Of Democracies, Dictatorships, and Resource Deposits:
A Time-Series Analysis of Third-Party State Military Interventions in Civil Wars

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Abstract

With the increasing proclivity of civil wars around the globe, it is important to know who gets involved in these conflicts and why. Third-party states considering whether to intervene in an outside civil war may make the decision to act based on perceived self-interest in the valuable natural resources which may be found in a civil war-afflicted state. I hypothesize that the type of domestic regime in a potentially interventionist third-party nation will affect when that country decides to militarily intervene in an external civil war. My analysis examines the effect of natural resources (specifically petroleum and coltan) on which type of regime will intervene, given those resources are located in the state experiencing the civil war. In line with my three hypotheses, I find that democracies will intervene more readily in countries which are oil producers and are experiencing a civil war, autocracies will intervene more readily in countries with known oil reserves (but not necessarily homes to oil production), and similarly autocracies are more likely to intervene in coltan-possessing countries in the hope of gaining control over this valuable (and easy to extract) mineral when compared to their more domestic audience-sensitive democratic counterparts. However, the results of the analysis are somewhat modest in terms of substance.

Keywords: Military Intervention, Civil War, Natural Resources, Petroleum, Coltan, Regime-Type, Global Security, Conflict, International Relations, Resource Curse, Autocracies, Democracies, Political Science, Interventionist, Tantalum, Time-Series, Production, Deposits

1. Introduction:

Within the Post-Cold War era, the preponderance of intra-state war has eclipsed more traditional forms of conflict. These intra-state conflicts can spur outside nations to act when they see that it is within their self-interest. A cursory glance at the news readily turns up stories of military interventions by third-party states in outside civil wars. It isn't altogether infrequent that the country experiencing the civil war has endowments of nonrenewable natural resources, such as petroleum and/or minerals including gold, tin, and coltan (the mineral which tantalum is derived from). Some recent and contemporary examples of these afflicted countries include Yemen, Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Iraq.

Frequently, states like these are afflicted with corruption and authoritarian governments (symptoms of the so-called "resource curse"), and this mixed with the large quantities of currency associated with possession of natural resources like petroleum and/or rare and valuable natural minerals can set the stage for civil strife and military interventions (Watts, 2007). States such as Iraq which possess a lot of petroleum will often neglect other sectors of their economies in order to throw their capabilities towards extracting oil (leaving many citizens left behind, disaffected, and unemployed) and have suffered because of that decision, while other states choose to diversify their interests and engage more of their citizenry in economic endeavors (like the modernization and diversification campaign currently underway in Saudi Arabia).

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Different countries, even perhaps connected geographically and found in the same region, may have their fates shaped in different ways due to matters beyond their control (Honig, 2019). By all appearances it seems thatthese matters sometimes involve the existence and production of natural resources. For example, research shows that the presence of oil strengthens the likelihood of civil conflict, which in turn can draw in other actors like third-party states (Ross, 2004).

Thus civil conflict may arise due to the presence of natural resources, and frequently the country experiencing the conflict has domestic institutions favoring an authoritarian government (which can in turn lead to grievances, and back around to civil conflict). States in this position might exhibit strong control over the media (with its ability to potentially influence the whole of a country's population) and a robust police apparatus, but often have weak civic institutions like the judiciary (Honig, 2019). These issues have been probed thoroughly by academics in the civil war literature. But what of potential third-party intervening states' domestic institutions, and how do they factor into which civil wars they decide to go into? Abiodun Alao and Funmi Olonisakin (2000) observe that "Natural resources serve as both a cause and a prolongation of armed conflict…the availability of natural resources introduces other complexities, particularly when a conflict has assumed a violent dimension…Thus, when armed conflict erupts…the ready availability of…mineral resources serves other purposes…" (pg. 34).

