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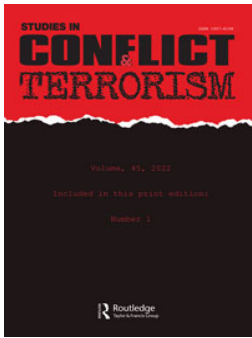
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Side-Switching as State-Building: the Case of Russian-Speaking Militias in Eastern Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

Why do some militias bandwagon with the state during a civil war while others resist state authority? A formal model highlighting the role of material incentives treats militia commanders as rent-seekers competing for security sector jobs run by civilians. Western donors can send aid to inflate the size of the pie that civilians distribute to militia commanders. Our key result is a *partial incorporation* equilibrium by which jointly-sustainable strategies selected by a minimum winning coalition of battalion commanders maximize their share of rents. Battalion commanders outside this coalition do best by remaining outside the state. We evaluate the model using an analytic narrative of contemporary Ukraine – a hard case for our theory since ideology and ethnicity play an important role in most standard accounts of the conflict. Analysis of a volunteer battalion incorporation dataset, results from a survey of 64 Ukrainian volunteer battalion members, and a short discussion of the Azov Battalion suggest the salience of intra-Ukrainian distributional politics to militia commanders' incorporation strategies.

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Introduction

An important distinguishing feature of the war in Ukraine's Donbas region is the presence of the Russian military. Ukrainian volunteer battalions had ambitions to completely re-conquer secessionist territory in the summer of 2014, forcibly securing their border with Russia. Battles at Ilovaisk and Debeltseve decisively clarified that *coercive* modes of consolidation were off the table for military planners in Kyiv. Since Kyiv cannot forcibly reincorporate separatist territory as long as Russia provides support, the frozen military map of Eastern Ukraine represents a data-rich laboratory to observe the limits of what this volume calls *cooperative modes* of militia consolidation. This paper filters case observations through a formal model of the cooperative mode of consolidation (vertically, vis-à-vis the state, rather than horizontal consolidation between militias).¹ How did relative political stability emerge in Ukraine in the shadow of Russian meddling and Western aid? What are the implications for the ongoing peace process?

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Settlement politics, in this account, have not stalled only because some of the policy issues are high stakes and can seem indivisible, or because Russia cannot be trusted to honor its commitments long-term (though both are salient barriers!). Conflict resolution has also stalled because, in a cooperative consolidation modality, the rents of post-settlement statehood are worth fighting over. If the “lost” territories were to re-join the polity cooperatively, the result would be a pie divided between more rent-seekers. Coalition management concerns inhibit compromise.

We favor game-theoretic modeling as a deductive tool. Since a model’s predictions are only as good as the assumptions built into the model in the first place, to assess the “realism” of our model we employ an analytic narrative, bringing to bear contextual knowledge of Ukrainian militia fragmentation and consolidation patterns. The rapid proliferation and *fragmentation* of militia groups in spring and summer 2014 is contrasted to the rapid *consolidation* of political control in state-held areas. The potential for field commanders³ to *cannibalize* the Ukrainian state remains salient. The ability of nonstate armed groups to influence the direction of Ukrainian politics by forming a *blocking coalition* is discussed. A final section concludes.

A Model

The game begins in a country with a well-institutionalized patronage system. As a political crisis causes important social groups to reevaluate their future rents from aligning with the central government, *n field commanders* emerge to speak on behalf of “their” group interests. Field commanders may be former police captains, heads of special forces units, criminal actors with access to heavy weapons, oligarchs heading private armies, or heads of radical street parties with a well-armed hooligan fringe. Their comparative advantage is the production of violence.

Three classes of strategic actor begin to second-guess each other’s strategies: more than one *field commander*, a **Western great power (G)**, and a *local patron* in the security bureaucracy (*p*). Since the purpose of the model is to illuminate potential for side-switching in the cooperative consolidation mode, whether a militia commander is pro-government or a rebel is determined by strategies chosen, not set ex-ante. Since the analytic focus is the behavior of field commanders, they get the first move and concluding move of the game.

The game unfolds in two stages. In the first stage, field commanders act simultaneously (e.g. they act independently, basing strategies on their beliefs about what others will do). In the second stage, if it is reached, first the great power moves, then the bureaucratic patron moves, and, finally, each field commander moves again (see Figure 1).

To simplify the choice set for field commanders, they must either *cannibalize* pre-crisis institutions or try to *rehabilitate* those institutions. To cannibalize institutions is to seize control of territory and refuse to re-join the state. By contrast, to rehabilitate state security institutions is to lend support to the pre-crisis institutions, infusing them with a commander’s charisma and legitimacy. (This choice set is repeated in the final node, when commanders have the last move.)

Without a minimum level of support by violence specialists, a state cannot maintain a pretense of a monopoly on violence. If *rehabilitate* is not selected by enough field

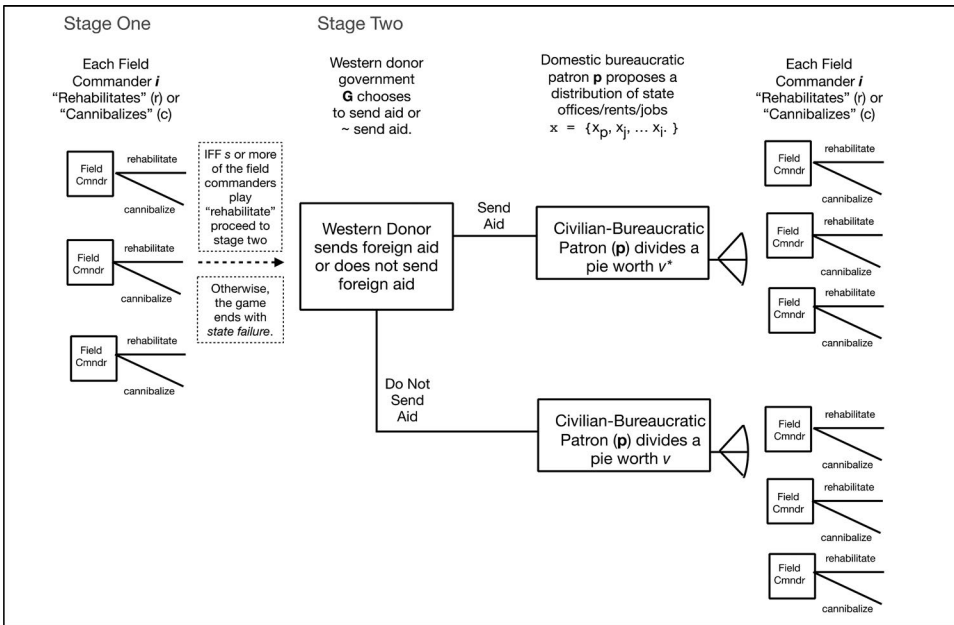


Figure 1. The formal model (path of play).

commanders, the result is *state failure*. Call this minimum number of field commanders the **stability threshold** s ($1 < s < n$).⁴ Only if s or more field commanders choose *rehabilitate* does the game enter stage two. The stability threshold is related to a country's external threat environment, especially the willingness of great powers to tolerate domestic disorder. While parameter s can change rapidly (and did in the Ukraine case), for simplicity assume s stays fixed from stage one to stage two.

The first thing that happens in stage two is that Western donors G can send money or weapons to stabilize the country. To highlight essentials, either a large package with few strings is allocated (*send aid*) or a token package with onerous conditions is suggested (*do not send aid*).

