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PALGRAVE STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

# DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN ARMED CONFLICT

Military Involvement in Kosovo,  
Afghanistan, and Iraq

**Patrick A. Mello**





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# 1

## Introduction

Compared to the amount of research devoted to the interdemocratic peace proposition, the “flipside” of democratic participation in armed conflict has received considerably less attention. Moreover, due to a widespread focus on regime type differences, many studies in International Relations (IR) implicitly treat democratic regimes as a homogeneous group and thus fail to account for substantial variation *within* the group of democracies. While scholars have persuasively made the case that “democracy” needs to be unpacked to be meaningful (Elman, 2000), this remains rarely done in the field of international politics and conflict research. In Comparative Politics, on the other hand, research on democratic subtypes and their virtues and weaknesses abounds, but this knowledge is seldom applied to matters of security policy.

In this book, I investigate the conditions under which democracies participate in armed conflict. Based on the premise that substantial variation exists among democratic systems and that this variation might account toward an explanation for democracies’ external conflict behavior, relevant institutional and political differences are identified across contemporary democracies. My integrative theoretical approach highlights the importance of domestic factors, such as partisan politics, executive–legislative relations, constitutional differences and public opinion but further takes into account systemic factors, such as a country’s relative power status.

This study resonates with a renewed emphasis on the link between domestic politics and international relations. While IR scholars have long neglected domestic politics in favor of systemic variables, it is by now widely acknowledged that domestic factors and international relations are highly inter-connected and that a focus on the former can enhance the understanding of the latter (Gourevitch, 2002: 309). In this

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context, a number of publications have initiated what may constitute a “democratic turn” in security studies (Geis and Wagner, 2011). Works in this vein have broadened the democratic peace research program by focusing on the conditions under which democracies use military force, democracy’s inherent ambiguities, and the differences between democratic states regarding their constitutional structure, domestic institutions, political culture, and partisan politics.<sup>1</sup> Yet the insights of these works have only sparsely made their way into comparative studies.

Against this backdrop, three general questions arise, concerning the domestic sources of democratic foreign policy and the interaction of domestic and international factors in relation to conflict behavior. First, when do *domestic institutions* constrain or enable government use of force? Previous research has conceptualized “institutional constraints” in various ways, ranging from abstract considerations of the democratic process, to the prospect of electoral backlash and concrete veto opportunities that arise in distinct political constellations. At the same time, it has been suggested that democracies are somehow able to alter their behavior when faced with non-democracies, sidestepping existing institutional constraints and “the due political process” (Maoz and Russett, 1993: 626; Russett, 1993: 38–40). This underlines the need to investigate more specific forms of institutional constraints such as parliamentary veto rights and constitutional restrictions on the use of force and the conditions under which these become effective. Second, to what extent do *partisanship* and *public opinion* matter in military deployment decisions? The traditional (realist) perspective suggests that “politics stops at the waters’ edge” (Gowa, 1998); thus, we should expect a foreign policy consensus between political parties on decisions over war and peace. This conception seems to be misguided, however, since studies have repeatedly demonstrated partisan divides on security issues. Relatedly, the role of public opinion in foreign policy decision-making remains heavily contested. While proponents of liberal arguments suggest that democracies are constrained by public opinion, others hold that democratic leaders are hardly affected by public opinion in their decision-making, even when substantial parts of the citizenry oppose a military commitment. Third, how do international *organizational frameworks* influence democracies’ participation in military operations? It seems plausible to assume that the organizational auspices under which an operation is run affect government decisions, that is, whether missions are carried out through the United Nations, by regional organizations such as the European Union (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), or in *ad hoc* coalition frameworks. Since the latter have become increasingly

common for enforcement operations, an investigation into the conditions that foster the participation in *ad hoc* coalition frameworks should be a pressing concern.

Recent studies have suggested promising explanations of democratic conflict behavior, but the question of how to conceptualize military participation remains. What kind of contribution counts as war involvement? Does it suffice if a country provides logistical support to an operation or should only the large-scale deployment of combat forces be considered military participation? To which extent is the timing of a military deployment relevant? In this book, I address these questions in the specific historical context of the wars in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Based on a comparative framework that includes 30 democracies and five causal conditions, I offer an integrative theoretical explanation for military involvement and non-involvement in each of these conflicts.