In practice, these mineral resources may serve the purposes of an intervening state seeking to exploit this naturally occurring wealth. But when does a potential intervener decide that it is in their interest to conduct an outside military operation in a different country? I theorize that the domestic political institutions of a potential intervening state affect the decision whether or not to intervene in an outside civil war, with natural resources in the afflicted country seen as a potential means of offsetting material losses incurred by a military intervention. In this article, I will attempt to shine some light on this area by examining the role of known petroleum and coltan reserves and/or production on the decision of third-party states to militarily intervene in an outside civil war. I chose these two resources as they straddle the technical spectrum of extraction. Oil production and transportation requires some degree of technical skill and labor, while coltan mining can be accomplished using common civilians or soldiers with shovels. In this way, a wide spectrum of potential interveners with varying degrees of technical capabilities are taken into account, instead of merely well-developed countries capable of complex extraction techniques such as great power states like the United States, China, or Russia. However, although the results correspond to my hypotheses, they are modest and as such may not merit much explanatory value when compared to other reasons for intervening.

2. Literature Review:

In a large portion of the current civil war literature, intervening states are examined as identical units. That is not to say that they are seen as having identical capabilities, but that their domestic traits don't have a great deal of involvement with their behavior internationally. This is despite the view by scholars that third-party states can play a pivotal role in civil wars (Sawyer et al, 2015), and thus subtle differences which could be deduced in terms of where they choose to go or not go is an underdeveloped area of exploration in the civil war literature. This is particularly relevant when it comes to scarce and nonrenewable resources (such as petroleum and coltan). The ever-increasing global demand for energy continues to drive the price of oil. Similarly, demand for coltan (which when refined into the element tantalum has many uses, ranging from circuitry found in airplanes to critical parts of smartphones and laptops) has been on the rise. According to an industry report for the years 2017-2021, "The global tantalum market is anticipated to grow at a steady rate…The increasing penetration of smartphones is triggering the demand for capacitors, which will drive the growth prospects for the global tantalum market…Moreover, one of the major factors responsible…is the increasing demand for smartphones in the developing economies" (Global Tantalum Market 2017-2021, 2017). This demand for naturally occurring resources such as petroleum and coltan have very real consequences for people around the world. Indeed, scholars including Ted Robert Gurr (1985) have for years found that "…substantial and persisting increases in the scarcity of widely-sought resources in contemporary societies tend to create…internal and international conflict…" and beget military interventions (pg. 51).

Type of regime as a factor to be considered frequently occurs in the present literature on civil war. However, more often than not it is found in the context of the state experiencing the civil war and not in the context of the intervening state. For the purposes of this article, I borrow from Stephen D. Krasner's (1982) assertion that "Regimes can be defined as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area…" (pg. 3).

It would seem to follow that regime traits would also play into the decision making process of a state when considering putting its own citizens and prestige on the line by launching a military intervention in an outside civil war. Leaders of states presumably make their decisions based on what (and who) will keep them in power. In turn, these decisions may differ from those of other states based on the domestic methodologies associated with different regime types which are used to select or keep leaders in office. The leaders, operating on the presumption that they wish to stay in power, will presumably do their best to satisfy those who are responsible for keeping them there.

So what does that mean in practice? Theoretically, democratic leaders will commit to actions designed to appease their constituents. In deciding to intervene in a civil war, the leader is putting the lives of their constituents on the line, which may result in that leader being ejected from office if there aren't enough benefits to make up for it (Koga, 2011). On the other hand, leaders of autocratic countries have a much smaller selectorate (the group of individuals who keep that leader in office) consisting of party leaders, military personnel, intelligence officials, and industry heads. Since these leaders have less to fear from the common citizenry when sending them off to intervene in an outside civil war, autocratic leaders need only keep the members of their selectorate happy in order to retain power, even if the intervention is ineffective in its stated objectives (Bueno de Mesquita et al, 2003). Autocratic leaders may be content simply to obtain access to valuable commodities (for example, direct access to unclaimed raw petroleum reserves or coltan mines) to pass on to their supporters, whereas democratic leaders might seek to provide their constituents with a less tangible "quality lifestyle" (since divvying up the potential spoils directly to every voter in that country would be impractical). Thus, the decision to intervene in an outside state's civil war likely has something to do with the domestic regime type which the potential third-party state has at its helm.

3. Theory:

Based on the potential third-party intervener's domestic regime type, I expect different countries to intervene in different civil wars. This is based upon the premise that leaders will do what they can to stay in power, satisfying whom they must. And since different regimes have different realities in terms of how they select and retain leaders, this should influence the decisions of powerholders accordingly.

