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1

Introduction

An irony of the end of the Cold War was confirmation that it was, in fact, never cold in the first place. In the early 1990s, interviews with Soviet veterans and newly opened archives verified that Soviet pilots covertly participated in air-to-air combat with American pilots during the Korean War for two years.[1] About a decade later, declassification of 1,300 American intelligence documents confirmed an even more striking fact: US intelligence agencies knew about the operation.[2] One intelligence review from July 1952, a full year before the end of the war, estimated that 25,000–30,000 Soviet military personnel were "physically involved in the Korean War" and concluded that "a de facto air war exists over North Korea between the

1 Early accounts appear in Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea 1950–1953* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 401; post–Cold War works include Jon Halliday, "Air Operations in Korea: The Soviet Side of the Story," in *A Revolutionary War: Korea and the Transformation of The Postwar World*, ed. William J. Williams (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1993); Kathryn Weathersby, "The Soviet Role in the Early Phase of the Korean War: New Documentary Evidence," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 425–58; Mark O'Neill, "The Other Side of the Yalu: Soviet Pilots in the Korean War" (Dissertation, Florida State University, 1996); William B. Breuer, *Shadow Warriors: The Covert War in Korea* (New York: Wiley, 1996); Mark O'Neill, "Soviet Involvement in the Korean War: A New View from the Soviet-Era Archives," *OAH Magazine of History* 14, no. 3 (April 1, 2000): 20–24; Kathryn Weathersby, "The Soviet Role in the Korean War: The State of Historical Knowledge," in *The Korean War in World History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

2 "Baptism by Fire: CIA Analysis of the Korean War." Collection available at Freedom of Information Act website for the Central Intelligence Agency. https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/collection/baptism-fire-cia-analysis-korean-war-overview.

UN and the USSR."[3] In short, the Cold War started hot.[4] Yet neither Moscow nor Washington gave any public indication that direct combat was taking place.

This episode is a dramatic example of the two related phenomena this book seeks to understand. The Soviet entry in the Korean War is a case of *covert military intervention*, in which an external power secretly provides military assistance during a war. The American decision to stay silent after detecting Russian pilots is a case of *collusion*, in which one government detects but does not publicize or confirm the secret intervention of another government. The episode raises two related but distinct questions. First, why use a covert form of intervention, especially if it will be detected by an adversary? Second, why would an adversary play along?

The conspiracy of silence that emerged in the Korean War is but one example of a broader phenomenon. In political campaigns, rival candidates may uncover evidence of secret legal or ethical violations by their opponents. While going public with such information is tempting, exposure could force the rival candidate to respond in kind and lead to a rash of attack ads and inflammatory accusations. Such mudslinging could depress turnout and open the door for other candidates, creating good reason for mutual restraint regarding secrets.[5] Childhood family dynamics also feature reciprocal secret keeping. Two siblings often know about one another's secrets, be it hidden Halloween candy, forged homework, or a clandestine romantic relationship. Exposing the other's secret to teachers or parents, while tempting, might prompt a reaction that neither sibling wants. If this scenario looms, then a sustainable conspiracy of silence could emerge. Finally, firms may find evidence that their competitor uses offshore bank accounts to evade taxes. The detecting firm may be tempted to expose and undermine its competitor's advantage. Yet doing so risks provoking regulators to more closely scrutinize the industry as a whole. One reasonable response would be mutual restraint in keeping secret such tax evasion.

3 National Intelligence Estimate, "Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action in Korea," NIE-55/1, 30 July 1952, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1952–1954, Korea, volume 15, part 1.

4 Other well-known episodes in which casualties were inflicted despite the "Cold War" moniker include the shootdown of U-2 surveillance flights in 1960 and during the Cuban Missile Crisis. On shootdown incidents, see the account of twenty-nine such incidents in Alexander L. George, *Case Studies of Actual and Alleged Overflights, 1930–1953——Supplement*, RAND Research Memorandum, August 15, 1955, RM-1349 (S).

5 E.g., Wioletta Dziuda and William Howell, "Political Scandal," unpublished manuscript, University of Chicago, 2018.

In each example, a mutually unacceptable outcome influences both the initial act of secrecy and the response by one who finds the secret. The central insight is that mutual silence may result if individuals, firms, or governments can act secretly, observe one another doing so, and share fear of a mutually damaging outcome. Cooperative secrecy of this sort is not so surprising for siblings that live together or firms that might price fix or collude in other ways. However, such behavior is quite surprising in world politics, especially during war. That collusive secrecy would emerge *among rivals under anarchy* is especially unexpected.

This book analyzes the politics of secrecy in war and puzzling features like tacit collusion among adversaries. Secrecy has long been a hallmark of international politics where "incentives to misrepresent" can be powerful for governments that must fend for themselves.[6] Seeing states act covertly is not surprising per se. After all, secrecy can be essential for protecting military forces in the field and for operational surprise.[7] Hence the adages that "loose lips sink ships" and "tittle tattle lost the battle." Yet secrecy in the Korean War example appears to be serving different ends. Covert activity was *observable* to the rival. Rather than being in the dark, Moscow's adversary had a unique window into its covert behavior. Moreover, secrecy in this case seems to have been mutually beneficial. Both the American and the Soviet leaders appeared to derive value from keeping the public and other governments in the dark.

This book links such decisions to limited war dynamics and the desire for escalation control. Large-scale conflict escalation is a mutually damaging outcome that is influenced by exposure decisions. I develop a theory in which initial covertness and reactive secrecy are driven by the need to control escalation and avoid large-scale conflict. When escalation risks are significant, adversaries will tend to share an interest in prioritizing control. External military involvement in a local war raises the prospect of expansion in scope and scale. Intervening covertly, however, allows both the intervener and its rivals to better control what scenario unfolds following the intervention. Keeping an intervention covert—that is, acting on the "backstage" rather than the "frontstage"—has two limited-war benefits: easing constraints from a domestic audience and improving communication about

6 James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 379–414.

7 Robert Axelrod, "The Rational Timing of Surprise," *World Politics* 31, no. 2 (January 1979): 228–46; Branislav L. Slantchev, "Feigning Weakness," *International Organization* 64, no. 3 (2010): 357–88.

interest in limited war. Covertness minimizes domestic hawkish pressures and expresses a mix of resolve and restraint that supports limited war. In the Korean War, covertness regarding the Soviet role allowed each side to operate with fewer constraints, to save face as it limited war, and to have confidence that its adversary valued limiting the conflict. This happened because of, rather than in spite of, detection by the other side. A central finding of the book is that this is not one-of-a-kind. Rather, covertness and collusion are an important part of wars ranging from the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s to the American occupation of Iraq in the 2000s.