The last two moves of the game involve the interplay of a consolidated coalition of patriotic field commanders. By now, some militias claim to be the military arm of the state. A patron p in the government security bureaucracy interfaces with donors and can offer state employment: honor, pensions, opportunities for graft, and contracts. If the donor does not send aid the total sum of employment opportunities is worth v ; with a generous infusion of foreign assistance from G , the sum grows to $v^* > v$. Taking stock of the identities of the commanders and the resources available for redistribution (v or v^*), p proposes a distribution among commanders and himself, $x = (x_p, x_1, \dots, x_n, x_p)$. The sum of all transfers will be either v or v^* . Each of the n field commanders observes their offer, and patriots begin to jockey for power. As some groups are elevated and others sidelined, field commanders can observe who has influence in the security bureaucracy and who does not. No one has disarmed, however. Field commanders, once again, decide to either *cannibalize* their newfound positions or try to *rehabilitate* state institutions. If fewer than s field commanders choose *rehabilitate*, the game ends

with *state failure*. In *state failure*, commanders fight over the carcass of the state. If s or more field commanders choose *rehabilitate*, p 's transfer occurs, and the game ends.

The payoffs for different actors depend on the joint strategies of the players. The first thing to assess is whether there is sufficient coordination by field commanders to meet the stability threshold s . In our model, as in other coordination games, the outcome depends on what individual field commanders believe the others plan to do. The method of coordination is extra-model, but it is important to note that this coordination can fail in either the first or second stage.

Cannibalization comes with an opportunity to seize local power. Playing *cannibalize* in both the first stage and second stage of the game nets the spoils of a de-facto oligarchic fiefdom. Cannibalizing state institutions is a viable option for each field commander. They are identical (symmetric) by assumption, with a roughly equal chance of aggregating power by force if the state fails.⁵ Fighting with improvised armies destroys assets and risks unpredictable spirals of violence, however. Call these costs c . The payoffs for cannibalizing in the first stage are $v/n - c$. If the field commanders coordinate to cannibalize the state in the second stage of the game, after G sends generous amounts of aid, the "pie" being fought over will be worth more, and a better cannibalization prize can be envisioned (a roof within a better-funded security bureaucracy, a protection racket in a wealthier urban neighborhood, etc.). The payoffs are higher: $v^*/n - c$.

If the stability threshold s is not passed in the first or second stage, any field commanders who played *rehabilitate* will be punished by their soldiers for misplaced loyalty to institutions that have been proven to be bankrupt. Call this a weakness penalty ($-w$).

The purpose of the Western aid is to institutionalize pro-Western reforms and improve the lives of civilians (including the bureaucratic patron p). This is impossible in a failed state, so if the game does not reach the second stage, both p and G receive zero. If the stability threshold is not passed at the end of the second stage, the same payoffs are obtained.

Call the number of field commanders supporting the state by playing *rehabilitate* k . Both p and G receive positive payoffs only if $k \geq s$. We shall see that p has the ability (and incentive) to shape the game in a way that increases the probability that this outcome will obtain, however, and G does not. The core strategic problem, from the perspective of the donor (G), is commitment: it stands to lose its investment if too many field commanders opt to *cannibalize* instead of *rehabilitate*. The size of the aid package is chosen before G can observe strategies. In the best case, foreign aid creates opportunities for local bureaucrats to "buy off" street forces and rapidly rehabilitate order-providing security services. In the worst case, the aid just disappears.⁶

Table 1 shows payoffs across strategy combinations. Field commanders can do quite well if $k < s$ in the second stage by playing *rehabilitate*, *cannibalize* (e.g. performing loyalty to the state, waiting for the arrival of foreign aid to "fatten the stag", then coordinating to *cannibalize* state institutions). Because $v^* > v$, this nets a higher payoff than playing *cannibalize* in both stages. That said, a militia commander can "opt out" of the cooperative consolidation process at the beginning of the crisis, seize territory, and refuse to allow himself to be bought out with aid, keeping the land and population initially seized, minus the cost of fighting ($v/n - c$).

Table 1. Payoffs for strategy combinations.

	s not passed in stage one (no stage two)	s passed in stage one; aid sent; s not passed in stage two	s passed in stage one; s also passed in stage two
Payoff for warlord playing "cannibalize, cannibalize"	$v/n - c$	$v^*/n - c$	$v/n - c$
Payoff for warlord playing "rehabilitate, cannibalize"	$v/n - c - w$	$v^*/n - c$	x_i
Payoff for field commander playing "rehabilitate, rehabilitate"	$v/n - c - w$	$v^*/n - c - w$	x_i
Payoff for field commander playing "cannibalize, rehabilitate"	$v/n - c$	$v^*/n - c - w$	x_i
Payoff for Western Donor	0	0	1 if Aid was sent, zero Otherwise
Payoff for civilian/figurehead	0	0	Maximum: $v^* - (s(v^*/n - c))$. Minimum: >0

If the $k \geq s$ a second time in the second stage, the distribution x is implemented. All field commanders that played *rehabilitate* in the first stage, as well as any that changed their strategies at any point across the two stages, are potentially eligible for a transfer (it is possible to rehabilitate, "purchasing the loyalty" of previously-disloyal commanders). The governing coalition can change to reflect the fortunes of war.

By a minimum winning coalition logic, p should offer exactly s field commanders enough to overcome their indifference between *rehabilitation* and *cannibalization*, with p pocketing the remainder of v or v^* .⁷ So depending on field commanders' expectations about the path of play, it is possible that there will be one or more "leftover" field commanders that played *rehabilitate* in the first round but will get a transfer of zero. Note that if field commanders are interchangeable, and the identities of the "inner circle" coalition is unknown, if v^* is large the odds may still be favorable compared to the expected payoff of *cannibalize, cannibalize*. It is possible for a field commander i to be transferred a positive x_i even if they play *cannibalize* in the second stage, so long as s or more other field commanders choose to *rehabilitate* in the second stage. (Imagine an aborted effort to try to disrupt consolidation by a field commander who then pretends it never happened and keeps his job). A field commander snubbed by an $x_i = 0$ transfer may not be in a pivotal position to crash the coalition and claim a higher *cannibalize* payoff (because they are arrested or do not secure a job with sufficient status to field a private army).

Key Results

There are two stable equilibria in which no player plays weakly dominated strategies. The first, *state failure*, is an equilibrium where all field commanders play *cannibalize* in the first round because none want to suffer the penalty for appearing weak. The second stable equilibrium is a *partial incorporation* equilibrium. Exactly s of the field commanders play *rehabilitate* in the first stage, the remaining $n - s$ field commanders play *cannibalize* in the first round, G sends aid, p transfers a minimum winning coalition ($s=k$) of field commanders just what they would get by playing *cannibalize* ($v^*/n - c$), p transfers himself the entire remainder of v^* ($v^* - s(v^*/n - c)$) and the $n - s$ field commanders

that played *cannibalize* are offered zero, “insider” field commanders play *rehabilitate*, the rest play *cannibalize*, and the game ends with a peaceful distribution.

Which of these two equilibria will obtain is a political question. There are two distinct logics by which a field commander might decide to *cannibalize* the state in the first stage. A commander pessimistic about the possibility that the game will advance to stage two should want to avoid a reputation for indecision or weakness ($-w$). The logic, in this pathway of reasoning, is analogous to the choice to go for the rabbit in a stag hunt: a fat stag (engorged by generous Western aid packages, in the analogy) is no temptation if it is thought no other hunters will cooperate to catch it. Alternatively, a commander may be pessimistic about whether they will be in the minimum winning coalition or not. A commander may expect that a state-seizing coalition will form (that k will equal or exceed s) but that he will be excluded from the flow of benefits.

