Throughout history, shifts in governing coalitions have critically affected war termination. For example, the execution of the Athenian democratic ruler Cleophon and the ascendancy of the pro-Spartan oligarchs in B.C. 404 led to Athens’ surrender to Sparta and ended the twenty-seven-year Second Peloponnesian War. Similarly, the death of Russian Empress Elizabeth in January 1762 led her Prussophile successor, Peter III, to immediately recall Russian armies that were occupying Berlin and conclude the Treaty of Saint Petersburg by May—ending the fighting between Russia and Prussia in the Seven Years’ War. During World War I, riots in Germany ushered in a new government that then negotiated the final war armistice, as Kaiser Wilhelm II fled to Holland. Likewise, during World War II, France and Italy surrendered shortly after changes in their governing coalitions, in 1940 and 1943, respectively. Most recently, on his first full day in office, U.S. President Barack Obama summoned senior officials to the White House to begin fulfilling his campaign promise to pull combat forces out of the war in Iraq.¹

Scholars working on issues related to war termination have noted this phenomenon, albeit anecdotally. For example, H.A. Calahan observes that “it seems fair to conclude that a change of regime for the vanquished comes close
to being a condition precedent to the making of peace.”\(^2\) Robert Rothstein concludes that “because it is unlikely that the officials currently in charge can make the necessary changes in policies with which they have become identified, new personnel seem imperative.”\(^3\) Michael Handel suggests that “the termination of a long and stalemated war is frequently preceded by a drastic political change in leadership in the country of one of the belligerents.”\(^4\) Finally, in the landmark study of this phenomenon, Fred Iklé classifies elites in each belligerent state as “hawks” and “doves” and asserts that the hawks may need to leave the government before the state can settle.\(^5\)

In short, the empirical record includes numerous examples of domestic governing coalition shifts leading to war termination, and many scholars from different theoretical perspectives have noted this tendency. Few scholars, however, have attempted to explain the causal mechanisms of this phenomenon in a rigorous and generalizable manner.\(^6\) In this article, I introduce a new theory about shifts in domestic governing coalitions, a state’s elite foreign policy decisionmaking group, and explain their role in the war termination process. I outline three obstacles to peace, as well as coalitional dynamics, that can lead incumbent governing coalitions to be unable to end the war—even when such a change is necessary or desirable. As a result, ending the war may only be possible by replacing some or all of the coalition’s members.

As bargaining models of war suggest, wars can only end once all belligerents develop similar expectations about the war. Whereas most bargaining models assume that this change in expectation occurs with an attitude change among incumbent leaders, my theory suggests that it may result from a change in the foreign policy leadership itself. Thus, my argument refines the

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\(^6\) One recent exception is Sarah Elizabeth Croco, who tests the argument that culpable leaders will feel more pressure to stay in the war than nonculpable leaders. Her argument, however, only applies to heads of state and not to governing coalitions. See Croco, “Peace at What Price? Domestic Politics, Settlement Costs, and War Termination,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008. Similarly, in a parallel study of interstate rivalry termination from 1816 to 1992, D. Scott Bennett found that a change in the leadership or political system of one of the rivals led to a decrease in the duration of the rivalry. See Bennett, “Democracy, Regime Change, and Rivalry Termination,” *International Interactions*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (April 1997), pp. 369–397; and D. Scott Bennett, “Integrating and Testing Models of Rivalry Termination,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (October 1998), pp. 1200–1231.
domestic-level mechanisms that lead to the international bargains that end war. As such, this analysis builds on a much wider literature within international relations about “two-level games,” one level being domestic and the other international.7

I assess this theory in a plausibility probe of the Korean War, a quintessential example of stalemated war. Unlike most other empirical studies of interstate war duration and termination, which focus only on wars that ended with a clear-cut victor,8 my model theorizes explicitly about stalemates. The irony of the Korean War is that the final armistice terms accepted in July 1953 were little different from those proposed at the start of negotiations in July 1951. Given that the battlefield situation remained relatively constant throughout those two years, yet casualties continued to mount,9 why did the belligerents wait so long? From a strategic viewpoint, continuing the war made no sense—but from a domestic viewpoint, it did. As my analysis makes clear, the end of the war was preceded by shifts in the domestic governing coalitions of the three major belligerents, which permitted the war to end.

The rest of this article is divided into four sections and a conclusion. The first section briefly reviews the existing war termination literature and shows how previous approaches are incomplete. The second section outlines my theory about domestic coalition shifts in war termination. The third section examines

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the domestic causal mechanisms in detail in the United States, China, and the Soviet Union during the Korean War. The fourth section briefly examines the war-terminating strategic interaction among these states while also addressing some potential objections.

The Theoretical Context

Existing literature about war termination can be grouped into three categories—realpolitik, domestic politics, and bargaining models. Of these, bargaining models have made significant inroads into scholarly understanding, because they can account for the strategic interaction between sides in ending war. I build on this literature by refining the domestic mechanisms implicit in bargaining models to explain why each side decides to come to the bargaining table. Specifically, I advance a key variable—the effect of domestic coalition shifts—that the literature has mostly ignored and remains largely underdeveloped.

The oldest theoretical approach to war termination, realpolitik arguments, suggests that war has only two outcomes—victory or defeat. War ends when one side gives up and accepts the more powerful side’s demands; the arguments assume, however, that the “winner” will not raise his demands once he realizes his advantage. In contrast, domestic politics arguments examine various mechanisms within one state to explain war termination. These arguments emphasize (1) public opinion, (2) elite behav-


ior, or (3) bureaucratic politics, based on their view about which domestic institution or group monopolizes the policy process and thus can catalyze a change in attitudes to bring about peace. While these scholars focus on domestic mechanisms for peace, they tend to overlook international factors. As a result, most realpolitik and domestic politics arguments generally ignore the strategic interaction inherent in settling with the enemy.

Addressing this theoretical gap, a third group of scholars argues that a change in the international bargaining space brings peace. These rationalist


bargaining models highlight the interactive nature of war, that it takes two or more sides to end it. Moreover, they address the theoretical problem of enforcement in an anarchic realm: agreements will be self-enforcing at terms where both sides perceive the marginal benefits of additional demands to be less than the marginal costs of fighting to achieve those demands.\footnote{The presence of potential intervening parties can make agreements self-enforcing even for the stronger state, because it can anticipate intervention and its consequences. See Goemans, War and Punishment, p. 32.} Most bargaining models of war focus on information dynamics. In this view, war is caused by uncertainty about the distribution of power between the belligerents, the costs of fighting or the enemy’s resolve, and the war itself is an important source of information for overcoming this uncertainty. War ends when both sides’ expectations converge enough to create an overlapping bargaining space.\footnote{Morrow, “Capabilities, Uncertainty, and Resolve”; Slantchev, “How Initiators End Their Wars”; Slantchev, “The Power to Hurt”; Powell, “Bargaining Theory and International Conflict”; Powell, “Bargaining and Learning while Fighting”; Filson and Werner, “A Bargaining Model of War and Peace”; and Filson and Werner, “Bargaining and Fighting.”}

In these models, belligerents continuously update their expectations throughout the war, based on observed battle outcomes and the diplomatic offers that are made (or not made). For example, winning a battle will lead a belligerent to believe he is more powerful than the other side, causing him to incrementally increase his demands. In contrast, a battlefield defeat will lead him to incrementally lower his demands. Many bargaining models conceive of this updating process in mathematical terms, in accordance with Bayes’s theorem.\footnote{For more information about Bayesian updating, see James D. Morrow, Game Theory for Political Scientists (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), chap. 6.} In practice, this Bayesian updating process may not be as precise as these models predict, and information dynamics cannot provide a complete account of war termination behavior. Although Bayesian models accept that this updating process can take time, the reasons for this “lag” are undertheorized.\footnote{Scott Sigmund Gartner argues that states may choose to change their military strategy rather than offer concessions. Gartner, Strategic Assessment in War (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997). Reiter argues that fears of adversary noncompliance with an agreement can account for the inefficiency in Bayesian updating. Reiter, How Wars End, chap. 11.}

Few scholars have theorized about domestic politics as a source of this
inefficiency, even as Bayesian formal theorists have flagged it as a possible cause. For example, Darren Filson and Suzanne Werner admit their model assumes that an attacker can “effortlessly revise upward or downwards her demands”; a “leader responsive to domestic political concerns, however, is likely much less flexible.” The domestic politics version of the Bayesian argument filters battlefield conditions through cost-sensitive democratic constituencies, which then pressure leaders to change war policy. In turn, this pressure causes leaders to change their expectations about the war. This argument, however, does not model the lag in the Bayesian updating process that one often sees empirically; rather, it assumes that political leaders update as soon as they perceive a change in their constituency. In contrast, Hein Goemans begins to account for lags in Bayesian updating, but only in losing “semi-repressive and moderately exclusionary” regimes (i.e., oligarchies). Goemans argues that oligarchs’ expectations about personal punishment after the war serve as a brake on updating their expectations during it. If accepting settlement terms appears to have nasty personal consequences, these leaders as individuals can rationally prefer to continue fighting if there is a chance they can obtain terms that prevent their punishment. Thus, losing oligarchs can prevent the state from updating war expectations and creating an overlapping bargaining space to end it.

