

# Where, when, and how does the UN work to prevent civil war in self-determination disputes?

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## **Abstract**

The UN has placed rhetorical emphasis on the prevention of armed conflict before it starts and has taken selective action toward that end. What determines where the UN gets involved? We examine UN preventive actions by focusing on UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions in self-determination disputes. We argue that UN decision-makers consider at least three factors when deciding where to target preventative action: the dispute's conflict history, the potential for regional contagion, and the characteristics of the dispute. We further argue that the political dynamics of UNSC decision making constrain the UN's ability to pay attention to the third factor (the characteristics of the dispute). We test this argument using data on all UNSC resolutions comprising the authorization of diplomatic engagement, condemnation, the authorization of sanctions, and the deployment of force targeted toward SD disputes from 1960-2005. We find that the UN is much more likely to act in nonviolent disputes that have a history of violence and in disputes with a potential for regional contagion. The analysis shows that, while political barriers likely restrict the ability for the UNSC to act when dispute-level characteristics suggest armed conflict is more likely, the UN does act proactively to prevent violence, rather than just reactively respond to existing violence.

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Conflict prevention has been a point of emphasis of the United Nations since its founding. Article 1.1 of the UN Charter states that a central purpose of the UN is to ‘prevent and remove threats to the peace.’ One of the only explicit responsibilities the Charter gives to the Secretary-General is the authority to warn the Security Council (UNSC) of threats to international peace (Article 99).

Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace* (1992) focused on preventive diplomacy, as well as peacekeeping and peacebuilding, as tools for conflict prevention. States at the 2005 World Summit pledged to build a ‘culture of prevention.’<sup>1</sup>

Does the UN actually work to prevent violent conflict? The 1993 preventative deployment of peacekeepers to Macedonia is credited with preventing violence from the other Balkan wars from spreading to the Albanian minority there.<sup>2</sup> A 1997 diplomatic push by UN envoys contributed to preventing renewed violence between Turkish and Greek Cypriots.<sup>3</sup> While these are promising examples, the 2015 Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations criticized the United Nations and its members for lackluster efforts at conflict prevention, stating that ‘a prevention culture has not been embraced by the Organization and its Member States.’ (A/70/95-S/2015/446, 11).

These contrasting assessments suggest that the UN and its Member States have sought to engage in conflict prevention, but the UN is unable or unwilling to engage with all potential conflicts. In this article, we examine why some potentially but not currently violent disputes see action from the UNSC and others do not.

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<sup>1</sup> See S/2011/552, page 3.

<sup>2</sup> See UN Department of Public Information. 3/16/1999. ‘United Nations Preventative Deployment Force.’ [http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unpred\\_p.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unpred_p.htm). Accessed 1/27/2017.

<sup>3</sup> See Agence France Presse. 10/16/1998. ‘UN envoy launches new round of Cyprus shuttle diplomacy.’ Accessed 6/30/2013; Middle East Review World of Information. 7/1/1999. ‘Cyprus-Review.’ Accessed 6/30/2013.

A large scholarly literature has examined the effect of various actions by the UN and other international actors in civil wars. Scholars have argued that UN action contributes to crisis management (Wilkenfeld & Brecher, 1984), peacebuilding (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006), peacekeeping (Fortna, 2008, Hultman et al., 2013), and mediation (Bercovitch & Gartner, 2008; Regan & Aydin, 2006). Yet, we know relatively little about the causes or effects of UN actions designed to prevent violence.<sup>4</sup> This gap is likely due to a lack of data, as studying these actions requires identifying a set of disputes with the potential to become civil wars but that have not yet become violent. Differentiating potential civil wars from locales and times that have little plausible risk of seeing armed conflicts is a serious empirical challenge.

To overcome this challenge, we focus on a set of self-determination (SD) disputes (from Cunningham, 2014) and examine the determinants of UN Security Council (UNSC) action in both violent and nonviolent disputes. SD Disputes involve state governments and some ethno-nationalist group seeking increased local control over some territory in the state (which includes, but is not limited to, secession). While SD disputes lead to many civil wars not all disputes become civil wars, and there are peaceful periods in almost all of them. As such, they allow us to examine the determinants of UN action in intrastate disputes that are nonviolent but have the potential to become civil wars.<sup>5</sup> Table I shows the yearly occurrence of UNSC resolutions in SD disputes and

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<sup>4</sup> Karreth & Tir (2013) examine how international actors can contribute to the prevention of low-intensity intrastate conflicts from escalating to violent disputes. Diehl et al. (1996) conducted an early study of UN intervention and the prevention of interstate crisis recurrence. Here, we are interested in actions to prevent the outbreak of violence in intrastate disputes that are not currently violent.

<sup>5</sup> In this article, we do not address the UN's involvement in trying to prevent center-seeking (i.e. governmental) armed conflicts. We narrow our scope condition to self-determination disputes to ensure that our set of potential civil wars are comparable to one another and focus on disputes with a high potential for civil war.

demonstrates that while UNSC action occurs at a greater rate in violent disputes, there is substantial activity in relatively peaceful dispute-years.

**Table I. Self determination disputes and UNSC resolutions (1960-2005, dispute-years)**

	<b>No civil war</b>	<b>Civil war</b>
<b>No resolution</b>	3076 (97.50%)	701 (94.35%)
<b>Resolution (one or more)</b>	79 (2.50%)	42 (5.65%)
	3,155	743

We argue that UN decision-makers consider at least three factors when deciding where to target preventative action: the potential for regional contagion, the dispute’s conflict history, and the characteristics of the dispute. We further argue that the political dynamics of UNSC decision making mean that the UN is less likely to pay attention to the third factor (the characteristics of the dispute) than the first two. We test this argument using data on UNSC resolutions in all SD disputes from 1960-2005 and find that the UN is much more likely to act in nonviolent disputes that have a history of violence, and in disputes with a potential for regional contagion.