The logic of a *partial incorporation* equilibrium is straightforward: a minimum winning coalition of field commanders coordinate via some unmodeled process to play *rehabilitate*. They cooperatively consolidate into the state, lured by the promise of employment in an aid-saturated institution. Western aid can facilitate *cooperative consolidation* indirectly, increasing the size of the pie that is divided between the Ukrainian government and the pro-government militias, altering “lottery odds” that *rehabilitating* institutions in the first stage is a risk worth taking. This is akin to fattening the stag (though see conclusion). Recall that p can be expected to offer “insiders” a job worth as much as they could receive by *cannibalizing*. Consulting Table 1, note this can be higher than the payoff of staying outside the state completely, yielding:

H1: The “Aid Buys Peace” Hypothesis: Welfare of field commanders inside the state is greater than the welfare of field commanders outside the state ($v^*/n - c > v/n - c$).

For a field commander to defect in the first stage, *cannibalization* must pay. This is not always so. If the cost of fighting exceeds a commander’s share of cannibalization rents ($c > v/n$), then *rehabilitation* strategies can be justified even if a transfer of zero is expected. In the case of Ukraine, however, we assume Russia guarantees first-stage rabbits are fat enough to tempt field commanders. A field commander *cannibalizing* the state near Russia’s border can anticipate a flow of rents from seizing and maintaining control of local assets under Moscow’s umbrella.

H2: The “Russian Policy Can Guarantee Fat Rabbits in A Stag Hunt” Hypothesis: Welfare of field commanders outside the Ukrainian state is not zero ($v/n - c > 0$).

As commanders make their first-round choice, the civilian bureaucratic apparatus p has not yet interfaced with donors. This creates an intertemporal commitment problem: The civilian figurehead government never gets off the ground without coordinated support from field commanders, but civilians in the state apparatus cannot credibly commit to transfer wealth to any one field commander.⁸ The decision to *rehabilitate* is thus a gamble at the time the choice is made. Field commanders know p needs only s supporters, and that p maximizes its utility by offering just s field commanders just enough to convince them not to *cannibalize*. On the other hand, when it comes time to consider strategies in the second stage, they have more information, having observed how large the pie is and how well other commanders are

doing. To *cannibalize* in the second stage is for a commander to consider creatively and entrepreneurially the “second-best thing” one might do with a private army. Salaries for field commanders should provide a sufficient positive incentive to overcome the temptation of criminal behavior.

H3: The “Bandits into Bureaucrats” Hypothesis: For volunteer battalions, welfare of field commanders “ambiguously in” the state should approximate the welfare of field commanders “ambiguously out of” the state ($x_i = v^*/n - c$).⁹

The other possibility is that field commanders might collude together and coordinate to collapse, or threaten to collapse, political order. The model’s sequencing emphasizes that who will be “dealt in” by p cannot be known at the time initial strategies are chosen. Those “dealt out” will receive transfers of zero – worse than those playing *cannibalize* from the beginning. Once a member is in, however, moves toward further incorporation into the coalition *should be resisted by the militias already in the state*, since it requires dividing the (v^*) among more claimants. Full consolidation ($k=n$) is therefore never an equilibrium so long as $s < n$. Especially in a one-shot setting, this game places a very high premium on players’ ability to coordinate. One way to lobby is to create *blocking coalitions* in order to demand a share of rents. A blocking coalition of field commanders requires just enough supporters to prevent the other field commanders from exceeding the s threshold: $n - s + 1$. If $n=50$, $s=35$, a blocking coalition does not require coordination across all 35; it needs just 16 commanders:

H4: The “Blocking Coalitions” Hypothesis: Insider militia captains should prefer the status quo to any peace settlement that would dilute their current share of rents (e.g., by granting amnesty to mobilized anti-regime militias and letting them compete for jobs).

This simple framework leaves out a lot. It excludes personalities of leaders, political institutions, nonviolent social actors, ideology, factional organizational characteristics, and a great deal more. It treats militia commanders as interchangeable rent-seekers. Militias compete against each other not for influence over policy, but for what are essentially “pork” goods: salaried jobs in the security sector that come with employment security, social status, formal amnesty or relative immunity from prosecution, decent salaries, and a promise of a pension.¹⁰

Why employ a reduced-form analysis that omits so many factors, then? It provides an account of why *partial incorporation* – a frozen territorial conflict in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region – may be a sustainable political equilibrium for the long term. Ukrainian militias have discovered that they do not *need* to re-incorporate the territories of the DNR/LNR, or to re-claim Crimea, to enjoy flows of Western aid and the benefits of international recognition. The stability threshold was passed in 2014 and 2015. Ukraine survived, albeit with altered *de facto* borders. It proceeded to hold elections, pass new laws, rotate presidents, and more (all extra-model). What the model shows is that the militia factions have strong incentives to coordinate to at least *threaten* to act as spoilers, forming a blocking coalition that can “veto” a settlement. Their potential to do so will continue to frustrate Western governments hoping to accelerate the Minsk process.¹¹

Analytic Narrative

The purpose of a formal model is to make it clear who the actors are, the sequence of play, and the payoffs over strategies, to clarify what is being argued. The model is solved formally in an appendix, with core results summarized above. Formal statements of welfare for field commanders have been re-stated as the testable hypotheses in the previous section. All emerge directly from the model and serve as signposts. Standard accounts of frozen conflicts tend to emphasize Russian meddling, attrition processes, and especially the large distance in ideological policy preferences between Eastern and Western social forces. These *are* all salient barriers to conflict resolution, admittedly, which makes Ukraine a counterintuitive case for theoretical exposition.¹² Nonetheless, an analytic narrative follows, tracking the behavior or non-ideological, interchangeably-rent-seeking battalion commanders, all competing in a *cooperative consolidation* scramble to maximize their share of state rents.

In Ukraine's eastern theater, especially early in the conflict, much of the relevant political and military action was within Russian-speaking communities. The sequencing of moves in the model also fit Ukraine's trajectory closely. After regime change in February 2014, the Kremlin ordered special forces to secure government buildings in Crimea, and quickly absorbed it into Russia's territory, *de facto* altering Ukraine's interstate border. Russian elites broadcast their desire on television and Russia's army massed troops for a rescue mission, raising the calculated benefits of *cannibalization* for Ukrainian field commanders. This set off a scramble for influence. The Western response was justified at the time as an effort to stiffen the backs of Ukrainians, changing the incentives for players in this scramble.

In the initial stages, Ukraine's military was underequipped, poorly organized, and poorly led.¹³ It was demoralizing when most of the Ukrainian military in Crimea defected to the Russian side – but many communities responded by forming self-defense units.¹⁴ As far-right paramilitaries claimed new prerogatives to dictate terms in civil-military debates, many Eastern field commanders mobilized in order to protect themselves, and safeguard their values, against the Western far-right social forces. The untested, post-Maidan government in Kyiv did not trust police to carry out policing, suggesting that police, military, and SBU units in the East were getting orders to suppress rebellions but also considering *cannibalization* seriously. Stakes were raised after heavily armed groups seized and held government buildings. In this chaotic milieu of armed organizing by both separatists and anti-separatist volunteer units, it was sometimes not known (perhaps even to participants themselves) which communities of Russian speakers were forming militias to “opt out” of the Ukrainian government taking form in Kyiv and which were forming to protect their country from invasion. It was a very confusing time for observers:

One rebel group, Oplot, comes from the Russian city of Kharkiv. Another, the Russian Orthodox Army, is composed of Russians and Ukrainians. A third, named for a river, Kalmius, is made up mainly of coal miners. This motley mix forms just part of the fighting force of Ukraine's eastern uprising. It is more patchwork than united front: some groups get along with others. Some do not. And their leaders seem to change with the weather. 'I can't keep them straight anymore,' said a fighter...¹⁵

The language spoken on the emerging front lines of combat was almost always Russian, and group boundaries were contestable and permeable. Small factions could (and did) “gang up” on larger ones, or “splintering off” and cannibalize others’ memberships as armed groups proliferated and commanders gained confidence.¹⁶ Ukraine’s government reinstated conscription in May, but to supplement its green recruits and small number of reliable contract troops, Kyiv relied more and more on a patchwork of volunteer battalions.¹⁷ After an initial breakdown of order in the spring of 2014, Russian-speaking battalion commanders rallied to the defense of the Ukrainian state. Some of these battalion commanders eventually merged their memberships into the state security forces, rehabilitating these institutions. Today, they *are* the Ukrainian state.

