REASSESSING REBELLION

EXPLORING RECENT TRENDS IN CIVIL WAR DYNAMICS

REASSESSING REBELLION:
Exploring Recent Trends in Civil War Dynamics

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Cover photo: Members of Jihadist group Hamza Abdualmuttalib train near Aleppo on July 19, 2012. Bulent Kilic/AFP/Getty Image

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The last two decades have built a significant amount of knowledge surrounding armed conflict; both academic research and widely distributed policy reports have pointed to a general decline in armed conflict. The decline, though, has largely ended: 2016 represented one of the worst years for armed conflict since the end of the Cold War, with over 50 separate armed conflicts occurring. Though fighting decreased somewhat in 2017, the current surge in civil wars represents a stark departure from past trends. With this point in mind, it is notable that past reports often focused simply on the prevalence of armed conflict as opposed to exploring variations within armed conflict. Many reports on the trends in armed conflict also provide little in the way of concrete policy suggestions to mitigate it. While informative, past reports do little to prepare policymakers for what wars will look like in the twenty-first century.

To address this gap, OEF Research has produced a new report that explores the shifting dynamics of civil wars.

The report addresses four components of armed conflict: how wars are fought (conventional versus asymmetric), who is targeted by rebel violence, where civil war violence is occurring within countries, and how the structures of rebel organizations have evolved over the last few decades. In addition to identifying trends, this report also offers suggestions on policies to mitigate the effects of armed conflict as well as reduce the likelihood that international involvement will exacerbate ongoing insurgencies. The report points to a clear evolution in the organizational structures of rebel groups and where rebels are seeking to contest state control. This may have unintended consequences for how the international community seeks to manage future armed conflicts.

The first part of this report examines how rebel groups are prosecuting civil wars; in particular, how often insurgents are using asymmetric violence as opposed to conventional armed conflicts. The findings indicate that while asymmetric insurgencies remain the most common form of warfare, current political dynamics are making conventional civil wars easier for dissidents to mount. In the following section, this report explores the use of civilian victimization as a

Syrian rebel fighters from the 'National Liberation Front' parade following military training at an unknown location in the northern countryside of the Idlib province on September 11, 2018, in anticipation for an upcoming government forces offensive.
photo: AAREF WATAD/AFP/Getty Images

deliberate strategy of rebel groups, focusing on one-sided killings, sexual violence, and soft-target terrorist attacks. The report then covers how the location of civil war violence is changing. Civil war battles, in general, appear to be moving away from major cities, while rebel one-sided violence is starting to move closer to major cities. Finally, the report includes a look at how rebel group structures are evolving over time. In particular, the findings suggest that rebels are becoming more decentralized and more religious. The report then concludes with a summary of findings and offers broad policy suggestions for dealing with new insurgencies.

One key facet of this report is that it provides a composite sketch of what the typical insurgency will look like in the twenty-first century. Based on available data, future rebel groups will be largely decentralized and will use Islamic rhetoric and ideologies to recruit soldiers. Most likely, these rebel groups will operate far from major cities and will launch asymmetric attacks on security personnel and civilians. This depends heavily, though, on the degree of state capacity, with rebels adopting more aggressive (and violent) campaigns when the central government is exceptionally weak.

Key Findings:

1. Though insurgency is generally the most common mode of warfare, current political instability has generated opportunities for insurgents to wage more conventional wars. This has been driven largely by the collapse (or near collapse) of central governments. Equally, this political instability has spillover effects, leading to longer civil wars in more stable, contiguous countries.

2. Based on available data, most rebel groups tend to avoid widespread civilian victimization. This is particularly true for sexual violence, which only a small share of armed groups engages in. Shifting battlefield dynamics and international pressure, though, may inadvertently lead to greater targeting of civilians by rebel groups.

3. Despite the international focus on urban fighting in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, most civil war battles are moving farther away from major cities rather than moving closer. Unfortunately, recent trends in rebel violence suggest that rebels are attacking civilians closer to major cities. These trends may depend on domestic political stability and subnational geographic factors.

4. Rebel groups are becoming more decentralized and more religious, with most new rebel groups adopting Islamic ideological goals. Though there is little consensus (or research) on what may explain this move away from centralized command structures, this report points to two possible contributors: effective counter-insurgency campaigns and a growing overlap in criminal and insurgent organizations.

Summary of Policy Suggestions:

Though each section includes specific policy suggestions based on the report's findings, the authors have identified three general themes in what the international community can do to mitigate the effects of these shifting trends in civil wars.

1. Reduce the use of military interventions to ensure political stability (or foster regime change) during armed conflicts.

2. Promote greater international (specifically regional) cooperation on border security and counter-insurgency operations.

3. Empower local actors and grassroots peacebuilding initiatives to resolve ongoing disputes.

I. OVERVIEW

Introduction

The past two decades have produced significant findings on the trends and nature of armed conflict. Particularly, reports produced by the Peace Research Institute of Oslo and the Center for Systemic Peace, along with the Human Security Reports, have pointed to a general decline in armed conflict in the last two decades.[1] Equally, popular work by Steven Pinker and academic studies by John Mueller have attempted to underscore a sustained decline in violence, suggesting a more peaceful world.[2] Unfortunately, the trend in armed conflict is no longer declining.[3] The Syrian Civil War has now entered its seventh year, with little sign of a resolution.[4] The war in Yemen has produced a critical humanitarian crisis that the international community seems, given continued foreign interference, ill-equipped to mitigate.[5] Persistent fighting between the Myanmar government and Rohingya rebels has led to mass killings and forced displacement, placing severe pressure on Burma's fragile neighbors (particularly Bangladesh).[6] Unfortunately, these war-related crises only represent a handful of the current armed conflicts affecting the world's most vulnerable populations. Even if the general trend of armed conflict has begun to decline, war as a phenomenon still persists.[7] It is therefore necessary that policymakers within the international community prepare to address the changing nature of violence in the twenty-first century.

A Syrian rebel-fighter from The National Liberation Front (NLF) takes position in a trench armed with an automatic rifle on a hill in the area of Al-Eis in the southwest of Aleppo province, overlooking regime-held territory several kilometres (miles) away. Omar Hai Kadour/AFP/Getty Images

With this point in mind, past reports often focused simply on the prevalence of armed conflict as opposed to exploring variations within armed conflict. The latest Human Security Report released in 2013 offered considerable insight into the current debates surrounding whether violence is declining and the theoretical underpinnings of this argument, as well as identifying key variations in where violence continues and where peace seems to be taking hold.[8] The report, though, still focused largely on the number and severity of armed conflicts as well as introducing new findings on the lethality of non-state actor conflicts. While these findings allow policymakers to examine where fighting may persist, they do not examine more subtle variations in the way that wars are being prosecuted. Other studies have attempted to address this by relying on key findings surrounding new datasets. Of note, the biennial Peace and Conflict report often offers a wide range of findings from excellent scholars in the field. Past reports have examined trends in regime change, conflict location, ethnic exclusion, and climate change and conflict, to name just a few.[9] Still, these findings are often limited in attempting to produce a holistic picture of what armed conflict will look like in the twenty-first century. Many reports on trends in armed conflict also provide little in the way of concrete policy suggestions to mitigate armed conflict.

This report attempts to build on past findings of the Human Security Report as well as other excellent studies by offering a more detailed focus on the major features of armed conflict. As opposed to looking at general trends in the rise and fall of war, this report looks more specifically at the dynamics of armed conflicts. Focusing narrowly on civil wars, by far the modal form of armed conflict today, this report examines what historical trends can tell us about how armed non-state actors choose to prosecute their wars against the state. Though trends in government violence are also included in this project (particularly in Sections III and IV), much of this report focuses primarily on rebel groups. This allows the contributors to produce clearer policy recommendations for mitigating the effects of armed conflict. From this lens, the report examines key variations in the type of wars being fought, who is targeted as part of these wars, where these conflicts are being fought, and how rebel groups choose to structure their organizations.

In general, we find that civil wars are evolving. While general trends in using asymmetric violence as a strategy remain constant, we find that the nature of insurgencies (such as their organizational structure, ideology, and areas of operation) has evolved. In short, rebels are becoming more decentralized as well as (ostensibly) more religious in their nature. While past civil wars may have been fought largely by rebels using economic grievances to motivate a population to help them gain either control of the state or greater self-determination, now rebel groups are mobilizing more around religious issues. Though widespread attention often focuses on rebels such as the Islamic State, the Sudanese People's Liberation Front in Opposition, and Boko Haram, the current trends in civil war dynamics suggest that rebel groups such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb or the Niger Justice Movement are more indicative of what rebellion will look like in the 21st century. This is not just an African phenomenon. For instance, Thailand has been dealing with numerous Patani insurgent groups (drawn primarily from the ethnic Malay population) who have mobilized support through religious appeals.