Even though including regime type is an improvement on bargaining models that exclude domestic politics, this emphasis focuses attention on the differences between regime types and away from variation within regime types. In the process, such arguments conceal important domestic political explanations for lags in Bayesian updating. For example, by treating all democrats as similarly cost-sensitive and all oligarchs as similarly afraid of political survival, these arguments ignore that different leaders within each regime type face different constraints, based on their governing coalition’s particular obstacles to peace. By ignoring variation within the same regime type, these arguments miss domestic constraints that can explain lags in Bayesian updating. They also ignore the effect of leadership changes in overcoming such lags.

This project addresses these weaknesses by elucidating the underspecified causal mechanism about when and how the overlapping bargaining space opens up. Accordingly, I look more carefully at the lag in the Bayesian updating process and theorize about how states get beyond it. In contrast to

Bayesian models, which assume that this change in expectations occurs when incumbent leaders change their minds, my research suggests that in many wars, it results from a change in the foreign policy leadership itself. In the process, my theory addresses two other shortcomings in these models.

First, most bargaining models do not allow for actors’ goals or interests to evolve during the settlement process. If preferences are given, why do actors’ views change during war? Instead, as I argue, preferences during war appear to shift over time in response to several issues, including a state’s “sunk costs” and the information gained from the process of fighting and negotiating. Moreover, new leaders often come to power with different preferences and policy goals, which can lead to a new calculation of the costs and benefits of continuing the war.22

Second, my model addresses an entire class of wars—protracted stalemates—that most bargaining models cannot explain and typically exclude from analysis. Leaders update their preferences as information is revealed through fighting, as long as the battlefield provides clear information. On stalemated battlefields, however, this information may be limited or ambiguous. Alternatively, clear information may be present, but for reasons I explain below, leaders may be unable to absorb it or act on it. These wars are empirically too common to be ignored as irrelevant: recent scholarship on war termination documents an increasing number of stalemates in the post–World War II period.23 Thus, my model adds breadth to the current literature by theorizing more explicitly about lags in the updating process that can lead to protracted stalemates.

**Domestic Coalition Shifts in Interstate War Termination**

As bargaining models about ending war suggest, belligerents will settle a conflict only when they develop an overlapping bargaining space.24 Bayesian models appear to best explain wars with a large power imbalance between the opposing sides, where updating occurs rather quickly. In contrast, Bayesian

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22. For example, Croco argues that “culpable” leaders—those whom the public can clearly link to the decision to go to war—face “settlement costs,” whereas “nonculpable” leaders can distance themselves from the original war decision and thereby become immune to such costs. Thus, culpable and nonculpable leaders face different utility functions and preferences about continuing or ending the war. See Croco, “Peace at What Price?”


24. The theory presented here pertains to interstate war termination but could easily be extended to civil war termination, because civil war leadership factions operate similarly to a state’s domestic governing coalition.
models are less effective for explaining longer wars, where realpolitik factors may not be enough to manifest clear battlefield outcomes and where war policies become “sticky.” Here, leaders find it more difficult to shift policies and strategies related to prosecuting and ending the war as quickly as the Bayesian approach would suggest; thus, war does not necessarily end when decision-makers want it to. Instead, belligerents must invest political capital in prosecuting the war, and these war policies can become stuck in a positive feedback loop. Thus, in longer wars, failure of realpolitik factors to produce a bargaining space and the sunk costs of expending political capital to wage the war make it increasingly difficult to end.

COALITIONS AND COALITION SHIFTS

Many different domestic interests influence the decision to enter, prosecute, or end a war. Thus, rather than characterize each belligerent state as a unitary actor, it is useful to model it as a domestic governing coalition. All states—regardless of regime type—are led by a domestic governing coalition. A “domestic governing coalition” is the elite foreign policy decisionmaking group in each belligerent government, comprising the actors who “if they agree, have both the ability to commit the resources of the government in foreign affairs and the power to prevent other entities within the government from overtly reversing their position.”

The actors who make up a state’s domestic governing coalition are constrained by broader societal interest groups and other political “patrons,” such as (1) dissenting actors in the regime’s ruling group or party, (2) other political parties in the legislature, (3) military and paramilitary groups, (4) groups reflecting regional or ethnic interests, (5) economic sectors, (6) military-industrial-scientific complexes, (7) public opinion, (8) the media, and (9) other interest groups and nongovernmental organizations. These constituencies vary by regime type: public opinion, the media, and opposition groups may have more effect in democracies, whereas the military, party apparatus, or

25. Margaret G. Hermann, “How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy: A Theoretical Framework,” International Studies Review, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 47–81, at p. 56. Hermann names three authoritative decision units that could be responsible for foreign policy decisions: predominant leader, single group, or coalition of autonomous actors. Unlike Hermann, I believe that predominant leaders are extremely uncommon. Almost all leaders make decisions through consultation with a small group of close advisers, and very few—if any—have the ability to stifle all dissent and opposition by themselves.

some external ally may be the relevant audience in authoritarian regimes.\textsuperscript{27} All leaders will depend upon some constituency to stay in power, and different coalition members may answer to different constituencies. Even apparent dictators can be removed if they no longer promote the interests of their selectorate.\textsuperscript{28}

A governing coalition’s ability to commit to or change policy depends heavily on the effective number of veto players, “a person, group or faction who, through their control of an office, post, or branch of government, can reject any proposed changes to existing policy.”\textsuperscript{29} The larger the number of veto players and the greater the distance between their policy positions, the more difficult it can be to change policy.\textsuperscript{30} Furthermore, the greater the number of veto players, the more policies will benefit targeted groups or constituencies, instead of the general public. This occurs when veto players are able to demand—and receive—side payments in the form of narrowly targeted policies.\textsuperscript{31} Such side payments can lead to contradictory policy positions or log-rolling, where each veto player gets what it most wants in return for tolerating the unpleasant effects of policies backed by other coalition members.\textsuperscript{32}


\textsuperscript{32} Snyder, \textit{Myths of Empire}, p. 44; Mansfield and Snyder, “Democratization and the Danger of
These coalitional dynamics help explain policy inertia and highlight the obvious relationship between policy stability and domestic coalition shifts. When a policy is functioning because of a coalition agreement, changing the policy requires renegotiating that agreement. Likewise, the less control a coalition member has over policy choice and implementation, the less willing he is to take political risks to change it. Thus, larger coalitions with more veto players are unlikely to take political risks to change policy. For these reasons, policy stability may make governments unable to change the status quo, even when such changes are necessary or desirable. In fact, a government with policy stability may become so immobile that policy change is only possible by replacing the incumbent government.

I define a “domestic coalition shift” as either (1) a consequential change in the identity of the decisionmakers or (2) a substantive change in the type of government. The first definition includes changes in the actual or nominal head of state, cabinet membership, political parties in a parliamentary governing coalition, and junta membership. The latter definition resembles the comparativists’ “regime change” (i.e., a change in the type of regime). Either type of shift can produce a significant change in policies as new members bring new resources, constituencies, perspectives, interests, and preferences to the leadership coalition.

OBSTACLES TO PEACE
There are many reasons why a war, once entrenched, is difficult to end. I argue that these reasons fall into one of three categories—preference, information, and entrapment obstacles. These three obstacles make it more likely that belligerents will need a domestic coalition shift before the war can end. By removing these obstacles, domestic coalition shifts may produce the necessary conditions for ending war. These three obstacles to peace can occur in tandem, although they may not all be present at the same time or have an equally powerful effect. The preference obstacle is already well documented in bargaining models of war; even in rationalist models, if decisionmakers do not want to end the war, a bargaining space cannot develop. In contrast, the information

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36. Notably, this definition excludes changes that involve only military leaders, unless a military leader also serves in a political role in the decisionmaking process.
and entrapment obstacles interfere with the Bayesian updating process critical to making decisions about continuing or ending a war.

