Incident Coding Manual

Introduction

Users of this manual are assumed to be familiar with the contents of Jones, Bremer, and Singer (1996) since it provides important background information about this project. Coders should be given a copy of this article (available from the Project Documents section of the MID3 web site) to read at the beginning of their training. In addition, users should read over the Notes of MID 3 Project Meeting of August, 2000 (also available on the MID3 web site), especially pages 4-9 which elaborate and clarify many of the matters discussed below.

The incident coding process consists of the following steps.

1) Search sources for reports of potential incidents.
2) Identify legitimate incidents and assemble the pertinent reports.
3) Complete an incident coding form for each incident.
4) Enter incident information into the web-based central data archive.
5) File all materials related to an incident in one place.
6) Identify and resolve problems and anomalies which reviews reveal.

This manual is primarily concerned with step 3 of this process.

General Observations on Militarized Incidents[1]

- A militarized incident must occur among two or more interstate system members. Therefore, actions between a system member and the forces of a non-system member are not included. But if such an act is diplomatically protested by the state within which the non-system entity resides, then a militarized incident between the two system members is said to exist.
- Militarized actions are excluded from the incident category when they are provided for by treaty with, or occur at the invitation of, the targeted state. In such instances, no militarized incident exists until the treaty or invitation is revoked, and a militarized incident occurs, or the militarized actions by one state clearly exceed the bounds spelled out within a treaty or agreement between both parties.
- A militarized incident is an explicit, non-routine, and governmentally authorized action. Actions that are vague or non-specific do not qualify, and in cases of alleged or dubious actions, a militarized incident exists only when the "targeted" state responds—militarily or diplomatically—to that specific action or the action is verified by an impartial observer. In cases where violations of territory or cross-border firings occur routinely, each such incident should be coded whenever there was an authorized standing order to respond militarily to all such actions.[2]
- A militarized incident is an overt action taken by the official military forces or government representatives of a state (head of state, foreign minister, etc.). When regular forces are disguised as non-regular forces, operate with or command non-regular forces, or engage in covert operations, their actions are excluded unless and until further militarized incidents involving official forces take place, or when the targeted state responds—militarily or diplomatically—to the act in question. In states where official military forces are virtually nonexistent, military actions taken by local forces qualify as government authorized only when the local forces are directed by a representative of the central government to engage in a specific military action. Paramilitary forces are frequently quasi-official, and the degree to which they act with government approval varies by state and over time. Usually,

[1] Specific coding conventions may differ from these general observations, but official coding conventions should be given precedence over these general observations.

[2] At this time there is some controversy as to whether or not a target must be aware of the threat, display, or use of force at the time it occurs in order for the action to be considered an incident. See the MID3 web site Discussion Forum for further clarification.

further research will be required to determine if actions taken by paramilitary forces are officially sanctioned.

- Military interactions between two states are not coded as separate militarized incidents if they are at war. A state at war may, however, be involved in one or more incidents of military confrontation with a state that is not involved in that war.
- Actions taken by the official forces of one state against private citizens of another state are generally not coded as militarized incidents. Exceptions include seizures (of personnel or material) within the confines of disputed territory, attacks on international shipping, and the pursuit (by air, land or sea) of rebel forces across international boundaries. Further, such incidents are included only when the "targeted" state responds militarily or diplomatically protests the action.
- A militarized incident involving competing territorial claims must take place within the context of a well-defined geographic area. Uncontested expansion into the territory of an independent non-system member by itself does not constitute a militarized action until there is a militarized incident by another system member in response to the initial action. However, the expansion by military force of one interstate member into claimed or contested territory of another interstate member can, by itself, constitute a militarized incident.

Using the Incident Coding Form

The incident coding form is a four-page folder that should be completed for each qualifying incident found. Reports[3] from different sources and/or different times that pertain to a given incident should be related to and referenced on a single incident coding form. Some fields on the form require written responses, and in completing these fields it is very important that the entered text be clearly written (*preferably printed*). Instructions concerning how each field in the form is to be completed follow. Whenever possible, *copies of the original reports* that pertain to the incident should be included in the folder.

