaluate CET’s expectations hypothesis in this case. As with the statistical analysis and the World War II chapter, I find evidence of reputational effects even when prior expectations are not taken into account.

This provides some support for the baseline rationalist model, which predicts that a war will have reputational consequences even if its outcome was expected. The rationalist model also receives some support from the wide range of scenarios in which the Cubans applied the lessons of the Vietnam. Although it cannot account for the more cautious behavior of the Soviets, the fact that Vietnam affected the behavior of both the USSR and Cuba supports its contention that reputational effects are not context dependent.

The other theories of reputation formation perform poorly. Mercer predicted that information about US skill in Vietnam would have reputational effects but that the information about its lack of will would be attributed to the idiosyncrasies of the Vietnam conflict. Neither Cuba nor the Soviet Union mentions the US possession of skill in their postwar statements about the lessons of Vietnam. They focus on will and their
statements suggest that the lessons of Vietnam are applicable to national liberation movements throughout the globe. Cuba even applies the lessons of Vietnam to its own relationship with the United States. The military effectiveness of the US in Vietnam does not prompt either state to adopt conciliatory policies toward the United States. Although the Soviet Union is more cautious than Cuba about potentially provoking the United States, it does not attribute this caution to the American military’s performance in Vietnam. Vietnam is always given as justification for escalatory behavior, not conciliatory behavior.

Neither the bias and learning literature, nor Current Calculus Theory, can account for the fact that Vietnam had reputational consequences during the Angola Crisis. Current Calculus Theory also cannot explain the fact that both Cuba and the Soviet Union believed the lessons of Vietnam about US cost tolerance were applicable to other national liberation movements, or that Cuba used Vietnam to draw inferences about the willingness of the US to attack its own country. In addition, it cannot account for the fact that both countries compared the issues at stake in Vietnam to the issues at stake in Angola.
Table 7.2: The Explanatory Power of Competing Theories of Reputation Formation for the Soviet Union and Cuba during the Angola Civil War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Cuba</th>
<th>Soviet Union</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextual Expectations Theory</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Motivations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Launches Operation Carlotta</td>
<td>Focus on will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sends advisors and military aid</td>
<td>Unclear whether information is unexpected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ignores US threats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationalist Theory</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Motivations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Launches Operation Carlotta</td>
<td>Focus on Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sends advisors and military aid</td>
<td>No references to prior expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ignores US threats</td>
<td>Domestic political constraints given as reason for doubting US Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>Soviet Union</td>
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<tr>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bias and Learning</td>
<td>No Prediction</td>
<td>No Prediction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributional Theory</td>
<td>Launches Operation Carolotta</td>
<td>No focus on skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sends advisors and military aid</td>
<td>Lessons of Vietnam about US will applied broadly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ignores US threats</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 7.2 compares how well the various theories explain the behavior and decision making process of American adversaries in the Angola Civil War. An examination of the table demonstrates that CET and baseline rationalist model perform fairly well, but the remaining theories do not.

This chapter demonstrates that the Vietnam War affected the decision making of US adversaries in a crisis that involved the spread of communism in the third world. The next chapter evaluates whether it affected the decision making of US adversaries in a crisis that revolved around other issues and took place in a region where American economic interests were paramount. By comparing the effect of Vietnam in these two cases I can test whether issue similarity mediates the reputational consequences of wartime information about cost tolerance.
Chapter 8: Egyptian and Soviet Decision Making in the October War, Assessing Vietnam’s Reputational Costs

Just 6 months after the last US troops withdrew from Vietnam, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack against Israel, one of the United States’ key allies in the Middle East. This chapter seeks to assess whether the US withdrawal from Vietnam and the lack of will it demonstrated during that conflict influenced the decision making of Egypt and one of its key patrons, the Soviet Union. This case was chosen because the issues at stake for the United States were different from the issues at stake in the Vietnam War was fought, especially when compared to the Angola case. Unlike Vietnam and Angola, the October War did not involve the spread of communism. Rather it was a territorial dispute involving a US ally in a geopolitically important region. Although it was an ally of the Soviet Union, Egypt was not a communist country and did not want to spread communism in the Middle East. It was primarily concerned with regaining the territory it lost in the 1967 Six Day War. Although the Soviet Union occasionally framed the larger Arab-Israeli conflict as one involving a national liberation movement, the strategic and economic importance of the Middle East were prioritized above the spread of communism. In addition, the Soviets recognized that the US considered the Middle East a region of vital importance when compared to Africa and South East Asia. Because the October War does not involve issues relating to the spread of communism, I can assess whether Vietnam had reputational consequences when the issues at stake for potential challengers were different from those at stake in the Vietnam conflict. Comparing the effect of Vietnam on decisions made during the Angola Civil War and with those made during the October War enables me to test CET’s issue similarity hypothesis. In addition, because the Soviet Union is much more powerful than Egypt, this case provides an additional test of the power asymmetry hypothesis.
I begin this chapter by drawing on CET and the other theories of reputation formation to generate competing predictions about the behavior and decision making process of the Soviet Union and Egypt during the October War. After providing an overview of the conflict, I conduct an in depth analysis of Soviet and Egyptian decision making during the war. I begin by analyzing their postwar assessments to determine if they drew inferences about the United States’ cost tolerance at the end of Vietnam. This is followed by an examination of the extent to which their actions during the October War threatened the US directly or indirectly by threatening their ally. I also examine how they responded to explicit threats made by the US during the war. I then assess whether there is any evidence that US withdrawal from Vietnam influenced their behavior or decisions during the conflict. In the conclusion, I summarize what this case tells us about Contextual Expectations Theory and the other theories of reputation formation, especially when compared to the Angola Case. I then discuss how these findings contribute to the larger project by evaluating the validity of the variables used in the large N analysis and comparing the results of the qualitative analysis to the statistical tests in chapters 3 and 6. I conclude by positioning my findings in the context of the larger debate over the reputational consequences of the Vietnam War.

**The Reputational Costs of the Vietnam War: Competing Predictions**

Below I use the different theories of reputation formation to make predictions about the behavior and decision making process of the Soviet Union and Egypt during the October War. Three different types of evidence are used to test the theories. First, I look at what each theory says the two countries should learn from the Vietnam War. Second, I discuss what types of behavior would be consistent with the predictions of each theory. Finally, I use the theories to make predictions about what factors should
influence the decision making process. Because most of the theories make similar predictions about behavior and the importance of Vietnam in this case, adjudicating between them requires careful attention to the differing predictions regarding each country’s postwar assessment and the relative importance of different factors in the decision making processes.

**Contextual Expectations Theory**

Contextual Expectations Theory predicts that Vietnam should have no effect on the behavior or decision making of the Soviet Union during the October War. The USSR’s assessment of the Vietnam War should still focus on the cost tolerance of the United States. There should be some indication that the outcome of the war was unexpected and that it sees the lessons of Vietnam as applicable to conflicts where the issues at stake are similar to those over which the Vietnam War was fought. However, the Soviet Union should not use this information to inform its decisions during the October War because the issues at stake for this conflict are different and because it is a peer competitor of the United States. Consequently, it should focus more heavily on the balance of power than on questions of resolve and cost tolerance when evaluating the potential American responses to its actions. Because CET predicts no reputational effects in this case, its predictions regarding the behavior of the Soviet Union are indeterminate. The important prediction regards CET’s expectations about the decision making process. The Vietnam War should not be mentioned and neither should references to the United States’ lack of will. US threats should be seen as credible. To the extent they are not, this should be attributed to balance of power considerations, not the willingness of the US to suffer costs on behalf of its ally.

CET’s predictions with respect to Egyptian behavior are mixed. On one hand, the issues involved in the conflict differ from the issues at stake in Vietnam. On the other
hand, Egypt is weaker than the United States and should be especially sensitive to information about will because it is more concerned with the balance of resolve than the balance of power. Thus, CET can only make predictions about how Egyptian behavior should compare to Soviet behavior. When this comparison is made, the issues at stake are held constant and the differing material capabilities of the two states becomes the primary conditioning variable. Like the Soviet Union, the Egyptian postwar assessment of the US performance in Vietnam should focus on will. However, their behavior and their decisions should reflect their increased sensitivity to the importance of information about the United States’ cost tolerance. The policies they adopt should be more confrontational than Soviet policies, and they should be less responsive to US threats. In addition, they should focus on cost tolerance and the balance of resolve more than the USSR. Vietnam might be mentioned to justify their assessment of US willingness to suffer costs. If it is not mentioned, there should be evidence that it was dismissed because the issues are not similar.

It may seem that CET is not falsifiable for the Egyptian case. If Vietnam is mentioned it supports CET because it supports the power asymmetry hypothesis, especially if the Soviet Union does not mention Vietnam. If Vietnam is not mentioned, it supports CET because it supports the issue similarity hypothesis. Because CET does not make any a priori predictions about the relative importance of power asymmetry and issue similarity in conditioning reputational effects, this is unavoidable. However, there are a number of ways in which CET could be falsified when Egyptian behavior is compared with Soviet behavior: first, if Egyptian behavior is more conciliatory toward the United States; second, if the Egyptians are more responsive to US threats than the Soviets; third, if Egypt evaluates US threats by relying on balance of power considerations. The theory can also be falsified if Egypt does not focus on the US cost
tolerance in its assessment of the Vietnam War. CET can also be falsified if the Soviets mention Vietnam in their decision making or focus on US cost tolerance in evaluating the credibility of US threats.

**Alternative Hypotheses**

The baseline rationalist model predicts that Vietnam should have broad reputational consequences and thus should affect the decision making of both Egypt and the Soviet Union. Both countries should focus on the cost tolerance of the United States in their postwar assessments. This information should make them more willing to adopt policies that threaten American interests while also making them less likely to respond to US threats. They should mention Vietnam and US concern about the costs of war when justifying their decisions during the October War.

Mercer’s attributional theory predicts that there will be reputational consequences, but in the opposite direction. His theory suggests that information from Vietnam about the United States’ low cost tolerance will not have reputational consequences because that information is desirable to America’s adversaries and thus should be attributed to situational factors. However, information about the United States’ skill should have reputational effects. Because this information is undesirable and the US is in the out-group, America’s adversaries should attribute its military effectiveness to the United States’ disposition. Unlike situational attributions, dispositional attributions can have reputational effects. Thus, the lessons of Vietnam for the Soviet Union and Egypt should focus on skill according to Mercer. This information should make them less willing to challenge the United States and more responsive to US threats. They should justify conciliatory behavior by referencing the effectiveness of the American military and should use Vietnam as an example of that effectiveness. Vietnam
should not be used to justify conflictual behavior and should not be mentioned as an example of the US revealing low cost tolerance.

The bias and learning literature predicts that the Vietnam War will have no reputational consequences because states rarely update their beliefs when faced with new information and do not normally engage in vicarious learning. This literature makes no predictions about postwar assessments or the behavior of either the Soviet Union or Egypt. Its primary prediction regards the decision making process; the Vietnam War should not be mentioned to justify either confrontational or conciliatory behavior during the October War.

Current Calculus Theory also predicts that the Vietnam War will have no reputational consequences because information about cost tolerance and resolve is issue specific. Leaders use the interests at stake in the current conflict to evaluate resolve rather than relying on the past actions of their adversaries. Any references to information about US cost tolerance in postwar assessments should focus on the peculiarities of the Vietnam conflict. No mention of Vietnam should be made justifying confrontational behavior during the crisis and any references to US resolve should focus on the interests at stake in the current crisis.

Table 8.1 compares the predictions of the competing theories. As can be seen below, CET, the bias and learning literature, and Current Calculus Theory make very similar predictions in this case. Even the logic of Current Calculus Theory and CET correspond. Both predict that information about Vietnam will not be relevant to the October War because the issues at stake are different from the issues at stake in the current war. The primary difference is that Current Calculus asserts that the information will never be relevant because the issues at stake in every crisis are
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Soviet Union</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Expectations Theory</td>
<td>More willing to challenge US than Soviet Union</td>
<td>Focus on will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less responsive to US threats than Soviet Union</td>
<td>Information should be unexpected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rationalist Theory</td>
<td>Focus on will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adopts threatening policies</td>
<td>No references to prior expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bias and Learning Literature</td>
<td>No prediction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.1: Competing Predictions about the Reputational Consequences of the Vietnam War for the Soviet Union and Egypt during the October War
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Soviet Union</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributional Theory</td>
<td>Careful not to threaten the United States</td>
<td>Focus on skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsive to US threats</td>
<td>Lack of will attributed to situational factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No prediction</td>
<td>Discussion of will focuses on the specific issues at stake in Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Calculus</td>
<td></td>
<td>No prediction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
different, while CET asserts that the information will be relevant under some conditions, just not those present in this case.

**Types of Evidence**

I primarily rely on the secondary historical literature to assess these hypotheses. For the Soviet Union’s decision making I also rely heavily on Isrealyan’s memoirs. Victor Isrealyan was a member of the four-man task force set up by Kremlin leaders to handle the October War. Their job was to provide the Politburo with data and to prepare the relevant documents once decisions had been made. Israelyan attended almost all of the Politburo meetings about the war, participated in some of the negotiations with Egypt and the US, and helped coordinate wartime policy by serving as a liaison between the Politburo and other Soviet ministries. If Vietnam influenced Soviet decisions during the war, it should be noted in this book. I also draw heavily on Golan’s accounts of the war (1974, 1977, 1990) because they cite numerous primary resources in the Soviet Union, especially media accounts of the USSR’s actions. While these reports are not entirely trustworthy since they were generated for public consumption, they do reflect the “official” policy of the USSR and thus can offer some insight into Soviet actions. When combined with the rest of the historical literature, they provide ample data by which to assess Vietnam’s reputational consequences in this case.

My analysis of Egyptian decisions also relies heavily on secondary histories. However in this case, I had access to the memoirs of multiple decision makers including President Sadat, General Shazly, the Armed Forces Chief of Staff, and General Gamassy, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. These are arguably 3 of the 5 most important Egyptian decision makers during the war.\(^1\) If the Vietnam War affected upper level

\(^1\) Ismail Ali, the War Minister, and Vice Marshal Muhammad Husni Mubarak, the Head of the Egyptian Air Force are the remaining two.
decisions during the October War, it probably did so by affecting the beliefs of these men. Their memoirs are thus an invaluable source by which to assess the reputational consequences of Vietnam for this case. Another important source is Sadat’s public statements leading up to the war which were collected by Israeli (1978) and published as The Public Diary of President Sadat: October 1970-October 1973. These documents provide insight into how Sadat justified his wartime decisions to the public. The account by Mohamed Heikal, a leading Egyptian journalist, is also valuable since it relies heavily on the Egyptian media’s account of the war. Other secondary histories, primarily written by western scholars, provide additional information on Egypt’s behavior and motivation during the war.

**Overview of the October War**

On October 6th at 2:00 pm Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack against Israel. Despite numerous indications that their Arab neighbors were mobilizing for war, Israel was caught off guard and both Egypt and Syria were able to break through Israeli defenses. Egypt established bridgeheads across the Suez and overran the Bar-Lev defensive line with very few casualties in less than two days. Syria suffered higher losses, but was still able to regain the southern half of the Golan Heights. On the 8th and 9th Israel launched a series of unsuccessful counterattacks on both fronts and began aerial bombing of Syrian cities. During this time the US publicly called for a ceasefire. Although the Soviet Union privately urged its allies to agree to a ceasefire to protect its early gains, it made no public pronouncements or diplomatic efforts to secure one due to Egyptian opposition.

On October 10th, the tide of battle began to turn on the Syrian front and to stall on the Egyptian front. The Israeli Army retook the Golan Heights and by October 13th their counteroffensive had succeeded in pushing the Syrian Army beyond the 1967 ceasefire
The front stabilized about 20 miles south of Damascus. Meanwhile, there was a lull on the Suez front, with neither the Egyptian, nor the Israeli armies gaining any headway. With the weapons and ammunition of all the belligerents being quickly depleted in the large tank battles, the superpower patrons of both sides stepped in to resupply their allies. Soviet aid began arriving in Egypt and Syria on October 10th, and the American airlift to Israel started a few days later, on the 12th. Both superpowers also continued to work for a ceasefire, but these efforts were largely futile because Egypt was unwilling to acquiesce unless Israel withdrew to its pre-1967 borders.

An Egyptian offensive to gain control of Milta and Gidi passes was repulsed in a major tank battle on October 14th. The following day, Israel launched a counterattack against Egyptian forces and succeeded in establishing a bridgehead to the western bank of the Suez Canal after maneuvering through a gap between the 2nd and 3rd Egyptian Armies. On the 16th they were able to move three tanks divisions onto the Egyptian side of the Suez. The Isreali Army continued its offensive over the next few days and on the 18th began operations designed to encircle the 3rd Army. By October 19th, the road to Cairo was open and the Egyptian 3rd Army was in a dangerous position.

Aware of the deteriorating battlefield conditions, the Politburo sent Alexei Kosygin to Cairo to convince Sadat to agree to a ceasefire on Oct 16th. Although he was unable to convince Sadat to alter his position during his visit, the gravity of the situation facing the 3rd Army and the potential danger posed to Cairo by the advancing Israelis prompted Sadat to inform the Soviets that he would accept a ceasefire in place on the 19th. The following day, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger flew to Moscow to work out the details of a ceasefire agreement. The eventual agreement called for a ceasefire, implementation of an early resolution calling for a “just and lasting peace in the Middle
East,” and the commencement of negotiations to establish that peace. The ceasefire resolution was adopted at 12:52 am on October 22\textsuperscript{nd} and went into effect later that day.

The ceasefire agreement broke down within a few hours of implementation and the Israeli Army recommenced their offensive. On October 24\textsuperscript{th}, the Security Council passed another resolution calling for a halt to the war. This second resolution had little effect on the ground. The Israeli Army continued its operations, encircling the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Army, capturing the Egyptian Naval Base at Adabiya, and launching an attack against Suez City. With the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Army encircled and Cairo endanger, Egypt pleaded for the US and the USSR to send troops to enforce the ceasefire. Despite a public US refusal that also warned against any outside intervention, the Soviet Union sent a message to Nixon proposing joint action to police the ceasefire and threatening unilateral action if the US refused. The US responded with a worldwide nuclear alert and private messages to the USSR and Egypt which communicated US opposition to intervention by either superpower acting jointly or unilaterally. In response, Egypt retracted its request and the Soviet Union proposed sending a UN force as an alternative. The US agreed. It also convinced Israel to honor the ceasefire and to allow the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Army to be resupplied. A few days later negotiations began that would eventually lead to a disengagement agreement and peace between Egypt and Israel.