The central argument of this book consists of three propositions. First, I argue that many generalizations about democracy obscure rather than help further our understanding of international politics. While the democratic peace research program has yielded a host of empirical observations and valuable insights about the conflict behavior of democracies and non-democracies, it has also reified the dividing line between these regime types. The result is that important sources of intra-democratic variance often get overlooked, which could partially explain why scholars report conflicting findings on the relationship between regime type and conflict behavior (cf. Mintz, 2005: 5). The second claim flows from the first: variation among democracies needs to be taken more seriously. Though scholars have paid lip service to the mutual benefit of an increased awareness of each other's work in the subfields of International Relations and Comparative Politics, few studies in conflict research have taken aboard richer conceptions of democracy. In fact, most studies base their conceptualization of democracy on lean models that do not take into account the institutional variety across Western democracies, much less the diversity that characterizes non-Western countries. Finally, I argue that our notions of democratic war involvement need to be brought in line with the nature of contemporary armed conflict and reconnected to processes of political decision-making. The democratic peace research program has relied, for the most part, on what constitutes an anachronistic conception of war involvement. Hence, frequently used measures of military participation tend to be far removed from the actual deployments made. However, in order to gain confidence about the conditions that lead toward

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war involvement and abstention, we also require a more fine-grained qualitative assessment of democratic war participation in the historical context of a given conflict.

The remainder of this introductory chapter introduces the book's research design, including definitions of key concepts and a detailed discussion of the criteria that guided the case selection for the conflicts and countries examined. The final section provides a concise book outline.

### **Research design**

This book investigates democratic war involvement. Conceived primarily as a comparative study, a two-fold emphasis is placed on exploring institutional and political sources of variation across consolidated democracies and examining their participation in armed conflict. Given these aims, the research design combines a comparative perspective on an intermediate number of democracies with a focus on three contemporary cases of armed conflict. The remainder of this section defines the book's conception of military participation and relates it to existing definitions of similar terms. This is followed by an explication of the criteria that guided the case selection, both in terms of armed conflicts and for the democracies included in this study.

#### **Defining participation in multilateral military operations**

For the purposes of the present study, I define *military participation* as the deployment of combat-ready, regular military forces across international borders to engage in the use of force inside or against a target country as part of a multilateral military operation.

This definition comprises several components that delineate the universe of cases. First, it entails a range of military operations where units are authorized to use force, from humanitarian military intervention to peace enforcement operations and interstate war. At the same time, it excludes traditional peacekeeping missions, where the use of force is restricted to purposes of self-defense. Second, the definition covers various kinds of military deployments, including ground, air and naval units, but these must be directed at a regime or against non-state actors within a country. Hence, the definition discounts involvement in naval operations, such as anti-piracy missions. It further focuses on the deployment of regular forces to ensure comparability, which eliminates the contracting of private military and security companies.<sup>2</sup> Finally, this study concentrates on multilateral military operations, because unilateral engagements, by definition, preclude within-case comparisons



across countries. Multilateralism is understood here in a minimal sense as coordination between “three or more states, through *ad hoc* arrangements or by means of institutions” (Keohane, 1990: 731).<sup>3</sup> Hence the definition applies to *ad hoc* coalitions as well as military operations under the auspices of international organizations.

My conception of military participation relates to established definitions of military intervention.<sup>4</sup> Unlike some prior studies, however, I do not differentiate war from military intervention for my case selection or for analytical purposes. As other authors acknowledge, there is a substantial gray area between military intervention and war (Finnemore, 2003: 9). This ambiguity puts into question the analytical value of the distinction between these two concepts. In legal terms, both military intervention and war constitute *armed conflicts*. However, a distinction should be made on the grounds of whether or not a case falls under one of the two stated exceptions to the general prohibition on the use of force under Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter. These entail individual or collective self-defense, based on Article 51, and the use of force under authorization from the Security Council, in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter (Greenwood, 2008: 1). In political terms, the distinction between military intervention and war traditionally serves to separate action on behalf of a regime or a powerful faction within a country from conflict between two or more sovereign states (Bennett, 1999: 14; Levite et al., 1992: 5). This view sees military intervention as directed toward “changing or preserving the structure of political authority in the target society” (Rosenau, 1969: 161), whereas interstate war is held to primarily serve the aim of territorial conquest (Levite et al., 1992: 6).