**The Preference Obstacle.** Leaders in a domestic coalition may not want to end the war, for four reasons. First, leaders’ personal stakes may be very high, because their personal reputation, domestic political standing, or physical or financial security is attached to continuing the war.37 Alternatively, most war benefits—including career advancement, protection from foreign economic competition, operational autonomy, larger budget slices, or boosted revenue streams—are disproportionately concentrated in specific groups, such as the military and military-industrial-scientific complexes.38 Second, fighting the war may help leaders stay in power, especially when nonconstituents are the ones bearing the war’s costs. Such “diversionary wars” can occur when the state is experiencing democratization or when leaders face domestic political problems (i.e., unrest or economic downturn). Here, the governing coalition may want to continue fighting to enhance its legitimacy, demonstrate strong leadership, deflect attention away from divisive domestic problems, or discredit domestic opponents.39 Third, leaders may perceive that the costs of military inaction are higher than the probable costs of fighting, such as when the country has been invaded and the only alternative to fighting is losing sovereignty. Finally, continuing the war may help leaders in a broader conflict by providing information about the adversary’s military or draining its resources in a tangential fight—as the Soviet case illustrates below.

**The Information Obstacle.** Leaders in a domestic coalition may not know they should end the war. In this case, the rational updating process does not occur, for any of the following reasons. First, coalition members may receive information about the war that is ambiguous, incomplete, biased, conflicting, or faulty.40 This can lead them to prolong the war to reduce uncertainty41 or to assume that their current war policy is having the desired effect and thus encourage them to continue fighting. Second, different coalition members may

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37. Goemans, War and Punishment; and Croco, “Peace at What Price?”
38. Mansfield and Snyder, “Democratization and the Danger of War,” p. 25; and Snyder, Myths of Empire, pp. 32–35, 49–52.
40. Von Clausewitz, On War, p. 191; and Iklé, Every War Must End.
be exposed to different information, because there is rarely perfect information flow inside the government. This can lead coalition members to manipulate others to their policy position by sharing information selectively, or it can generate inefficiencies that can delay a war-ending decision. Third, different coalition members may use different indicators to assess the war and thus reach different conclusions, which can lead to policy gridlock. Finally, coalition members may have individual cognitive, affective, or learning biases or organizational or group decisionmaking biases that prevent them from processing war information. For example, coalition members often take data that support their expectations at face value, while ignoring, discounting, or rejecting information that does not fit with favored or well-established beliefs. Likewise, organizations' formal and informal power structures, standard operating procedures, and internal culture can affect how information is processed and filtered, and groups are subject to decisionmaking biases as


43. Snyder, Myths of Empire; Mansfield and Snyder, “Democratization and the Danger of War”; McGinnis and Williams, Compound Dilemmas; Mor, “Peace Initiatives and Public Opinion”; Colaresi, Scare Tactics; Baum, Soft News Goes to War, pp. 44–45; and Johnson and Tierney, Failing to Win, pp. 67–75.


Individual and group biases become particularly potent during “effort justification,” when leaders become so personally invested in a policy that they cannot change expectations.48

Thus, whereas Bayesian models predict a relatively linear function between actors receiving new information and changing their expectations or beliefs, the information obstacle would suggest that information updating occurs according to a step function, if it occurs at all. Although information-updating pathologies are usually associated with authoritarian leaders, these dynamics also exist in democracies, as the U.S. case illustrates below.

THE ENTRAPMENT OBSTACLE. Leaders in a domestic coalition may want to end the war but cannot. Entrapment can occur when the leaders’ hawkish constituencies want to continue the war, and the leaders must acquiesce to remain in power. If leaders know they will likely lose power if they end a war now, they can rationally choose to continue it.49 Leaders can face this political entrapment from a domestic constituency or from external allies.

Internally, entrapment may be the result of having to answer to hawkish

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constituencies or, more benignly, from having “spun up” the population to mobilize for war.\(^{50}\) Unless the war ends quickly, leaders must expend political capital to enact policies—such as demonizing the enemy and mobilizing the armed forces—to ease the process of waging war. The more political capital leaders expend, the more they convince their constituents that fighting the war is the right thing to do. But while manipulating perceptions helps to sustain the war effort, it hampers peacemaking. The leader is likely to pay a domestic political price—a domestic audience cost—if he backs down.\(^{51}\) Even if the governing coalition wants to de-escalate, other political challengers can capitalize on enemy stereotypes and accuse the coalition of “being soft” on the adversary.\(^{52}\)

Externally, entrapment results from having hawkish allies or patrons. If an ally intervenes on a belligerent’s behalf, it is difficult to de-escalate after that intervention without disappointing the ally. Leaders may decide that they value the ally’s support during or after the war enough to stay in the war for the ally’s sake—as the Chinese case illustrates below. Finally, parallel to the unintended consequences of domestic mobilization, demonizing the enemy and mobilizing allies can make it harder for leaders to back down without losing international stature.\(^{53}\)

In both cases, although the governing coalition may have realized it is not going to obtain its initial goals, a radical change in strategy is not politically possible without admitting failure—which politicians are loathe to do. Because a sudden departure from a previous policy raises serious questions about the wisdom of having pursued it for so long, political entrapment puts decision-makers into a no-win situation. They realize that they cannot win, but they cannot afford to quit at once. This can lead the governing coalition either to adopt a high-risk strategy for prosecuting the war (i.e., “gamble for resurrection”)\(^{54}\) or to succumb to the “sunk cost paradox,” effort justification, and other psychological aspects of entrapment.\(^{55}\) The result in both situations is the same: decision-makers may want to settle but cannot because they feel trapped.

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OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO PEACE

Regardless of the length of the war, the overlapping bargaining space necessary to end it can develop only when at least one side changes its expectations about the costs and benefits of fighting. This change in expectations could theoretically occur if one (or more) of the belligerents’ existing governing coalitions either (1) changes its attitudes about the war or (2) changes its composition to include members with more appropriate expectations. The former is the Bayesian updating model. A change in attitudes is unlikely, however, because of coalition dynamics and the three obstacles identified above.

For example, where coalition members place different values on policy priorities, a coalition shift allows one faction to remove the members whose preferences created gridlock. Where the rational-updating process is not even among all of the coalition members because of information obstacles, a coalition shift allows one faction to be removed or replaced, hopefully facilitating information flow and removing biased inputs. Where coalition members face entrapment, a coalition shift removes the entrapped element. In this manner, domestic coalition shifts can help to overcome the obstacles to peace and bring an overlapping bargaining space within reach.

Thus, unless a war’s battlefield situation compellingly shows the belligerents’ relative strengths quickly, it is unlikely that the governing coalition that started and invested significant political capital in prosecuting a war can end an unsuccessful one. Policies that a state enacted to better wage the war become sticky and will often require a coalition shift to get them unstuck. A coalition shift allows different political actors—with different interests, assessments of the war, and constituencies—to take power. This, in turn, can lead to a change in the war policy (e.g., from continuing it to ending it). The new leaders may have not only a new calculation of the costs and benefits of the war, but also a new conceptualization of them. Because it introduces new actors, a coalition shift may overcome the obstacles to peace and thus permit the war to end.56

Figure 1 summarizes the domestic coalition shift theory. The gray rectangle delineates the standard Bayesian model: the change in expectations occurs when incumbent leaders change their minds (“attitude change”). In many wars, however—41 percent since World War II, for example—this change in

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56. There are four other practical effects as well. A coalition shift could (1) allow scapegoats to be identified and removed; (2) provide the previous leaders with a “golden parachute” to avoid physical or political harm after the settlement; (3) help stabilize the domestic political scene after the settlement; or (4) help the state rebuild its international reputation.
expectations results from a shift in the domestic governing coalition ("change in decisionmakers").

Domestic coalition shifts may be produced in a number of ways, both endogenously to the war and exogenously. Although endogenous shifts are influenced by the battlefield situation, this does not mean they have no causal weight in explaining war termination. In some wars, the necessary updating of war aims cannot happen without an endogenous shift, which makes the shift a necessary intervening variable to ending the war. Importantly, my model excludes domestic coalition shifts that are forced upon a state by its external enemies. Excluding these “victor-imposed” shifts helps guard against the possibility that the causal arrows are reversed—that the end of the war is leading to coalition shifts, rather than vice versa.