**The Soviet Union and the October War**

The Soviet Union’s behavior during the October War reflected its desire to balance two incongruous objectives. On the one hand, it wanted to increase Soviet influence in the Middle East by supporting its Arab allies. On the other hand, it wanted to avoid a confrontation with the United States in order to preserve the benefits of détente. The result was a bifurcated policy that was both confrontational and conciliatory with regards to US interests. It was the first time the Soviet Union
intervened “on behalf of a non-Communist client engaged in all out conflict and the first historical instance of its taking definite escalatory steps in a regional conflict central to US interests” (Porter 1984, 113). The USSR was much more involved compared to previous Arab-Israeli disputes: the quantity of the weapons supplied was much greater; the quality of those weapons was much more sophisticated; and it was the first time it threatened to intervene unilaterally (Kohler, Goure, and Harvey 1974, 99). However, during the conflict they also privately urged their clients to agree to a ceasefire, worked closely with the US to negotiate the details of that ceasefire, and refrained from publically denouncing US support of Israel. They also reversed their policy position on superpower intervention after observing the US reaction to their own veiled threat of unilateral action.

My analysis of Soviet decision making suggests that their escalatory policies were undertaken to prevent their allies from experiencing another humiliating defeat at the hands of Israel. They discounted the possibility of a US intervention because they believed that the US would only intervene if Israel was in danger of being defeated or if the USSR intervened on behalf of its own clients. Since they had no intention of intervening and thought an Arab victory unlikely, they did not think their actions would prompt an American military response. The US withdrawal from Vietnam did not influence their assessment of US intentions or alter their decisions.

**Soviet Assessment of US Performance in Vietnam**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Soviets attributed the outcome of the Vietnam War to the superior will of the Vietnamese. Although the public statements of Soviet leaders and Soviet news coverage do not explicitly ascribe the US defeat to its low cost tolerance, their emphasis on the willingness of Vietnamese to suffer costs during the war suggests that they saw will, not skill, as the decisive factor in the conflict. In
addition, Soviet observers made repeated statements about how domestic opposition to the war in the United States undermined their military efforts and eventually led to their defeat. These statements suggest that the Soviet Union attributed the US defeat in Vietnam to a lack of political will that was fueled by the public’s sensitivity to rising casualties and an anti-war movement that placed increasing constraints on America’s ability to wage war. Their statements suggest that they believed that this information about the determinants of America’s cost tolerance were relevant to other conflicts, particularly those that involved national liberation movements. An International Affairs article published just after the US withdrawal from Vietnam states, “One can hardly overestimate the importance of the defeat suffered by US imperialism’s aggressive policy in Vietnam for the entire national liberation movement” (Skvotsov 1973, 63). Another article made similar argument, exclaiming, “It is difficult to exaggerate the inspiring significance of this fact [the US defeat] for the people waging anti-imperialist liberation struggles” (Sergyev 1974, 18). At a speech given after the fall of Saigon, Secretary Brezhnev expressed similar sentiments, explaining, “the attempts to suppress the national liberation movement of people are destined to failure in our days, and the best evidence of this is the glorious victory won by the Vietnamese people in the struggle against foreign invaders and their henchmen” (quoted in Zhukov 1975, 16). The joint Soviet-Vietnamese Declaration issued in October of 1975 emphasized the same thing. It declared that the US defeat “convincingly demonstrated the invincible might of the military alliance between the forces of national liberation and the forces of socialism” (Pravda, 31 October 1975). Thus, the Soviets viewed the lessons of Vietnam as being applicable outside the Indochinese theater. The next two sections evaluate whether the Soviet used those lessons to evaluate US resolve during the October War.
Soviet Behavior During the War

Many of the policies adopted by the Soviet Union during the October War indirectly threatened the United States by enabling Egypt and Syria to attack Israel. Significantly, they also threatened to intervene unilaterally to prevent Israeli destruction of the Egyptian 3rd Army after the US-Soviet brokered ceasefire broke down. Although these escalatory decisions challenged US interests in the Middle East, the Soviet Union was careful to couple them with more conciliatory measures aimed at ending the war without wrecking détente.

Prior to the onset of the war, the USSR provided both Egypt and Syria with the weapons they needed to launch the surprise attack. In February of 1973, the Soviets dramatically increased the quantity of weapons they were sending to Egypt. This increase was partially driven by a resumption of supplies that had been cut off when the Egyptians expelled Soviet advisors in July of 1972, but it also included new offensive weapons that the USSR had previously refused to sell to Egypt, including SA-6 missiles, Sukhoi 20 ground attack aircraft, T-62 tanks, and the coveted SCUD missiles (Jabber and Kolkowicz 1981). Golan (1990) claims that although the Soviets did not know the details of Egypt’s or Syria’s plans for war, they probably assumed that these weapons would eventually be used in an offensive to reclaim territory lost in 1967 (83).

Egypt told the Soviet Union of its plans to attack Israel on October 3rd, and Syria relayed the date of the offensive on the 4th, just two days before the war began. Although the Soviets had grave doubts about the Arabs’ ability to successfully prosecute an offensive, they relayed their support to Sadat through their Egyptian ambassador, Vladimir Vinogradov. He told Sadat that “the USSR would fulfill all its obligations and would support the Arab rights [to reclaim their territory] by all means . . . military, political, and economic” (quoted in Porter 1984, 125).
The Soviet Union kept its promise and began supplying weapons to its allies almost immediately. Golan (1977) claims that the USSR dispatched a few ships with arms and equipment on October 4th and 5th (70). Although most sources date the start of major airlift and sealift operations as October 10th (Golan 1977; Gartoff 1985; Porter 1984; Rabinovich 2004), Israelyan (1995) claims the decision was made earlier. According to his account, the decision to begin a resupply via air and sea was made on the October 6th or 7th and began on the 8th (57). Soviet planes began arriving in Syria and Egypt on the 10th because of an overnight stop in Budapest and Belgrade (58).

The airlift and sealift were significant because it was the first time the Soviet Union actively supplied the Arabs during fighting (Freedman 1978, 142). In previous conflicts, the USSR had helped them rebuild their arsenals after the war but had refrained from mounting a resupply effort while hostilities were ongoing. The scale of the resupply effort and the types of weapons the Soviet provided also represented a major escalation in Soviet involvement compared to earlier conflicts (Kohler et al 1974, 99). The airlift delivered between 12,500 and 15,500 tons of military material and involved more than 900 round trip flights from the Soviet Union to the Middle East (Quandt 1976, Golan 1977, Jabber and Kolkowicz 1981, Parker 2001). The sealift transported around 60,000 tons of war material and involved 25 ships (Quandt 1976; Jabber and Kolkowicz 1981).²

The types of weapons supplied were also more sophisticated and lethal than past shipments of weapons had been. In addition to replacing the Arabs' tank inventory which was quickly being depleted in both the Golan Heights and on the Suez front, the Soviets provided Egypt and Syria with coveted offensive weapons including MIG 21.

²Kohler et al (1974) estimate the total supply of weapons as much higher, between 200 and 250 thousand tons (64), but this is inconsistent with the rest of the literature, which cites the much lower numbers described above.
and MIG 25 fighter aircraft, TU-16 and TU-22 medium range bombers, Su-20 Ground Attack aircraft, SA-6s, Sager Missiles, RPG rocket launchers, FROG 7s, and SCUD missiles (Jabber and Kolkowicz 1981; Porter 1984). The SA-6s proved very effective at neutralizing Israeli air superiority and the Sagger missiles and RPGS were very effective at destroying Israeli tanks (Porter 1984). The range of the SCUD missiles provided Egypt with a “counter-terror” weapon that could deter Israeli attacks on Egyptian cities by threatening the Israeli heartland (Rubinstein 1977). The Syrians, who lacked that deterrent weapon, were subjected to strategic bombing in Damascus and other major population centers. They retaliated with the less powerful FROG 7 missiles.

In addition to providing weapons, Soviet advisors aided Syria and Egypt. Kohler et al (1974) notes that although Soviet civilians were evacuated from both countries prior to the onset of hostilities, advisors and technical experts remained (64). Soviet advisors repaired damaged weapons, assembled sophisticated weapons like the MIG aircraft, drove newly delivered tanks to the front lines, operated the radars for Egyptian air traffic controllers, and maintained control of the Air Defense Centers in Damascus and Latika (Porter 1984; Isrealyan 1995; Rabinovich 2004). The USSR also put their airborne forces on alert and increased their naval presences in the Mediterranean to protect their resupply effort and to ensure their forces were prepared for other contingencies.

The Soviets directly threatened Israel twice during the war. The first warning was issued on October 12th, after a Soviet merchant ship was sunk during the Israeli bombing of Damascus. Although some Politburo members argued for overt retaliation, Brezhnev vetoed this idea and opted instead to issue a verbal warning (Rabinovich 2004, 325). The official statement condemned the “criminal acts of the Israeli military,” demanded “the immediate stop [of] the bombing of peaceful towns in Syria and Egypt,” and threatened “grave consequences for Israel itself” if it did not halt its bombing.
campaign (quoted by Isrealyan 1995, 69). The Soviet Union issued a similar warning after Israeli violations of the ceasefire, expressing “angry protest” at the “perfidious action of the Israeli government.” They demanded that the Israeli military immediately end their operations and withdraw to the October 22nd lines, ominously warning “of the gravest consequences” if Israel continued its “aggression actions” (quoted in Yaacov 1974, 583).

The major escalatory decision the USSR made during the conflict was threatening unilateral intervention to police the ceasefire. After the ceasefire broke down on October 22, Israel continued its offensive, moving to encircle the Egyptian 3rd Army and attack Suez City and Ismailia. After a second Security Council ceasefire failed to halt the Israeli advance, Sadat requested a joint US-Soviet force be sent to enforce the ceasefire and asked the USSR to consider unilateral intervention if the US refused to participate in a joint venture.

The Politburo met to discuss the request and decided to formally propose joint US-Soviet action. They believed that the US would be open to such a proposal because of the Kissinger-Brezhnev talks. Brezhnev believed that the two superpowers had reached “an understanding” and that they were both “committed to exerting their influence on their respective friends in order to stop the fighting” (Isrealyan 1995, 161). Isrealyan (1995) is careful to point out that at the initial meeting “none of the participants proposed sending Soviet observers unilaterally. They had to be part of a Soviet-American team” (163). The US responded to the Soviet initiative by publicly refusing Egypt’s call for joint action. They also sent a message to Ambassador Dobrynin, expressing US opposition to superpower involvement.

With the situation on the ground quickly deteriorating for the Egyptian Army, the Soviets felt they had to do something to prevent an Egyptian defeat. They
considered Sadat’s call for unilateral intervention, but “nobody liked or supported that idea. ‘We have already made a principled decision not to be involved in the Middle East War, and there are no reasons to change our decision,’ noted Brezhnev. Thus, any military involvement . . . was ruled out” (Isrealyan 1995, 168). However, the Politburo felt that they had to do something to compel the United States to restrain its ally, and so they opted to send a message to Washington, threatening unilateral action if the US refused to agree to a joint force to police the ceasefire. On October 24, Brezhnev sent Nixon the following letter:

Let us together, the Soviet Union and the United States, urgently dispatch Soviet and American military contingents to Egypt to ensure implementation of the Security Council decisions of October 22 and 23 concerning the cessation of fire and all military activities . . . It is necessary to adhere without delay. I will say it straight that if you find it impossible to act jointly with us in their matter, we should be faced with the necessity urgently to consider taking appropriate steps unilaterally (quoted in Isrealyan 1995, 169-170).

According to Isrealyan (1995) the letter was “drafted cautiously in order not to frighten the Americans too much” (Isrealyan 1995, 169). The Politburo also opted not to tell their UN ambassador about the letter because they did not “want to frighten the whole world” (Isrealyan quoting Brezhnev 1995, 171). Despite the Politburo’s alleged caution, the note represented the first time the Soviet Union had threatened to intervene in an area outside Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It was a major escalatory decision, and it was taken very seriously by the United States.

Although some of the actions taken by the Soviet Union during the October War threatened US interests, the USSR tried to limit the negative effects of these actions on Soviet-American relations by keeping the conflict limited and by bringing hostilities to an early conclusion. Prior to the war, the Soviets tried to convince their Arab allies not to launch a war, emphasizing that a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute was both possible and preferable (George 1983, 140; Gartoff 1985, 362-363; Golan 1990, 84). Sadat
mentions four separate occasions where emissaries from the USSR pressured him not to attack Israel (Gartoff 1985, 363).

At the first Politburo meeting after the Soviets received word of the impending Arab attack, Brezhenev expressed “his disappointment that war had broken out” since such a war would undermine détente and, in all likelihood, lead to a speedy defeat of both Egypt and Syria (Isrealyan 1995, 31). Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyoko expressed similar misgivings, noting, “the Soviet leadership had done everything it could to talk Sadat and Assad out of launching a military attack” (Isrealyan 1995, 2). Although they felt compelled to stand by their Arab allies, they responded to Egypt’s announcement by “emphasizing the obvious advantages of a political settlement of the crisis” (Isrealyan 1995, 11). They then tried to disassociate themselves from the pending military operations by airlifting Soviet civilians out of Egypt and Syria, moving their naval vessels out of Alexandria and Port Said, and redeploying their lead missile cruiser from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea.

Once the conflict began, the Soviets took special precautions to avoid antagonizing the United States. On October 8th, they sent a message to the US emphasizing their desire to keep the war limited (Porter 1984). On the 10th they sent another message which stated, “the Soviet Union did not wish to damage détente” and assured the US that the Soviets did not question “the existence and viability of Israel” (quoted in Jabber and Kolkowicz 1981, 451). Their propaganda avoided criticizing the US (Golan 1977, Wehling 1997), and they agreed not to bring up the matter before the UN General Assembly, where Israel and the US would be at a disadvantage (Gartoff 1985, 369).

The Soviets also worked tirelessly to convince the Arabs to agree to the ceasefire. They thought it would be impossible for the Arabs to retake all of their lost territory and
that eventual defeat was likely, so they pressed Sadat to agree to a ceasefire to protect his initial gains. They first approached Sadat only six hours after the initiation of hostilities (Golan 1990, 86). Sadat refused. He felt the Russians “were trying to force Cairo to abandon its successful efforts to wear down Israeli forces in the interests of a quick end to that conflict” (Fukayama 1980, 22).

When the Syrian position began to deteriorate on October 10th, the Soviets began pressing Sadat to reconsider his position. The USSR also told the US that it was willing to work jointly to broker an agreement (Isrealyan 1995). Over the next few days, the US and the USSR worked together to draft a proposal that the British agreed to sponsor in the Security Council. However, when the British discovered that Sadat was firmly opposed to a ceasefire, they refused to move forward on the agreement.

With both Egypt and Syria’s battlefield position quickly deteriorating, Premier Alexei Kosygin went to Cairo on October 16th to convince Sadat to reverse his position. During Koysgin’s initial discussions with Sadat, the Egyptian leader agreed to a ceasefire only if Israel withdrew to its 1967 borders. Kosygin argued that the tide of the battle might be turning and that the war had served its purpose. Egypt could use its territorial gains as leverage in political negotiations in order to recoup the rest of its lands (Isrealyan 1995, 105). Sadat refused, and Kosygin returned to Moscow without an agreement. However, shortly after Kosygin left, Sadat had a meeting with his General Staff and realized the severity of the situation on the battlefield. He quickly sent a message to the USSR relaying his acceptance of a ceasefire in place. With Sadat’s agreement, the USSR began working with the US to nail down the details of the ceasefire agreement that eventually was passed by the Security Council on October 22nd. After the initial ceasefire broke down, the Soviets approached the US about cosponsoring another
Security Council Resolution, calling on both sides to return to the October 22\textsuperscript{nd} lines. The US agreed and Resolution 338 was passed on October 23\textsuperscript{rd}.

Thus, the USSR tried to prevent the war from precipitating a superpower conflict by urging their Arab allies not to go to war and by working for a ceasefire from the onset of hostilities until the second ceasefire held on October 25\textsuperscript{th}. The Soviets also avoided criticizing the US during their propaganda campaign and sent reassuring messages to Washington communicating their desire to avoid damaging détente. However, these cooperative actions were undertaken at the same time they were arming their Arab allies and threatening Israel.

Initially, the United States downplayed the Soviet role in the conflict. In his first public address after the start of the war on October 6\textsuperscript{th}, Kissinger stated, “If you compare their [Soviet] conduct in this crisis to their conduct in 1967, one has to say that Soviet behavior has been less provocative, less incendiary, and less geared to military threats than in the previous crisis” (quoted in Jabber and Kolkowicz 1981). After the Soviet airlift commenced, Kissinger publically announced that although the US did “not consider the Soviet airlift of military equipment helpful. [They] also [did] not consider that Soviet actions as of now constitute the irresponsibility that . . . would threaten détente” (quoted in Freedman 1978, 142). Many of their private communications were equally cautious and, at times, cooperative. On October 16\textsuperscript{th}, Kissinger sent a message to Dobrynin offering to “stop the airlift immediately” if the Soviets were willing to do to the same (Kissinger 2003, 257). He followed up with another message on the October 17\textsuperscript{th} which stated, “You know our policy, as I have told you, is to try to really, to the utmost, to not only keep the détente going, but to strengthen it” (Kissinger 2003, 279).

As this statement suggests, US restraint was primarily due to the administration’s desire to maintain the benefits of détente. Rabinovich (2004) argues,
“The attitudes of decision makers in Washington and Moscow had been almost identical when the war broke out. . . . [Both were determined] that the détente they had worked so hard to achieve would not be undermined by their unruly clients” (319). Laquer (1974) writes that the US avoided criticizing the USSR because it knew that such “outspoken criticism of Soviet behavior would jeopardize détente” (145). The emphasis Kissinger puts on détente in both his public and private statements to the Soviets reinforces this point.