These distinctions notwithstanding, complications arise when trying to categorize particular historical cases. For instance, the Persian Gulf War that began with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 has been termed “fundamentally an interstate war” because the US-led multinational coalition had the objective “to restore internationally recognized territorial boundaries” (Levite et al., 1992). At the same time, scholars have classified the Gulf War as a military intervention to acknowledge the fact that an outside power intervened on behalf of the regime in Kuwait (Kreps, 2011: 15, 51; Saunders, 2011: 15, 22). To take another example, the American engagement in Vietnam began in 1950 as military assistance to the French and later to the South Vietnamese government, but this support incrementally turned into a military intervention and by 1965 it had escalated into full-scale war (Krepinevich, 1988: 258–275). These two cases illustrate that the search for a sharp dividing line

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between war and military intervention is fraught with difficulties, if not illusory. Hence, for the purposes of this book, I apply the inclusive definition of military participation stated above. With regard to the observed conflicts and the outcome to be explained this allows for variation within well-defined limits.

### **Case selection**

The comparative design of this study essentially requires two case selection decisions. The first concerns the armed conflicts to be investigated, which are drawn from the universe of cases circumscribed by my definition of military participation. The second decision relates to the democracies that ought to be considered potential military participants in the selected conflicts. I address each in turn.

With regard to armed conflicts, the book's inclusive definition of military participation yields a fairly large number of potential cases. Hence, for case selection purposes, three scope conditions are applied to narrow down the population and to enhance comparability. First, the observed timeframe is restricted to the post-Cold War period (1990–2011). This way systemic factors are held largely constant. Second, conflicts are only included if they contain at least one military operation with personnel equal to or above 5,000 soldiers.<sup>5</sup> Finally, in order to be considered for case selection, several Western democracies need to have made sizable military contributions to a given conflict. This criterion eliminates many UN peace support operations, where non-Western countries are often the major troop contributors.<sup>6</sup> Given these scope conditions, the universe of cases consists of 11 armed conflicts and 28 military operations. These are listed in Table 1.1.

Of the potential case studies, the book investigates democratic participation and non-participation in the wars in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These cases were selected for several reasons. First, the three conflicts are among the most extensive uses of force by democracies in the post-Cold War era, both in terms of combat intensity and the duration of the multilateral military engagement, if one includes operations that followed upon the initial invasion. This makes them particularly interesting cases for study.<sup>7</sup> Second, each conflict reached a certain issue salience and was surrounded by substantial political conflict and public contestation across Western democracies.<sup>8</sup> Thus, if approaches that emphasize partisanship or public opinion have any explanatory value, then they should apply to these cases. Finally, democratic governments have shown substantial variance in their responses to these conflicts. While some countries became involved militarily in all three cases,

