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Accounting for the Unaccounted: Weak-Actor Social Structure in Asymmetric Wars

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This paper addresses a puzzle of how conflicts characterized by significant power asymmetries often play out much differently than dominant powers expect. We adapt the notions of institutionalized peace and riot systems from the literature on ethnic violence to identify ways in which *social institutions* attenuate collective action dilemmas, thereby increasing capability for a less-powerful group. Dominant groups often miscalculate the true nature of capability relationships by failing to account for these group-specific institutions that operate in the face of exogenous threats. We illustrate our model with two episodes of Chechen mobilization in the 1990s.

> On April 16, 2003…Huddling in a drawing room with his top commanders, General Franks told them it was time to make plans to leave. Combat forces should be prepared to start pulling out within 60 days if all went as expected, he said. By September, the more than 140,000 troops in Iraq could be down to little more than a division, about 30,000 troops (Gordon 2004).

From the statements of U.S. military and civilian elites ruling Iraq, it would appear that the capability of an insurgent group to maintain hostilities in the country was largely unexpected by many analysts. Three years after the beginning of the conflict, many now liken the situation to U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Others note a similar dynamic about the Russian invasion of Chechnya—it has arguably become similar to the Soviet–Afghanistan war. Prior to the Chechen wars, many leaders were highly optimistic about the prospects of a short war as well. Despite much optimism in both cases, both the Iraqi and Chechen ability to resist proved far greater than was expected. This is especially puzzling, because both dominant actors (the U.S.A. and Russia) had lost asymmetric conflicts, and yet were willing to go to war again under similar circumstances. These

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cases pose a puzzle to researchers of asymmetric conflicts. Why do conflicts characterized by significant power asymmetries often ''surprise'' the nominally stronger actor in the way they progress?

Researchers have addressed this puzzle from several different perspectives. An answer to this question might focus on characteristics of the stronger actor, such as emphasizing misperceptions (e.g., under-weighing disconfirming evidence) or, alternatively, by examining characteristics of the weaker actor, such as group resolve or capability. In this paper, we argue that one factor contributing to strong actor miscalculation is a tendency to conceive of weak-actor capabilities in *static* form. Such a conception does not account for *social institutions* that operate in response to exogenous threats, and which confer additional capability to the group. *Failure to account for these institutions and the way in which they may alter the true capability relationship often leaves dominant actors surprised.* Given the possibility that social institutions may affect the overall capability relationship, and consequently the (mis)calculations of a stronger actor, our research question focuses primarily on these institutions. Specifically, we seek to identify (1) which aspects of a (seemingly) weak actor's social structure increase its ability effectively to resist a stronger actor, and (2) how the increase occurs. As social institutions are more likely to play a role in societies not maintaining a conventional army or fighting a conventional war, our analysis has particular applicability to conflicts such as guerrilla wars, nonviolent resistance, and terrorist-type group responses.

To understand why dominant actors are often ''surprised'' by the resistance of dominated groups, we propose examining more closely the social institutions which aid groups in carrying out their objectives. We draw on theories of collective action problems (e.g., Lichbach 1995) and ethnic conflict and civil society (e.g., Brass 1997; Varshney 2001) to posit that groups sometimes (1) centralize in the face of threat for greater resistance, (2) exploit existing organizational structures (such as religious groupings) to provide coordination, and (3) use incentive structures to mobilize the population. *Central to our argument is the idea that these factors are difficult-to-observe ex ante, yet ''activate'' in the face of an exogenous threat, thereby significantly altering a group's capability structure.* Prior to an identifiable, exogenous threat actors may appear disorganized and lacking in material capabilities. Once a threat is introduced, however, nominally weak actors can demonstrate sudden and dramatic shifts in capability to resist, thus pushing the actual costs of conflict well above the predicted costs.

This point is important, because it suggests that a group's social institutions appear (and may be) benign prior to a threat, but the addition of a threat transforms the purpose of the institutions making them active for carrying out conflict objectives. During conflicts in Latin America, for example, insurgent groups used churches and the associated support structure to make available pools of individuals for mobilization and to gain greater legitimacy (Mason 2004). To be clear, our primary interest lies in understanding when actual costs of conflict for a dominant group deviate from the group's predicted costs. Whether a dominated group wins or loses is interesting, but an exclusive focus on ultimate outcomes is beyond the scope of this study. Our goal is to demonstrate that social institutions are an important part of a group's capability structure, and that an outside group's failure to recognize them can contribute to a prolonged war, or even defeat, both of which can be far more costly than dominant powers originally expected.

An understanding of how groups' social structures transform to aid in carrying out conflict goals has important theoretical implications. First, a conceptualization of group capability needs to take into account not just *material* capabilities on the one hand, or insurgent or guerrilla *tactics* on the other. Instead, capability can be profoundly affected by group-specific social institutions. Many rationalist arguments, especially since Fearon's (1995) seminal paper on war, focus on the distribution of capabilities, and our paper has implications for how actors identify

this distribution. Second, our analysis suggests that dominant actors suffer unexpected costs not only because of poor state learning, overconfidence, or domestic organizational barriers, but also because difficult-to-predict, dramatic shifts in the purpose and role of social institutions can occur in the face of exogenous threats. Third, although there is a vast literature focusing on collective action primarily in nonviolent circumstances such as social movements (e.g., Tarrow 1998), far less focuses on how groups achieve orchestrated collective action in situations of violence including violent ethnic conflict. Our study has implications for how ethnicity and religion shape social institutions that facilitate networks and other bridging connections among individuals to foster effective collective action.

Our argument also has policy implications for (1) states that may become involved in asymmetric conflict, as well as (2) international actors seeking to make or keep peace—a topic we address in the conclusion of this paper after developing the key logic of our argument. The paper proceeds by addressing alternative explanations for asymmetric conflicts, paying special attention to works emphasizing social structure. Secondly, we detail the concept of an ''institutionalized conflict system'' and integrate this idea into the larger literature. Finally, we assess the plausibility of the model by exploring the dynamics of two episodes of Chechen mobilization in the 1990s.

Perspectives on Asymmetric War

Research emphasizing stronger actors has highlighted the idea that strong states lose *because* they actually have more strength (Maoz 1989:239) or because they overestimate their own capability and success (e.g., Johnson 2004). Furthermore, others have highlighted institutional constraints such as from the defense establishment, which may impede states' ability to fight (e.g., Cohen 1984), poor (or no) learning by states about their environment (e.g., Nagl 2002; Van Evera 2003) and the inadequacy of Western military organizations to meet ''new'' security challenges such as transnational terrorist techniques (Paul 2005:50). Arreguín-Toft (2005), in a review of alternative approaches, notes that some emphasize that authoritarian regimes fight better than democratic regimes (7), and that democratic regimes are constrained by society to avoid sufficient escalation to win small wars (15).[1] According to these approaches, states are ignorant of weak actor capabilities or fare poorly in asymmetric conflicts, because of organizational biases and institutional constraints within their own country. These approaches largely ignore the characteristics of, and what is happening within, the weaker state, however.

Explanations highlighting *both* the strong and weak actor have focused on a few aspects. First, Mack (1975) emphasizes how the type and course of the war affect the stronger power's ability to continue waging it. When political factions exist within the stronger power's domestic political structure, for example, they can affect the state's willingness to continue fighting. Arreguín-Toft (2001:95) sets forth a model emphasizing the strategic interaction between stronger and weaker powers, arguing that the best predictor of conflict outcomes is the interaction of actor strategies during conflict. He posits that ''strong actors will lose asymmetric conflicts when they use the wrong strategy vis-à-vis their opponent's strategy'' and finds empirical support for this thesis. Paul (1994:13) provides an argument about why weaker powers still *initiate* wars even though they recognize their own weakness, and emphasizes that they initiate if key decision-makers perceive they can achieve limited objectives in a short war. Furthermore, a sizeable literature exists addressing the interaction between counterinsurgents and

[1] For an excellent review and thorough review of alternative approaches to asymmetric wars, see Arreguín-Toft's (2005:5–18) entire discussion.

insurgents with an emphasis on counterinsurgent tactics. Much of this literature addresses Leites and Wolf (1970) who make an argument about the mix of incentives counterinsurgents use (or should use) to break the will of members of the populace who serve as potential insurgents.[2] These approaches primarily focus on strategies and tactics of the stronger actor vis-à-vis the weaker actor.

