

Circling the Wagons: Civil-Military Relations and International Disputes

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Introduction

The guardians tasked with protecting the state may also threaten the state, creating a *Guardianship Dilemma* that many regimes fail to solve. In this study, I develop a general equilibrium theory of regime security in which international outcomes are endogenous to concerns about military loyalty. The model reveals previously unidentified links across security domains. In particular, while poor civil-military relations can make regimes more aggressive, this occurs only when rulers lack sufficient information about the threat environment. When rulers are certain of the threats they face, these political elites prefer to pursue less risky foreign policies, since this approach allows their regimes to economize on defense and avoid strengthening a competitor for political power. I find support for this dynamic in survival analysis of disputatious dyads between 1950 and 2001. Where prior disputes are especially informative, states with contentious civil-military relations are less likely to become engaged in subsequent disputes.

Model

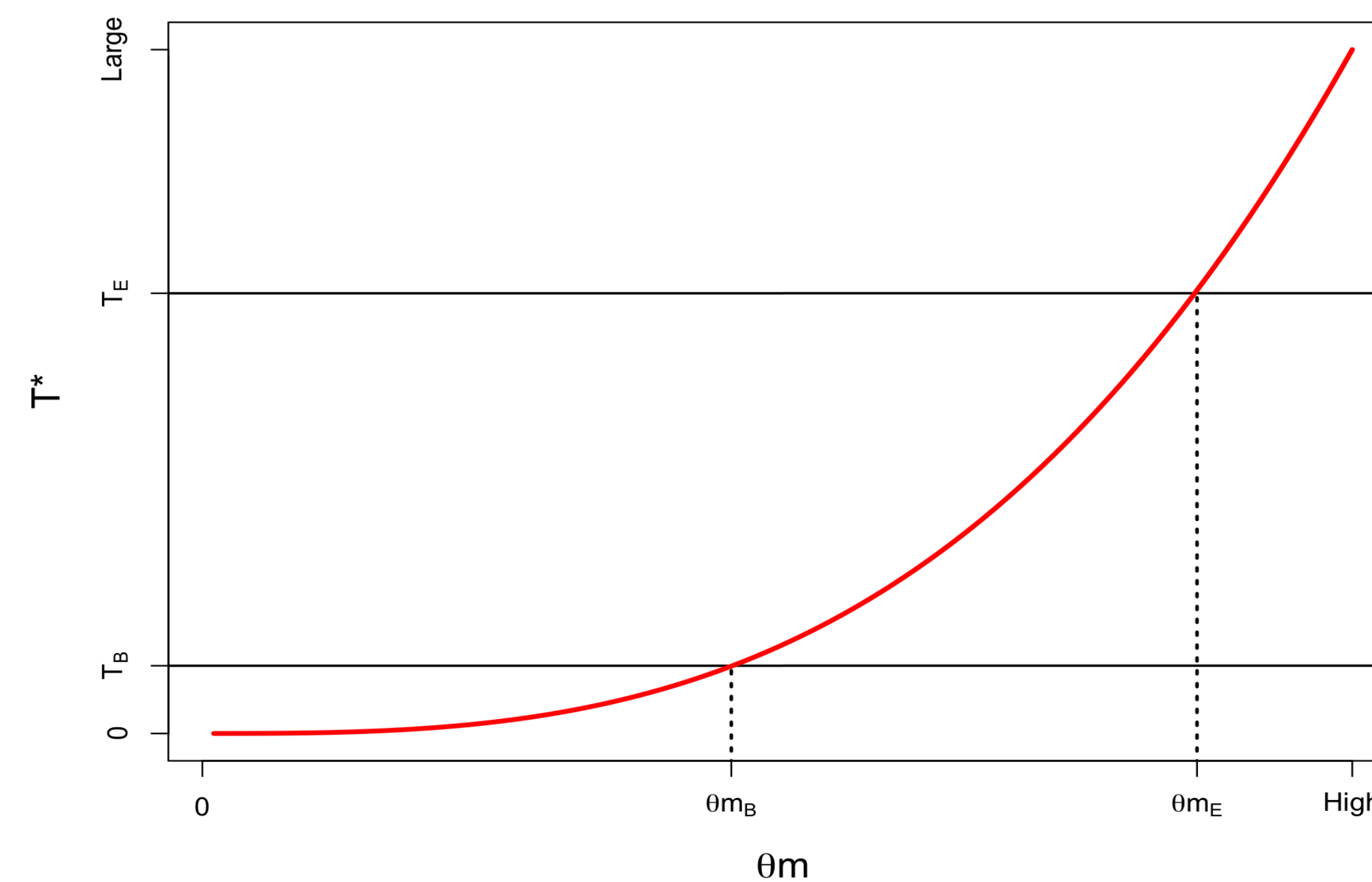
1. Ruler faces external threat (T) that is at a baseline (T_B) or elevated (T_E) value
2. Ruler decides whether to hire a general to help in facing the external threat
 - Chooses general of competence θ from social group i with status quo benefit b_i
3. Sends military resources $m > 0$
 - Contest success function:
$$p(m_1, m_2; \theta) = \frac{\theta m_1}{\theta m_1 + m_2}$$
4. Ruler can inflate threat by acting aggressively, $T_B \rightarrow T_E$
5. If the general is hired, he decides whether or not to stay loyal
 - If general remains loyal, gets status quo benefit b_i
 - If general succeeds in a coup, gets value of state minus costs $c > 0$ of coup
 - If general fails in a coup, receives NOTHING
6. Whoever is in control of the state faces the external threat