This cautious approach to superpower diplomacy was abandoned after the Soviet threat to intervene unilaterally was made on October 24th. The Americans thought that the Soviet threat to intervene was credible because it was accompanied by a range of military actions that could have been interpreted as preparations for an intervention. There was the alert of airborne troops and the pause in the airlift, which could have been taken to refit the transport planes to carry troops (Jabber and Kolkowicz 1981). Soviet naval activity in the Mediterranean Sea increased. The number of surface combatants increased from 26 to 34, and a number of destroyers were moved from Crete to monitor the USS independence, potentially to defend ships carrying troops or supplies to the Egyptian front (Jabber and Kolkowicz). Finally, the US had received intelligence reports of the movement of nuclear material in Egyptian waters.

Interpreting these developments in light of Brezhnev’s letter prompted the US to take the threat of unilateral action seriously and to respond with vigorous opposition. Kissinger explains in his book on the October War that the “dispatch of Soviet forces” was unacceptable because the US had not worked for years to reduce the Soviet military presence in Egypt, only to cooperate in reintroducing it as a result of a UN resolution. Nor would it be acceptable to participate in a joint force with the Soviets, which would legitimize their role in the area and strengthen radical elements (Kissinger 2003, 331).
In justifying the nuclear alert President Nixon explained, “For the Soviet Union to move any kind of forces into the Mid-East would, first, tip the balance so that Israel would have been down the tube. But even more important, it would have established the precedent where the Soviets had a presence in the Mid-East . . . and so it ran the risk of great power confrontation” (quoted in Wehling 1997, 121). Kissinger justified the US response in a similar way, noting that this would be the “first time that Soviet combat forces were introduced in an area not contiguous to the Soviet Union, and for reasons not connected with the preservation of a socialist regime . . . therefore it was a matter taken extremely seriously” (quoted in Parker 2001, 167). Peter Rodman, a special assistant to Kissinger, made a similar point during a post-mortem policy conference on the conflict. He explains, “From our point of view, it was absolutely impermissible that the Soviet Union even contemplated unilateral intervention in the Middle East in the middle of a war to make itself, to make Soviet arms, the arbiter of an Arab-Israel conflict. That was totally impermissible. It threatened an American vital interest” (Parker 2001, 202). After reading the note, Kissinger concluded, “There was no question in my mind that we would have to reject the Soviet proposal. And we would have to do so in a manner that shocked the Soviets into abandoning the unilateral move they were threatening” (quoted in Wehling 1997, 122).

Faced with what it thought was a threat to vital US interests in the region, the US responded with firm opposition. While American senior policy officials considered potential responses to Brezhnev’s letter, Kissinger sent a private message to Dobrynin stating, “We are assembling our people to consider your letter. I just wanted you to know if any unilateral action is taken before we have had chance to reply that will be very serious” (Kissinger 2003, 345). After deliberations, the US decided to take a major step: they would put the American military, including its nuclear forces, on an
increased state of readiness. Defense Condition (DEFCON) III, the highest peacetime readiness level, was activated. The 82nd Airborne Division was put on alert, and three aircraft carriers were moved to the Mediterranean Sea. This show of force was accompanied by a private response to Brezhnev’s letter which read, “You must know, however, that we could in no event accept unilateral action . . . such action would produce incalculable consequences which would be in the interest of neither of our countries and which would end all we have striven so hard to achieve” (quoted in Kissinger 2003, 353). This was accompanied by a public statement, announcing

The United States does not favor and will not approve the sending of a joint Soviet-United States force into the Middle East. . . It is inconceivable that we should transplant the great power rivalry into the Middle East, or alternatively, that we should impose a military condominium by the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States is even more opposed to the unilateral introduction by any great power, especially by any nuclear power, of military forces into the Middle East, in whatever guise those forces should be introduced (quoted in Kissinger 2003, 357).

The Soviets were very surprised at the US reaction to Brezhnev’s letter. In fact, Isrealyan claims they did not initially connect the nuclear alert to the letter. He remembers that “Very few indeed guessed that the pretext for Washington’s decision was Brezhnev’s latest message to Nixon. . . [which emphasized] joint Soviet-American action in accordance with the understanding reaching during Kissinger’s visit to Moscow” (Isrealyan 1995, 179-180).

Once the Politburo members realized the alert was a response to Brezhnev’s own threat, and that they were “heading toward a confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States” there was consensus that they had to respond in a way that would avoid such a confrontation (Isrealyan 1995, 179). Kosygin stated, “It is not reasonable to become engaged in a war with the United States because of Egypt and Syria.” Andropov agreed, “We shall not unleash the Third World War.” Kirilenko reaffirmed this point of view, arguing that “the steps we take should not lead us into a
war.” Ponmorev was similarly resolved, “We do not need another war” (all quotes from Isrealyan 1995, 180). The only person who supported sending troops was Defense Minister Andrei Grechko who argued, “In the past we have never asked anybody if we could send troops or not, and we should not now” (quoted in Isrealyan 1995, 181). Koysgin voiced resolute opposition to this proposal, arguing that intervention would lead to a war with the US: “Suppose we send two divisions to the Middle East. In response the Americans will send two divisions as well. If we send five divisions, the Americans will send their five. Neither side would be frightened” (quoted in Isrealyan 1995, 181). Gromyoko thought sending troops was reckless. He asked his fellow Politburo members: “Where is the brink, the line between peace and a new, nuclear war? Who can draw that line” (quoted in Isrealyan 1995, 181)?

Although most of the Politburo members agreed that sending troops to the Middle East was unwarranted and dangerous, “the majority held that the American nuclear alert had to be considered as a challenge to the Soviet Union” (Isrealyan 1995, 180). Kirlenko proposed instituting an increased state of readiness. Grechko thought a partial mobilization would be a clear signal. Kosygin focused on political solutions and argued for sending Gromyoko to Washington. Katushev suggested calling up an Emergency UN force to police the ceasefire. After a heated debate, Secretary Brezhnev suggested ignoring the alert: “What about not responding at all to the American nuclear alert? Nixon is too nervous—lets cool him down . . . Let Nixon explain the reasons for the nuclear alert first” (quoted in Isrealyan 1995, 183). This would avoid a confrontation, preserve détente, and allow Israel time to shift its policy position.

In the end, Brezhnev’s policy of not responding prevailed. The Politburo agreed to send a message to Kissinger which reminded the US of its commitment to end the war by pressuring Israel to stop fighting. The message also proposed sending a UN force to
police the ceasefire. Nixon’s response approved of sending a UN force and reiterated the US desire to end the conflict stating,

We are ready to undertake every effective measure in order to guarantee the implementation of the cease-fire and we are already in close contact with the government of Israel aimed at ensuring its full compliance with the provision of the Security Council decisions (quoted in Isrelyan 1995, 186).

Thus, a possible superpower confrontation was avoided and, shortly after, Israel began honoring the ceasefire.

**Process Tracing: Did the Vietnam War Affect Soviet Decisions During the October War?**

How did the USSR think the US would respond to its decision to provide material and diplomatic support to Egypt and Syria, to its threat of unilateral intervention, and to its decision to back down after the US nuclear alert? Was the potential US reaction a vital part of the decision making calculus, and if so did the US withdrawal from Vietnam influence these decisions? Below I address each of these questions for their general wartime strategy, their decision to issue the intervention threat, and their decision to back down from that threat.

The Soviet Union supported Egypt and Syria prior to and during the October War in order to maintain and increase its influence in the Middle East. Thus, even though the Soviets opposed the war, they still provided the weapons required for their allies to launch the attack. Rubinstein (1977) argues that because Egypt was the USSR’s primary ally in the Middle East, not supporting its policies would send a message to the whole region about the USSR’s dependability as an ally and superpower (Rubinstein 1977, 236). Isrelyan’s account of the Politburo’s decision to launch air and sea lift operations supports this contention. He mentions that the decision to resupply the war effort was made very early in the war and that the primary motivating factors were the USSR’s desire to fulfill its international obligation to its ally and to maintain its position
as leader of the “historical mission” of the socialist camp (Isrealyan 1995, 57). The latter reason probably refers in part to the Soviet desire to avoid Chinese criticism of its Middle Eastern policies—a factor that Rubinstein (1977) also mentions as being an important motivator. The Soviet Union could not let the Egyptians lose another war. Its reputation in the Middle East would have plummeted, and its clients all over the globe would doubt its willingness to back its allies.3

Although the USSR wanted to support its ally, it also wanted to avoid a US-Soviet confrontation and preserve détente. Nearly all of the histories of Soviet involvement in the conflict stress this point. Rabinovich (2004) writes that one of Moscow’s primary concerns was that “the Middle East war not bring it into direct conflict with the United States” (413). Golan (1974) argues that Soviet behavior was constrained by “the overriding limiting factor of American interest in the Middle East and the danger of direct Soviet-American confrontation in the area, coupled in recent years with the Soviet pursuit of détente” (8). Jabber and Kolkowicz (1981) make a similar point, claiming that the Soviets were deterred by their “conviction that the United States was seriously committed to the defense of regional interests, and by its fear of the harmful consequences of a military confrontation in the Middle East” (465). Quandt’s (1976) postwar analysis claims that the Soviet’s two priorities in the war were preventing an Arab defeat and avoiding a superpower confrontation (iii). Porter (1984) reaches a similar conclusion: “There is evidence to indicate that the Kremlin wanted to contain the conflict and to avoid an overt confrontation with Washington” (140). Isrealyan’s (1995) account of Politburo decision making during the conflict confirms these conclusions. He writes,

3 Other factors also probably influenced their decisions but were of secondary importance. Rubinstein (1977) mentions that monetary considerations weighed heavily on Soviet decisions. The USSR needed cash to rectify its balance of payment problems with the West and Egypt and its Arab allies were willing to pay cash for the weapons.
The Kremlin wanted to maintain and develop cooperation with the West—which in view of the Soviet Union’s shaky economy and backward technology was a necessity. A military confrontation with the West, and in particular with the United States, was by no means on the Kremlin’s political agenda (17).

Soviet behavior during the crisis is consistent with these accounts. Their attempts to dissuade their allies from going to war, the efforts they made to ensure a ceasefire, and the cautious tone they took with the Americans suggest that they wanted to avoid a US-Soviet confrontation. The Soviet Representative explained the USSR’s opposition to another war at the Syrian Communist Party’s annual meeting in 1971. He argued that a military solution could “lead to a confrontation between the Soviets and the Americans. We do not conceal the fact that we are not in favor of this except in the case of extreme necessity. Our opposition is not to a military solution per se, but arises only because we are realistic” (quoted in Kohler et al 1974, 32). Israelyan (1995) documents a similar justification for their pursuit of an early ceasefire. He claims, “the proponents of the Soviet-American détente, Brezhenev and Kosygin among them, saw in an early ceasefire, a real chance to avoid any deterioration of the superpower relationship” (32).

However, the Soviets also thought that a major US response to their resupply effort was unlikely for a number of reasons. They thought that Western dependence on Middle Eastern oil would prompt the Americans to downplay the dispute (Kohler et al 1974, 100). In addition, they believed that international public opinion was rallying against Israel due to its tough stand on the territorial dispute and its retaliatory attacks on its neighbors. They pointed to Western Europe’s criticism of Israel, the American acknowledgement of Palestinian Rights at the Washington Summit, and the non-aligned movement’s support of the Arab cause. They reasoned that this shift in international opinion would prevent the US from intervening openly in support of Israel (Kohler et al, 1010). They also thought that the US would be constrained by détente (Kohler et al 1974, 103-105; Freedman 1978, 142-143). Finally, the USSR viewed the East-West military
balance in the region as having shifted due to the growth of Soviet nuclear and conventional capabilities (Kohler et al 1974, 102-103; Porter 1984, 113). This made it much less likely that the US would adopt policies that would risk a military confrontation with the Soviet Union.

Despite these constraints, the USSR viewed a US intervention as possible under two conditions: if Israel was threatened with defeat or if the USSR overtly intervened in the conflict itself. Porter (1984) and Golan (1990) both describe how a one-sided outcome to the conflict was dangerous for the USSR. Although they thought it unlikely, the Soviets worried that the US would intervene in the event of an Arab victory (Porter 1984, 117; Golan 1990, 86). They thought it was more likely that the Arabs would be defeated, and that they would request Soviet intervention, which would in turn prompt an American intervention on behalf of Israel (Porter 1984, 118; Golan 1990, 86). Isrealyan (1995) notes that the Kremlin leaders were opposed to direct intervention precisely because they “believed that direct Soviet military involvement in the conflict would lead to a world war” (97). Their assessment was probably correct, given the American reaction to Brezhnev’s threat of intervention later in the conflict.

Because the Soviet Union thought it very unlikely that Israel would be defeated, and because it did not plan to intervene in the conflict, it was confident that the US would also refrain from direct intervention. Isrealyan (1995) notes that at the first Politburo meeting after the Soviet Union was informed of Arab plans, Brezhnev “predicted certain and speedy defeat of the Arabs. Others fully shared Brezhnev’s belief that there was no chance for an Arab victory. Some participants even believed that in a few hours Israel would begin a counterattack that would result in the surrender of Egypt and Syria and the fall of their governments” (31). Freedman (1978) notes that the Soviet response to Egypt’s news was cautious, in part because they doubted the Arabs’
ability to prosecute the war (141). George (1983) and Porter (1984) both argue that Soviet doubts about the Arabs’ military capabilities was one of the main reasons they opposed the war in the first place (George 1983, 140 and Porter 1984, 118).

The Soviets had no plan of intervening in the war. This was one of the reasons they evacuated their civilians after receiving news of impending hostilities. This decision was partially a message “directed at Sadat and Asad, reminding them not to expect the Soviets to intervene directly if their enterprise ran into trouble” (Quandt 1976, 12). During Koysgin’s trip to Moscow on October 16th, he was given specific instructions to tell Sadat that the Soviets would not stage an intervention to save Egypt. Israelyan (1995) writes that “one of the most important instructions Kosygin received at the meeting was to let Sadat know that the Soviet Union would not become a party to the war. ‘You must declare it officially. There should be no misunderstanding,’ Brezhnev told him” (97). Israelyan (1995) claims intervention was never considered during the initial postwar meetings (33). Retaliation for the Israeli bombing of the Soviet Cultural Center and sinking of the merchant ship was rejected by Brezhnev and Kosygin because they “opposed any military action that would involve the Soviet Union in the war” (Israelyan 1995, 68). Even after the initial violations of the ceasefire, “the issue of sending Soviet troops unilaterally never came up. Nobody liked or supported that idea” (Israelyan 1995, 168).

Thus, the Soviets thought the two conditions that might prompt an American intervention were very improbable. Their decision to provide material and diplomatic support to Egypt and Syria was made because they believed that those actions were unlikely to lead to a confrontation with the United States because neither would trigger the conditions that would elicit a major American response.
There is very little evidence to suggest that Vietnam played any role in Soviet perceptions of US intentions or that it influenced Soviet decision making during this stage of the conflict. The only history that mentions Vietnam at all is Golan’s 1977 book. However most of the references Golan cites in her analysis suggest that in the context of the Middle East Crisis, Vietnam was seen not as an example of the US lacking political will, but as an example of the potential for peaceful negotiations. Izvestia “used Vietnam as an example of the futility of trying to solve disputes by weapons” (Golan 1977, 47); Novosti’s report on the Middle East conflict cited Vietnam “as proof ‘that it is possible to find peaceful and just settlements . . . in other critical situations’” (Golan 1977, 50). Golan documents how in meetings with the Arabs, Moscow used Vietnam “to demonstrate that even the most difficult international conflict could be resolved . . . Vietnam [was used] as an example of the possibility of settlement” (39). She does mention one example where Vietnam was used to question American willingness to intervene in the Middle East: a Literaturnaya Gazeta article published on October 17th “which sought to minimize the danger or extent of the American role in the war by pointing to the domestic limitations placed on the United States as result of the unpopularity of the Vietnam War” (Golan 1977, 110). However the larger article did not advocate greater USSR involvement because of this constraint on the US, rather it used Vietnam as one reason why the US would be willing to work with the USSR in arranging a ceasefire. Thus, the few citations in Golan’s work provide almost no evidence of Vietnam influencing Soviet decision making the way one might expect if a reputational mechanism was operating. Furthermore, none of the other authors, including Israelyan (1995) whose insider account provides the most details on Politburo decision making, mention Vietnam. This suggests that it is very unlikely that the US withdrawal from Vietnam influenced the Soviet’s decision to support their Arab allies in the October War.
The USSR was willing to provide weapons to the Arabs partly because it did not believe arming Egypt and Syria would elicit a strong US response. However, late in the conflict Brezhnev sent a letter to Nixon threatening unilateral intervention despite the fact that the USSR knew that such an intervention would be unacceptable to the United States. As mentioned earlier, it was one of the two things the Soviets thought might prompt a US intervention. Why did they decide to proceed? Did the information generated during the Vietnam War about the United States’ cost tolerance prompt them to underestimate US resolve in this situation, making them more willing to threaten unilateral action?

The evidence suggests no. Vietnam was not mentioned in any of the histories or in Isrealyan’s account of the Politburo’s decision making. Rather these histories suggest that the Soviets issued the threat because of the dire military situation in Egypt. They did so believing that the US response would be muted since America had an interest in seeing the ceasefire hold.

The Soviets felt they had to do something drastic to save Egypt which was facing destruction of its 3rd Army and a possible Israeli march on Cairo. Rabinovich (2004) argues that “something meaningful had to be done to help Sadat . . . . It was decided to hint to the Americans that the Soviets might intervene unilaterally, in the hope that this would make the Americans worried enough to pressure the Israeli clients” (Rabinovich 2004, 479). Jabber and Kolkowicz (1981) claimed that the Soviets decided to issue the unilateral intervention threat only “in the final stages of the war, [when] Egypt seem[ed] likely to suffer a crippling military and political defeat” (465). Isrealyan’s (1995) account tells a similar story:

With the situation hopeless for Sadat, and not wanting to become a party in the war, the Kremlin leaders concluded that the only way out of the deadlock was to exert effective pressure on Washington and force the Americans to pressure Israel. Therefore, it was decided to hint to the Americans that in case the United States was not ready for join action, the Kremlin would not exclude the
possibility of unilateral action in the Middle East. The participants were convinced that even a reference to such an eventuality would frighten Washington and force it to take appropriate measures with Israel (168-169).

Isrealyan (1995) claims that most of the Politburo members thought that Nixon would “strongly” oppose either bilateral or unilateral intervention and threaten “a serious deterioration” in US-Soviet relations if the USSR went forward with its threat (173). The Politburo members predicted “that Nixon would send an urgent message to Brezhnev, strongly rejecting Soviet proposals, and that at the same time he would put effective pressure on the Israelis to force them to stop fighting immediately” (173). They were willing to risk a verbal response from the United States if it prompted Washington to restrain its ally.

