

Codebook for War Declaration Militarized Interstate Incidents (MIIs)

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This document describes the coding procedures used to identify War Declarations (WD), 1816-2014. These are Militarized Interstate Incidents (MIIs) according to Correlates of War Militarized Interstate Dispute (CoWMID) coding rules. However, we argue and show how these incidents are not “uses of force” as described by CoWMID. Instead, these events are political actions that often simply signal state preferences that only sometimes coincide with the use of force. That is why we separate these incidents from others in the CoWMID data, and we provide this dataset for those who either want to examine war declarations separately or integrate these cases with other types of state behavior like our MIE data or CoWMID.

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Citation

We ask that users of this dataset cite the following manuscript and note the version number of the data they are using in their study:

- D. M. Gibler and S. V. Miller. The Militarized Interstate Confrontation (MIC) Dataset, 1816-2014. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Forthcoming.

Rationale for a War Declaration Dataset

A unique coding rule exists within the Correlates of War (CoW) Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data that codes public proclamations of war—war declarations—as its second highest action in the second highest hostility level—the use of force. Only wars and the use of chemical, biological, and radiological weapons rate higher than these cases.¹ CoWMID has long recognized this coding decision as peculiar (Gochman and Maoz, 1984) but justified this decision by reference to a Maoz (1982) analysis that suggested war declarations are second only to war in their severity. As they write, “Though the declaration of war may be seen more as a threat than as a use of force, several scaling efforts and intuitive expert judgments suggest that this action is second only to war in terms of the level of its dispute severity.”

We disagree. Our review of the CoWMID data suggests this peculiar coding decision constitutes a categorical error. Researchers using the hostility level of the dispute on either side of their regression equation are treating cases like the Iranian declaration of war against Japan on March 1, 1945, as observationally equivalent to the 1982 Falklands conflict between the United Kingdom and Argentina. This type of false equivalence is rampant within the data. Arguing these are second only to war in their severity belies the typical case of a war declaration in the data. These cases are disproportionately not cases of active conflict. Rather, the bulk of war declarations are one-day political statements made for various political reasons. Indeed, the modal case of a war declaration in the CoWMID data is a state declaring war against an Axis power so that they could participate in the peace conference that became the United Nations. Several Latin American states declared war against all three Axis members the day of or the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in order to show solidarity with the United States (and not provoke the United States in the process) (Sadlier, 2012). In one case, Liberia declared war against the remaining Axis members expecting developmental assistance and an airport from the United States as gratitude for the declaration (Akingbade, 1985). These states did not fight and were not targeted by Axis powers, and classifying these cases as a “use of force” is both incorrect and introduces a great deal of heterogeneity within the concept of a militarized incident.

Our review of the CoWMID data identified additional problems with how these war-declarations were coded (Gibler, Miller and Little, 2016). War declarations were overwhelmingly the subset of MID cases with the highest number of errors in the CoWMID data. Indeed, every single one-day war declaration had an error for either the start date, the end date, or the outcome of the conflict. Almost half the cases had errors in each of those variables.

For these reasons, we do not include these cases in our Militarized Interstate Confrontation (MIC) data. Instead, we provide this separate dataset of war declarations that mirror CoWMID coding rules. Our data corrects the dates for these cases and also adds war declarations that CoW missed. Finally, we identify the known universe of war declarations that have occurred since 1816, including the CoWMID number during which the declaration was made (if applicable).

¹There are actually no cases of CBR use in the CoWMID data because that dataset presents only summary actions, and each use of CBR has been within the context of war, which is a higher-valued action in the CoWMID data.

Since CoWMID provides only the highest action in the dispute, and these declarations are often made within wars, CoWMID cannot be used to identify approximately half of the declarations. However, with this dataset, interested users can analyze all war declarations or merge the war declarations with other types of conflict events, such as our MIC data or even the CoWMID data. We include at the end of this coding manual some suggestions for how to integrate these data with other datasets.

Features of Our War Declaration Dataset and Implications for the Base MIC Data

The war-declaration-only disputes are identified in the data using a dichotomous variable called `onlyevent`. If this variable is positive, then the war declaration was the only CoWMID-defined incident that took place at that time. We also include in the data war declarations that were made in disputes that had other militarized actions. We provide unique numbers for each war declaration and link each case to the dispute number associated with the declaration, if CoWMID has identified the war declaration or the dispute.