Theoretically, there are two kinds of endogenous shifts (labeled as arrows 1 and 2). Endogenous shifts may be a response to changes in the domestic constituency’s perceptions about the progress of the war that are not shared by the existing domestic coalition (arrow 1). These may be cases where the coalition

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has become so immobile that policy change is possible only by replacing the incumbent government. Such shifts often include changes to the head of state through political processes such as coups, revolutions, regime changes, or elections that replace the governing coalition from the outside. An example of an arrow 1 shift is the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. The new communist leader, Vladimir Lenin, subsequently accepted the harsh terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to make a separate peace and end Russia’s participation in World War I.  

Alternatively, endogenous shifts may be a response to changes in part of the existing coalition’s perceptions about the progress of the war and constituent pressures (arrow 2). These endogenous shifts are likely to result from heads of state recalibrating their governing coalitions to remove veto players who are stuck by the three obstacles. A common arrow 2 shift among losing states is to remove hawks in the existing domestic coalition to allow the remaining doves to make a “bad” peace. For example, Menachem Begin and other Gahal Party ministers opposed to peace resigned from the Israeli national unity government on August 6, 1970, thereby allowing Prime Minister Golda Meir to accept a negotiated settlement to end the seventeen-month War of Attrition the next day.

Finally, exogenous shifts (labeled as arrow 3) may include the death, illness, or incapacitation of a coalition member or changes in the coalition composition for purely domestic political reasons, such as economic crises or political scandals. For example, Joseph Stalin’s death in March 1953 allowed the communist states to offer crucial concessions necessary to end the Korean War. Although exogenous coalition shifts occur for reasons that have no relationship to the war, their effect on war policy can be the same as endogenous shifts.

The box around the domestic coalition shift model highlights how this alternative causal pathway to war termination builds on the Bayesian model. Domestic coalition shifts can explain how states get beyond the lag and stickiness of long wars. These shifts, however, are neither necessary nor sufficient for getting beyond these lags, because we cannot know a priori how much each shift will change the belligerents’ expectations and what effect the strategic interaction with the opposing side will have. How many coalition shifts are necessary

58. Arrow 1 shifts do not necessarily require that all domestic constituencies are ready to end the war. Domestic constituencies are likely to have their updating impeded by obstacles to peace, as well. Some constituents, such as the military or industrial groups, may be gaining private benefits from continuing the war (preference obstacle). Other constituents will lack access to information about the war and come to believe the elite’s interpretation of events (information obstacle). Finally, many constituents will have internalized negative enemy stereotypes and be intensely distrustful of the adversary (entrapment obstacle). Thus, updating among the different domestic constituencies is likely to be as uneven as among the coalition members themselves.
to create the overlapping bargaining space depends on how much distance exists between the two sides’ demands. If their demands are not very far apart, then a coalition shift on one side may lead it to lower its demands enough to bring an overlapping bargaining space within reach. If the distance between the two sides is greater, however—such as during sticky wars that endure for many months or years—multiple coalition shifts may be necessary to dislodge the obstacles to peace and create the overlapping bargaining space.

The Korean War

This section examines the mechanisms of the coalition shift theory in the Korean War, which is a hard case for standard bargaining models. Not only was there power symmetry between the two sides—the United Nations (UN) Command and the communists—but the final armistice terms accepted in July 1953 were virtually the same as those proposed in July 1951. Why did the belligerents wait so long to make the peace, given that the battlefield situation was stalemated throughout those two years while casualties continued to mount? I argue that peace was not possible until domestic coalition shifts in the three “primary” belligerents—the United States, China, and the Soviet Union—produced the necessary overlapping bargaining space. Most important, the Soviet shift with Stalin’s death in March 1953 was exogenous to the war yet critical for precipitating the crucial communist concession on voluntary repatriation of prisoners of war (POWs).

For this plausibility probe, I have limited my analysis to the three primary belligerents, as they were the most important in making decisions about prosecuting and ending the war. Given the importance of strategic interaction in understanding how an overlapping bargaining space develops in the war termination process, it is critical to examine belligerents in the same war. Furthermore, the Korean War has abundant values on the independent variables of interest—the three obstacles to peace and domestic coalition shifts. Each primary belligerent had a different predominant obstacle to peace, which allows me to explore the dynamics of each obstacle more carefully. Such “extreme value” cases are well suited for plausibility probes, because the variables’ effects should stand out sharply against the case background and are unlikely to be produced by measurement error or other causes. As a result, the Korean

59. Because of space constraints, I explore only one obstacle for each state, although other obstacles were also present. For additional discussion, see Stanley, Paths to Peace, chaps. 4–6.
War provides a “most likely” test for the domestic coalition shift theory and a “least likely” test for the alternative standard bargaining models of war.\(^6^1\) As a stalemated war, the Korean War meets the scope conditions for the theory, making it likely on a priori grounds that the case will support it. Therefore, it would be easy to discard the theory if it did not explain this case.

Although the war was fought on their soil, neither North nor South Korea had much influence in decisions about when and how the war ended. Not only were they materially powerless, as their forces were incapable of waging war without their larger patrons’ help, but the way the primary belligerents viewed them as client states rendered them politically powerless as well. Their respective powerlessness provides an ironic parallel: whereas North Korea wanted to end the war much sooner,\(^6^2\) South Korea wanted to fight on much longer,\(^6^3\) but both were overruled by their respective side’s more powerful primary belligerents. Thus, even though both Korean states experienced domestic coalition shifts during the war, there was almost no relationship between these shifts and the international bargaining process.\(^6^4\) Both Kim Il-sung and Syngman Rhee used the ongoing war to affect their domestic political scenes, but changes in their governing coalitions were intended to provide cover for consolidating their rule and sidelining rivals—not to enhance fighting or end

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64. North Korea experienced three domestic coalition shifts, while South Korea experienced six. For more information, see Stanley, Paths to Peace, chap. 3.
the war. For this reason, these coalitions are omitted from this plausibility probe.

**BACKGROUND ON THE KOREAN WAR, 1950–53**

The first year of the Korean War was marked by a rapidly shifting battlefield, as different states entered the war and changed the balance of power. The fluid front line moved south to the “Pusan perimeter” after North Korea’s initial invasion, back north to China’s border on the Yalu River after UN Commander Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s amphibious landing in Inchon, and then back south of Seoul again after Chinese forces entered the war. By June 1951, however, the battle line had more or less stabilized near the 38th parallel, the former border between North and South Korea, and both sides began to realize that moving beyond a stalemate would be extraordinarily costly.65

What followed were two years of armistice negotiations where both sides fought deadly but static battles near the 38th parallel while facing off in the negotiating tent. Negotiations began in July 1951, and by the end of the month, the belligerents agreed on an agenda for the armistice talks. By March 1952, all items were resolved except for agenda item 4, repatriation of prisoners of war.66

In effect, POW repatriation stalled the talks for an additional fifteen months. In January 1952, the UN Command had proposed voluntary POW repatriation,67 but the communists insisted that all prisoners must be returned, even those who did not want repatriation. By March, Chinese negotiators had hinted that they might accept some compromise solution: a UN screening of the prisoners and subsequent removal from the lists of those who would violently resist repatriation.68 This concession came after the UN team had suggested that such a screening would result in the return of 116,000 communist prisoners—including almost all Chinese POWs. In early April, therefore, the UN screened prisoners. The results shocked everyone: only 70,000 of the 132,000 agreed to return, including only 5,000 of the 21,000 Chinese prisoners. When the UN presented these figures on April 19, the communists were outraged and moved to recess.69

There was no movement on negotiations until March 30, 1953—three weeks

65. For good introductions to the Korean War, see Stueck, *The Korean War*; and Foot, *A Substitute for Victory*.
after Stalin died—when the communists conceded on the principle of voluntary repatriation of POWs. Armistice negotiations resumed on April 26, and the armistice was signed on July 27, 1953. The rest of this section explains why the war lasted so long, in terms of the theory’s three obstacles.