With the exception of Arreguín-Toft (2001), who rightly notes that guerrilla warfare strategies depend ''directly on a network of social support for intelligence, logistical assistance, and replacements'' (109), approaches emphasizing the strong and weak actors do not address the underlying social institutions, which are necessary preconditions for the implementation of such strategies and tactics. Some studies have focused on how the possession of arms translates into power for nominally weaker actors (Cohen 1984 [cf. Arreguín-Toft 2005]). Parker (1999), for example, argues that it takes more than the simple acquisition of arms to alter the outcome of a war; the arms must be assimilated into the military and social structure of the group. Yet the existence of arms can exist in the absence of social institutions, and vice versa. Early studies of asymmetric conflict in the context of the Vietnam war highlighted the importance of ''cost-tolerance'' noting, for example, that the Viet Cong had superior cost-tolerance and could therefore continue the war longer [for a summary and evaluation, see Mueller (1980)]. This approach emphasizes the willingness of actors to absorb costs, which does not account for the additive capability social institutions confer.

In a different vein, but closer to our argument, much has been written about social structures and their importance in ameliorating collective action problems. The social movement literature details the strategies, interests, and organization of movements to explain why initially weak movements sometimes experience success, but primarily focuses on nonviolent behavior.[3] There are important lessons to be learned for instances of violent conflict, especially violent asymmetric conflict, however, which we explore hereafter. Mason (2004:86–114) summarizes many contributions of the social movement and collective action literature. Importantly, our model is about how social institutions activate in the face of threat, as opposed to being vehicles for social mobilization that form over time in order to make revolutionary challenges against the government. Thus, although our argument draws upon theories of social movements, it applies to asymmetric conflicts within a state or without, so long as the nominally weaker power does not primarily rely on a standing military, but rather on the population. Although existing approaches to asymmetric conflict are important, we contend that an understanding of the role of social institutions—especially how they operate in times of exogenous threat (versus popular discontent, as in social movement approaches)—complements existing models and contributes to a more complete story.

Institutionalized Conflict Systems

Scholars and policymakers alike often assume that highly decentralized, disorganized, and factional groups employ tactics even if in a haphazard way to aid in achieving conflict objectives. Necessary to the successful implementation of these tactics, however, is the maintenance of some support system by which to pursue the tactics (Arreguín-Toft 2001:109), including the material and logistic

[2] Other works in this vein include Shultz (1978); Maranto and Tuchman (1992). Also see Mason (1996) who provides a similar argument, but one predicated on strategic decision making, which explicitly incorporates the decisions of the populace.

[3] The literature on social movements is far too voluminous to review here, but one of the closer arguments to ours is that set forth in Traugott (1995) on ''repertoires of collective action, although this work emphasizes protest behavior rather than asymmetric interstate violence or civil war. For more recent work applying social movement theories to violence, see McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001).

support they require. This is an important point, because so-called insurgent operations cannot possibly be carried out in the absence of a more basic institutional support structure. These systems include (often) complex social networks, training programs, and supply lines or material sources. Implicitly, these also require veterans of past conflicts; people who may have killed for the cause and for whom doing so again or training others to do so will likely be easier than for the novice dissident. These individuals, the connections among them, and the resources they control, are components of *group-specific social order*. Dominant group failure to account for the strength of resistance is attributable in part to a lack of recognition of how a specific group's social order contributes to its capability structure. Specifically, the level of a group's effective resistance is not solely a function of military capabilities and chance, but rather group-specific social order.

Identifying the relevant societal/group institutions in which those actors operate is a useful way of examining conflict behavior for societal actors. Social institutions define the rules of social behavior, and are constituted by culture, norms, and social hierarchy, in addition to the more formal elements of institutions. Those social institutions that *aid in the development and execution* of group-specific tactics in the face of some exogenous threat (real or perceived) are ''conflict institutions'' and comprise what we call ''institutionalized conflict systems'' (hereafter ICS). When the elements of the ICS have little or no impact in times of peace, we call these ICS ''latent.'' When groups face an identifiable exogenous threat, we say that the ICS is ''active'' or operative.

The concept of an ICS is a logical extension of two related concepts. The first is the ''institutionalized peace system'' (Varshney 2001). Institutionalized peace systems are civic or social organizations, networks of individuals, or other associations that are characterized by group or communal heterogeneity. That is, multiple ethnic or social groups interact within them. These peace systems operate by minimizing the effect of exogenous shocks that might make conditions more conducive to violence. In addition to guaranteeing security, successful peace institutions operate as ''firefighters,'' alerting groups of micro-level conflict. The second concept from which we develop the notion of an ICS is the ''institutionalized riot system,'' in which there are ''known persons who perform leadership roles, pools of persons from whom riot actors are drawn, and established links of communication'' (Brass 1997:15).

The literature on civil society and inter-group violence from which our concept is drawn makes a distinction between ''integrated'' and ''disintegrated'' social institutions as explanations for conflict, with integrated social institutions a necessary condition for peace systems (Varshney 2001:378). *Integrated* social institutions refer to institutions that are common forums of interaction for members of at least two different groups. Implicit in the definition of an ICS is that the institutions in question are communally, ethnically, or socially *disintegrated*. In other words, the communal institutions in question are wholly contained within group ''boundaries,'' or what Putnam (2000) calls ''nonbridging civic networks.'' Varshney suggests that the concept of an institutionalized peace system applies only to cities that are communally integrated, whereas the institutionalized riot system applies only to cities that are communally disintegrated. Although this dichotomy may be useful, generally it fails to address the possibility that in the same societies, episodes of peace and episodes of violence *both* occur from time to time. Moreover, not all institutionally disintegrated societies engage in conflict and not all societies with integrative characteristics remain in peace (e.g., Rwanda where there were high rates of intermarriage, yet society still descended into war). Understanding why requires an analysis of how conflict institutions function in times of peace versus times of threat.

According to Mary Katzenstein (cf. Goldstone 2003:1), ''students of social movements commonly associate institutionalization with demobilization…social movements…are necessarily extra-institutional.'' In evaluating this commonly accepted notion that ''social movements…are necessarily extra institutional,'' we contend that *the opposite is often true*. Social mobilization facilitates and is facilitated by group-specific institutions. Whether the group's social and hierarchical institutions encourage demobilization (through hand tying, reassurance, amelioration of security dilemma) or mobilization (through the processes we will set out) is dependent on the institution and the threat. Thus the group's internal order is a crucial unit of analysis. Just as the peaceful institutions Katzenstein is referring to promote peace by altering expected utility calculations, so too do conflict institutions alter utility calculations by making conflict behavior more attractive.

As formal, state institutions have tremendous implications for the range of behavior available to a given actor, the formation of less ''formal,'' sub-national, or group-specific social institutions also has implications for the utility of certain behavior by group actors. These social institutions have longstanding effects on group interactions, and lead to variant responses, given some exogenous threat. Much as state behavior research has unpacked the ''black-box'' of the state, so too must intra-state conflict research delve into the internal order of the group. We argue that a useful way to do so is by focusing on these conflict institutions.