A deductive model can illuminate not only the equilibrium path, but counterfactual “roads not taken.” We know the path of actual play. What might have been?

The first stage of the game describes the chaotic initial weeks and months after Russia’s seizure of Crimea. Russian policy raised the stability threshold s in February 2014. Since at least 1997, the Ukrainian state had acted as if it had no need for a military for self-defense, a situation that implies a low stability threshold. After Crimea, the gap in military power between Russia and Ukraine mattered a great deal. We parameterize as a higher threshold (s). Regardless of intent, the possibility of *state failure* in Ukraine loomed, and Russia annexed Crimea knowing that dominoes could fall in Eastern and Southern Ukraine as a result, since so many Russian-speakers (and millions of self-identified ethnic Russians) might have wanted to “opt out” of Ukraine and hope that they could “opt in” to Russia, too.

Did the Kremlin hope to induce field commanders to play *cannibalize* instead of *rehabilitate* so that the stability threshold would not be passed? Perhaps. Whether or not the goal was to deliberately push Ukraine toward *state failure* is disputed, but Russian television messaging was certainly calibrated to push a narrative of imminent threat from Ukrainian fascists (as cover for their Crimea policy) and long-term status reversals (aided by the unfortunate decision by the Maidan victors to immediately revisit the language law).¹⁸ The effects of the Russian government’s propaganda narrative were never intended to only influence politics in Crimea. In the language of the model, we would say that the propaganda perhaps made Russian-speaking Ukrainian field commanders pessimistic about whether they would be in the winning coalition even if they were to join the state, as well as promised commanders that their payoffs for playing *cannibalize* would be substantial with Russian support. Opening the border to patriotic Russophile volunteers, clandestine arming and re-supply, and other forms of plausibly-deniable support cast a security shadow over the Eastern Donbas so field commanders could expect a positive payoff from *cannibalization*. Russia tried to engineer a situation in which locals compared a positive $v/n - c$ payoff from seceding to a transfer of zero from an exclusionary state (*Hypothesis 2*).

Russian propaganda fell short of convincing a majority of locals to mobilize against the state. If *state failure* had occurred, what would have happened? The Kremlin might have been tempted to deploy troops further into Ukraine, framing the intervention as humanitarian. At a minimum, this would have changed the conflict geography by moving the line of contact. Without a massive armed anti-Kyiv mass-uprising to assist in 2014, occupation was not to be. Russia’s military stayed (mostly) on its side of the border. Russia’s Crimea policy backfired in some respects, easing and facilitating

cooperative Ukrainian counter-consolidation. Many field commanders opted to *rehabilitate* the Ukrainian state military. The line of control enveloped nearly the entire width of the country and much of the Donbas. The game entered stage two.

If the first stage of the game focuses on Russian intervention, the second stage of the game is meant to model the arrival of Western aid – and the limits of Western ability to influence the particulars of the consolidation of Ukraine's security forces in intervening years. Model predictions hold up serviceably well, describing the equilibrium path of play. Field commanders were offered positions, considered *cannibalization*, but, since the offers were good, *rehabilitated*.

While the mobilization of a critical mass of locals in support of Kyiv averted state failure, a new problem arose. Nonstate armed actors had gained significant social and political power by taking up arms. They did not disarm. For its first year, the Donbas war was fought primarily by well-armed volunteers. The dawning realization that the Ukrainian military was in total disarray enhanced the heroic profile of some volunteer battalion formations. Many drew on local symbolism for their names and in their insignias.¹⁹ A vocal portion of the volunteer battalions were radical right paramilitary groups, such as the Azov and Pravyi sektor battalions.²⁰ The state had announced an "ATO" (Anti-Terrorist Organization) to act as an umbrella for mass social mobilization, so the volunteers using force against the separatists were fighting terrorists.²¹ For a few months during the "Russian Spring" of 2014, it was not clear to onlookers, or Ukrainians, that the civilian Maidan government being recognized in Kyiv was even really in command or coordinating the actions of these volunteer battalions. Pro-government militias had mobilized to fill a gap in Kyiv's coercive power. Did the state have *any* direct means to incentivize them?

Our model emphasizes two parameter shifts that jointly explain patterns of centralization: stabilizing costs of fighting, c , and the arrival of foreign aid, v^* . These will be addressed in turn.

The conflict rapidly became conventional, especially after August 2014 when the Russian military intervened at the battle of Ilovaisk. Front lines were basically fixed by the fall of 2014. Artillery separated lines of control. Russia never quite withdrew. Lines have not moved much since. Less is known about processes of consolidation that have taken place in this period in the separatist republics in the Donbas, even years into the conflict, than is known about the consolidation on the Ukrainian side.²² The operational readiness of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR)/Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) as early as fall 2014 suggests that they had institutionalized a hierarchical military chain-of-command.²³ This stabilized into an order of battle designated as the DNR Army I Corps and the LNR Army II Corps to form a total force size between 26,000 and 35,000 fighters.²⁴ This fighting force is clearly capable of absorbing cost c and still persevering, making *cannibalization* a viable long-term option (again, *Hypothesis 2*).

Buying off the remaining pro-Ukraine militias became the order of the day. The process involved cosmetic changes and brokering as beards were shaved, new uniforms were donned, old insignia were re-sewn, the mandate of the "anti-terrorist operation" was extended to approximate a *levee en masse*, and many vigilante social groups that had emerged from the streets were formally deputized. The model does not specify

the brokerage processes, but does make crude predictions: A side-payment to a local field commander in the form of immunity from prosecution, a salary, a uniform, and a promotion, along with his top lieutenants, to join the state security forces with a winking promise of a pension and upward advancement opportunities. There is no moment of disarmament. Instead, there is a considered comparison between the payoffs for operating outside the state and inside it (*cannibalization* and *rehabilitation*) – which, if the market clears, should be higher the more aid that arrives ($v^*/n - c$, *Hypothesis 1* and *3*). As the introduction to this edited volume hypothesizes, when international sponsors share similar goals with the armed groups they support, cooperative consolidation tends to be a policy aim.

The model emphasizes that Western actors have limited leverage, since aid increases the potential payoffs of *cannibalizing* the state. In the Ukrainian case, it is somewhat ambiguous whether the arrival of foreign aid was causal, but anticipated arrival of Western assistance (v^*) probably changed strategies. Governments in the West responded to the Crimea annexation with economic sanctions on Russian firms. Shortly thereafter, the IMF announced a \$14-18 billion rescue package.²⁵ Did IMF transfers help convince militia captains and field commanders to *rehabilitate*, and not *cannibalize*, Ukrainian state institutions? Probably. The state became a straightforward conduit for accessing Western funds. Salaries would be paid to public-sector jobs in a currency that was not worthless. Consistent with *Hypothesis 1* and *Hypothesis 3*, [Table 2](#) is consistent with strategic field commanders weighing options and “tipping” away from *state failure* toward *partial incorporation*. By fall 2015, most factions chose to affiliate with the state.