Table 1.1 Case selection: Armed conflicts

Conflict	Military operation	Timeframe	Framework	Military personnel	UN authorization
Iraq	Desert Storm	01/1991-03/1991	ad hoc	540,000 (1991)	678 (1990)
	Provide Comfort	04/1991-12/1996	ad hoc	23,242 (1991)	688 (1991)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	UNPROFOR	02/1992-03/1995	UN	39,789 (1994)	743 (1992)
	IFOR	12/1995-12/1996	NATO	60,000 (1996)	1031 (1995)
	SFOR	12/1996-12/2004	NATO	32,000 (1996)	1088 (1996)
	EUFOR Althea	12/2004-ongoing	EU	6,381 (2004)	1575 (2004)
Somalia	UNITAF	12/1992-05/1993	ad hoc	37,000 (1993)	794 (1992)
	UNOSOM II	03/1993-03/1995	UN	14,968 (1994)	814 (1993)
Haiti	UNMIH	09/1993-06/1996	UN	6,065 (1995)	841 (1993)
	Uphold Democracy	09/1994-03/1995	ad hoc	25,000 (1994)	940 (1994)
Kosovo	Allied Force	03/1999-06/1999	NATO	50,500 (1999)	not authorized
	KFOR	06/1999-ongoing	NATO	42,700 (1999)	1244 (1999)
East Timor	INTERFET	09/1999-02/2000	ad hoc	11,285 (1999)	1264 (1999)
	UNTAET	10/1999-05/2002	UN	6,281 (2002)	1272 (1999)
	UNMISET	05/2002-05/2005	UN	4,583 (2002)	1410 (2002)
	MONUC	11/1999-06/2010	UN	19,815 (2007)	1279 (1999)
Congo (DRC)	MONUSCO	07/2010-ongoing	UN	19,557 (2013)	1925 (2010)
	Artemis	06/2003-09/2003	EU	1,968 (2003)	1484 (2003)
Afghanistan	EUFOR RD Congo	07/2006-11/2006	EU	2,276 (2006)	1671 (2006)
	Enduring Freedom	10/2001-ongoing	ad hoc	19,448 (2005)	not authorized
	ISAF I	12/2001-08/2003	ad hoc	5,500 (2003)	1386 (2001)
	ISAF II	08/2003-ongoing	NATO	51,100 (2008)	1510 (2003)
Iraq	Iraqi Freedom	03/2003-08/2010	ad hoc	250,000 (2003)	not authorized
	MNF-Iraq	10/2003-01/2010	ad hoc	180,000 (2005)	1511 (2003)
Haiti	MIF-H	02/2004-06/2004	ad hoc	3,440 (2004)	1529 (2004)
	MINUSTAH	06/2004-ongoing	UN	8,940 (2010)	1542 (2004)
Libya	Odyssey Dawn	03/2011-03/2011	ad hoc	11,167 (2011)	1973 (2011)
	Unified Protector	03/2011-10/2011	NATO	12,909 (2011)	1973 (2011)

Note: The aerial operations in Kosovo and Libya comprised 29,000 and 26,500 sorties, respectively. UN authorization indicates the initial Security Council resolution for each mission, excluding mandate renewals or alterations.

Sources: ISS, 'The Military Balance' (various yearbooks), SIPRI 'Multilateral Peace Missions database' ([www.sipri.org](http://www.sipri.org)), SIPRI, 'Armaments, Disarmament and International Security' (various yearbooks), UN Security Council documents ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)).

several governments abstained entirely and still others made selective deployments. At the same time, the conflicts in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq vary with respect to their political legitimization, legality in international law, the involvement of international organizations, and the intensity of armed conflict, which enhances their inferential value from a comparative perspective.

One might object that the selected cases are too dissimilar for comparative purposes. However, this study focuses primarily on comparing democracies' responses *within* each case. Only in the final chapter is the attempt made to compare across conflicts and to draw out similarities and generalizable patterns. The Kosovo case set a precedent as a military operation under NATO auspices that was not authorized by the UN Security Council, yet widely conceived as a legitimate use of force. Due to the tension between legal principles and appeals to humanitarian norms, Kosovo is an illuminating case to examine the role of domestic constraints on the use of force. By contrast, the war in Afghanistan was initiated by an *ad hoc* coalition outside existing organizational frameworks. It lacked formal UN authorization, though the Security Council acknowledged the right to individual and collective self-defense. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and subsequent declarations of solidarity with the United States across the international community make Afghanistan a "most-likely case" for the involvement of NATO allies and partner countries. Finally, the Iraq War represents an "extreme case" that was widely perceived as an illegal preventive war. Because it damaged transatlantic relations and polarized the political debate in many countries it is also a most-likely case for arguments on partisan politics.<sup>9</sup>

With regard to the democracies selected for study, the procedure is based on two criteria: (1) the presence of uncontested democratic political institutions and (2) institutionalized security cooperation with other democracies. As a threshold for the first criterion, I employ the Polity IV data to exclude countries with a score of seven and below on the combined autocracy-democracy scale.<sup>10</sup> The second criterion of institutionalized security cooperation refers to countries with EU or NATO membership, or those that have cooperation agreements with either regional organization. In addition to these criteria and to enhance cross-case comparability, I further apply a scope condition that excludes countries with a population size below one million inhabitants. This is based on the premise that very small countries, due to a lack of military capability, are often not in a position to participate militarily. For instance, Iceland has a coast guard but no armed forces, while Luxembourg has a single infantry battalion but no air force (IISS, 2003: 47, 49).