Structure

The report focuses on four key aspects of civil war. In the following section, contributors examine trends in how rebel groups choose to prosecute their wars against the state; specifically, whether rebels wage irregular or conventional wars. There are significant barriers to rebels waging conventional armed conflicts, particularly with regard to gathering the requisite material and manpower to directly contest state control of territory. The initial findings of the section underscore this challenge, with the majority of rebels electing to pursue irregular wars (engaging in significant asymmetric violence) against the government. Still, historically there have been noticeable spikes in conventional wars waged by rebel groups (particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe). These spikes often occur after the fall of, for example, a government like the Soviet Union, and/or are centered around exceedingly fragile governments. This trend continues to emerge in the most recent armed conflicts (as of 2017), with stronger rebels launching more conventional campaigns in states that have collapsed or are particularly fragile. The continuation of conventional armed conflicts is only partly explained by weak governments. Drawing on anecdotal evidence from Iraq and Yemen, rebel groups often capitalize on abandoned military hardware to significantly increase their ability to contest state control. Our findings also demonstrate that this can have reverberating effects for conflicts waged on the periphery of failed states, as rebels in contiguous countries may utilize instability in their neighboring countries to supplement their own power.

Section III of this report offers a brief look at historic variation in the targets of rebel groups. In particular, this section examines rebel use of one-sided violence, as a global average, to explore how often rebels are engaging in one-sided violence over the course of wars. The findings demonstrate that one-sided violence throughout much of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been relatively low, but there were substantial spikes in the mid to late '90s. The report then digs into the historical context that led to this spike. Section III also similarly examines the use of sexual violence by rebel groups. Though there has been substantial international attention paid to the use of sexual violence (particularly following ISIS's occupation of parts of Iraq and Syria), most rebel groups appear to abstain from the practice. There are clear exceptions, though; the report then provides an overview of the worst perpetrators of this violence. The findings demonstrate that many rebel groups that have tended to abstain from severe human rights abuses may engage in sexual violence under extreme battlefield pressures or when experiencing internal divisions. Other rebel groups, though rare, appear to utilize sexual violence as a strategy of war. Finally, this section examines the logic and utilization of terrorism as a form of civilian victimization. In particular, this portion

leverages recent data on rebel use of terrorism to examine when and where rebels employ terrorist attacks against soft targets (i.e., civilian locations) as opposed to hard targets (e.g., police, military, etc.).

The fourth section of this report digs into the location of civil war events, in particular examining whether occurrences of conflict events are moving closer to or farther from major cities as compared to previous disputes. Surprisingly, the report demonstrates that civil war battles have been systematically moving farther and farther away from major cities in conflict-affected countries. Though recent conflicts in Libya, the Central African Republic, Syria, and Yemen would suggest that disputes have begun to draw nearer to major cities, global averages indicate that fighting has continued to press farther away from the large economic hubs of countries. The story seems a bit different, though, when we examine the locations of one-sided violence perpetrated in war. The data would suggest that, while rebel groups tend to commit violence against civilians in more rural locations, governments often vacillate between killings closer to cities and atrocities committed farther away.

Outside of battlefield dynamics, our report also examines how the organizational structure of rebel groups has evolved. In particular, Section V examines the changing ideological goals of rebel groups as well as the degree to which power is concentrated at the top of rebel organizations or whether organizations have become more decentralized. Our findings demonstrate that there has been a substantial decline in the number of rebel groups advocating for Marxist/socialist goals while there has been a steady rise in the number of religious rebel groups operating in the international system. Specifically, we notice that the rise in religiously motivated rebel groups has been driven overwhelmingly by rebel groups adopting ideological goals centered around Islam practices (with some increase in Christian and Hindu insurgencies). As discussed in the section, these findings may have very clear implications for the ability of international actors to effectively negotiate with insurgencies. The trends in rebel group structure also demonstrate that there has been a marked decline in the degree of centralization in the command structures of most insurgencies; rebel groups have become much more decentralized. We explore two possible drivers of this shift; specifically, the criminal–rebellion nexus as well as more brutal counter-insurgency operations (i.e., decapitations of rebel groups).

Finally, our report ends with a review of the key findings as well as a summation of the key policy recommendations from each section. Drawing on the recent trends, our report provides a composite image of what rebel groups will likely resemble going forward in the twenty-first century. Given this picture, the report distills common themes in the policy recommendations to offer three broad suggestions for the international community to employ in order to mitigate the effects of armed conflicts. Specifically, this report suggests reducing the use of military interventions into ongoing armed conflicts, generating greater security cooperation for states near conflict-affected countries, and promoting more grassroots peacebuilding initiatives as compared to national-level peacebuilding efforts.

II. MODES OF WARFARE

Introduction

Though this report generally finds that civil wars have evolved, one persistent feature of civil wars is the ubiquity of asymmetric violence. In other words, the vast majority of rebels engage in irregular warfare as a way to achieve their goals, as opposed to engaging in conventional armed conflicts. This section digs into this general trend, exploring when and where rebel groups diverge from this mode of warfare. Though most conflicts are still irregular, there are noticeable spikes in when rebels shift to more conventional armed conflicts. Specifically, as the central government begins to collapse (or is significantly weakened), rebels may elect to pursue more conventional wars. This may also have reverberating consequences for other conflicts in neighboring countries.

One key feature of intrastate armed conflicts are the modes of warfare chosen by rebels and the government. In general, modes of warfare refer to how wars are prosecuted. For instance, rebel groups may attempt to marshal their resources and wage

conventional armed conflicts, where dissidents tend to launch large, overt attacks on government positions with the intention of taking and holding territory. Rebels may also elect to fight asymmetric armed conflicts, where, given a dearth of resources, insurgents often take shelter amongst a civilian population and choose to engage in bombings, ambushes, or surprise assaults on government positions. While there is certainly a considerable degree of overlap in civil wars where some groups engage in bombings as well as large, overt attacks on government positions, the scholarship on civil wars has largely disaggregated the modes of warfare into two distinct camps: irregular and conventional armed conflict.

As noted by Balcells and Kalyvas, the modes (or technologies) of rebellion often play a key role in shaping the course of civil wars.[10] While conventional civil wars substantially increase the lethality of conflicts (more men and women are killed on the battlefield), irregular wars generally last much longer. These prolonged guerilla insurgencies often exacerbate the tactics of the incumbent government, generating significant human rights violations perpetrated by the state as they attempt to "drain the sea."[11] Equally, there is reason to assume that conventional armed conflicts often generate less incentive for rebels to respect human rights as insurgents rely less on civilians for protection and supplies.[12]

These evolving battlefield dynamics may also play a significant role in how these conflicts terminate. As noted by Balcells and Kalyvas, conventional civil wars increase the likelihood that rebels will be victorious in their war against the state.[13] As opposed to rural insurgencies where dissidents simply seek to persevere in order to demonstrate their capacity to undermine state control, conventional armed conflicts often center on the willingness of rebel groups to contest state control in different parts of the country.[14] Rebels often gain favorable terms as they are capable of pushing closer to economic centers, putting pressure on the state to seek a settlement.[15] Rebels, though, are typically less willing to agree to settlements as it becomes clear that they will be able defeat the government on the battlefield.[16] On the other hand, it is often very difficult for rebel groups to wage conventional civil wars. Outside of the fact that dissidents face substantial collective action problems,[17] acquiring the manpower, weapons, and vehicles necessary to contest state control presents a significant barrier to engaging in this mode of warfare. Outside of the material constraints, rebel groups are often limited in their ability to maintain adequate supply lines, stymieing their efforts to contest state control in different parts of the country.[18]

When launched, though, conventional armed conflicts often have the potential to generate significant damage to national infrastructure and cities and promote massive displacement. As opposed to irregular armed conflicts where insurgents tend to be lightly armed, conventional armed conflicts generally include the use of heavy weapons (such as large artillery) by both sides. Salient historical examples such as the Biafran war for independence or the Lebanese civil war underscore the significant human suffering that may emerge as part of large campaigns. Recent anecdotes reinforce that these conflicts are not just relics of the Cold War, though. For instance, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (or AFDL) war against the government of Zaire was quick, but brutal. ISIS had for years launched massive attacks on cities in both Syria and Iraq, generating massive casualties and critical damage to national infrastructure. What remains unclear, though, is what proportion of past armed conflicts have been fought as conventional as opposed to irregular armed conflicts. It is therefore important to examine the current trends in conventional and irregular armed conflicts.