As we describe in our data release manuscript for the MIC data, we no longer code the `hiact` variables of “20 - Begin Interstate War” and “21 - Join Ongoing War”. First, it makes little sense that joining an ongoing war somehow exhibits a higher-level of militarized action than beginning an interstate war. Second, since war is most often defined as fatalities, the differences in uses of force between “17 - Clash” and either of the war categories are not meaningful. CoWMID coding rules implicitly should code all disputes with 1,000 or more fatalities as wars; the fatalities threshold changes the hostility level even though the actual actions exhibit no differences. This is the equivalent of having two values for “seizures”—a bad seizure and a really bad seizure. Further, CoWMID conflates the `outcome` variable with the hostility level value for the war joiners by allowing coders to identify joiners either through hostility level or dispute outcome. We eliminate this conflation of variables by only coding the outcome of a confrontation as “Joins Ongoing War”; we eliminate the highest action of “21”. War declarations have a `hiact` of “18”, but these cases never represent a higher level of use of force which is why we separate these cases from the core MIC data. Users of the MIC or CoWMID data are always cautioned that the `hiact` variable is not ordinal, but this change does introduce more face validity in terms of what represents a highest action in the conflict. Finally, as we note in other codebooks, we use the value of “22” to identify war battles.

To summarize our changes, we have removed all war declaration incidents/events from the MIC data and provide these cases as a separate dataset. For cases in which the war declaration was the only CoWMID-labeled militarized event, these cases are no longer represented in the MIC data but are included in the war declaration data as cases with an `onlyevent` value of “1”. Fatalities can still be used to identify researcher-defined thresholds for war, whether it is the CoWMID threshold of 1,000 battle deaths or another figure the researcher may specify. Finally, for all other MIC cases in which war declarations were made but other militarized events took place, we use the highest action in the confrontation that was not a war declaration. So, for example, in MIC#3131, there was low-level guerrilla fighting between Zambia and its neighbors, and Zambia issued declarations of war against those neighbors but never followed through with increased hostilities. The declarations are included in this dataset but not in the core MIC data. The MIC data instead codes the `hiact` as clash and overall fatalities well below any common threshold for identifying wars. Sub-war confrontations with war declarations are rare in the data with only 9 cases that we could find, and these were recoded as three clashes, three attacks, and three occupations of territory.

Data Files Associated with the War Declaration Data

We provide the following files for users of the War Declarations data set. We advertise the data of interest in the list below first as the more accessible comma-separated values file (.csv), but we also have the same data available in a Stata data file format (.dta) or an R serialized data frame (.rds). Please note that we are constantly revising these data; users should report the version number of the dataset used in any research. Future releases of the data will come with a text file summarizing changes to the data.

- wardecmid-[version].csv: This is the War Declaration data (WDD) with one case per war declaration.

Variables in the War Declaration Dataset

We include the following variables in the WD dataset:

- wardecnum: The identification number of the war declaration.
- ccode1: The CoW ccode of the state declaring war.
- ccode2: The CoW ccode of the state(s) targeted in the war declaration.
- month: The month of the war declaration.
- day: The day of the war declaration.
- year: The year of the war declaration.
- onlyevent: This dummy variable is positive if the war declaration was the only militarized incident between the two states.
- cowmidnum: The CoWMID dispute number associated with the war declaration.
- micnum: The militarized interstate confrontation number associated with the war declaration. Note that there are often cases in which the war declaration constitutes a separate dispute in the CoWMID data, but the declaration is associated with World War I or World War II. We report the world war as the micnum for these declarations.
- action: This variable always takes on a value of "18" in this dataset. Note that we do not include the hostility level in the data. CoWMID codes declarations of war as constituting a "use of force", but we maintain these incidents are always political, not militarized events.
- wardeclarationtext: A text description of the war declaration incident.
- associatedwar: A text description of the war associated with the war declaration.
- version: The current version number of this dataset. We are always revising our datasets so please specify which version is being used in a particular study.

Suggestions for Using the War Declarations Dataset

This dataset provides the known universe of war declarations between 1816 and 2014. For those interested in war declarations as either the dependent or independent variable, the data can be used as is. We have also identified the cases that occurred during wars, so researchers can better model the data making process, including the political decisions that encouraged the declaration.

CoWMID treats these cases as disputes, even though these “uses of force” have no actual force attached to the declarations. Nevertheless, for those who wish to merge this data with our clean MIC data, the process is quite easy. We have provided the CoWMID dispute numbers for each war declaration. The cases with an `onlyevent` code of “o” are already represented in both the core MIC and MIE data and the CoWMID data. These cases should be dropped. The war declarations data is essentially directed-dyad, so it is just a matter of appending the `onlyevent` codes of “1” to the MIC or MIE data. The duration of these cases should be one day, per CoWMID coding rules, and the `sidea` of the dispute is `ccode1`. This dataset separation also allows the user to identify these one-day cases within a larger dataset by using a dummy variable for war declaration.

Again, we encourage users of this dataset to consider our argument that these are political, not military events. Please use this dataset when it is appropriate for the research design employed.

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