### **Conflict prevention as a priority**

In recent years, the United Nations has emphasized the importance of preventing, rather than just resolving, violent conflicts. In his ‘Preventive Diplomacy, Delivering Results’ (S/2011/552) report, Ban Ki-Moon specifically called attention to the UN entities involved in conflict prevention, including the General Assembly, Department of Political Affairs, UN special envoys, regional offices and the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as the Security Council. From 2010 until early 2012, the UNSC held periodic ‘Horizon-Scanning Briefings’ hosted by the UN’s Department of Political

Affairs that covered potential hot-spots where preventive diplomacy could be useful.<sup>6</sup> However, these briefings were discontinued in 2013, in part, due to objections of UNSC Member States who did not want their internal affairs discussed.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars have likewise shown an interest in conflict prevention, and have focused primarily on two areas. First, large-scale early-warning projects such as the Political Instability Task Force (PITF)<sup>8</sup> and the Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS)<sup>9</sup> seek a better understanding of when violent conflict is imminent, so that prevention resources might be efficiently allocated. The wider availability of data on political violence has also led to a greater attention to forecasting such events.<sup>10</sup> Second, scholars have developed analytical frameworks and tools for conceptualizing prevention and understanding how it is likely to be effective<sup>11</sup> and have used observational data, such as those in the International Crisis Behavior (ICB)<sup>12</sup> and Managing Intrastate Low-Level Conflict (MILC)<sup>13</sup> projects, to explore the factors which help prevent the escalation of conflict.

This growing literature has expanded our understanding of conflict prevention but still largely ignores the determinants of preventative action. When, and where, does the UN get involved

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<sup>6</sup> For a list of specific briefings, see 'Horizon-Scanning Briefings' (2015). *Security Council Report*. [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/working\\_methods\\_horizon\\_scanning.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/working_methods_horizon_scanning.pdf). Accessed 26 February 2016.

<sup>7</sup> See Romita (2011); UN General Assembly. 16 June 2015. 'Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects.' A/70/95-S/2015/446, 33.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/political-instability-task-force-home/>

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.lockheedmartin.com/us/products/W-ICEWS.html>.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Gleditsch & Ward (2013), Goldstone et al. (2010) and Ward et al. (2013).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Lund (1996), George (2000), and the edited volumes by Jentleson (2000), and Davies & Gurr (1998).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Brecher et al. (2000); Brecher & Wilkenfeld (1997); DeRouen & Goldfinch (2005).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Melander et al. (2009).

in disputes to prevent the outbreak of civil war? Why does the UN take the specific preventive actions that it takes?

### **The determinants of UN conflict prevention efforts**

The UN takes a range of actions that could decrease the chances that nonviolent disputes escalate to civil war. In general, prevention works through two main mechanisms: by altering the cost-benefit calculus of actors and by helping combatants overcome barriers to reaching efficient non-violent settlements. We focus on four specific types of UN action that can have these effects.

First, the UN often engages in diplomatic engagement — including good offices, mediation, fact-finding, civilian monitoring, and special tribunals — in intrastate disputes. This engagement can help overcome barriers to efficient bargaining as well as to raise the perceived benefits of continued nonviolence. Second, the UN often issues Security Council resolutions in the form of condemnations, in which the Security Council deplores hostilities, non-compliance with prior UN directives or international agreements, or human rights violations. While the condemnation itself may have little direct effect on the cost-benefit calculation of states and dissidents, it can signal UN intention to intervene more forcefully in the event of a violent conflict and thus indirectly affect that calculation. Third, the UN can levy sanctions on countries in an effort to directly raise the costs of conflict and incentives for reaching a settlement. Fourth, the UN can authorize and deploy peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions to either directly enforce a peace, raise the costs of violence, or monitor implementation of an agreement.

The UN, then, has a range of tools it can use to seek to prevent violence, and recent work suggests that some of these can be effective at preventing intrastate disputes from escalating to high levels of violence, including among disputes with no history of significant violence (Beardsley,

Cunningham & White, 2015). However, the UN does not act in all disputes, and in the disputes it does get involved in, it uses various combinations of preventive tools.

We argue that the UN uses objective indicators to determine the likelihood of civil war and desires to engage in conflict prevention in the disputes with the greatest likelihood of becoming violent. Scholarship has demonstrated that the UN acts to promote humanitarian interests. Murdie & Peksen (2014) show that human rights organizations have substantial influence on UN action, and Choi (2013) finds that humanitarian actions taken by the United States are often driven by liberal interests to promote democracy and human security.<sup>14</sup> Beardsley & Schmidt (2012) find that UNSC action is driven by both incentives to respond to the gravest threats to international stability and to act in the interests of the P-5, but the latter influence appears weaker than the former.

Additionally, scholarship on UN action in violent conflicts has demonstrated that the UN and other international actors primarily get involved in the civil wars most in need of intervention (the “hardest” cases). Several studies demonstrate that UN peacekeepers deploy, on average, to conflicts with the lowest probability of successful resolution<sup>15</sup> and that mediators generally are sent to conflicts where negotiations are least likely to succeed.<sup>16</sup> Taken together, scholarly evidence combined with UN rhetoric suggests the UN has a desire to work to prevent violent conflict in intrastate disputes and should be most likely to act in disputes with the greatest likelihood of civil war.