Beyond developing a novel logic for secrecy in war, this book also offers new insights into the very nature of modern war. In the wake of two devastating world wars in the first half of the twentieth century, how did great powers avoid a third? Nuclear weapons, democracy, and bipolarity are typical answers.[8] This book provides a different take on this question. As O'Brien notes, wars still erupted after 1945 despite these larger changes but were "guided by the principle that the conflict should be geographically limited to the immediate overt belligerents."[9] I show that leaders learned over time to use covertness and collusion to avoid domestic constraints and miscommunication that might otherwise lead to large-scale escalation. This book underscores that *overtness* is an important qualification and identifies how it came to be. Conflicts like the Korean and Vietnam Wars featured direct casualties among the major powers on the backstage. Moreover, understanding these historical links between limited war and secrecy offers practical lessons for policymakers responding to tragic and potentially explosive civil wars in places like Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen.

Secret Wars also holds broader theoretical implications for scholars of International Relations (IR) beyond the study of secrecy itself. For example, the secret side of war I analyze yields new insights about domestic politics and statecraft. Subsequent chapters feature infamous personalist dictators like Adolf Hitler cautiously navigating the dangers of conflict escalation via

8 E.g., Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages, 1979); John Mueller, "The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World," *International Security* 13, no. 2 (1988): 55–79; John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: The Decline of Violence In History And Its Causes* (New York: Penguin Books Limited, 2011).

9 William V. O'Brien, *The Conduct of Just and Limited War* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 230; emphasis added.

covertness and collusion. These otherwise unobservable policy decisions showcase caution on the part of leaders and regime types better known for reckless aggression. Regarding democracies, the book shows that democratic leaders often detect but stay silent about covert activity by other governments. This is an under-recognized way in which presidents and prime ministers can deceive and manipulate domestic elites and public opinion which raises questions about accountability and transparency in democracy. The book also provides new insight into how states under anarchy communicate. Covert intervention takes place in a distinct communicative venue during war. This backstage is visible to other major powers and can allow governments to send and receive messages, including regarding escalation and limited war. This metaphor of a theater provides a heuristic use for the study of war more generally. Rather than conceptualizing war as simply a bargaining process dividing up finite spoils, the book suggests the promise of conceptualizing war as a kind of performance. Later chapters show how major powers move between visible and hard-to-observe spaces to manage the image and meaning of their clashes. Doing so protects the performance of limited war and produces collaborative patterns like collusion that are otherwise hard to explain.

The Topic

This book addresses two questions. First, why do states intervene covertly rather than overtly? Second, when covert interventions take place, why do detecting states collude rather than expose? Secrecy, defined as intentional concealment of information from one or more audiences, is simply one way of making decisions and behaving in the world. Secrecy can be used regarding state deliberations, government decisions, communications among heads of state, or externally oriented policy activity. Secrecy, moreover, requires effort. Especially for complex organizations like states, effectively concealing decisions and actions requires information control in the form of physical infrastructure, rules, penalties, and organizational habits. A term closely related to secrecy, which I use when discussing military intervention specifically, is "covert." Covertness is defined as government-managed activity conducted with the intention of concealing the sponsor's role and avoiding acknowledgment of it. It has a narrower scope than the term "secrecy" because it is specific to a state's externally oriented behavior rather than discrete decisions, refers to the sponsor's identity rather than

operational details or outcomes, and explicitly incorporates the concept of non-acknowledgment.[10]

I specifically assess secrecy regarding external military interventions. An intervention is combat-related aid given by an outside state to a combatant in a local civil or interstate conflict that includes some role for personnel. An *overt intervention* involves weaponry and personnel sent to a war zone without restrictions on visibility and with behavioral and verbal expressions of official acknowledgment. A *covert intervention*, in contrast, features an external power providing such aid in a way that conceals its role and does not feature official acknowledgment. Covert intervention is a specific form of covert operation, distinct from covert surveillance, regime change, or other operation that does not aim to alter battlefield dynamics.[11] States can covertly intervene by providing weaponry that lacks military labeling or appears to originate from a different source; they may send military personnel in unmarked civilian uniforms, as "volunteers," or as "military advisors." Much existing research has focused on why states intervene and on intervention's effect on war duration and other outcomes. I focus on the *how* of intervention, specifically, covert compared to overt forms. Such a focus is both theoretically important and timely. Just in the last ten years, the list of countries that have reportedly featured covert external involvement by major powers includes Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Pakistan, and Yemen. [12]

10 See chapter 2 for additional discussion of these terms. Note that clandestine is a related term which tends to connote concealment of both sponsor and the fact that there was an operation. See Alexandra H. Perina, "Black Holes and Open Secrets: The Impact of Covert Action on International Law," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 53 (2014): 512.

11 Alexander B. Downes and Mary Lauren Lilley, "Overt Peace, Covert War?: Covert Intervention and the Democratic Peace," *Security Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010): 271–72.

12 Roy Allison, "Russian 'Deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," *International Affairs* 90, no. 6 (2014): 1255–97. On Syria, see Greg Miller, "CIA Ramping up Covert Training Program for Moderate Syrian Rebels," *Washington Post*, October 2, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/cia-ramping-up-covert-training-program-for-moderate-syrian-rebels/2013/10/02/a0bba084-2af6-11e3-8ade-a1f23cda135e_story.html; Mark Mazzetti, Adam Goldman, and Michael S. Schmidt, "Behind the Sudden Death of a $1 Billion Secret C.I.A. War in Syria," *New York Times*, August 2, 2017, sec. Middle East, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/world/middleeast/cia-syria-rebel-arm-train-trump.html. For Libya, Mark Hosenball, "Exclusive: Obama Authorizes Secret Help for Libya Rebels," *Reuters*, March 30, 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-usa-order/obama-authorizes-secret-support-for-libya-rebels-idUSTRE72T6H220110330; "France Gave Libyan Rebels Weapons," *BBC News*, June 29, 2011, sec. Africa, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13955751. For Somalia, Mark Mazzetti, "U.S. Is Said to Expand Secret Military Acts in Mideast Region," *New York Times*, May 24, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/25/world/25military.html?hp.