Reporting Region

The data collection work is distributed across the following nine regional centers, and the Reporting Region check box is used to designate which region is reporting the incident. The state composition of the regions is specified in the regional designation list (the latest version of which will always be available from the MID3 web site). *Any qualifying action in which a regional state is either an actor or a target should be coded by the relevant regional center*.[4] Cross-regional incidents will be flagged by MID Central at Penn State and a check will be made to be sure that all affected regions are aware of such incidents.

[3] A "report" is defined as an account of some action or actions that describes some aspect of an incident which appears in one source on a specific date.

[4] In the previous MID collection only escalatory incidents were coded (see Jones, Bremer, and Singer, 1996). In this effort we will attempt to identify *all* threats, displays and uses of force by one state against another between 1993 and 2001.

Region Abb	Region Name	Center Location	Principal Contact Person
AF	Africa	Vanderbilt & Kentucky	Jim Ray
CE	Central Europe	Texas A&M	Glenn Palmer
FE	Far East	Illinois	Paul Diehl
LA	Latin America	Florida State	Paul Hensel
ME	Middle East	Pittsburgh & Tel Aviv	Chuck Gochman
NA	North America	Ohio State	Brian Pollins
OC	Oceania	Binghamton	Pat Regan
SA	South Asia	Mississippi	Dan Geller
WE	Western Europe	Rice	Ric Stoll

Regional Incident

The Regional Incident # is assigned by the authorized agent of the regional center, and *this should be assigned before the coding form is distributed for use*. These numbers must be right justified, sequential (each region starting with one) and *unique*. If for some reason an incident form is spoiled or the coded incident is not ultimately entered into the incident database, its number should not be reassigned to another incident form. The Master Incident # will be assigned by MID Central when the incident is entered into the database, and this should be noted on the incident coding form at that time.

Actor(s)

The actor (or actors) is defined as the state(s) that undertook the qualifying action. Joint actions (i.e., those undertaken by more than one actor against the same target) must be clearly and officially coordinated. If this is not true, then the action(s) should be considered separate incidents. Each actor should be entered as a *capitalized state abbreviation* (separated by commas and no spaces if there is more than one). The standard COW state abbreviations are listed on the last page of the incident coding form,[5] and care must be taken to enter the correct ones. Examples of valid entries in this field are:

ARG
ARG,BRA,CHL

Target

The target is defined as the state against which the qualifying action was taken. An incident must have one and only one target, and if an action is directed at two or more states, then two or more incidents must be coded. The target should be entered as a *capitalized state abbreviation*. The standard COW state abbreviations are listed on the last page of the incident coding form, and care must be taken to enter the correct one. An examples of valid entries in this field is:

GMY

Incident Date

The Incident Date fields specify the year, month, and day upon which the incident began and ended. The *year and month of the Start Date and End Date must be identified*, and it is highly desirable to know the beginning and ending days, as well. If the beginning day and/or ending day cannot be determined then the relevant field(s) should be left blank. Please note that we seek to specify here the dates of the incident, not the dates of the report(s) of the incident. Every effort should be made to accurately day-date the start and end dates of the incident, but it is inevitable that some ambiguity about these dates (especially with respect to the precise days) will be encountered. If no day or days are specified, then ultimately it will be assumed that the incident could have started or ended any time during the relevant year and month. Hence, more information is better than none with respect to the start and end days. All

[5] Any changes to this list will be posted on the MID3 web site.

incident start and end dates are inherently "fuzzy," and our objective is to measure them as precisely as possible.

Incidents are assumed to last one day unless there is information to the contrary. However, a similar action in a similar place within 3 days of the original action will be considered a continuation of the original action, not a new action. Similar actions in similar places that occur more than 3 days later should be coded as new incidents.

Incident Type

The Incident Type check box is used to specify which particular action was undertaken in the incident. These are divided into three categories—threats of force, displays of force, and uses of force—and the specific actions within each category are listed below. Please note that only one action should be selected for each incident report form (multiple actions require multiple incident report forms). The specific coding rules for each incident type are given below.