By the summer of 2015, the resilience of the Ukrainian institutions had survived a major test. Volunteer battalion memberships expanded in 2014-2015, then contracted rapidly in 2016-2017.²⁶ The drawdown can be attributed to both supply and demand factors. The supply of public began to dry up mid-September 2015. The demand from units had also gone down. Volunteers already had acquired necessary survival equipment such as bullet-proof flak jackets and helmets. The frontlines were no longer moving.²⁷ Officially, various militias chose to subordinate their chains of command to the Ukrainian state, at least on paper, in exchange for a recognized position inside the state. Unofficially, many soldiers remained in an ambiguous gray zone between disarmament and incorporation into the state, operating as “contractors” according to opaque logics. Because personal ties of loyalty to commanders was so important to initial recruitment, it is not clear that chains of command follow official organization flow charts. Some militias retained significant autonomy and control over their own organizations. There were strong incentives to maintain an ability to return to the streets and disrupt political order. Some prominent and visible fighting units maintained overt ties to a far-right-wing social milieu.²⁸

Hypothesis 1 meets with very strong support during this period. Once IMF transfers began to wash through bank accounts in Kyiv, the payoffs for militias in the winning coalition were clearly much higher than those of their counterparts in the DNR/LNR who could not access these funds. This is clearest if one compares life outcomes at the ragged edge of the coalition formation project in the Donbas. The DNR/LNR militias that *cannibalized* the pre-Maidan state institutions are still huddled in the defensive position (often the same literal buildings) they were in before ($v/n - c$). On

Table 2. Battalions and centralized control as of 2015.

Battalion Name	Soldiers	Field Commander	Subordination
37th TBD (Zaporizhia)	600	Oleksandr "Sobol" Lobas	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
43th TBD (Patriot)	500	Oleksandr Vodolaz'kyi	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
24th TBD (Aydar)	300	Mykola V. Petrushyn	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Azov	2000	Andrii Biletskyi	National Guard of Ukraine (MOD), *Not Clear
"General Kulchytskyi"	400	Viktor Tolochko	National Guard of Ukraine (MOD)
Bilotserkivskiy TDB	200	Unknown (Denys "Angel")	Main Directorate of Intelligence (MOD)
Cherkasy (14th TDB)	100	Mykola P. Radchenko	Armed Forces of Ukraine
Police Company "Chernihiv"	600	Vitalii Kostiuhenko	National Police (MOD)
"Crimea"	150	Issa Akayev	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Dnipro-2 (39th TDB)	400	Volodymyr P. Berbushenko	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Donbas - Ukraine (46th TDB)	400	Vyacheslav Vlasenko	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Donbas (the National Guard)	600	Anatolii Vinohorodskyi	National Guard of Ukraine (MOD)
Harpun (Kamianets-Podilskiy)	Unknown	Kostiantyn O. Zhuk	Ministry of Interior
Horyn' (2nd TDB)	400	Oleksandr Tsys'	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Ivano-Frankivsk	150	Mykola R. Ivoniak	National Police (MOD)
Karpatska Sich (rota)	Unknown	Oleh Kutsyn	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Kharkiv – 1	300	Serhii Yanholenko	National Police (MOD)
Police Company "Kherson"	100	Maksym V. Zharkov	National Police (MOD)
Khortytisia (23rd TDB)	650	Dmytro Herasymenko	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Kirovohrad	150	Vyacheslav H. Shevchenko	National Police (MOD)
Police Company "Kremenchuk"	100	Oleh V. Berkelia	Ministry of Interior
40th TDB (Kryvbas)	600	Viktor Pochernyayev	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
12th TDB (Kyiv)	400	Nikolay "Akula" Bilosvit	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
11th TDB (Kyivska Rus) -	400	Valeriy Vovk	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
25 TDB (Kyivska Rus)	400	Andriy Yanchenko	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Luhansk-1	250	Kostyantyn Sklifus	National Police (MOD)
OUN Battalion	100	Mykola Kohanivkyi	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Poltava (16th TDB)	300	Oleg Gromadskyi	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Police Battalion "Poltava"	50	Yuriy Anuchin	National Police (MOD)
Prykarpattia (5th TDB)	400	Vitaliy Komar	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
42nd TDB (Rukh Oporu)	500	Kostiantyn Zayichenko	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
"Storm"	300	Yevgen Rudkovsky	National Police (MOD)
Sich Battalion	200	Oleksandr Pysarenko	National Police (MOD)
Sicheslav	100	Vladyslav Portianko	National Police (MOD)
"Slobozhanshchyna"	300	Andrii O. Yanholenko	National Police (MOD)
"St. Mary"	Unknown	Oleksiy Serdiuk	National Police (MOD)
Sumy	Unknown	Igor Martynov	National Police (MOD)
15th TDB (Sumy)	400	Pavlo Herasimov	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Ternopil	400	Volodymyr Katruk	National Police (MOD)
22nd TDB "Kharkiv"	400	S.V. Gorbenko	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)

Table 2. (Continued)

53rd Mechanized Brigade	Unknown	Unknown	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Tornado (rota, Luhansk)	200	Ruslan Onishchenko	Ministry of Interior
UNA-UNSO Battalion	1000	Kostiantyn Vinnytskyi	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
9th TDB (Vinnytsia)	700	Sergii Ivanov	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
1st TDB (Volyn)	450	Oleksandr V. Ohrymchuk	Armed Forces of Ukraine (MOD)
Zoloti Vorota (Golden Gates))	300	Sergii Shapoval	National Police (MOD)

the Ukrainian side, members of the armed forces enjoy better lives ($v^*/n - c$). Some patriots mobilized early, were not selected to be part of the minimum (s) winning coalition (for whatever reason), and are today bitter about the corruption at the top (x_p) that yielded an outcome these veterans see as unjust ($x_{in}=v^*/n - c > x_{out}=0$). All of this harmonizes with the model.

In August and September of 2015, 64 representatives of defense battalions (at various levels, some at command rank) were administered a survey that included many open-ended questions by our research team. One question asked was, “Do you think most members of your group consider themselves to be subordinate to the regular police and military forces of the government of Ukraine, or are they operating outside of (and parallel to) the regular police and military forces of the government of Ukraine? Explain what you mean in your own words.” The modal response was a variant of “Yes, we are in the structure of the Armed Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The battalion used to be a territorial defense battalion, but now it is incorporated.”²⁹ Consider the following variation in answers that we received, however:

I do not have an unambiguous answer. On the one hand we are an independent military unit, on the other hand we subordinate to the National Guard of Ukraine and ATO Joint Staff. We subordinate to the National Guard in terms of military matters, military actions, but we are different regarding trainings and structure.³⁰

No. Factually, DUK [UVC] is not legal. It is not in the structure of the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Defense, but there is a coordination with the Joint Staff.³¹

Yes, we are supposed to say that the battalion completely subordinates to the Ministry of the Interior. But even though we subordinate to the Ministry of Interior, the battalion makes some independent decisions on the front line. They are all ignoramuses in the Staff. They do not understand what is happening during the fight, so we must act on our own.³²

We started as an independent unit, then had to legalize ourselves as people usually called us a criminal gang. We asked the former Minister of Defense Heletei for help. We have been a part of the Armed Forces of Ukraine since that moment.³³

We became the Ministry of Interior’s military unit, but for us it means only a formal legalization of a volunteer movement. When we were just a volunteer rota, we faced difficulties of getting weapons. We realized that the Ministry of Interior would supply us with weaponry and equipment, so decided it would be wise to incorporate into it.³⁴