THE PREFERENCE OBSTACLE: THE SOVIET UNION UNDER STALIN

The Soviet Union under Stalin provides strong evidence of the influence of the preference obstacle in ending the Korean War and thus allows me to explore preference obstacle dynamics.70 Although the Soviet Union did not fight on the ground in Korea, it bankrolled the communist forces, providing massive quantities of armaments and supplies, significant numbers of military advisers to the Chinese and North Koreans, and air support as the backbone of the communist air war. It also wrote the North Korean invasion plan, arbitrated between North Korea and China, and played a central role in formulating decisions about the war.71

Although Stalin had initially been surprised by U.S. entry into the war, he was able to avoid direct Soviet ground involvement by urging the Chinese to deploy to Korea. Once the battlefield stalemate was realized, Stalin quickly realized it was in his interest for the war to continue, as long as UN forces did not advance again into North Korea. Russian documents indicate that Stalin’s main concern regarding negotiations was to ensure that the communists did not give the impression of weakness, because the Soviet Union could only benefit from a stalemate.72 A stalemate provided the Soviets with

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70. Because the Soviet Union was not a declared participant in the war, skeptics might wonder how useful the Soviet case is for theorizing about war termination: how often does a state have almost complete control over war decisions, reaping benefits without incurring the costs of fighting? Four actors in other interstate wars since World War II had this dynamic operating to some degree: France and Britain in the Sinai War (1956), Greece in the Cyprus War (1974), and Syria in the Lebanon War (1982). Thus, 15 percent of post–WWII interstate wars involved states controlling war decisions without committing many ground forces. This dynamic is also common in civil wars, where an outside patron to one of the belligerent factions supplies arms and effectively controls war decisions. For example, Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević played a central role in Bosnian Serb decision making during the 1990s Bosnian civil war. Likewise, the United States used its role providing arms to the mujahideen to influence war policy during the Soviets’ war in Afghanistan in the 1980s.


four benefits. First, it tied down U.S. forces, which hindered U.S. efforts to engage militarily in Europe, drained U.S. economic resources, and caused domestic political problems for President Harry Truman. Second, it created a rift between the United States and its allies over tactics in the Korean War. Third, it provided the Soviets with an excellent opportunity to gather intelligence on U.S. technology and military organization. Not only could it field-test its new equipment against American technology, but it could gain information from U.S. POWs. Finally, it created hostility between China and the United States and tied China more firmly to Moscow through dependence on Soviet military and economic assistance.

Because the Soviets were not deployed in the ground war, Stalin was able to push the human costs of the war onto his allies, China and North Korea. As a result, from Stalin’s perspective, there was no reason to end the war. He was receiving a number of benefits from the prolonged conflict, yet assuming very few of its costs. Given this cost-benefit calculation, it was clearly Stalin’s preference to delay the war’s end, and he consistently took steps to ensure that this preference prevailed. Although beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that information obstacle dynamics in the Soviet regime exacerbated this preference obstacle. Not only was Stalin able to keep those who might disagree with him in the dark, but much of the information Soviet leaders received was tailored to support Stalin’s known preferences, rather than to provide an accurate picture about the war.

73. These four reasons were Stalin’s beliefs about the war, but they may not have been objectively true. For example, the war also galvanized the United States into approving National Security Council Paper 68 (NSC-68), dramatically increasing military spending, strengthening NATO, and starting to rearm Germany—all of which arguably imposed costs on the Soviet Union in terms of the wider bipolar superpower conflict. Chang and Halliday, Mao, p. 353; and Vladislav M. Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 70.


78. For more information about the interaction between the information and preference obstacles under Stalin, see Stanley, Paths to Peace, chap. 4.
The Information Obstacle: The United States and Voluntary Repatriation of POWs

The U.S. decision to adopt the voluntary repatriation policy provides evidence of an information obstacle. Truman adopted the policy in October 1951, without considering its wider effects. Subsequently, his coalition became “too invested to quit” and thus systematically ignored unpalatable information suggesting this policy would conflict with more important policy preferences. By the time the coalition became aware of the policy’s full implications, it was too late to back down without signaling “weakness” to the communists or incompetence to the domestic audience. Elements of the entrapment obstacle were at work as well, but for the purposes of this plausibility probe, this section focuses on the information obstacle dynamics.89

The United States began armistice negotiations with a one-for-one prisoner exchange policy, which was strongly supported by Secretary of State Dean Acheson and opposed by the Department of Defense.80 Although defense officials, especially the U.S. Army’s chief of psychological warfare, argued instead for voluntary repatriation, because of its alleged propaganda benefits, it does not appear they had any evidence of communist prisoners wanting to defect.81 After bilateral debate between the State and Defense Departments, defense officials agreed to support the one-for-one exchange, until all UN prisoners were released, and then a return of remaining communist POWs in the UN Command’s possession.82 (In effect, they argued for a staggered all-for-all exchange.)

On October 29, 1951, Truman told Acting Secretary of State James Webb that he was against the one-for-one policy because it was “not an equitable basis.”83 Webb pointed out there might come a time when voluntary repatriation would be the last outstanding issue and thus could hold up settlement. Truman acknowledged this fact, but said he would agree to the staggered all-for-all POW swap only if the UN Command received “some major concession that could be obtained no other way.”84 There is little indication from this conversation that

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89. For more information about the interaction between the entrapment and information obstacles in the Truman coalition, see ibid., chaps. 5–6.
Truman had reflected on the POW policy’s ramifications—both its first-order effects on the armistice negotiations and second- and third-order effects on his other policies. The conversation highlights Truman’s natural inclination to make decisions rapidly, leading to premature cognitive closure.85 There is evidence, however, that Truman placed the Korean War in the context of the “struggle between freedom and communist slavery,” and this context may have motivated his hasty decision. For example, the previous month, arguing faith and ethical action were integral to any victory in the Cold War, he explicitly called for an international religious campaign against communism—the Campaign of Truth.86 Voluntary POW repatriation was certainly in line with these ideals.

Truman’s interest in the issue reopened the debate in his administration. During this debate, most uniformed and civilian defense officials argued for the all-for-all POW exchange. Most of the State Department—including Acheson, who reversed his views after hearing about Truman’s comments in October—argued for voluntary repatriation. There were four State Department officials, however, who bucked their colleagues’ support of voluntary repatriation. These officials raised some serious objections to the policy, including that the administration (1) did not know the full size of the POW problem; (2) had not considered the impact of additional casualties on allied and domestic opinion if negotiations broke down over the issue; (3) could not tell which POWs would want to be returned, because of internal POW camp politics; and (4) had refused to consider whether the communists would seek reprisals against U.S. POWs if the United States refused to return communist prisoners.87 Acheson, now knowing Truman’s preference on the issue, disregarded his subordinates’ objections to voluntary repatriation. Instead, he effectively defined voluntary repatriation as an irrevocable moral principle.88 As a result of Acheson’s organizational bias against using all available information, Truman never fully considered the policy’s implications and possible trade-offs.

Truman’s intervention and Acheson’s reversal on POW policy catalyzed a
consensus; all key members of the Truman coalition except the chief of naval operations, Adm. William Fechteler, fell in line behind it. In the United States, all major newspapers and most congressmen supported the policy, but it is important to note that contemporary polls suggest that public opinion permitted but did not require adoption of this policy. At the February 27 meeting to approve the policy, the Truman coalition swept aside possible evidence that its decision could significantly prolong the war. For example, Acheson told Truman that he consulted key allies and “none . . . indicated any disagreement with our position on this question.” Actually, most Western allies had mixed feelings about the policy but lacked enough confidence in opposing arguments to argue forcefully against Truman. Even more important, two days before the meeting, two U.S. officials returned home from a trip to Korea to estimate the number of communist prisoners unlikely to elect to go home. These officials told Truman that 116,000 would elect to return home. In fact, this also meant 15,900 prisoners—including 11,500 (more than half) of the Chinese POWs—would resist repatriation, but the implications of this evidence were not adequately considered.

In March 1952, as POWs became the last contentious issue in armistice negotiations, U.S. negotiators used those February estimates to propose that POWs unwilling to return home be removed from the lists and all others be repatriated. This proposal would have allowed the United States to achieve its aims while protecting the communists from having to endorse the voluntary repatriation principle. When U.S. negotiators made this offer, however, the February estimates were no longer accurate, and more recent information was ignored. This more recent information suggested that those numbers were at best wildly inaccurate and at worst too optimistic, because it would be virtually impossible to get an accurate screening and allow prisoners to make a genuine choice about repatriation. It also suggested that many more than 15,900

91. Foot, A Substitute for Victory, p. 92.
93. The communists disagreed with voluntary repatriation on the grounds that it (1) violated the Geneva Convention, which called for the exchange of all prisoners of war immediately at the cessation of hostilities; (2) was an attempt to retain prisoners and coerce them to stay in South Korea or go to Taiwan; and (3) was a political issue and thus should not have been brought up at the military armistice negotiations. See Foot, A Substitute for Victory, pp. 96–97. More generally, the communists were concerned about the illegitimizing effects on their regimes, both domestically and internationally, if communist POWs did not choose to return home.
POWs would resist repatriation. This information, however, from at least four sources, was ignored.