The Soviets “were quite certain that neither Nixon, nor Kissinger, believed the Soviet Union would intervene in the war in the Middle East, let alone do anything to provoke a military confrontation with the United States” (Isrealyan 1995, 188). Jabber and Kolkowicz (1981) stress that the USSR viewed this course of action as entailing very little risk of a superpower confrontation because they believed that the US had an interest in enforcing the ceasefire. They claim that the Soviets must have calculated that it had little to lose by sponsoring Sadat’s request. The call was for joint superpower action: it had already gained the endorsement of a number of Security Council members; the sending of forces would be part of a United Nations operation to enforce a resolution introduced by both the United States and the Soviet Union and almost unanimously supported by the council’s members (457).

Because the United States was invested in the success of the ceasefire and had no interest in the complete defeat of Egypt’s Army, the Soviet Union calculated that it would not have to carry out its threat (Jabber and Kolkowicz, 365). The United States would pressure Israel into accepting the ceasefire, and the war would be brought to an end.

The Soviet response to the US nuclear alert demonstrates the importance they placed on avoiding a confrontation with the United States. It also reveals that the US
threat to intervene in response to a Soviet intervention was credible. “The question of whether the Soviet Union was prepared to engage in war with the United States” was broached at the first Politburo meeting after the nuclear alert was issued. Most Politburo members “answered with a definite no” (Isrealyan 1995, 180). Kosygin argued, “It is not reasonable to become engaged in a war with the United States because of Egypt and Syria” (quoted in Rabinovich 2004, 484). The Soviet Union decided not to respond to the alert because it was “not prepared politically or psychologically to be engaged in a war that could easily turn into a nuclear confrontation with the United States” (Isrealyan 1990, 190).

A response was also unnecessary because the US convinced Israel to allow the 3rd Army to be resupplied. After Kissinger ordered DEFCON III and warned Brezhnev that unilateral intervention would be firmly opposed by the United States, he continued working through diplomatic backchannels to pressure Israel to comply with the ceasefire and to allow resupply of the 3rd Army (Laquer 1974, Jabber and Kolkowicz 1981, Kissinger 2003). Kissinger sent a message to Meir stating that the destruction of the 3rd Army “is an option that does not exist.” He reminded Israel of the high stakes: “I hope it’s clear to you that you’re playing with a superpower confrontation” (quoted in Rabinovich 2004, 486-487). They also issued an ultimatum on the evening of October 26th, warning that if Israel did not allow the resupply by 8:00 the following morning, the US would support the UN demand for withdrawal to the October 22nd lines. That night, Egypt offered direct talks in exchange for a ceasefire and resupply of the Third Army. Israel accepted, allowed the resupply, and the crisis ended.

The US probably would have pressured Israel anyway, given that a complete defeat of Egypt would have made a postwar settlement unlikely (Jabber and Kolkowicz 1981, 456). However the combination of the Soviet threat and US pressure succeeded in
convincing the Israelis to spare the 3rd Army and agree to a ceasefire (Wehling 1997, 122-123). Israel’s foreign minister, Abba Eban admits, “The feeling was that there could very well be a Soviet military intervention in the Middle East, unless the US put up a very strong show . . . The entire [cabinet] meeting was devoted to the question, do we accept the second ceasefire or not? The decision was unanimous. The decisive factor was the Soviet threat, and the preparedness of the US for a confrontation” (quoted in Wehling 1997, 122-123). Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan also points to US pressure after the Soviet intervention threat “as the deciding factor” (Wehling 1997, 123). Thus, the US nuclear alert increased the potential costs of a possible intervention for the Soviet Union while the American decision to pressure Israel into complying with the ceasefire decreased the need for that intervention (Quandt 1976, 34). The cautious policy the Soviets adopted after the nuclear alert was a response to America’s threats and Israel’s decision to stand down.

Much of the literature suggests that the Soviet threat to intervene unilaterally was a bluff, and that they never had any intention of carrying it out. If this is true, it is possible that the US nuclear alert and accompanying private and public warnings actually had no effect on Soviet policy. Isrealyan (1995) claims that when Sadat requested a joint or unilateral intervention to police the cease fire, nobody in the Politburo “liked or supported that idea. ‘We have already made a principled decision not to be involved in the Middle East War, and there are no reasons to change our decision,’ noted Brezhenev. Thus, any military involvement unilateral or together with the United States was ruled out” (Isrealyan 1995, 168). He claims that there was not even “speculation about the consequences of unilateral Soviet military action in the Middle East for a very simple reason: Nobody thought there would be one given current circumstances” (Isrealyan 1995, 173). Caution must be used when interpreting
Israelyan’s comments because the Soviets have an incentive to say they were bluffing since that admission would be preferable to admitting that they backed down when faced with an American threat. However, most historians of the war—including those from the opposing side—conclude that the Soviets never planned on intervening. Golan makes this argument in her 1990 book. She notes that there was no propaganda preparation for an invasion taken at home and no military actions taken to enable a full scale intervention. She concludes that the Soviets estimated “that a threat would be sufficient to persuade the Americans, and assist them, to pressure Israel” (Golan 1990, 92). Jabber and Kolkowicz (1981) reach a similar conclusion. They argue that the most reasonable inference from the scanty available evidence is that Soviet diplomatic and military signals were orchestrated on Oct 23-25 mainly to increase pressure on Washington to restrain the Israelis. From Moscow’s perspective the Soviet objective must have appeared fairly limited and noncontroversial: to secure full implementation of a ceasefire . . . that had been negotiated and co-sponsored by the United States . . . The chance that they would have to act upon the threat contained in his note of Oct 24 must have seemed slight (463). Rabinovich (2004) puts it even more bluntly, arguing that the threat was a bluff since Moscow had no intention of sending troops” (Rabinovich 2004, 479).

These authors argue that the military signals the US interpreted as evidence of Soviet intentions were ambiguous. Parker (2001) and Israelyan (1995) claim that the airborne troops were on alert for the entire war in order to protect the airlift and sealift. Jabber and Kolkowicz (1981) note that the pause in the airlift coincided with the ceasefire and Israelyan (1995) argues that the pause was meant to be a sign of restraint. Jabber and Kolkowicz (1981) and Isrealyan (1995) also claim that the increased naval presence was a response to the buildup of the US sixth fleet. Finally, Golan (1990) and Parker(2001) argue that the nuclear material detected by the US was probably destined for the Soviet Mediterranean fleet (Golan 1990, Parker 2001). The Soviets “would never, never send nuclear warheads to a third world country, especially a noncommunist, noncontiguous one engaged in war” (Parker 2001, 185).
Although there is much evidence to suggest that the Soviets never intended to intervene unilaterally in the Middle East, this does not rule out the possibility that the US response to Brezhnev’s note affected their decisions. Israelyan’s (1995) account of the Politburo meeting after the nuclear alert suggests that the Soviets interpreted the alert as a challenge and considered responding with escalatory moves. They decided not to, in part because they wanted to avoid a confrontation with the United States, and also because Israel finally agreed to uphold the ceasefire.

Thus, my analysis of the Soviet’s decision to arm the Arabs, to issue the unilateral intervention threat, and to subsequently back down from that threat suggest the US withdrawal from Vietnam did not make the Soviets doubt the credibility of the United States’ commitment to Israel. They considered US intervention possible, though unlikely, and they took steps to minimize that eventuality from being realized.

Because only a few references were made to Vietnam and most did not refer to the lack of will the US displayed when withdrawing from the conflict, it is not clear whether issue dissimilarity prompted Soviet decision makers to discount the relevance of the US performance in Vietnam during the October War. However, an analysis of Soviet interests in the region and their views of US interests suggest that they viewed the issues at stake in the Middle East as different from the issues at stake in Vietnam and Angola.

At times, Soviet propaganda framed the larger Middle East conflict as part of the larger conflict between national liberation movements and imperialism. A 1970 Pravda article emphasized this point. It reported that “the Soviet Union regards the Middle East crisis not as a clash of national interests, but as an attempt by world imperialism with the aid of the Israeli state . . . to strike a blow against the national liberation movement of the Arab countries” (quoted in Kohler et al 1974, 23). In June of 1973 a Soviet official, E.
Dmitryev, wrote an opinion piece which again emphasized the fight against imperialism. He argued, “The Arab Israeli conflict arose as a result of the policy pursued by the imperialist powers in their Arab East, utilizing the Zionists as their tool in the fight against the national liberation movement of the Arab people” (quoted in Porter 1984, 119).

Laquer (1974) notes that although the Soviets often chose to interpret the Arab-Israeli conflict as involving issues of national liberation, their ideology made it possible for “every separatist movement . . . [around] the globe [to] be regarded, in principal, as a war of national liberation, worthy of direct or indirect support. Potential wars of liberation could be discovered if necessary in the United States and China, for these countries too have their minority problems” (Laquer 1974, 69-70). Within the context of the October War, Egypt and Syria could not really be considered national liberation movements. Neither were communist powers, and they were trying to regain lost territory for themselves, not liberate that territory for the people living there. If any group could be considered a national liberation movement it was the Palestinian refugees, but the Soviets were careful to downplay the Palestinian issue to avoid prolonging the conflict and antagonizing the United States (Golan 1977).

For the most part, the support of national liberation movements and communist parties took a back seat to the geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. The USSR’s relationship with Egypt was important because of its proximity to the Mediterranean Sea. Having a presence in the Middle East would provide the Soviet Union with a means to protect its southern borders using naval forces, with free passage through the Dardanelles, and access to the Indian Ocean via the Suez. In addition, increasing the number of ports open to Soviet vessels extended the USSR’s naval reach, which gave it greater flexibility to respond to crises in the Middle East and Asia. The
Soviets also had economic interests in the region. The Suez Canal was an important thoroughfare for transporting goods between Russia and the Soviet Far East. The region provided a lucrative market for Soviet weapons, with the added bonus that many of the countries could pay for the weapons using cash rather than loans. In addition, oil exports from the region could be used to meet energy needs of Warsaw pact countries without depleting Russia’s own reserves. Golan (1977) argues that these strategic and economic interests were of paramount importance to Soviet policy in the region. Consequently, the support of communist movements took a back seat. She admits that although “the proliferation of such [communist] regimes may well be the Russians’ long range goal in the Middle East, as elsewhere,” the pursuit of that objective was limited during the early and mid 1970s. The Soviets recognized that pursuing that goal might “jeopardize the more immediate Soviet political interest in [fostering] relationships with stable regimes willing to cooperate with Moscow” (Golan 1977, 9). Their support for nationalist dictatorships, such as Egypt, suggested that the longer term objective of spreading communism in the Middle East played a “minor” role in Soviet policy in the region (Golan 1977, 9).

In addition, the USSR recognized that the stakes in the Middle East for the United States went beyond an ideological desire to stop the spread of communism. The Soviets acknowledged that “continued access to Middle Eastern oil and the security of Israel were held by the West to be vital interests, which could not be threatened without evoking a forceful response” (Jabber and Kolkowiz 1981, 438). Kohler et al (1974) provide the most thorough insight into USSR’s estimation of US interests in the region. Their analysis of official Soviet statements and public discussion suggests that the USSR believed that “the US has vital interests in that region” (23). One 1972 article in *Ekonomika, Politica, Ideologica* mentioned that “American imperialism is attributing such
great importance to the Mediterranean Sea for military-strategic reasons . . . As in the past, this region was evaluated by Pentagon and NATO strategists as a convenient position for the siting [sic] of various types of offensive weapons, . . . [which became more important as the United States] put greater emphasis on naval forces in [its] military policy” (Kohler et al 1974, 24). Kommunist claimed that the US regarded the Middle East as one of the “critical bridgeheads” which the United States and its NATO allies “have long earmarked for the deployment of their armed forces in the event of a general aggravation of the international situation” (Kohler et al 1974, 25).

The Soviets believed that US interests in the Middle East were, like their own interests, a function of the geopolitical importance of the Mediterranean. The Deputy Director of the USSR’s Institute for World Economic and International Relations at the Academy of Sciences noted, “The Mediterranean Sea is of great strategic importance for the United States. The Near East is not only the gateway to the Persian Gulf but also the Indian Ocean” (Kohler et al 1974, 24). A 1972 article in Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologica claimed that “US interests in the region arose from the fact that control over the Mediterranean basin largely determines the political and economic posture of power in the adjoining land areas, including Southern Europe, and especially, the Near East, and North Africa” (Kohler et al 1974, 25).

The Soviets were also aware that the US had important economic interests at stake in the Middle East due to its oil resources and its location at the epicenter of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Kohler et al (1974) cite a 1972 Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologica article which argued that the “dependence by a number of [Western] countries on Near East petroleum . . . has determined and continues to determine America’s endeavor to establish and maintain its control over its extraction and transportation at any price”
(Kohler et al 1974, 27). Jabber and Kolkowicz (1981) also mention that the Soviets viewed access to oil as an important motivating factor for US policy in the region (438).

Because the Soviets believed that the US had “vital interests” at stake in the Middle East, they were wary of provoking a confrontation in that region. Israelyan notes, “all discussions in the Kremlin concerning the war finally focused on the impact of any Kremlin decision on the American standing and reputation in that region” (Parker 2001, 226). One of the reasons the US commitment to Israel remained credible was that the USSR believed “that the United States was seriously committed to the defense of regional interests” (Jabber and Kolkowicz 1981, 465).

Thus, the USSR viewed the issues at stake in the October War as involving much more than the global clash of communism and imperialism. There were specific strategic and economic interests involved for both the US and the USSR that made the Middle East a region of vital importance to both. Strategic and economic interests were less important in the Vietnam War and in the Angolan Civil War, which were both primarily about the spread of communism via national liberation movements in the eyes of the Soviet Union. Because Vietnam is mentioned so rarely, and never by Soviet decision makers, establishing a causal connection between issue dissimilarity and the lack of references to Vietnam is impossible. However, the fact that the Soviets thought that the October War involved issues other than the spread of communism and subsequently ignored the US performance in Vietnam during the war is consistent with Contextual Expectations Theory’s issue similarity hypothesis.

**Egypt and the October War**

Although the Egyptians attacked a US ally, their behavior during the war vis-à-vis the United States was largely conciliatory. Their public denunciations of Israel did not mention the US and they sought to maintain diplomatic channels to the US
throughout the conflict. The only threat the US made during the war was issued in response to Egypt’s invitation for a joint US or Soviet force to police the ceasefire. Egypt responded promptly to US warnings, withdrawing its request for superpower intervention in favor of a UN force. An analysis of Egyptian decision making before and during the crisis reveals that US performance in Vietnam did not influence its decision to go to war or the way it treated the US during the war.

**Egyptian Assessment of the Vietnam War**

As with the Cuban case, I rely on the public pronouncements of Egyptian leaders in order to evaluate what inferences those leaders drew about the United States’ defeat in Vietnam. Looking at the speeches that President Sadat delivered in years preceding the October War it becomes evident that like the leaders of Cuba and the Soviet Union, he saw the outcome of the war as a function of the United States lack of will. During an interview with Newsweek in December of 1971, Sadat explained, “You Americans have learnt a lesson from Vietnam. It is the will of the people that decides the battles . . . Military technology is only part of it . . . the will and solidarity of a nation to liberate its land is decisive” (Israeli 1978, 133). He made a similar point in a speech a few months earlier noting, “There is no power in the world that can vanquish peoples’ will, the best example being Vietnam. There, all the modern US arsenal, electronic and otherwise . . . could not defeat those who had the will power, national unity and a clear sense of purpose” (Israeli 1978, 109). During a rally in Alexandria in May of 1972, he exclaimed that “As we watch the American [military] sinking in Vietnam” it becomes evident that “when the people is[sic] united, no force in the world can defeat it” (Israeli 1978, 202). In an interview conducted shortly after the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam, Sadat explained America’s defeat as the result of underestimating the enemies will: “You Americans always use computers to solve geopolitical equations and they always
mislead you . . . You simply forgot to feed Vietnamese psychology into the computer” (Israeli 1978, 346).

Sadat’s speeches focused less on the anti-war movement in the US than did those by the Soviets and Cubans. However, there is still some indication that he was aware of the political repercussions of the United States’ failure in Vietnam. During an interview with Al Hawadith in October of 1972, Sadat commented,

McNamara had made Johnson aware of the helplessness of the computer when it came to calculating the will power of nations, and in consequences [sic] of America’s escalation of the war in Vietnam, McNamara had to leave the Pentagon, and Johnson had to bow out of the White House, while Vietnamese endurance has proved stronger than the mightiest military machine (Israeli 1978, 268-269).

A speech delivered the same month alluded to the American public’s disenchantment with the war. Sadat stated, “the uncalculated destruction in Vietnam has also caused unlimited and uncalculated destruction of the American people’s spirit” (Israeli 1978, 277). These public pronouncements suggest that Egypt attributed the US failure in Vietnam to the superior will of the Vietnamese, and implicitly the lack of will in the United States. They also provide some evidence that the Egyptians believed that this lack of will was, in part, a function of the extent to which Vietnam affected US domestic politics.

Sadat’s statements do not provide much evidence about whether Egypt considered the US defeat or America’s lack of will unexpected. Statements emphasizing the fact that the US was unable to prevail despite its material superiority may indicate that the Egyptians viewed the outcome as surprising. However, this only provides indirect evidence about Egypt’s prior expectations. Unfortunately a more definitive analysis is impossible because direct evidence on those expectations is unavailable. Thus, Sadat’s speeches suggest that the Egyptians attributed the US defeat in Vietnam to its lack of will. It is possible that they viewed this outcome as unexpected because of
America’s material superiority. Consequently, it had the potential to affect their decisions. The next two sections evaluate whether this was the case during the October War.

**Egyptian Behavior During the War**

By attacking the United States’ primary ally in the Middle East, Egypt indirectly challenged the US when it embarked on a war against Israel. The initial decision to go to war was made while the US was drawing down its forces in Vietnam, but before the Paris Peace Accords had actually been signed. However, the date of the attack and the specific operational plans were developed after the last American forces left South Vietnam in March of 1973.

