

# Dispute Coding Manual

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## ***Introduction***

Users of this manual are assumed to be familiar with the contents of Jones, Bremer, and Singer (1996) since it provides important background information about this project. Coders should be given a copy of this article to read at the beginning of their training.

The dispute construction process has the following steps:

- (1) Group incidents into potential disputes.
- (2) Review/revise potential disputes.
- (3) Complete a dispute coding entry for each dispute.
- (4) Enter dispute information into the cloud-based central data archive.
- (5) File all materials related to a dispute in the relevant folder of the cloud-based project archive.
- (6) Identify and resolve problems and anomalies revealed by reviews.

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

## ***General Observations on Constructing Militarized Disputes***

A militarized dispute (MID) is based on a sequence of related militarized incidents, each of which (except the first) is an outgrowth of or a response to one or more previous incidents. To ensure that each MID is a unified and recognized episode of militarized incidents, particular attention should be given to continuity of location and issue, as well as the interpretations of observers. For the purpose of grouping individual incidents into temporally bounded disputes, the following rules are to be applied.

- All incidents must involve the same or an overlapping set of interstate members. In a 2-party dispute this is not a problem but coding a  $N > 2$ -party dispute can be more difficult. To qualify as a multi-party ( $N > 2$ ) conflict there must be evidence of coordinated action by all states undertaking military action. When one or more actors direct the same action towards two or more targets, a multi-party dispute exists unless there is evidence that suggests otherwise. Evidence can primarily be found in joint participation by all states in one or more militarized incidents. That is, the militarized incident involved many states and took place at the same time and place, or within the same communique. Supporting evidence such as frequent consultations or a unified chain of command also indicates the presence of state collaboration and a multi-party dispute. However, mere proximity of actions in space and time without any evidence of coordination with other belligerents does not necessarily warrant grouping these states together in a multi-party dispute. Likewise, the denial of key battlefield information represents clear evidence

that military actions are not being coordinated, and thus no multi-party dispute exists.

- Each incident must involve the same issue or set of issues and occur within the same geographic area—unless there was information provided by observers that leads one to believe that seemingly unconnected issues and locations are linked to one another. The aggregation of incidents into disputes occurs whenever observers suggest that the sequence of actions led to a direct response to such actions, even if the militarized events encompassed more than one distinct issue or geographic area. It is occasionally possible for two nations to be engaged in two different disputes at the same time, if the militarized incidents along one front are not countered along the other front and the respective governments clearly keep their diplomatic behavior regarding the disputes separate before, during, and after the conflicts. The existence of two simultaneous militarized disputes can often be determined by the presence of separate negotiations or separate treaties, the text of speeches by official representatives, and by the interpretations of the observers.
- The start date of a dispute is defined by the start date of the first militarized incident, but the end date is determined in several ways, depending upon the context of the termination and on whether the dispute escalated to war. In the absence of a formal resolution, cease-fire or mutual troop withdrawal a non-war militarized dispute ends on the date of the last incident in the sequence when there are no codeable incidents for at least six months. Those that cover the same issue/location and occur after a formal resolution of a non-war militarized dispute are treated as: (1) part of a new dispute only if they begin one month or more after the formal resolution, or (2) part of the original dispute if some of the incidents occur within one month of the formal resolution. If either a cease-fire or negotiated withdrawal of forces occur, the old dispute ends at the point of the cease-fire or troop withdrawal if no militarized incidents take place in the following three months. Non-war militarized disputes involving a continuous military action (blockade, seizure, occupation or show of troops/ships/planes) that last longer than six months, end either: (1) six months after the first continuous action occurs in the absence of any other militarized incidents, or (2) six months from the last date in which some other incident of military confrontation takes place. Any militarized incident chronologically following the recognized conclusion of a war, formal or otherwise, constitutes the onset of a new militarized interstate dispute.
- When a dispute ends in war, the participants are treated somewhat differently with regard to the aggregation of incidents. When two states go to war, all other ongoing disputes between these two states cease. Any dispute that erupts between a war belligerent and a non-belligerent state is treated as a separate dispute and only merged with the “core” war if the non-belligerent actively joins the war. If the entry into an ongoing war occurs within six months of its onset, then all non-war militarized actions between a war belligerent and the third-party entrant will be considered as part of incidents leading up to the intervention into the war. In cases when war intervention

occurs six months or more after the start of the war, a separate militarized interstate dispute exists between the war belligerent and the other state up to its official entry in the ongoing war; thereafter, all actions are coded as part of the ongoing war. A state can be a participant in a war at a lower level of hostility only if its actions are fully coordinated with the war participants and its military combat falls short of the war threshold. The end date for a state's involvement in an interstate war is coded as the last day of the war itself, unless it drops out prior to the termination of the war. It is theoretically possible for a state to exit an ongoing war and:(1) re-enter the war on either side at a later time, or (2) enter into a new militarized interstate dispute with one or more participants in that war.