Systematic Characteristics of ICS

Work specifying the exact collective action problems that groups face (e.g., Olson 1965; Tullock 1971; Lichbach 1995; Mason 2004), and how groups operate in order to ameliorate the devastating effects of these problems on a movement, gives us insights into how conflict institutions work. Accordingly, to maximize the analytic usefulness of the ICS, we draw upon the general collective action literature, especially that which emphasizes group dynamics, to specify some common elements: (1) authority structure, (2) cohabitational institutional frameworks, and (3) incentive provision mechanisms.

First, whether or not an ICS can be characterized as centralized or decentralized has important implications for how the group as a whole acts. Centralization can be geographic concentration of the material or infrastructure that in part constitutes an ICS, or concentration of decision-making power (i.e., a hierarchical decision-making system). In Northern Ireland, for example, we see relatively centralized ICS that maximize efficiency as a function of the geographic concentration of group members. Clearly, as groups centralize those institutions that aid in their struggle, they benefit with the ability better to coordinate elements of the group and maximize the utility of material capabilities through an over-arching decision-making process.[4] The drawback, of course, is that the concentration of the components of these institutions (i.e., the people and infrastructure that comprises them) provides the group's enemies with clearer targets. Therefore, the effect of centralized authority versus decentralized authority in the context of some exogenous threat to the group is dependent on the environment in which the group operates.

[4] Mack (1975) highlights the idea that conflicting national groups may find a common unity in the face of an external threat, which is somewhat different from what we are arguing. He applies this to divisions within the stronger power, whereas we discuss centralization within the weaker power. Furthermore, centralization as we see it does not apply solely to popular support but rather to geographic concentration, or even concentration of decision-making power. Our approach also differs from sociological literature on centralization and collective action, in that the sociological literature primarily identifies centralization as in the *density of social networks* (Marwell, Oliver and Prahl 1988).

To be clear, the characteristics of the ICS affect the macro-strategic environment. As groups centralize the institutions that provide the support necessary to carry out violence or other dissent, this in turn alters power relationships. Previous research has demonstrated, for example, that colonial wars or civil wars with foreign patrons tend to demonstrate higher levels of cooperation among otherwise unfriendly groups responding to the exogenous threat (e.g., Atlas and Licklider 1999). In the civil war for Algerian independence, for instance, Berber and Arab insurrection groups joined forces in order to free the country of French rule, temporarily putting aside long-standing divisions. Likewise, the Somali independence campaign was characterized by cooperation among otherwise unfriendly groups that were deeply divided along clan and other familial boundaries. We see such consolidation or coalescence between groups unfriendly to each other in Afghanistan, Chad, Lebanon, Indonesia, and often in Latin America as well.

Where we find highly centralized ICS, we are less likely, ceteris paribus, to find random or uncoordinated attacks by that group. We are also more likely to observe *seemingly* spontaneous mobilization due to centralized ability to disseminate mobilization orders and coordinative ability to move individuals into the streets together. As the ICS decentralizes, we are more likely to see factionalization and multiple power-wells that translate into attacks with less of an overarching strategy, as the group's behavior as a whole (in terms of targets and methods) is decreasingly homogenous.

A second characteristic of an ICS is the extent to which it is ''co-habitational'' with other social or political institutions. Although an ICS is, by definition, group-boundaried, the availability of existing social institutions that confer capability provide for the possibility of institutional cohabitation. Mason (2004:101–111) discusses that revolutionary movements can take advantage of local (village) institutions to further their agenda in mobilizing peasants—a process highlighted in various works on social movements. We contend that a similar process occurs when groups mobilize in the face of exogenous threats from dominant powers. This cohabitation may lead to the disintegration of a prior-to-threat integrated institution. During the Rwandan genocide, for instance, churches were co-opted by the dominant Hutu allowing for further mass slaughter of the Tutsi (Des Forges 1999). Given that the possibility of cohabitation of churches was unrealized until after perceived threat, we would identify this element of the Hutu ICS as latent. This is an example of the ''dominant'' group developing more effective ICS traits, but the effect is the same for dominated groups.[5] Recall the Latin American example raised earlier—weaker insurgent elements used churches to increase their resistance.

Cohabitation also provides a means for recruitment. Groups in conflict especially in Africa use refugee camps, for example, as a resource for recruitment, refuge, and aid interdiction (see, for example, Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). Refugee camps, which are usually contaminant with conflict, are thus often co-opted by rebel or insurrection groups as a means to overcome power asymmetries, and the effect of these co-opted resource centers are often *unaccounted* for by dominant powers ex ante. We see the obvious cohabitation of camps by dominated groups engaged in asymmetric conflict in Sudan, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, D.R. Congo, Myanmar, Pakistan, Palestine, and many others.

In addition to cohabitational organizational structures, the existence or absence of in-group incentive processes (what Olson (1965) calls ''selective incentives'') is a third important characteristic of an ICS. These incentive processes are mecha-

[5] Religious cohabitation may also compel individuals to include in their utility functions nonmaterial benefits that conflict behavior may provide. The same logic applies to nonreligious institutions, such as schools, businesses, and labor organizations.

nisms that maximize retention, promote allegiance and discipline, and recruitment. For instance, in Sri Lanka, the Tamils as a group have incentive processes in place to recruit individuals for very dangerous (and often suicidal) operations (see, for example, Ramasubramanian 2004). The incentive process provides martyrdom and family benefits to individual ''black tigers.'' Other incentive processes actually provide disincentives to individuals (e.g., ''sympathizer'' killings). In a study of ethnic violence in Rwanda, for example, Bhavnani and Backer (2000) discuss the role of ''in-group policing'' mechanisms whereby members of groups sanction deviants within for nonconformity. The internal policing mechanisms and norms that determine the extent and type of the incentive structure clearly have important implications for the capability of the group as a whole, given some exogenous threat.

Here too, though, the larger environment in which the group operates has tremendous consequences for what kind of in-group incentive processes are characteristic of an ICS. In a conflict where a group's population is at least partially mobilized, for example, these institutions are focused on discipline and are much more likely to be characterized by coercive incentives than reward-based incentives. And when there are strong mobilization or discipline norms, there will clearly be additive capability.

Latent ICS and Dominant Power Decision-Making

When are dominant actors more or less likely to ''misjudge'' a dominated target? We have argued that the often-observed phenomenon of misperception as it relates to group capabilities may be a function, among other things, of ignorance about the social institutions of a weaker group, and how those institutions become consequential in the face of threat. The greater the influence of unaccounted conflict institutions on a dominated group's capability, the more likely a dominant power will find itself in an unintended situation given ignorance of ICS elements. Table 1 summarizes the posited influence of latent institutions, namely when a stronger actor is likely to be surprised by the way conflict plays out.

The three characteristics of ICS we identified are not exhaustive, but they are an important first step in capturing the effects of ICS, latent and active. These elements alter expected utility calculations for the dominated group by lowering aggregate costs to conflict, and by increasing probabilities of success. Our approach would predict an *incompletely* informed dominant group to make ''mistakes.'' Given that the elements of social institutions that comprise the ICS are often latent (i.e., inconsequential until faced with threat) the information the dominant group has about the returns-to-scale of the social institutions may be inaccurate or nonexistent. From a rationalist perspective to inter-group conflict, incomplete information about the internal group structures that provide additive capabilities may cause rational actors to initiate a conflict in which they incur costs they may not wish to pay ex ante (Fearon 1995).

Where there is a latent centralization institution in a certain fragmented societal group, for instance, we are likely to see dominant-power miscalculation.

TABLE 1. Dominant Group Information and Additive Capability

	Weak actor	
Strong actor	*Strong institutions*	*Weak institutions*
Ignorant	Surprise	No surprise
Accurate	No surprise	No surprise

As the dominant actor threatens the group, the latent ICS elements activate, possibly leading to mass mobilization, centralization under higher authority, or institutional coalescence, all adding to the ability of the nominally weaker group to impose greater costs on the dominant group. These costs may be manifest as electoral costs (if the dominant actor is a state agent), duration costs (if the conflict is ultimately won but takes ''longer'' than is expected), or a myriad other costs leading to ''surprise.'' If dominant actors wish to avoid such costs, they cannot neglect to (1) gather detailed intelligence about group social structures, and (2) *use that intelligence* to develop war strategies and tactics. Such intelligence would include ways in which group social structures can be transformed to confer additive capability to the group.