Threats of force	Displays of force	Uses of force
Threat to use force	Show of Force[6]	Blockade
Threat to blockade	Alert	Occupation of territory
Threat to occupy territory	Nuclear alert	Seizure of material or personnel
Threat to declare war	Mobilization	Attack[7]
Threat to use CBR weapons	Border fortification	Clash
Threat to join ongoing war[8]	Border Violation	Declaration of war
Other Codes		Tactical use of CBR weapons
Unsure		Interstate war
		Join interstate war

Threats of Force

The coding of threats of force can be particularly difficult because threats are often transmitted in ambiguous diplomatic language, making them hard to identify and interpret. Diplomats often refer to the extreme, dire, serious, or dangerous consequences of an act without necessarily conveying that a threat to use force exists. However, all threats are contingent upon some condition, and a state making a threat of force must communicate its intention to use force against another state (or other states) if the other state(s) acts, fails to act, or does not refrain from acting in a specified manner. In addition, there must be evidence that the threat was received by the targeted state or it is reasonable that the threat was/would have been received for the incident to be included. Finally, for an incident to be coded as a threat of force one of six different types of action described below must be stated or clearly implied within the communicated threat.

Threat to use force—the threat by one state to use its regular armed forces to fire upon the armed forces or violate the territory of another state.

Threat to blockade—the threat by one state to use its regular armed forces to seal off the territory of another state to prevent partial or complete entry or exit.

Threat to occupy territory—the threat by one state to use military force to occupy all or part of another state's territory without that state's permission.

Threat to declare war—the threat by one state to issue an official declaration of war against another state.

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[6] In previous MID collection efforts a distinction was made between shows of troops, ships, and planes. Since this is not a terribly meaningful distinction and troop, ship, and plane combinations are frequently encountered, this distinction has been discontinued.

[7] Previously this type of action was referred to as a Raid. Reflection suggests that Attack is a more accurate label.

[8] This is a new type of incident.

Threat to use CBR weapons—the threat by one state to use chemical, bacteriological, and/or radiological weapons against the territory or forces of another state.

Threat to join ongoing war—the threat by one state to join the opposing side of an inter-, extra-, or intra-state war in which another state is currently involved.

If a threat is coded, then a type 5 note must be added stating specifically the "if XXX, then YYY" conditions of the threat.

Displays of Force

Displays of force are in some ways easier to code than threats of force since actions are less ambiguous than words and such events tend to be more accurately recorded by reporters and historians. However, the target of a display of force is not always clearly defined and must sometimes be inferred from contextual factors. And observers are not always unanimous about who is the primary target of a display of force. Nevertheless, every effort must be made to identify the explicit or implicit target of a display of force. If *no target* can be reliably assessed for *non-routine* shows of force, alerts, or mobilizations, the incident should be coded with the coder's best guess as to the target of the display of force and a note (type 5) added describing the ambiguity. The six types of displays of force are listed and described below.

Show of force—a public demonstration by a state of its military forces intended to intimidate another state but not involving actual combat operations. Examples include non-routine maneuvers and military exercises, naval patrols immediately outside the territorial waters of another state, and the intentional violation of another state's territorial waters or air space.

Alert—an increase in the military readiness of a state's regular armed forces.

Nuclear alert—an increase in military readiness of a state's nuclear forces.

Mobilization—the activation by a state of all or part of its previously inactive (reserve) forces.

Border fortification—an explicit attempt to publicly demonstrate control over a border area through the construction or non-routine reinforcement of military outposts in or near the border area.

Border violation—a crossing of a territorial land boundary for a period of *less than twenty-four hours* by military forces of one state without any significant damage to the territory or population of the violated state. Since no military force is actually used within this incident type and no long-term occupation of territory takes place, this type of military action is consider more of a display than a use of force.

Uses of Force

Nine incident types discussed below are considered uses of force. With the exception of the declaration of war, each entails an active military operation by one or more states. The other eight incident types involve the active participation of the military forces of one state against the military forces of another state and/or the intentional infliction of significant damage to, or possession of, the territory, citizens or goods of another state.