Data and Trends

To examine the historical trends in the modes of warfare for intrastate conflicts, we rely largely on data from the Technologies of Rebellion dataset.[19] Rebellions within the dataset are categorized as irregular, conventional, and symmetrical non-conventional (or SNC). The last category refers to armed conflicts in which both the government and the rebel group lack the large weapons or military infrastructure to wage a conventional armed conflict. The distinction between conventional conflicts and SNCs is less about strategy and more about the military capacity of both the rebels and the government. Attacks, as in conventional armed conflicts, are often overt, with the intention of capturing and holding territory. This stands in contrast to irregular conflicts, where insurgents often rely on ambushes or bombings as a way to inflict costs on the central government. Given this point, we count Balcells and Kalyvas's SNC armed conflicts as conventional armed conflicts.

The Technologies of Rebellion dataset also provides two different sample populations for us to draw on in our analysis. Specifically, the dataset builds first on Sambanis's dataset that includes information on all civil wars that reached at least 1,000 battle-related deaths (the typical threshold for wars as compared to small insurgencies).[20] Balcells and Kalyvas also include data on smaller conflicts, drawing on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo (UCDP/PRIO) Armed Conflict dataset.[21] Specifically, they have included conflicts that experienced at least 100 battle-related deaths. This provides a comparison of major armed conflicts (with over 1,000 battle deaths) as well as smaller insurgencies. It should be noted that each dataset was produced with a different method for data collection, so sample populations may vary.

As an additional metric for irregular warfare, we look at the use of terrorism by rebel groups, drawing on the ACD2GTD dataset.[22] As noted by much of the previous literature on the use of terrorism, it is often a tool of the weak.[23] Rebel groups often engage in this form of asymmetric warfare to signal resolve, impose costs on the government, and generate attention for their cause.[24] The ACD2GTD dataset provides a useful sample population, as researchers have been able to attribute terrorist attacks specifically to rebel groups challenging state control through armed violence as opposed to other non-state organizations. This allows us to look specifically at the strategic use of asymmetric violence by rebel groups as part of their war effort. The dataset provides a count of terrorist attacks perpetrated by rebel groups for each year in which the conflict is ongoing. This poses a slight problem for our analysis when looking at global trends in rebel violence. An annual count of all terrorist attacks perpetrated by rebel groups may be biased by the significant use of terrorism by a few rebel groups. To address this, we rely on the average use of terrorism by all rebel groups that are active within a given year. The annual number of active rebel groups are drawn from the UCDP Conflict Termination dataset.[25] For this initial section, terrorism perpetrated by rebels is examined largely in the context of civil war strategies (i.e., asymmetric versus conventional). A more detailed discussion of the logic behind terrorism as well as a closer look at the distinction between hard and soft targets is included in the following section of this report.

A Somalia police officer investigates the scene of a suicide bomb attack in the capital, Mogadishu on October 1, 2018 by Al-Shabaab Islamists.
Photo: Abdi Hussein Farah/AFP/Getty Images

Conventional vs. Irregular Wars: General Trends

**FIGURE 2.1:** MODES OF WAREFARE (TR DATASET) (CONFLICTS WITH 1000 BATTLE DEATHS)
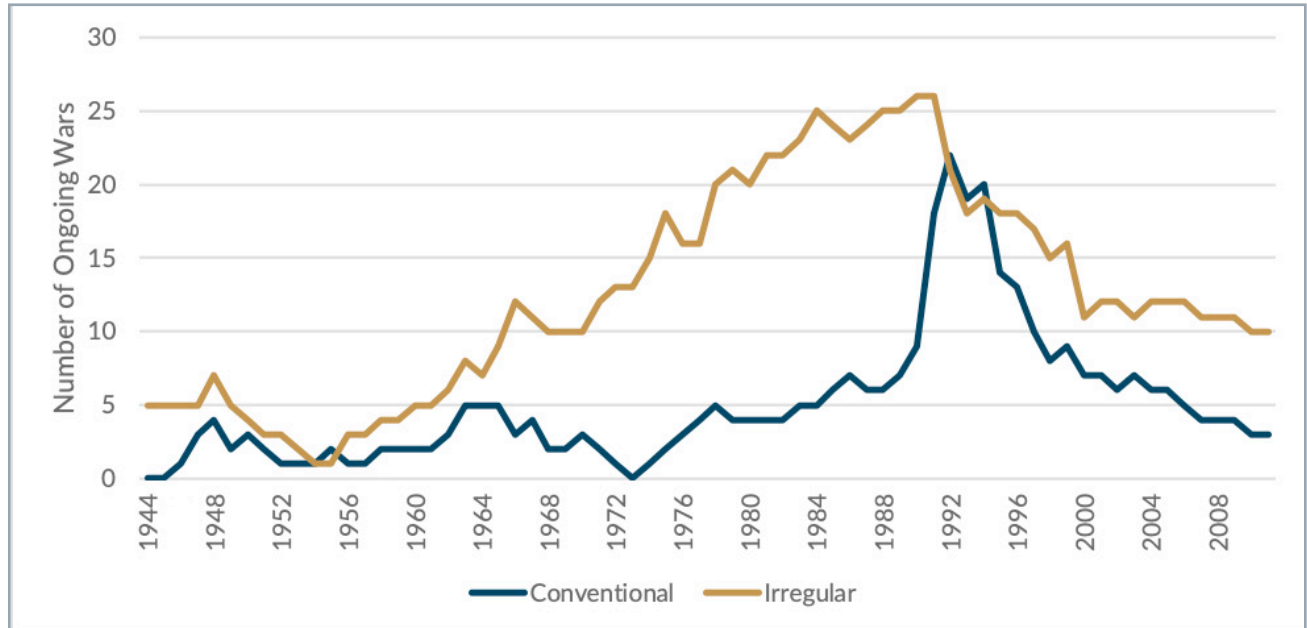
Data drawn from the Technologies of Rebellion dataset.

The first dataset examines the historic trends in conventional and irregular armed conflicts using the Technologies of Rebellion (TR) dataset for all conflicts that reached 1,000 or more battle-related deaths.a As demonstrated by the results, irregular insurgencies represent the majority of armed conflicts fought globally. This finding should be unsurprising given the significant barriers for rebels seeking to wage conventional armed conflicts. This trend, though, deviates from 1992 through 1994, when conventional armed conflicts surged amidst a decline in irregular insurgencies. Specifically, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, conventional armed conflicts became the modal form of warfare while asymmetric insurgencies continued to decline from their peak in 1989.

These results differ to some extent when we examine the trends for smaller insurgencies. Drawing on a version of the TR dataset that includes all conflicts that reach 100 battle-related deaths, the trends appear to shift. While irregular modes of warfare for major civil wars have been declining steadily for years, Figure 2.2 demonstrates that small insurgencies have largely remained stagnant (hovering between 15 and 20 ongoing insurgencies each year since 1982). The trends suggest that these small insurgencies often have staying power, especially where governments may have little incentive (or few resources) to pursue these smaller rebel groups when they do not pose a significant risk to the central government. Organizations such as the Oromo Liberation Front in Ethiopia may still claim to contest Ethiopia's sovereignty over the Oromo people, but as an insurgency they have only generated roughly 25 battle-related deaths each year since 2000. These organizations persist, but do not pose an immediate threat to the central government, allowing them to continue operating with little risk of state sanctioning.

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a   Counts within the Sambanis (2004) dataset are based on civil war country-year counts as opposed to conflict or dyad year counts.

FIGURE 2.2: MODES OF WARFARE (PRIO DATASET)
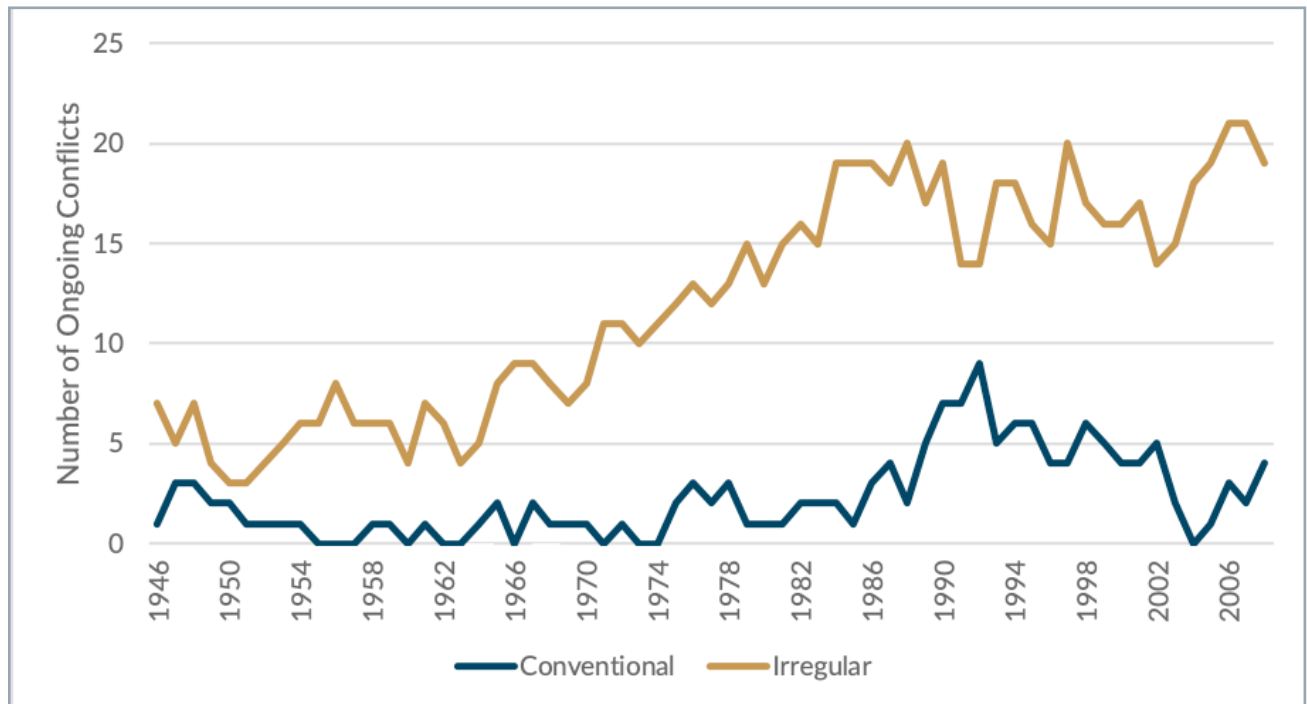
Data drawn from the Technologies of Rebellion dataset.