Theoretical Results

External threats induce military loyalty, a “Circling of the Wagons” effect

- The general coups iff $T \geq T^*(m, \theta)$, where:

$$T_i^*(m, \theta) = \left(\frac{\theta m}{c} \right) \left[\frac{\theta m}{\theta m + 1} - (b_i + c) \right]$$



First key result: The ruler never inflates the threat when he knows for certain that it is baseline (small)

- Doing so would lead to higher defense costs and strengthen a competitor for political power

Second key result: The ruler sometimes seeks to inflate the threat when uncertain about the size of the threat

- Threat is baseline (small) with probability q and elevated (large) with probability $1-q$
 - If $q > q^*$, do not inflate and allocate $m(T_B)$ resources
 - If $q \leq q^*$, inflate and allocate $m(T_E)$ resources
- Intuition: If the threat is likely to be small, the ruler devotes only the amount of resources for the baseline threat. This ensures the military’s loyalty, but leaves the regime exposed in an elevated threat environment. At some point, the risk of dealing with an elevated threat without the proper resources becomes too great. When the threat level is elevated with sufficient probability, the ruler prefers to make certain that the threat is large, as one could through behaving aggressively toward other parties. This ensures both military loyalty and an appropriate response to the external threat.

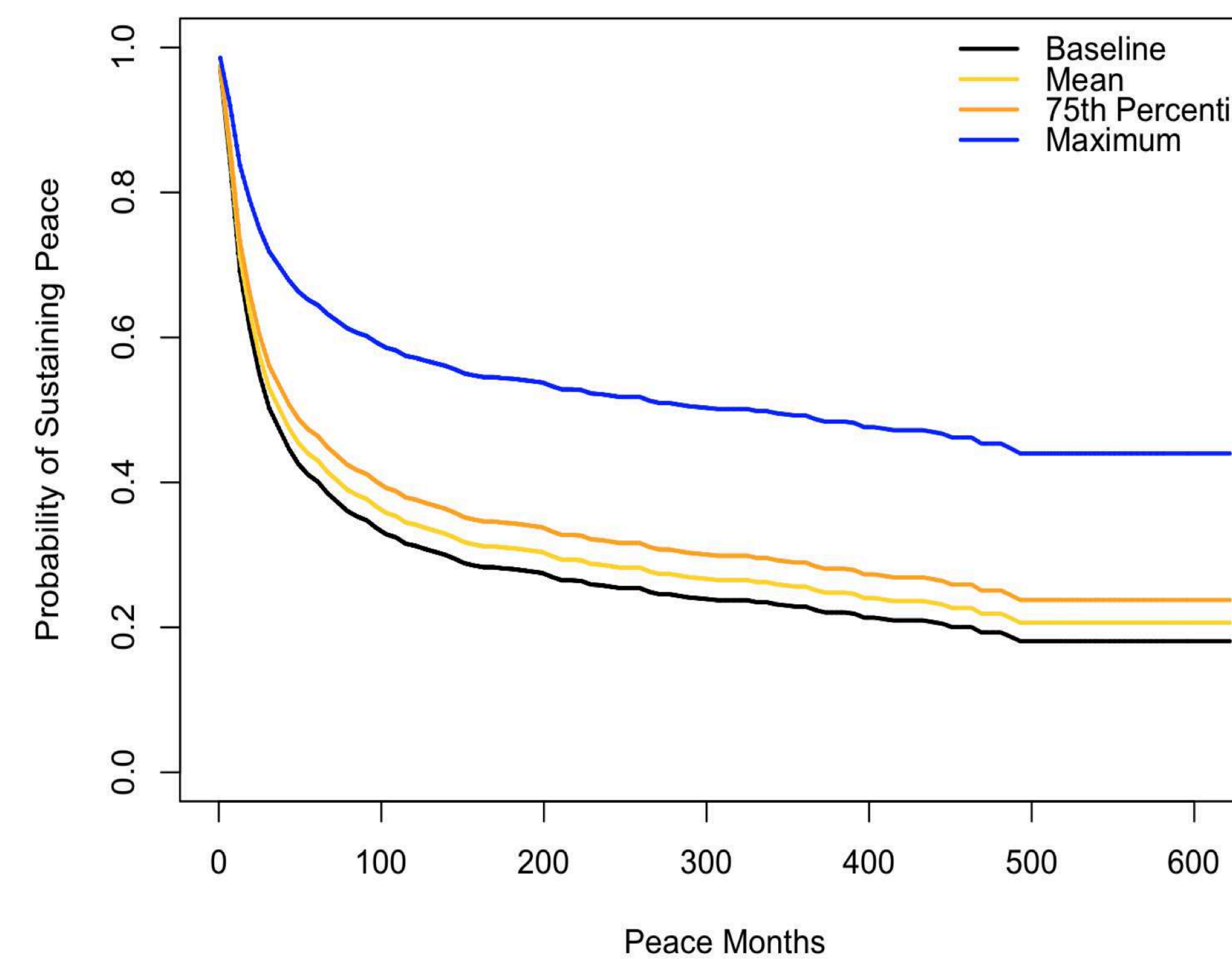
Hypotheses

H1: *States with poor civil-military relations are less likely to become involved in disputes following particularly informative contests.*

H2: *States with poor civil-military relations are less likely to become involved in disputes following informative contests among potential opponents and third-parties.*