However, political opposition can impede the UN’s preventive efforts. UN action in intrastate disputes has the potential to provide international legitimacy to dissidents and can suggest

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<sup>14</sup> Jakobsen (1996; 2000) argues that media attention can have an important, and sometimes pernicious, effect in shaping UN humanitarian responses.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Fortna (2008); Gilligan & Stedman (2003); Mullenbach (2005); and Rugeri et al. (ND).

<sup>16</sup> Beber (2012); Gartner (2013).

that the government is incapable of managing its internal affairs. As such, governments are likely to be stridently opposed to these types of actions in their own nonviolent disputes. This opposition can directly constrain the ability of the UN to act in nonviolent sub-state disputes when the government in question is either a permanent member of the UN Security Council (P-5) or a close ally of one of the P-5 members. The P-5— China, France, the UK, the US, and Russia—can veto any action proposed in the Security Council, and therefore prevent the UN from taking action.<sup>17</sup> In addition, there are 10 rotating members of the Security Council who will be sensitive to UN involvement that diverges from their interests or those of their allies. In some cases, these states are precisely those that have disputes that could be prone to civil war. Indeed, a main reason the Horizon Scanning Briefings were largely discontinued after 2012 (only three were held in 2013) was opposition from the rotating members of the Security Council who did not want their internal affairs to be the subject of UNSC briefings (Romita 2011). Moreover, states that are not members of the Security Council can reduce the potential for authorizations of certain UN activity—involvement that requires the consent of states facing SD disputes in order to occur, such as peacekeeping and mediation.

We consider three sets of factors that determine where preventive action is needed, and we argue these sets of factors have differential impacts on the level of political opposition to UN involvement. The first is the history of conflict in the dispute. Periods of peace in civil wars often break down; in fact, most “new” episodes of civil war are actually *recurring* wars. Existing scholarship has shown that states with a history of civil war are much more likely to experience civil war than states that have never experienced civil war (e.g. Collier et al., 2003; Walter, 2004; Mason et al., 2011). This empirical reality is acknowledged explicitly in the Secretary-General's 2011 report on

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<sup>17</sup> On the role of the P-5, see, for example, Voeten (2001, 2005); Chapman (2011); Thompson (2006); Allen & Yuen (2013); Gibbs (1997); Mills & McNamee (2009).

preventative diplomacy, stressing the role that established UN peacekeeping missions can play in preventing conflict recurrence through on-the-ground mediation (S/2011/552, 14). While in some cases UN involvement in nonviolent disputes with a history of conflict follows shortly after the end of the war, in many cases, such as the Turkish Cypriot, Abkhazian, and Western Saharan disputes, much of the activity takes place years or decades after the violence subsides. This suggests that the UN is not just concerned with maintaining a short-term peace, but is also actively seeking to prevent the emergence of new episodes of violence.

The history of violence in a dispute is clearly observable and, as such, we expect it to strongly influence where the UN chooses to get involved. Additionally, the objectivity of prior conflict history is likely to aid the UN in overcoming political constraints on acting. As such, we expect the UN to be highly involved in disputes with a history of violence and to be able to do so using the most forceful and costly forms of intervention—such as sanctions and the deployment of force—in addition to less active forms of involvement like diplomacy and condemnation.

*Hypothesis 1:* UN preventive action is more likely in nonviolent disputes with a prior history of violence than in those without a history of violence.

The second set of factors we expect to influence where and how the UN intervenes is the regional context within which the dispute takes place. It is well established that civil wars frequently diffuse (Gleditsch, 2007; Buhaug & Gleditsch, 2008), and policymakers often pay attention to regional “hot spots” such as the Horn of Africa or the Balkans. Kathman (2011) argues and shows that third-party states evaluate the potential for regional destabilization when deciding whether to intervene into civil wars. Indeed, in 1993, the UN deployed the United Nations Preventative Deployment mission to Macedonia specifically to prevent contagion from the nearby civil wars in

Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. Refugee flows stemming from armed conflict, such as the flight of thousands of refugees to Cyprus during the Lebanese Civil War,<sup>18</sup> can also raise the regional risk of violence (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006), and may further motivate UN action.

While we expect the potential for regional contagion to motivate the UN to act preventively, this potential is less objectively obvious than a past history of violence. We anticipate the UN will pay less attention and be less motivated to devote substantial resources to these disputes than in disputes with a history of violence. In addition, because the potential for violence is less objectively obvious, political opposition to UN involvement in these disputes will be higher. This leads us to expect that, while the UN will be more likely to act in disputes where the potential for regional contagion is higher, it is more likely to intervene in less active and less costly ways such as authorizing diplomatic engagement and issuing condemnations.

*Hypothesis 2:* UN preventive action is more likely in nonviolent disputes with greater potential for regional contagion.

*Hypothesis 3:* UN deployments of force and issuances of sanctions in nonviolent disputes are more responsive to the history of violence than the regional context of violence.

A third set of indicators the UN can use pertains to the characteristics of the dispute itself. Practitioners have expectations about the types of disputes that are more or less prone to violence. Scholarship has suggested SD disputes are most likely to be violent when SD groups are internally divided (Cunningham, 2013), geographically concentrated (Toft, 2005), have ethnic kin in other states (Jenne, 2004), and when the state contains multiple SD groups (Walter, 2009). The UN can

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<sup>18</sup> E.g. *The New York Times* 18 September 1989. ‘As Lebanese Battles Worsen, War Refugees Swamp Cyprus.’

examine these factors, as well as more dynamic events, such as protests, negotiations, referenda, and elections, to determine the likelihood of violence.

However, determining which disputes are more prone to violence based on their current dispute-level characteristics is more subjective and uncertain than when there is a history of violence in the dispute or current conflict in the region. Even our best forecasting models based on dispute-level variables fail to predict many conflict outbreaks and produce many false-positives (Ward et al., 2013). Due to the political constraints on UN preventive action in cases that are not clearly at risk for conflict escalation, we do not have empirical predictions about the effects of dispute-level factors on UN action.