While the trends support the general notion that irregular warfare tends to be the modal form of conflict for many rebellions, a more interesting question is when are rebel groups engaging in more conventional armed conflicts? As noted, conventional armed conflicts often generate significantly greater casualties, with the propensity for destruction being much greater as rebels assume more aggressive tactics.

To examine this further, we look at both regional and temporal variation in the use of conventional and irregular warfare. For consistency, we rely primarily on the updated version of Sambanis's (2004) sample of civil wars used by the TR dataset. Looking at the data, conventional armed conflicts appear to be largely fought in Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. In each region, conventional armed conflicts spiked following the end of the Cold War, underscoring the significant rise in conventional armed conflicts fought globally since 1989. Looking first at African civil wars, the results show a somewhat even distribution of irregular and conventional armed conflicts (with slightly more irregular armed conflicts). Since 1998, conventional modes of warfare made up the majority of major civil wars being fought in sub-Saharan Africa until 2006.

FIGURE 2.3: AFRICAN WARS (1000 BATTLE DEATHS)
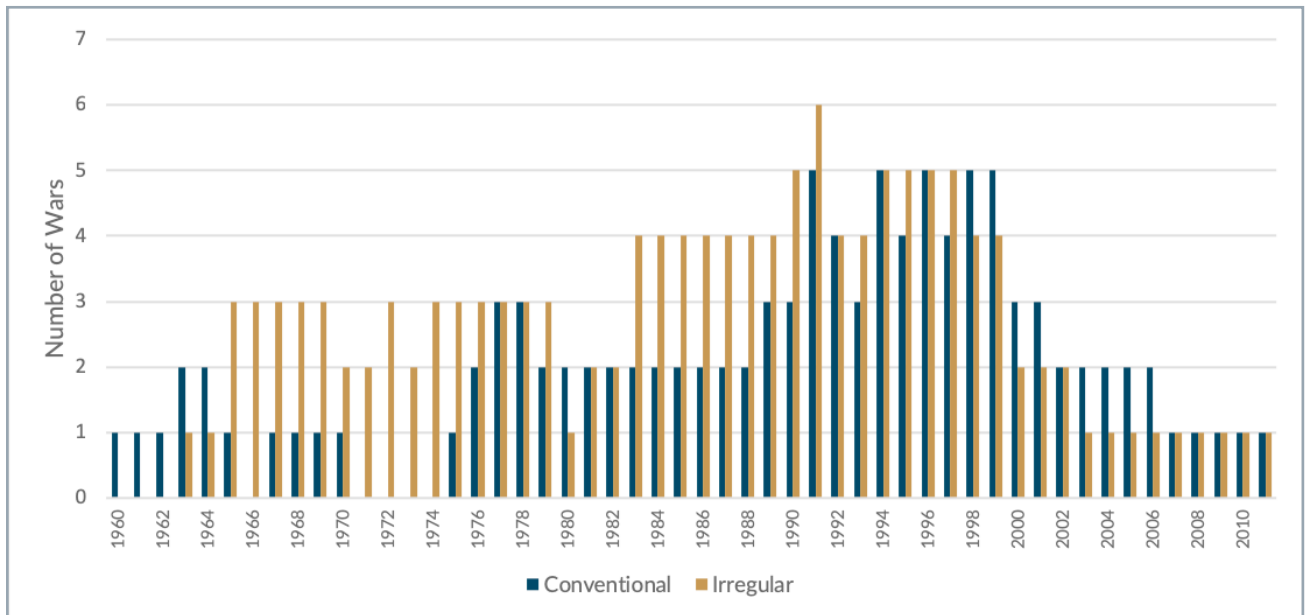
Data drawn from the Technologies of Rebellion dataset..

FIGURE 2.4: EASTERN EUROPEAN WARS (100 BATTLE DEATHS)
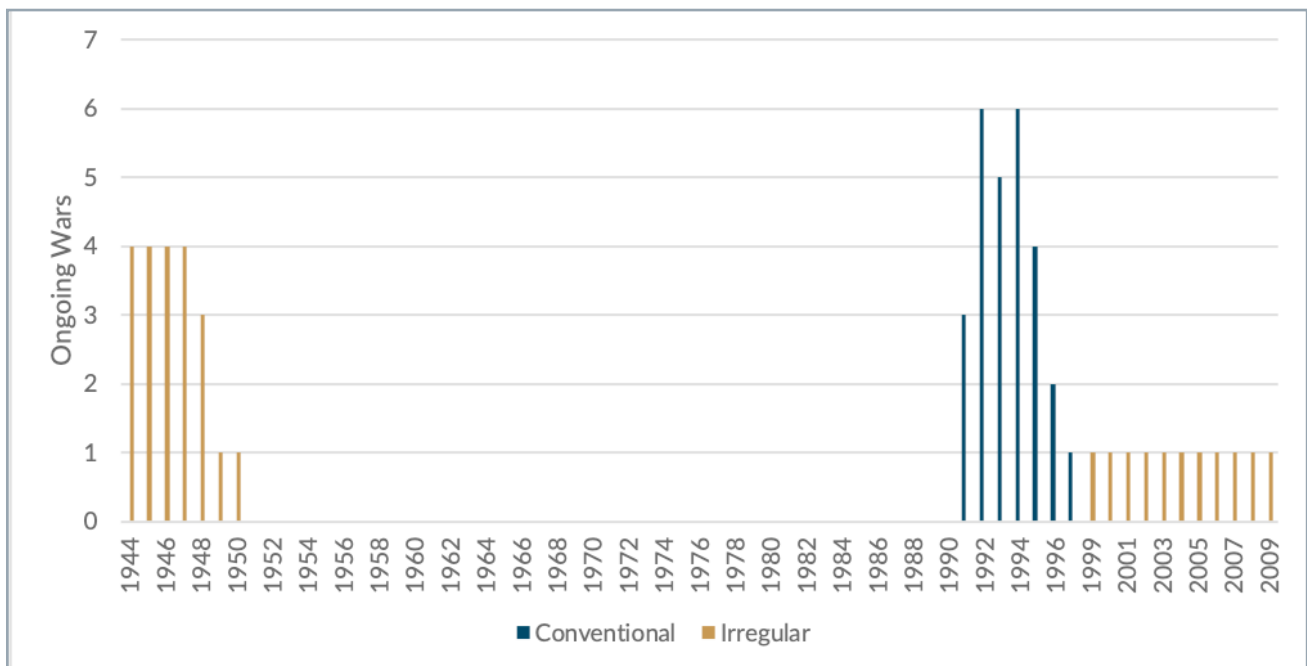
Data drawn from the Technologies of Rebellion dataset.

Similar to sub-Saharan Africa, conventional civil wars expanded significantly in Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War (with no wars fought from 1951 through 1989). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a substantial jump in the number of conventional armed conflicts. From 1991 through 1997, conventional armed conflicts remained the only mode of warfare fought in Eastern Europe. This changed following the start of the Chechen insurgencies in Russia, as rebels sought independence through more asymmetric political violence.

The end of the Cold War also led to a slight jump in the number of conventional civil wars fought in Asia (though to a much smaller degree as compared to sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe). As with many other parts of the globe, most conflicts fought throughout Asia have been irregular conflicts, where governments are faced with insurgencies rather than challenges from well-armed dissidents. To further demonstrate this point, conventional armed conflicts have been exceedingly rare in other parts of the globe (for instance, almost all of Latin American intrastate conflicts have been irregular insurgencies). Taken together, a key trend in the TR dataset on the rise and fall of conventional armed conflicts is that the collapse of the Soviet Union coincided with a rise in the number of global conventional intrastate armed conflicts. This trend also follows other prominent state failures around that time, primarily the collapse of governments in Somalia and Liberia as well as significant political upheaval in the Congo River basin.