The Egyptian defeat in the 1967 Six Day War left Egypt humiliated and Israel in possession of a large swath of Egyptian territory, including the Suez Canal and most of the Sinai Desert. Postwar negotiations proved futile and the unsuccessful War of Attrition, launched in 1970, failed to alter the status quo. During this time, the Egyptians sought to build up their military arsenal so they could challenge Israel and retake their lost territory by force. However, the Soviet Union, their principal supplier, refused to provide them with the offensive weapons required for launching an attack of that magnitude.

In 1972, President Anwar el-Sadat decided he was not going to continue waiting for the Soviet Union. He would initiate a limited attack with the resources currently available to the Egyptian military. Sadat claims that he made this decision in July of 1972 when he expelled Soviet advisors from the country. He claims that he asked General Sadek, his War Minister, to prepare the military for battle that upcoming November (Sadat 1977). In October he followed up with his War Minister and found the military unprepared for war. He relieved Sadek from his position and announced to his general
staff that he had decided to launch a limited war against Israel. Chief of Military Operations, General Gamasy, remembers Sadat’s October announcement and his rationale behind launching a limited operation rather than waiting for more Soviet weapons. Sadat explained, “If we don’t fight, our cause will disintegrate and die by 1973” (Gamasy 1989, 151). Planning for the more limited operation began in November of 1972 and by February initial operational plans had been drawn up and three potential dates had been selected based on various factors that might influence the outcome of military operations, including weather, the tides, and Israeli mobilization schedules (Shazly 1980, Gamasy 1989). At this time, Egypt also began preparing the nation for war by enacting austerity measures and raising taxes (Rubinstein 1977). In April of 1973, Sadat met with Syria’s President, Bashar Assad, to coordinate their operational plans. They decided that the war would be launched in the fall. Following a series of meetings in August of 1973, the operational plans were finalized and the date and time for the attack were set. On October 6th, Egypt and Syria launched their surprise attack.

This attack constituted an indirect challenge against the United States since it was aimed at a longtime US ally. However, their behavior during the war suggests that while Egypt wanted to regain its lost territory, it was not interested in challenging the United States directly. In fact, Egypt took steps to avoid antagonizing the United States. Compared to earlier conflicts their rhetoric was muted, focusing exclusively on Israeli aggression and downplaying US involvement. This changed somewhat at the end of conflict when Sadat blamed battlefield reverses on American aid. In his public statement to the Egyptian people, Sadat exclaimed that “America came into the war to help Israel with weapons still at the testing stage . . . I know my own capacities and limits . . . and I will not fight America” (quoted in Gamasy 1989, 294). In his letter to Syria’s President Assad, he explained why he had agreed to a ceasefire: “I am willing to fight Israel no
matter how long, but never the USA” (Sadat 1977, 264). Although these statements implicate the United States in the war, they were primarily intended for consumption by domestic and Arab publics. In all of the other wartime speeches, Sadat downplayed the American role in the conflict, in part to maintain the option of working with the United States in postwar negotiations.

Egypt kept in touch with the US throughout the conflict, establishing diplomatic contacts with Kissinger as early as October 7th. On that day, Egyptian National Security Advisor Hafez Ismail sent Kissinger a message outlining the conditions under which Egypt would stop the attack, emphasizing that their goal was liberation of occupied territories and the establishment of peace in the region, not the destruction of Israel (Meital 1997). Kissinger remembered, “What was important to note was the arrival of the memorandum and not its contents. Sadat was inviting us to participate in the peace project . . . Ismail’s memorandum was proof of the possibility of negotiating with countries which had attacked our ally” (quoted in Gamasy 1989, 239). Rabinovich (2004) explains that message itself also suggested that Egypt had limited aims. It did not intend to attack Israel proper or “to ‘widen the dispute’ by attacking the United States verbally . . . By not depicting America as the cause of his woes. . . Sadat was leaving open the possibility of Washington serving as a mediator following the war” (Rabinovich 2004, 320). Gawrych also argues that this initial communiqué was a way to draw the United States into postwar diplomacy (Parker 2001, 112).

Diplomatic contacts continued throughout the war. On October 9th – 10th, Ismail sent additional messages to Washington offering a ceasefire for Israeli withdrawal to pre-1967 lines (Meital 1997). After the US airlift commenced on October 12th, Ismail sent another message to Kissinger which stressed that Egypt wanted to keep the diplomatic channel open. Only at the end of the message “did Ismail refer to the airlift, dismissing it
as unacceptable . . . He did not linger over it, nor did he threaten any consequences” (Kissinger 2003, 260). In fact, he concluded the message by inviting Kissinger to visit Egypt.

As the war progressed, the messages from Egypt demonstrated its willingness to use US mediation to resolve the conflict. An October 21st message informed Kissinger that Egypt would agree to a ceasefire in place if the US and the USSR would act as guarantors (Isrealyana 1995, 131). After the Israeli violations of the ceasefire, Sadat requested that the US come into Egypt to enforce the ceasefire: “Please come in. I am willing to have your forces land on Egyptian territory to ensure that the Israelis pull back to the October 22 lines” (Sadat 1977, 266). Janice Stein explains that President Sadat used his secret communications with Kissinger to counter the “strong diplomatic support” that Israel had always garnered from America “by signaling to the United States his strong interest in their involvement in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict” (Parker 2001, 82-83). Thus, although Egypt’s attack of Israel posed an indirect challenge to the US, its behavior during the conflict, especially its diplomatic contacts with the US, sought to avoid damaging the US-Egyptian relationship.

The US maintained diplomatic contacts with Egypt throughout the war and tried to reassure Egyptian leaders that the United States was supportive of a political settlement in the Middle East that took into account Egypt’s grievances. General Gamasy (1989) noted that throughout the conflict “the US administration refrained from calling the Arabs the aggressors or accusing them of provoking the war” (232). During his October 8th public address, Kissinger mentioned that “détente can’t survive irresponsibility in any area, including the Mid East but put no blame put on Egypt or Syria for the war” (Laquer 1974, 143). During the October 17th meeting of foreign
ministers, Kissinger explicitly stated, “We don’t consider President Sadat our enemy” (quoted in Heikal 1975, 234).

On the first day of the war, Kissinger sent a message to Egypt’s Foreign Minister Mohamed el-Zayat stating, “I just wanted you to know that I’m open for discussion and that we are not lined up in order to create difficulty” (Kissinger 2003, 79). On October 7th he replied to Ismail’s letter by explaining that the US wanted “to bring about a ceasefire without at the same time taking a position which might produce a confrontation with the Egyptian side” (quoted in Meital 1997, 120). After the airlift began, Kissinger tried to prevent deterioration in US-Egyptian relations by sending another message to Ismail explaining, “The United States . . . recognizes the unacceptability to the Egyptian side of the conditions which existed prior to the outbreak of recent hostilities. The US side will make a major effort as soon as hostilities are terminated to assist in bringing a just and lasting peace to the Middle East” (quoted in Rabinovich 2004, 413).

The Egyptian side recognized that these diplomatic overtures were designed to position the United States in the role of mediator in postwar negotiations. General Gamasy (1989) noted that the US “maintained contact with Egypt and the Soviet Union so that any political solution would take the enemy position (that of the Soviet Union and the Arabs) into account” (259). Egypt welcomed the US taking a larger role in negotiations and reciprocated by keeping the diplomatic channels open throughout the war and by refraining from criticizing the US role in the conflict.

Why did the United States opt to reinforce diplomatic contacts with the Egyptians during the crisis rather than make threats to protect its ally? First, the US was confident in the military superiority of Israeli forces and so was not worried about Israel’s ability to defend itself. As long as Israel had the weapons it needed to prosecute
its campaign, it was unlikely that it would need the US to step in to coerce its adversaries into surrendering.

Second, the US did not want to alienate the Arabs because they wanted to be involved in the postwar peace process. Laquer (1974) explains that the US refrained from criticizing Egypt and Syria or openly supporting Israel because they were afraid doing so “would endanger American interests in Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Middle East” (145). Bernard Reich makes a similar point arguing, “The United States sought to avoid humiliating the Arabs while preventing the defeat of Israel . . . [Thus] the United States was careful not to label the Egyptians or the Syrians as aggressors” (Parker 2001, 162). Concern for Arab public attitudes even made the United States wary about making its airlift to Israel public (Parker 2001, 153-160; Rabinovich 2004, 324). Initially, the US agreed to resupply weapons but insisted on Israeli transport of those weapons. When it became apparent that Israeli airlines did not have the capacity for a major airlift operation, the US government tried to contract with private charter companies. Only after those airlines refused did the US agree to use its military transport planes. Kissinger explains that “all American policymakers were agreed that we should do our utmost to prevent a confrontation with the Arab world . . . We also strove for a low profile in the method of resupply [because] we were conscience of the need to preserve the American position in the Arab world” (Kissinger 2003, 159).

Finally, the diplomatic channels established by Ismail and Egypt’s stated willingness to work with the United States in the postwar negotiations provided further incentives for the US to avoid antagonizing Egypt by making verbal threats. Nixon explained to Sadat, “In 1967 you accused of us of collusion with Israel. This time you came to talk to us: that makes a lot of difference” (quoted in Heikal 1975, 233).
Although most US-Egyptian contacts during the war were civil and the US generally avoided threatening Egypt or Syria, it responded with firm opposition to Egypt’s request for US or Soviet intervention to police the ceasefire in late October, noting that joint or unilateral action would be “intolerable” to the United States (Parker 2001, 166). After a public announcement outlining their opposition to intervention by either or both superpowers, Kissinger sent a message to Sadat which contained an ominous warning about the consequences of such an intervention: “I ask you to consider the consequences for your country if the two great nuclear countries were thus to confront each other on your soil” (Kissinger 2003, 351). This message combined with the nuclear alert prompted Sadat to withdraw his request. He responded to Kissinger’s message, “Since the US refuses to take such a measure, Egypt is asking the Security Council to provide an international force” (quoted in Kissinger 2003, 354). Thus, Egypt proved very responsive to the one warning issued by the US during the October War. During the rest of the war, Egypt and the US maintained fairly amicable relations in the hope that they could work together during the postwar peace.

**Process Tracing: Did Vietnam Influence Egypt’s Assessment of US Intentions?**

President Sadat was aware that a war in the Middle East ran the risk of triggering a superpower conflict and he was keen to avoid involvement by both powers. In a message to Brezhnev in the run up the war, Sadat stated: “We needed no one to fight our battle for us other than our own troops . . . we do not want our battle to develop into a confrontation between the Soviet Union and America as this could lead to a world catastrophe” (quoted in Gamasy 1989, 145). In his memoirs, Sadat focuses specifically on the possibility of US intervention, explaining, “I was very eager to prevent the United States from intervening on Israel’s side” (Sadat 1977, 266).
There is not much evidence that Egyptian decision makers considered such an intervention likely. The only statements I uncovered during the planning phases of the war that considered potential US actions focused on the likelihood of the US supplying material aid to Israel during the war (Sadat 1977; Shazly 1980; Gamasy 1989, 128). No mention is made of a possible US intervention, and no plans were developed to counter such an eventuality.

Egypt probably estimated the likelihood of US intervention as low for two reasons. First, Cairo’s war aims were limited. Egypt’s goal was to capture some territory on the east side of the canal to disrupt the status quo and give it a better position in peace negotiations (Lorenz 1990, Asher 2009, Parker 2001). General Gamasy (1989) claims that “the strategic aim was to upset the prevailing balance in the region and to challenge Israel’s concept of security and the principals behind its military strategy” (134). Heikal (1975) remembers that at the October meeting where President Sadat announced his intention to go to war, Sadat “argued strongly in favor of a limited war, making his favorite point that if we could win only ten millimeters of ground on the east bank of the Suez Canal, this would immeasurably strengthen his position in subsequent political and diplomatic negotiations” (181). In 1974, Sadat made a similar point to Western journalists, explaining,

> When we planned the war and defined its objectives we assumed that the number of kilometers of the occupied land was not important. Demolishing Israel’s security concept and overcoming international disbelief in our words and ability to do so were more important to us than crossing the canal and seizing the Bar-Lev line (quoted in Asher 2009, 61).

Since Egypt did not plan to infringe on Israeli territory, the Egyptians thought it was unlikely that the US would intervene. Kissinger affirmed the validity of this estimation on October 17th during the meeting with Egypt’s Foreign Minister, where he “stressed his determination to avoid any confrontation with the Soviet Union and said that there would be no actual intervention by America in the fighting unless there was ‘violation of
the territory of Israel proper”” (Heikall 1975, 234). The same logic prompted Egypt to disregard Israel’s nuclear capability in their pre-war planning. Rabinovich (2004) explains that although “Egypt was aware of Israel’s nuclear potential, Sadat’s limited operational goals in Sinai did not threaten Israel’s borders and, therefore, were not seen as risking a doomsday response” (Rabinovich 2004, 27). The Egyptians also probably thought that US intervention was unlikely because Israeli military superiority made it unnecessary. In planning his limited attack, Sadat “knew that Israel had military superiority over the Arabs” (Gamasy 1989, 307). He acknowledged that Israel would prevail in a full scale war, especially if it had access to US equipment. Israeli superiority made it very unlikely that the United States would feel compelled to rescue its ally by intervening with its own forces.

There is no evidence that Egypt considered the US withdrawal from Vietnam during their prewar deliberations or when deciding how to respond to American opposition to superpower enforcement of the ceasefire. None of the memoirs of the Egyptian decision makers I read mentioned US performance in Vietnam. Neither do the secondary histories. On the contrary, because Egypt did not pose an existential threat to Israel, it thought US intervention was unlikely. Consequently, it did not spend time evaluating US willingness to fight or suffer costs in a war to protect Israel.

Since none of the sources I consulted mention Vietnam, it is not clear whether issue dissimilarity influenced the relevance of the US experience in Vietnam in the minds of Egyptian decision makers. However, some of Sadat’s statements during the lead up to the war suggest that he believed that the issues at stake for the US in the Middle East were different from those in Vietnam. In an interview given to Newsweek in April of 1973, he explicitly stated that the situation in Egypt would be very different from Vietnam “because your vital interests are at stake” (346). In September of 1972,
Sadat explained that although the US public and Congress might “be doves with regard to Vietnam . . . they are hawks with respect to the Arab homeland, where Israel is conducting its war” (Israeli 178, 268). This implies that he probably did not think that the domestic constraints operating in Vietnam would affect US decision making during a war in the Middle East. These statements also suggest that he may have viewed the US willingness to suffer costs in Vietnam as irrelevant to American behavior during the October War. This may be why Vietnam did not affect his decision making. In the absence of more direct evidence, I can only speculate.

Issue dissimilarity also affected US-Egyptian relations during the October War in a more subtle way. Because the October War did not involve the spread of communism, the US approached the war in a way that opened up the possibility of US-Egyptian engagement, despite Egypt’s attack on an American ally. This created an incentive for Egypt to reciprocate by treating America as a partner rather than an enemy.

Unlike North Vietnam, Egypt was not automatically considered America’s enemy because it had attacked America’s ally (Heikal 1975, 234). The Egyptians were not interested in spreading communism to the Middle East. In addition, in the summer of 1972, they demonstrated a willingness to distance themselves from their Soviet patrons by expelling Soviet advisors from their country. Because of this, the US sought to strengthen its relationship with Egypt during the war by maintaining diplomatic contacts and expressing its willingness to work with Egypt in postwar negotiations (Parker 2001, 178; Rabinovich 2004, 320).

Similarly, Egypt’s non-aligned position made it view the United States as a potential partner rather than an automatic enemy. In fact, one of Egypt’s primary political goals was to involve the US in postwar peace negotiations. Janice Stein claims that, for Egypt, one of the benefits of a limited military campaign was that it would
break the political deadlock and “engage the United States in the diplomatic process” (Parker 2001, 81). Herman Elits makes a similar point, arguing that one of Sadat’s primary political goals “was to get the United States back into the negotiating table” (Parker 2001, 129). Gawrych cites Heikal’s summary of Egypt’s limited war strategy which also emphasized engaging the United States: “You start the war, you inflict heavy casualties on Israel, you teach them that deterrence doesn’t work, and in the process, you bring in the United States to change its policy” (Parker 2001, 111). The willingness to work with the United States is evidenced by Egypt’s efforts to maintain diplomatic contacts with the US during the war and its stated desire to involve the US in postwar negotiations. Thus, removing the spread of communism from the equation fundamentally altered the way in which the US approached the conflict. This created space for US-Egyptian cooperation, despite the fact that Egypt had attacked a US ally.

**Conclusion**

My analysis of Egyptian and Soviet decision making during the October War suggests that the US withdrawal from Vietnam did not prompt either Egyptian or Soviet leaders to doubt the United States’ commitment to defend Israel. Both sides believed that if Israel was unable to contain the Arab defensive or was threatened with possible defeat, the US would intervene. Neither side thought this scenario was likely and so were, for the most part, unconcerned about a possible US intervention. I found no evidence that Vietnam effected the decision making of Egyptian or Soviet leaders. Thus, there appear to be no reputational consequences for US failure in this case.

**The October War and Theories of Reputation Formation**

The fact that the outcome of the Vietnam War did not affect the decision making of America’s adversaries during the October War provides fairly strong evidence in support of Contextual Expectations Theory, especially its issue similarity hypothesis. As
predicted by CET, the Soviet Union did not use the American performance in Vietnam
to justify challenging the US during the conflict. To the contrary, it took a number of
steps to decrease the likelihood of a superpower confrontation. The fact that the Soviets
did not use information about US cost tolerance during the October War is consistent
with their evaluation of the issues at stake. They recognized that the Arab-Israeli
conflict was not about the competing ideologies of the two superpowers or the fate of
national liberation movements. Rather it was about superpower influence in a region
that was strategically and economically important. Given the vital US interests involved,
the Soviets never doubted the willingness of the US to intervene to defend its ally.
Egypt’s behavior and decision making process during the war are also consistent with
CET’s predictions. Sadat’s statements suggest that Egyptian leaders attributed the US
failure in Vietnam to its lack of will. However, they did not use this information during
the October War because, like the Soviets, they recognized that the issues at stake for the
US in the Middle East were different from those over which the Vietnam War was
fought. This provides strong support for CET’s issue similarity hypothesis.