By failing to recognize this, dominant actors risk being surprised as the ICS activates. ''Surprise'' is not a simple dichotomy, however, but rather is a matter of degree that is a function of both the ICS itself and what the dominant actor knows about the social arrangements that comprise the ICS. While some groups may be capable of exacting much higher costs on dominant actors than ex ante predicted (as a function of ICS elements), others may not. Likewise, while some dominant actors may be completely ignorant of the social arrangements of their adversary (and thus, may be more likely to be surprised by the costs they incur), other dominant actors may be more sensitive to the parts of a group's potential ICS. Sensitivity to the additive capability of the ICS may stem, for instance, from historical interactions or shared socio-cultural elements. Factors that may account for ignorance include a lack of previous engagement or interaction with the dominated group, ethno-chauvinism (or other group-related biases), or significant changes in a dominated group's social order.

Distant culture or social structures that are relatively alien to the dominant power may contain elements of an ICS that may contribute to misperception about that dominated group's capability. Furthermore, the less ''open'' a society is to outsiders, the more likely it is a dominant power will misjudge capability, when relevant social institutions exist. A U.S.A./European invasion of Iran or North Korea, for example, might hold surprises for the invading countries because of the extent to which these societies are ''closed.'' Finally, although not explicitly examined here, the social institutions themselves may change over time, rendering dominant-actor impressions of additive capability by ICS in the face of exogenous threat anachronistic.[6]

Conversely, actors that have been engaged for an extended time period should have relatively reliable information about the additive capability that social institutions confer to a dominated target in times of crisis. For instance, although Palestinians are heavily outgunned in terms of military capability relative to Israel, the existence of strong ICS confer additive capability to the Palestinians as a whole. These elements include strong institutional cohabitation (schools, churches), extensive in-group incentive mechanisms, and multiple hierarchical chains to minimize targeting. Over the course of decades, however, Israeli decision-makers and security analysts have become more familiar with the various intersections of social order and violent dissent, thus altering tactics accordingly. This does not suggest, however, that a stronger power can ever know for certain of what a dominated group's ICS consists. Even after having witnessed the active ICS previously, a dominant actor may still not account for it adequately in future interactions. Yet, this begs the question of why stronger actors may still be surprised, given prior interaction? Although our model does not explicitly account for the perceptions or memory of the actors, we offer some possible

[6] Future research could fruitfully be devoted to understanding how social institutions facilitate long-run adaptation and learning during war.

reasons why dominant actors would be surprised even if they had witnessed this phenomenon before.

Dominant actors reduce uncertainty over time, but are unable to know for certain the additive capability that conflict institutions confer. In a given episode of violence, for instance, coordinating institutions may operate, but not materialize as well as they did in the past. Alternatively, they may materialize even better than before. Empirically, the process has a random element as the availability of individuals, resources, and other contextual factors fluctuate. Second, dominant actors do not necessarily learn accurate lessons about past events. Even given prior interaction, dominant actors may or may not conclude that additive capability is a function of social structures, especially if the social structures are not well understood (i.e., in closed societies). Furthermore, if they do attribute additive capability to social structures, they may or may not be able to identify precisely which social structures are consequential. Third, if a dominant actor does develop an accurate (or nearly accurate) understanding of how ICS confer additive capability, it does not follow that the dominant actor will retain that lesson in the future, especially if there is a significant gap between interactions. In cases where decades pass between episodes of conflict, typically there is a high turnover of policymakers (i.e., individual decision-makers), and in many cases complete changes in institutional arrangements (i.e., regime changes). Furthermore, literature on learning note the difficulties with reifying learning to the collective level (Levy 1994) and suggest that even when organizational learning is possible, there is often great resistance to it (see Nagl [2002] on organizational learning during the Vietnam war). Finally, because ICS are latent in times of peace, lessons learned from past conflicts might carry little weight prior to a new episode of conflict, because the institutions are not yet active. Indeed, the institutions may be deceiving during peacetime, appearing as if they will not activate as they did in the past. In the Chechen illustration we develop below, prior to the 1994 Russo-Chechen war, the clans appeared extremely uncooperative, primarily because of widespread disapproval of President Dzhokhar Dudaev, giving Russia the impression that the clans would not cooperate with each other if Russia invaded. Yet once Russia did invade, the clans put aside their differences, rallied behind Dudaev, and cooperated in the face of threat.

Despite prior interaction, *even the dominated group* may not have complete information about the ICS, because there is a collective action problem about which rebels are well-aware. In other words, whether collective action problems can be overcome successfully is not always certain. Yet, the rebels are also more familiar with how the ICS has operated (or is operating), because they participate in the activation and maintenance of the ICS, and therefore have more information than the dominant actor. The dominant group is not privy to such information, on the other hand, and thus can only attempt to reduce uncertainty by observing the resistance.

Episodes of Russo-Chechen Conflict

In what follows, we examine two episodes of mobilization between the Russians and Chechens in the early 1990s. We first briefly narrate the events leading up to the 1991 and 1994 Russo-Chechen encounters to give the reader a sense of what took place.[7] Then, we move to an analytic discussion of how these events relate to our concept of an ICS.[8]

[7] This narration is almost purely descriptive, but important in setting up the context.

[8] We acknowledge at the outset that we focus primarily on the Chechen side of the conflict. We noted in the paper that actions and misperceptions of the stronger actor might also be important, but our goal is to elucidate factors from the perspective of the weaker actor.

Our argument will be strongest when there has been no prior violent interaction. This does not apply to Chechnya, as there have been a number of conflicts between Russia and Chechnya over a long period of time. Yet, the most recent conflict (prior to the 1990s) was during WWII, following which Chechens were deported. Based on our discussion above about why dominant actors may still be surprised despite prior interaction, it is reasonable to argue that Russia did not rely on lessons learned from previous conflicts, especially given the long period of time since the most recent interaction. Therefore, our model still helps to elucidate the Russo-Chechen case by evaluating the operation of the ICS. Our argument by no means fully explains the case, but it complements and supplements explanations that other authors have offered, which we discuss at the end of the case study.

Our goals in this empirical section are modest—in particular, we hope to demonstrate the existence of the hypothesized effects of conflict institutions for two episodes of asymmetric conflict between Russia and Chechnya. Our approach makes existence claims rather than correlative hypotheses, and therefore we focus on two episodes of a case where conflict institutions indeed exist and operate. Thus, we do not follow standard methodological practice (King, Keohane and Verba 1994), but are consistent with arguments ''about testing noncorrelative hypotheses'' (Dion 1998; Braumoeller and Goertz 2000; cf. Mertha and Pahre 2005:3). Ideally, future analysis of the ICS effects on dominant power misperception would include variation in the systematic characteristics of the social institutions.

To be sure that our model is applicable more generally, more systematic analysis needs to be conducted for other conflicts. We have raised a number of examples/ideas throughout the paper for heuristic purposes, and that are on point, yet only more systematic analysis can reveal for sure. Any *one* study likely will have difficulty providing a real ''test'' of the theoretical propositions we have set forth. A cumulative set of studies, on the other hand, involving multiple cases wherein dominant actors suffered varying degrees of costs that were greater (and less than) was expected ex ante would be ideal for assessing the model.