FIGURE 2.5: ASIAN WARS (1000 BATTLE DEATHS)
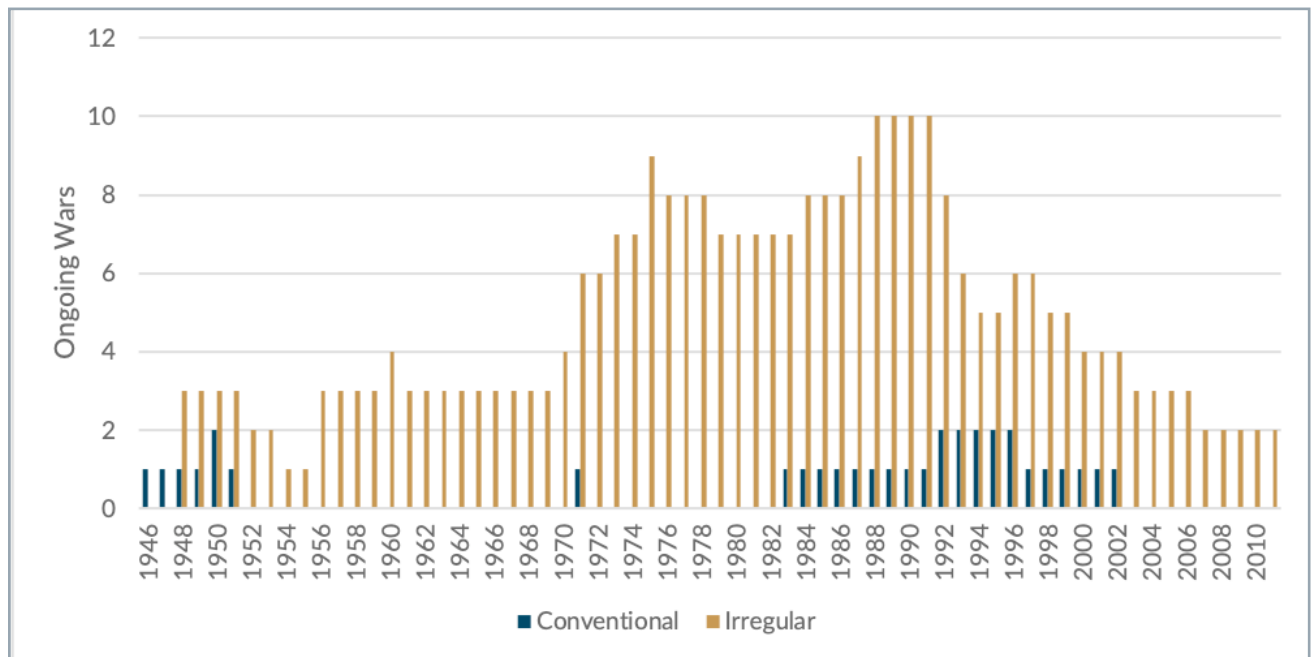
Data drawn from the Technologies of Rebellion dataset.

To further explore this trend, we rely on the use of terrorism in civil war as a proxy for the modes of warfare chosen by rebel groups. Figure 2.6 includes data on the use of terrorism in civil wars. Specifically, the graph charts the average use of terrorism by rebel groups as opposed to total counts of terrorist attacks perpetrated by rebel groups. This helps offset the effects of outlier rebel groups driving up annual counts. In order to ensure that shifts in trends are not driven by declining conflict more generally, the figure also includes a count of the number of active rebel groups globally. As underscored in the graph, terrorism as a weapon of war grew steadily from 1977 on, and reached a peak shortly after the end of the Cold War (1991). Since the end of the Cold War, terrorist attacks by

rebel groups have declined significantly, reaching a low point of an average of five terrorist attacks per rebel group in 1998. Though terrorism began to become slightly more common after that end point, it was not until 2004 (or shortly after the invasion of Iraq) that terrorist attacks by rebel groups began to rise significantly. A puzzle in the use of asymmetric political violence as a weapon of war is why terrorism declined in 1992, and what explains the sudden spike since 2004?

FIGURE 2.6: TERRORISM PERPETRATED DURING CIVIL WARS
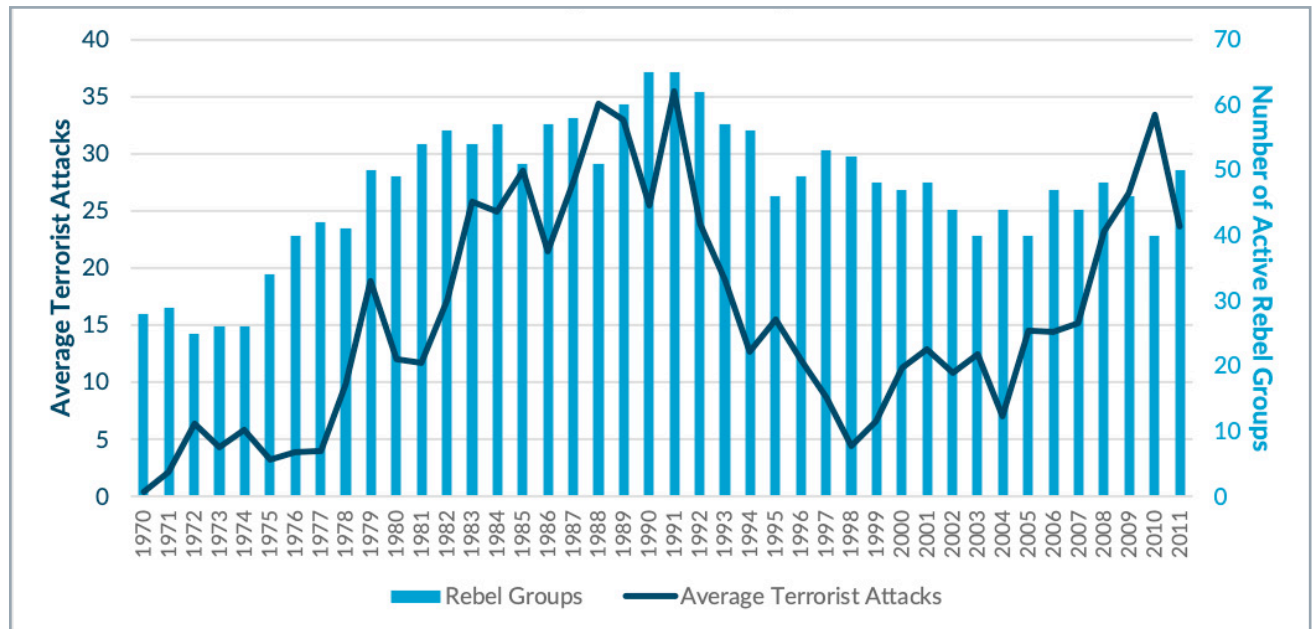
Data drawn from the ACD2GTD dataset.

The spikes in terrorism in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s can be attributed, in part, to terrorist violence being pursued by Latin American and European rebel groups. As demonstrated by Figures 2.7 and 2.8, terrorism as a weapon of war was quite common in civil wars throughout Latin America and Western Europe. Rebel groups such as the FMLN in El Salvador were often prolific in their use of terrorist violence (particularly against hard targets like army convoys or police stations).[26] The decline in terrorism following 1992 can be explained, in part, by the termination of conflicts such as Salvadoran civil war as well as the Provisional Irish Republican Army's (PIRA or IRA) irredentist campaign. The significant use of terrorism by Latin American rebel groups is intuitive, as terrorist violence is often a weapon of the weak, where weaker rebel groups use asymmetric violence against stronger opponents.[27] Throughout this time period in Central and South America, the United States funneled millions of dollars to military regimes intent on stamping out communism. Such military spending generates a clear power imbalance between rebels and the government, incentivizing insurgents to use terrorist violence as a way to signal resolve and impose costs on the government.