Blockade—the use of military forces by one state to partially or completely seal off the territory of another state to prevent the entry or exit of goods or personnel. Stopping or inspecting ships or vehicles or the confiscation of goods in transit is evidence of the erection of a blockade. A formal declaration is not required.

Occupation of territory—the use of military force by one state to occupy all or part of another state's territory for a period of *at least twenty-four hours* (occupations lasting less than twenty-four hours are usually considered border violations). In addition, a border violation differs from an occupation of territory in that the latter usually entails other actions, such as the establishment of military bases or the assumption of governmental functions in the occupied area, that indicate that the occupation is intended to be long

term. The immediate occupation during a post-war period by a victorious side's army is not coded as an incident unless provisions of a relevant treaty or agreement are violated by the occupying forces or further militarized incidents are undertaken by the state being occupied.

Seizure—the capture by one state of another state's material goods or personnel. A distinction is made between official and non-official goods and personnel. Official material goods of another state include such things as its armaments, military equipment, financial assets, and government papers or documents. A state's official personnel are members of its armed forces and its government officials. The holding of official goods or personnel for a period of at least twenty-four hours is considered a seizure.

Non-official personnel of a state are its citizens, and non-official material goods are the property of those citizens. For the capture of non-official goods or personnel to qualify as a seizure it must involve the direct use of military force or it must be officially protested by the affected state. Again the period of detention or confiscation must be at least twenty-four hours in order for the incident to be considered a seizure.

Attack—the use of regular armed forces of a state to fire upon the armed forces, population, or territory of another state. Occasional military interventions into an ongoing civil war on behalf of insurgents may be considered this type of incident.

Clash—the outbreak of sustained military hostilities between the regular armed forces of two or more states. This differs from an Attack, a unilateral action, in that a Clash is a basically reciprocal in nature. The initiator (the Actor side) may or may not be clearly identified, and it will be assumed that the designation of Actor(s) and Target is arbitrary in this type of incident unless stated otherwise in the Notes section.

Declaration of war—an official statement by one state that a state of war exists between itself and another state.

Tactical use of CBR weapons—the use of chemical, bacteriological, and/or radiological weapons by one state against the territory or forces of another state.

Interstate war—the outbreak of interstate war between two or more states as defined by the Correlates of War project, i.e., sustained military combat between the military forces of COW states that results in 1,000 or more combat-related deaths of official military personnel. Like the Clash incident, the initiator (the Actor side) may or may not be clearly identified in an interstate war incident, and it will be assumed that the designation of Actor(s) and Target is arbitrary in this type of incident unless stated otherwise in the Notes section.

Join interstate war—the joining of an ongoing COW interstate war by a state in opposition to another state that is currently involved in that war. The details concerning the relevant war must be supplied in the Notes section.

The Unsure box should only be checked if the coder believes that a threat, display, or use of force did indeed occur but is uncertain about the specific incident type. If this box is checked, then the coder must supply some information on the lines provided and may place additional information in the Notes section. The Unsure option should be used sparingly, and the designated regional authority should promptly review all uses of this option.

Issue Type

In the previous MID data collection the apparent issue(s) at stake in a dispute were related to the goals of the so-called revisionist state, and these were coded only with respect to a dispute as a whole, not specific incidents. In this extension of the data set we will attempt to identify the main issue(s) that appear to underlie each incident. For the sake of continuity, the revisionist state and issue(s) will be

included and identified in the MID construction phase. The issue information that is collected at the incident level will feed into this later determination.

The Issue Type boxes on the incident coding form offer four possibilities: territorial issues, regime issues, policy issues, and the ubiquitous "other." If no issue can be identified, then the Issue Type fields should be left blank. Broadly speaking, a territorial issue is at stake when the actor is attempting to gain control over a piece of territory that it claims but does not possess. A policy issue is involved when the actor seeks to change the foreign policy behavior of the target, while a regime issue centers on the desire by the actor to change the government of the target.[9] If any other major issue is involved, then this should be recorded in the Other box. It is possible that more than one issue type may be involved in an incident. If this occurs, then the issue type judged most important should be given a "1" in the appropriate box, the second most important a "2," and so forth. If only one major issue is present in the incident, then a "1" or a check mark should be entered in the appropriate box. Finally, a brief description of the issue(s) should be clearly written on the appropriate lines and may be continued in the Notes section. The description should be as specific as possible.