### **Empirical analysis**

We test the determinants of UN preventive action using data on all disputes between SD movements and states from 1960 to 2005.<sup>19</sup> The population of SD movements comes from the Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) Peace and Conflict Report (Marshall & Gurr, 2003).<sup>20</sup> This report identifies 145 SD movements residing in 77 countries which demand increased local control and autonomy for an ethnic group in some territory. This list encompasses both groups that have participated in civil war, such as the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, as well as those, such as the East Caprivians in Namibia, that have not. As such, these data represent a set of disputes that have the potential to become violent, some of which experience civil war, some of which do not, and there is substantial variation within the violent disputes in the timing of the

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<sup>19</sup> 1960-2005 is the date range for which Cunningham (2014) has coded the data that we use on the existence and characteristics of SD movements.

<sup>20</sup> The CIDCM data stem from the Minorities at Risk (MAR) data, which focuses on ‘politically active ethnic groups,’ (see Cunningham, 2013) so ‘SD movements’ here exclude separatist movements without a clear ethnic dimension.

onset and end of violence. Of the SD movements we examine, 44 percent experienced a civil war at some point. The appendix provides a table listing each self-determination dispute and indicating whether it experienced a civil war at any point in our data.

To operationalize UN action, we examine the issuance of UNSC resolutions comprising the authorization of diplomatic engagement, condemnation, the authorization of sanctions, and the deployment of force targeted toward these disputes. The UN has a number of sub-agencies that work on the ground in disputes, and much of their action could potentially be viewed as ‘conflict prevention.’ However, UNSC resolutions provide the most visible signal of UN interest in the conflict, precisely because passing a resolution requires at minimum no opposition from the P-5. Resolutions provide clear evidence to disputants that, at the highest levels, the United Nations is actively monitoring a dispute.

To examine where and how the UNSC issues resolutions related to diplomacy, condemnations, sanctions, and force we have coded the content of all UNSC resolutions directly related to all active self-determination disputes from 1960 to 2005. We used data from Beardsley (2013), who has coded whether a resolution pertains to diplomacy, the authorization of force, sanctions, or condemnation based on the text of the operative paragraphs of the resolution. After matching the resolutions to the countries with SD movements, we went through each resolution and determined if the resolution directly pertained to the SD movement in question, indirectly pertained, or was not relevant.<sup>21</sup> In this article, we consider the UNSC to have been active in a particular

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<sup>21</sup> The International Peace Institute (IPI) provides important data on "Compliance with Security Council Resolutions" (Mikulaschek & Perry, 2013). However, the IPI data only cover disputes that have escalated to civil war, so cannot be used to examine conflict *prevention*.

dispute-year if it issued a resolution directly pertaining to that dispute,<sup>22</sup> and which contained calls for diplomatic action by the UN, the authorization of the deployment of force by the UN or its member states, the assignment of sanctions, or condemnation.

Resolutions authorizing diplomatic actions include those calling for good offices, mediation, fact-finding, civilian monitoring missions, and the formation of special tribunals. An example is UNSC Resolution 367 (March 1975), which called on the UN Secretary-General to undertake a mediation role in the dispute over the status of Turkish Cypriots. We also consider as diplomacy initiatives that focus on non-military peacebuilding activities, such as political assistance as well as demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR). An example is Resolution 1590 (March 2005), which mandated the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) to assist in the return of refugees and displaced persons following the adoption of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Sudanese government and the Southern Sudanese representatives.

UNSC resolutions comprise condemnations when the Security Council deplores hostilities, non-compliance with prior UN directives or international agreements, or human rights violations.<sup>23</sup> We also consider as condemnations threats of sanctions that are not actually implemented in a resolution. An example of a condemnation is Resolution 1076 (October 1996), which condemned the civil war inside of Afghanistan — a conflict which incorporated the Tajik and Uzbek self-determination disputes.

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<sup>22</sup> In most cases, a resolution was coded as directly pertaining to a particular SD dispute if the SD group was explicitly mentioned in the text of the resolution. However, in other cases, the group was not explicitly mentioned, but was invoked — e.g., when the "two communities" are mentioned in resolutions discussing the Turkish-Greek dispute (e.g. Resolution 383). In such cases, our decision criteria for direct relevance to an SD dispute was that the leaders of the SD group would understand the resolution as being addressed specifically to their dispute with the government.

<sup>23</sup> We only consider condemnations in the operative paragraphs (excluding the preambles) of the resolutions.

We code UNSC resolutions as levying sanctions when they impose, reauthorize, or expand sanctions on the country involved. Resolution 713, for example, established an embargo in September 1991 on military material being exported to the former Yugoslavia.

Finally, resolutions authorizing the deployment of force can either include UN peacekeeping missions — such as the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (Resolution 858, August 1993)— or authorizations of non-UN multinational forces — such as the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF).<sup>24</sup> For the purposes of this study, we only focus on “new force” authorizations, which authorize a new deployment, expand an existing mandate, or authorize “all necessary means.” We consider the expansion of existing mandates to be “new force,” because the UNSC may authorize extant missions to use additional actions to forestall violence or may expand the geographic scope of the mission — effectively establishing a new UN presence. For example, the UNPROFOR mission was originally established in 1992 by UNSC Resolution 743 with a mandate limited to Croatia, but this was later expanded to include Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNSC 758) and Macedonia (UNSC 795). Technically-speaking, there was still only one mission (UNPROFOR), but a new application of force was established as its mandate was expanded to new disputes. We also code the authorizations of ‘all necessary means’ as ‘new force’ because this language is rare and has special significance, signaling that the UNSC is using the full weight of its authority. In contrast, we do not consider resolutions that simply extend the duration of an existing mission — without an expansion of the mandate or authorization of ‘all necessary means’ — to be relevant preventative action, because peace operations are typically extended at regular intervals without any adjustments to the mandate.