FIGURE 2.7: LATIN AMERICAN INSURGENCIES
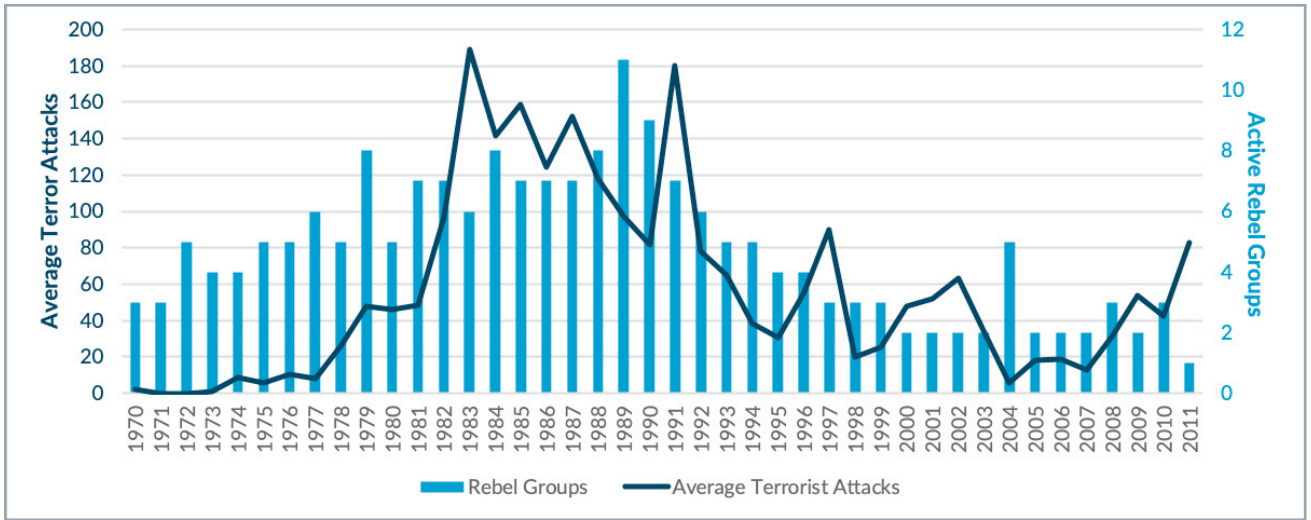
Data drawn from the ACD2GTD dataset.

FIGURE 2.8: WESTERN INSURGENCIES
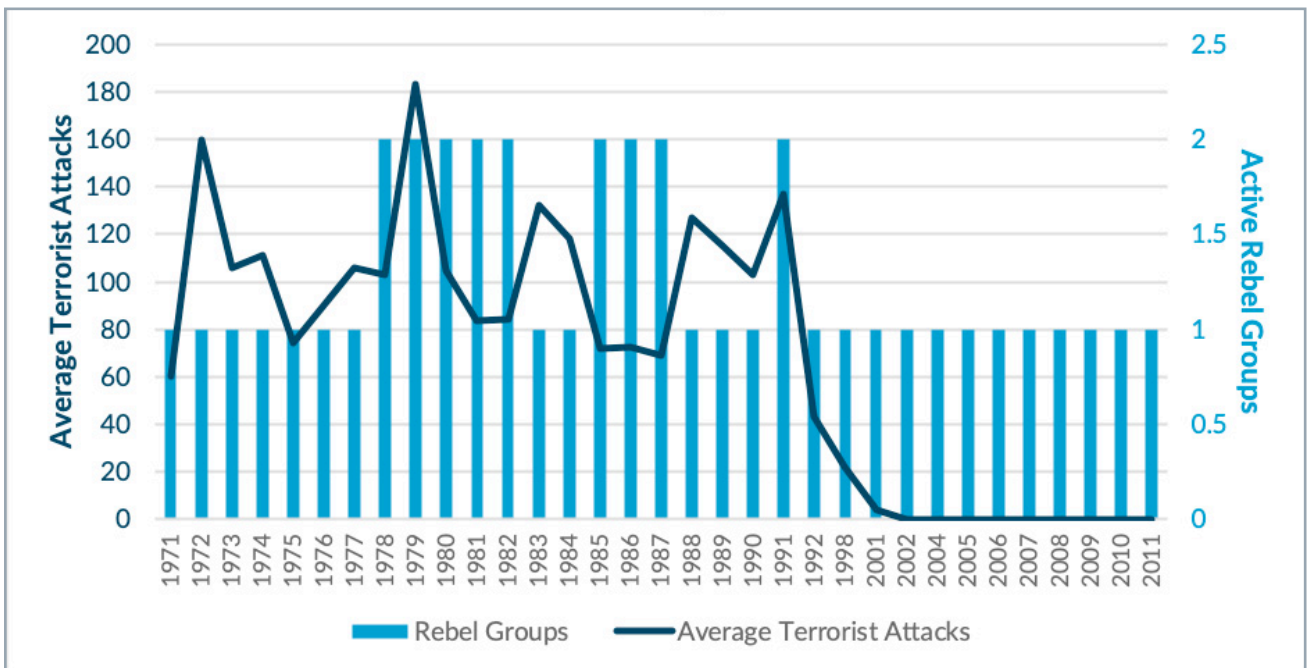
Data drawn from the ACD2GTD dataset.

Similarly, rebel groups operating in Western Europe, such as ETA or the IRA, engaged in substantial terrorism over the course of their insurgencies. Though only the IRA succeeded in pressuring their opponents to the negotiating table, terrorism was a common feature of these intrastate disputes. Again, these findings fit with the general trend indicating that weaker rebel groups often resort to terrorism as a way to pressure the state into entering into negotiations. Terrorists operating in Western Europe also benefited from significant media coverage of terrorist attacks. Rebel groups often seek to use terrorist violence when they can use media coverage of attacks to reiterate their goals to the broader population.[28] As noted by Jenkins, "Terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead."[29]

FIGURE 2.9: AFRICAN INSURGENCIES
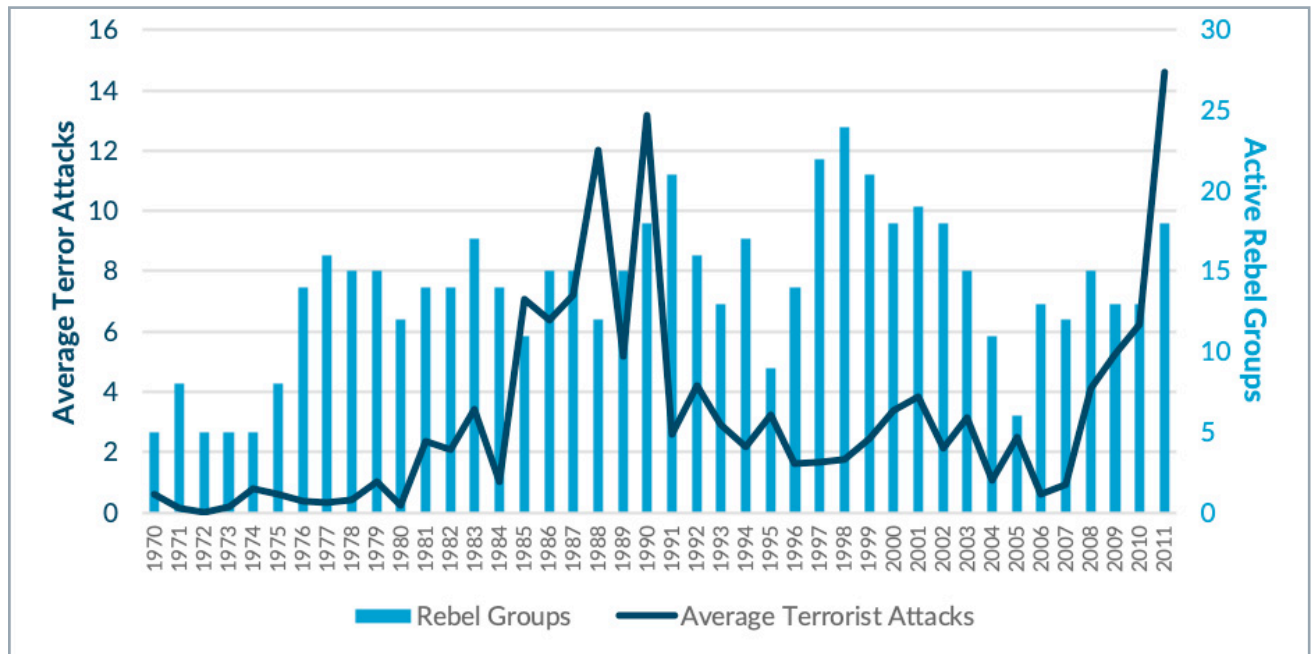
Data drawn from the ACD2GTD dataset.