First, since January, officials at the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff had argued that UN camps embodied a “reign of terror,” especially for Chinese POWs, implying it would be impossible to get an accurate count among them.94 Second, since early February, the U.S. embassy in Korea had reported to U. Alexis Johnson, the deputy assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs, that it would be impossible to count POWs accurately for organizational and political reasons. These reports noted fear among prisoners intimidated by brutal pro-Chinese Nationalist (KMT) gang leaders in the camps and implied the number of nonrepatriates would be very large.95 Third, the UN camps had already observed much violence, starting with disturbances in September 1951 and escalating to full-scale riots in February 1952 in the Koje-do Island compound. Although these riots were not publicized, the UN Command, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and Johnson knew about them. These riots reinforced the embassy reports that communist prisoners were afraid and would probably not respond accurately in the repatriation screenings.96 Most important, UN Commander Gen. Matthew Ridgway argued in mid-March that at least 73,000 POWs would resist repatriation (not 15,900 as had been estimated in February).97

Hearing Ridgway’s numbers, the JCS proposed reopening the whole question of voluntary repatriation. In a State-JCS meeting on March 19, State Department officials disagreed and argued instead that Truman considered the February 27 decision to be “the final position on the POW question.”98 Then, in another State-JCS meeting two days later, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg specifically asked about using Ridgway’s newer estimate in the negotiations. In reply, Johnson consciously ignored the newer numbers and directed the JCS to use his February estimates in negotiations instead.99 In his memoirs, Johnson admitted receiving in March information about camp conditions from the U.S. embassy in Korea and revised repatriation figures from Ridgway. He did not acknowledge, however, having any opportunity to reopen discussions about the POW policy. Instead, Johnson argued that even though the military largely ignored the embassy reports “because they came

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94. Foot, A Substitute for Victory, p. 125.
98. Ibid., pp. 97, 100.
99. Ibid., p. 113.
from outside the chain of command,” he was “able to make good use” of them in “private talks with Chiefs.” It is unclear from the documentary evidence whether Acheson and Truman knew at this time about Ridgway’s numbers or Johnson’s unilateral decision to use the February numbers instead.

On April 1, UN negotiators used the February numbers to tell the communists they expected 116,000 of the 132,000 communist prisoners would return home. The communists assented, and polling began. As Ridgway had predicted in March, the 116,000 estimate was too high. Instead, of the roughly 104,000 polled, about 75,000 (including 14,126 Chinese) said they would resist repatriation. The screening process also reinforced earlier information that most POWs refused repatriation because of the violent tactics of pro-KMT gang leaders before and during the screening. Thus, while the Truman administration and its UN negotiators were making righteous statements about the morality of its voluntary repatriation policy, it was clear—up to the level of Acheson—that the official POW screening was severely compromised and perhaps even conducted unethically.

When the UN delegation informed the communists on April 19 that only 70,000 prisoners could be returned, the communists were outraged and charged the United States with a breach of faith. When the talks broke down on May 7 over the issue, Truman addressed the American people, saying, “To agree to forced repatriation would be unthinkable. It would be repugnant to the fundamental moral and humanitarian principles which underlie our action in Korea. To return these POWs in our hands by force would result in misery and bloodshed to the eternal dishonor of the United States and the United Nations. We will not buy an armistice by turning over human beings for slaughter or slavery.” Reiterating the moral stance he first expressed in October, Truman drew a line over the POW issue that did not change for the rest of the war.

The Truman administration’s adoption of voluntary POW repatriation provides ample evidence of the information obstacle to ending war. The POW issue single-handedly held up negotiations for fifteen months, and the result was that Truman staked his—and the nation’s—reputation on voluntary repatriation, which led to entrapment dynamics, as well. Beleaguered by partisan

attacks and political crises—many resulting from the Cold War mobilization effort he embarked on as a result of the Korean War—Truman could neither abandon the POW policy nor escalate the war to force the communists to settle. Once aware of the POW policy’s full implications, it was too late for Truman to back down without signaling “weakness” to the communists or incompetence to the domestic audience.

THE ENTRAPMENT OBSTACLE: CHINA AND ITS HAWKISH EXTERNAL ALLY

The Chinese case during the Korean War provides evidence of the entrapment obstacle, because although China was willing to settle in August 1952, it was prevented from doing so by its ally and patron, Stalin.\(^\text{104}\) While China used the war to elicit Soviet patronage, its growing dependence on Soviet military and economic assistance locked it into a war policy from which it could not disengage. It was not until after Stalin’s death that China was able to make concessions regarding the voluntary repatriation policy it had been advocating since the previous summer.

The Chinese decision to intervene in the Korean War had initially not been unanimous among the Chinese governing coalition. Indeed, the majority of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo had believed it was unwise to deploy troops. Opponents included Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai; CCP Vice Chairman Liu Shaoqi; Finance Minister Chen Yun; Chen’s deputy, Li Fuchun; East China region leader Rao Shushi; Northeast region leader Gao Gang; and Central-South region leader Lin Biao. Most of these leaders were logical opponents to intervention, given their responsibilities for balancing the national budget, controlling inflation, demobilizing the Chinese military, and building regional economies.\(^\text{105}\)

Opponents to intervention listed four reasons for their position, including:
(1) China’s need for rehabilitation and economic reconstruction after decades of war; (2) the 1 million KMT troops and bandits that threatened internal secu-

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rity; (3) the fact that Chinese forces were inferior to UN forces and the United States had more industrial resources for a long war; and (4) the reality that forces from the People’s Liberation Army were exhausted from decades of fighting and too depleted to fight another major war. Indeed, when China intervened in Korea, the communist regime had accomplished little with its reconstruction programs. China’s domestic situation was dire, because it was still recovering from its civil war and faced a long list of domestic challenges. Nevertheless, Chairman Mao Zedong eventually convinced them that the Korean War was inextricably linked to China’s internal security, because not fighting would increase “reactionary” uprisings at home and encourage the KMT to resume fighting and invade the mainland. Moreover, Mao argued, if war with the United States was inevitable, Korea was geographically and logistically best suited of the possible battlegrounds.

The war effort was very costly, both in economic and human terms, and the Chinese populace paid dearly. About 3 million Chinese troops and laborers entered Korea to fight and provide logistical support for the war—suffering as many as 1.5 million casualties, including more than 300,000 dead. At home, about 3 million people died during the ruthless domestic mobilization campaigns, initiated in large part to support the war effort. The Korean War’s financial costs were staggering as well, with military expenses related to the war making up 44 percent of the Chinese government’s budget in 1950, 52 percent in 1951, and 28 percent in 1952. (While military expenses were a smaller fraction of the 1952 budget, that budget was larger, as economic development finally took root. Thus, the absolute magnitude of war expenses increased.)

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Military spending and arms-related industries beyond the war effort accounted for 61 percent of the budget during this time, whereas education, culture, and health care shared only 8.2 percent.111

CCP leaders met this need with stiff agricultural taxes, mass mobilization campaigns, and a policy of “total mobilization.” By the spring of 1952, Chinese forces possessed sufficient arms and equipment to sustain the stalemate, but economic distortions, missed industrial production targets, rural unrest, and a famine demonstrated the inherent weaknesses in China’s mobilization strategy.112

Given these tremendous war costs, the Chinese governing coalition decided in the summer of 1952 to focus on economic reconstruction and began working on its first Five-Year Plan along the lines of Soviet-style centralized planning. It established new economic ministries in Beijing and transferred senior party leaders there from regional posts to carry the increasingly heavy administrative workload. As a result, key CCP members—including Deng Xiaoping, Deng Zihui, Gao Gang, Rao Shushi, and Xi Zhongxun—moved to Beijing and became important members of the decisionmaking group.113

The new emerging leadership was concentrated institutionally and organizationally in the sphere of economic management. These rising leaders—together with Finance Minister Chen Yun; Chen’s deputy, Li Fuchun; and Premier Zhou Enlai—cooperated closely.114 These economic decisionmakers formed the core of China’s new coalition making decisions about the war. Assembled together in Beijing, with a new mandate for economic growth and government centralization, they became increasingly influential in the Chinese governing coalition. Some—Deng Xiaoping, Deng Zihui, and Xi—had not participated in the original decisions to enter the war and thus were new members of the coalition. Others—Chen, Gao, Li, Rao, and Zhou—had been included in the initial debates but had opposed intervention.