Covert interventions raise a second-order question regarding secrecy: If detected, will others keep the secret too? This question is especially germane for other major powers that are most likely to detect a given covert intervention. Providing military aid beyond one's borders for months or years is a significant undertaking, no matter the scope. Doing so without partial exposure is difficult enough. In addition, major powers tend to invest significant resources in intelligence bureaucracies. To be clear, detectors often remain in the dark about many details. However, the sponsor of a covert intervention is often discernible. Any detector has two basic options: collude or expose. Exposure involves publicly revealing evidence that a covert intervention is underway and/or publicly validating allegations by others. Collusion, in contrast, involves staying silent. There is an informational component of collusion; the detector must keep evidence of a covert intervention private rather than share it widely. There is also an acknowledgment component: a colluder must publicly deny or stay silent about allegations of a covert intervention made by others such as the media.

Two Puzzles

The study of secrecy, deception, and related aspects of informational misrepresentation are at last getting their due in IR. In the past ten years, new research has been published on secrecy in diplomacy and deal-making, prewar crisis bargaining, military operations, elite decision-making, alliances, and international institutions.[13] This has been joined by related work

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For Pakistan, "Secret Memos Reveal Explicit Nature of U.S., Pakistan Agreement on Drones," *Washington Post*, October 23, 2013. For Yemen, Robert Booth and Ian Black, "WikiLeaks Cables: Yemen Offered US 'open Door' to Attack Al-Qaida on Its Soil," December 3, 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/03/wikileaks-yemen-us-attack-al-qaida; Karen McVeigh, "'Trump's Secret Yemen War': UK Role in US Counter-Terrorism Causes Unease," *Guardian*, September 25, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/sep/25/trump-secret-yemen-war-uk-role-us-counter-terrorism-causes-unease.

13 On diplomacy, David Stasavage, "Open-Door or Closed-Door? Transparency in Domestic and International Bargaining," *International Organization* 58, no. 04 (2004): 667–703; Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors: The Logic and Practice of Secret Reassurance," *Security Studies* 22, no. 3 (2013): 405–35; Jonathan N. Brown, "Immovable Positions: Public Acknowledgment and Bargaining in Military Basing Negotiations," *Security Studies* 23, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 258–92; Jonathan N. Brown, "The Sound of Silence: Power, Secrecy, and International Audiences in US Military Basing Negotiations," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 31, no. 4 (September 1, 2014): 406–31; Corneliu Bjola and Stuart Murray, *Secret Diplomacy: Concepts, Contexts and Cases* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Shawn L. Ramirez, "Mediation in the Shadow of an Audience: How Third Parties Use Secrecy and Agenda-Setting to Broker Settlements," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, September 25, 2017, 0951629817729227. On crisis bargaining,

on covert operations, deception and lying, intelligence, and declassification.[14] Two predominant logics for the appeal of secrecy provide initial intuition about the book's two specific research questions. The most prevalent view is that information misrepresentation helps insecure states protect their security under anarchy. Here secrecy is directed at adversaries. Especially during war, effective concealment of new weapons, troop locations, or an operational naval vulnerability can be essential to avoiding losses and harnessing the power of surprise. A second strand of research emphasizes secrecy's link to domestic politics. For research on security and conflict, the dominant emphasis is on *democratic* leaders avoiding *dovish*, antiwar constraints. Leaders might circumvent public constraints to initiate war against a threatening foe or change the regime of a fellow democracy.

Shuhei Kurizaki, "Efficient Secrecy: Public Versus Private Threats in Crisis Diplomacy," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 03 (2007): 543–58; Jonathan N. Brown and Anthony S. Marcum, "Avoiding Audience Costs: Domestic Political Accountability and Concessions in Crisis Diplomacy," *Security Studies* 20 (April 2011): 141–70. On operational benefits of surprise, Adam Meirowitz and Anne E. Sartori, "Strategic Uncertainty as a Cause of War," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 3, no. 4 (December 2008): 327–52; Slantchev, "Feigning Weakness"; David Lindsey, "Military Strategy, Private Information, and War," *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (December 1, 2015): 629–40; Austin Carson, "Facing Off and Saving Face: Covert Intervention and Escalation Management in the Korean War," *International Organization* 70, no. 01 (2016): 103–31; Austin Carson and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret," *Security Studies* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 124–56. On elite decision-making, Elizabeth N. Saunders, "War and the Inner Circle: Democratic Elites and the Politics of Using Force," *Security Studies* 24, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 466–501. On alliances, Jeffrey Ritter, *"Silent Partners" and Other Essays on Alliance Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Muhammet Bas and Robert Schub, "Mutual Optimism as a Cause of Conflict: Secret Alliances and Conflict Onset," *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (September 1, 2016): 552–64. On international organizations, Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Zachary C. Steinert-Threlkeld, and David G. Victor, "Predictability versus Flexibility: Secrecy in International Investment Arbitration," *World Politics* 68, no. 3 (June 23, 2016): 413–53.

14 Downes and Lilley, "Overt Peace, Covert War?"; Lindsey A. O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Michael Poznansky, "Stasis or Decay? Reconciling Covert War and the Democratic Peace," *International Studies Quarterly*, March 1, 2015; Michael F. Joseph and Michael Poznansky, "Media Technology, Covert Action, and the Politics of Exposure," *Journal of Peace Research*, November 16, 2017, 0022343317731508. On deception and lying, John M. Schuessler, "The Deception Dividend: FDR's Undeclared War," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010): 133–65; John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Dan Reiter, "Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War," *Security Studies* 21, no. 4 (2012): 594–623; John M. Schuessler, *Deceit on the Road to War: Presidents, Politics, and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Erik Gartzke and Jon R. Lindsay, "Weaving Tangled Webs: Offense, Defense, and Deception in Cyberspace," *Security Studies* 24,

To be clear, each of these perspectives sheds light on covert aspects of war. Yet some shortcomings suggest there is more to the story, presenting two empirical puzzles. First, existing research provides little reason to expect adversaries to collude. The operational security logic sees information manipulation as part of the broader pursuit of security at the expense of rivals, whereas the domestic dove logic focuses on domestic concerns that are not directly related to an adversary's interests. If anything, these logics would expect a rival that detects a covert intervention to expose it, either to neutralize any operational advantage or to trigger domestic dovish constraints in the intervener. And yet we have historical documentation of cases in which rival powers did allow detection of covert operations and did collude in this way. Examples include Chinese and Soviet border clashes before 1969, aerial clashes from covert American surveillance flights over Soviet territory, and the covert dimension of Iran-Israel rivalry today.[15]

A second puzzle also underscores the need for a fresh approach. Whether or not major powers collude, covert intervention can be widely exposed by non-state actors like media organizations. This can be due to enterprising journalism on the ground or simple bureaucratic leaks. Recent examples include the Russian covert role in eastern Ukraine and the