A leader of a democratic regime would presumably desire to avoid getting their constituents killed in battle unless the payoff is enough to offset negative audience costs associated with the casualties. An exemplar of a potentially broad enough payoff to offset negative public relations stemming from deaths of soldiers would be a high standard of living and lifestyle (such as that found in the United States). In order to provide this lifestyle, for example, the United States must protect the integrity of the overall oil supply system as well as ensure access to necessary minerals on a global scale (Stokes, 2007). Intervening in a civil war in a known oil-producing state is likely to be in a democracy's best interest since it keeps the energy pumping, so as to satisfy the lifestyle demands of its entire electorate. This is opposed to sending off crude oil to every voter's house in America to divvy up the spoils, which is unrealistic. Oil-producing states whose petroleum infrastructure and trained experts are in jeopardy are at an increased likelihood of intervention by countries seeking to stabilize the overall energy sector. This leads me to my first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Democracies are at an increased likelihood of intervening in civil wars where oil is currently being produced, so as to ensure the stability of the overall global energy supply.

Autocracies, on the other hand, don't have a particular reason to care about the lifestyle of their everyday citizens. The leaders of autocracies need only satisfy the pivotal players in their country (military officials, party leaders, etc.) to stay in power. A lengthy, potentially long-term involvement via intervention in an external civil war in order to keep the global energy supply running smoothly probably won't accomplish this goal for an autocrat. It is most likely too slow and not enough to keep their selectorate happy in the immediate sense. On the other hand, if there were unclaimed resources free of any previous competitors or stakeholders which were de facto up for grabs in the midst of a chaotic civil war (in someone else's backyard), this would open up the possibility of a relatively direct transferal of wealth (barrels of crude oil, land rights to known reserves, primacy in trade negotiations) from the state experiencing the civil war to the intervening autocratic third-party state's ruling elite. This leads me to my second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Autocracies are at an increased likelihood of intervening in civil wars where there are known, possibly unexploited reserves of oil in order to reward regime elites with the spoils.

Not all countries are created equal, and the possibility of preying on the oil reserves of others is not within the realm of capabilities of every potential interventionist state. Coltan, on the other hand, is readily accessible to those with basic mining equipment (such as shovels) and labor. An underdeveloped autocracy could theoretically send in some regular troops with shovels to a coltan-possessing country experiencing a civil war to dig up the spoils and cart them back home. Once smelted together with legitimate coltan, it is impossible to discern its origin. In addition to that, coltan is an extremely valuable commodity for which global demand is increasing every year. This represents a tempting prize for an autocracy with little to fear from political reprisals by their common citizenry, as any deaths incurred will be largely irrelevant to the leadership's survival. On the other hand, the potential negative audience costs which a democracy might suffer (due to problems related to an external military intervention) might make any profits incurred from interventions based oncoltan extraction simply not worth it. This leads me to my last hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Autocracies are more likely to intervene in civil wars taking place in coltan-possessing countries when compared to their democratic counterparts.

4. Methodology:

My dependent variable is the dichotomous variable *Military Intervention*. If a military intervention happened during any calendar year in the dataset, the dependent variable is coded as 1. My independent variables having to do with third-party domestic regime type are *third_Dem* and *third_Aut,* representing respectively third-party states which are democratic and third party states which are autocratic. Both these variables are dichotomous measures of polity taken from Marshall and Jaggers' (2010) results on domestic regime types. Those two independent variables and the dependent variable are derived from Jun Koga's (2011) dataset on military interventions by third parties. My analysis is set up similarly to Koga's (2011), in a dyadic manner with each observation a pair of a conflict state and a potential intervening state, while each pair of conflict states and potential interveners is observed from the year when a given civil warbegins to the year when it ceases. This represents my unit of analysis. This dataset in turn used Fearon and Laitin's (2003) dataset covering civil conflicts from 1945 to 1999, and also Regan's (2002), Pearson and Baumann's (1993), and Kisangani and Pickering's (2007) respective datasets on third-party interventions. My analysis consists of two models, with Model 1 encompassing my first two hypotheses, while Model 2 concerns my third. In both models, I included dummy variables. I tested to see how 3rd party regime types affected the likelihood of military intervention in any civil war, natural resources or not, for both democracies and autocracies. In addition, I included a control variable indicating whether the 3rd party state was an autocratic state with ethnic ties amongst the leadership to the state experiencing a civil war, as well as another variable indicating whether the 3rd party state has a pluralistic regime-type (not necessarily purely democratic, but not a full autocracy) with ethnic ties amongst the leadership to the civil war-afflicted state. I conducted my analysis with all things being equal regarding geography and shared borders, as there has been some evidence that shared borders can actually decrease the likelihood of a military intervention (Regan, 1998), and as such I decided to leave it for future consideration.