Test of Hypothesis 1

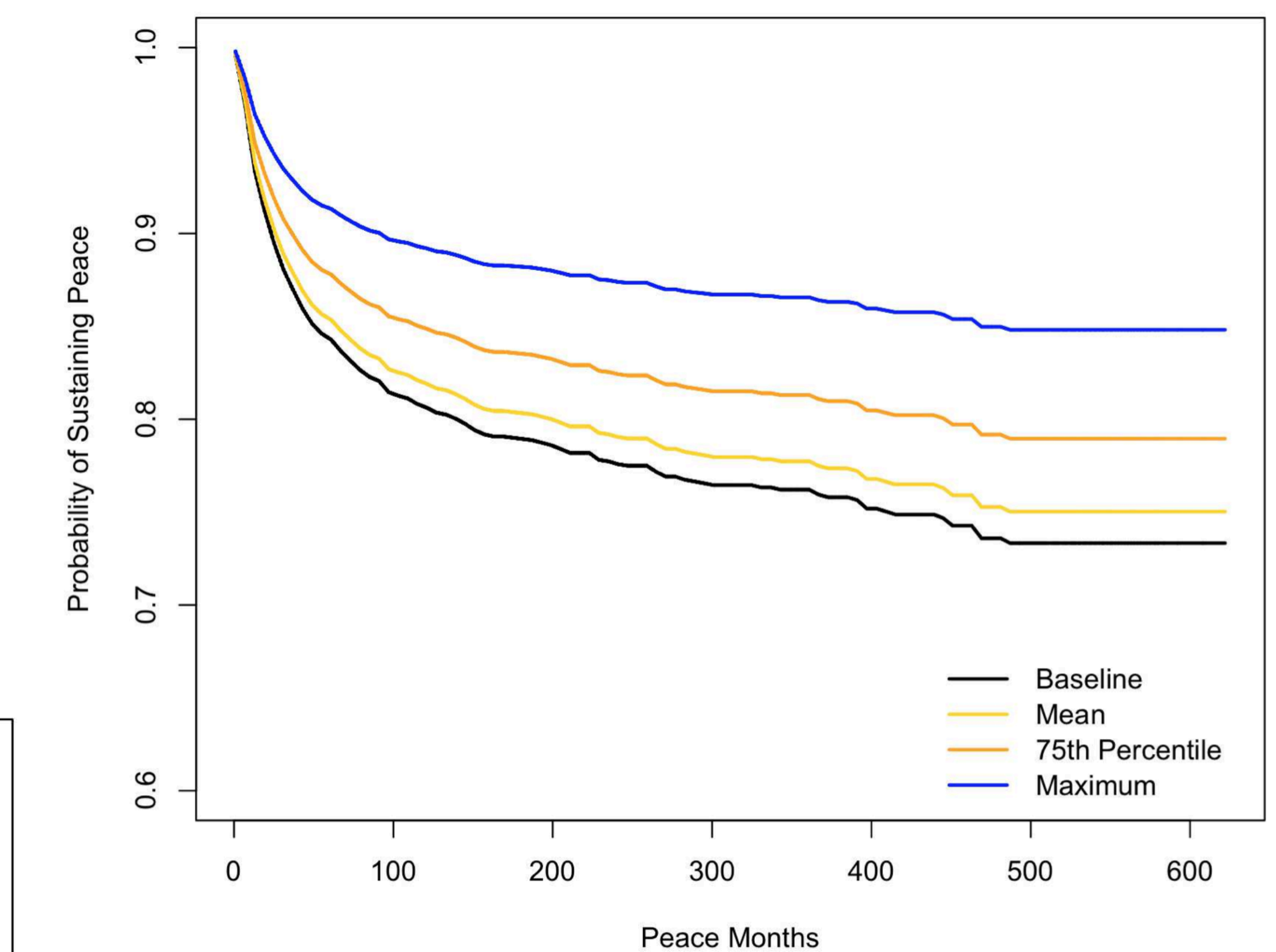
- Cox hazards model analysis on 573 dyads between 1950 and 2001
- Hazard is MID recurrence



- The effect of information (battle deaths in a most recent dispute) on the likelihood of dispute recurrence among states with recent coup attempts
- Compared to baseline hazard, dispute recurrence is:
 - 8% **less likely** among dyads with 13 battle deaths in a most recent dispute and a recent coup attempt
 - 16% **less likely** among dyads with 64 battle deaths in a most recent dispute and a recent coup attempt
- Controls for regime type, capabilities, previous dispute outcome, settlement type, successful coups

Test of Hypothesis 2

- Cox hazards model analysis on 1146 dyads between 1950 and 2001
- Hazard is the initiation of a subsequent MID



- Information provided by fighting between the potential target and third-parties **reduces** the likelihood that states with poor civil-military relations will initiate a subsequent dispute
 - Even though 1) the fighting does not directly involve these regimes and 2) the conflict against a third-party may weaken their opponent

Key Findings

1. The Circling of the Wagons effect provides a new diversionary mechanism that does not depend on regime popularity or the demonstration of competence
2. Rulers may run greater risks abroad to ensure security at home, but do so only when they are uncertain about the threat environment
3. In this, the study reveals a key way in which informational asymmetries *within* states drive the chances for conflict *between* states

For More Information

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