Overview of Events

How could the military of a former superpower not defeat a group with an official military numbering only around 2,000 people?[9] After all, approximately 40,000 troops entered Chechnya on December 11 and 12, 1994 armed with tanks, planes, and high-powered weaponry. Importantly, the Chechens' fighting strength was not limited to official military involvement, but many members of the population were mobilized based on the social institutions we have posited in this paper. Despite disagreements over exact numbers of people involved in the Chechen conflict, what is clear is that the official forces numbered very few—no more than a few thousand. Yet the many people living in villages contributed over the course of the war and numbered far greater. This is interesting for the argument we have posed in our paper. That is, with so many common

[9] There is considerable disagreement about the number of rebels in Chechnya. According to Dunlop (1998:116), the number of people in the actual *fighting detachments* of the national guard consisted of only about 2,000 people. Estimates of others ''belonging'' to the national guard and popular militia exceed 90,000. Tishkov (2004:97) estimates that the number of people engaged in fighting did not exceed three or four thousand. Evangelista (2002:44) indicates that some 1,500 Chechen fighters were involved with Maskhadov in storming Grozny, although he does not say that this was the entire military force. With respect to the second Chechen war, Lopez (2005:8) estimates that there were only 800–1,000 rebels, with another 100–150 foreign fighters. Evangelista further notes that Maskhadov estimated ''We have exactly 420 villages in Chechnya. In each one of them we have at least 50 combatants and 30 or so reservists. That's around 33,000 persons I can count on, in addition to my commanders and their staffs'' (161).

people as potential fighters, how else could they be organized to fight effectively absent some coordinating social institutions?

Some scholars acknowledge Chechnya's dominating clan structure, yet few analyze the way in which it operates in the amelioration of collective action problems. When no external enemy is present, the clans are often noncooperative. Each seeks its own benefit even if at the expense of others. Dunlop (1998:98) notes that the clans were so divided that the only person that could come to power was Dudaev, an outsider (an ex-Soviet military leader who had lived in Estonia for many years). Between the 1991 and 1994 episodes of conflict, for example, the clans engaged in extensive infighting, but when Russia provided clear and identifiable threats, the Chechen clans operated on the basis of several institutionalized structures.

A practice of centralization, in-group incentive mechanisms, and a cohabitational structure were all instrumental in achieving more effective conflict behavior. The latent nature of these institutions also contributed to Russian underestimation of Chechen capability.[10] Our analysis suggests that the Chechens had an institutionalized system of conflict that was unapparent ex ante, yet significantly capable of absorbing a Russian attack and maintaining sustained violence until an acceptable settlement was reached.[11]

The 1991 Russian State of Emergency

On October 27, 1991 Dzhokhar Dudaev was elected president of Chechnya. Four days later, he declared Chechnya independent. The anti-secessionist sentiments in Moscow were already very high, and this declaration only intensified the atmosphere. On November 4 and 5, the Chechen Parliament met and instituted rapid, extensive reforms. They adopted Chechen and Russian as the national languages, abolished the KGB in Chechnya, nationalized property, and banned Soviet Supreme Council activity (Foreign Broadcast Information Service 1991a:54 [cited as *FBIS* hereafter]).

On November 7, 1991, Russian President Boris Yeltsin approved a state of emergency in the Chechen-Ingush Republic. According to Gall and de Waal (1998:101), ''The following evening, November 8, Russian television announced the declaration of a state of emergency in Chechnya. The new Chechen Parliament, elected on the same day as Dudaev, met in emergency session and voted Dudaev powers to 'defend the sovereignty of Chechnya.''' The Russian state of emergency imposed ten regulations on the Chechen people that included a ban on rallies, street marches, demonstrations, and any other events involving large numbers of people. It banned the use of any weapons or military activity (FBIS 1991b:38).

Chechens were familiar with this rhetoric. Nikolaev (1996:20) adds, ''The rumor was circulated about a new deportation of the Chechen people…'' On November 9, newly elected President Dudaev

> appealed on local television to his compatriots to defend the freedom of his people…the appeal by the president…found response among the republican population. In spite of the late hour, the center of Groznyy is turbulent. Thousands of people took to the streets…Groups and individual residents who are prepared to defend the president at all costs are heading toward Groznyy. They appear to be very well armed (FBIS 1991c:39).

[10] As a first cut, we examine only the onset of conflict. That is, we spend more time discussing the events surrounding the initial stages of war. Analyzing the events of the wars themselves could highlight important adaptation processes.

[11] We avoid using the term ''win,'' because the Russians did not agree to an independent and sovereign Chechnya. Most scholars would concur that the Chechens were victorious in forcing the Russians to retreat from Chechnya.

News of the state of emergency as well as rumors of the deportation circulated rapidly and overnight large numbers of people mobilized in response to this exogenous threat. On November 9, TASS International Service (FBIS 1991d:40) reported,

> The past night has been turbulent in Chechen-Ingush. The decision to introduce a state of emergency has roused the masses. Tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets and squares of Groznyy. In a matter of hours the town has been turned into a well reinforced fortress…Now the Russian leadership will have to deal with not just a political group but with all people ready to make any sacrifices for the sake of freedom.

The same evening that Yeltsin broadcast the news about the state of emergency, he also posed a further threat by sending 600 troops by air to invade Grozny and overthrow the Dudaev regime. The troops landed at Khankala Airport on the outskirts of Grozny. Dunlop (1998:117) writes,

> By dawn on the 9th, Dudaev's national guards had blockaded the airport and had also placed the main railroad station in Groznyi under guard. Throughout the day, November 9, a mass meeting numbering tens of thousands took place in Freedom Square in Groznyi supporting the Chechen declaration of independence and defending the Dudaev-led government. The threat of a Russian invasion served palpably to unite the people of Chechnya around their new president.

Gall and de Waal (1998:101) cite considerably higher numbers about the size of the Chechen response: ''Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of people gathered in the centre of Grozny for the biggest rally yet seen in Chechnya. Faced with the Russian threat, the big opposition (to Dudaev) demonstration on Lenin Square dissolved and melted into the bigger rally.''

The ''spontaneous'' uprising to defend Chechnya was not limited to mass rallies alone. Yanderbiev writes that many of the protestors seized MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) headquarters. Another group of fighters led by Isa Arsamikov blockaded the Russian spetsnaz forces that had been flown into Khankala Airport. ''Nationalists,'' according to Yanderbiev (1996:94), blockaded Russian military bases in Groznyi and Shali, while ''all railroad stations, bridges, highways, and other places of possible [troop] movement were taken under control.'' Militancy among the Chechens increased as the day progressed. By 10:35 a.m. on November 9, TASS International Service reported, ''the situation in Groznyy remains extremely tense and explosive…Today a large gathering of people can be observed in the area of the unit [Ministry of Internal Affairs Headquarters], and calls can be heard for the seizure of military stores. Those assembled are threatening bloodshed and the use of force…'' (FBIS 1991f:41). At 12:12 p.m. on the same day TASS reported that ''the center of Groznyy now looks like a human sea. Roads into town are blocked by the National Guard, and people continue to arrive from settlements near and far. Many are armed'' (FBIS 1991e:41). At 3:37 p.m., Moscow All-Union Radio broadcast the following:

> The first day of the state of emergency in Checheno-Ingushetia which has been declared by Russian President Boris Yeltsin is almost over…Without exaggerating, all Chechen people have risen to support President Dudaev and the parliament which were nationally elected on October 27. A meeting on Svoboda Square in the center of Groznyy is continuing. An event which at face value may be considered as extraordinary but natural to the Chechen people has taken place. *The people have united in the face of danger…* (FBIS 1991g:42, emphasis added).

The Chechens demonstrated that they were ready to fight and that they were poised to take even more desperate measures if needed. Once the Russian leadership witnessed the widespread reaction, they immediately denounced the state of emergency and the introduction of the troops. After forcing the Russians to ''surrender,'' the Chechens escorted the captured Russian soldiers by bus back to Russia.