In terms of the power asymmetry hypothesis, CET’s predictions are only
partially borne out. As expected, Egypt’s behavior during the war was somewhat more
confrontational than their superpower ally. They attacked Israel despite the USSR’s
protestations, and they resisted both US and Soviet calls for a ceasefire during the early
stages of the conflict. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this increased
belligerence was due to Egypt’s reliance on information from Vietnam or even its
estimation of the US willingness to suffer costs to protect its ally. Like the Soviet Union,
it viewed the implicit US threat to intervene to save Israel as credible. Because Egypt had
no intention of attacking Israel proper, the credibility of the US deterrent threat was of
little relevance. In addition, most of their behavior during the conflict reflected Egypt’s
desire to work with the United States, not to challenge it. They kept diplomatic channels between Washington and Cairo open and tried to ensure that the US would be involved in the postwar peace process. Egypt was also responsive to the one threat the US issued during the conflict, opting to withdraw its request for superpower intervention when the US warned of the dangers of intervention and put its nuclear forces on high alert. Thus, it appears that the relative power positions of Egypt and the USSR vis-à-vis the United States did not condition how they used information from Vietnam during the October War. Neither state referenced the United States’ cost tolerance or the US withdrawal from Vietnam to justify their decisions.

My analysis, however, did find some support for the mechanism underpinning the power asymmetry hypothesis. As predicted by CET, the Soviet Union focused primarily on balance of power considerations during the conflict, while Egypt ignored power disparities and focused instead on the cost tolerance of its adversaries. Laquer (1974) argues that the Soviets emphasized how the balance of power between the US and the USSR had changed by the earlier 1970s. They claimed that the emergence of nuclear parity at the global level and the increase in Soviet conventional capabilities at the regional level would prompt the US to adopt a more cautious policy during this conflict (168). Kohler et al (1974) cite numerous Soviet media sources which argue that the global shift in the correlation of forces made “Moscow reasonably confident that the US was effectively deterred from risking nuclear war with the Soviet Union” over the Middle East conflict (102). Porter’s (1984) analysis attributes “the unprecedented level of Soviet involvement” in the October War to the “the achievement of strategic parity with the United States, the expansion of [its] airlift and sealift capability, and the logistical experience gained in previous regional conflicts” (Porter 1984, 113).
The Soviets also focused on Israeli capabilities during the conflict. They believed that the Israeli’s military superiority would enable them to “quickly defeat the Arab armies” (Rabinovich 2004, 319). Almost all the members of the Politburo concurred with Brezhnev’s assessment “that there was no chance for an Arab victory. Some participants even believed that in a few hours Israel would begin a counterattack that would result in the surrender of Egypt and Syria and the fall of their governments” (Isrealyan 1995, 31). This concern about the Israel’s military superiority led them to oppose Egypt and Syria’s plan for the war, and also led them to pressure their allies into accepting a ceasefire early in the conflict. Thus, the Soviets focused on the strategic balance of power in evaluating US intentions and on the conventional balance of power in predicting the likely outcome of the war. These assessments motivated their actions throughout the crisis.

On the other hand, Egypt paid very little attention to balance of power considerations. The Egyptians acknowledged that Israel was better equipped and more powerful than they were in terms of material capabilities. They planned on fighting Israel despite its material advantage because they believed that a limited attack would shock Israel out of its sense of complacency. The Egyptians also believed that Israel’s vulnerability was its inability to suffer large numbers of casualties, and they planned to capitalize on that vulnerability. They would slowly bleed Israel until it withdrew from Egyptian territory. Shazly and Gamasy both emphasize this component of their strategy, which was summed up by Heikal in the lead up to the war: “You start the war, you inflict heavy casualties on Israel, you teach them that deterrence doesn’t work” (quoted in Parker 2001, 111). Shazly (1980) claimed that the Achilles heel of the Israeli military was its small population and its sensitivity to casualties: “Loss of equipment, however, sophisticated or costly, leaves them unmoved . . . but the loss of a single soldier wounds them” (26). The Egyptian plan was to launch a limited attack and consolidate their
defenses, thereby forcing the Israelis to engage in a counterattack that would enable the Egyptians to inflict high casualties on the Israelis without exposing their own troops. Gamasy’s (1993) description of Egypt’s strategy was similar. He claims that one of the goals was to “inflict on Israel the greatest possible number of losses in men and weapons in order to convince it that an indefinite occupation of our lands was too costly to bear” (135).

The fact that Egypt paid little attention to balance of power considerations, instead focusing on the cost tolerance of its major opponent, while the USSR was influenced by both the global and the regional balance forces, suggests that the logic underpinning Contextual Expectations Theory’s power asymmetry hypothesis is sound. However, the fact that neither the Soviet Union nor Egypt considered Vietnam during the October War implies that power asymmetry may only matter in terms of reputational consequences when the issues at stake are similar. Even weak challengers who focus primarily on the will of their opponents when deciding whether to issue a challenge may discount information about their opponent’s revealed cost tolerance if that information was generated during a war that involved issues other than those at stake for the challenger.

As with previous chapters, CET’s expectations hypothesis receives little support. The available evidence did not enable me to adequately assess the prior expectations of either Cuba or the Soviet Union. They both emphasize power disparities in their postwar commentary on Vietnam and the Soviet Union warned the DRV not to underestimate the United States prior to conflict. However, the Soviet Union’s public statements prior to 1965 predicted US failure and some of its postwar statements implied that the Vietnamese victory was inevitable. I found no evidence to evaluate Egypt’s prior expectations. The paucity of data makes it difficult to either confirm or
disconfirm CET’s hypothesis. However, the fact that I found evidence of reputational effects without accounting for expectations suggests that a more parsimonious theory would be preferable.

The predictions of the learning and bias literature and Current Calculus Theory were very similar to CET’s predictions in this case. All three theories were correct in predicting that Vietnam would have no reputational consequences for the Soviet Union and Egypt during the October War. Current Calculus Theory was also correct in its prediction that US resolve would be evaluated by examining the issues involved in the current war rather than relying on America’s past actions. However, Current Calculus Theory cannot account for the fact that Soviet statements suggest that the lessons of Vietnam for the United States are applicable to the struggle for national liberation movements in general. It also cannot account for Egypt’s assessment of the US performance in Vietnam, which did not emphasize how the issues at stake in that conflict determined US cost tolerance, but rather made general statements about the importance of “will” in determining the outcome of militarized conflicts.

The other two theories of reputation formation fare poorly in this case. The baseline rationalist model predicted that information about US cost tolerance from the Vietnam War would be used to justify confrontational policies. Egypt’s decision to invade, its initial refusal to negotiate a ceasefire, the Soviets’ decision to arm their allies, and the Soviet threat to intervene unilaterally are all consistent with the predictions of this model. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the US defeat in Vietnam influenced any of these decisions by reducing the credibility of America’s implicit threat to defend Israel. Both Egypt and the USSR believed that America would intervene if Israel proper was threatened. They both were responsive to US threats and took steps to work with the United States to resolve the conflict.
Mercer’s attributional theory was correct in predicting that information about the United States’ cost tolerance would not affect Egyptian and Soviet decision making. However, it cannot account for the fact that neither state mentioned the effectiveness of the US military in their postwar assessments or used information about that effectiveness to justify their conciliatory policies during the October War. The postwar assessments of both Egypt and the Soviet Union focused on the will of the Americans and, contrary to the predictions of the theory, these assessments did not attribute the United States’ lack of will to situational factors.

Table 8.2 compares the accuracy of each theory’s predictions about the Soviet Union’s and Egypt’s postwar assessments, their behavior during the October War, and their decision making processes.
Table 8.2: The Explanatory Power of Competing Theories of Reputation Formation for the Soviet Union and Egypt during the October War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Soviet Union</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextual Expectations Theory</strong></td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Focus on Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Unclear whether information is unexpected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationalist Theory</strong></td>
<td>Attack US</td>
<td>Focus on Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unwilling to agree to ceasefire until battle turns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperative attitude toward the US during the war</td>
<td>Not much evidence that information was unexpected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsive to US threats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Soviet Union</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bias and Learning Literature</strong></td>
<td>No prediction</td>
<td>No prediction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attributional Theory</strong></td>
<td>Attack US</td>
<td>US cost tolerance in Vietnam not attributed to situational factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unwilling to agree to ceasefire until battle turns</td>
<td>Cooperative attitude toward US during the war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperative attitude toward US during the war</td>
<td>Responsive to US threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Calculus</strong></td>
<td>No prediction</td>
<td>No indication that the lessons of Vietnam are peculiar to that case</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most important prediction regards whether the defeat of the US in Vietnam influenced the decisions of Egypt and the Soviet Union. The rationalist model incorrectly predicts that information about US cost tolerance during the Vietnam War will embolden America’s adversaries in this case, while Mercer’s attributional theory incorrectly predicts that information about US military effectiveness during the Vietnam War will prompt America’s adversaries to adopt conciliatory behaviors. All of the other theories correctly predict that Vietnam will have no reputational effects in this case. CET also correctly predicts that both states will focus on will in their postwar assessments, that Egypt will be more willing to challenge the US than the Soviet Union, that Egypt will focus on cost tolerance while the USSR will focus on the balance of power, and that both states will see the October War as involving different issues than the Vietnam War. Current Calculus Theory correctly predicts that the resolve of the US will be evaluated by looking at the issues at stake in the October War. The bias and learning literature makes no other predictions.

Thus, this case provides fairly strong support for CET, the bias and learning literature, and Current Calculus Theory. However, when the overall reputational consequences of Vietnam are analyzed using the findings from both the Angola crisis and the October War, CET provides the most explanatory leverage. It is the only theory that can account for the behavior and decision making process of all the actors. The rationalist literature correctly predicts that Vietnam would have reputational consequences, but it fails to appreciate the importance of context. It cannot account for the lack of consequences in the October War or the fact that Vietnam had a greater influence on the Cubans than on the Soviets. The bias and learning literature and Current Calculus Theory have the opposite problem—they can explain why Egypt and the USSR do not consider Vietnam during the October War, but cannot explain why the
US withdrawal from Vietnam encouraged Cuba and the Soviet Union to get involved in Angola. Mercer’s attributional theory receives very little support in either case study. He incorrectly predicts that American adversaries will focus on skill in their postwar analysis and justify conciliatory decisions by referring to the US military’s effectiveness at fighting the Vietnam War. His theory cannot account for the postwar assessments’ focus on will or Cuba and the Soviet Union’s decision to challenge US interests in Angola.

CET’s emphasis on issue similarity explains why Vietnam affected the decision making of America’s adversaries during the Angola Crisis but not during the October War. In addition, its emphasis on the mediating effect of power asymmetries explains why the Cubans applied the lessons of Vietnam to a wider variety of scenarios and were more emboldened by the US defeat than the Soviets. It also explains why, during the October War, the Soviets focused on balance of power considerations while the Egyptians focused on the cost tolerance of their adversaries.

**The Reputational Consequences of Revealed Cost Tolerance: A Multi-Method Analysis**

The qualitative analysis of the reputational consequences of the Vietnam War suggests that issue similarity is of the utmost importance. The United States’ adversaries only used information generated during Vietnam about American cost tolerance when the issues at stake were similar. This runs contrary to the findings of the large N statistical tests conducted in chapter 3 and the intervention analysis in chapter 6. The former used region as a proxy for interests and found that the number of casualties suffered by combatants had no effect on challenger behavior either inside or outside the region where the war was fought. The latter found that the Vietnam War affected challenger behavior across a wide range of issues, not just those involving the spread of
communism. In chapter 9, I discuss how to reconcile these findings, speculate about the cause of the disparate results, and suggest ways in which future research can untangle the relationship between reputational effects and issue similarity.

Although each method generated different conclusions about issue similarity, their findings regarding CET’s expectations and power asymmetry hypotheses were consistent. All three methods found that expectations were less important than CET predicted. Despite measurement difficulties in both the quantitative and qualitative analyses, I found evidence of reputational effects. This suggests that controlling for expectations may be unnecessary and a simpler version of CET that just focuses on information and context may be preferable. In terms of context, all three methods provided some support for CET’s power asymmetry hypothesis. The cross-national-time-series tests found that information about cost tolerance only affected the behavior of weak actors. The intervention analysis found that small and middle powers were more likely to initiate challenges against the US after Vietnam, but great powers were not. The case studies found that Cuba was more emboldened than the Soviet Union during the Angola crisis. Together these three methods provide strong support for CET’s contention that the reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance are most pronounced for weak actors because those actors are especially sensitive to information about the willingness of their adversaries to suffer costs.

In terms of the validity of the indicators used to measure the conditioning variables in the large N statistical tests, my analysis of Vietnam, Angola, and the October War finds that CINC scores are a good measure of relative power but that region is not a particularly good proxy for issue similarity. The Soviet Union was more powerful than Cuba and Egypt in all of the categories used by CINC to measure capabilities. The Soviet Union was wealthier, more populous, and more industrialized than its allies. This
enabled it build a larger army and to spend more on defense. In fact, both Cuba and Egypt relied on Soviet military assistance to conduct their military operations. Cuba required transport assistance to move its troops to Angola and it primarily fought with weapons the USSR had supplied to the MPLA. Egypt used Soviet weapons to launch its attack on Israel and relied on the Soviets to resupply their arsenal during the war. Because the Soviet Union was wealthier than its allies and devoted more resources to defense, it was also able to develop a nuclear arsenal. Because it possessed nuclear weapons, it had to take the strategic balance of power into account when deciding whether to challenge the United States. Neither Cuba nor Egypt had to worry about the strategic balance or the possibility of nuclear escalation because they did not have the capabilities to threaten the US directly. It was unlikely that the US would respond to any of their actions, no matter how provocative, using nuclear weapons. Thus, because the USSR was more powerful than its allies, it had to approach its relationship with the US with more care. The qualitative difference in the power positions of the USSR compared to Egypt and Cuba are well captured by the CINC score, which aggregates multiple dimensions of power, including defense spending and the size of the military. These two components of power directly influenced the ability of America’s adversaries to threaten its interests in Angola and Israel, while also influencing their decision making process during those conflicts. Thus, my analysis of the Angola crisis and the October War reveal that the CINC score is a good measure of relative power.

On the other hand, these cases suggest that there are problems with using region as a proxy for issue similarity. The USSR did consider the importance of the Middle East in evaluating the interests at stake for the US in the October War. They noted the economic importance of the oil producing region and the strategic importance of the Mediterranean Sea as the gateway between Europe, the Persian Gulf, and Asia. These
references to regional considerations suggest that the issues at stake in a conflict are partially determined by the location of that conflict. However, in Angola, regional concerns played hardly any role at all in determining US interest in the conflict. The Soviet Union and Cuba saw the lessons of Vietnam as applicable to Angola because both involved national liberation movements and the spread of communism in the third world. Although the geopolitical importance of Africa was very different from the geopolitical importance of Southeast Asia, America’s adversaries believed the US defeat in Vietnam provided information about how resolved it would be in Angola. The October War did not involve the spread of communism or the fate of a national liberation movement and so the US experience in Vietnam was not considered relevant. This suggests that although regional concerns sometimes inform assessments of issue similarity, using them in isolation to measure similarity may be problematic.

**Debate over Vietnam: What Were the Reputational Consequences of American Intervention?**

Before moving onto the conclusion, I want to revisit the debate over the reputational costs of the US intervention in Vietnam. Concerns about America’s reputation were used to justify decisions during every phase of the Vietnam War. Johnson intervened in Vietnam because he believed that failing to do so would reduce America’s credibility and embolden communist movements worldwide. Nixon remained committed to the conflict despite domestic opposition because he feared the reputational costs of losing. When Congress cut off funding for South Vietnam during the NVA offensive in the spring of 1975, Kissinger lambasted the administration’s congressional opponents for being blind to the reputational consequences of their actions and predicted an upsurge in communist aggression as a result of the US failure to protect its ally.
This emphasis on America’s reputation made it inevitable that the postwar debate over the wisdom of intervening in Vietnam would center on the reputational consequences of that intervention. This debate began almost as soon as Saigon fell. The war’s proponents noted that the US failure in Vietnam led almost immediately to communist takeovers in Laos and Cambodia. They pointed to Thailand’s decision to close its US bases, Indonesia’s reevaluation of its relationship with China, and the Philippines’ assertions of independence as evidence of America’s waning credibility (Taylor 1975). Later scholarly work asserted that the reputational costs of US defeat extended beyond the Southeast Asian theater. The withdrawal from Vietnam emboldened the Soviets in Angola, Ethiopia, Yemen, and Afghanistan and encouraged communist insurgents to renew offensives in South America (Brown 1991, Record 2002, Rodman 2002). Other scholars took up the mantle of the war’s opponents, who argued that both the Johnson and Nixon administrations had exaggerated the reputational costs of losing in Vietnam. These scholars critique the domino theory, arguing that the reputational consequences of the war were limited. Only Laos and Cambodia fell. America’s credibility in areas of strategic importance was unharmed (Moss 1990; Arnold 1991; Isaacs 1997; Bantz 1998).

My analysis of the reputational consequences of Vietnam suggests that US failure entailed significant reputational costs. The intervention analysis demonstrated that the US faced an increased number of challenges after the Vietnam War in all regions and across a wide range of issues. However, the case studies suggest that the US defeat only had a causal effect on situations that involved the issues at stake in Vietnam, namely the spread of communism in the third world. Even focusing on the more limited reputational consequences that the case studies uncovered, my analysis suggests that the costs of defeat involved more than the loss of Cambodia and Laos. The US failure in
Vietnam prompted a number of America’s adversaries to make inferences about the public’s cost tolerance. These inferences affected the decision making of the Soviet Union and Cuba during the Angola Crisis. It is likely that the US defeat also affected Soviet behavior in Ethiopia, Yemen, and Afghanistan since the Soviets saw these conflicts as involving national liberation movements. It clearly affected Cuba’s foreign policy and probably also influenced the behavior of other states and insurgent groups seeking to spread communism in the third world. If the results of the intervention analysis are indicative of Vietnam’s reputational costs, then the consequences of defeat were even more widespread. Thus, for the most part, my analysis supports the contentions of scholars like Brown (1991), Record (2002), and Rodman (2002), who claim that US withdrawal from Vietnam damaged America’s reputation and emboldened its enemies. However, my study of the October War suggests that the reputational costs of the war were not all encompassing. In that conflict, America’s adversaries considered its commitment to defend Israel credible because the issues at stake were different from those over which the Vietnam War was fought. America’s “vital” interests were at stake and no one doubted the US willingness to suffer casualties in defense of those interests. This suggests that critics of the domino theory were partially correct in concluding that the failure of the US in Vietnam had little effect in areas of strategic importance, including the Middle East and Western Europe.

