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Does the Diversionary Use of Force Threaten the Democratic Peace? Assessing the Effect of Economic Growth on Interstate Conflict, 1921–2001

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A democratic leader, anticipating a "rally 'round the flag effect," may have an incentive to divert attention from domestic economic problems by becoming involved in military conflict abroad, undermining Immanuel Kant's prescription for "perpetual peace." We assess the risk to the democratic peace by evaluating this diversionary incentive within a general dyadic model of interstate conflict, 1921–2001, using both directed and nondirected analyses. Our results indicate that economic conditions do affect the likelihood that a democracy, but not an autocracy, will initiate a fatal militarized dispute, even against another democracy. Economic growth rates sufficiently low to negate the democratic peace are, however, rare; and the behavior of five powerful democracies raises further doubts about the importance of diversions. We find no significant evidence that a bad economy makes a democratic state less likely to be targeted by others, nor does the timing of legislative elections influence the decision of democratic leaders to use force. Although economic conditions affect the likelihood of a fatal dispute for democracies, the influence is sufficiently small that Kant's hope for a more peaceful world does not seem misplaced.

Scores of studies indicate that democracies are much less likely to become involved in military conflict with one another than are two autocracies or a mixed pair of states. This is good news because the number of democracies continues to grow. The long-term prospect, according to Immanuel Kant (1991 [1795]) and other liberals, is a world of democratic states living together peacefully. There has been an important undercurrent of research, however, suggesting that democratic leaders sometimes have an incentive to use military force, not to make their countries more secure, but to improve their public approval ratings and their chance of remaining

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in office. By the 1970s, there was evidence that the American public's support for the president increased when the United States became involved in an international crisis (Mueller 1973). This suggested to many that a president, anticipating such a rally 'round the flag effect, might divert attention from domestic problems, notably a faltering economy, by becoming militarily involved abroad. Smith (1996:134) noted the irony: "There exists the possibility that democratically elected leaders act against the interests of the citizens precisely because the public can remove them from office." Hess and Orphanides (1995, 2001) argue that this institutional pathology makes war likely even in a world of democratic nations, rendering the effectiveness of Kant's prescription for "perpetual peace" uncertain.

Academics are not the only ones who believe that military force is sometimes used for partisan purposes. In September 2002, the *New York Times* claimed in a lead editorial that "many Democrats in Congress" agree with former Vice President Gore, "who accused the White House of botching the campaign against terrorism and mobilizing the United States for war with Iraq to avoid having to talk about its economic failures" (The Healthy Politics of Iraq 2002:A30). President Bush's father, George H. W. Bush, had to defend himself against similar charges in 1990 and 1992. The veteran journalist R. W. Apple Jr. (1992:5) argued that a president is apt to gain politically when he acts forcefully overseas, which "has led America into a number of adventures over the last 45 years." In 1994, the French defense minister criticized a deployment of U.S. marines to Kuwait, suggesting that the buildup was "not unconnected with domestic politics" (Sciolino 1994:1); and in 1996, Ross Perot accused President Clinton of using military force to increase his electoral prospects. The diversionary use of force has been an element in fiction from Shakespeare (Levy and Mabe 2004) to the contemporary American film, *Wag the Dog*.

In this article, we assess whether diversionary incentives increase the likelihood of interstate conflict and threaten the democratic peace, focusing on the influence of hard economic times. We use the method adopted in previous research on the democratic peace: directed and nondirected dyadic analyses of pooled time-series data regarding militarized interstate disputes. This allows us to confront the evidence for the democratic peace directly with tests of diversionary theory. Our dyadic approach is an important departure from most previous research on the diversionary thesis, which has used a monadic framework. Smith (1996) has shown that the strategic interaction of states—observable only in directed dyads—must be considered in testing for diversionary conflict because domestic problems may simultaneously make a state a likely initiator and a forbidding target. Thus, we examine the influence of slow economic growth on states' initiation of and their involvement in militarized disputes, 1921–2001. We also test the effect of the timing of legislative elections on interstate conflict.

Our results indicate that diversionary incentives pose little threat to Kant's vision. Slow economic growth increases the incidence with which democracies initiate militarized disputes against autocracies, states with mixed political regimes, and even other democracies; but only a small minority of democracies experience such slow growth that the greater peacefulness of democratic dyads is eliminated. There is little evidence that poor economic performance increases the initiation of disputes by the leaders of powerful democracies, including the United States, which are thought to be most prone to using force for partisan purposes. Of five prominent democracies examined, only Israel seems to respond to diversionary incentives. We also show that military conflict is unaffected by the timing of legislative elections. Kant's hope for a dramatically more peaceful world does not seem misplaced.

Our article is organized as follows. In the next section, we review past research on the diversionary theory of war. Subsequently, we explain our tests of the effect of diversionary incentives on the probability of a militarized dispute. Next, we discuss the general model of conflict within which we conduct our tests, define our

variables, and identify the sources of our data. We present our empirical analyses in the next to the last section. Finally, we summarize our findings.

Previous Research on the Diversionary Theory of War

It has long been suggested that a state's leader might seek to divert attention from domestic problems with a foreign adventure. Lenin argued that the tsar hoped World War I would delay reforms in Russia, and Germany's readiness to fight in 1914 has been attributed to the government's desire to forestall democratization (Taylor 1954). Diversionary theory is often derived from sociological studies of group dynamics (Simmel 1898; Coser 1956), which indicate that groups become more cohesive in response to conflict with outsiders if internal divisions are not too deep. There have been several periods of intense research on diversionary theory since the 1960s, but little evidence has emerged that such uses of force are common, despite the theory's intuitive appeal and the plausibility of historical accounts of particular conflicts.

Early work by Rummel (1963) and Tanter (1966) considered whether domestic unrest (e.g., riots, revolutions, and civil wars) is correlated with interstate conflict. Rummel (1963:24) concluded, however, that "foreign conflict behavior is generally and completely unrelated to domestic conflict behavior" in both democratic and autocratic countries. In the subsequent decade, Zinnes and Wilkenfeld (1971) sought to differentiate the effects of various types of internal disorder on the propensity of particular types of governments to externalize conflict; but again, no consistent pattern of relations was uncovered. As a participant in these investigations concluded, "seldom has so much common sense in theory found so little support in practice" (James 1987:22), a judgment shared by others (Stohl 1980; Zinnes 1980; Levy 1989; Gelpi 1997).[1]

Much attention has been focused on the United States. Ostrom and Job (1986; see also James and Oneal 1991) suggested that domestic politics affects America's use of military force. Indeed, their statistical analyses of the 1949–1976 period indicate that economic conditions and various partisan considerations are more influential than key aspects of the international system. Ostrom and Job's (1986) theoretical argument is problematic, however, because they did not derive their propositions from a consistent set of assumptions. They argue that a president will act forcefully when the U.S. economy is in decline and when he enjoys popular support—even though the state of the economy is the most important determinant of presidential popularity (Hibbs 1987; Alesina and Rosenthal 1989; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1992). Their portrayal of the president's attitude toward risk is also inconsistent. Sometimes the president is thought to accept risk, emphasizing the opportunity for gain; at other times he is portrayed as fearful of loss and risk-averse.

Theoretically, the effect of a bad economy on the likelihood that a president will use force is uncertain, as Ostrom and Job (1986) noted. It might create an incentive to divert the public's attention with a foreign adventure; but it might also lead him to focus on solving the economic problem, become preoccupied with domestic affairs, and be less inclined to act abroad. Empirically, several of Ostrom and Job's key findings, including the influence of a bad economy and the president's popularity, are not robust to alternative measures and estimators, corrections to the data, and extension of the temporal domain of analysis (Meernik 1994; Mitchell and Moore 2002).