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<sup>24</sup> While resolutions authorizing the deployment of peacekeepers or other deployments may not specifically authorize ‘force’ as an action, we consider ‘force’ to involve the deployment of military or police forces, not necessarily the use of violence.

We use this coding to generate our main, binary dependent variable of ‘Any UNSC Action’ in a given dispute-year, and additional binary dependent variables for each type of UN action. These variables are not mutually exclusive; a dispute can attract multiple resolutions in a year, and each resolution can contain more than one action.

**Table II. UNSC actions in self-determination disputes (1960-2005)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>SD group</b>	<b>Condemn</b>	<b>Diplomacy</b>	<b>Sanctions</b>	<b>New force</b>	<b>Total actions</b>
Afghanistan	Tajiks	4	0	3	1	8
Afghanistan	Uzbeks	4	0	3	1	8
Azerbaijan	Armenians	2	1	1	0	4
Bosnia	Croats	23	8	7	30	68
Bosnia	Serbs	26	8	7	30	71
Croatia	Serbs	10	7	2	16	35
Cyprus	Turkish Cypriots	14	60	0	2	76
Georgia	Abkhazians	22	4	0	4	30
India	Kashmiri Hindus	1	0	0	0	1
India	Kashmiri Muslims	1	1	0	1	3
Iraq	Kurds	1	0	0	0	1
Israel	Palestinians	25	2	0	0	27
Lebanon	Palestinians	32	13	0	9	54
Macedonia	Albanians	1	0	0	0	1
Morocco	Saharawis	6	7	0	3	16
Russia	Chechens	1	0	0	0	1
Spain	Basques	1	0	0	0	1
Sudan	Southerners	0	2	0	1	3
Yugoslavia	Albanians	1	0	0	0	1
Yugoslavia	Croats	0	0	1	0	1
Yugoslavia	Kosovar Albanians	3	0	1	1	5
Yugoslavia	Slovenes	0	0	1	0	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>416</b>

Table II presents counts of each type of action across these disputes. Condemnation is the most common. However, many resolutions mandating the deployment of force also contain

condemnations of the violence that the force is being deployed to stop. Diplomacy is the second most common UNSC action — with the majority of diplomacy directed towards the Turkish Cypriot dispute. Renewals of the peacekeeping mandate in Cyprus were often accompanied by authorizations for the UN Secretary-General to pursue good offices missions in Cyprus. Surprisingly, sanctions are much rarer than even new authorizations of force—with the Balkan SD disputes attracting the majority of sanctions. It may be that the political hurdles of achieving sufficient support in the UNSC for sanctions even against the most egregious violators of human rights can be steep.<sup>25</sup> It may also be that sanctions are a relatively blunt instrument that are ill-suited for dispute-level targeting. While the Balkans also see the majority of new UN authorizations of force, there are a wide range of SD disputes with at least one authorization of force.<sup>26</sup>

In our analysis, we examine the effect of conflict history, regional contagion, and dispute-level characteristics on UN preventive action. Before we turn to that analysis, looking at Table 2, we can quickly identify two important determinants of UN action. First, the UN almost never issues resolutions related to SD disputes within the P-5 even while every P-5 member has at least three SD disputes active at some time from 1960-2005 (see Appendix). The lack of involvement in P-5 SD disputes illustrates some of the constraints on the UN. Indeed, the only UNSC action that applies to a P-5 member is Resolution 1440, which condemned the taking of hostages at a theater in Moscow by Chechen extremists and expressed *support* toward Russia.

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<sup>25</sup> Regarding South Africa, no UNSC resolutions were passed because of the willingness of the USA and UK to veto such resolutions. Regarding Syria, at the time of writing, Russia has resisted all attempts for sanctions against Syria to be authorized in the UNSC.

<sup>26</sup> The high counts of ‘new force’ for the conflicts in former Yugoslavia stem from resolutions either a) involving expansions of existing mandates or b) including instructions to use ‘all necessary means’ to carry out mandates.

Second, as expected, the UNSC is active at a greater rate in violent disputes. Table 2 shows that the Balkan SD disputes take the lion's share of UN involvement, generally. The Palestinian SD disputes in both Lebanon and Israel attract a great deal of involvement as well. Table I in the introduction shows that while there are more dispute-years with UNSC action in non-violent disputes (79 versus 42), the UNSC gets involved through the issuance of relevant resolutions in violent years in SD disputes at more than twice the rate that it does in nonviolent years (5.65% of dispute years versus 2.50%).

The clear association between violence and UNSC action shows that, not surprisingly, the UN is much more active in sub-state disputes once they become civil wars. However, we can see from Tables 1 and 2 that the UN does still act in periods of these disputes that are nonviolent.

### **Independent variables**

To test the theoretical framework here, we measure the potential for regional contagion, the history of conflict in the dispute, and the domestic characteristics that affect the propensity for civil war in SD disputes. To measure the potential for regional contagion, we count the number of nearby states experiencing an internal armed conflict.<sup>27</sup> We code this using the Uppsala Conflict Data Project/Peace Research Institute Oslo Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD) (Gleditsch et al., 2002; Melander, Themnér & Wallensteen, 2016). The ACD identifies internal armed conflict as conflict between the state and one or more rebel group generating at least twenty-five battle-related deaths in a calendar year. In coding the regional civil war indicator, we include armed conflicts over both

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<sup>27</sup> "Neighbors" are those with capital cities within 900km of one another, defined using CShapes (Weidmann et al., 2010). This variable is measured contemporaneously (at  $t$ ). Including a one-year lag of neighboring civil war does not substantively change the effect of the un-lagged variable from the results discussed in the following section (see Appendix).

territory and government. To measure the potential for within-country contagion, we also include a dummy variable of whether another civil war is active within the same country as the SD movement.