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no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 316–48. On intelligence, Joshua Rovner, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); James Igoe Walsh, *The International Politics of Intelligence Sharing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Keren Yarhi-Milo, "In the Eye of the Beholder: How Leaders and Intelligence Communities Assess the Intentions of Adversaries," *International Security* 38, no. 1 (2013): 7–51; Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Jonathan N. Brown and Alex Farrington, "Democracy and the Depth of Intelligence Sharing: Why Regime Type Hardly Matters," *Intelligence and National Security* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 68–84. On declassification, Michael P. Colaresi, *Democracy Declassified: The Secrecy Dilemma in National Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

15 Thomas W. Robinson, "The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes," *American Political Science Review* 66, no. 04 (1972): 1175–1202. On surveillance flights, George notes that "in fourteen cases of Soviet action against a Western plane, neither side disclosed the incident either diplomatically or publicly … the Russians prefer to make no disclosure at all of action they take against an intruding foreign plane. In only three of the thirty-one cases did the Soviets themselves initiate disclosure." Alexander L. George, *Soviet Reaction to Border Flights and Overflights in Peacetime*, RAND Research Memorandum, 15 October 1954, RM-1346 (TS-1106), p. 2. On Iran-Israel, Karl Vick, "Spy Fail: Why Iran Is Losing Its Covert War with Israel," *Time*, February 13, 2013, http://world.time.com/2013/02/13/spy-fail-why-iran-is-losing-its-covert-war-with-israel/.

American covert aid program in the Syrian Civil War. Widely exposed covert interventions become a kind of *open secret*. Such a scenario would obviate secrecy's value as a device to address dovish critiques (domestic dove logic) or deceive an adversary (operational security logic). A puzzle therefore arises when covert interveners maintain a covert posture despite open secrecy. This is possible because covert activity can remain *officially unacknowledged* even if is widely visible. Examples of exposed-but-unacknowledged state behavior include Israel's nuclear weapons arsenal, the American drone strike program in Pakistan, and Russia's "little green men" in Eastern Ukraine.[16] If the pretense of covertness is valuable even after wide exposure, then we must look beyond existing work for insights into a more complex story.

The Argument

I argue that escalation control and a shared desire to limit war can motivate covert intervention up front, collusion by major powers that detect it, and official non-acknowledgment if it is widely exposed. Since World War I, large-scale escalation of war has become unacceptably costly, yet leader control of the escalation process has been simultaneously weakened. While a range of factors influence the escalation potential for war, my theory focuses on two specific escalation-control problems: constraints created by domestic hawks and misunderstandings among adversaries about the value of limited war. My theory claims that backstaging military intervention allows rival leaders to insulate themselves and one another from domestic hawkish constraints. In addition, embracing the backstage communicates shared interest in keeping war limited. This basic relationship provides a unifying logic for the initial decision to intervene covertly, a detector's decision to collude after detection, and an intervener's continuing non-acknowledgment of a widely exposed intervention.

THE CHALLENGE OF ESCALATION CONTROL

In general, war escalation is the expansion in scale or scope of violence. What I refer to as "large-scale escalation" is when a local conflict expands to a regional or global level with at least one major power's participation.

16 One analyst concluded the drone strike program was the "worst kept covert secret in the history of U.S. foreign policy." Interview with Micah Zenko, "Raising the Curtain on U.S. Drone Strikes," Council on Foreign Relations, June 2, 2010. On Russian involvement in Ukraine, see Andrew Higgins, Michael Gordon, and Andrew Kramer, "Photos Link Masked Men in East Ukraine to Russia," *New York Times*, April 20, 2014.

Industrialized warfare is ruinous to cautious and reckless states alike. As I develop in chapter 3, World War I made clear that mechanized warfare using industrial-era innovations produced astounding levels of violence. The advent of nuclear weaponry only exacerbated this. As a result, leaders and governments seek to control the pathways to large-scale escalation. Cautious governments hoping to preserve the status quo will tend to see entanglement in a regional or global conflict as gravely damaging. Yet even risk-acceptant states with revisionist goals will find escalation dangerous. The current debate about China and the United States demonstrates this dynamic. Even if China is risk acceptant and revisionist in East Asia, a regional war involving Japan, Korea, and/or the United States could inflict fatal damage on the Communist Party's hold on power, dislocate the Chinese economy, and risk a military humiliation harmful to long-term security. Even if more modest forms of "escalation" are tolerable or even useful, large-scale escalation is strategically counterproductive for major powers in the modern era.

Techniques for building and maintaining control over the escalation process are therefore appealing. In Clausewitzian terms, war tends toward escalation but can be limited if leaders can impose political purpose.[17] Two threats to control are especially relevant. First, domestic politics can undermine escalation control. When one or both sides of a rivalry face strong nationalist pressure, leaders can have little choice but to push forward a tit-for-tat escalation process. While dovish and hawkish sentiment varies, managing hawkish pressure is an especially pressing problem during crises in which a major power has interests. Literatures on domestic rally-round-the-flag effects, nationalism and hypernationalism, audience costs, and the nature of limited war all point to the way mobilization of elites and masses can make restraint during a crisis or war very costly.[18] Moreover, this holds across regime type. Elite or mass criticism in a single-party authoritarian regime can constrain a head of state's options, especially during an ongoing crisis.[19]

17 Peter Paret, "Clausewitz," in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 199–200.

18 Stephen Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," *International Security* 18, no. 4 (April 1, 1994): 5–39; Jack Snyder and Karen Ballentine, "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas," *International Security* 21, no. 2 (October 1, 1996): 5–40; John Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973).

19 Jessica L. Weeks, "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve," *International Organization* 62, no. 01 (2008): 35–64; Jessica Chen Weiss, "Authoritarian Signaling,

The second escalation-control problem is between heads of state. It is a product of the complexity of communicating under anarchy, specifically regarding interest in limited war. As Schelling first developed, adversaries seeking to compete while bounding conflict face numerous challenges in accurately and intelligibly expressing their goals.[20] This applies to both resolve and restraint. Most important is the temptation to see an adversary in pessimistic terms, especially when they transgress limits during a war. Accurately understanding one another, however, is essential to controlling escalation because limited war takes two to tango.[21] Escalation control requires identifying "salient thresholds," such as political borders, which allow both sides to show that they are able and willing to localize war.[22] Either side failing to indicate a degree of resolve *and* restraint can lead to misunderstanding that fuels tit-for-tat escalation.