Recent work on the diversionary use of force is better grounded theoretically. Several formal models build upon the principal-agent problem, which is exacerbated

[1] Davies (2002) reports a link between domestic strife and the initiation of interstate disputes, but his results cannot be reproduced with his posted data, and they contain substantial errors.

when an asymmetry of information favors the national leader over the public. Some models indicate that domestic problems create significant diversionary incentives only for democratic leaders (Hess and Orphanides 1995, 2001; Smith 1996). Others argue that autocrats, too, are dependent upon the support of groups adversely affected by a poor economy (Richards et al. 1993; Downs and Rocke 1994; Miller 1995; Pickering and Kisangani 2005). Popular unrest might make it harder for an authoritarian state to extract rents from the public and raise the danger of revolution. There is evidence that military coups follow declines in personal income (Londegran and Poole 1990:178): "For this reason, even authoritarian governments have powerful incentives to promote economic growth, not out of concern for their citizens, but because *failure to deliver adequate economic performance may lead to their downfall*." Indeed, autocracies may be *more* prone to use military force for diversionary purposes because citizens in democratic countries are able to express their preference for peace (Russett 1990a). The advanced democracies also have greater financial resources—to fund unemployment insurance, for example—that can be used to ameliorate the political consequences of an economic downturn (Miller 1995).

Hess and Orphanides (1995, 2001) offer a clear account of why democratic leaders may be inclined to use force for partisan purposes. When the economy is weak, incumbents may initiate conflict in order to demonstrate their war-fighting abilities. Because the public values both prosperity and security, a diversionary use of force increases the prospects that a leader will be reelected despite the economic decline. Hess and Orphanides (1995) report that the United States has been more apt to become involved in an international crisis when the economy was in recession and the president had the opportunity to be reelected. They conclude that, even in a world populated only by democratic states, wars are likely because a democratic leader, desiring to resurrect his prospects for reelection, will have no choice but to target another democracy (Hess and Orphanides 2001).

The empirical evidence offered by Hess and Orphanides (1995) is not compelling, however. Economic recessions are statistically related to forceful action by an incumbent U.S. president in fewer than half of their tests. Economic performance is important in their model because it affects the popularity of an American leader, which is the direct measure of his prospects for reelection. Consequently, they also correlate the conflictual behavior of the United States with the president's public approval rating. This association is statistically significant in only one of four tests, and this is with the weakest possible standard of statistical significance (.10 with a one-tailed test). Even the limited support they report for their diversionary theory must be treated cautiously because they rely on bivariate tests of association. They do not evaluate their theory within a general model of interstate conflict, so their findings may be spurious, a result of the omission of important determinants of conflict.[2] Indeed, based on a large sample of countries in the post-World War I period for which the probability of conflict is carefully modeled, Chiozza and Goemans (2003) report that democratic leaders are unlikely to initiate a crisis when they risk losing office.

Some studies find that, contrary to diversionary theory, a president is more likely to use force when his public approval rating is high (Morgan and Bickers 1992; Morgan and Anderson 1999).[3] This is consistent with traditional analyses of U.S.

[2] If the public gains important information about a president's war-fighting ability during a crisis, there should be a long-term increase in public opinion following successful military action. There is, however, a consensus that the rally 'round the flag effect is short-lived (Mueller 1973; Russett 1990b). In addition, the magnitude of the rally is not influenced by the outcome of the crisis (Levy 1989; Gaubatz 1991; Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995; James and Rioux 1998; cf. Lee 1977). Thus, there is not convincing evidence that the American public learns about the president's war-fighting abilities in a crisis and translates this into support for the leader.

[3] Morgan and his colleagues suggest that a democratic leader may use force to increase support among his/her partisans, but popular backing is necessary for this to be practical. Diversions are likely, therefore, when a leader has

foreign policy (e.g., George 1971; Blechman and Kaplan 1978): presidential popularity increases the president's freedom of action because he can be confident that the public is behind him. In this view, presidents are more apt to use force when they are popular, instead of using force to become popular. A number of other empirical analyses, however, report no relationship between America's involvement in interstate conflict and a president's approval rating (Lindsay, Sayrs, and Steger 1992; Meernik 1994; 2004; Meernik and Waterman 1996; Wang 1996; Fordham 1998a, 1998b; DeRouen 2000; Moore and Lanoue 2003).

The evidence regarding the influence of economic growth on the use of force by the United States is also mixed. Fordham (1998a, 1998b) and DeRouen (1995) find no relation in the post-World War II period. Gowa (1998) finds none over a longer temporal span, 1870–1992; but Fordham (2002) has revised Gowa's analyses to show some effect. Clark (2003) reports evidence for Smith's (1996) theory regarding the importance of strategic interaction, with the United States responding to diversionary incentives but potential targets acting to limit this opportunity. On the other hand, Meernik (2000) concludes that the state of the American economy does not influence others' initiation of crises with the United States. DeRouen and Peake (2002) report that a use of force diverts the public's attention from a poor economy. In an early analysis of pooled data by Russett (1990a), slow growth increased the likelihood that the United States would become involved in militarized disputes, 1853–1976. Yet, slow growth did not affect the behavior of other democracies, including Great Britain and France, or authoritarian countries. Miller's (1995, 1999) results are quite different: autocracies are significantly more likely than democracies to use force when economic growth is slow, and the United States is particularly unlikely to do so. Oneal and Russett (1997) reported that slow growth increased the incidence of militarized disputes for all types of regimes; but with more complete data (Russett and Oneal 2001:152–153), they find no significant relationship. Leeds and Davis (1997) conclude that the conflict-initiating behavior of 18 industrialized democracies is unrelated to either economic conditions or the electoral cycle, and Pickering and Kisangani (2005) report no connection for any type of regime even when countries are divided into fine-grained political categories.[4]

In sum, there has been substantial interest in the diversionary theory since the early 1960s. Over time the sophistication of the theoretical work has increased, spurred perhaps by the intuitive plausibility of the argument and the weak empirical support for earlier versions of the theory. Recent accounts are derived from the principal-agent problem: national leaders may use military force, not in the national interest, but as a gamble to resurrect their political fortunes. There is disagreement about whether this danger affects all states, is limited to democracies, or is most likely for autocracies. Diversions by democracies may be uncommon because wars are unpopular and the leading democratic states have sufficient financial resources to offset an economic downturn (Miller 1995, 1999). There is great concern, however, that the importance of public opinion and limits on the use of repression make democracies particularly susceptible to this pathology (Hess and Orphanides 1995, 2001; Smith 1996; Gelpi 1997).

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the support of the general public but is unpopular with members of his/her own party; however, Meernik and Waterman (1996) and Wang (1996) were unable to corroborate this finding.

[4] Other studies use alternative indicators of U.S. economic performance, and evidence for diversionary uses of force by American presidents is again mixed. A high rate of unemployment makes forceful action more likely, according to Fordham (1998a, 1998b) and DeRouen (2000). Meernik and Waterman (1996; cf. Meernik 1994) and Yoon (1997) report, however, that the military force is less likely to be used by the United States when the misery index (the sum of the unemployment and inflation rates) is high, while Wang (1996) finds that military action is more likely then. Finally, consumer sentiment seems unrelated to military action by the president (Lindsay, Sayrs, and Steger 1992).