In Model 1, I added an additional independent variable (called *known_petro*)to the dataset to indicate countries with known petroleum reserves. I derived this data from Lujala, Rod, and Thieme's (2007) PETRODATA dataset on known locations of onshore deposits of oil and natural gas, which country's territory they are located in, and their discovery dates. For every country in my civil conflict dataset that experienced a military intervention, I coded *known_petro* as "0" if there are no known petroleum deposits, "1" if there are known petroleum deposits (taking into account what year they were discovered in order to ascertain whether military interventions occurred before or after the discovery), and "2" if exportation of finished petroleum products has occurred in the civil war state (further taking into account when production began, in order to ascertain whether military interventions occurred before or after that time).

In Model 2, I returned to the original dataset and added an additional independent variable (called *known_Coltan_deposits*) to indicate countries with known reserves of coltan. I derived this data from the Minerals Yearbook on Tantalum put out by the United States Geological Survey (2018) on known deposits of coltan, which nation's territory they are situated within, and their dates of discovery. For each country in my civil conflict dataset that experienced a military intervention, I coded *known_Coltan_deposits* as "0" if there are no known coltan deposits, and "1" if there are known coltan deposits in the country.

The dataset contains 340 military interventions total as well as any non-interventions, with these military interventions occurring on behalf of either side of a civil war (government or rebel). This sample does not take into account any diplomatic or peaceful interventions, however. Taking into account that the data is time-series cross-sectional with a binary dependent variable, I elected to utilize a probit model to analyze my three hypotheses in both my two models. In order to avoid problems with heteroskedasticity of observation, I decided to test for robust standard errors in both as well. All told, my analysis in Model 1 produced 116,274 observations. I tested the interactions between *third_Dem* and *known_petro*, as well as *third_Aut* and *known_petro*, to see how domestic institutions affect a third-party state's likelihood of intervening given the presence of petroleum in some substantial fashion, as well as testing the interactions between potentially interventionist states and oil producers embroiled in a civil war. Model 2, on the other hand, produced 121,743 observations. I tested the interactions between *third_Dem* and *known_Coltan_deposits,* as well as *third_Aut* and *known_Coltan_deposits,* to see how domestic institutions affect a third-party state's likelihood of intervening given the known presence of coltan in the country experiencing a civil war.

5. Results:

The results of my analysis appear to confirm my hypotheses and lendcredence to my theory. This is true across both models and for all three hypotheses. However, it is notable that the results were relatively modest after the analysis was fully conducted.

5.1. Model 1 Results:

Table 1: Model 1 Regression Results for Petroleum Reserves, Production, and 3rd Party Domestic Regime Type

Variable:	Coefficient:	Robust Standard Error:	Z:
Known Petroleum Deposits	.05384	.12254	0.44
Petroleum Producer	-.39698*	.00964	-4.12
Democratic 3rd Party State	.19522*	.08109	2.41
Autocratic 3rd Party State	-.03638	.09333	-0.39
Autocratic 3rd Party and Civil War State with Known Petroleum Reserves	.33935*	.15267	2.22
Autocratic 3rd Party and Petroleum Producing Civil War State	.04997	.12619	0.40
Democratic 3rd Party and Civil War State with Known Petroleum Reserves	-.22063	.15844	-1.39
Democratic 3rd Party and Petroleum Producing Civil War State	.14709	.11169	1.32
Pluralistic 3rd Party Ethnic Leadership Ties with Civil War State	.95489*	.06712	14.23
Autocratic 3rd Party Ethnic Leadership Ties with Civil War State	1.12991*	.09558	11.82