COVERTNESS AND COLLUSION AS ESCALATION CONTROL

This book posits that *how* states intervene and *how* detectors react affect these two escalation problems. In general, each intervention by an outside power raises questions about the continued viability of limits. Nonintervention by outside powers is itself one of the "salient thresholds" that can bound war. Not all interventions are alike, however. An intervention that is a public spectacle (i.e., overt) tends to exacerbate these two escalation-control problems; hawkish domestic constraints become sharper and an adversary tends to see a provocation and infer the absence of restraint. Placing an intervention on the backstage, however, does the opposite, preserving escalation control. On the one hand, covertly crossing the salient threshold of foreign entry reduces the inflammation of domestic hawkish constraints in responding states. Such hawks may not be aware of the entry

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Mass Audiences, and Nationalist Protest in China," *International Organization* 67, no. 01 (January 2013): 1–35.

20 Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966).

21 "Limited war requires limits; so do strategic maneuvers if they are to be stabilized short of war. But limits require agreement or at least some kind of mutual recognition and acquiescence. And agreement on limits is difficult to reach, not only because of the uncertainties and the acute divergence of interests but because negotiation is severely inhibited both during war and before it begins and because communication becomes difficult between adversaries in time of war." Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 53; see also Jeffrey Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint During World War II* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

22 Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 135.

and will be less able to mobilize pressure to escalate. The absence of official acknowledgment, moreover, can reduce the degree to which an intervention is seen as a provocation. On the other hand, covertness communicates a balanced message. Using a low profile provides a legible and credible indicator of both resolve and restraint. Yet a covert intervention is still an intervention. It also shows an adversary that the intervener is serious about its interests and will give observable (to the adversary) assistance to a local client. This blend of moderate resolve and moderate restraint can be ideally suited to producing the shared understanding that is key to controlling escalation and limiting war.[23]

The mechanisms in my argument differ significantly from the operational security and domestic dove logics. Covert intervention is valuable in part *because* it is observable to the adversary. Moreover, to the extent that domestic politics matter, punishment by elites or masses with hawkish, nationalist preferences is the problem, both for the intervener and those reacting. Finally, escalation control is a goal that is often shared by adversaries and that, I argue, benefits from both information manipulation and non-acknowledgment. These two insights make sense of the two puzzles in the opening: collusion and open secrecy.

THEATER ANALOGY

Herein I use an analogy of the theater to refer to how major powers navigate publicity and secrecy in intervention scenarios. Doing so highlights the shared interests adversaries have in managing impressions during war and the role of limited war and outside audiences in shaping decisions about secrecy. In important respects, major powers are "actors" moving between a space in which their behavior is known and acknowledged to all (frontstage) and a place where actions are visible only to other performers (backstage). Navigation happens in light of the observation of an "audience," which in my theory is domestic observers with hawkish views. One advantage of the theater metaphor is highlighting the shared interest adversaries have in limited war, which is akin to the shared interest actors have in protecting the performance. Limited war is also a co-produced outcome that relies on mutual restraint, just as a performance on stage is a co-production of actors. Finally, just as actors can step out of character on the

23 On covert communication and the resolve side of the signal, see Carson and Yarhi-Milo, "Covert Communication."

backstage, major powers during war can direct their behavior to the covert sphere out of the view of domestic hawks. Yet this backstage behavior is not fully concealed; other performers, i.e., other major powers with access to the backstage, can witness that behavior.

The theater analogy captures the key structural features of the strategic setting I theorize. The backstage insulates actors from the humiliation and damage to the performance that would result if mistakes or costume changes were on the frontstage. Backstaging an intervention similarly protects the public-facing image of a limited war and helps major powers save face. Moreover, actors that see one another using the backstage to protect a performance can learn. Stage maneuvers are an indication of commitment to the performance. This is akin to the way observing covert intervention rather than an overt form can communicate a mix of resolve and restraint that supports limited war. Chapter 2 develops the analogy in more detail and links it to the mechanisms and puzzles the book addresses.

BALANCING PUBLICITY AND SECRECY

Any theory of the *choice* for secrecy must specify the temptation to reject it. Put differently, why should we observe *variation* in overt and covert intervention if escalation is easier to control with the latter? Why not always conceal and collude?

This book suggests that major powers have some basic temptations to use the frontstage. For interveners, there are logistical advantages to overtly providing weapons and personnel. It implies simpler logistics and a broader range of scope and scale. Moreover, public interventions are, by definition, more likely to be highly visible vehicles for signaling. Overtness therefore sends the broadest and strongest indication of resolve. For detectors of covert intervention, there are also powerful reasons to consider public exposure. Exposure is tempting primarily due to its impact on the covert intervener's prospects of success. Exposure will heighten awareness among third-party states and tend to better trigger diplomatic, economic, and other forms of punishment. Doing so can raise the costs to the intervener and undermine its goals.

When do interveners and detectors prioritize escalation control or, alternatively, embrace the operational and symbolic advantages of overt intervention and exposure? I argue that the *severity* of escalation risks determines how this balance is struck. When escalation risks are severe and control of escalation via the backstage is feasible, major powers will priori-

tize escalation control by embracing covertness and collusion. This was the case in the Korean War: both Soviet and American leaders saw escalation risks as severe and believed control via the backstage was feasible. In contrast, the initial American intervention in Korea was overt despite the same structural features. Why? The answer is that a *first-mover intervention* that was *geographically localized* to the Korean peninsula presented a much milder escalation problem. With more manageable risks, the United States prioritized logistics and symbolism, best achieved through an overt intervention. The historical cases that this book assesses follow this basic approach, analyzing the way escalation dynamics often give rise to covertness and collusion but also shed light on why rivals sometimes seize the spotlight.

Empirical Analysis

I use a comparative case study design to analyze five wars: the Spanish Civil War, Korean War, Vietnam War, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and the US occupation of Iraq. I decompose them into a number of cases of intervention and exposure/collusion within each war. This empirical strategy is especially important for three reasons. First, a qualitative approach allows me to analyze within and across wars that each feature multiple interventions. My empirical chapters therefore assess up to three different interventions, often varying in overtness and covertness. This allows me to assess differences among different interveners and detectors. Such controlled comparisons also help identify the causal importance of escalation and the theory's specific mechanisms.[24] Second, central to my theory is a contextually specific phenomenon: behavior vis-à-vis a set of "salient thresholds" that are limiting a war. Identifying how major powers understand the limits bounding a war, and how publicity and secrecy influence them, requires drawing on qualitative evidence that documents conflict-specific, shared beliefs. Third, the practical challenges of studying covert intervention and intelligence-based detection are significant. After all, states are selecting themselves out of traditional data sources. Archival resources are often essential to documenting the very fact of a covert intervention, the fact of detection, as well as the internal debates about what to do and why. American

24 On the promise of multiplying observations with "subcases" within a single case, see John Gerring, "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?," *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 2 (May 2004): 342; Peter Hall, "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics," in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 395.

covert operations in Laos during the Vietnam War demonstrate this. Only by relying on now-declassified records from the ambassador and White House managers of this program can we see why leaders perceived political utility in refusing to acknowledge a widely exposed covert program. For each war, I draw on existing archival collections, newly accessed archival materials, and work by historians specializing in states whose records are not publicly available. Only these data can provide the raw material for drawing the descriptive and theoretical inferences this book proposes.