The Russian debacle of November 1991 illustrates well the Russian failure to account for the Chechen ICS. Chechens had a latent system for centralizing their resistance ability. In particular, the practice of uniting the clans under the central leader in order to fight against a common enemy was highly successful, much to the chagrin of Russian leaders. Although Chechen society appeared disorganized prior to the invasion, the response to the state of emergency and invasion was surprisingly comprehensive, as if everything had been well-planned in advance. Women's organizations and religious groupings also came together quickly in the face of the threat.

Russia's state of emergency and subsequent deployment of troops could be called a planned invasion. Yeltsin and his leadership planned the intervention, announced a state of emergency, and then ordered the troops to fly in and suppress the secessionist movement. The Chechen reaction to the reports, however, was largely spontaneous, and seemingly unorganized. Dudaev appealed to the clans on Chechen television and a response formulated overnight. By morning high numbers of protestors had gone to the streets.

A high degree of social institutionalization already existed in Chechnya, attributable to the extant clan-based society. This has facilitated close networks of communication and interaction as information and resources are disseminated through the clan structures. Karasik (2000) argues that a norm developed in Chechen society that all clan vendettas be dropped in the face of an external threat. It is likely that the Russians underestimated the extent to which the clans would actually cooperate to benefit from a centralized fighting capability.

The 1994 Russian Invasion

Nineteen ninety-four was a year full of intense relations between Russia and Chechnya. In addition to Russian opposition to Dudaev, anti-Dudaev sentiment was widespread among the Chechens themselves. Dudaev had failed to provide public goods such as transportation and other important infrastructure. Most Chechens were disgruntled with his performance as president. The Russian leadership recognized his predicament and planned to oust him. They attempted to stage a Chechen opposition coup that in reality was little more than the Russian secret service backing mercenaries and disillusioned Chechens. The Russian leadership gambled with the hopes that the Chechen population would unite against its unpopular president. Unfortunately, the Russians misjudged (again) the Chechen response to this exogenous threat.

Despite Dudaev's widespread unpopularity, Dudaev escalated anti-Russian rhetoric and took other actions aimed at eliciting a response from the Chechens. On November 24, Dudaev declared martial law and decreed that an ''urgent mobilization of Chechen citizens aged seventeen and over and of those liable for call-up has been announced'' (FBIS 1994a:33–34). He later declared, ''In two days we must do away with the bands [clans] and liberate the sacred Chechen land from the Russian invaders…The fate of the free Caucasus will be decided in Chechnya'' (FBIS 1994c:43). As of 6:00 p.m. on November 26, Interfax reported that ''some 2000 volunteers arrived from the Chechen countryside in Groznyy. More are arriving'' (FBIS 1994c:43).

Various clashes of rhetoric between Moscow and Dudaev coupled with several attempts at displacing Dudaev led to the ill-fated coup attempt on the morning

of November 26. The FSK (the post-Soviet KGB) sent mercenaries to Chechnya and promised them an easy fight. It claimed that Dudaev had already given up and fled Grozny. The so-called Chechen opposition—a small group of Chechens backed by the Russian FSK and its mercenaries—launched a full-scale attack on Grozny, invading with aircraft and heavy artillery. Within hours, the mercenaries found that their ''easy invasion'' was a complete failure. Russian leaders misjudged the response of the Chechen people. Importantly, although just weeks and even days earlier the Chechens seemed decentralized and noncooperative, they came together to fight the Russians. The Chechens had routed the staged invasion with grenade launchers and hand grenades (Dunlop 1998).

In the succeeding weeks, Yeltsin issued a decree and other propaganda that amounted to a significant threat such that many Chechens considered it a declaration of war (FBIS 1994b:43). On November 30, in particular, Itar-Tass reported: ''Judging from today's speeches at a rally in the center of Groznyy…many inhabitants of the town are ready to rise in its defense, bearing weapons'' (FBIS 1994d:32).

Following the ignominious Russian failure of November 26, Dudaev responded with a propaganda campaign that strengthened his hold on power and increased the centralization of Chechen capability under him. Among other things, he issued numerous reports claiming that Russia would again deport the Chechens. Williams (2000:121–122) writes: ''As the Russian army began to move into Chechnya in December 1994…Moscow's errors gave Mr. Dudaev the opportunity to exploit the Chechen population's deep-seated fears. He repeatedly claimed that Russia would once again deport the Chechens''….

The time between the November 26 attempted coup and the December 11 invasion was a significant period. Ruslan Khasbulatov, a pro-Russian Chechen said that on November 26, Dudaev's forces ''now became not bandit formations but rather the armed opposition of a people to [foreign] occupation. The pride of the Chechen-mountaineer had come awake'' (Dunlop 1998). Once Dudaev circulated the events of the failed November 26 coup, the majority of the Chechen people put aside their anti-Dudaev rhetoric. Even the elders of the clans, who began to oppose Dudaev between 1991 and 1994, bolstered Dudaev's position by pledging support to his leadership.

On December 11, 1994, former President Boris Yeltsin sent 40,000 troops into Chechnya and began a military campaign to retake Chechnya. The Chechens did not buckle, but united. They transcended clan divisions and united under Dudaev to fight. A BBC special report indicates, ''What they lacked in organization and training they more than made up for in tenacity and improvization, including mobilizing entire villages to prevent the passage of tanks'' (BBC 2000:3).

Discussion

Following a 2-year war, in 1996 the Chechens succeeded in driving the Russians out of Chechnya. In spite of what took place in the 1991 episode, Russia, it seems, had not figured out how the Chechens were likely to react in the event of an invasion. Although some ''doves'' in the Yeltsin administration warned against the hazards of a full-scale invasion, the ''hawks'' prevailed. Oleg Lobov advocated a short, victorious war to boost Yeltsin's ratings. Accounts indicate that he had in mind Clinton's success in invading Haiti. Grachev's commonly cited phrase that a single Russian airborne regiment could have resolved the Chechen crisis in two hours (though it was probably just rhetoric) was indicative of his feeling about the prospects of success. At other times, Grachev expressed his belief that the operation would be over in just twelve days (Lieven 1998:88–89; Evangelista 2002:37–38).

Returning to our original question, how could a group with such small levels of overt capability impose such high costs on a nominally dominant power? How could Russia misjudge the likely Chechen response to an invasion? Although Russia probably expected guerrilla warfare, it likely did not account for the institutionalized conflict system: the centralization norm, in-group incentive structures, and institutional cohabitation. Although these institutions appear straightforward in hindsight, we argue that prior to conflicts, they are not readily apparent. We contend that Russian surprise can be attributed to a failure of information about the ICS, as well as a failure to process what information Russia did have. Russia clearly had *some* information about the ICS (based on past interaction), yet given the length of time that had lapsed between the previous interaction and the 1990s episodes, Russia failed to use that information. In what follows, we analyze the ICS in Chechnya to demonstrate that it was difficult to identify, ex ante, and therefore that it contributed to Russian miscalculations about the relative costs of deciding to engage in conflict.

Centralization

Prior to the conflicts in the 1990s, Chechnya appeared to be a highly decentralized and factional region. A persistent clan network has almost always dominated Chechen society. Although Chechens have often chosen a central leader, that individual rarely has had real authority. As the Chechens announced secession in 1991, it appeared (to the Russians) as if the Chechens could be easily routed because they were neither organized nor centralized. The Russians, however, miscalculated their fortune in part due to a misunderstanding of the latent ICS in Chechnya. According to Arutyunov, ''Chechens retained an institution of supreme military chief. In peacetime, that chief would have no power at all. No sovereign authority was recognized, and the nation might be fragmented in a hundred rival clans. However, in time of danger, when confronted with an aggressor, the rival clans would unite and elect a military leader. While the war was going on, this leader would be obeyed'' (Dunlop 1998:211). Dunlop continues by noting how the clans would set aside their differences and fight unitedly, but ''when tensions would subside, Chechen society would once again ''fragment'' into its constituent clans, and Dudaev's power would visibly dissipate (212). Thus, in response to an exogenous threat from the Russians, latent elements of the social institution system (i.e., a norm of centralization) led to behavior by the dominated group that would be unpredictable ex ante without knowledge of the norm.