*p ≤ .05

Table 2: Model 1 Margins and Predicted Probability Results for Petroleum Reserves, Production, and 3rd Party Domestic Regime Type

Variable:	Margin:	Delta-method Standard Error:	Z:
Known Petroleum Deposits	.00468	.00067	6.94
Petroleum Producer	.00129	.00014	9.56
Democratic 3rd Party State	.00318	.00035	9.10
Autocratic 3rd Party State	.00203	.00031	6.61
Autocratic 3rd Party and Civil War State with Known Petroleum Reserves	.00816	.00187	4.37
Autocratic 3rd Party and Petroleum Producing Civil War State	.00135	.00029	4.73
Democratic 3rd Party and Civil War State with Known Petroleum Reserves	.00447	.00132	3.39
Democratic 3rd Party and Petroleum Producing Civil War State	.00254	.00038	6.68
Pluralistic 3rd Party Ethnic Leadership Ties with Civil War State	.02402	.00342	7.03
Autocratic 3rd Party Ethnic Leadership Ties with Civil War State	.03817	.00721	5.29

All p ≤ .01

The results of Model 1's margins and predicted probabilities generated 116,274 observations. All predicted probabilities were strongly significant at the 99% confidence level. Given known petroleum reserves, the predicted probability of a military intervention by any country is .00468. If the civil war state is a petroleum producer, predicted probability for an intervention is .00129. The predicted probability of a military intervention regardless of petroleum reserves was .00318 for democracies and .00203 for autocracies. If the civil war state is a petroleum producer, predicted probability of a democratic state intervening is .00254, while predicted probability of an autocratic state intervening is .00135. Given known petroleum reserves, an autocracy has a predicted probability of .00816 of intervening, while a democracy has a predicted probability of .00447. These results support both Hypotheses 1 and 2. Regarding my control variables, a pluralistic 3rd party state with shared ethnic kin amongst the leadership with the state experiencing a civil war has a predicted probability of .02402 of intervening, while an autocracy has a predicted probability of .03817. These results suggest that shared ethnicity has more explanatory value for interventions than does the presence or production of petroleum.

In order to further clarify my results, I decided to test for margins and marginal effects. This helped aid me in interpreting the probit data so as to see if the results of my analysis clearly supported my theory. After testing for margins and marginal effects, I found that the results do appear to correspond to my theory.

Autocracies are at an increased predicted probability of .00579 in intervening in a different country's civil war if there are known reserves of petroleum, and this result is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Contrast this with democracies that have a predicted probability of -.00041 given the same circumstance, although this result wasn't statistically significant. Also according to my theory, democracies are at an increased predicted probability of .00204 in intervening in a different country's civil war if finished petroleum products are being produced in that country (and isstrongly statistically significant at the 99% confidence level), while autocracies are at an increased probability of .00032 of intervening given these circumstances (although the results are insignificant statistically).The overall results appear to correspond to my theory that democracies will intervene in countries who are oil producers in order to support the global energy market (and their own state's standard of living), while autocracies will intervene in countries who have known, but possibly unexploited, oil reserves so as to reward their elites with relatively direct wealth derived from the resources of a vulnerable country experiencing a civil war. However, the results are admittedly modest and as such may not represent much explanatory power.

5.2. Model 2 Results:

Table 3: Model 2 Regression Results for Coltan Deposits and 3rd Party Domestic Regime Type

Variable:	Coefficient:	Robust Standard Error:	Z:
Known Coltan Deposits	.44207*	.10657	4.15
Democratic 3rd Party State	.29465*	.05649	5.22
Autocratic 3rd Party State	.0994	.06512	1.53
Autocratic 3rd Party and Civil War State with Known Coltan Deposits	-.07733	.14087	-0.55
Democratic 3rd Party and Civil War State with Known Coltan Deposits	-.28672*	.13523	-2.12
Pluralistic 3rd Party Ethnic Leadership Ties with Civil War State	.92689*	.06496	14.27
Autocratic 3rd Party Ethnic Leadership Ties with Civil War State	1.03802*	.08755	11.86

*$p \leq .05$

Table 4: Model 2 Margins and Predicted Probability Results for Coltan Deposits and 3rd Party Domestic Regime Type