No. They are absolutely independent.³⁵

No. The battalion is part of DUK [UVC] organization. It was founded as an alternative to Ukrainian army and it remains independent.³⁶

Well, the answer is complicated. This special forces unit has never been under the Armed Forces of Ukraine. However, I cannot say we are illegal since we subordinate to the Chief Directorate of Intelligence and perform special military operations. The only people aware of our existence are our intelligence superiors. We are not fighting at the moment; a part of soldiers joined other brigades, mainly the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Still, a group of people remain subordinating to me as their commander, because they don't want to be under the Armed Forces.³⁷

Yes. At first, we came here to protect our country, not to climb the ranks within the Ministry of Interior. But the situation has changed, now we subordinate to the Ministry of Interior.³⁸

In part. If there was an opportunity, we would act independently, but now we [are told we] must subordinate whether to the Ministry of Interior or the Armed Forces. We are in the process of merging with the Armed Forces because we fought alongside with them since the first day and performed some combat tasks [cooperatively].³⁹

The motivations of the volunteer units for fighting were similarly ambiguous. The most common answer to the question “Why did most men in your unit volunteer?” was “We were fighting a Russian invasion.” This is consistent with the basic choice set in the model. Many interviewees claimed they were fighting against infiltration by the Russian military, but distrustful of the dilapidated institutions of the Ukrainian military. Others were interested in engaging in heroic military performances while living in a place with the least possible amount of government. Are efforts to *rehabilitate* dilapidated Ukrainian security institutions or *cannibalize* them? Empirically, what coding rules ought to apply are unclear to our team. This ambiguity is consistent with *Hypothesis 3*. Field commanders demanded different prices to join the state. The transfers of weapons and goods from the state make it possible for ideologically-motivated soldiers to fight more effectively (as a survey respondent stated above). For militias desiring a side transfer of policy advocacy – to act as armed lobbyists for a government policy on language, cultural protections, or some such – those policy positions may have served as an additional benefit (though this is outside the scope of the model, which is better calibrated for material side-payments: jobs, pensions, solicitation of private donations without interference etc.). Documented examples of the veterans’ involvement in violent entrepreneurship, used as muscle in local criminal-business *razborki* are plentiful. It is not easy to empirically assess how many resources a typical battalion acquired from state institutions, how many were siphoned from Western aid, and how much they were subsidized by indigenous local elite (“oligarchs”).

Prominent far-right volunteer militias are the most morally troubling exemplars of this ambiguity. Consider two of the most prominent volunteer battalions that continue to recruit volunteer soldiers outside the state, maintain independent training, and cling unapologetically to divisive symbols – Azov and the Right Sector’s Ukrainian Volunteer Corps (DUK). When asked, representatives of Azov are quick to assert that their Regiment is formally incorporated into the Ukrainian National Guard.⁴⁰ Despite its formal incorporation into the National Guard, Azov still maintains its own recruiting facilities – in a Kyiv building, Cossack House, that also houses other right-wing organizations, the National Corps leadership, and Azov’s barely-disguised outreach efforts

to right-wing groups across Europe.⁴¹ It rents Cossack House from the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense to maintain physical autonomy. War has been profitable for Azov and other far-right groups, as well. The war shields their members from prosecution and allows them access to the budget of the National Guard.⁴² Even the most ideologically-motivated militias, therefore, find they have material incentives to align with the state and capture their share of pork.

The merging of militia commanders with the state gives them a vested interest in the status quo. This is an impediment to resolving the conflict (*Hypothesis 4*). The logic is straightforward coalition management. The mechanism is to construct a variant of Ukrainian patriotism that exiles from the normal political sphere any actor (especially any armed actor!) disloyal to the Ukrainian nation. They can wave the bloody shirt, and rally around the flag, and maximize their rents, all at the same time.

The possibility that pro-government armed actors might “spoil” or “veto” a future peace settlement in Ukraine is thus illuminated by our model. The continued autonomy, without any nod toward disarmament, of these militias gives them the option to exercise such a veto. Veteran constituencies are adamantly opposed to reintegration of secessionist territory until Russia withdraws its military completely. They want no votes counted in the DNR/LNR. Constitutional revisions that would grant special status or autonomy the East are similarly anathema. In August 2015, when this proposal was discussed in the Rada, there were calls of treason inside parliament and three police officers were killed by a grenade. The outsized influence of paramilitary forces allied with the “No To Capitulation” front in parliament is well-established. Their talking points are consistent. As one member of the Azov battalion stated, “If there is renewed Russian aggression and the Ukrainian government shows weakness by trying to compromise between Russia and Ukrainian society, then the veterans will again regain their power and show who they are. The necessary network, the pyramid of power is already built within the veteran organizations, the battalions.”⁴³

Theoretical and Policy Implications

A typical starting point for descriptions of Ukraine’s war is the metaphor of a war of attrition. In a typical war of attrition, two well-institutionalized (in this case state-backed) actors face off. The no-man’s-land in Ukraine’s east, if described in terms of a static, ethicized master cleavage of Russians against Ukrainians, fits this metaphor well.⁴⁴ Our modeling approach differs. We treat militia leaders as interchangeable, scrambling in a competitive market for pork and political influence. The empirics in this paper provide some validation of our model of *cooperative consolidation* processes.

Our ambition is not to provide a complete account of Ukraine’s slide to war, nor a full account of the barriers to settling it. Ideology certainly mattered. To amplify the role of material incentives that are sometimes cloaked beneath ideological slogans, we assume field commander interchangeability. Some will find this modeling choice unconvincing. Rent-seeking field commanders are not the only vested interest in Ukraine that prefers the status quo to a re-integrated Donbas. Many powerful factions of the Ukrainian political elite, and in nationalist civil society (in Ukraine and in the diaspora) see the Minsk Accords as capitulation. Our model excludes them. Finally, among ourselves we sometimes doubt that foreign aid matters much to the Ukraine

case. The v^* lure should perhaps be thought of as “frosting on the cake,” rather than actual leverage for Western actors to force a settlement. The cake itself (v), the state apparatus of a medium-income country full of oligarchs, represents a tempting prize.

Our stylized model identifies a barrier to the resolution of the Ukraine conflict: Field commanders should expect their fortunes to diminish post-settlement. Since reconciliation introduces new actors that will attempt to claim scarce rents, some do better if the population of Eastern Donbas never comes back. That may be a fundamental settlement barrier. We remain optimistic that the DNR/LNR territorial dispute could be resolved with creative institutional design, but such a design will somehow need to overcome a powerful political logic – the logic of minimum winning coalitions – that hedges in the direction of a permanent standoff.

Our model also clarifies the role being played by Russia. Without Russian support for the Donbas separatists, Ukraine would be tempted to engage in *coercive consolidation*. By assumption in our analysis, *cannibalization* payoffs are positive. This is not the whole story, of course, since many separatist commanders have been killed in the process of consolidation. The Ukrainian state cannot use coercive consolidation to force separatist militias in the DNR/LNR to join, nor can it forcibly disarm pro-Ukraine militias. If we relax this assumption, however, the same model can describe a *coercive mode* of consolidation.⁴⁵ *Coercive* consolidation is raising the costs of fighting c to drive *cannibalization* payoffs toward zero.

