

Incident Coding Manual

Introduction

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

The incident coding process consists of the following steps:

- (1) Query news source databases using a pre-determined search string to find reports of potential incidents
- (2) Identify legitimate incidents and assemble the pertinent reports.
- (3) Complete an incident coding entry for each incident.
- (4) Enter incident information into the cloud-based central data archive.
- (5) File all materials related to an incident in the relevant folder of the cloud-based project archive.
- (6) Identify and resolve problems and anomalies which reviews reveal.

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

General Observations on Militarized Incidents¹

- A militarized incident must occur among two or more interstate system members. Therefore, actions between a system member and the forces of a non-system member are not included. But if such an act is diplomatically protested by the state within which the non-system entity resides, then a militarized incident between the two system members is said to exist.
- Militarized actions are excluded from the incident category when they are provided for by treaty with, or occur at the invitation or concurrence of, the targeted state. In such instances, no militarized incident exists until the treaty or invitation is revoked, and a militarized incident occurs, or the militarized actions by one state clearly exceed the bounds spelled out within a treaty or agreement between both parties.
- A militarized incident is an explicit, non-routine, and governmentally authorized action. The presence of a prompt government apology or disavowal is an indication that an action was accidental or not authorized, thus failing to meet the definition of an MII. The apology must

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

be prompt and explicit in its referent. Subsequent codable actions taken in response to the regretted or disavowed action, however, should be included.

- A militarized incident can exist in instances where there is a denial of an alleged action from either state in a dispute. In these cases, militarized incidents are coded if there is evidence (from an impartial observer, context, etc.) that the incident did occur.
- In cases where violations of territory or cross-border firings occur routinely, each such incident should be coded whenever there was an authorized standing order to respond militarily to all such actions.
- A militarized incident is an overt action taken by the official military forces or government representatives of a state (head of state, foreign minister, etc.). When regular forces are disguised as non-regular forces, operate with or command non-regular forces, or engage in covert operations, their actions are excluded unless and until further militarized incidents involving official forces take place, or when the targeted state responds—militarily or diplomatically—to the act in question. In states where official military forces are virtually nonexistent, military actions taken by local forces qualify as government authorized only when the local forces are directed by a representative of the central government to engage in a specific military action. Paramilitary forces are frequently quasi-official, and the degree to which they act with government approval varies by state and over time. Usually, further research will be required to determine if actions taken by paramilitary forces are officially sanctioned.
- Military interactions between two states are not coded as separate militarized incidents if they are at war. A state at war may, however, be involved in one or more incidents of military confrontation with a state that is not involved in that war.
- Actions taken by the official forces of one state against private citizens outside their recognized home territory are generally not coded as militarized incidents. Exceptions include seizures (of personnel or material) within the confines of disputed territory, attacks on international shipping, and the pursuit (by air, land or sea) of rebel forces across international boundaries. Further, such incidents are included only when the “targeted” state responds militarily or diplomatically protests the action.
- A militarized incident involving competing territorial claims must take place within the context of a well-defined geographic area. Uncontested expansion into the territory of an independent non-system member by itself does not constitute a militarized action until there is a militarized incident by another system member in response to the initial action. However, the expansion by military force of one interstate member into claimed or contested territory of another interstate member can, by itself, constitute a militarized incident.

Using the Incident Coding Spreadsheet

The incident coding spreadsheet is a document in which a line should be entered for each qualifying incident found. Reports from different sources and/or different time that pertain to a given incident should be recorded and retained in a separate file, identified with the corresponding incident number, containing the documentation for each incident. Instructions for completing each of the fields of the incident coding spreadsheet follow.

Actor(s)

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

ARG

ARG, BRA, CHL

Target

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

GMY

Incident Date

The Incident Date fields specify the year, month, and day upon which the incident began and ended.