The empirical evidence for diversionary theory is contradictory, and the analyses are usually limited in scope. Most tests of diversionary theory examine only the United States, but the United States is apt to be an exceptional case because of its ability to project its power globally. Even for the United States, support for the theory is mixed: there is no consistent relation between economic conditions (or a president's popularity) and America's involvement in interstate conflict. Studies that have examined pooled data for a number of countries also report conflicting results: economic conditions may be related to the incidence of interstate conflict for all states, only democracies, or only autocracies. Of course, previous studies examine different periods, use alternative measures of key concepts, and test with different sets of controls. Still, it is unusual to find so little consistency in empirical studies on a topic that has attracted so much attention. Perhaps this is because a faltering economy has offsetting effects, increasing the incentive for a democratic leader to initiate conflict while decreasing the likelihood that it will be the target of military action by others, as Smith (1996) has suggested. We address this possibility below.

Testing Whether Diversionary Incentives Threaten the Democratic Peace

Over the past two decades the scientific study of international relations has progressed rapidly by examining the interaction of pairs of states through time. Here we evaluate the threat to the democratic peace posed by diversionary incentives in a nested test using a general model of interstate conflict. We analyze the behavior of thousands of dyads, 1921–2001, using directed and nondirected logistic regression analyses of pooled time-series data.[5]

Although diversionary theory has most often been cast in terms of the behavior of individual states, we adopt a dyadic framework because a monadic approach ignores the conditioning influence of the international environment. Militarized disputes take place *between* states, so one cannot examine their causes properly by looking at the attributes of a single country (Most and Starr 1989), as research on the democratic peace has demonstrated. When tempted to involve his/her country in interstate conflict for partisan gain, a leader must take into account the character of relations with a potential target. It would make little sense to attack a more powerful country or an important trading partner, for example. There must be a reasonable opportunity for the use of force (Meernik 1994, 2004). Directed-dyads allow us to examine the state-level conditions that determine the diversionary incentive (as in a monadic analysis) but also permit consideration of which states make opportune targets (something the monadic approach cannot do). Thus, we are able to assess Smith's (1996) argument that domestic problems *simultaneously* make a state a likely initiator and an undesirable target. Our test with nondirected dyads provides a direct link to the great majority of previous studies on the democratic peace, which have used the same unit of analysis.

Directed-dyadic analyses are particularly well suited to investigating the tension between the democratic peace and diversion. For this purpose, our analyses are superior to recent research. For instance, Pickering and Kisangani (2005) use the traditional monadic setup that cannot incorporate the characteristics of both the states that might initiate a diversion and their potential targets nor important elements of their bilateral relations. Chiozza and Goemans' (2003, 2004) sophisticated leader-year approach represents an improvement over the use of a country-year unit of analysis, but their research design is still monadic and thus subject to the limitations of that

[5] Chiozza and Goemans (2003) data on leaders' tenures determine the starting year of our analyses. All but the first year of World War II as well as the immediate postwar years, 1946–1949, are omitted because bilateral trade data are fragmentary.

methodology.[6] Mitchell and Prins (2004) suggest looking for diversionary behavior in the context of enduring rivalries, such as India–Pakistan, because traditional foes should make popular targets; but the danger to the democratic peace cannot be established by following this approach because, of 63 enduring rivalries during roughly the last 200 years, only one (U.K.—U.S. in the nineteenth century) involved two democracies (Diehl and Goertz 2000). Our framework is also superior to earlier diversionary work, such as Miller (1995) and Gelpi (1997) that employed only nondirected dyads. Both of these studies focus only on instances of conflict, not its initiation, and investigate the circumstances for conflict escalation. They do not attempt to determine whether the diversionary use of force threatens the democratic peace; and their research design—which does not include the target's regime type, its economic conditions (per Smith 1996), or many other important control variables—precludes them from doing so. In short, our analysis of directed dyads allows us to investigate an important issue that has not previously been tackled.

We assess the danger posed by diversionary uses of force using economic growth rates. There are, of course, other problems that might threaten a leader's stay in office, such as civil unrest, interethnic relations, etc. (Davenport 1995; DeRouen and Goldfinch 2005a, 2005b). We focus on economic performance for both theoretical and practical reasons: it is the most commonly cited source of diversions because the state of the economy is the most important predictor of leaders' popularity (Hibbs 1987; Alesina and Rosenthal 1989; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1992). We cannot measure their popularity directly because public opinion polls are available for only a small number of countries in recent years. In addition, slow economic growth is a problem to which all countries are susceptible, which is not the case for some potential sources of diversion, such as ethnic tensions; and reliable economic data are available for more countries than measures of other social conditions. In addition, social unrest often causes countries to experience poor economic performance (Rodrik 1999).

In the first set of tests below, we examine two competing hypotheses: (1) that slow economic growth increases the attractiveness of interstate conflict for all leaders, regardless of the character of their countries' regimes and (2) that this logic applies only to democratic leaders. To evaluate these possibilities, we calculate the average annual rate of growth in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita over 2 years for each potential initiator and include this variable in an analysis of directed dyads. We ensured that growth was measured during the tenure of a single leader since he or she might not be held accountable for the poor economic performance of a predecessor. To do this, we used the information on leadership change assembled by Chiozza and Goemans (2003)—a revised version of Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson's (1995) data. In evaluating the influence of a bad economy on democracies, we pay particular attention to five prominent democracies—the United States, Great Britain, France, Israel, and India—because diversions may be practical only for leaders of powerful states. We also report in Table 1 the effects of legislative elections on the incidence of interstate conflict.

In a second set of tests with directed dyads, we take into account the regime type of the prospective initiator and target using a specification that permits the risk of conflict for particular types of dyads to be assessed. Thus, we estimate the effect of a poor economy on the likelihood that a democracy will initiate a militarized dispute against another democracy, an autocracy, or a state with mixed characteristics. Democratic leaders seeking partisan gain should, of course, be most likely to provoke a conflict with an autocracy, states with which democracies are particularly conflict-prone (Oneal and Russett 1997, 1999; Russett and Oneal 2001). The

[6] Importantly, neither of these studies finds strong evidence for diversionary theory. Thus, there is no indication that by not following their research designs we are ignoring important diversionary influences. In particular, none of Pickering and Kisangani's (2005) results for economic performance support the theory.

clearest evidence that diversionary incentives threaten the democratic peace would emerge if democracies are also inclined to initiate conflict against other democracies when they experience an economic downturn. Although democracies are rarely involved in militarized disputes with one another, the likelihood of conflict might be influenced by economic conditions—an important question that has not been addressed in previous research on the democratic peace.

In both sets of directed analyses, we take stock of Smith's (1996) argument that a diversionary incentive has off-setting effects on the potential initiator and its prospective targets. A poorly performing economy may give a leader an incentive to divert, but his or her eagerness to demonstrate war-fighting abilities might make the state a risky target, decreasing the chances that it will be attacked by others. These simultaneous effects might cancel each other in monadic and nondirected dyadic analyses.

Finally, in a third set of tests, we assess the effect of diversionary incentives on the onset of militarized disputes using pooled data for nondirected dyads. This provides a direct link to much of the previous research on the democratic peace. Support for diversionary theory would be strengthened if the results of the directed and nondirected tests are consistent.