How does this explain intransigence on the sequencing of the Minsk Agreement? The Kremlin argues that Ukraine must do what it has promised (hold elections and seat Rada representatives) before it does what it promised (withdraw its soldiers and heavy material from the Eastern Donbas, which Russia will not formally admit is there). Ukraine wants Russia to do its part first. So long as Russian soldiers stay, ongoing Russian support gives separatist fighters leverage. In the language of the model, Donbas field commanders can use the protection they receive from Russia to press the rent-capturing coalition inside the Ukrainian state be expanded to include them. Ukraine’s refusal to implement its Minsk obligations is packaged, in the court of Russian public opinion, as evidence of intent to engage in victor’s justice (*coercive consolidation*) after Russia leaves. Russia’s refusal to implement *its* Minsk obligations is packaged, in the court of Ukrainian opinion, as inappropriate, condescending, and illegal.

Will more sanctions, more Western aid transfers, or more training for Ukrainian military forces help Kyiv achieve its goals through coercion? Probably not. In our model coercion is not necessarily the endgame, either. A Ukrainian polity with its territorial integrity restored would be desirable from the perspective of the West. After all, after decades as a frozen conflict, Nagorno-Karabakh re-erupted violently, reminding everyone of the costs of a leaving a disputed map in Eurasia. An undisputed map is not a prerequisite for Western recognition or modest levels of assistance. Since 2014, v^* arrived, conflicts of interest between Ukraine and Western governments notwithstanding. Why not send even more (like the hundreds of billions sent to Afghanistan)? A lack of leverage, perhaps, or limited national interests. The desire to stabilize Ukraine and punish Russia for Crimea is balanced against desire to avoid costly quagmires, to limit the West’s footprint and liability, to minimize the possibility of escalation or arms racing. Training and advising of operational units, along with ongoing advising to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, provides some influence. The IMF pushes a gradualist

anti-corruption and reform agenda. Since few Western politicians advocate for *reducing* aid to Ukrainians unless they “move first” to implement their Minsk concessions, Ukrainian observers might be forgiven for believing *partial incorporation* is what external donors actually desire.⁴⁶

If Western policy could be calibrated to balance the need to punish Russia for its transgressions *and* the need to induce Ukrainian elites to politically reintegrate and to rebuild the East, it might change the incentives for DNR/LNR residents.⁴⁷ This is not on the near horizon. It violates taboos in Ukrainian society to suggest that any barriers to settling Ukraine’s war are intra-Ukrainian.⁴⁸ Our goal in this paper is not to whitewash Russia’s role in instigating and prolonging the crisis, but simply to remind analysts of two basic constraints that make it possible for conflict to continue: (1) in fragile institutional settings, agents are tempted to gradually cannibalize state institutions; (2) military jobs are a desirable and divisible form of pork that make the rents of post-settlement statehood worth fighting over.

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Notes

1. Though the vertical cooperative consolidation we examine in this article differs from the horizontal cooperative consolidation between militant groups discussed in the rest of the special issue, we view the two processes as similar. In horizontal cooperative consolidation, rebel groups decide whether to merge with or affiliate with a stronger group, similar to how rebel groups decide whether to affiliate with a state that is not strong enough to coerce them into joining involuntarily.
2. For a very good summary of this position, see Kristian Åtland, “Destined for Deadlock? Russia, Ukraine, and the Unfulfilled Minsk Agreements,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 36, no. 2 (2020): 122–39.
3. We use field commanders, militias, and militia commanders to refer to the armed non-state actors in the Ukraine conflict and their top leadership.
4. This assumption implies that no field commander should be sufficient to unilaterally ensure state survival ($s > 1$) or have a veto over state stability ($s < n$).
5. We assume symmetry of field commanders for the sake of simplicity. Relaxing this assumption could change what the winning coalition looks like (more powerful field commanders may be more likely to be incorporated) as well as when coordination happens (coordination depends on beliefs about what the most powerful field commanders will do).
6. *G* does not have much leverage in the game, which we describe in more detail near the end of the article and in the downloadable appendix. For one, sending aid inflates both stag and second-stage rabbit payoffs simultaneously. Adding complexity to *G*’s choice set in the model (e.g., selecting an amount of aid *a* in a range $0 \leq a \leq 1$) adds little. The same would be true even if the second stage of the game were iterated. The problem is that some Ukrainian actors can correctly anticipate they will be cut out of the spoils of aid

- in stage two by a minimum winning coalition logic, so they do not join in stage one. Changing the size of the pool of aid does not solve this problem.
7. For those seeking an accessible introduction to how the notion of a minimum winning coalition shapes political decision-making, a good start is William H. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions*, vol. 173 (Yale University Press, 1962).
 8. The equilibrium formally defined in the downloadable appendix fudges this point a bit, with exactly s joining so each is pivotal (capable of unilaterally breaking the coalition and achieving a $v^*/n - c$ payoff). If $k_1 > s$, this commitment problem is more serious.
 9. The hypothesis is stated with a playful nod to Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), 1994.
 10. James D. Fearon, "Why Ethnic Politics and 'Pork' Tend to go Together." In *an SSRC-MacArthur sponsored conference on "Ethnic Politics and Democratic Stability,"* (University of Chicago, 1999).
 11. There is a rich literature how rebel groups often act as spoilers for peace processes across a variety of contexts. See David E. Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 875–92; Wendy Pearlman, "Spoiling Inside and Out: Internal Political Contestation and the Middle East Peace Process," *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2009): 79–109; Wendy Pearlman and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Nonstate Actors, Fragmentation and Conflict Processes," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 3–15; Andrew G. Reiter, "Does Spoiling Work? Assessing the Impact of Spoilers on Civil War Peace Agreements," *Civil Wars* 17, no. 1 (2015): 89–111. Similarly, interveners in conflict can make a peace settlement less likely. See David E. Cunningham, "Blocking Resolution: How External States Can Prolong Civil Wars," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (2010): 115–27; Aysegul Aydin and Patrick M. Regan, "Networks of Third-Party Intervenors and Civil War Duration," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 3 (2012): 573–97.
 12. Our sparse model excludes many variables that are relevant to a complete history of the case, such as variation in the economic recruiting base of militias (Yuri M. Zhukov, "Trading Hard Hats for Combat Helmets: The Economics of Rebellion in Eastern Ukraine," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 44, no. 1 (2016): 1–15); local community beliefs about the legitimacy of the Maidan regime change (S. Kudelia, "How They Joined? Militants and Informers in the Armed Conflict in Donbas," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 30, no. 2 (2019): 279–306; Elise Giuliano, "Who Supported Separatism in Donbas? Ethnicity and Popular Opinion at the Start of the Ukraine Crisis," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no. 2/3 (2018): 158); the role of some business oligarchs (Volodymyr Ishchenko, "Insufficiently Diverse: The Problem of Nonviolent Leverage and Radicalization of Ukraine's Maidan Uprising, 2013–2014," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020): 201–15); regime characteristic of Russia or particular beliefs of Russian leaders (Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia* (Routledge, 2018); Michael McFaul, "Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy," *International Security* 45, no. 2 (2020): 95–139; Catherine Belton, *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took on the West* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020)); East-West cleavages in Ukrainian domestic politics (Keith Darden and Anna Grzymala-Busse, "The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism, and the Communist Collapse," *World Politics* 59, no. 1 (2006): 83–115); domestic changes in Ukraine undermining its ability (or NATO's ability) to credibly commit to not taking actions in the future that might threaten Russia (Robert Powell, "War as a Commitment Problem," *International Organization* 60, no. 1 (2006): 169–203); and slow-moving shifts in the global distribution of power affecting polarization in Ukraine (Nicholas Sambanis, Stergios Skaperdas, and William Wohlforth, "External Intervention, Identity, and Civil War," *Comparative Political Studies* 53, no. 14 (2020): 2155–82).
 13. Maj Michael Cohen, "Ukraine's Battle at Ilovaisk, August 2014: The Tyranny of Means," *US Army Press Online Journal* (2016): 11.

