International conflict is neither random nor inexplicable. It is highly structured by antagonisms between a relatively small set of states that regard each other as rivals. Examining the 173 strategic rivalries in operation throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this book identifies the differences rivalries make in the probability of conflict escalation and analyzes how they interact with serial crises, arms races, alliances and capability advantages. The authors distinguish between rivalries concerning territorial disagreement (space) and rivalries concerning status and influence (position) and show how each lead to markedly different patterns of conflict escalation. They argue that rivals are more likely to engage in international conflict with their antagonists than nonrival pairs of states and conclude with an assessment of whether we can expect democratic peace, economic development and economic interdependence to constrain rivalry-induced conflict.

Michael P. Colaresi is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University.

Karen Rasler is Professor in the Department of Political Science at Indiana University.

William R. Thompson is Rogers Professor of Political Science in the Department of Political Science at Indiana University.
Strategic Rivalries in World Politics

*Position, Space and Conflict Escalation*

Michael P. Colaresi, Karen Rasler, and William R. Thompson
To our kids, Cam, Lieu, and Landon
Contents

List of figures ix
List of tables xi
Acknowledgments xiv

Part I About strategic rivalries
1 An introduction to strategic rivalries 3
2 Defining and identifying strategic rivalries in world politics 21
3 Describing strategic rivalries 73

Part II The dangers of strategic rivalries: Crisis behavior and escalation
4 Protracted conflict and crisis escalation 101
5 Serial crisis behavior and escalating risks 132

Part III Playing to type: Spatial and positional issues in strategic rivalries
6 Contiguity, space and position in the major power subsystem 161
7 Initiating and escalating positional and spatial rivalries 189

Part IV Filling in some steps to war
8 Arms build-ups and alliances in the steps-to-war theory 219
9 Contested territory and conflict escalation 240
Part V Strategic rivalries and conflict

10 Inducements, facilitators, and suppressors 275

References 291
Index 307
### Figures

3.1 The number of rivalries, 1816–1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.1 The effect of power asymmetry across rivalry contexts</th>
<th>124</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2 The effect of democracy and major powers on probability across rivalry contexts</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 The effect of violent triggers, grave threats and militarized issues across rivalry contexts</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 The effect of the number of actors across rivalry contexts</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 The effect of system polarity and regional level across rivalry contexts</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 The effect of government instability across rivalry contexts</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 The effect of the number of previous crises on the average time till the next crisis, with 90 percent confidence intervals (no previous crises included)</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 The effect of the number of previous crises on the average time till violence, with 90 percent confidence intervals (no previous crises included)</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 The effect of the number of previous crises on the average time till the next crisis, with 90 percent confidence intervals (dyads with one or more previous crises)</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 The effect of the number of previous crises on the average time till violence, with 90 percent confidence intervals (dyads with one or more previous crises)</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 The effect of previous crises on the average time till war, with 90 percent confidence intervals (dyads with one or more previous crises)</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 The distribution of the difference in the coefficients predicting spatial rivalry versus positional rivalry initiation from a parametric bootstrap</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 The effect of contiguity on the probability of spatial and positional rivalry initiation, with 90 percent confidence intervals</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.3 The effects of nondemocracy, militarization, and major/regional power on spatial and positional rivalry initiation, with 90 percent confidence intervals

7.4 The estimate biases that you would find if you ignored information on rivalry initiation types, with 90 percent confidence intervals

7.5 Effects of spatial and positional rivalry on the probability of a war onset, any militarized disputes and war joining, with 90 percent confidence intervals