According to Pain (2000:8), there was an anti-Dudaev disposition throughout Chechnya, however, when the threat of Russian invasion emerged, the mood changed and most of Chechnya decided to support Dudaev. Pain writes,

> just prior to the first war there were mass demonstrations in the streets of Grozny, especially after the dissolution of the local parliament and constitutional court, the appearance of dozens of so-called ''mortal enemies'' of Dudaev and several attempts on his life. However, when Russian troops arrived in Chechnya most of the former enemies either forgot or temporarily dropped their vendettas and united against a common enemy.

What we have been calling an institutionalized centralization norm seems quite obvious in retrospect, but the Russians failed to understand how important this institution is in Chechnya, despite having some knowledge about how it had operated in the past. The Russian military and government ''had contracted a case of historical amnesia, and this amnesia, in turn, constituted an intelligence failure of immense proportions'' (Dunlop 1998). Perhaps Dudaev's waning support between

1991 and 1994 deceived the Russians into thinking that this time around they would not see centralization.[12]

More fundamentally, the Russians, failed to appreciate how the structure of the clan system changes in response to threat. Russians continued to view them as fragmented, tribal groups that could not achieve swift, and orchestrated collective action. It is worth reiterating that Chechen clans were severely divided between 1991 and 1994, but in the face of the Russian threat, they centralized to achieve greater coordination and cooperation. The Russians arguably missed several key aspects of clan organization. Over several centuries, the clans, and the social institutions in which they exist, have become increasingly integrated (although disintegrated from the Russians). Interclan marriage, wider clan neighborhoods, and interclan alliances all served to bring the clans into closer cooperation. Soviet rule also served to disrupt the rigidity of clan autonomy (Lieven 1998:338). Much to the Russians' chagrin, the threat of a Russia invasion served to unite the people, through the clans, around their president (Dudaev), as it always had in the past (Dunlop 1998). The Russians severely misunderstood this latent institutional characteristic of Chechen society and the additive capability it yielded by facilitating collective action.

Cohabitation

The institutionalized conflict system is also cohabitational with religion in Chechnya. Specifically, conflict and religion are together institutionalized, and religion was indeed an important factor in mobilizing Chechnya prior to the first war (Tishkov 2004:203). Rhetoric is an indicator of an institutionalized *willingness* to fight (e.g., calls to Jihad), but more importantly, Islam also helped institutionalize the *opportunity* to fight by way of religious brotherhoods.

In the early 19th century, radical Sufism took root among many Chechens in part because it preached resistance to the Russians, but also because it was well-suited to the needs of a military order of fighting against heavy odds. Prior to the introduction of radical Sufism, traditions of warrior brotherhoods prevailed. The attractiveness of Muridism (a Sufi order) lay in its ability to maintain and extend these warrior brotherhoods in the form of religious brotherhoods (Lieven 1998:359).

These Sufi orders and religious brotherhoods are operative and influential today. The Naqshabandiya and Qadiriya have also provided a significant ideological basis and organizational form to fight Russian control in the Northern Caucasus. These groups are very large, having up to fifty subgroups each (Karasik 2000). Islam in Chechnya is expected to provide authority and support to the political regime, in addition to any spiritual functions it provides.

In addition to the Sufi orders, as noted earlier, later in the 1994–1996 war Sharia law was used to sanction any deviants, thus providing a religious incentive to keep individuals on the battlefield (Lieven 1998:365). In conjunction with the centralization norm, rural religious leaders were also instrumental in persuading the populace to cooperate with the center (Dunlop 1998).

At the beginning of the 1991 episode, the provisional council also initiated such actions as handing over the House of Political Education in Groznyi to the republic's recently opened Islamic Institute (Dunlop 1998). Furthermore, Dunlop notes that the green flag of Islam was raised over the building of the republican council of ministers.

[12] Other reasons for Russia's failure to account for the ICS include those factors discussed earlier such as learning and the lengthy time between interactions.

Incentive Structures

A commonly cited incentive structure is the in-group policing mechanism (Fearon and Laitin 1996). It is often cited in the context of Rwanda and Cambodia in terms of a ''kill or be killed'' mentality. Less often noted in studies of ethnic violence, however, is a softer version of this institutional framework. Specifically, we are referring to an idea commonplace in the theoretical collective action literature that small group settings decrease anonymity (see for example Miller 1992). Chechen clan organization in times of exogenous threat provides this institutional framework in several ways.

First, in and of themselves the clans are small. Each member of the clan is likely to know many other members, if not all of them. When clan leaders declare support for a central military leader and commit the clan to war, those loyal to the clan (the vast majority) can easily detect free-riders and sanction them as needed. Sanctions include various practices such as social ostracization, but are normally not as severe as kill or be killed. (For a related argument on incentives among Chechens, see Lieven [1998:325–326]. According to Lieven, Shariat law was also used as a means of discipline, to join existing practices of ''familial loyalty and social shame. Such informal, 'spontaneous' sources of discipline have been both crucial and strikingly successful'' (365).

Second, military tactics are shaped by this incentive structure. Any one clan might be able to supply approximately 600 fighters. These groups are subdivided into units of 150 and further broken down into squads of 20 for combat operations. These squads are organized into groups of four-man fighting cells that consist of an antitank gunner, a machine or sub-machine gunner, and a sniper. The squads rotate in and out of the battlefield every other week (Karasik 2000). Without going into too many details about tactical operations, we note that the battlefield organization is structured such that there is little incentive to shirk. Members of a group can efficiently detect and punish in-group deviation.

In retrospect, it is fairly straightforward to see how this incentive structure can lead to seemingly spontaneous mobilization, and efficient battlefield performance. This institutional framework is, however, largely latent in nature, and thus contributed to the failure of the Russians to detect it. We say that it is latent because these organizational structures (units, squads, hunter-killer fighting cells) are not codified in some military document, neither are they operative in times of peace. It is in times of conflict (i.e., in the face of some exogenous threat) that the clan uses organizational incentives to facilitate effective performance. Whereas the clan structure was seen by Russia as a liability to the Chechens, it actual served to mobilize and discipline individuals through these incentive processes (while at the same time the centralization norms brought the clans in concert, thus ameliorating coordination problems).

Alternative Explanations

Our analysis has highlighted the role of difficult-to-identify conflict institutions in Chechnya as a contributing factor for the seemingly irrational actions of Russia. Other explanations emphasize factors such as overestimation of Russian capabilities, Russian lack of preparedness for urban warfare, indivisibility of territory, history and collective memory, the role of elites, and religion as ideological rhetoric. These accounts are important, but only partial, explanations for what happened in Chechnya. Our analysis complements existing approaches and contributes to a more complete story of the Russo-Chechen conflict.

It is possible that Russia's overestimation of its own strength led to the invasion of Chechnya. Yet, such overconfidence was also based on extremely low estimates of Chechen capability and resistance *in large measure because they*

misunderstood the institutionalized conflict system in Chechen society. This overestimation might have stemmed from Russia's dominance over Chechnya in numerous past interactions, or even an ethno-chauvinism toward the Chechen people, which led Russia to believe that it was superior. In reality, it is difficult to decouple Russian overconfidence from underestimation, because in the calculation of how much effort will be required by the Russians, they must factor in how much resistance will be encountered. To be sure, there were some within Russia that recognized the military's poor preparation. Many military officers who believed Russia was indeed poorly prepared (perhaps over 500 according to Evangelista 2002:38) resigned prior to the war. Evangelista further notes that the ''General Staff for the first time requested that the Defense Ministry's Institute of Military History provide information on earlier Russian campaigns in the Caucasus'' (38). Moreover, Tishkov (2004:95) conducted interviews and found that many external observers at various levels did not expect Dudaev's troops to be so effective.