- In cases of militarized interstate disputes within the context of a civil war, the side that controls the pre-war capital is said to be in control of the government. When effective control of the capital, and hence the central government, is lost by one side and gained by another faction, a change in government is said to have occurred. A switch in control over the capital during a civil war may either:(1) mark the onset of a militarized dispute between the new government and an interstate system member which supported the old government, or (2) signal the end of a militarized dispute because the confrontation between the old government and the system member would no longer be between two members of the interstate system. When interstate system members are involved on both sides, the loss of control of the capital will lead to the switching of sides for the civil war state. Lastly, a militarized interstate dispute or war can concurrently exist within the context of a larger internationalized civil war or extra-systemic war if two or more states fight one another to the exclusion of all other combat activity in the immediate region.
- Wars and non-war disputes concerning political independence are included in the data set only if there are interstate system members on both sides of the dispute. When system membership entry takes place during an ongoing conflict, this date is used as either the start date of the militarized interstate dispute or the ongoing dispute entry date of a newly recognized state. However, when recognition follows the conflict, the case is excluded from the data unless there is at least one system member militarily involved on each side of the conflict. In the latter instance, actions by the non- recognized actors are not included within the data.
- The MID data set records the starting and ending dates of each state's involvement in a dispute. In multiparty disputes, a state joins an ongoing dispute at the moment it initiates a militarized action or is the target of a militarized action by one or more states already involved in the MID. A state may exit a multiparty dispute early, provided it meets the above-mentioned rules for dispute termination. Thus, if a state agrees formally to leave a dispute and no militarized action follows, the end date of state participation is the date of formal agreement. Likewise, if a state undertakes no militarized actions in a multiparty MID for 6 months, then the last date of state participation will be the date of

the last recorded incident in which it was involved.

## ***Using the Dispute Coding Spreadsheet***

The dispute coding spreadsheet is a document in which an entry should be created for each qualifying dispute. Incidents that pertain to a given dispute should be referenced and recorded in a supplementary file for the dispute. This file should be identified with the corresponding dispute number and saved to the cloud-based project archive. All relevant information about the dispute should be recorded in the supplementary file.

### **MID #**

The MID # is assigned by MID leadership and should be entered on all documentation pertaining to each dispute.

### **MID Dates**

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

### **Participants**

The participants fields are used to identify *all* states that participated *at any time* in the dispute.

### **Related Incidents**

In this section of the form the coder must enter the assigned incident numbers of incidents that pertain to the dispute. The incident coding information for the related incidents should in the supplementary dispute information document.

## Outcome Type

The outcome of a dispute is related to the operational demands, made prior to the dispute's onset, that constitute a challenge to the pre-existing status quo. A dispute outcome then depends upon a comparison of the challenges made against the status quo and any alteration of the status quo that occurred as a result of actions taken during the dispute. Because the determination of dispute outcomes is directly related to an alteration of the status quo, a state can only “win” a dispute when the status quo is changed in its favor. Although a status quo defender may gain tangible benefits from its successful maintenance, such outcomes should be coded as a “stalemate” since no alteration of the status quo took place. The six outcome types are defined as follows:

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**Victory** — A victory is defined by the favorable alteration of the status quo by one state through the use of militarized action which imposes defeat upon the opponent. It denotes the attainment of a tangible piece of territory, the significant change in an adversary's foreign policy, or the successful downfall of another state's political regime by force. A victory can be identified whenever one or more state(s) are able to secure a favorable change through the application of successful military actions which directly leads to a forced alteration of the pre-dispute status quo.

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**Yield** — A yield is defined by the coerced submission by one state to the demands made by another state but short of any clear alteration of the status quo directly attributable to the threat, display, or use of military force. Whenever a state offers concessions that alter the status quo in exchange for not being militarily threatened or to stop further military attacks, the “losing” state has yielded to the pressure imposed by the “winning” state. As an outcome of a MID, a yield can be identified whenever one state capitulates by offering concessions which appease the demands of another state before the militarized forces of either state has secured any substantial tactical gains on the battlefield.