To measure the history of conflict, we include a dummy variable for whether the SD movement experienced a civil war since 1946 and a count for how many “peace years” have elapsed since either the most recent civil war or the first point in the data in which the SD movement was at risk for experiencing a civil war (i.e. 1946 or its entry into the data).<sup>28</sup> These variables allow us to examine the effect of the history of dispute violence on the likelihood of UNSC intervention, as well as to some degree account for duration dependence (Beck, Katz & Tucker, 1998).

To measure the characteristics of SD disputes, we draw from Cunningham (2013), who conducted the seminal study on the escalation of SD disputes to civil war. We include the number of SD movement factions (logged), which Cunningham (2013) shows to robustly increase the chance of civil war as well as an indicator for whether the state has previously made concessions to the movement, which can be a mechanism states use to reduce violence (Cunningham, 2011). We include also an indicator of democracy, since democracies have more legitimate political avenues by which the SD group’s grievances can be heard (e.g. Hegre et al., 2001).<sup>29</sup> We also include the natural log of a state's GDP per capita, as poorer states will likely lack the capacity to prevent insurgencies from coalescing (Collier et al., 2003). Drawing on Jenne (2004), Cunningham (2013) posits that neighboring kin groups can contribute to the escalation of disputes to armed conflict; we thus include a dummy variable for whether neighboring kin groups are present.

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<sup>28</sup> These variables come from the ACD and from Cunningham (2013), who pairs the data with SD disputes.

<sup>29</sup> Democracies are those with a combined Polity index greater than six (Jagers & Marshall, 2000).

## Model estimation

Our data include all state-SD group dispute-years—our unit of analysis<sup>30</sup>—from 1960-2005, excluding years in which a civil war between the SD group and state is ongoing, but including the year in which civil war began.<sup>31</sup> We exclude ongoing war years because action during such time periods is outside of our focus on conflict *prevention*. We estimate models for the occurrence of the different types of UNSC resolutions — one model for any of the four types and one for each of them. Each of these dependent variables are binary, with the percentages of ones less than 5%, so we use rare events logit (King & Zeng, 1999). The models of sanctions could not be estimated because of too few authorizations of sanctions related to SD disputes. We estimate standard errors that are robust to clustering at the level of the SD dispute.

As control variables, we first include a measure of P-5 security interests, operationalized as a dummy variable of whether the state in which a dispute took place was a P-5 member or ally of a P-5 member.<sup>32</sup> We also include a control for the Cold War (1960 to 1991 in our data), when Security Council politics markedly reduced the potential for UNSC preventive diplomacy. Finally, we control for the number of states in the home-country's "neighborhood," so that our variable that counts the number of nearby civil wars is not just picking up the size of the state's neighborhood.

## Results

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<sup>30</sup> E.g. Macedonia-Albanians-1995 and Macedonia-Albanians-1996.

<sup>31</sup> This approach does include dispute-years in which civil war broke out, given that these very often include a period of peace prior to the outbreak of violence in which the UNSC may take action. In additional analyses (Appendix), we exclude UNSC actions that occurred in the year of civil war onset, but after significant violence began. The results do not change our main findings.

<sup>32</sup> We use the COW Alliance Data (Gibler, 2009).

Table III presents the exponentiated coefficients — odds ratios, with values greater than one indicating a positive relationship — and standard errors. We first ran a logit model with the onset of civil war in an SD dispute as the dependent variable in order to confirm that the explanatory variables help anticipate the outbreak of a civil war. Model 1 shows the estimated results from this model and confirms that many of the variables used by Cunningham (2013) have a statistically significant association with civil war onset in SD disputes. Disputes with more factions, fewer previous concessions, non-democratic political institutions, that take place in poorer states, and with a history of civil war are more likely to escalate to a civil war.

**Table III. Determinants of resolutions in nonviolent SD disputes**

	1: Logit <i>Civil War</i>	2: RE Logit <i>Any UNSC</i>	3: RE Logit <i>Diplomacy</i>	4: RE Logit <i>Force</i>	5: RE Logit <i>Condemn</i>
Factions (logged)	2.437* (0.480)	0.666 (0.383)	0.810 (0.356)	0.947 (0.364)	0.583 (0.380)
Previous concessions (lag)	0.565* (0.140)	1.532 (1.199)	0.821 (0.617)	0.257* (0.147)	1.823 (1.263)
GDP per capita (lag)	0.747* (0.083)	2.210* (0.581)	1.823 (0.743)	0.991 (0.566)	2.079* (0.735)
Democracy (lag)	0.543* (0.156)	0.707 (0.600)	2.383 (1.427)	0.385 (0.420)	0.331 (0.272)
Neighboring Kin	1.644+ (0.428)	1.785 (1.823)	1.366 (1.379)	0.966 (0.956)	1.653 (1.479)
Previous civil war	1.579 (0.489)	13.560* (8.841)	11.120* (4.794)	6.251* (3.877)	15.230* (12.450)
Years since civil war	0.968* (0.014)	0.972 (0.027)	0.953 (0.031)	0.975 (0.030)	0.995 (0.018)
Nearby civil war		2.096* (0.492)	3.336* (1.047)	1.344 (0.419)	1.892* (0.509)
Other civil war in State		0.478 (0.352)	0.304 (0.295)	0.779 (0.690)	0.703 (0.525)
Cold War		1.227 (1.100)	4.092* (2.878)	0.418 (0.442)	0.317+ (0.218)
P-5 or P-5 ally		0.331 (0.396)	0.069+ (0.096)	0.978 (1.560)	1.196 (1.086)
Nearby States		1.063 (0.066)	1.019 (0.108)	1.177+ (0.116)	1.098 (0.084)
N	2,503	2,502	2,502	2,502	2,502