Modeling Interstate Conflict

In our statistical analyses, we model the initiation and onset of fatal militarized interstate disputes. We purposefully do not limit our study to wars, even though the literature often refers to the diversionary *war* theory. Diversionary uses of force are meant to create a diversion, not start a large conflict. Wars generally do not help national leaders retain office because of their high cost (Mueller 1973; Cotton 1987; Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995); but to inspire a rally in public opinion, a use of force must capture the attention of the public so it must be dramatic and sharply focused (Mueller 1973). Militarized disputes with fatalities meet this requirement; minor conflicts do not. Moreover, if diversionary incentives do not motivate fatal disputes, then the diversionary argument would not meaningfully endanger the democratic peace. In our tests, we use the conflict data of the Correlates of War (COW) project prepared by Maoz (1999), which is available from EUGene version 3.04 (Bennett and Stam 2000a; Ghosn, Palmer, and Bremer 2004).[7]

In testing the significance of diversionary incentives, we control for several other factors that influence the likelihood of dyadic conflict: the political character of the two states, the degree to which they are economically interdependent, whether the states are allied, the bilateral balance of power, whether the states share a common border, the distance separating them, and whether either state is a major power. We take into account temporal dependence by controlling for the time elapsed since the last fatal dispute, and we adjust for the changing number of states in the international system. This model has evolved from that of Bremer (1992), Maoz and Russett (1993), and Polachek and Robst (1998). Bennett and Stam (2000b, 2004), Hegre (2000, 2004), Mousseau (2000), Gartzke, Li, and Boehmer (2001), King and Zeng (2001), Russett and Oneal (2001), Heagerty, Ward, and Gleditsch (2002), Oneal, Russett, and Berbaum (2003), Beck (2003), Choi and James (2005), and Oneal (2006), among others, have used similar specifications. Next, we define

[7] We analyze militarized disputes because data on "uses of force" (Fordham and Sarver 2001) are only available for the United States. Limiting the analysis to fatal militarized disputes reduces the bias in the reporting of conflict at the low end of the spectrum. The use of even minimal force in Europe, for example, is likely to be reported in the Western media from which the COW data are primarily extracted; such incidents in many parts of Africa are apt frequently to go unnoticed. An examination of fatal disputes reduces this regional disparity because disputes with fatalities are newsworthy.

the explanatory variables in our model of conflict and discuss the sources of these data.

Democracy—We use the Polity data (Jaggers and Gurr 1995, 1996) to assess the political character of regimes. Our measure ranges from -10 for an extreme autocracy to $+10$ for the most democratic states. In some tests, we use indicator variables to identify democracies, autocracies, and mixed or "incoherent" regimes. Following Jaggers and Gurr (1995), a state is a coherent democracy if its DEMOC minus its AUTOC score is greater than 6; it is a coherent autocracy if the net Polity score is less than -6; and it is considered a mixed polity if the scores are between these values. Regime scores and all other right-hand side variables, including our measure of economic growth, are lagged 1 year. Thus, conditions in year $t-1$ explain militarized disputes in year t.

Economic Growth—For the years 1950 onward, we used information regarding the real GDP per capita (Summers et al. 1995; Central Intelligence Agency 1998) assembled by Gleditsch (2002). No comprehensive collection of GDP data exists for the pre-1950 era, but Maddison (1995) reports estimates of per capita GDPs for 56 countries in all regions of the world for 1870–1992; these provide the basis for estimating average incomes for many other countries.[8] We calculated the geometric mean annual rate of economic growth over the two years before a dispute might have occurred. If states are susceptible to diversionary uses of force, the sign of the estimated coefficient for economic growth will be negative. Using the lagged value, in addition to ensuring that a militarized dispute does not affect growth, is consistent with Fordham's (1998a, 1998b) finding that it is unemployment, a lagging economic indicator, that influences presidents' uses of force.

Interactions of Regime Type and Growth—We use interactive terms to clarify the effects of economic growth on the likelihood that particular types of regimes, or the five powerful democracies, will initiate conflict. To assess whether a poor economy affects the probability that a democracy in particular will become involved in a militarized dispute, we multiply economic growth and an indicator showing whether the state was a coherent democracy. If democracies are prone to violence when growth rates are low, the estimated coefficient of the interactive term will be negative and significant. Because only the leaders of the most powerful democracies might realistically have the opportunity to take military action for partisan purposes, we created five variables—one each for the United States, Britain, France, Israel, and India—that measure their economic fortunes. For example, United States Growth equals the average annual economic growth rate of the United States over the previous 2 years if the United States is the focal state in a dyad; otherwise, this variable equals zero.[9] We also use interactive terms to assess the influence of economic growth on the likelihood that a democracy will initiate a fatal dispute against particular types of regimes: another democracy, an autocracy, or a mixed type. In the analyses using nondirected dyads, too, we use interactive terms to gauge the effect of diversionary incentives on the incidence of militarized disputes for various types of dyads.

Elections—We report one test in which the timing of national elections is added to the regression model. For this, we use information about elections held in democratic states for the lower house of national legislatures from Banks's (2005) Cross-

[8] Maddison's (1995) data were made consistent with and merged with those of Summers et al. (1995). The combined time series were then regressed on estimates of annual energy consumption per capita (Singer and Small 1995), which is a good correlate of individual income (Morgenstern, Knorr, and Heiss 1973), to estimate missing values. For some countries, there are no estimates of GDP per capita in any years. Then, energy consumption, the year, and geographical region were used to create estimates of average incomes based on the relationships revealed in the regression analysis of the Maddison-Summers et al. time series and the COW data on energy consumption.

[9] Because France was not a coherent democracy during the presidency of Charles de Gaulle, Fr Growth was coded zero in the years 1958–1968.

National Time-Series Data.[10] If at least one national election was held in the focal state in a year and it was a coherent democracy, we code the Election variable one; otherwise, it equals zero. Unfortunately, Banks does not provide information on the precise date of elections, so it is impossible to know if they came before or after a dispute in a given year. To address this problem, we include two other variables in the model to assess the influence of elections; one is Election_{t-1}, which incorporates a 1-year lag in the elections indicator, and the other (Election_{t+1}) a 1-year lead. If the proximity of an election adds to the incentive for a diversionary use of force, the estimated coefficients of Election and Election_{t-1} will be positive and significant, and that for Election_{t+1} will be negative. If, on the other hand, democratic leaders are inclined to use force after elections because military action is politically unpopular (Gaubatz 1991; Huth and Allee 2002), the coefficients of Election and Election_{t+1} will be positive, and that for Election_{t-1} will be negative.

Economic Interdependence—To measure interdependence in the post-1950 period, we use Gleditsch's (2002) data, which were drawn from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and specialized sources for the Soviet bloc and other non-IMF members. For earlier years, bilateral trade data are harder to acquire. For the years 1920–1938, we use the data on bilateral trade in current values and the exchange rates compiled by the League of Nations (various years).[11] Since trade is expected to influence dyadic relations only if it is economically (and hence politically) important, we divided the sum of a country's exports and imports with its partner by its GDP. We used population estimates from the COW project and the GDP per capita estimates discussed above to calculate countries' GDPs. Our measure of the economic importance of trade is

$$\text{Dependence}_{i,t} = \left(\frac{\text{Exports}_{ij,t} + \text{Imports}_{ij,t}}{\text{GDP}_{i,t}}\right).$$

Previous research indicates that the more economically dependent one state is on another, the less likely is the use of force.

Capability Ratio

Realist theories emphasize the importance of the balance of power in determining the character of interstate relations. The belief that an equal distribution of power leads to peace has deep historical roots, but recent empirical work indicates that it is preponderance that deters military action (Bremer 1992; Lemke and Kugler 1996). To measure countries' power, we use the COW project's data (Singer and Small 1995) on population (total and urban), industry (iron or steel production and energy consumption), and military forces (number of armed forces personnel and defense budget) to calculate military capabilities. For analyses of directed dyads, we created an index of relative power (Capability Ratio) that is the natural logarithm of the ratio of the focal state's military capability index to that of the target in each dyad. Both the Capability Ratio and its square must be used for directed dyads because previous research indicates that the initiation of a dispute is most likely at parity (Bennett and Stam 2004; Hegre 2004; Oneal 2006). For nondirected dyads,

[10] We are unaware of a dataset reporting elections for countries' leaders that would cover the spatial–temporal domain employed by our study. Given that most democracies are parliamentary and that the results of midterm elections influence presidents' ability to govern effectively, lower-house elections should present diversionary incentives if the theory is true. That is, the Banks data are a reasonable, though imperfect, substitute for data regarding the elections of national leaders.