14. Serhy Yekelchuk, *The Conflict in Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press, 2015).
15. Sabrina Tavernise and David M. Herszenhorn, "Patchwork Makeup of Rebels Fighting Ukraine Makes Peace Talks Elusive," *The New York Times*, July 9, 2014.
16. Volodymyr Ishchenko, "Far Right Participation in the Ukrainian Maidan Protests: An Attempt of Systematic Estimation" (European Politics and Society, Taylor & Francis, 2016), 453.
17. Ilmari Kähkö, "A Nation-in-the-Making, in Arms: Control of Force, Strategy and the Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions," *Defence Studies* 18, no. 2 (2018): 147–66.
18. Some in the Kremlin probably desired more secessionist Russian influence than just a sliver of the Eastern Donbas, but only if they could avoid paying occupation costs. Some pro-Kremlin groups clearly believed Russia might come to their defense if they could provoke a general uprising through actions such as seeking a referendum on independence: Ilmari Kähkö, "A Conventional War: Escalation in the War in Donbas, Ukraine" Forthcoming (2021). For others, the violence was motivated both by strategic reasoning and strong emotion: to protect family and friends or to respond to Ukrainian nationalists in the new government. Serhiy Kudelia, "The Donbas Rift," *Russian Politics & Law* 54, no. 1 (2016): 5–27.
19. Those interested in these insignias (or the raw survey data) should contact the authors directly.
20. Alexander Clapp, "The Maidan Irregulars," *The National Interest*, no. 143 (2016): 26–33; Andreas Umland, "Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine: The Prehistory and Emergence of the 'Azov' Battalion in 2014," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 1 (2019): 105–31.
21. Kähkö, "A Conventional War: Escalation in the War in Donbas, Ukraine."
22. Kimitaka Matsuzato, "The Donbass War: Outbreak and Deadlock," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 25, no. 2 (2017): 175–201.
23. Tetyana Malyarenko and Stefan Wolff, *The Dynamics of Emerging De-Facto States: Eastern Ukraine in the Post-Soviet Space* (Routledge, 2019).
24. The reorganization seems to have folded the original militia units into a command-and-control structure with some brigades based on a single militia unit and others constructed from remnants of other units or reassigned fighters. For very informed speculation on these matters, see Mark Galeotti, *Armies of Russia's War in Ukraine*, 1 edition (Osprey Publishing, 2019).
25. The year-by-year amounts subsequently transferred from the IMF (in SDRs): \$3.9b in 2014, \$7.7b in 2015, \$8.4b in 2016, \$8.5b in 2017, \$8b in 2018, \$6.9b in 2019, \$6.5b in 2020. Non-military and military assistance allocated to Ukraine adds hundreds of millions. US GAO, "Democracy Assistance: State Should Improve Information Sharing with Embassies" (US Government Accountability Office, January 2020), <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-20-173>.
26. Kateryna Zarembo, "Doing State's Job: The Impact of Volunteers on State Defense Capacity in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine," in *Civil Society in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 101–28.
27. See also Vera Mironova and Ekaterina Sergatskova, "How Ukraine Reined in Its Militias," *Foreign Affairs*, 2017, who describe how militias filled niches in state capacity. Examples include the provision of thermal imaging cameras, drones, and tablets with ballistic software and electronic maps, and the development of artillery fire control systems.
28. Volodymyr Ishchenko, "Nationalist Radicalization Trends in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine," *Ponars Eurasia*, 2018.
29. Interviewee #63, Interview with self-identified member of 37th TBD, September 15, 2015.
30. Interviewee #3, Interview with self-identified member of Azov, August 19, 2015.
31. Interviewee #5, Interview with self-identified member of DUK (Ukrainian Volunteer Corps); 5th independent battalion, August 20, 2015.
32. Interviewee #8, Interview with self-identified member of Slobozhanshchyna, August 20, 2015.
33. Interviewee #12, Interview with self-identified member of UNA-UNSO Battalion, August 26, 2015.

34. Interviewee #13, Self-identified member of St. Mary Special Battalion (Reserve Rota), August 25, 2015, 13.
35. Interviewee #16, Interview with self-identified member of DUK (Ukrainian Volunteer Corps); 6th Alternate Battalion (Ternopil Oblast), August 25, 2015.
36. Interview # 25, Interview with self-identified member of DUK (Ukrainian Volunteer Corps); the 7th Alternate Battalion, August 28, 2015.
37. Interviewee #41, Interview with self-identified member of Bilotserkivs'kyi TBD, September 4, 2015.
38. Interview #50, Interview with self-identified member of Ternopil', September 9, 2015. This self-reporting was inconsistent across the unit, reflected in an alternative coding in Table 2.
39. Interview #58, Interview with self-identified member of Crimea Battalion, September 11, 2015.
40. "Attention! The Azov Regiment's response to the allegations published in 'TIME' magazine," *Офіційний сайт полку "Азов" На захисті України з 2014 року* (blog), January 10, 2021, <https://azov.org.ua/the-azov-regiments-response-to-the-allegations-published-in-time-magazine/>; Vyacheslav Likhachev, "Far-Right Extremism as a Threat to Ukrainian Democracy," Freedom House, accessed March 5, 2021, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/analytical-brief/2018/far-right-extremism-threat-ukrainian-democracy>; Aris Roussinos, "[Letter from Kyiv] The Armies of the Right," *Harper's Magazine*, January 2021, <https://harpers.org/archive/2021/01/the-armies-of-the-right-ukraine-militias/>.
41. Simon Shuster and Billy Perrigo, "How a Far-Right Militia Uses Facebook to Train New Members," *Time*, January 7, 2021; Oleksiy Kuzmenko, "The Azov Regiment Has Not Depoliticized," *Atlantic Council* (blog), March 19, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-azov-regiment-has-not-depoliticized/>.
42. "По Ту Сторону «Азова». Чем Занимается в Тылу Самый Известный Полк Нацгвардии," *ФОКУС*, August 4, 2017, <https://focus.ua/long/377902>, Aris 2021. Violence Marker 2021
43. We are hesitant to speculate about a specific mechanism that could allow some field commanders to block moves to reconcile and reintegrate Donbas, preferring the somewhat antiseptic language of "blocking coalition" to irresponsible speculation. Talk of "soft coups" or militaries refusing to obey orders is premature.
44. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a model that puts policy divergence between social forces zero-sum issues (especially language choice) more central to analysis, see Driscoll and Arel (forthcoming).
45. Formally, if $c > v^*/n$, there is a unique equilibrium in which every field commander plays *rehabilitate*, G sends aid, p allocates all of v^* to himself, all field commanders still play *rehabilitate*, and the game ends.
46. Western actors have some ways that we do not model to influence Ukraine's actions. For example, Ukraine's need to develop a supply chain for its military that is not dependent on Russia gives Western powers some transactional leverage over reform processes. Training and advising by Western military actors may mitigate the information problems inherent in principal-agent relationships and provides opportunities for influencing reforms. See Alexandra Chinchilla, "Advising War: Limited Intervention in Conflict" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2021); Walter C. Ladwig III, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counterinsurgency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Eli Berman and David A. Lake, *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence through Local Agents* (Cornell University Press, 2019).
47. Roger D. Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 64–79; Aila M. Matanock, "Bullets for Ballots: Electoral Participation Provisions and Enduring Peace after Civil Conflict," *International Security* 41, no. 4 (2017): 93–132.
48. See also Tymofiy Mylovanov, Yuriy Zhukov, and Yuriy Gorodnichenko, "Review of EU Policy for Ukraine," *EU Global Strategy and Human Security: Rethinking Approaches to Conflict*, 2018.