Exponentiated coefficients (odds ratios); Robust standard errors in parentheses

+ p<0.10; \* p<0.05, two-tailed

Models 2 through 5 pertain to the occurrence of the different types of UNSC resolutions during SD disputes that are not experiencing an ongoing civil war and provide tests of Hypotheses 1-3.<sup>33</sup> We find strong support for the first two hypotheses: that UN preventive action is more likely in nonviolent disputes with a history of civil war and when the dispute takes place in a region with nearby civil wars. The “previous civil war” variable is positive and statistically significant with a large coefficient in Models 2-5, and the “nearby civil war” variable is positive and statistically significant in all but Model 4.

The results from Model 2 comport well with the expectations of Hypotheses 1 and 2 for where UN action was likely. Hypothesis 3 concerns observable expectations regarding *how* the UN gets involved. Again, we find clear support. Models 3-5 show that diplomacy, condemnations and authorizations of force are more likely in nonviolent SD disputes with a previous civil war. The results are strongest for the “lighter” forms of UNSC action — diplomacy and condemnations. Compared to SD disputes without any previous civil war, UNSC diplomacy and condemnation are more than 10 times more likely in the SD disputes that have experienced a previous civil war. However, the coefficient on previous civil war in Model 4, predicting the authorization of force, is large as well.

Also consistent with Hypothesis 3, we find that the potential for regional contagion is significantly associated with diplomacy and condemnation. On average, for an SD dispute that is in a country with one civil war in its regional neighborhood—such as Yugoslav Albanians in 2001—the odds of a UNSC resolution related to diplomatic activity increase by 234% relative to an SD dispute in a country that resides in a peaceful region—such as Scots in the UK in the same year. The odds

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<sup>33</sup> In addition, we examined Receiver-Operator Characteristic curves for each of the UNSC action models and with regards to in-sample predictive advantage. The curves further demonstrate the substantive importance of regional contagion and conflict history and the relative unimportance of dispute and state-level characteristics (see Appendix).

of a resolution related to condemnation increase by 89% in expectation. However, as expected by Hypothesis 3, the strength of the relationship between nearby civil wars and UNSC involvement is diminished for resolutions pertaining to new force authorizations, and the coefficient is statistically insignificant. Interestingly, we do not find that UNSC action of any type is more likely when there is another civil war in the same state. All of the coefficients are less than one, indicating the presence of a negative relationship, although there is substantial imprecision around the estimates. One potential explanation could be that the presence of another civil war overshadows attention to other SD movements in the same state.

While we examine the effect of dispute-level characteristics associated with the likelihood of civil war, we did not have a prediction of their effect because we anticipated that political constraints would severely limit the ability of these relatively static variables to generate UN preventive involvement in SD disputes. The results show little evidence of the importance of dispute-level factors in driving UNSC resolutions oriented toward conflict prevention.<sup>34</sup> The number of factions, democracy, and neighboring kin groups never have a statistically significant relationship with UNSC action. GDP per capita does have a statistically significant relationship with UNSC action, but the direction of the effect (negative) is *opposite* that of its correlation with civil war. This suggests that UNSC action is more likely to go to states that are more economically developed, which is the opposite effect we would anticipate if the UN were directing its action to disputes with

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<sup>34</sup> In another approach, we replaced the dispute- and country-level factors with a propensity score generated from the civil war model (Model 1) — following the Nordhaus et al. (2012) approach to international conflict risk. Here also, the dispute-level factors aggregated in the propensity score are not associated with increased UNSC involvement. This specification does not substantively change our main findings.

characteristics that make them more likely to escalate to civil war.<sup>35</sup> The previous concessions variable does have a statistically significant and negative relationship with UNSC authorizations of new force, but the bulk of the evidence suggests that state- and dispute-level variables positively related to the potential for civil war do not strongly predict UNSC activity.

Turning to the other variables included in the models, we find the Cold War is associated with a higher likelihood of diplomatic interventions — which is counterintuitive but driven in part by the high rates of diplomacy in the Cypriot conflict during the Cold War. We find, consistent with expectations, that SD movements in P-5 states or P-5 allies are typically less likely to experience UNSC resolutions. Moreover, SD movements in states with many neighbors tend to experience more UNSC resolutions.

### **Additional analyses**

To provide additional evidence for the main results, as well as additional insight into the patterns observed, we pursued a number of alternative model specifications (results in Appendix). We first replace the P5 and P5 Ally indicator with the natural log of the state's trade volume with a specific P5 member (one each for each of the P5). The results show that trade with Russia is associated with a greater likelihood of UNSC action in SD disputes<sup>36</sup> while trade with the US or China is associated with a reduced likelihood. Trade with either the UK or France does not have a statistically significant

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<sup>35</sup> Additional analysis including a squared term of GDP per capita suggests that UNSC involvement is most likely to go to disputes in states with middling levels of economic development. This suggests the UN may be more likely to act in disputes where the government has some basic capacity to forestall a nascent civil war, but not in particularly well-developed states.