Table 1.2 Case selection: Democracies

Western Europe			Central & Eastern Europe			North America, Pacific		
	NATO	EU		NATO	EU		NATO	EU
France	1949	1952	Czech Republic	1999	2004	Canada	1949	–
Italy	1949	1952	Hungary	1999	2004	United States	1949	–
Belgium	1949	1958	Poland	1999	2004	Japan	1990 <sup>a</sup>	–
Netherlands	1949	1958	Slovakia	2004	2004	New Zealand	2001 <sup>a</sup>	–
Denmark	1949	1973	Slovenia	2004	2004	Australia	2005 <sup>a</sup>	–
United Kingdom	1949	1973	Bulgaria	2004	2007			
Portugal	1949	1986	Romania	2004	2007			
Greece	1952	1981	Estonia	2004	2004			
Germany	1955	1952	Latvia	2004	2004			
Spain	1982	1986	Lithuania	2004	2004			
Norway	1949	1994 <sup>b</sup>	Slovenia	2004	2004			
Finland	1994 <sup>c</sup>	1995						
Sweden	1994 <sup>c</sup>	1995						
Austria	1995 <sup>c</sup>	1995						
Ireland	1999 <sup>c</sup>	1973						

Note: Years indicate date of accession or cooperation agreement.

<sup>a</sup>NATO cooperation agreement.

<sup>b</sup>European Economic Area agreement.

<sup>c</sup>NATO Individual Partnership Programme.

For the Kosovo case study, this selection procedure yields 23 democracies from Europe and North America, while the chapters on Afghanistan and Iraq are based on a sample of 30 democracies, adding the Baltic countries and Slovenia, as well as Japan, New Zealand, and Australia from the Pacific region. In other words, a core sample of 23 countries is present across all three cases. Table 1.2 lists the selected democracies by region and organizational membership. Since the units of analysis are country cabinets, each chapter specifies the relevant governments for the case at hand.

## Book outline

This chapter has delineated the book's research aim, its core argument and analytical strategy. In the chapters that follow, I first revisit the debate on democracy and war involvement before introducing my own theoretical framework and methodological approach. The ensuing case study chapters provide empirical evidence for the existence of distinct pathways toward democratic war involvement and, *vice versa*,

war abstention. These chapters further demonstrate substantial variance across the observed democracies, both in terms of their institutional and political characteristics and their involvement in armed conflict. The final chapter draws together the separate findings and makes a modest attempt at generalizing the results beyond the observed cases, including a discussion of more recent conflicts, such as the military intervention in Libya and the civil war in Syria.

Chapter 2 examines prevalent explanations of democratic conflict behavior, which are divided three-fold into institutional constraints, political preferences, and external constraints and inducements. Beginning with institutionalist arguments on the restraining effects of democratic systems, the first section revisits the Kantian notion of participatory constraints, studies on democratic subtypes, and veto rights approaches. The second part focuses on political preferences, starting with the connection between public opinion and foreign policy decision-making. This is trailed by a review of studies that emphasize culture, identity, and role conceptions as factors that shape foreign policy behavior. The chapter closes with a survey of systemic theories that highlight external constraints and inducements, including burden-sharing arguments derived from collective action theory and realist approaches that underline external threats or alliance dependence as principal causes of war involvement.

Set against the explanatory approaches introduced previously, Chapter 3 advances the theoretical framework that guides the empirical analysis in the case study chapters. I develop an integrative theoretical approach that combines explanatory factors from various IR perspectives. Specifically, the framework includes the analysis of domestic factors, such as different forms of institutional constraints, political ideology, and public opinion, in addition to structural factors, such as a country's relative power position. The approach thus conjoins factors that prior studies have identified as crucial in accounting for democratic war involvement but whose interaction has gone largely unobserved.