8.1 An abridged version of Vasquez’s steps-to-war theory

8.2 The effect of mutual arms build-ups and external alliances on the hazard of war
## Tables

1.1 Korean interactions ............................... page 11
1.2 Warfare in the second half of the twentieth century 13
1.3 Rivalries in contemporary warfare 15
2.1 Six identifications of rivalries in world politics 38
2.2 “Consensus” rivalries 57
2.3 The extent of agreement/disagreement in six rivalry identifications 58
2.4 Five rivalry series 61
2.5 Rivalry distributions by types of dyads 67
2.6 Starting date biases 68
2.7 The geographical distribution of rivalries 70
3.1 The net number of rivalries in the system 77
3.2 Number and type of rivalries by dyadic type 78
3.3 Types of strategic rivalry 79
3.4 Participation in rivalries 82
3.5 Number of years between rivalry onset and independence 84
3.6 Mean rivalry duration in years by dyadic rank type 85
3.7 Primary reasons for rivalry termination 87
3.8 Wars with apparent strategic rivalry roots 88
3.9 Rivalries and militarized dispute years 91
3.10 The regional distribution of rivalries over time 93
4.1 Protracted conflicts in the twentieth century 105
4.2 Variable definitions 115
4.3 Issues and rivalry 119
4.4 Rivalry and violence in crises 120
4.5 Logit results for war and escalation 122
5.1 Descriptive statistics for control variables 145
5.2 Weibull regressions results for all dyads (“no previous crisis” is comparison group) 148
Tables

5.3 Weibull regressions results for contiguous non-major power dyads with at least one previous crisis (“one previous crisis” is comparison group) 151
5.4 Dyads involved in multiple crisis sequences 155
5.5 Rivalry–nonrivalry crisis sequence comparisons 156
6.1 The spatial–positional continuum 173
6.2 Major power status, contiguity, rivalry, and rivalry type 174
6.3 A list of dyads and their war involvement 176
6.4 Contiguity and rivalry type 181
6.5 Rivalry type and war onset 184
6.6 Rivalry type and war types during war onsets 185
6.7 Rivalry type and war joining during war onsets 186
6.8 Bremer’s seven dangerous dyad attributes 192
6.9 Competing risks analysis of rivalry initiation type 200
6.10 Logit results for escalation 210
8.1 Propositions on war escalation 224
8.2 Cox regression results for recurrent crises, mutual arms build-ups, alliances, and war 234
8.3 Cross tabulation of steps to war and previous crises (dyad-years) 236
9.1 Frequency of dyad-years, 1919–1992 (excluding pre-1919 contested territory and rivalries) 249
9.2 The sequencing of contested territory, militarized disputes, and strategic rivalries 251
9.3 Contested territory, strategic rivalry, and interstate war 253
9.4 Interaction of rivalry and contested territory on militarized interstate disputes and war, 1919–1992 (excluding pre-1919 contested territory and rivalries) 254
9.5 Impact of dyadic variables on MIDs and war, 1919–1992 256
9.6 Interaction effects of contested territory, rivalry, and contiguity on militarized interstate disputes and war, 1919–1992 (excluding pre-1919 contested territory and rivalries) 257
9.7 Impact of interactive effects of rivalry, contested territory, and contiguity on MIDs and war, 1919–1992 258
9.8 Frequency of dyad-years, 1919–1992 (excluding pre-1919 contested territory and rivalries) 264
9.9 Interaction of rivalry, contested territory, and contiguity on crises and war, 1919–1992 (excluding pre-1919 contested territory and rivalries) 264
9.10 Impact of dyadic variables on crises and war, 1919–1992 266
APPENDICES: TABLES

9.A-1 Interaction of rivalry and contested territory on militarized interstate disputes and war, 1919–1945 268
9.A-2 Impact of dyadic variables on MIDs and war, 1919–1945 269
10.1 Statistical studies of the trade–conflict relationship 280
10.2 Logit regression estimates of militarized interstate disputes, 1950–1992 284
Acknowledgments


We are also grateful for National Science Foundation funding to Thompson in 1995–7 that underwrote the collection of data on strategic rivalries. At various points, a number of individuals have commented on earlier parts of the manuscript or provided assistance in acquiring pertinent data. For services rendered along the way, we thank Todd Allee, Terry Boswell, Eric Chang, Derekh Cornwell, Jonathan DiCicco, Paul Diehl, Gary Goertz, Paul Hensel, Paul Huth, David Kelly, Brian Lai, Jack Levy, Sara Mitchell, Joachim Rennstich, Bruce Russett, Brandon Valeriano, and John Vasquez. All are absolved from any errors we may have committed or advice that we may have ignored.