Location Description

A short description of the geographical location of the incident should be entered in the lines provided (unless the incident does not have a geographical location per se), and additional information may be placed in the Notes section. Two rules should be observed in completing this part of the form.

(1) Proper geographical names should match those found in *Merriam Webster's Geographical Dictionary* (3rd edition, 1997) with respect to identity and spelling. A slightly less comprehensive but more portable version of this exists, i.e., *Merriam Webster's Pocket Geographical Dictionary* (1996). The ultimate authority for geographical names will be *The Columbia Gazetteer*, a mammoth three-volume compilation found in most libraries.

(2) The text describing the specific location must be clearly written (preferably printed).

Identifying locations can be difficult for several reasons. The geographical locus of some threats, displays, and uses of force may be ambiguous. This is especially so with respect to threats since the origination point of a threat is frequently one state capital and the destination point is the other state capital, so the incident itself may not have a geographical location per se. If the threat does not mention some specific geographical location, no location information need be entered but something like "No specific location" should be placed into the Location Description box.

Another type of difficulty may arise when the location is diffused, i.e., it takes place in many different locations. If only a few distinct locations are relevant, then these may be separately listed in the Locations Description lines and the Notes section as necessary. If an incident takes place in many locations, then a geographical term should be used to describe the location that encompasses all or most of the locations, e.g., the area near a principal city, a district or province, a body of water (river, lake, bay or sea), a border area near some landmark, etc. It should be borne in mind that our intention here is to define the geographical "center of gravity" of an incident, if it exists. It is likely that in future studies we will want to convert these locations into geographical coordinates so that spatial conflict analyses will be possible, and the more location information we have, the easier this will be.

Source Information

Some single action incidents may be adequately documented by two or three reports from one or more sources, while other incidents will involve several actions or events that may be reported in different sources and at different times. The Source Information section of the coding form is designed to record all the sources of the reports used in coding an incident.

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[9] An appendix to a paper by Senese and Vasquez (1998) that gives examples of these various issues is available on the MID3 web site.

For each report pertaining to an incident a line in the Source Information table should be filled in by specifying the source name (Source column) and the location of the report within that source (Location column). If the source is one of the standard sources used in the MID 3 project, then an abbreviation of its full name should be used. The list of standard sources and their abbreviations is to be found on the MID3 web site. For a non-standard source, the source name must be clearly written (*preferably printed*) and detailed enough to uniquely identify the source later. For monographs this will usually mean specifying the author(s) or editor(s), year, and short title of the work.

The Location column should indicate specifically where within the source the incident report was found. If a copy of the original report is included in the folder, then only minimal location information need be entered. However, *copies of reports should be clearly identified by the Regional Incident # and the source number found on the left of each source line*. The type of location information supplied will depend upon the type of source. Examples of how different types of sources should be cited follow.

Newspapers—issue date, page number, e.g., d7/4/00, pA1.
Serial publications—year, volume, issue, page, e.g., y1996, v52, i3, p345.
Monographs—page, e.g., p215 or p10-21.

If more than six reports are cited then a Supplementary Source Sheet should be filled out and added to the folder. In addition, the Supplementary Source Sheet Completed box should be checked.

When recording source information the coder should bear in mind that it may be necessary to recheck incident reports at some later time, and a clear specification of the source and the location of the report within the source makes this much easier.