Each empirical chapter addresses two questions. First, I explain *how* and *why* intervening states adopt a particular form of military intervention (the dependent variable) based on the perceived escalation features of a given conflict (the independent variable). Second, I explain *whether* and *why* detector states choose to collude or expose (the dependent variable) based on the same escalation features as well as the level of exposure by other actors. Two clarifications are important in this regard. One is that other logics for secrecy can and do coexist with my own. Secrecy in war serves multiple purposes and they are not mutually exclusive within the same conflict. My empirical analysis therefore focuses on assessing relative importance rather than refuting other logics. A second clarification is that escalation is part of the causal story and not the outcome of interest. As I argue in chapter 2, the magnitude of escalation is ultimately the product of a number of factors. Covertness and collusion handle two escalation-control problems (domestic hawks and miscommunication) but these are not the only problems. A war may widen despite these efforts if a commander in the field goes rogue, for example. The test for my theory is why we see covertness and collusion, not whether they provide perfect escalation control when we see them.

The book focuses on conflicts that balance inferential leverage with a broad and historically informed chronological scope. The theory applies to ongoing local conflicts with some major power involvement that have not escalated to a large scale, as I define it. The theory does not make sense of secrecy's role in a war like World War II; conflicts that quickly reach a regional or global scope will not have escalation control as an important constraint. Moreover, I purposefully and explicitly bound my empirical analysis to post–World War I conflicts because, as chapter 3 describes, that conflict consolidated systemwide changes that sharpened escalation costliness and the problem of escalation control. Within these bounds, I analyze a set of conflicts that feature multiple, nested interventions across seven decades. This results in chapters on five wars and their related interventions (see table 1.1). Each covert intervention also gives rise to separate cases

TABLE 1.1. Conflicts and Cases of Intervention

	Case	Date	Form	Details
Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)	Germany	1936–1939	Covert	Aircraft with pilots in Spain
	Italy	1936–1939	Mixed	"Volunteer" ground troops, aircraft with pilots in Spain; submarines with crews in Mediterranean
	Soviet Union	1936–1938	Covert	Tanks with tank crews, aircraft with pilots in Spain
Korean War (1950–1953)	United States	1950–1953	Overt	Ground, air units in Korea
		1951–1953	Covert	Weapons, training for insurgency and raids into mainland China
	Soviet Union	1950–1953	Covert	Aircraft with pilots in China and North Korea
	China	1950–1953	Mixed	"Volunteer" ground troops in Korea; aircraft with pilots in Korea
Vietnam War (1964–1968)	United States	1964–1973	Overt	Air, ground operations in North and South Vietnam
		1964–1973	Covert	Air, ground operations in Laos
	China	1965–1969	Covert	Air defense weapons and crews in North Vietnam
	Soviet Union	1965	Covert	Air defense weapons and crews in North Vietnam
Afghanistan (1979–1986)	Soviet Union	1979	Covert	Ground, air personnel in Afghanistan
		1979–1988	Overt	Ground, air units in Afghanistan
		1982–1987	Covert	Air, ground raids into Pakistan
	United States	1979–1986	Covert	Weapons supply to rebels in Afghanistan
		1986	Overt	US-only weaponry (Stinger) to rebels
U.S.-occupied Iraq (2003–2011)	Iran	2003–2011	Covert	Iranian-suppled weaponry, advisors for insurgents

of detector exposure or collusion. Each chapter therefore assesses these reactions as well.

Regarding generalizability, I include cases from outside the Cold War, such as the Spanish Civil War (chapter 4), and a shorter case study of US-occupied Iraq in the 2000s (chapter 8). I also include conflicts that feature

democracies and non-democracies in both intervener and detector roles. These choices ensure the book can weave a coherent historical narrative that holds across a broad range of contexts. It is important to note that I explicitly reject the treatment of each conflict as an independent event. I follow others in conceptualizing limited war as a learned state practice akin to other learned practices like nuclear deterrence. Moreover, key mechanisms such as backstage communication benefit from experience. Thus, escalation control becomes easier with more interactions. My selection of conflicts allows me to specifically identify cross-conflict influence. For example, a leader in one war (say, the Korean War) may observe and understand its rival's covert intervention in terms of similar events during a prior war (say, the Spanish Civil War). This, in turn, may improve the leader's confidence that limited war is the rival's goal. I present primary documentation of exactly these intertemporal comparisons in later chapters. Moreover, this evidence of cumulative learning is a distinct form of evidence that limited-war issues are important.

Contributions

The theory and findings presented here make contributions to scholarship on international relations, histories of war, and policy.

For scholars of International Relations, the theory and empirical findings most directly contribute to the growing research on secrecy-related themes. I develop a distinct escalation-focused understanding of why states value covertness during war and why collusion often follows. Moreover, while anchored in the dynamics of limited war and intervention, the basic structure of the argument is broadly applicable to situations with a mutually damaging outcome. More broadly, the book develops several conceptual tools—e.g., how secret behavior is detected, the phenomenon of collusive secrecy, and the distinct effects of acknowledgment—that can inform future research on secrecy in other domains.

My findings also have implications for broader themes in the study of war. The book makes clear that information plays a more complex role in war than often assumed. Scholars of IR have long viewed information primarily as a strategic resource wielded against rival states to secure tactical or strategic advantage.[25] Deception along these lines has been seen as one

25 Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War"; Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); As one recent entry notes, "states planning aggression may seek to hide this or appear peaceful to lull potential adversaries

key reason two sides can believe war will pay; such mutual optimism makes war more likely.[26] While information revelation is often useful, this book shows how restricting some specific kinds of information can be important to preserving leaders' ability to control escalation. The implication is that more transparency and more information, especially when it fuels hawkish domestic constraints, can worsen the prospect for containing war.[27]

The book also makes a case for reviving the study of escalation and sheds new light on its dynamics. Studies of limited war and escalation largely fell out of fashion with the end of the Cold War. Yet developments in the last ten years—the rise of China; the emergence of cyberwarfare; Russia's revisionism in Eastern Europe—have generated renewed interest in escalation dynamics.[28] My theory draws attention to a largely overlooked aspect of limited war: transgressions that are covert and unacknowledged. Earlier work on limited war has simplified the choice regarding limits to "obey" or "violate."[29] This book shows that governments often have a third

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into a false sense of security. Similarly, states with peaceful intentions may hide their designs or appear aggressive to deter aspiring predators." Sebastian Rosato, "The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers," *International Security* 39, no. 3 (January 1, 2015): 87.