[11] Because the data before 1950 are less standardized, the appropriate exchange rates for converting the data to a common unit are less certain, and there are more missing data, we compared alternative estimates for bilateral trade in the pre-1950 period (Mitchell 1981; Barbieri 1998) to the data from the League of Nations and adjusted the data as appropriate.

we use the logarithm of the ratio of the stronger state's military capabilities to those of the weaker member of the dyad.

Alliance—Allies are thought to fight each other less than other states because they share common security interests. They often share other political and economic interests as well. We control for this influence using a variable that equals 1 if the members of a dyad were linked by a mutual defense treaty, neutrality pact, or entente; it equals 0 otherwise. These data, too, are from the COW project and were downloaded from EUGene (Bennett and Stam 2000a).

Contiguity, Distance, and Major Power Status—The potential for interstate violence exists when at least one member of a dyad can reach the other with effective militarily force. For most states, the ability to do so, especially the farther back one goes in history, is determined primarily by geographic proximity. Furthermore, neighbors are likely to have the most reasons to fight—over territorial boundaries, natural resources, irredentism, etc. Thus, distance reduces the capability to fight and most of the incentives to do so as well, a finding that is extremely robust in previous research. Because of the importance of geographic proximity, we include two terms in our regression analyses to capture its influence as fully as possible. The variable Distance is the natural logarithm of the great circle distance in miles between the two states' capitals (or major ports for the largest countries); using the logarithm reveals that there is a declining marginal effect (Bennett and Stam 2000a). We also include Contiguity, a variable that equals 1 if two states are contiguous. It equals 0 if they do not share a land boundary or are separated by more than 400 miles of water (Stinnett et al. 2002).

The effect of distance in constraining conflict, however, is less for powerful states, those with the capability to deploy substantial military forces globally. The major powers have been identified by the COW project based on the consensus of historians (Small and Singer 1982). To control fully for the ability to initiate conflict, we add, therefore, a third variable, Major Powers, coded 1 to identify a great power and 0 otherwise.

Years of Peace and the Size of the International System—Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998; Beck 2003) recommend that researchers control for duration dependence. We created a variable (Years of Peace) that marks the number of years that elapsed since the most recent militarized dispute and generated a natural cubic spline with three interior knots. Inclusion of these variables creates the equivalent of hazard analysis and addresses the possibility that some explanatory variables are endogenous. By controlling for the years of peace, we can be confident that the influence of past conflict on economic growth, states' interdependence, etc. is being taken into account. We also introduce, as Raknerud and Hegre (1997) recommend, a variable (System Size) that corrects for the reduced probability of dyadic conflict between small, distant countries as the number of states in the international system has increased over time. System Size equals the natural logarithm of the number of states in the system for pairs of noncontiguous, minor powers; it is zero otherwise.

Results

In this section we report the results of tests designed to estimate the influence of the growth rate in GDP per capita on the incidence of interstate conflict. In most analyses we use directed dyads to examine the initiation of fatal disputes because it is the best way to assess diversionary theory, but we also consider whether slow growth increases the frequency of dyadic disputes in a nondirected framework, which has been the most common test of the democratic peace. We examine all possible pairs of states, 1921–2001, using logistic regression analysis. We report one-tailed tests of statistical significance, because all our hypotheses are directional, and rely on robust standard errors that take into account the clustering of our data by dyads (Stata Reference Manual 1999).

In Table 1 we report the results of our first set of tests. In column 1 are the estimated coefficients of a baseline model. The democracy score of both the focal state and the potential target are included. The results indicate that democracies are less likely to initiate conflict than are more autocratic states ($p < .02$). On average, democracies are more peaceful than other political regimes. The political character of the target state does not influence the likelihood of an initiation in this specification. Democracies seem disinclined to start a dispute with any type of regime, not just other democracies; but this specification does not allow for the possibility that the political character of a potential target affects the likelihood of conflict differently for different types of regimes. That is, autocratic states may be likely to initiate military action against a democratic target while democracies are particularly unlikely to do so (Oneal and Russett 1997). We reconsider this issue below.

The other variables in the baseline equation generally perform as expected. States that are economically interdependent with the potential target are unlikely to initiate conflict ($p < .03$); and a balance of power, rather than preponderance, makes the use of force more likely. The logarithm of the ratio of the focal state's capabilities to those of the target and its square are jointly significant at the .02 level. Both the weak and the strong are unlikely to initiate a fatal dispute, though presumably for very different reasons. The sign of the estimated coefficient of the alliance indicator is negative as expected but insignificant ($p < .30$). Distance makes the initiation of a fatal dispute less likely, while the existence of a shared border increases the likelihood of conflict. The major powers are prone to use military force ($p < .04$); a long period without a fatal dispute is a good predictor of continued peace; and the probability of conflict for a given pair of noncontiguous, minor powers has declined as the number of states in the system has increased. All of these statistical controls are very significant ($p < .001$). The results of estimating our baseline model are consistent with those reported by Bennett and Stam (2004) and Hegre (2004).

The general form of diversionary theory holds that the leaders of both autocratic and democratic states have an incentive to use interstate conflict to distract their citizens from poor economic performance. To evaluate this possibility, we add to the baseline model the potential initiator's rate of growth in GDP per capita. As seen in the second column of Table 1, there is no indication that national leaders generally are susceptible to diversionary pressure during hard economic times. The economic growth rate is clearly insignificant ($p < .23$). The influences of the other variables in the equation are essentially unchanged.

In the third column, we add to the model in column 2 a variable that measures economic growth for democratic states only. The estimated coefficient is negative and highly significant ($p < .001$), indicating that democracies are more likely to initiate a fatal dispute when their economies are performing poorly.[12] The insignificance of the estimated coefficient for the initiator's growth rate ($p < .48$, one-tailed test) shows clearly that nondemocratic states are not subject to diversionary economic pressure. The evidence that economic growth affects the likelihood of initiation only for democracies is robust to several modifications of the test reported in column 3: limiting the analyses to the politically relevant dyads; dropping extreme values of growth; analyzing only cases from the post-World War II period; using King and Zeng's (2001) rare-events logistic estimator; and limiting the number of co-variates to contiguity, distance, the major-power indicator, the number of states in the system, and the years of peace. Interestingly, economic growth rates did not affect the initiation of fatal disputes when the dyad-year observations were constructed using states, rather than leaders, as the unit of analysis. That is, when

[12] In the specifications reported in columns 2 and 3, we determined whether the effect of slow growth increases as growth gets progressively worse, but we found no evidence of such a non-linear effect. The use of a simple indicator marking recessions produced results similar to those reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1. The Impact of the Diversionary Incentive on the Initiation of Fatal Militarized Disputes, 1921–2001