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

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

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

Incident Type

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

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

Threats of Force

The coding of threats of force can be particularly difficult because threats are often transmitted in ambiguous diplomatic language, making them hard to identify and interpret. Diplomats often refer to the extreme, dire, serious, or dangerous consequences of an act without necessarily conveying that a threat to use force exists. However, all threats are contingent upon some condition, and a state making a threat of force must communicate its intention to use force against another state (or other states) if the other state(s) acts, fails to act, or does not refrain from

acting in a specified manner. In addition, there must be evidence that the threat was received by the targeted state or it is reasonable that the threat was/would have been received for the incident to be included. Finally, for an incident to be coded as a threat of force one of six different types of action described below must be stated or clearly implied within the communicated threat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Displays of Force

Displays of force are in some ways easier to code than threats of force since actions are less ambiguous than words and such events tend to be more accurately recorded by reporters and historians. To be codable, the target of a display must be identified. While this is often clear, it may be necessary to utilize contextual factors to determine the target and effort should be dedicated to reach a correct determination of that target. If, however, no target can be reliably assessed for non-routine shows of force, alerts, or mobilizations, the event should not be coded. The six types of displays of force are listed and described below.

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

territorial waters of another state, and the intentional violation of another state's territorial waters or air space.

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

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

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

Border fortification — an explicit attempt to publicly demonstrate control over a border area through the construction or non-routine reinforcement of military outposts in or near the border area. A border fortification must be directed at a state actor. A border fortification directed immediately or nominally against non-state actor(s) is coded only if it is intended to pressure a state actor to change its policy. In these cases, the action is coded if the context clearly indicates that: 1) the target state can plausibly exert control over the border area relevant to the non-state actor; and 2) the non-state actor does not pose an imminent threat to the initiating state.

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

Uses of Force

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

Attack — the use of regular armed forces of a state to fire upon the armed forces, population, or territory of another state. Occasional military interventions into an ongoing civil war on behalf of insurgents may be considered this type of incident. Strikes by unmanned drones are attacks when the initiator is identifiable and there is clear evidence, such as public acknowledgement, that the use of unmanned drones against the territory, armed forces, or population of the target was non-covert at the time of the strike, provided the action meets all other requirements to be coded as a militarized incident.

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

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

Occupation of territory — the use of military force by one state to occupy all or part of another state's territory for a period of at least twenty-four hours (occupations lasting less than twenty-four hours are usually considered border violations). In addition, a border violation differs from an occupation of territory in that the latter usually entails other actions, such as the establishment of military bases or the assumption of governmental functions in the occupied area, that indicate that the occupation is intended to be long term. The immediate occupation during a post-war period by a victorious side's army is not coded as an incident unless provisions of a relevant treaty or agreement are violated by the occupying forces or further militarized incidents are undertaken by the state being occupied.

Seizure — the capture by one state of another state's material goods or personnel. A distinction is made between official and non-official goods and personnel. Official material goods of another state include such things as its armaments, military equipment, financial assets, and government papers or documents. A state's official personnel are members of its armed forces and its government officials. The holding of official goods or personnel for a period of at least twenty-four hours is considered a seizure. Non-official personnel of a state are its citizens, and non-official material goods are the property of those citizens. For the capture of non-official goods or personnel to qualify as a seizure it must be officially protested by the affected state. Again, the period of detention or confiscation must be at least twenty-four hours for the incident to be considered a seizure.

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

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

Interstate war — the outbreak of interstate war between two or more states as defined by the Correlates of War project, i.e., sustained military combat between the military forces

of COW states that results in 1,000 or more combat-related deaths of official military personnel. Like the Clash incident, the initiator (the Actor side) may or may not be clearly identified in an interstate war incident, and it will be assumed that the designation of Actor(s) and Target is arbitrary in this type of incident unless stated otherwise in the Notes section.

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

Issue Type

In previous MID data collection efforts, the apparent issue(s) at stake in a dispute were related to the goals of the so-called revisionist state, and these were coded only with respect to a dispute as a whole, not specific incidents. In of the current version of the data set we will attempt to identify the main issue(s) that appear to underlie each incident. For the sake of continuity, the revisionist state and issue(s) will be included and identified in the MID construction phase. The issue information that is collected at the incident level will feed into this later determination.