26 Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1988); Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War"; Meirowitz and Sartori, "Strategic Uncertainty as a Cause of War"; Bas and Schub, "Mutual Optimism as a Cause of Conflict."

27 My claims therefore build on a smaller literature on the dangers of more information in crises and wars, such as Bernard I. Finel and Kristin M. Lord, "The Surprising Logic of Transparency," *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (June 1999): 315–39; Bernard I. Finel and Kristin M. Lord, *Power and Conflict in the Age of Transparency*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Dan Lindley, *Promoting Peace with Information: Transparency as a Tool of Security Regimes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Kristin M. Lord, *The Perils and Promise of Global Transparency: Why the Information Revolution May Not Lead to Security, Democracy, or Peace* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006).

28 Avery Goldstein, "First Things First: The Pressing Danger of Crisis Instability in U.S.-China Relations," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (April 1, 2013): 49–89; Caitlin Talmadge, "Would China Go Nuclear? Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States," *International Security* 41, no. 4 (April 1, 2017): 50–92; Martin C. Libicki, *Cyberdeterrence and Cyberwar* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009); Martin C. Libicki, *Crisis and Escalation in Cyberspace*, MG-1215-AF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1215.html; Jon R. Lindsay, "Stuxnet and the Limits of Cyber Warfare," *Security Studies* 22, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 365–404; Alexander Lanoszka, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe," *International Affairs* 92, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 175–95.

29 The literature on limited war and forms of escalation is vast and addressed in more detail in chapter 2. Classics are Robert E. Osgood, *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*; Schelling, *Arms and Influence*; Robert E. Osgood, *Limited War Revisited* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979); a more recent treatment is Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire*.

option: covertly violate them. I argue this third option has unique and important consequences for escalation.[30] These mechanisms can provide insight into whether, say, a clash in the South China Sea escalates. The book suggests concealment, ambiguity, and non-acknowledgment can be important tools for managing the domestic pressures and miscommunication risks in the aftermath of such a clash. Moreover, analyzing the backstage can reveal unique and meaningful forms of adversary collaboration that might otherwise be overlooked. This is dramatized by the mutually concealed Soviet-American casualties that helped keep the Korean War limited.

Taking the covert side of conflict seriously also yields new insights about domestic politics. A consistent finding across conflicts is that autocratic regimes exhibit caution and insight about democratic domestic constraints that is often not observable when only analyzing overt behavior. The covert sphere also appears to host instances of democratic leaders suppressing intelligence findings that might endanger limited war which is a novel purpose for deception. The book also has important implications for new forms of covert warfare, such as non-attributable cyberattacks. One important rationale for using a cyber offensive attack instead of a kinetic use of force is escalation control. Moreover, the theory provides important insight into the diplomatic and domestic implications of publicizing forensic analysis of a cyberattack, as in the American intelligence findings about Russian interference in the 2016 election. Similarly, collusive secrecy could emerge among adversaries in civil wars or between governments and terror groups if one conceptualizes escalation more broadly. I discuss many of these extensions in more depth in chapter 8.

The broadest implications of the book reach beyond issues of conflict and communication. The intuition of the theory has implications for states struggling to avoid any worst-case outcome, not just large-scale escalation. Leaders that hope to avoid an all-out trade war or a diplomatic crisis over blame for past war crimes, for example, might find tools like covertness and collusion to be useful in similar ways as limited-war scenarios. The book builds this logic, in part, by drawing on insights from comparisons to performance and the stage. Previous scholars drawing on dramaturgical concepts and the work of sociologist Erving Goffman have focused on widely

30 The book therefore builds on a finding mentioned by Legro. He finds evidence of concealed and unacknowledged chemical weapons use during World War II and finds evidence that a desire to keep mutual restraint led the British and German governments to avoid drawing attention to these limit violations. He does not theorize the unique mechanisms of secrecy and non-acknowledgment. Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire*, chap. 4.

visible impressions, roles, and performances.[31] This book adds consideration of the backstage. Theorizing what states conceal as part of performing is useful in its own right; it also helps shed light on the production of cohesive frontstage performances. Moreover, conceptualizing limited war as a kind of performance recognizes that states often must work together, explicitly or tacitly, to define the nature of their encounters. Secrecy and nonacknowledgement are therefore part of a process of instantiating limited war. This basic insight—that states, even adversaries, can use secrecy to cultivate a definition of specific encounters as a way to maintain political control—has wide applicability.

The book also highlights events and episodes in the covert sphere that change how we understand specific wars and modern war more broadly. A dedicated analysis of the backstage and escalation dynamics sheds new light on conflicts ranging from Vietnam to the Spanish Civil War. Archival records I review show that, for example, Nazi Germany tracked Soviet covert involvement during the war in Spain and carefully calibrated covert German combat participation in light of hawkish domestic sentiment in London and Paris. I review unusually candid declassified American records that show that US leaders anticipated the covert involvement of Chinese and Soviet personnel in the Korean War and detected their presence after entry. Newly reviewed archival material from the US covert intervention in Laos during the Vietnam War shows that leaders foresaw media leaks and carefully calibrated their response in order to limit the war. Subsequent empirical chapters note the episodes that add new details to the histories of these wars.

The covert sphere is more than a venue for rivals to deceive and outmaneuver one another during war. The backstage is also a segregated space that can help major powers, even adversaries, manipulate perceptions and control the escalation risks of war. The book also shows that the domestic politics that shape secrecy decisions are complex. Rather than the evasion of antiwar mass mobilization to initiate and maintain intervention, I demonstrate that secrecy is alluring to democratic leaders seeking to insulate

31 E.g., Michael N. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Frank Schimmelfennig, "Goffman Meets IR: Dramaturgical Action in International Community," *International Review of Sociology: Revue Internationale de Sociologie* 12, no. 3 (2002): 417; Rebecca Adler-Nissen, "Stigma Management in International Relations: Transgressive Identities, Norms, and Order in International Society," *International Organization* 68, no. 1 (2014): 143–76; Todd H. Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

themselves from hawkish reactions that would make *limiting* war more difficult. This results in two very different stories about secrecy in a case like the Vietnam War. Nixon and Kissinger used secrecy to minimize antiwar constraints late in the war, but this book tells the story of the early and middle years, in which the Johnson White House saw secrecy and non-acknowledgment as critical to keeping the war localized to Vietnam.[32] This book therefore joins with well-known observations of war theorists like Clausewitz and Schelling that controlling escalation during war is challenging. It differs, however, in linking that process to secrecy-related tactics and outcomes.