Trends in terrorism look rather different in other parts of the globe. As opposed to Latin American civil wars, where the incumbent government was generally quite strong, African insurgencies were often waged against weaker regimes. There are exceptions, of course. During the Rhodesian civil war, ZAPU and ZANU faced a relatively strong incumbent government, pushing ZANU to use greater terrorism in an effort to pressure the white minority government into settling the dispute diplomatically.[30] Still, regimes during this era were often relatively fragile, allowing rebel groups to wage more conventional wars. This is reflected in the smaller number of terrorist attacks in sub-Saharan Africa as compared to those in insurgencies in Latin America and Western Europe. In short, data on the use of terrorism by rebel groups tracks well with the emergence of conventional armed conflicts waged globally. One area where these trends do not match well is within Asia. Though the preponderance of intrastate conflicts were irregular wars, terrorism remains a tool relatively underutilized by Asian insurgencies. This may be, in part, the result of Asian insurgencies being pitted against more autocratic governments. As noted by past work on terrorism, dissidents often pursue this form of violence as a way to attract attention from the press.[31] Governments that do not allow a free (or partly free) press to cover attacks are less likely to experience terrorist attacks as compared to other forms of irregular warfare (such as ambushes on government forces). Though, as with African insurgencies, there has been a steady climb in the use of terrorism by these rebel groups since the advent of the twenty-first century, underscoring a change in strategies.

FIGURE 2.10: ASIAN INSURGENCIES
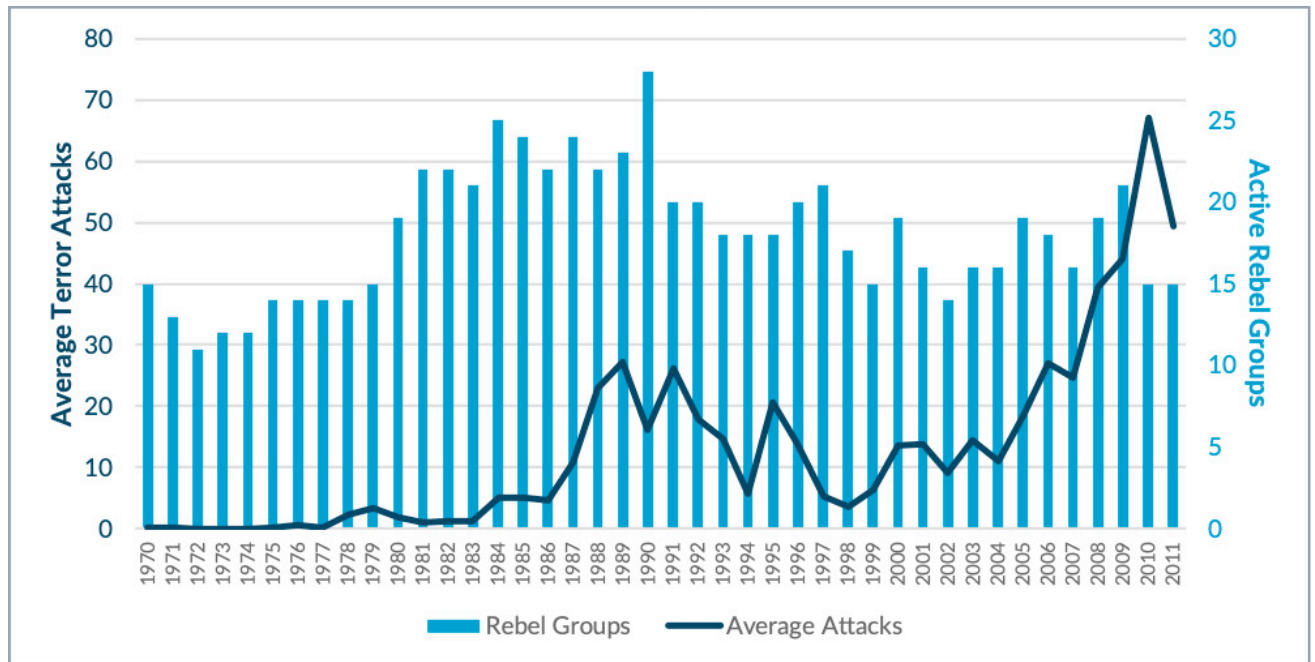
Data drawn from the ACD2GTD dataset.

Contemporary Wars

As noted, while these findings represent a broad look at conflict throughout much of the twentieth and some of the twenty-first century, they do not include many of the most recent conflicts. To address this, we include a breakdown of all intrastate conflicts from 2017 that have been identified by the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict dataset (ACD). Table 2.1 includes a list of countries affected by conflict and the rebel groups involved in the conflict, as well as the primary mode of warfare employed by rebels. Data on rebel capacity and tactics that were used to generate the mode of conflict are drawn from recent reports by organizations such as the International Crisis Group and the Small Arms Survey, as well as histories included in the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia.[32]

The table includes five different descriptions of modes of warfare. Conventional describes armed conflicts where rebels launch large, overt attacks on government positions, use heavy weapons, and/or do not attempt to blend into the civilian population as part of their war effort. Conventional/Mixed indicates that the conflict is largely fought along conventional lines but includes some elements of irregular warfare (such as terrorist bombings and sheltering among the civilian population). Conventional (Formerly an Insurgency) describes armed conflicts where rebels began the war using asymmetric violence but have transitioned (as of at least 2017) to conventional modes of warfare. Insurgency describes rebels who operate clandestinely among the civilian population, engage in asymmetric violence, and typically avoid large, overt assaults on government positions. Insurgency (Formerly Conventional) describes rebel groups that initially began their insurgency seeking to wage conventional armed conflicts but have been forced to operate clandestinely. This is largely due to dissidents suffering significant losses waging conventional attacks and thus having to reformulate their stratagem to ensure their survival.

TABLE 2.1: ONGOING INTRASTATE CONFLICTS, 2017

COUNTRY	REBEL GROUPS	MODES OF WARFARE
South Sudan*	SPLM-IO	Conventional/Mixed
Nigeria	Boko Haram	Insurgency
Syria*	ISIS Free Syrian Army YPG Opposition Factions	Conventional/Mixed
Iraq	ISIS	Insurgency (Formerly Conventional)
Yemen*	Houthi Rebels	Conventional (Formerly an Insurgency)
Libya*	Opposition Factions	Conventional
Myanmar	ARSA KIO MNDAA	Insurgency
Philippines	ASG ISIS	Insurgency
Somalia*	Al Shabaab	Conventional/Mixed
Cameroon	Boko Haram	Insurgency (Formerly Conventional)
Egypt	Harakit Sawa'id Misr Jama'at Ansar al-Islam ISIS	Insurgency
Democratic Republic of Congo*	CMC CNPSC (Yakutumba) Kamuina Nsapu M23 MNR BDK	Conventional/Mixed

India	Kashmir UNLFW Maoist	Insurgency
Turkey	PKK	Insurgency
Algeria	AQIM	Insurgency
Angola	FLEC-FAC	Insurgency
Azerbaijan	Republic of Artsakh	Conventional
Ukraine	DPR LPR	Conventional
Afghanistan*	Taliban ISIS	Insurgency
Mali	AQIM JNIM	Insurgency (Formerly Conventional)
Thailand	Patani Insurgents	Insurgency
Pakistan	TTP ISIS	Insurgency
Niger	ISIS	Insurgency
Bangladesh	ISIS	Insurgency
Lebanon	ISIS	Insurgency
Iran	ISIS	Insurgency
Sudan	SARC SRF	Insurgency
Kenya	Al Shabaab	Insurgency

*Indicates country is exceedingly fragile and is at or near a collapse of central government

As demonstrated by the breakdown of rebel groups, almost 75 percent of current conflicts (20 of the 28) are insurgencies. While clearly the lion's share, it should not be overlooked that over 25 percent of current conflicts were waged through conventional modes. Certain conflicts such as the Ukrainian civil war are clearly the product of outside states (such as Russia) providing substantial military support and manpower to rebels to allow them to wage larger campaigns. Still, the majority of these conflicts (such as the wars in Yemen, South Sudan, and Syria) are largely organic, and their support is as much tied to disaffected domestic communities as it is from foreign patrons (though external support is intimately tied to the war effort). Many of the small insurgencies (45 percent) involve subsidiaries of the Islamic State. Specifically, they are dissident cells that claim allegiance to the Islamic State and are pursuing asymmetric violence against the incumbent government in their home country. The significant transnational component of current armed conflicts provides a troubling new trend that should be explored in future research.

Another disturbing trend is the fact that 75 percent of the conventional armed conflicts are occurring in states where the central government has collapsed or is severely restricted. Given the significant issues of dual sovereignty within these beleaguered states (far beyond simply the presence of rival armed groups), these countries, for lack of a better term, are failed states. This is likely one reason why conventional modes of warfare are possible, as the state lacks the capacity to sanction insurgents. But the relationship between collapsing states and the rise of more conventional forms of warfare goes well beyond insurgents' freedom of movement. As government forces abandon cities and territories, they often leave behind military hardware that is utilized by rebel groups. This was a common feature of the Islamic State's campaign across Northwest Iraq.[33] Similarly, as Houthi Rebels captured the Yemeni capital of Sana'a, rebels took control of much of the country's armory of small and medium arms.[34] As states collapse during civil wars, their military hardware often leaks from national armories into the hands of non-state actors. This may explain, in part, why the dissolution of the Soviet Union coincided with a rise in conventional armed conflicts throughout the globe.