	Model 1: Baseline Model	*Model 2: General Diversionary Incentive*	*Model 3: Diversionary Incentive for Democracies*	*Model 4: Diversionary Incentive for Democracies with Election Effects*
Initiator's economic growth rate		− 1.21 (1.67)	− 0.0588 (1.654)	
Initiator's economic growth rate × coherent democracy			− 13.9*** (4.12)	− 20.0*** (6.27)
Initiator democracy score	− 0.0324* (0.0145)	− 0.0305* (0.0164)	− 0.0214 (0.0165)	− 0.0193 (0.0279)
Target democracy score	0.0125 (0.0148)	0.0135 (0.0166)	0.0131 (0.0164)	0.0199 (0.0219)
Economic dependence	− 17.7* (9.3)	− 22.1* (11.0)	− 21.0* (10.7)	− 13.6* (7.6)
Ln(Capability Ratio)	0.734* (0.356)	0.743* (0.425)	0.743* (0.429)	0.431 (0.432)
Ln(Capability Ratio)^2	− 0.0402* (0.0172)	− 0.0416* (0.0202)	− 0.0417* (0.0204)	− 0.0274 (0.0230)
Alliance	− 0.263 (0.202)	− 0.122 (0.221)	− 0.130 (0.219)	− 0.212 (0.319)
Contiguity	1.53*** (0.47)	1.52*** (0.52)	1.48*** (0.52)	1.37 (0.88)
Ln(distance)	− 0.392*** (0.100)	− 0.308** (0.110)	− 0.320** (0.110)	− 0.231 (0.145)
Major power	0.737* (0.346)	0.648 (0.411)	0.664 (0.414)	0.180 (0.830)
Election, t				− 0.294 (0.795)
Election, $t - 1$				− 0.863 (1.045)
Election, $t + 1$				0.221 (0.664)
χ^2 (df) N	654.02*** (14), 799,738	556.88*** (15), 509,604	550.77*** (16), 509,604	355.87***(18), 489,148

The results are for logistic regressions with the BTSCS correction (Beck, Katz, and Tucker, 1998) and robust standard errors (noted in parentheses). The dependent variable is a fatal militarized dispute and the unit of analysis is a directed dyad-year.

*$p < .050$; **$p < .010$; ***$p < .001$ (one-tailed tests). The coefficients of the peace-years splines and the number of states in the international system had the expected signs and were highly significant; they and the coefficient of the constant are not reported to save space.

observations in which growth is measured across leaders are also included, the economic growth rate of democratic states is not significantly related to the initiation of fatal disputes ($p < .15$). This supports the view of rational-choice theorists that it is the incentives facing leaders that determine their actions. In democracies, these incentives depend, in part, on leaders' expectations of rational behavior by voters who can remove them from office.

In a test not reported in the table, we found little evidence that the economic conditions in a democracy affect the likelihood that another state will initiate conflict against it. That is, the initiation of fatal disputes is not significantly related to a potential democratic target's rate of growth ($p < .15$), though the sign of the estimated coefficient is positive (Smith 1996). Potential initiators do not seem to avoid democratic targets when they have a diversionary incentive. It is unlikely, therefore, that simultaneous, off-setting effects of a poor economy on the potential initiator and target account for the weak support for diversionary theory found in previous research.

In the last column of Table 1, we estimate the effect of legislative elections on democracies' initiation of fatal disputes. Given the clear evidence that democracies alone are subject to diversionary pressure, we consider the effects of economic growth and elections only when the focal state is a coherent democracy. We add three binary variables to the specification in column 3, indicating whether or not an election was held in the year of the observation, the year before, or the year after. If an approaching election increases the political incentive for the use of force, as diversionary theory suggests, the coefficients of the first two terms should be positive and the third negative. In fact, all three estimated coefficients are far from statistical significance. Nor do the results indicate that democratic leaders are more likely to employ the military after an election. In that case, the coefficients of the indicators of an election year and the year after would have been positive and significant. In additional analyses not reported in a table, there was no indication that democratic leaders are particularly susceptible to divert when faced with slow growth in an election year or that legislative elections affect the likelihood that a democracy will be the target of military action.

The evidence presented in Table 1 indicates that slow economic growth increases the likelihood that a democracy will initiate a fatal dispute, but diversionary action does not increase as an election approaches. Perhaps this is because there is "a permanent referendum on elected officials" (Russett 1990a:134), a phenomenon Lowi (1985) calls "plebiscitary democracy." Democratic leaders are probably concerned about their standing with the public at all times because their popularity influences local elections (Fiorina 1981; Abramson et al. 1987; Marra and Ostrom 1989) and the ability of the government to have its political program enacted (Edwards 1980; Rivers and Rose 1985; Rohde and Simon 1985). If public approval is always an important political asset, diversionary uses of force could occur at any stage in the election cycle.[13]

As noted earlier, the diversionary use of force should be most feasible for powerful democracies. Indeed, a military advantage seems almost a necessary condition. To assess this, we created variables that equal the growth rate of each of five prominent, powerful democracies: the United States, Great Britain, France, India, and Israel. These five variables and "dummy" indicators for each country were

[13] Previous empirical research on the effect of elections has been inconclusive. Gaubatz (1991) and Huth and Allee (2002) report that democracies are most likely to become involved in a militarized dispute shortly after an election, when their leaders are most secure politically. Yet, Miller (1995) and Leeds and Davis (1997) find no relation for more limited samples of countries. As for the United States, Russett (1990a) and Wang (1996) report that military action is more likely shortly before an election; but several others (Lindsay, Sayrs, and Steger 1992; Meernik 1994, 2004; Meernik and Waterman 1996; Gowa 1998; Fordham 1998a; cf. Stoll 1984) find no evidence that elections influence the use of force.

then added to the baseline equation in the first column of Table 1. The results, not reported in a table, indicate that only Israel may have been susceptible to diversionary pressure ($p < .02$). This finding is consistent with that of Barzilai and Russett (1990) and Spracher and DeRouen (2002), who report that Israel exhibits diversionary behavior in its rivalry with Arab states. The sign of the estimated coefficient for the British growth rate is negative as expected but insignificant at conventional levels ($p < .08$). This suggests that the evidence Morgan and Anderson (1999) report for British diversions may be a consequence of their omitting important control variables.

The coefficients for U.S. and Indian growth have positive signs, and that for the United States is highly significant ($p < .001$). Thus, contrary to diversionary theory (e.g., Ostrom and Job 1986; Hess and Orphanides 1995; Fordham 2002), the United States has been more likely, ceteris paribus, to use military force when its economy was strong, not weak. This finding is consistent with previous research arguing that, because the use of force is risky, U.S. presidents are more likely to take military action when they are popular (e.g., George 1971; Blechman and Kaplan 1978; Morgan and Bickers 1992; Mitchell and Moore 2002). France did not initiate a fatal dispute while a democracy. The war against Algeria was begun in 1964 when France had a regime with mixed political characteristics. Since France has suffered economic recessions while democratic, its behavior, too, lends no support to diversionary theory. Thus, of the five powerful democracies, only one seems to have been influenced by unfavorable economic conditions to initiate conflict. We found no evidence that the five powerful democracies are less likely to be targeted by other states when their economic growth rates are low (Smith 1996).

In Table 2, we clarify the influence of economic growth on democracies' uses of force by estimating the likelihood that they will initiate conflict against an autocracy, a regime with mixed political characteristics, or another democracy. In this second set of tests, our baseline model includes indicator variables that identify the nine possible types of directed dyads: democracy → democracy, democracy → incoherent regime, democracy → autocracy, autocracy → democracy, autocracy → incoherent regime, etc. This allows for discontinuities in the influence of political regimes on the initiation of conflict. The nine indicators are substituted for the democracy scores of the focal state and the target in the specification used in Table 1. The autocracy → autocracy dyad is the omitted category, and it represents the reference group.

As seen in the first column of Table 2, only the estimated coefficients for the democracy → democracy ($p < .04$) and the autocracy → democracy ($p < .03$) dyads are significantly different from zero. As liberals expect, democracies are unlikely to start a dispute with another democracy. Contrary to Bennett and Stam's (2004) findings, autocracies target democratic states, and democracies do not initiate against autocracies with unusual frequency. The estimated coefficients for the other six types of dyads are clearly insignificant, indicating that these pairs initiate conflict at the same rate as the autocracy → autocracy dyads.