Finally, the book has implications for policy analysts and decision-makers who use and react to the covert side of war. First, I find a recurring pattern of communication and collusion in covert interventions. While it is tempting to focus on operational considerations when assessing or using covert methods, this book highlights a specific set of *political* considerations relevant to exposure and acknowledgment. For example, my theory suggests leaders may need to bridge traditional analytic divides by combining analysis of domestic political constraints abroad with expertise on covert operations and military considerations. Failure to do so may lead to an inaccurate understanding of the value of covertness for rivals. Second, the book suggests that policymakers need to be attentive to differences among covert interventions. Policy design should account for the timing and location of different interventions as well as the severity of the specific escalation problems I develop in chapter 2. Users of covert military tools should specifically assess different exposure scenarios and whether effective secrecy or mere non-acknowledgment can achieve key goals.

Third, the book's findings provide policymakers with a rare set of cross-case historical comparisons that can guide efforts to decipher the meaning of rivals' activity in the covert sphere. This is especially important and timely in an era when leaders in countries like Russia and China increasingly seem to favor tactics that draw on covertness and non-acknowledgement in "hybrid warfare" or "gray zone conflicts." Fourth, the book provides important lessons about when to expect collusion from other governments. I find that adversaries often share an interest in avoiding competitive embarrassment by exposing one another. Yet I also I find that collusion is most reliable when other major powers also seek to control escalation *and* have unique

32 See chapter 6.

knowledge of covert activity. These incentives and constraints can be assessed if leaders seek to anticipate when a rival will participate or abandon secrecy-related restraint in a limited war.

Plan of the Book

In chapter 2, I develop my core concepts and theoretical claims. I define and take stock of the challenge of war escalation and the practice of limited war. I argue that secrecy generally addresses two common pathways for unwanted escalation: political constraints and miscommunication. The heart of the chapter argues that covert forms of military intervention can simultaneously insulate leaders from outside audience reactions and communicate to adversaries one's interest in maintaining a limited-war framework. I then connect these themes to the two puzzles by showing that limited-war dynamics make sense of collusion by an adversary and the continued value of widely exposed interventions. The chapter ends by explaining how the severity of escalation dangers influences the choice between frontstage and backstage and identifies process-related observable implications.

Chapter 3 describes the confluence of political, technological, and social changes that prompted the emergence of covert military intervention as an escalation-control technique. The chapter therefore places my case studies in historical context and lays the foundation for assessing how more recent political and technological changes, such as cyberwarfare and drones, influence the covert sphere. It highlights the special role of World War I. I conceptualize the Great War as a critical juncture that dramatized the dangers of large-scale war escalation and accelerated political, social, and technological developments that influenced escalation control. These changes sharpened the problem of escalation control by making leaders more vulnerable to hawkish domestic constraints and making intentions about limited war harder to discern. Yet it also made possible new ways of using military force anonymously through, for example, the development of airpower.

Chapters 4 through 7 move chronologically and assess secrecy in four wars. In chapter 4, I analyze foreign combat participation in the Spanish Civil War. Fought from 1936 to 1939, the war hosted covert interventions by Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. The chapter leverages variation in intervention form among those three states, as well as variation over time in the Italian intervention, to assess the role of escalation concerns and limited war in the use of secrecy. Hitler's German intervention provides

especially interesting support for the theory. An unusually candid view of Berlin's thinking suggests that Germany managed the visibility of its covert "Condor Legion" with an eye toward the relative power of domestic hawkish voices in France and Great Britain. The chapter also shows the unique role of direct communication and international organizations. The Non-Intervention Committee, an ad hoc organization that allowed private discussions of foreign involvement in Spain, helped the three interveners and Britain and France keep the war limited in ways that echo key claims of the theory.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus to the early Cold War. I review primary materials on a poorly understood aspect of the Korean War: Soviet-American air-to-air combat over North Korea. Records released since the end of the Cold War document how Washington and Moscow engaged in a deadly multiyear struggle for air supremacy and used secrecy to contain its effects. The chapter includes new archival material on American intelligence showing anticipation, detection, and concealment of the Soviet covert entry. The chapter also assesses the United States' initial decision to intervene overtly, its turn to covert action against mainland China, and China's complex role in the war. I argue that China's initial ground intervention used secrecy to achieve surprise, following an operational security logic, but used an unacknowledged "volunteer" intervention to limit the war.

Chapter 6 focuses on the covert side of the Vietnam War. Secrecy famously helped Richard Nixon cope with dovish domestic opposition toward the end of the war. In contrast, I highlight the role of covert intervention in helping both sides compete in Vietnam while keeping the war limited during the earlier Johnson years (i.e., 1964–1968). Even as he greatly expanded US military activity in Vietnam, President Lyndon Johnson acted to avoid provoking a larger war with China or the Soviet Union. Covert US military operations in places like Laos, though an open secret, were a way to prosecute a counterinsurgency while keeping a lid on hostilities. China and the Soviet Union similarly sought to control escalation dangers through covertness. Both communist patrons provided military personnel covertly to improve air defense in North Vietnam. The chapter suggests that all three outside powers worked hard to avoid public and acknowledged clashes up through 1968.

In chapter 7, I analyze the end of the Cold War and external involvement in Afghanistan. On the Soviet side, the December 1979 invasion was preceded by six months of covert involvement in counterinsurgency military operations. I review evidence on the motives for covertness and the

detection of it by American leaders. The chapter then assesses covertness in the American weapons supply program after the overt Soviet invasion. Escalation fears—in particular, fear of provoking Soviet retaliation against Pakistan and a larger regional war—led to consistent efforts to keep the expanding US aid program covert from 1979 to 1985. By the mid-1980s, however, American leaders embraced a more aggressive strategy and identified key changes that largely eliminated the risk of escalation, leading them to approve an overt form of weaponry (the Stinger missile system). The chapter also reviews covert Soviet cross-border operations into Pakistan and US inferences from its detection of these activities.

The book concludes in chapter 8. I summarize the key empirical findings and address extension of the basic argument to cyberconflict and violence within states (i.e., civil wars, terrorism). I then present a brief case study of a post–Cold War conflict: the Iranian covert weapons supply program during the US occupation of Iraq (2003–2011). The chapter also addresses questions about the initial choice to intervene, mistakes and exploitation, and the possible implications of social media and leaks in the contemporary era. I conclude by discussing the implications of secrecy's role in escalation control for policy and scholarship.

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