There are four possible issue types: territorial issues, regime issues, policy issues, and the ubiquitous “other.” If no issue can be identified, then the Issue Type fields should be left blank. Broadly speaking, a territorial issue is at stake when the actor is attempting to gain control over a piece of territory that it claims but does not possess. A policy issue is involved when the actor seeks to change the foreign policy behavior of the target, while a regime issue centers on the desire by the actor to change the government of the target.² If any other major issue is involved, then this should be recorded as “other”. Territorial issues are coded as “1,” policy issues as “2,” and regime issues as “3,” while identifiable issues that do not fall into these first three categories are coded as “4.” It is possible that more than one issue type may be involved in an incident. If this occurs, then the issue typed judged most important should be places in the category “Revision Type #1” and the second most important in the category “Revision Type #2.”

Source Information

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

If the source is one of the standard sources used in the MID project, then an abbreviation of its full name should be used. For a non-standard source, the source name must be clearly

² An appendix to a paper by Senese and Vasquez (1998) gives examples of these various issues.

identified and detailed enough to uniquely identify the source later. For monographs this will usually mean specifying the author(s) or editor(s), year, and short title of the work.

Copies of reports should be clearly identified by the Incident #. The type of location information supplied will depend upon the type of source. Examples of how different types of sources should be cited follow.

Newspapers—issue date, page number, e.g., d7/4/12, pA1.

Serial publications—year, volume, issue, page, e.g., y2008, v52, i3, p345.

Monographs—page, e.g., p215 or p10-21.

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

Fatalities

Two sections of the incident coding spreadsheet are devoted to indicating the fatalities, if any, suffered by the military personnel of the actor(s) and target in the incident. In the Fatalities of Actor(s) field each actor specified in the Actor(s) field should be entered in a separate row (using the 3-letter COW abbreviations). Possible values for this field are as follows:

- 9 — Missing. No mention of military fatalities at in in the pertinent report(s).
- 0 — No military fatalities occurred in the incident.
- 1 — Total military fatalities in the incident were between 1 and 25.
- 2 — Total military fatalities in the incident were between 26 and 100.
- 3 — Total military fatalities in the incident were between 101 and 250.
- 4 — Total military fatalities in the incident were between 251 and 500.
- 5 — Total military fatalities in the incident were between 501 and 999.
- 6 — Total military fatalities in the incident were 1,000 or more.

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

It is possible to enter the fatalities of up to six actors and one target on the incident coding form. If more actors are involved, then a Supplementary Fatality Sheet should be completed and added to the incident report folder. In addition, the box on the incident report form indicating that a Supplementary Fatality Sheet has been completed should be checked. It is vital that the

Reporting Region and Regional Incident # on this sheet be the same as that on the incident reporting form to which it relates.

Several problems may be encountered in coding fatalities. (1) A report may specify "casualties" rather than fatalities. Since "casualties" include both dead and wounded personnel, this number is typically much larger than fatalities. A casualty figure should be mentioned in the Notes section but is not directly relevant to the assessment of fatalities. (2) A report may specify the number of fatalities over a period of time (e.g., "the last three days") rather than a point in time (e.g., "yesterday"). Usually an incident fatality assessment will be based on several reports rather than a single report, and differences in partially overlapping accounts will need to be reconciled before the incident is coded. (3) Sources may differ about the number of fatalities. These differences must be reconciled before the incident can be coded, and such a reconciliation should be based on the following rules: (a) later reports are generally more accurate than earlier reports, and (b) reports from "independent" sources (i.e., those not directly connected to the governments involved in the incident) are generally more reliable than government sources. There is some inherent uncertainty in incident fatalities, which is one of the reasons why we code ranges of fatalities.

Conclusion

It is to be expected that additions or changes to this manual will be necessary as the incident coding progresses. Such changes will be communicated by the MID's project leadership.

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