These leaders brought an interesting mix of personal perspectives and pro-

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111. Chang and Halliday, Mao, p. 374.
114. Teiwes, Politics at Mao’s Court, p. 30.
essional expertise to the problem of the Korean War. On the one hand, having spent time in key regional leadership posts, they understood the human and societal costs imposed by prolonged participation in the war. On the other, their expertise in managing economic recovery and industrialization showed them the opportunity costs of waging war instead of rebuilding and modernizing the nation. As a result, they had a different vision of the war’s costs and benefits. Their increasing influence in Mao’s decisionmaking coalition helped spur China toward ending the war.

During August–September 1952, China’s top economic officials trekked to Moscow to negotiate massive Soviet support for Chinese industrial development and expansion, while seeking to end the costly Korean War. An armistice would naturally liberate domestically generated revenue for industrial development, and China was ready to divert funds in that direction. During this trip, Zhou met with Stalin twice to discuss China’s proposed strategy for ending the war. Russian transcripts of these conversations reveal that China was more eager to reach an armistice agreement than it had been before. Zhou’s dual aims were to achieve an armistice in Korea as quickly as possible while maximizing Soviet economic and military assistance to his ravaged country. In contrast, Stalin continued to press for extending the war, implicitly linking Soviet economic assistance to China continuing the war. Providing Soviet arms and economic assistance was a means to manipulate the Chinese into advancing Soviet interests.115

In his first conversation with Stalin, Zhou suggested the communists “sign an armistice agreement by putting off the POW question and resuming its discussion afterwards.” Without reaching any decision, however, the discussion moved toward Soviet military assistance to China.116 In the second conversation, Zhou returned to this theme, suggesting that both sides send the POWs to India, a neutral country. When Stalin failed to agree, Zhou persisted and argued that they “cease fire and resolve the issue of POWs later.” But Stalin would not commit.117

Zhou was unable to gain Stalin’s support for China’s interest in compromising on POWs, neither by transferring nonrepatriates to a neutral country nor by concluding the armistice first and settling the POW question later. The in-

conclusive outcome of both conversations was a victory for Stalin, which may be why he agreed to equip sixty more Chinese divisions and provide ammunition, artillery, and new fighter jets. Zhou’s visit concluded without clear agreement on a war-terminating strategy. Ultimately, China’s need for Soviet economic assistance to prosecute the war and develop its industrial base outweighed China’s willingness to implement a war-ending strategy without its ally’s support. As Pingchao Zhu argues, “It was Stalin’s desire to continue the war and Mao felt pressured to comply with it.”118 Or as Vojtech Mastny argues, “Despite the appearance of Beijing’s agreeing with Moscow in taking an intransigent position against [an armistice], Stalin was the one who stalled, while the Chinese were seeking ways to achieve it.”119 Trapped by its patron, China wanted to end the war but could not.

After these meetings, China tried once more to end the war. On October 31, 1952, Zhou publicly signaled Chinese interest in an Indian resolution at the UN to end the war by transferring prisoners to India or some other “neutral zone,” but the Soviet UN delegation stepped in and rejected the plan. Soon after, China told India that it agreed with Moscow that the resolution was unacceptable. Indian diplomats believed that the Chinese had been subjected to Soviet pressure and that, had they been left to themselves, they would have endorsed the resolution.120

**Ending the Korean War**

This section argues that the timing of the Korean War’s end depended on the strategic interaction of three domestic coalition shifts—Stalin’s death in March 1953, the Chinese shift described above, and the inauguration of U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower in January 1953.

**The Soviet Domestic Coalition Shift: Outlasting Stalin’s Preferences**

Stalin’s death on March 5, 1953, prompted a radical change in the Soviet approach to the Korean War. As Kathryn Weathersby argues, “Despite the great uncertainty and anxiety within which the new collective leadership operated, it nonetheless moved immediately to bring an end to the war in Korea.”121 Indeed, it is remarkable that the leadership took such decisive action within ten

days of Stalin’s funeral. When Stalin died, the question of succession had not been on the agenda; the leadership troika that emerged was an awkward, dysfunctional structure prone to infighting and power grabbing.\textsuperscript{122} That these new leaders could agree to act decisively to end the Korean War only reinforces the high priority they assigned to a settlement.

The new Soviet leadership was led by a troika of Lavrentii Beria, Georgii Malenkov, and Vyacheslav Molotov, with help from Nikita Khrushchev.\textsuperscript{123} Beria and Malenkov led the Politburo’s moderate faction, which advocated more conciliation toward the West and had supported a negotiated settlement toward Korea.\textsuperscript{124} Although militant Molotov had always supported a hard line toward the West, even he “believed that Stalin should never have approved of the North Koreans’ plan to reunify their country.”\textsuperscript{125} Moreover, the troika worried that the new Eisenhower administration might escalate the war, and they looked differently at information about U.S. potential use of atomic weapons in Korea.\textsuperscript{126} Their major foreign policy goal was to avoid a Soviet-American conflict, and they quickly expressed interest in disarmament and détente with the United States.\textsuperscript{127} They wanted to curtail military and industrial programs to free resources for neglected domestic programs and agriculture,\textsuperscript{128} and they were more focused toward Europe and the growing crisis in the German Democratic Republic.\textsuperscript{129}

Because of these other policy priorities and their different conceptualization


\textsuperscript{124} The moderates had emphasized that Soviet conciliatory moves would make it more difficult for the United States to consolidate the Western alliance. For more detail about foreign policy debates in the Soviet Politburo early in the war, see Ronald L. Leitteney, “Foreign Policy Factionalism under Stalin, 1949–1950,” Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1971, pp. 336–339.

\textsuperscript{125} Larson, \textit{Anatomy of Mistrust}, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{126} Zubok and Pleshakov, \textit{Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War}, pp. 149, 155; and Mastny, \textit{The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity}, p. 164.

\textsuperscript{127} Larson, \textit{Anatomy of Mistrust}, p. 45.


\textsuperscript{129} Stueck, \textit{The Korean War}, p. 327.
of the war’s costs and benefits, the new Soviet leaders moved immediately to end it. First, at Stalin’s funeral on March 9, Malenkov emphasized “the possibility of the prolonged coexistence and peaceful competition” between capitalism and socialism. Then, in a March 15 speech to the Supreme Soviet, Malenkov unveiled a “peace initiative,” declaring “there is not one disputed . . . question that cannot be decided by peaceful means on the basis of mutual understanding” and naming the United States as a country to which this statement applied. Finally, on March 19, the Council of Ministers adopted a resolution to end the war with attached letters to Mao and Kim Il-sung. The resolution outlined statements that the three communist governments should make to indicate their willingness to resolve outstanding issues and reach an armistice agreement.

Chinese and North Korean leaders also saw Stalin’s death as the opportunity finally to end the war. Zhou traveled to Moscow for Stalin’s funeral, and on March 21, he met with the new Soviet leadership to discuss a war-terminating strategy. This produced a communist consensus that “the Chinese and North Korean side was now in a position to conclude the war on the basis of reasonable compromises with the enemy.”

On March 27, the communists agreed to a UN suggestion to exchange sick and wounded prisoners. Three days later, Zhou publicly proposed that POWs unwilling to be repatriated should be transferred to a neutral state “as to ensure a just solution to the question of their repatriation.” This statement mirrored the proposals Zhou had put forward to Stalin in August 1952. In making this substantial concession, Zhou expressed Chinese willingness to “take steps to eliminate differences on this question so as to bring about an armistice in Korea.” Following the same script, on April 2, Molotov talked about the need for peace in Korea and associated the Soviet Union with the actions of its allies. Zhou’s statement was the largest concession made during the negotiations, and it reopened the door to an armistice. Negotiations resumed in late April, and the armistice was signed in July.

130. Quoted in ibid., p. 308.
137. Dmitrii A. Volkogonov argues that Stalin had decided to end the war on February 28, but that
Less apparent than the coalition shifts in the Soviet Union and China may be how much President Eisenhower’s inauguration in January 1953 affected communist cost-benefit calculations about the war. After successfully campaigning on a platform to end the Korean War, Eisenhower came to office less constrained about expanded military options than his predecessor. Although a complete discussion of this dynamic is beyond this article’s scope, it is useful to note that Eisenhower was thus able to make credible threats that affected communist calculations.138

Casual observers might point to the hawkish U.S. coalition shift in January 1953 and the Eisenhower coalition’s subsequent nuclear threats as the reason for the war’s end. This explanation—made by the Eisenhower administration itself—is that Eisenhower’s nuclear threats caused the communists to agree to the armistice terms. There has been great debate about the effectiveness of Eisenhower’s nuclear coercion in bringing about the end of the Korean War.139

Without a reference, we cannot know for sure how Volkogonov knows this “fact” he reports. Presumably, it must have come from the other men present at the dinner—and these men were precisely the ones who wanted to end the war. It is certainly possible that these men, who assumed power after Stalin’s death, claimed that Stalin said this. Having it appear that Stalin wanted to end the war was in their interest, because it provided them justification for enacting their own long-held but dormant preferences for ending the war.