<sup>36</sup> This result is driven largely by the relatively high volume of trade that Russia has with Cyprus, Bosnia, Georgia, Croatia, and Lebanon in years in which disputes in those countries see UNSC action.

association. These models yielded no change to previous civil war while nearby civil war is no longer statistically significant in the Condemnation model or the Any UNSC Action model, but remains highly significant in the Diplomacy model ( $p < .01$ ).

To address historical UN involvement, we added a cumulative count of the number of UNSC actions directed at the dispute. We find that the greater the record of prior UN involvement, the higher the likelihood of subsequent involvement. There is some loss of statistical significance for previous civil war in the individual action models, but it remains robust in the Any UNSC Action model. Nearby civil war loses statistical significance in the condemnation and any action models but remains robust in the diplomacy model. Controlling for other types of UNSC action in the individual action models (e.g. controlling for diplomacy and condemnation in the force model) does not substantively change the results for previous civil war, and while there is a loss of statistical significance in the condemnation and any action models for nearby civil war, it remains significant for diplomacy ( $p < .001$ ).

We also explored in more detail the effect the risk of contagion plays in UNSC action. We first limited the nearby civil war variable to only *territorial* civil wars—the type that stem from SD disputes. Here, the effect size and statistical significance of nearby civil war generally increases, suggesting that the contagion risk for SD disputes is judged by the UNSC to be most concerning for other SD disputes. Second, we employed a more restrictive measure of nearby civil war that captures only wars in states that *both* share a border and whose capitals are less than 900 kilometers away. This measure is no longer statistically significant<sup>37</sup> and there is some weak evidence that the UNSC is *less* likely to involve itself in disputes that are literally "next door" to a civil war in another country. This, and the robustness of our original measure, leads us to believe that the UNSC is proactive with

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<sup>37</sup> The results for Previous Civil War do not change.

regards to regional hotspot conflicts, but not with regards to the direct spillover of individual civil wars across borders.

We addressed also the historical effect of regional and within-country civil wars on UNSC involvement. We added three-year moving averages of the number of nearby civil wars and the number of other SD civil wars in the country, respectively. We find that while the state's recent history of SD civil wars is not a statistically significant driver of UNSC involvement,<sup>38</sup> the recent history of regional conflicts is.

We also examined different plausible populations of SD disputes that are candidates for UNSC preventative activity. We first excluded all dispute-years in which there is another civil war in the same country as the SD dispute. Second, we included only disputes-years where the SD dispute had been at peace for at least three years. There were no changes to our main findings in either of these additional tests.

Third, while we consider both recurring and new civil wars to be areas where conflict "prevention" applies, we do consider separately SD disputes where civil war has previously *never* occurred. This analysis drops approximately two-thirds of the observations and, not surprisingly, leads to losses of statistical significance for most variables. However, there is evidence that the UNSC takes into account regional considerations even absent a prior history of significant violence — the nearby civil war variable remains positive across the models and is statistically significant in the diplomacy model at the .10 level.

While the UN is ostensibly more active in preventing recurring violence, the activity we identify as 'prevention' in the main analyses is not just taking place following a violent conflict. Though the effects are not as statistically significant nor as substantively strong as in the full sample,

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<sup>38</sup> The inclusion of the variable does not substantively change our main findings. The same is true when adding a dummy variable for whether or not another SD group in the state has ever had a civil war.

the UNSC appears more likely to issue resolutions in response to the threat of regional contagion, even in disputes that have no history of severe violence. This is particularly true for diplomatic activity.

### **Conclusion**

We know the UN is constrained in where it can act by great power competition and the interests of the P-5. Additionally, we know that, particularly after the end of the Cold War, the UN exerts considerable effort at seeking to resolve ongoing violent disputes. The results in this article show that the UN does not wait for violence to start, but gets involved in relatively peaceful disputes that have a greater likelihood of escalating to violence. Specifically, the UNSC is more likely to adopt resolutions that apply to an SD movement when there is a possibility that a nearby civil war might undermine the security environment in the region or when a dispute has a history of significant violence.

These results also suggest that the UN uses a diverse set of tools in preventing violence. In both our main analyses and robustness checks, diplomacy is a central activity, suggesting that the UN's rhetorical focus on "preventative diplomacy" extends beyond mere words. The prominence of diplomacy is important; in other work we show that UNSC resolutions authorizing diplomatic action directly pertinent to SD disputes reduce the likelihood of civil war (Beardsley et al. 2017). By contrast, the UN rarely uses sanctions in SD disputes. There is a large literature on the effect of economic sanctions (e.g. Pape, 1997; Drezner, 2003), and a prominent argument is that the effect of sanctions is primarily driven by selection effects — i.e., it is the threat of sanctions that is effective. The analyses here generally only measure the authorization of sanctions,<sup>39</sup> not their threatened use, and this may partly explain why the UN does not appear to use sanctions proactively in our data.

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<sup>39</sup> If the UNSC explicitly threatened sanctions, we did code this under condemnations, but these are rare and miss the threats that members of the UNSC might issue outside of resolutions.

The results here suggest a clear need for further research on conflict prevention. Much discussion about conflict prevention by policymakers and academics focuses on the cases of failed prevention, and there are unfortunately many. However, our study shows the UN seeks to act in disputes before they become violent, and by only focusing on actual conflicts we have the potential to miss cases that would have become violent in the absence of UN action.

While in this article, we focus on the UNSC, regional organizations, national governments, and nongovernmental organizations also play an important role in conflict prevention (particularly in the area of diplomacy) and may actually be better positioned to respond quickly to disputes where violence is a possibility. Future research examining when and how a broader range of actors work preventively in nonviolent disputes, and whether these actions have an effect at reducing violence, is warranted.

### **Replication data**

The dataset and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article, as well as the Online Appendix, can be found at <http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets>.

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