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**Stalemate** — A stalemate is defined by the lack of any decisive changes in the pre-dispute status quo and is identified when the outcome does not favor either side in the dispute. Stalemates usually are produced when there was no alteration of the status quo. However, they can occur even if the status quo has changed so long as net balance results in a draw.

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**Compromise** — A compromise is defined as a situation in which each side in the dispute agrees to give up some demands or make concessions with regard to the status quo. A compromise is identified whenever actors on both sides of a dispute agree to divide the spoils roughly equally, and hence, redefine the status quo, or agree to amicably settle their differences and accept the current status quo.

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**Released** — A released outcome is applied only for situations in which a seizure of material or personnel defines the context of the dispute. It is identified whenever the seizure of material or personnel culminates with their release from captivity.

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**Unclear** — An unclear outcome exists when sources provided either conflicting interpretations or ambiguous information about post-dispute status quo.

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*Only one* of these options should be recorded in this section of the dispute coding spreadsheet.

## Settlement Type

Militarized interstate disputes are terminated by different formal and informal procedures. For each dispute, close attention should be given to negotiations, formal and informal treaties, protocols and the like, as these may relate to the type of settlement. However, many disputes end without any explicit agreement to stop or any resolution of the issues. At the other end of the spectrum, some disputes may have multiple agreements, some or all of which are honored by both sides. Only those agreements that both nations chose to observe for at least one year are considered relevant to the settlement of a dispute. Finally, some settlement terms are mutually agreed upon while others are forced upon a vanquished state. Hence, whether a settlement was amicably reached or forcibly coerced also enters into the determination of the settlement type. The four different methods of dispute settlement are identified as follows:

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**None** — A dispute is considered unsettled when none of the pre-conditions that fueled the conflict are resolved nor is there any agreement between the parties that the dispute should be terminated. No settlement is identified when none of the conditions of negotiated settlement are present, there is no evidence of any attempt to impose a resolution of the conflict, and no evidence of any unconditional surrender. Basically, no settlement denotes the lack of any formal or informal effort which successfully resolves or terminates the dispute.

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**Imposed** — An imposed settlement is defined as an agreement that has been forced upon another state by means of overwhelming authority and without invitation. Instances of an imposed settlement can be determined by the presence of an unconditional surrender, the occupation of territory and failure to withdrawal prior to the termination phase of the dispute, or the evidence of being forced into accepting the terms of a termination by one or more protagonist

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**Negotiated** — A negotiated settlement of a MID is defined by the successful attempt to confer, bargain, or discuss an unresolved issue with a view towards reaching an acceptable settlement. It is identified by some type of agreement (formal or informal), the lack of any unconditional surrender or giving up on concessions, and the absence of any attempt of external imposition of a settlement. Examples include the presence of a written agreement signed by official representatives of the state, reached in a situation unfettered by constraints; a joint communique stating their mutually accepted conditions for agreement; the exchange of letters stipulating mutually agreed upon terms; the formal acceptance of a cease-fire; or the existence of a verbal or tacit understanding by official representatives of all protagonists as noted in the sources.

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**Unclear** — An unclear settlement exists when the historical sources present either a conflicting or opaque interpretation of dispute termination.

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*Only one* of these options should be recorded in this section of the dispute coding spreadsheet.

## Total Fatalities in Dispute

This section of the dispute coding spreadsheet is devoted to recording the fatalities, if any, suffered by the military personnel of *all* the participants in the dispute. The options are:

- 9 — Missing. No overall assessment of military fatalities was possible.
- 0 — No military fatalities occurred in any related incidents.
- 1 — Total military fatalities were between 1 and 25.
- 2 — Total military fatalities were between 26 and 100.
- 3 — Total military fatalities were between 101 and 250.
- 4 — Total military fatalities were between 251 and 500.
- 5 — Total military fatalities were between 501 and 999.
- 6 — Total military fatalities were 1,000 or more.

If an exact value for total military fatalities can be determined from the related incidents, then that number should be entered in the precise fatality cell of the coding spreadsheet.

## State Participation Dates

The State Participation Dates section of the coding spreadsheet is devoted to recording the starting and ending dates of dispute involvement for each and every participant and the

side upon which each participant acted. These dates should be specified as precisely as possible, and *values must be entered into the starting and ending year and month cells*. The starting and/or ending day boxes should be left blank only if it is impossible to provide an approximate day.