Variable:	Margin:	Delta-method Standard Error:	Z:
Known Coltan Deposits	.00491	.00069	7.03
Democratic 3rd Party State	.00353	.00035	9.97
Autocratic 3rd Party State	.00256	.00033	7.81
Autocratic 3rd Party and Civil War State with Known Coltan Deposits	.00514	.00142	3.62
Democratic 3rd Party and Civil War State with Known Coltan Deposits	.00498	.00132	3.78
Pluralistic 3rd Party Ethnic Leadership Ties with Civil War State	.02315	.00321	7.21
Autocratic 3rd Party Ethnic Leadership Ties with Civil War State	.03684	.00653	5.64

All p ≤ .01

The results of Model 2's margins and predicted probabilities generated 121,743 observations. All predicted probabilities were strongly significant at the 99% confidence level. Given known coltan deposits, the predicted probability of a military intervention by any country is .00491. Predicted probability of a military intervention regardless of coltan deposits is .00353 for democracies, and .00256 for autocracies. Given known coltan deposits, an autocracy has a predicted probability of .00514 of intervening, while a democracy has a predicted probability of .00498. These results support Hypothesis 3. Regarding my control variables, a pluralistic 3rd party state with shared ethnic kin amongst the leadership with the state experiencing a civil war has a predicted probability of .02315 of intervening, while an autocracy has a predicted probability of .03684. These results suggest that shared ethnicity has more explanatory value for interventions than does the presence of coltan.

In order to further clarify my results, I decided to again test for margins and marginal effects. This helped aid me in interpreting the probit data so as to see if the results of my analysis clearly supported my theory. After testing for margins and marginal effects, I found that the results do seem to correspond to my hypothesis. As theorized, autocracies are at an increased predicted probability of .00067 in intervening in a different country's civil war if there are known coltan deposits, compared with democracies' predicted probability of .00012. These resultsappear to correspond to my theory that democracies won't intervene as readily as their autocratic counterparts will in this circumstance, although neither are statistically significant. The results are admittedly modest and as such may not represent much explanatory power.

6. Conclusion:

In order to observe how countries with different regimes decide to intervene in civil conflicts outside their borders, I tested to see how both the presence and production of petroleum as well as the presence of known coltan deposits in a state experiencing a civil war affected a third-party state's likelihood of intervening (based on its regime type). I theorized that democracies will more readily act to support the energy system as a whole by intervening where vulnerable infrastructure and personnel associated with petroleum production are already in place (but are now in danger), whereas autocracies will intervene more readily where there are unclaimed and/or vulnerable known deposits of petroleum in order to reward their elites. By conducting a probit analysis and then testing for margins and marginal effects, my results appear to largely support my theory. I further theorized that autocracies will tend to intervene in civil wars in coltan-possessing countries more often than their democratic counterparts. After conducting a probit analysis and then testing for margins and marginal effects, my results seem to uphold this hypothesis. It is of note that the results for my analysis were somewhat modest, and as such may not hold much explanatory value regarding third-party state military interventions when compared to some other factors.

For future research, it would be helpful to discern exactly how long interventionist third-party states were democracies (or vice versa) at the time of their external military interventions. As some countries switch from autocracies to democracies or the inverse, the possibility exists of old guard powerbrokers still being able to exert decision making in similar ways to the former regime from behind the political and economic scenes. By testing to see how long regime types in third-party states had established themselves, it may be possible to parse out holdover effects of concealed former-regime powerbrokers in new governments in states who may make the choice to intervene militarily in a different country's civil war. It might also be useful to investigate how offshore petroleum deposits might play into different third-party states' motivations for intervening. One limitation of the analysis is the age of the dataset, which was originally published in 2011. A solution to this would be to wait on more reliable and up-to-date data for future analysis, such as the new military intervention dataset being worked on by Emizet Kisangani and Jeffery Pickering which will include cases running through 2018. An updated dataset including new observations (for example, the 2015 military intervention in Yemen by aSaudi Arabian-led coalition, or the Syrian civil war and its various interveners) would be useful in keeping this information relevant and reflective of facts as they stand on the ground today.

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