138 For additional information about the Eisenhower coalition shift and its role in strategic interaction with the communists, see Stanley, Paths to Peace, chaps. 6, 8.

The Eisenhower administration did discuss the possibility of using nuclear weapons, as part of its endorsing a shift in U.S. strategy for ending the war. It also tried two diplomatic channels in late May and early June to signal a growing willingness to escalate the level of violence. In retrospect, however, the nuclear threat could not have caused the crucial March 30 communist concessions about the voluntary POW repatriation policy that paved the way for an armistice. In fact, the only signal that the Eisenhower coalition had sent by this date was Eisenhower’s February 2 State of the Union announcement to move the Seventh Fleet from the Taiwan Strait—a move widely regarded as designed to appease the pro-KMT U.S. Republican right wing. Moreover, it appears that Chinese leaders neither believed that U.S. nuclear threats were credible in general, nor received the threats via the diplomatic channels later that spring.

A careful tally of events, however, suggests that the communist leaders were paying attention to the Eisenhower domestic coalition shift and the possible escalation that might result. Chinese documents suggest Beijing monitored Eisenhower’s campaign statements for more aggressive strategies in Korea and started making military preparations in response. The new Soviet coalition also acknowledged the hawkish U.S. shift and made a number of gestures toward conciliation (detailed above). In other words, the U.S. hawkish shift influenced the communists’ cost-benefit calculations, and they responded by lowering their demands—eventually conceding on POW repatriation.

There appear to be three reasons why the United States chose not to profit from its bargaining “advantage” after the shift. First, the Eisenhower coalition recognized the shift and subsequent communist behavior as signaling peaceful

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141. Mark A. Ryan, Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons: China and the United States during the Korean War (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), p. 156; Chen, Mao’s China and the Cold War, p. 111; and Zhang, Deterrence and Strategic Culture, pp. 132–137.
142. Gaddis, We Now Know, p. 108; Zhang, Deterrence and Strategic Culture, pp. 133, 150; Foot, A Substitute for Victory, pp. 177–178; and Stueck, The Korean War, p. 329.
intentions. Second, it expected that continuing the conflict was likely to be costly, and it no longer wanted to bear these costs. Finally, because Eisenhower had built up the expectation during his campaign that he would end the war soon, the public both looked for and expected decisive action. Eisenhower believed he had a “mandate from the American people to stop this fighting,” but he also knew that he did not have a blank check.

Interestingly, the peace Eisenhower eventually won was “indistinguishable” from what Truman could have probably garnered, “except that it was achieved without the accompanying howls of the GOP.” While Eisenhower retained the same war aims that Truman had espoused, including the voluntary POW repatriation policy, politically he could agree to terms that Truman could not. He was less vulnerable to Republican right-wing attacks and could placate hard-liner critics in other issue areas, such as domestic mobilization policy. In other words, it was only with a domestic governing coalition shift in the United States that Truman’s entrapment and information obstacles were lifted, as well.

Conclusion

Whereas bargaining models of war suggest that war ends when an overlapping bargaining space develops, my argument suggests how, when, and why it develops. My approach offers insights about the timing of war termination, including the undertheorized category of protracted wars, which Bayesian models have had little success in explaining. Its major theoretical contribution is its attention to domestic coalition shifts as an important mechanism for why states come to the bargaining table to end interstate war. Ending war requires settling at home as well as settling with the enemy.

This article has suggested three reasons why an entrenched war is difficult to end. A preference obstacle occurs in situations when belligerents’ leaders do not want to end the war—as Stalin’s ability to push costs onto his allies while drawing abundant benefits demonstrates. An information obstacle occurs in situations when belligerents’ leaders do not know they should end the war—

as U.S. decisions about voluntary POW repatriation show. An entrapment obstacle occurs in situations when belligerents’ leaders want to end the war but cannot—as China’s experience with Stalin suggests. This plausibility probe has illustrated each of these different mechanisms separately, but they often can occur in tandem. For example, a more complete discussion of the Soviet case would show that Stalin’s strong preferences led his government to fall victim to information-processing biases to reinforce his preexisting beliefs. Similarly, a fuller treatment of the U.S. case would demonstrate how entrapment and information obstacles interacted in the Truman administration. By focusing on these obstacles, this article has explained domestic-level impediments to the international bargains that end war.

An interesting extension of this research is modeling more explicitly the strategic interaction of coalition shifts on opposing sides of a war and the effect these shifts have on creating overlapping bargaining space between belligerents. Such a model would probably need to introduce coalition shift directions (i.e., in a hawkish or dovish direction). For example, the interaction between the U.S. hawkish and communist dovish shifts was obviously crucial for ending the Korean War. Further study is needed to determine what effect coalition shift directions might have on the strategic interaction between opposing sides in ending other wars.

The domestic coalition shift model presented here has at least three wider theoretical implications. First, my argument suggests that regime type may not be as important for explaining war termination as previously assumed. All states, regardless of regime type, are governed by domestic coalitions and answer to some constituency to stay in power. Regime type may influence the baseline frequency of coalition shifts. Certainly, democracies are more likely to experience relatively frequent coalition shifts by nature of their institutional structure. Democracy is not the underlying mechanism driving coalition shifts during war, however, and variation in democratic institutions leads to variation in the likelihood of democratic leaders being replaced. When taken together with the argument that democracies select into wars they expect to be short, this suggests that democracies are unlikely to experience coalition shifts in war—unless the war becomes protracted. Overall, we could expect


that states in which coalition shifts are more difficult and less frequent—generally, authoritarian regimes—are more likely to engage in more protracted wars. The relationship between regime type and coalition shifts during war remains a fruitful question for extending this model. Nonetheless, these initial findings suggest that it is the domestic coalition shift—not the regime type per se—that explains war termination: regime type may be a correlative, not causative, factor in war termination.

Second, although this article has not systematically examined civil war termination, an important extension would apply the theory developed here to such conflicts. Civil wars involve multiple substate warring factions—one of which might be the government—each with its own leadership ("governing") coalition. Nonetheless, in terms of making decisions to prosecute and end war, warring factions operate like a state's domestic governing coalition. Just like a domestic governing coalition, factional leaders answer to some internal constituency or external patron. And just like a domestic governing coalition, factional leaders are less likely to end the war by changing their expectations about the war than by rotating leadership or splintering the faction. The greatest difference between civil and interstate war termination seems to be the magnitude of the obstacles to peace. All three obstacles seem to be more severe in civil war, implying that civil wars are more likely to become sticky and thus last longer than interstate wars—and empirically, this is indeed the case. Although the coalition shift dynamics in civil war factions probably follow the same logic as those in interstate war belligerents, the explicit comparison remains an issue for future research.

A third extension of this model would be its applicability to international coalitions or alliances. An international coalition often comprises members (states) that are actually coalitions themselves (domestic governing coalitions). This implies that the three obstacles to policy change can become nested and even stickier. While each state is subject to its own obstacles domestically, the international coalition is subject to additional obstacles as well. Theoretically, there are two ways that coalition shifts could manifest themselves in an international coalition. First, one of the states in the international coalition could experience its own domestic coalition shift, bringing new perspectives to the international coalition's policies and bargaining positions—which is what occurred after the Chinese and Soviet domestic coalition shifts in the Korean War. Alternatively, the international coalition could gain or lose state members. For example, during World War II, when Italy surrendered to the Allies in 1943, the Axis coalition shifted in a hawkish direction, as the remaining members no longer felt constrained by Italy's desire for settlement. Obviously, the nested obstacles in domestic governing and international coalitions impede the ability to create an overlapping bargaining space and significantly
complicate the analysis. Delineating these nested effects is another area for future research.

The transitions from war to peace are neither as inscrutable nor as senseless as they may at first seem. There are identifiable obstacles and processes at work in the ending of any war. Although protracted wars may make no sense from a strategic viewpoint, they do from a domestic one. Ending interstate war requires that belligerents make peace with each other, but they cannot embark on that process until their domestic governing coalitions are ready. As this study has shown, understanding belligerents’ domestic politics is crucial to explaining what makes interstate wars continue and what finally makes them end.