The side designations are ultimately arbitrary, but the convention is as follows: *side A is the side that contains the state (or states) that first crossed the threat-display-use of force threshold*. That is, the Actor(s) in the first incident in the sequence of incidents upon which the dispute is based are assumed to be on side A. It is possible for a given state to be on both sides of a dispute but not at the same time. That is, a state may switch sides during a dispute. If this occurs, then the state should be listed twice, once on side A and a second time on side B, with the appropriate (non-overlapping) participation dates for each entry.

## Revisionist State(s)

Some of the participants in a dispute seek to change the status quo while others try to preserve it. The former are referred to as revisionist states, and the Revisionist State(s) section of the dispute coding spreadsheet is where such states are identified. Note that status quo-oriented states should not be listed in this section—*only revisionist states*. The judgement as to whether or not a state is revisionist should be based on the behavior of the state in the related incidents and not on some intuition about who was the "aggressor" in a dispute or the state that "started it all." To be considered revisionist, a state must demonstrate, through its behavior, a desire to change the status quo in a significant way.

It is possible for there to be no revisionist states in a dispute, and it is possible for revisionist states to be on both sides of a dispute. More typically, however, at least one revisionist state will be identifiable in a dispute and revisionist states on both sides of a dispute is very rare phenomenon.

The identity (3-letter COW abbreviation) of each revisionist state in a dispute should be recorded. In addition, the type of revisions sought by that state (territory, regime, policy, and/or other) should be indicated. An explanation of the differences between these issue areas is contained in the Incident Coding Manual. If only one of the four options are relevant, then a "1" should be placed in that cell. However, more than one of these objectives may be relevant to a revisionist state in a dispute, and if this is so then the numbers 1,2,3... should be entered into the cells where 1 is the most important, 2 the second most important, etc. A response of "Other" must be elaborated on in the supplementary dispute file.

## Participant Fatalities

The Participant Fatalities section of the dispute coding spreadsheet is used to record the fatalities of each and every participant in the dispute. These values should be derived from the incidents related to the dispute and may require a good deal of work in complex disputes.

Assessment of each participant's fatalities should be based on the following categories:

- 9 — No overall assessment of military fatalities for this participant was possible.
- 0 — No military fatalities were suffered by this participant.
- 1 — Participant fatalities were between 1 and 25.
- 2 — Participant fatalities were between 26 and 100.
- 3 — Participant fatalities were between 101 and 250.
- 4 — Participant fatalities were between 251 and 500.
- 5 — Participant fatalities were between 501 and 999.
- 6 — Participant fatalities were 1,000 or more.

## Notes

This space is provided for the coder to enter any additional information deemed relevant to the dispute. These notes should also be included, and elaborated on if necessary, in the supplementary dispute file. As was true with the incident coding procedure, each note should be preceded by a number. These numbers refer to the type of note. In general, the eleven types of notes should contain the following information.

- (1) General observations about the dispute as a whole.
- (2) Special information about the starting and ending dates of the dispute.
- (3) Additional information about the participants in the dispute.
- (4) Comments on incidents related to the dispute.
- (5) Information pertaining to the outcome of the dispute.
- (6) Information concerning the settlement of the dispute.
- (7) Comments on the total fatality assessment.
- (8) Additional information about the participants in the dispute.
- (9) Elaborations about the revisionist (or status quo) states in the dispute.
- (10) Observations on participant fatalities in the dispute.
- (11) Expanded discussion of the relations of this dispute to other disputes and wars.

In most disputes only a few types of notes will be necessary, in which case only those need be entered. An example of how notes for a dispute might appear follows.

- (2) The ending day could have been between 8/7/13 and 8/11/13, but the latter date was chosen.
- (6) Informal negotiations may have taken place.
- (11) This dispute may be related to dispute #100345 because there is some temporal overlap. However, the issues are different.

Notes should be carefully and properly composed as it is likely that they will eventually be distributed and perhaps published.

## Coding Information

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

## **Conclusion**

It is to be expected that additions or changes to this manual will be necessary as dispute construction progresses. Such changes will be communicated via the MID Project web site, which should be routinely checked for new developments.

*- Dispute Coding Manual Last Updated August 26, 2019 by Mikaela Karstens -*