In the second column of Table 2, we simplify the analysis in column 1. We keep the indicator variables that identify the three types of dyads that have a democracy as the focal state. This allows us to assess the influence of a bad economy on the likelihood that a democracy will initiate against a democracy, a mixed regime, or an autocracy. We also keep the autocracy → democracy indicator because autocracies initiate disputes against democracies at a significantly higher rate than normal. The coefficients reported in column 2 are similar to those in column 1.

To assess the influence of economic growth on democracies' initiation of disputes against particular targets, in the third column we add three interactive terms to the regression model in column 2. There is one for each possible target: a democracy's growth rate when it faces another democracy, its growth rate if the potential target is a regime of mixed political characteristics, and the growth rate when facing an

TABLE 2. The Impact of the Diversionary Incentive on a Democracy's Initiation of a Fatal Militarized Dispute Against Various Regime Types, 1921–2001

	Model 1: Baseline Model	*Model 2: Restricted Baseline Model*	*Model 3: Diversionary Incentives for Democracy Versus Other Regime Types*
Democracy's growth versus autocracy			− 10.7* (4.96)
Democracy's growth versus democracy			− 22.6** (8.4)
Democracy's growth versus mixed regime			− 12.0* (6.4)
Democracy versus autocracy	0.172 (0.379)	0.0926 (0.3676)	0.251 (0.360)
Democracy versus democracy	− 1.06* (0.59)	− 1.15* (0.56)	− 1.00* (0.57)
Democracy versus mixed regime	− 0.314 (0.444)	− 0.393 (0.409)	− 0.177 (0.419)
Autocracy versus democracy	0.636* (0.350)	0.551* (.287)	0.541* (0.288)
Autocracy versus mixed regime	− 0.00255 (0.27565)		
Mixed Regime versus democracy	0.460 (0.413)		
Mixed Regime versus autocracy	0.119 (0.328)		
Mixed Regime versus mixed regime	− 0.025 (0.359)		
Economic dependence	− 19.2* (10.7)	− 18.2* (10.1)	− 17.1* (9.7)
Ln(Capability Ratio)	0.770* (0.423)	0.750* (0.420)	0.747* (0.424)
Ln(Capability Ratio)^2	− 0.0423* (0.0201)	− 0.0414* (0.0199)	− 0.0414* (0.0201)
Alliance	− 0.00424 (0.2302)	− 0.0318 (0.231)	− 0.0465 (0.2292)
Contiguity	1.59** (0.53)	1.60** (0.53)	1.59** (0.53)
Ln(Distance)	− 0.312** (0.117)	− 0.310** (0.114)	− 0.323** (0.112)
Major power	0.602 (0.408)	0.603 (0.412)	0.638 (0.413)
χ^2 (df) N	751.32*** (20), 509,604	639.31*** (16), 509,604	642.88*** (19), 509,604

The results are for logistic regressions with the BTSCS correction (Beck, Katz, and Tucker, 1998) and robust standard errors (noted in parentheses). The dependent variable is a fatal militarized dispute and the unit of analysis is a directed dyad-year.

*$p < .050$, **$p < .010$, ***$p < .001$ (one-tailed tests). The coefficients of the peace-years splines and the number of states in the international system had the expected signs and were highly significant; they and the coefficient of the constant are not reported to save space.

autocracy. All three coefficients are negative, which is consistent with diversionary theory, and significant at least at the .03 level; the probability that the three are jointly different from zero is .003. Remarkably, even the greater peacefulness of democracy → democracy pairs is conditional on the state of the economy; but their pacific advantage is eliminated only when the growth rate of the focal state averages − 4.4% for 2 years (− 1.00–22.6 × growth = 0). Such slow growth is rare. Only 3.9% of the democracy → democracy pairs had growth below this level. The coefficient of the democracy → democracy indicator is significantly different from zero at the .05 level or better for growth rates above − 2.35%; 8.3% of the focal democracies in jointly democratic pairs had growth below this level. Furthermore, despite the comparatively large magnitude of the coefficient of a democracy's growth rate versus another democracy, χ^2 tests indicate that the differences among the three interaction terms involving growth are not statistically significant ($p < .46$). Thus, democracies are no more likely to divert against another democracy than against a state with a different type of regime. Thus, diversionary uses of force do not pose a particular challenge to the democratic peace.

The statistical evidence for diversionary action in democratic pairs rests on very few historical cases. There are only four instances in our data where a democracy initiated a fatal dispute against another democracy: Peru against Ecuador in 1984, Turkey against Cyprus in 1988, Niger against Mali in 1993, and Turkey against Greece in 1995. Not only do these observations constitute less than .01 of 1% of the observations for jointly democratic dyads, the initiating countries are not the mature democracies Pickering and Kisangani (2005) identify as prone to divert. The results of their monadic analyses, however, provide little information about the impact of diversions on the democratic peace. By considering the regime type of potential targets, we are able to show that consolidating democracies are those most likely to target other democratic states; but the use of force, even by these democracies, is still rare. Several studies report that democratization does not increase the net risk of conflict (viz., Gleditsch and Ward 2000; Oneal, Russett, and Berbaum 2003; Bennett and Stam 2004; Rousseau 2005); none has corroborated Mansfield and Snyder's (1996) conclusion that democratizing states are prone to violence.

In a test not reported in the table, we added the growth rate of potential democratic targets—one term each for a democracy confronted by an autocracy, a regime with mixed political characteristics, and another democracy—but again found no significant support for Smith's (1996) theory that other states will avoid initiating conflict when a democracy has a domestic incentive to respond forcefully.

Thus far, we have considered whether democracies are likely to initiate a fatal dispute in response to slow economic growth. In our third set of tests, presented in Table 3, we assess the strength of diversionary pressure using nondirected analyses of the onset of fatal disputes, the most frequent method for testing the democratic peace. Again, we first report the results for the relevant baseline model. We use indicator variables to gauge the incidence of fatal disputes for the three types of dyads that involve democratic states: two democracies, a democracy–mixed regime pair, and a democracy and an autocracy. A preliminary analysis showed that other types of dyads did not differ in their rates of involvement in fatal conflicts. In column 1, it is evident that democracies do not become involved in militarized disputes with one another ($p < .004$), and democracies and autocracies are particularly prone to fight ($p < .004$). The frequency of conflict for dyads containing a democracy and a state with mixed political characteristics is no different than the reference group, which includes all dyads that do not contain a democracy. The other variables in the equation perform as expected, again with the exception of Alliance.

To estimate the effect of economic conditions on democracies' involvement in fatal disputes, we add three terms to the baseline model: the growth rate of the democracy in the democracy–autocracy and democracy–mixed state dyads and, for

TABLE 3. The Impact of the Diversionary Incentive on Democracy's Fatal Militarized Dispute Involvement, 1921–2001

	Model 1: Baseline Model	*Model 2: Diversionary Incentives for Democracy Versus Other Regime Types*
Joint democracy × Lower economic growth		− 14.5** (5.8)
Democracy–autocracy × democracy's economy growth		0.410 (3.229)
Democracy–mixed regime × democracy's economy growth		− 3.05 (3.87)
Joint democracy dyad	− 1.21** (0.45)	− 1.09* (0.62)
Democracy–autocracy dyad	0.489** (0.183)	0.651*** (0.205)
Democracy–mixed regime dyad	− 0.0695 (0.2250)	0.420* (0.239)
Lower economic dependence	− 130*** (41)	− 107** (41)
Capability Ratio (ln)	− 0.403*** (0.052)	− 0.410*** (0.054)
Alliance	− 0.153 (0.186)	− 0.223 (0.182)
Contiguity	1.05*** (0.266)	1.28*** (0.30)
Distance (ln)	− 0.507*** (0.090)	− 0.528*** (0.096)
Major power	1.15*** (0.26)	1.37*** (0.27)
χ^2(df), *N*	1189.54*** (14), 431,945	1003.37*** (17), 320,345

The results are for logistic regressions with the BTSCS correction (Beck, Katz, and Tucker, 1998) and robust standard errors (noted in parentheses). The dependent variable is a fatal militarized dispute and the unit of analysis is a nondirected dyad-year.

