Clarence L. Moore
Proposed Plan of Research

Title: "Collective Identity and Alliance Shifts in Domestic Conflict"

  Introduction – Alliance Shifts in Domestic Conflict. Given Anbar Province's Sunni majority population and proximity to Shi'a Najaf Province, it seems no surprise that western Iraq has suffered extensive sectarian violence. This was not the case, however, until after the summer of 2004 when Anbar became a hotbed of Sunni Islamist insurgent activity. It was then that Anbar became a launching base for attacks against Najaf and its two holy Shi'a cities. International Crisis Group reports show that the number of Sunni insurgents increased substantially from 2003 to 2006 while the amount of foreign fighters remained fairly constant, suggesting that locals became combatants.[*] This outcome is strange given that Sunni Islamists unsuccessfully tried to court Iraqi coreligionists before 2003. Why did so many Anbar Sunnis suddenly ally with Islamists? I observed a similar realignment during past research on transnational alliance behavior in central Afghanistan. The ethnic Hazara traditionally relied on clan leaders for political decisions and religious figures held little political clout. But soon after the Soviet invasion, Islamist political parties founded new militias that swelled with volunteers and tribal leaders were replaced by their religious counterparts in the region's republican-styled *Shura*. Why did most Hazara ally with religious leaders even though traditional leaders were still active? In other words, how can we explain alliance shifts such as these in domestic conflict?

  Stephen Walt's discussion of balancing posits that weak states join forces against powerful threats.[1] Applied to Anbar and central Afghanistan, balancing logic holds that domestic actors simply allied with whomever they believed could best provide security. However, this account does not explain why so many Anbar Sunnis switched allegiance to tribal leaders in 2006 before the 2007 surge granted those leaders extra support. David Laitin's *Identity in*

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[*] International Crisis Group. *In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency*. Released February 15, 2006.

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Formation provides an important starting point for considering the role of collective identity in domestic alliance shifts. His tipping model suggests that conflict may provide an exogenous shock that creates identity instability, leading some cultural entrepreneurs to create new identities to which population members can shift.[2] Despite the link it creates between conflict and identity, the tipping model does not provide insight in the situations described because it does not consider conflict's ability to change the meanings associated with preexistent identities. Moreover, Laitin does not specify why some exogenous events cause instability or what these events destabilize. Stathis Kalyvas proposes that alliances reflect preexistent local rivalries, meaning that war in Iraq and Afghanistan simply gave local actors the opportunity to settle old disputes.[3] Though Kalyvas's focus on micropolitics is significant, his conclusion does not explain why alliance preferences change. His analysis posits that conflict aggravates present cleavages, overlooking the possibility that it creates new ones. None of these authors considers the availability of multiple identities as a variable that may help explain shifting alliances.

Hypothesis. I would like to address this gap by exploring the possibility that the combination of conflict and the availability of multiple non-mutually exclusive identities can help explain alliance shifts in civil war. Collective identities may become politically salient relative to one another through a two-step process. First, conflict destroys or alters the social

institutions - the interaction patterns that constrain individual action, to use North's definition – on which power relations and conceptions of identity were based.[4] This creates a vacuum that identity entrepreneurs can use to promote their conceptualization of a chosen identity, altering its content, or meaning.[5] Second, if the identity entrepreneurs manipulate content such that the modified identity reduces uncertainty by yielding prescriptions that group members consider

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beneficial, then they will begin to base political decisions on it. The availability of a repertoire of

identities makes it possible for identity-based alliances to change throughout domestic conflict.

Methodology. I am in the early stages of developing a rigorous multi-method approach

to identifying and measuring changes in identity content and salience. Content analysis, the

quantitative examination of message characteristics, is one possible method. I am proficient in

Arabic and Persian and can utilize interviews, political speeches, and other primary sources in

both languages. Formal modeling is another potential avenue. Identity-based decisions emanate

from individuals' ideas about what other group members would or should do in the same

situation, making them a form of strategic action. Agent-based modeling is especially promising,

as it would allow me to create simulations with adaptive processes built into them. I could use

agent-based models to test the feasibility of various explanations for alliance shifts. Case studies

would then allow me to explore and evaluate the external validity of model results.

Given my language skills and present regional knowledge, I will draw most of my cases

from the Middle East and Southwest Asia. In order to understand the mechanisms behind

domestic alliance shifts, I will analyze ongoing conflicts wherein different actors seek to

mobilize the public on the basis of different but overlapping identities. Anbar Province is a

prospective case, as violence there has persisted for nearly a decade and tribal and Islamist

leaders compete for allegiance within the same population. Palestine also offers great analytic

potential because secular Palestinian nationalists and Islamists have vied for popular support.

Southern Lebanon and Pakistani Baluchistan are possible cases as well. In order to isolate the

change variable I will compare this set of cases to another wherein conflict was present but

alliances were fairly stable. Western Afghanistan and 1990s Tajikistan offer such environments.

As a UW-Madison student I will draw on the knowledge of distinguished scholars such as Nadav

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Sidebar (left): At the proposal stage, plans are still in development. This writer leverages that uncertainty by describing more than one possible research methodology. In this context, this interesting strategy showcases the writer's flexibility and willingness to consider a range of options.

Sidebar (right): Language expertise is especially important for this project, and this writer does a good job of weaving acknowledgment of these proficiencies into this section.

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Shelef and Yoshiko Herrera who share my interests and are experienced with rigorous

approaches to the measurement of identity and identity change. I will also learn from several

scholars who utilize innovative formal models, including Scott Gehlbach and Andrew Kydd. I

am thus in an ideal position to design and execute meticulous empirical methods.

The writer returns here to the idea of using a mixed methods approach and underscores this as an effective and valid option.

Expected Significance and Broader Impacts. I aim to contribute to knowledge within

political science by providing a model of local-level mechanisms that can alter identity content

and lead individuals in wartime to emphasize one identity over others. In so doing my project

will provide a novel theoretical and empirical articulation of the relationship between political

violence and the social construction of identity. Ongoing civil violence in the Middle East and

Southwest Asia, and US involvement in these conflicts, highlights the importance of my

research. In clarifying the interaction between conflict and identity, my work will help develop

Here the writer very clearly identifies the practical outcomes of this research.

foreign policy cognizant of and tailored to the social institutions it influences. This knowledge

will lead to more focused and effective policies that avoid unintentionally empowering the

wrong actors. I also aspire to increase the methods available to those who study identity change

by finding ways to formally model variation in identity salience and alteration. My regional

knowledge and access to UW-Madison's deep intellectual resources, combined with NSF

support, would provide me with the resources needed to complete my proposed research.

Literature: 1. Walt, Stephen. *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987. **2.** Laitin, David. *Identity in Formation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998. **3.** Kalyvas, Stathis. "The Ontology of 'Political Violence'." *Perspectives in Politics*. 1 (2003): 475-494. **4.** North, Douglass. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press, 1990. **5.** Abdelal, Rawi, Yoshiko Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott, ed. *Measuring Identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. **Additional text:** Hale, Henry. *The Foundations of Ethnic Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.