One part of the debate over Vietnam’s reputational consequences involves the cost of defeat in 1975. The other part involves a counterfactual analysis of the costs that would have been suffered had the US backed down in 1965. Many of the domino theory critics assert that because the consequences of the US defeat were limited in 1975, the costs of backing down in 1965 would have also been limited. This argument is fallacious for two reasons. First, my analysis of the reputational consequences of the US defeat in
Vietnam demonstrates that the costs in 1975 were not insignificant. More importantly, there is no reason to believe that the costs the US suffered in 1975 are indicative of the costs it would have suffered had it abandoned Vietnam in 1965.

Moyar (2006) and McCann (2006) both argue that the US intervention in Vietnam prevented a number of important dominoes from falling. Moyar provides convincing evidence that “For every Southeast Asian country not already in league with China... the fall of Vietnam [in 1965] would [have led] to either an alliance with China or defeat by Communist subversives who were supported by China and its allies” (Moyar 2006, 388). He cites the precarious positions of Laos, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Cambodia in fighting communist insurgencies. The US decision to fight in Vietnam dampened the enthusiasm of these communist movements, hardened the resolve of governments battling these forces, and prompted China and the DRV to focus their energies and their resources on Vietnam rather than other communist movements. Moyar also demonstrates that a number of US allies in the region were concerned about the spread of communism and Chinese influence throughout Asia. He argues that the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and India would have faced severe pressure to accommodate China or at least adopt a policy of neutrality in the face of Chinese expansion. The US commitment to South Vietnam bought time for these countries to build up their own capabilities while China’s influence deteriorated as a result of the Cultural Revolution and the Sino-Soviet split. Thus, in 1975 “the countries of Southeast Asia were more capable of protecting themselves against Communist encroachment and more determined to do so” than they were in 1965 (Moyar 2006, 379).

McCann (2006) makes a similar argument. Like Moyar, he claims that a US withdrawal from Vietnam in 1965 would have increased the likelihood that communist movements would have taken hold in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines,
Thailand due to “morale effects” and the fact that China would have had more resources “to cement communist gains” in these countries. During the Vietnam War, these countries “were able to overcome old rivalries and create meaningful partnerships . . . [Consequently] when the United States ultimately departed Indochina in 1975, Southeast Asia proved far better equipped to repel the spread of communism” than it would have been in 1965 (McCann 2006, 148). He claims that a similar process occurred in Latin America where Bolivia, Guatemala, El-Salvador, and the Dominican Republic were facing Cuban agitated insurgent movements in the mid 1960s.

Moyar and McCann’s findings suggest that reputational costs of the US failure in 1975 understate the costs that the US would have suffered in 1965 had it backed down without a fight. America’s prolonged commitment to Vietnam encouraged at risk countries to stand firm when faced with their own communist insurgencies. It also bought time for them to consolidate their hold on power and develop the capabilities to resist future communist incursions, including those that they faced after the US withdrawal in 1973. However, that prolonged commitment also revealed information about US cost tolerance that was unavailable to America’s adversaries in 1965. This information emboldened some of those adversaries. America’s allies, especially those in Southeast Asia, may have been better equipped to deal with these new communist threats in 1975 than they were in 1965, but it is not clear that America was, especially given the domestic political climate after Vietnam. Thus, answering the question posed by George Ball during the debate over whether to increase America’s commitment to Vietnam in 1965 is difficult. Moyar and McCann’s work suggests that the President was correct in predicting that “breaking the word of three presidents . . . would seem to be an irreparable blow” to American credibility. My research suggests that George Ball was correct that the US inability “to defeat a handful of guerrillas” would also be an
“irreparable blow” (quoted in Khong 1992, 126-127). Whether it was a “worse blow” is difficult to assess because during the intervention the geopolitical context the US was operating in changed. There were significant costs to losing the war, but these costs came to fruition in an environment that was quite different from the environment in which America made its initial commitment to Vietnam.

The case studies of Vietnam, Angola, and the October War suggest that the US defeat in Angola involved reputational costs. In the next chapter, I discuss how these findings relate to the larger dissertation and draw out the policy implications of the overall research project.
Chapter 9: The Reputational Consequences of War, Policy Implications and Avenues for Future Research

Throughout the centuries, countries have taken up arms to defend their reputation and have remained committed to costly wars to preserve it. In ancient Greece, the Athenians refused to accept the neutrality of the Melians because they thought others would assume that Athenian inaction was born of fear (Thucydides 1996, 532-533). In another instance, the Spartans warned the Athenians that Sparta “had always assiduously cultivated a reputation for military excellence” and their defeat at Sphacteria prompted them to look for ways “to avenge their earlier shame” by forcefully counting Athenian expansion in Sicily (Robinson 2011 quoting Thucydides, 3).

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, European powers justified colonial wars because they feared the reputational consequences of allowing their colonial possessions to revolt or to fall into the hands of rivals. For example, Frederic von Holstein, the chief strategist of the German Foreign Office argued, “If we let ourselves be trampled on in Morocco, we invite similar treatment elsewhere. Not for material reasons alone, but even more for the sake of prestige, must Germany protest against the intended appropriation of Morocco by France” (quoted in Synder 1991, 78). Similar logic informed British foreign policy. Prime Minister Palmerston claimed, “We are defending Turkey in the Basque Provinces by resisting the growth of Russian influence in Spain” (quoted in Snyder 1991, 177). The same reasoning was used to justify Britain’s costly commitment to Afghanistan in the 1830s. Advocates of the campaign argued that failure to counter the Russians there would inevitably lead to the loss of India and a decline in Britain’s prestige (Snyder 1991, 171).

In the prelude to World War II, Tojo justified maintaining Japan’s commitment to China despite rising costs and diminishing prospects of victory by warning that a
Japanese defeat would make the United States “more arrogant and overbearing” (quoted in Snyder 1991, 127). A Liaison Conference convened to discuss the Chinese War concluded that if Japan withdrew from China “for the sake of a temporary peace, the United States, its military position strengthened, is sure to demand more and more concessions on our part; and ultimately our empire will lie prostrate and the feet of the United States” (quoted in Sagan 1989, 342).

Stalin made a similar argument during the Winter War when the Politburo met to decide how to respond to Finland’s initial victories in December of 1939. He argued that the USSR had to make drastic changes because “ineffective military action could reflect on our policy. The entire world is watching us . . . If we get bogged down for a long time before such a weak enemy, then by that very action we will stimulate anti-Soviet activities of imperialist groups” (quoted in Chew 1971, 76). Concern about reputation also motivated Finland’s actions during the conflict. Helsinki decided to fight the numerically superior Soviets to convince them that future encroachment on Finnish sovereignty would not be worth the costs involved (Sechser 2007, chapter 4). They hoped the long term reputational benefits of fighting fiercely and demonstrating their high cost tolerance would justify the inevitable losses they would suffer at the hands of the Red Army in the winter of 1939.

More recently, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles justified committing US troops to Korea because “a disastrous chain of events leading most probably to world war” would result if America were “to sit by while Korea is overrun by unprovoked armed attack” (quoted in Press 2005, 2). Similarly, the Johnson administration intervened in Vietnam because it feared that failing to do so “would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of America’s commitment, the value of America’s word” (quoted in Record 2002, 430). At the same time, Zhou en Lai was
encouraging the DRV to stay committed despite the United States’ escalation of the conflict because anti-American forces in the rest of the world would “suffer heavy losses” if the communists were defeated in Indochina (quoted in Moyar 2006, 377). Later in the war, Nixon justified remaining committed to Vietnam despite the rising costs by referencing the potential reputational costs of losing:

Our defeat and humiliation in South Vietnam without question would promote recklessness in the councils of those great powers who have not yet abandoned their goals of world conquest. This would spark violence wherever our commitments help maintain the peace—in the Middle East, in Berlin, eventually even in the Western Hemisphere. Ultimately, this would cost more lives. It would not bring peace; it would bring more war (Nixon 1969).

Much of the empirical literature on reputation in international relations suggests that this concern for reputation is misplaced. As Daryl Press (2005) argues, “assessments of credibility are not based on . . . historical examples from the enemy’s past” (143). Neither the case studies conducted by Mercer (1996) or Press (2005), nor the statistical tests performed by Huth (1988) find evidence of reputational effects. This dissertation demonstrates that, contrary to the conclusions of those studies, the policy makers were correct. Reputation matters. Wars have reputational consequences, and leaders should be concerned with them.

**Theories of Reputation Formation**

In chapter one, I developed a theory of reputation formation, which I termed Contextual Expectations Theory (CET). This theory posited that wars generate information about the combatants’ skill and will. Unexpected information about the military effectiveness, or skill, of the combatants was predicted to affect the decision making of potential challengers operating in a fighting environment that was similar to the one in which the combatant fought. Unexpected information about the cost tolerance, or will, of the combatants was predicted to affect the decision making of weak
challengers and those whose primary dispute with the combatant was similar to the issues over which the war was fought.

Both the statistical analysis and the case studies provide support for key tenets of CET. Information matters and it interacts with context to determine the conditions under which wars have reputational effects. The reputational consequences of revealed effectiveness are quite broad and are most pronounced when the fighting environment is similar. The reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance are much more limited. The statistical analysis found that information about the combatant’s will only influenced very weak challengers, while the case studies found that it only influenced the behavior of states concerned about issues similar to those over which the past war was fought. When the issues at stake were similar, weak challengers were more emboldened than strong challengers, but weak challengers with different issues at stake did not alter their behavior.

Although CET’s emphasis on the importance of information and context was born out, its emphasis on expectations was not. The statistical results were the same regardless of whether prior expectations were controlled for. The Soviet performance in the Winter War affected German decision making during WWII despite the fact that many Germans had a low opinion of the Soviet military prior to its war with the Finns. The Vietnam War also had reputational consequences, even though it is not clear that the US defeat was unexpected by its adversaries.

The failure to find evidence of prior expectations mediating the reputational effects of wartime information may due to the inherent difficulty of assessing prior expectations. The case studies revealed some of the difficulties involved. First, policy makers often misrepresent their beliefs for strategic reasons, making it difficult to assess their “true” expectations. For example, US allies who supported US involvement in
Vietnam told the US they thought victory was possible, while US allies who doubted the worth of Vietnam told the US they thought failure was likely. Soviet public statements predicted that the US would end up in a quagmire in Vietnam, but in private they warned the DRV that the US should not be underestimated. During the Winter War, Hitler told Finland that their situation was hopeless because he was not interested in providing them with aid, although he privately expressed doubts about the Red Army’s abilities. Second, there are differences in expectations across countries. Germany had low expectations about the Soviet performance during WWII because of its performance in Finland and Poland, while Japan had higher expectations because of its own experiences in Nomonhan and Changkufeng. There were also differences across individuals. George Ball expected the US to perform poorly in Vietnam despite the more optimistic assessments of the rest of the Cabinet. Most of the German Generals thought the Red Army would smash the Finns, but the German Foreign Minister to Finland, Wipert von Blücher, thought the Soviets would have a very difficult time. General Shaposhnikov voiced similar views prior to the Winter War, despite the Politburo’s confidence in their military superiority. This variation makes it difficult to come to an overall assessment about the international community’s or even one country’s prior expectations.

The case studies also shed some light on why the statistical models that controlled for expectations did not outperform the simpler models. As predicted, leaders used the material balance of power to inform their expectations about the likely outcome of both the Winter War and the Vietnam conflict. However, other factors mattered too. In the Winter War, Russia’s dysfunctional civil-military relations and the Nazis’ ideological racism informed Germany’s assessment of Soviet military capabilities. France’s experience in Indochina and the fragility of the Saigon government influenced
third party expectations of the likely outcome of the US intervention in Vietnam. Many of these factors were idiosyncratic to the case being studied, and so could not be included in the statistical model of expectations. Others like civil military relations and past war performance have the potential to improve the model, which relied almost entirely on the material balance of power to predict LER and casualties. This was justified because of the emphasis the international relations literature places on material power. However, the models did not do a very good job predicting LER and casualties, so the residuals used to measure expectations looked very similar to the baseline variables. This might explain the similarity in the results. Including better predictors of outcomes might improve the analysis. However, it is not clear that coming up with an overall measure of the international communities’ expectations is even possible given the variation across countries and individuals. Better tests are needed, perhaps at the individual level, to assess the importance of expectations.

I found evidence of reputational effects even though I had difficulty assessing prior expectations. The baseline statistical models of both skill and will revealed that information generated during war affected the subsequent behavior of future challengers. In addition, the Winter War and the Vietnam War both had reputational repercussions despite the fact that the information generated about the USSR and US was not entirely surprising. Since controlling for expectations was not required to get explanatory leverage in these cases and in the statistical analysis, it may be better to go with a more parsimonious theory.

One question that emerges from this conclusion is why prior expectations are not as important as Tomz (2007) found in the financial market place. The discrepancy is probably due to the amount of information available in the security environment compared to the financial environment. In finance, and banking in particular,
information about a country’s willingness to pay off its debts is being constantly produced every time a payment is due. In the international security environment, wars are thankfully rare. Consequently, information about the effectiveness and the cost tolerance of states is scarce. Because of this, new information always has a big effect on the cost-benefit calculus of potential adversaries. The last war may have been years or even decades earlier. Even if it was fought more recently, it is still only one data point. If the new data reinforces the inferences drawn from that data point, it still might have an effect because of the scarcity of information. In the financial world, banks have access to lots of data on lending credibility, so their prior expectations are more firmly rooted and information that reinforces these expectations has a smaller effect on decision making.

Despite the problems associated with measuring expectations, Contextual Expectations Theory performed better than the competing theories, primarily because it was sensitive to the importance of context. The baseline rationalist model can account for German decision making during WWII, Soviet and Cuban decision making during Angola, and the findings of the statistical analysis of revealed skill. However, it cannot account for Japanese decision making in World War II, Soviet and Egyptian decision making in the October War, or the narrow situations in which information about will mattered in the statistical analysis of cost tolerance.

Like the rationalist model, Current Calculus Theory cannot account for the importance of context so it cannot explain the variation in the effect of skill across fighting environments or Japan’s lack of attention to the Winter War during World War II. More importantly, it cannot account for the reputational consequences of revealed cost tolerance. Its primary prediction was that information about skill would have reputational effects, but that information about will would not. This theory receives some support because the reputational consequences of skill are much broader than the
reputational consequences of will. However, it missed important situations in which information about will has an effect: namely when the combatants are faced with weak actors and when the issues are similar. Press controls for issue similarity in his case studies, but not for power asymmetries. By only looking at the behavior and decision making processes of great powers, he misses the situations were information about will is most relevant—when weak actors contemplate challenging more powerful ones.

The bias and learning literature had the opposite problem. It got the null predictions right: the Winter War did not influence decision making in Japan during WWII, and Vietnam did not influence decision making during the October War. There was also some evidence during the process tracing of the World War II cases which suggested that preexisting beliefs influenced what information was assimilated by different statesmen. The fact that the Japanese focused on Nomonhan and Changkufeng rather than on the Winter War also suggests that direct experiences may have more profound effects than vicarious ones, as predicted by this literature. However, this literature cannot explain the existence of the reputational effects that were uncovered in the statistical analysis and case studies of Germany in World War II and the Soviets and Cubans in Angola.

Mercer’s attributional theory also fared poorly. Because this analysis focused on the behavior of challengers who are in the out group, his theory predicts that there will be reputational effects for undesirable information like the possession of skill or a high cost tolerance, because these characteristics will be attributed to the disposition of the actor. Non-desirable information, like the lack of skill or a low cost tolerance, will not have reputational effects because it will be attributed to the situation. Thus, his theory cannot explain the symmetry of the statistical results. Information about the possession of skill and the lack of skill both have reputational consequences. Although information
about will has narrower reputational effects, they are still symmetrical. Weak actors are emboldened by information about low cost tolerance and deterred by information about high cost tolerance. In terms of the case studies, the Winter War is particularly problematic for Mercer’s theory because the Soviets demonstrated a very high cost tolerance and a low level of skill. According to Mercer, adversaries should have attributed the lack of skill to the peculiarities of the Finnish terrain and focused instead on the Soviets’ cost tolerance. The opposite was the case, as most assessments focused on the Soviets’ poor fighting abilities. The Germans were not deterred by the Soviets’ high cost tolerance, and the Japanese never mentioned it during their deliberations over whether to adopt or honor the neutrality treaty. Similarly, the lesson of Vietnam was about the United States’ low cost tolerance, which was not attributed to the peculiarities of the Vietnam campaign. Hardly any attention was paid to US conventional skill, which was demonstrated throughout the campaign, or the American’s improvement in counterinsurgency skill, which occurred over the duration of the war.

Thus, compared to the alternative theories of reputation formation in the literature, Contextual Expectations Theory receives the most support. It is the only theory that can account for the statistical results and explain the behavior of all the actors examined in the case studies.

In addition to adjudicating between various models of reputation formation, this dissertation makes two important contributions to the international relations literature. First, as discussed above, it demonstrates that reputation matters in international security. Although theoretical models have been developed which predict reputational effects, most of the empirical literature found no evidence of reputation mattering in the ways policy makers and theoreticians predicted. Two aspects of this project enabled me to uncover reputational effects: one theoretical and one empirical. First, CET's
sensitivity to context and the way context interacts with information allowed me to focus my attention on the situations in which reputation was most likely to matter. Second, looking at war outcomes rather than crisis bargaining provided me with new independent variables that did not suffer from problems arising from “bluffing.”

This dissertation also demonstrated that numerical superiority and material resources are only one component of a state’s “power.” Material capabilities were not a great predictor of skill or will in the statistical analyses, and the case studies revealed the importance of intangible factors that affect the ability of states to secure their preferred outcomes in the international environment. A state’s reputation, particularly its reputation for effective action, is an important component of power. Other important factors include civil military relations and domestic unity. Stalin’s purge of his high ranking military officers led many states to downgrade their estimate of the Red Army’s strength, and the domestic displays of disunity after the Vietnam War made other states doubt the United States’ willingness to use force. Both of these factors hindered the superpowers’ ability to use their material resources to influence international events.