While the initial chapters focus on substantive arguments, they also show that some theoretical divisions arise from differences over methods. Against this backdrop, Chapter 4 provides a concise methodological review of extant studies in democratic peace research before introducing the approach of fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) as an alternative that holds specific advantages over traditional approaches. The chapter introduces the method and procedure of fsQCA, including the basic principles of fuzzy sets and their coding procedures, conceptions of complex causation, the calculation

of consistency and coverage measures, as well as details regarding the analytical procedure and documentation of fsQCA results.

Chapter 5 examines the Kosovo War. Following an account of the historical and legal context, I review prevailing explanations for the conflict and identify issues that have not been sufficiently addressed with regard to democracies' participation in Operation Allied Force. The main part provides a comparative analysis of war involvement in Kosovo. While some countries fully participated in the air strikes, others restricted their contribution to support functions and explicitly ruled out combat operations. Still others did not participate at all, or provided mere logistical support to the mission. The analysis yields explanations for these different outcomes. In brief, constitutional restrictions are identified as an almost necessary condition for military abstention. Yet I also document that several countries overstepped their constitutional frameworks by joining a military operation that was out of bounds with the UN Charter, even when there was a legitimate humanitarian concern on which the action was justified. It is further shown that, contrary to the free-rider hypothesis, pathways exist under which weak states did indeed participate militarily. Concerning partisanship, evidence is found suggesting that right executives were more willing than their left counterparts to use military force even in the absence of public support.

Chapter 6 investigates democratic participation in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan. The chapter begins with a portrayal of the historical and legal background that emphasizes important differences between OEF as the military response to 9/11 and the ISAF mission that had initially been conceived as a peace support operation restricted to the Kabul area. The comparative analysis focuses on OEF, where 12 out of 30 countries participated with combat forces, while 18 countries abstained from participation or provided non-combat support. NATO countries were evenly split: half of them participated militarily, whereas the other half abstained or fulfilled limited support functions. Among other findings, the analysis reveals substantial empirical evidence in support of the participatory constraints argument, which holds that democratic governments require popular support to deploy armed forces to a conflict. This contrasts with recent arguments made in the literature. While NATO members were most-likely cases for military participation, my analysis finds a correspondence between public support and military participation, since those alliance members with low public support ended up not participating or reducing their participation to nominal contributions.

Chapter 7 analyzes democracies' military participation in the Iraq War. The initial section traces the conflict's political and legal background, which benefits from material made public in legislative inquiries and recently declassified documents. The historical account is complemented with a review of extant academic work on the Iraq War. Whereas previous studies identified partisan and institutional differences as explanations for the observed variance in war involvement, the interaction of partisanship and institutions has remained essentially unobserved. I argue that these factors should be analyzed in combination: institutional constraints become veto points only when actors hold preferences that stand in conflict with the executive. Similarly, partisan politics must be seen in the context of specific institutional frameworks that enable or constrain decision-making. The analysis of partisanship reveals distinct cross-country patterns, most pronounced among Western democracies. Contrary to prior work on parliamentary war powers, the study finds no supportive evidence for the suggested "parliamentary peace" in the context of the Iraq War. However, with regard to constitutional restrictions, it is shown that these present a structural veto against military participation. No democracy with constitutional restrictions on the scope of permissible military operations has become involved in the Iraq War.

Chapter 8 investigates cross-case patterns of war participation, based on the preceding case studies. What follows is a discussion of the theoretical contributions made in this study. I argue that the introduction of parliamentary veto rights and constitutional restrictions has enriched institutionalist approaches and that these factors should see wider usage in the future development of the democratic peace research program. I further line out the book's methodological contribution, arguing that fuzzy-set analysis provides a novel perspective that allows for the discovery of new insights based on its focus on the interaction and combination of conditions. This is complemented by an attempt to generalize beyond the observed cases, examining the recent conflicts in Libya and Syria and Western democracies' dissimilar responses to them. The closing section summarizes key findings and suggests prospects for future research. Finally, the Appendix provides replication data for the fuzzy-set analyses of the empirical chapters as well as alternative analyses for the Afghanistan study.



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