Fatalities of Actor(s) and Target

Two sections of the incident coding form are devoted to indicating the fatalities, if any, suffered by the military personnel of the actor(s) and target, respectively, in the incident. In the Fatalities of Actor(s) section each actor specified in the Actor(s) field should be entered in a separate row (using the 3-letter COW abbreviations) and the relevant check box selected for that actor. The boxes are:

Missing—no mention of military fatalities at all in the pertinent report(s).
None—the incident reports specifically state that no military fatalities occurred.
1-25—the reported military fatalities were between 1 and 25.
26-100—the reported military fatalities were between 26 and 100.
101-250—the reported military fatalities were between 101 and 250.
251-500—the reported military fatalities were between 251 and 500.
501-999—the reported military fatalities were between 501 and 999.
> 999—the reported military fatalities were 1,000 or more.

If an exact value can be determined from the relevant reports, then that number should be entered in the last column. The Fatalities of Target section should be completed in the same manner. It is important that each actor or target listed on page one of the incident reporting form be included in the relevant fatality section.

It is possible to enter the fatalities of up to six actors and one target on the incident coding form. If more actors are involved, then a Supplementary Fatality Sheet should be completed and added to the incident report folder. In addition, the box on the incident report form indicating that a Supplementary Fatality Sheet has been completed should be checked. It is vital that the Reporting Region and Regional Incident # on this sheet be the same as that on the incident reporting form to which it relates.

Several problems may be encountered in coding fatalities. (1) A report may specify "casualties" rather than fatalities. Since "casualties" include both dead and wounded personnel, this number is typically much larger than fatalities. A casualty figure should be mentioned in the Notes section but is not directly relevant to the assessment of fatalities. (2) A report may specify the number of fatalities over a period of time (e.g., "the last three days") rather than a point in time (e.g., "yesterday"). Usually an incident fatality assessment will be based on several reports rather than a single report, and differences in partially over lapping accounts will need to be reconciled before the incident is coded. (3) Sources may

differ about the number of fatalities. These differences must be reconciled before the incident can be coded, and such a reconciliation should be based on the following rules: (a) later reports are generally more accurate than earlier reports, and (b) reports from "independent" sources (i.e., those not directly connected to the governments involved in the incident) are generally more reliable than government sources. There is some inherent uncertainty in incident fatalities, which is one of the reasons why we code ranges of fatalties.

Notes

This space is provided for the coder to enter any additional information deemed relevant to the incident. This may include ambiguities about the type of incident, known or suspected links to other incidents, anomalies or oddities found, additional relevant information, etc. If additional space is required, then a Supplementary Note Sheet should be completed and included in the folder. If a Supplementary Note Sheet is used, then the relevant box should be checked on the incident reporting form. And again, it is important that the Reporting Region and Regional Incident # on this sheet be the same as that on the incident reporting form to which it relates.

To help us keep track of notes, each note should be preceded by a number. These numbers refer to the section of the form to which they pertain and are to be found in parentheses on the left side of the pages in the form. A general observation about the incident should start with "(1)", e.g., "(1) This incident may be directly related to incident # 456 and war # 99," while notes concerning the identity of actors and target should begin with "(2)" and "(3)" respectively. Examples of these would be "(2) Actor EGY's role in this incident reflected significantly less direct involvement than that of the other actors" or "(3) The target of this show of force is too ambiguous to be coded reliably but many believe it was GMY." Notes concerning the dates of an incident should be preceded by a "(4)", e.g., "(4) The end date was probably between October 7 and October 23." Incident Type notes should begin with a "(5)", such as "(5) According to some sources the incident was a mobilization rather than an alert, but the call up of reserve forces is not confirmed." Similarly, notes pertaining to Issue Type, Location, Source Information, Actor Fatalities, and Target Fatalities should begin with "(6)", "(7)","(8)","(9)", and "(10)", respectively.

Notes should be carefully and properly composed (and clearly written) since it is likely that they will eventually be distributed and perhaps published.

Coding Information

The last items in the incident reporting form to be completed are the identity of the coder and the date on which the coding took place. The coder's identity should be specified with enough precision and clarity so that it can be easily determined who completed the form at a later time.

Conclusion

It is to be expected that additions or changes to this manual will be necessary as the incident coding progresses. Such changes will be communicated via the MID3 web site, which should be routinely checked for new developments. Coders should direct all questions to the designated regional authority.