*$p < .050$, **$p < .010$, ***$p < .001$ (one-tailed tests). The coefficients of the peace-years splines and the number of states in the international system had the expected signs and were highly significant; they and the coefficient of the constant are not reported to save space.

the jointly democratic pairs, the lower rate of economic growth. As noted earlier, democratic leaders seeking to divert attention from a bad economy should be particularly prone to target autocracies. The results reported in column 2 indicate, however, that the likelihood of conflict for democracy-autocracy pairs is unaffected by the growth rate of the democratic state. Indeed, the sign of the coefficient is wrong. Thus, there is no evidence here that hard economic times increase the incidence of fatal disputes between democracies and the regimes with which they share dangerous rivalries. The estimated coefficient of the democracy's growth rate in dyads with a mixed regime is negative, as expected, but far from statistical significance ($p < .22$). Importantly, a slow economy does influence the likelihood of a fatal dispute between two democracies ($p < .01$), but the peacefulness expected of two democracies is eliminated only when the annual growth rate of GDP per capita falls below − 7.5% (− 1.09–14.5 × lower democratic growth rate = 0). Only 3.3% of the jointly democratic observations had a growth rate this low over two years. The coefficient of the indicator of the jointly democratic dyads is significant at the .05 level when growth is greater than − 4.5%, which includes 92% of the democratic pairs. The coefficients of the three growth terms are jointly significant at only the .09 level.[14]

[14] That democratic leaders' use of force against other democracies is influenced by domestic conditions provides some evidence in favor of the institutional/structural version of the democratic peace. That is, domestic circumstances can trump, albeit infrequently, the non-violent norms associated with the normative/cultural explanation. As shown above, however, it is not the leaders of mature democracies that initiate conflict against other democratic states. It is possible, therefore, that over time, as the norms of the democratic peace become more established, these democratic leaders will become increasingly immune to diversionary pressure.

How can we account for our finding that the diversionary use of force, though statistically significant, poses little threat to the democratic peace? Perhaps embattled democratic leaders are not confident that a use of force will boost their popularity. Indeed, the rally effect on an American president's public approval is usually small. James and Rioux (1998) report that, during an international crisis, the president's popularity increased by only 3.3 percentage points on average *if the United States did not use military force*. If a high level of force was used, the president's popularity actually declined by 0.3%. These results are consistent with earlier work by Oneal and Bryan (1995), who report that the mean increase in the president's popularity in the 41 crises involving the United States, 1950–1985, was 1.4%, less than what is expected if a presidential speech is televised during prime time (Russett 1990b:36).[15] The president's popularity declined following 15 of the 41 crises. Thus, presidents, hoping to resurrect their political fortunes, cannot assume that a meaningful rally will occur; and they run the risk of a major conflict that makes defeat at the polls more likely (Cotton 1987).

The relative weakness of the diversionary effect may also be due to the checks and balances characteristic of democracies. In the United States, Congress can limit a president's ability to create or use a crisis for his political advantage with powers derived from the Constitution and the War Powers Act of 1973. In addition to such formal powers, political leaders of the opposing party can influence public opinion (Levy and Mabe 2004). The rally effect is significantly reduced when they question the need for military action. The media, too, shape the public's response to presidential actions (Brody 1991; Oneal and Bryan 1995; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Baker and Oneal 2001). Thus, partisan uses of force may be uncommon because democratic leaders know that a meaningful rally is far from certain, there is the danger of escalation that would be politically costly, and there are checks and balances on the executive. They may also be rare because democratic leaders are more far-sighted or altruistic than assumed.

Conclusion

That democracies almost never use military force against one another is one of the most important findings to emerge from the scientific study of international politics, leading many to conclude that democratic institutions offer the best hope for achieving a "perpetual peace." Using data for the period 1921–2001, we have assessed whether slow economic growth creates a diversionary incentive that threatens this optimistic prognosis.

We do find evidence that a bad economy increases the likelihood that a democracy, but not an autocracy, will initiate a fatal dispute. On average, democracies are less likely to start a serious conflict than are autocracies, but this greater peacefulness is conditional to a degree on the growth rate in GDP per capita. Our analyses of directed dyads confirm that democratic states are particularly unlikely to initiate fatal disputes against other democracies. Moreover, autocracies are prone to attack democracies while democracies are not unusually violent toward autocracies. Surprisingly, economic conditions affect the likelihood that a democracy will start a fatal dispute not only with an autocracy or a mixed regime but even with another democracy. The proximity of legislative elections does not increase the risk of a partisan use of force, whatever the state of the economy. Fortunately, the greater

[15] Earlier studies report a larger rally effect, one in the 5–7% range (Mueller 1973; Lee 1977; Kernell 1978; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Brace and Hinckley 1992), but they looked at a variety of international events: treaty signings, foreign trips by the president, dramatic events in the space program, etc. In addition, there has been persistent concern about the process by which the cases in the early studies were selected. Both James and Rioux (1998) and Oneal and Bryan (1995) started with sets of independently selected observations. Blechman and Kaplan (1978), Brody (1991), Edwards with Gallup (1990), and Brace and Hinckley (1992) also report that rallies are uncertain and small on average.

peacefulness of democratic pairs is eliminated only when a democracy's annual growth rate is below −4.4% over 2 years; only 3.9% of the focal democracies in democratic dyads grew this slowly. Moreover, this statistical result rests on only four historical cases, none involving a stable, mature democracy. We found no significant evidence for Smith's (1996) strategic argument that a bad economy makes a democratic state less likely to be targeted by others. The weak empirical support for diversionary theory in many previous studies cannot be explained, therefore, by the simultaneous, off-setting effects Smith considered.

Our analyses of five prominent, powerful democracies raise further doubts about the substantive importance of diversionary uses of force. Military action for political reasons is most feasible for the leaders of powerful democracies. Most previous research has focused on the United States, at least in part, for this reason, but the United States has been significantly more likely to initiate conflict when its economy was strong, not weak. The evidence regarding Britain is inconclusive, while India and France have also exhibited behavior inconsistent with theoretical expectations. Only Israeli leaders seem to have been susceptible to diversionary pressures (Barzilai and Russett 1990; Spracher and DeRouen 2002). Thus, there is little evidence in this important subset of cases that military force is used to divert attention away from a poor economy.

Our analysis of nondirected dyads confirms that the incidence of conflict for jointly democratic pairs is affected by economic conditions, but growth slow enough to offset the democratic peace (− 7.5% per annum for 2 years) using this unit of analysis occurs in only 3.3% of the democratic pairs. Moreover, unlike our directed analyses, the nondirected test does not indicate that a slow economy affects the likelihood that a democracy and an autocracy (or a state with a mixed regime) will become involved in a dispute. This surprising result, akin to the dog that did not bark in one of Sherlock Holmes's cases, must be counted as important evidence against diversionary theory.

In sum, the use of force by the leaders of democratic states is influenced by economic conditions; autocrats are unaffected. Slow growth increases the likelihood that a democracy will initiate a fatal dispute, even against another democracy; but the economic conditions that nullify the democratic peace are rare, and the leaders of mature democracies, even the most powerful, are not as a rule susceptible to diversionary pressures. Nor does an approaching election increase the likelihood of a dispute. Consequently, the risk of conflict between two democracies, even under adverse economic conditions, is sufficiently small that Kant's hope for a more peaceful world does not seem misplaced.

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