**Policy Implications**

Wars have reputational consequences that should be considered when leaders contemplate using armed force to settle disputes. The results of this dissertation suggest that going to war to preserve one’s reputation is not advised unless the leaders are confident that they can fight more effectively than their enemy. Those who reveal a lack of skill are more likely to be challenged than those who avoid war. In addition, not many reputational benefits accrue to those who fight losing battles to demonstrate their willingness to suffer costs in pursuit of their goals. Revealing a high cost tolerance only deters weak actors that are concerned with the same issues over which the current war was fought. Thus, fighting to demonstrate resolve does not make sense unless you are a
great power who faces a string of weak actors concerned with the same set of issues over which the war is being fought. Fighting to demonstrate effectiveness has the potential to yield more reputational benefits, but the risks involved are high and should not be taken lightly.

Leaders should also be aware of the reputational consequences of war outcomes when deciding whether to remain committed to a costly conflict. If a country is losing because its military is ineffective, there will likely be broad reputational costs for withdrawing. Staying committed in order to figure out how to fight effectively is probably preferable if leaders are confident in their ability to institute the necessary changes to their force employment. However, if a country is losing despite being militarily effective because their opponent has more resources or a very high cost tolerance, the reputational costs of withdrawal are limited. In those situations it may be advisable to throw in the towel. The one exception would be when the state is primarily concerned with challenges from weak actors, since those are the actors who will be emboldened by information about will. This is a significant exception, especially for great powers since most of their adversaries are considerably weaker.

Questions about the reputational consequences of Iraq and Afghanistan motivated this project. This dissertation suggests that the troop surge and the new counterinsurgency strategy adopted by the Bush administration in 2007 probably limited the reputational costs of the Iraq War. The US failure to control the violence in Iraqi cities in 2006 would have emboldened it enemies. They would have deduced that the US military was incapable of mounting an effective counterinsurgency campaign. These reputational effects would have been quite broad, but would be especially pronounced for countries with desert and mountainous terrain, such as Iran and Syria. Because the US struggled with urban warfare in particular, states with populations
concentrated in major cities might also have been emboldened. In addition, by escalating the conflict despite domestic pressure to draw down, Bush demonstrated that the US was willing to suffer high costs in pursuit of its goals. The reputational effects of this information are probably more limited than the information about the improved ability of the US to fight an insurgency. They are significant nonetheless, especially because the US is primarily concerned with deterring challenges from actors that are much weaker than it.

As the US withdraws its remaining forces from Iraq, what will the likely reputational consequences be? The US proved militarily effective at conventional war from the onset, and the tactical and operational changes instituted during the surge vastly improved its ability to conduct counterinsurgency operations. Thus, the likely reputational consequences of the war will most likely be due to information generated about the United States’ cost tolerance.

So what has the Iraq war taught America’s adversaries about its cost tolerance? As casualties mounted in Iraq, significant segments of the public began demanding the US withdraw its forces, and some democratic leaders in Congress served as the voice for these demands. However, President Bush did not respond by withdrawing troops. He responded with the surge and a new counterinsurgency strategy that actually exposed American troops to more dangers by sending them into population centers. Similarly, President Obama faced political pressures from his party and large segments of the population to fulfill his campaign promises by rapidly drawing down troops beginning in 2009. Despite this, he opted to give his military commanders flexibility to deal with the changing situation on the ground. He ordered an end to combat operations in August of 2010, specifying that 50,000 troops would remain Iraq. By the time the 2010 date arrived, security in most of the country had been transferred to the Iraqi Security
Forces and the situation in Iraq had been largely stabilized. The Obama Administration tried to negotiate terms for a longer stay but those negotiations failed, and he agreed to bring the remaining troops home in December of 2011 in accordance with the withdrawal agreement signed by the Bush Administration and the Iraqi government in 2008.

The fact that many Americans withdrew their support for the war as casualties mounted may lead potential adversaries to believe that the cost tolerance of the public is limited. However, President Bush’s and President Obama’s decisions to resist withdrawing in the face of public pressure demonstrated that targeting America’s will to fight may not be a winning strategy. By remaining committed to the war effort, both leaders limited the reputational costs of the Iraq War.

These costs should remain limited even if the situation deteriorates after the US withdraws its remaining troops. This is a very real possibility because Iraq is a fragile state. There is still much violence, national reconciliation is tenuous, the Iraqi Security Forces are not entirely integrated, and deep distrust remains between rival tribes, sects, and ethnic groups. As America withdraws its forces, it is possible that the situation may again become unstable. Although this may be detrimental to Iraq and the region (and steps should be taken to prevent this from happening), the United States’ reputation will likely remain intact because of the way its military has fought, and because America’s leaders were willing to stay the course despite public pressure to desist.

In terms of deciding how to move forward in Afghanistan, this dissertation suggests that withdrawing forces precipitously will have adverse reputational consequences for the United States. Although a new counterinsurgency strategy is being implemented in eastern and southern Afghanistan, the results have been mixed and it is not clear the US military is effectively containing the Taliban insurgency. If the US
withdraws before it can implement a successful counterinsurgency strategy its potential adversaries may be emboldened. The distinctiveness of Afghanistan, particularly its mountainous terrain and its lack of infrastructure, may somewhat limit these reputational effects but my analysis suggests that the reputational consequences of appearing militarily ineffective are quite broad. In addition, the United States is in a unique position because it is so strong militarily. Most of its potential adversaries, including Iran, North Korea, al Qaeda, and Syria, are much weaker in terms of material capabilities. Even the militaries of its strongest competitors, China and Russia, pale in comparison. Because of this, information about the United States’ cost tolerance is relevant to a wide range of actors. Consequently, it needs to consider the reputational consequences of information about its sensitivity to costs. As the Obama Administration decides how to proceed, it is important that domestic political calculations and public pressure to withdraw not appear to dictate America’s approach to Afghanistan.

**Multi-Method Research**

Before discussing avenues of future research, a few comments about multi-method research are in order. The goal of multi-method inquiry is to attack research problems from different angles. Every method has its weaknesses, and by using multiple approaches, the strengths of one method can compensate for the weaknesses in others. In this dissertation I used three different types of methods to evaluate Contextual Expectations Theory. The large N statistical analysis enabled me to test various hypotheses while controlling for confounding factors in a systematic way. Because the sample is large, the findings from these tests are generalizable. However, because its difficult to gather data on lots of wars and numerous dyadic relationships over more than 200 years, I had to rely on proxy variables to measure the concepts of interest. In addition, there was no way to evaluate whether the causal mechanisms identified by
CET were operative. The case studies compensated for these weaknesses by providing better information on the variables of interests and by allowing me to assess causality. Although it is difficult to control for confounding variables and the results of these tests may not be generalizable across wars or actors, when combined with the statistical analysis they provide a rigorous test of CET. In the Vietnam case, I also employed intervention analysis to look at how the Vietnam War influenced the overall number of challenges initiated against the United States. This hybrid method benefited from improved precision on the key independent variables and from being generalizable across challengers. Its measures of the contextual variables were better than the large N statistical analysis but not as good as the case studies, and the findings were still not generalizable across wars.

In an ideal situation, all of the methods will point in the same direction and the researcher can be confident in the results of all of the tests. This was the case with my analysis of the reputational consequences of skill. The statistical analysis found quite large effects that were more pronounced in similar terrain. My case study of the Winter War also found reputational effects for revealed effectiveness both in terms of the behavior and the decision making process of the German High Command. Although I did not find reputational effects when the terrain was different, this is still consistent with the statistical findings since they are probabilistic. The case study also suggested that the variables used in the statistical analysis were good representations of the concepts being tested. Together, these two tests provide strong evidence for the existences of the reputational consequences of revealed effectiveness.

What happens when the various methods do not point to the same conclusion? This was the case with my analysis of the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance. The large N statistical analysis revealed very few reputational effects. Information about
will only affected the behavior of weak challengers. Issue similarity, operationalized by looking at the region where the war was fought, did not matter. In the case studies of Vietnam, I found evidence of power asymmetry mediating the reputational effects of will, but issue similarity was more important. Vietnam did not affect decision making of either the Soviets or the Egyptians in the October War, but it did effect the decision making of the Cubans more than the Soviets in Angola. The intervention analysis found widespread reputational effects for all types of issues. It also found that reputational effects were more pronounced among weak states, although the relationship was not strictly linear.

All of these methods support the power asymmetry hypothesis to various degrees, so we can be fairly confident in that result. However, what should we make of the issue similarity hypothesis? The large N statistical tests suggested that issue similarity, as proxied by region, does not matter because information about will almost never has reputational effects. The intervention analysis suggested that issue similarity does not matter because information about will almost always has reputational effects. The case studies suggested that issue similarity was determinative: there were only reputational effects when the issues involved were similar.

What accounts for the different conclusions of each of these methods? The Vietnam case study suggests that the key independent variable used in the large N statistical analysis may be problematic. The US suffered high casualties in Vietnam but was still seen as lacking will. How the United States fought the war and the conditions under which it withdrew were key to the inferences that were made about its cost tolerance. This suggests that even high casualty losers might be seen as lacking will. It also opens up the possibility that war winners can reveal information about their cost tolerance by the way they fight.
The case studies also revealed that region is not a good proxy for issue similarity. Although the two countries were geographically very far apart, the Soviets and Cubans considered the issues at stake in Angola similar to those at stake in Vietnam because they both involved national liberation movements and the spread of communism. The issues at stake in the October War did not revolve around the spread of communism, and so lessons from Vietnam were not deemed relevant. In the intervention analysis, region was the one issue variable that did not work. There was evidence of reputational effects for communist challengers, challengers allied with the USSR, challengers concerned with regime disputes, and challengers concerned with territorial issues, but there were not reputational effects for challengers in Asia. Thus, the discrepancy in the findings could be due to variable specification problems. However, it could also be due to the fact that Vietnam is not representative of other wars.

Getting a more definitive answer on the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance and the conditional effect of issue similarity requires redesigning the statistical analysis to deal with problems of variable validity. Prior to that, it would be advisable to undertake an exploratory case study of another war that revealed information about a combatant’s lack of will. Rather than specifically looking for reputational effects, this case study would be used to assess what factors lead third party states to make inferences about the cost tolerance of the combatants. If the factors are similar to the Vietnam case, then the idiosyncrasy of the US experience in Vietnam is less likely to be the underlying problem.

If that is the case, the large N statistical tests should be rerun with variables that look at how states fought or the conditions under which states surrendered. These variables will be much harder to measure than casualties, but not impossible. One option might be to look at the rate of casualty accumulation. If countries take steps to
reduce their casualties during a war, monthly casualties should decrease as the war drags on. If states make tactical decisions that put troops at increased risk in order to prevail, monthly casualties should increase. A comparison between Vietnam and Iraq is illustrative. The US adapted new counterinsurgency strategies in both of these conflicts. However, in Vietnam the US took multiple steps to limit casualties because of domestic opposition to the war. Consequently “Vietnamization” was accompanied by a reduction in American casualties. It also led third party states to make inferences about the United States’ lack of resolve. In Iraq, the new strategy’s focus on population security put US troops at increased risk and consequently led to higher casualty rates. It simultaneously demonstrated America’s willingness to suffer costs to achieve its objectives. Another variable might look at variations in troop deployments. Are the combatants willing to send additional troops to secure victory or do they try to rely on strategies that keep additional troops out of harms way? Again, the comparison between Vietnam and Iraq is apt. In Vietnam, Abram’s new strategy was accompanied by a reduction in US forces; In Iraq, Petraeus’ new strategy was accompanied by a “surge” of American troops. The differences in the two approaches reflect differences in the willingness of US leaders to continue suffering costs in those conflicts. It might also be possible to look at the loss exchange ratios and resources available to war losers in order to assess the conditions under which the combatants surrendered.

Dealing with issue similarity is more complicated because a variable is needed that can measure issue similarity prior to the onset of a conflict. This difficulty may make it impossible to test the issue similarity hypothesis in a large N setting with the current research design. However, a research design that only looks at cases where a conflict has occurred might prove more tractable. For example, it would be possible to test whether information about cost tolerance affected dispute escalation since issue
similarity could be measured for all the dyads in the dataset. This type of analysis would have to control for selection bias since the parties involved in disputes had access to the wartime information before they got involved (Fearon 1994), but there are statistical means of dealing with this. Even with this modified research design, measuring issue similarity may be difficult because the real concept I am trying to capture is unobservable: it is the challenger’s belief that the combatant’s cost tolerance in the prior case applies to the current case. Objective similarity in the issues at stake influences those beliefs but the beliefs themselves are inherently subjective, and thus difficult to quantify. This is one of the reasons why it is so important to supplement cross national analyses with other methods, like case studies or public opinion experiments, that can better measure subjective concepts.

One critique that might be leveled against this approach is that redesigning the statistical analysis amounts to curve fitting. However, the new study would be testing for an entirely different relationship. It would not be assessing whether third party states challenge war losers who suffer low casualties. It would be testing whether third party states challenge combatants who fight in ways that reveal a low cost tolerance or surrender when they have the means to achieve victory. Vietnam and the initial exploratory case study could not be used as evidence in support of the findings, but additional cases could be examined with the goal of assessing the validity of the new statistical tests. In this way, research on the reputational effects of cost tolerance could move forward.

**Future Research**

This dissertation opens up a number of avenues for future research. Most obviously, reevaluating the will hypotheses in the ways discussed above would improve the literature’s understanding of the reputational effects of revealed cost tolerance.
It would also be beneficial to expand the types of conflicts and the types of actors included in the analysis. This dissertation focused primarily on conventional wars and state actors. I initially wanted to include counterinsurgencies and non-state actors in my analysis because a large motivation for this project was the likely reputational consequences of Iraq and Afghanistan. I argued that conflict and actor type was another contextual variable that would mediate the reputational effects of information about skill. I predicted that information about skill at counterinsurgencies would matter more for non-state actors and skill at conventional wars would matter more for state actors.

Testing these hypotheses proved difficult given current data constraints. In my analysis of conventional wars, I found that looking at outcomes yields few results. The specific information generated during the war mattered, not just the outcome, so data was needed on skill and will specifically. This information is not available for counterinsurgencies. The one large N dataset of counterinsurgencies focuses on the overall political outcome of the conflicts (Lyall and Wilson 2009). I looked into collecting data on skill and will, but coming up with a measure of skill was difficult. In addition, data on basic statistics like government and rebel casualties was spotty for many of the conflicts.

It is also difficult to measure non-state challenges. Here the problem is specifying what constitutes a challenge. There are lots of datasets that look at civil conflict, war initiation by colonial actors, and terrorist attacks. Because I did not have a theoretical reason to focus on one type of actor, I ran some preliminary analyses on all these datasets using Lyall and Wilson’s (2009) counterinsurgency outcome variable as my independent variable. I looked at civil and extra territorial war initiation using the Correlates of War (Sarkees 2000) and PRIO datasets (Gleditsch et al 2002). I also looked at the incidence of guerrilla war and revolutions using the Banks (2004) data. The results
were not stable across the different models. Both the sign and the significance of the key independent variables changed depending on which dependent variable was used and how the model was specified. The poor quality of the data and the instability of the results suggest that assessing the reputational effects of counterinsurgencies using statistical techniques will entail an entirely new data collection effort. It may not even be possible given the scarcity of data on many of the wars. However, it is worth looking into given the importance of the question. If data availability and reliability make it impossible to use statistical methods, other research designs should be explored.

This project focused on how third party states changed their behavior based on the combatant’s performance during the war. It did not consider how combatants responded to their own performance. Since policymakers are concerned with reputation, they often work hard to undo the negative consequences of their wartime decisions. This may make it difficult to uncover reputational effects when policymakers take steps to mitigate those effects. However, policymakers do not always seek to counteract the reputational costs of losing. The two wars examined here reveal very different responses by the relevant combatants. After the Winter War, the USSR instituted a number of reforms designed to remedy the problems the Red Army encountered in Finland. The Soviets abolished the role of the political commissars and established new training programs designed to improve their combat performance. After Vietnam, the US failed to institutionalize the improvements it made in counterinsurgency warfare, and the domestic political climate heightened its sensitivity to the potential costs of war. Future research could look at what factors explain variation in how combatants respond to their own performance and also evaluate how those actions can exacerbate or alleviate wars’ reputational costs.
Another potential area for future research includes examining the reputational consequences of war from the perspective of the combatant’s allies, rather than its adversaries. When a state performs poorly during war, do its allies respond by seeking out new alliances or building up their own resources to compensate for the combatant’s weaknesses? Do states that fight effectively or reveal a high cost tolerance attract new allies? I predict that some of the contextual variables identified in the dissertation will condition the behavior of allies in the same way they conditioned the behavior of potential adversaries. Environmental similarity will influence the way allies respond to information about effectiveness, while issue similarity will influence the way they respond to information about resolve. However, the conditioning effect of power asymmetries might be different since both power dynamics within the alliance and between the alliance and potential adversaries come into play.

Future research could also examine which types of actors actually accrue reputations. This dissertation focuses on the state as the unit of analysis, but it is also possible that reputations are possessed by a subset of individuals or organizations within that state. Assessing whether reputations accrue to states, individual leaders, political parties, or militaries would further improve our understanding of the reputational effects of war. I hypothesize that the relevant actor is, in part, a function of the information generated during the war. Reputations about cost tolerance might accrue to individual leaders or political parties, while reputations about skill might accrue to militaries or the larger state.

This dissertation has demonstrated that the conventional scholarly wisdom is wrong. Reputation matters in international security. It is worth considering and fighting for. Research should continue on the conditions under which state actions have reputational consequences, with special attention paid to the specific information
generated by those actions and the contexts in which that information would be relevant.
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Biography

Kathryn McNabb Cochran was born on October 14, 1982 in Arrowhead, CA. She graduated magna cum laud with distinction from Duke University in 2004, with a Bachelor of Arts in political science. After college, she worked as a legislative assistant for Congressman Steve Buyer (IN-04), where she handled committee work on telecommunications and energy policy. She earned her Masters of Arts in political science from Duke University in 2008. During graduate school Kathryn received numerous fellowships, including Duke’s Summer Research Fellowship, the Alona Evans Graduate Fellowship in International Relations, the Duke Bradley Fellowship, and the Program for Advanced Research in the Social Sciences’ Fellowship. She also received the 2010 Alona Evans Award and the 2008 Midwest Political Science Association’s Award for Best Paper in International Relations. Kathryn has co-authored a paper on the military effectiveness of strategies that intentionally target civilians that was published in an edited volume in 2010. She is married to Captain David Cochran. They have two children, Ian and Noah.