Underscoring the distinction between over- and under-estimation, Oliker (2001) contends that Russia not only overestimated its own capabilities, it also severely underestimated the Chechens.' Oliker's analysis focuses primarily on the Russian inability to prosecute urban warfare adequately. Her argument emphasizes that the Russian army prepared itself primarily for conventional wars, and because of that did not fight well in Chechnya until it adapted to the Chechen resistance. Our argument complements Oliker's, as she primarily focuses on Russia's experience, whereas we focus on Chechnya's experience—namely the Chechen ICS. Oliker's analysis is consistent with our argument that dominant actors often fail to conduct intelligence and reconnaissance adequately, and therefore, in the Russian case, Russia did not expect such a strong resistance from the Chechen people (3–5). Indeed, in the process of documenting Russia's failure in urban warfare, Oliker documents a number of instances in which, what we have called the Chechen ICS, operated to frustrate Russia's efforts [e.g., resistance from the local population (10), training of militias (16)].

An alternative explanation highlights the role of the indivisibility of territory—that both Russia and Chechnya would rather fight than agree to a division of territory. As explicated by Monica Duffy Toft (2003), the argument is that both Russia and Chechnya perceived the Chechen territory as indivisible. The logic of the argument is based on how settlement patterns determined legitimacy and capability to push for independence. Because of this, Russia saw Chechnya as a precedent setting decision (85). If Russia allowed Chechnya to secede, then other republics might follow, and such a ''domino effect'' would be terribly costly. Toft demonstrates that Chechens were concentrated and a clear majority of the population, and therefore had a high capacity to mobilize (80). Consistent with our argument about group-boundaried social institutions, we contend that such institutions are more likely to develop and be effective in concentrated groups such as in Chechnya, and therefore, our argument supports and is supported by Toft's.

Implicit in the explanations discussed above is the idea that history has shaped current interactions whether to cause Russians to overestimate their own capability, or to cause each of the groups to see territory as indivisible. Gagnon (1995) sets forth a possible explanation of how history and identity can shape mobilization behavior arguing that elites manipulate publics into fighting ethnic wars by appealing to identity. Williams (2000:104) applies this type of model to Chechnya by attempting to ''demonstrate the ways in which the memorialization of [the Chechen] people's tragedy can politically and militarily mobilize [the] population.'' Collective memory of history and identity provide an important context for the conflict, but in and of themselves cannot explain mobilization. A viable explanation needs to show how exactly collective memory and history have

an influence. One way that this could occur is if elites manipulate individuals into joining a conflict. Yet ultimately these individuals have to make a decision about whether or not to mobilize for conflict, given the collective action problems we discussed in this paper. Kuran (1995) and Van Belle (1996) address ways in which elites can overcome the collective action problem, and thus it is plausible to suggest that elites are an important part of the activation of an ICS. Future research could be devoted to understanding how exactly elites fit in an ICS and facilitate its operation. Clearly elites do not always elicit violence, and therefore, understanding how elites affect the activation of an ICS—whether for violence or nonviolence—would be important to address.

Finally, with respect to religion, we diverge from those who contend that religion is useful primarily as a rhetorical device. Appealing to sentiments of Jihad may play a role, but in Chechnya many of the individuals participating in the fighting were drawn from the formal ranks of religious brotherhoods. Thus, in addition to religious appeals as rhetoric, the *institutional nature* of religious involvement cannot be understated. Religion also facilitated the involvement of external actors, as help for the Chechens flowed in from other Islamic countries especially later in the 1994–1996 war. As discussed earlier in the paper, a fundamental feature of ICS is the ability to make ''bridging connections'' within a group (but not necessarily with an adversary). Although we primarily discussed in-group bridging connections, it is plausible that in the Chechen case that the religious component of the ICS facilitated bridging connections with people and organizations in other countries committed to goals similar to that of the Chechens, such as the advancement or preservation of Islamic movements.

Conclusion

Why do conflicts characterized by significant power asymmetries often ''surprise'' the nominally stronger actor in the way they progress? In this paper, we have argued that the social institutional structure of a group confers additive capability. Where these institutionalized conflict systems are latent in times of peace, they are more observable and consequential in times of threat. From our case study of the Russo-Chechen wars, it appears that Chechens maintained an institutionalized conflict system, which aided their resistance at least in the early and mid-1990s.

In addition to addressing the theoretical literature on asymmetric warfare as discussed early in the paper, this study has important policy implications. First, the U.S. arguably has been ''surprised'' by the way the recent Iraqi war has played out, and importantly, the U.S. and other major powers face other crises in Iran and North Korea, which may result in asymmetric conflict scenarios. Our analysis suggests that policymakers pay closer attention to the ways in which social institutions in these countries could multiply their ability to resist, beyond what ''objective'' estimates of material capability suggest. Of particular importance is the identification of how social institutions operate in times of peace versus times of war. Typically, policymakers tend not to account for social structures. Prior to the recent Iraq war, for example, the U.S. was concerned primarily about the resistance from the Republican Guard and other likely Baathist insurgent elements. Though there was surely an expectation of some informal resistance, it is clear that U.S. policymakers underestimated the costs that the elements of existing social structures would impose. Underscoring this idea, Oliker (2001:2) notes that ''the enemies that U.S. forces will face in the future are far more likely to resemble the Chechen rebels than the Russian army, and the battlefield will very likely look more like Grozny than central Europe.''

International peacekeeping efforts, moreover, often suffer security setbacks when they neglect to address social elements of a group's capability structures. In the recent Darfur crisis, for example, the 2006 peace agreement has forced

the Janjawid into Eastern Chad where the Janjawid is relying on social structures for support (Sudan: Crying Out for Safety 2006). It is recruiting among nomadic groups and in refugee camps (what we have called institutional cohabitation), consolidating forces with Chadian rebel groups (what we have called centralization), and attacking those groups who are unlikely, or have refused, to join (what we have called incentive mechanisms). If peacekeeping efforts are to succeed, then they need to account more fully for the additive capability from group social structures.

Although we have only explored the dynamics of the Russo-Chechen case, we expect that the model has applicability in other situations. To reiterate several examples raised in the paper, the centralization institution appears important outside of Central Asia in contexts such as the Somali independence campaign in which clans and tribes cooperated. Cohabitational institutional arrangements have been or are important in many refugee camps throughout Africa and in churches in Latin America. Finally, in-group incentive mechanisms have been documented in contexts as diverse as South Asia (e.g., family benefits to rebels) and Rwanda and Cambodia (e.g., ''kill or be killed'' incentives).

Our list of institutional characteristics represents one set of factors that contributes to a group's capability, and consequently, probability of experiencing unforseen costs associated with violent conflict. Future research could examine social institutions in other contexts in order to determine under what conditions different social institutions are likely to confer significant capability to a dominated group. This is important as variation in social institutions clearly exists and these institutions might function differently under alternative circumstances. Future research could also address the ways in which elites and external actors play a part in the activation and operation of ICS. Understanding how social institutions facilitate long-run adaptation, which effectively amount to increased capability for the dominated group would also be a fruitful endeavor. Finally, future research on this topic could examine how dominant actors counter an ICS. For example, dominant actors may resort to indiscriminate violence against civilians and noncivilians alike in order to disrupt, or eliminate, the ICS (Downes 2006).

In sum, dominant actors are often surprised by the way conflicts play out because, among other things, they fail to ''account for the unaccounted'' capability that social institutions, such as centralization, cohabitational institutions, and incentive frameworks, confer. Not recognizing ex ante the impact of ICS adds to the miscalculation by powerful actors of the capability structure of their ''weaker'' adversaries. Dominant actors, therefore, may end up in wars where actual costs far exceed what they originally expected.

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