State collapse should not only have tangible effects on the conflicts that occur within their borders, but neighboring disputes should also experience the reverberations of failed governments. As states flirt with near-collapse, they produce opportunities for transnational violent non-state actors to expand their influence. Rebel groups in neighboring states should be able to smuggle both weapons and illicit goods for sale, as well as relocate their forces to these areas to avoid sanction. These factors allow rebel groups to persevere over the course of the conflict and thereby generate more intractable disputes. To investigate this claim further, we examine how proximity to failed states affects the duration of civil wars in Africa. As civil war duration is a key indicator for intractability, those conflicts that are fought on the periphery of failed states should last longer.

Data for this analysis are drawn from the UCDP Conflict Termination dataset.[35] The sample population includes all intrastate conflicts that experienced 25 or more battle-related deaths. Failed states are coded using the UCDP Conflict Termination dataset as well as the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia. In order to establish a high bar for state collapse, we only include states that have had a recent regime change as a result of the armed conflict and where there is no subsequent return to order following a settlement or a rebel victory. Museveni's 1986 rebel victory in the Ugandan civil war, for instance, would not qualify given his quick restoration of order. On the other hand, Barre's fall from power in Somalia in 1991 and Gadhafi's violent overthrow in 2011 both meet the criteria given the quick descension into political instability following the overthrow. Periods of state failure end when the conflict terminates.

To account for rebel group characteristics and temporal variation, the unit of analysis is the civil war dyad year. The models include controls for third-party interventions, rebel group strength,[36] lootable goods,[37] regime type,[38] conflict intensity,[39] and national wealth,[40] as well as dispute controls for whether the conflict was based on self-determination goals[41] or a religious dispute.[42] All models are estimated using a Cox Proportional Hazard model with robust standard errors. Additionally, no violations of the proportional hazard assumption were found.

FIGURE 2.11: LIKELIHOOD OF CIVIL WAR TERMINATION
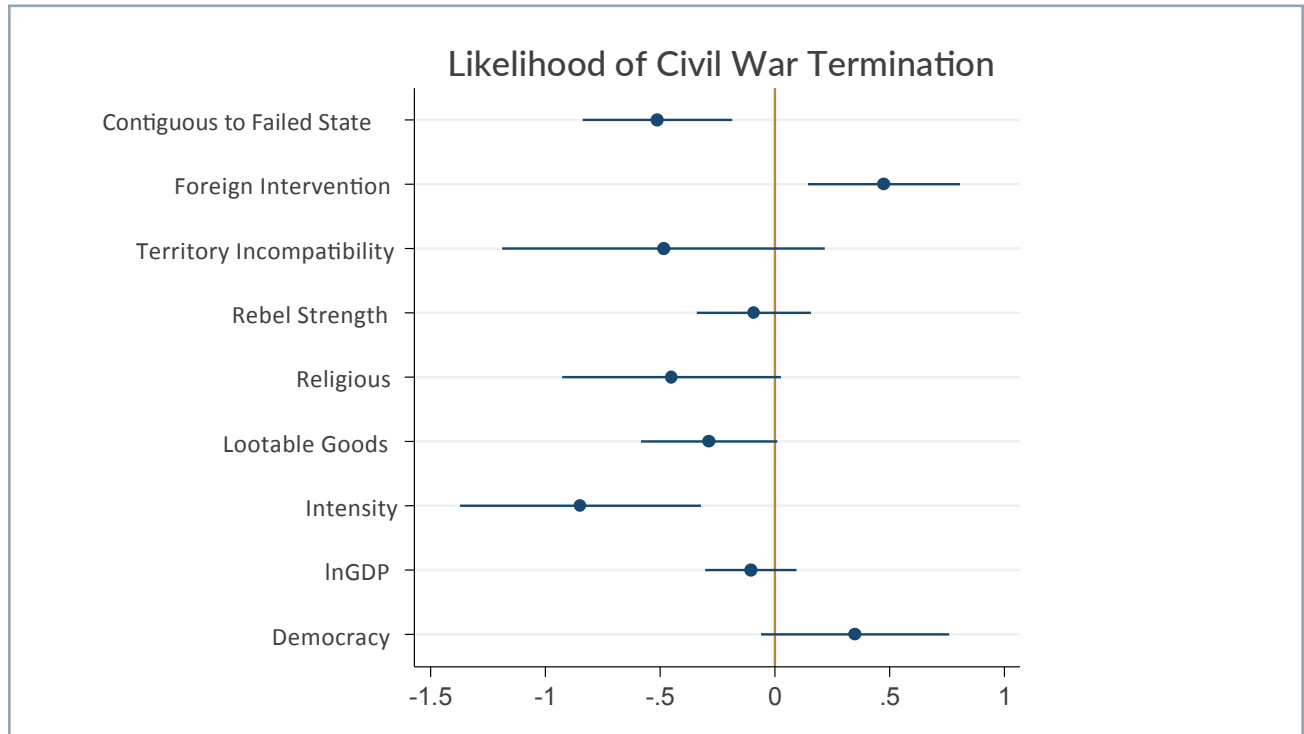
Coefficient plots from a Cox Proportional Hazard model.

The results from the Cox model show a significant and negative relationship between contiguity to failed states and civil war termination. In other words, conflicts are much less likely to end when they are fought near a failed state. As posited earlier, failed states may have reverberating effects on conflicts fought nearby. Rebels are likely able to smuggle weapons or purchase and/or steal weapons lost within the collapsed state. Military equipment allows weaker rebel organizations to hold off government advances or even take and hold territory they would not normally be able to without access to artillery or armored personnel carriers. These results remain robust when we account for a number of confounding factors such as rebel group strength, access to lootable goods, or the presence of external interventions into the conflict.

FIGURE 2.12: SURVIVAL CURVES (DURATION OF CIVIL WARS)
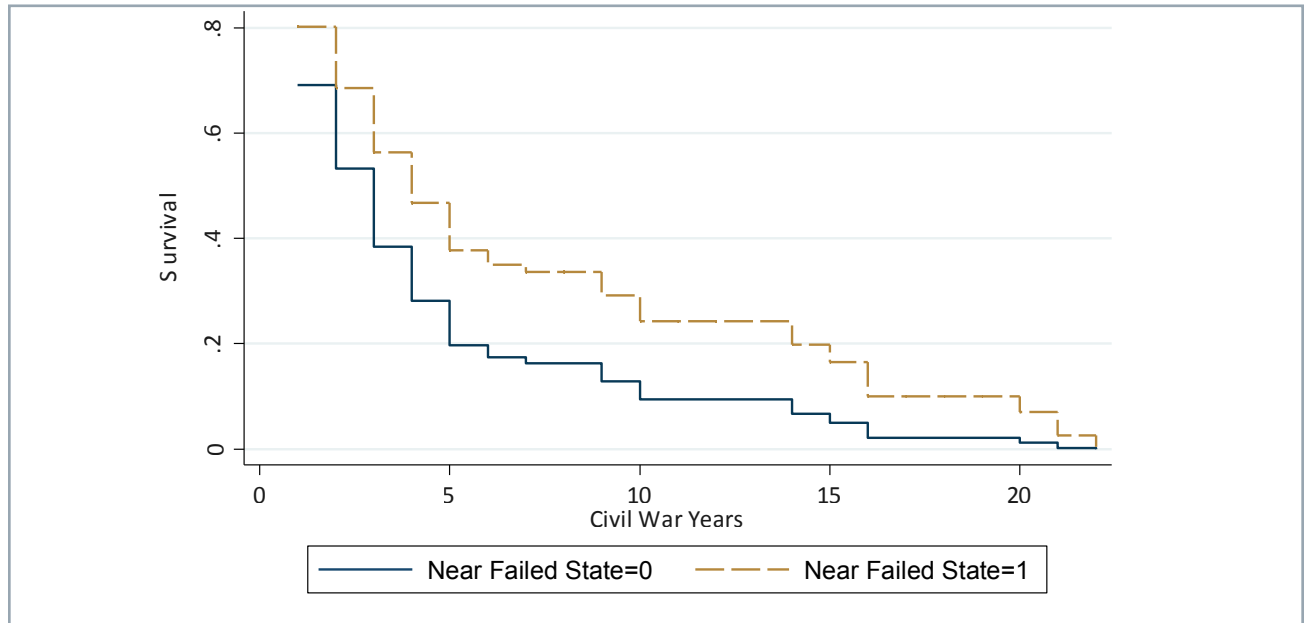
Graphed survival curves from a Cox Proportional Hazard model.

To further illustrate this point, we chart the expected survival of civil wars varying whether or not rebels are fighting near a failed state. Survival curves graph the predicted lifespan of armed conflicts, with steeper curves indicating a reduction in the duration of armed conflicts. As illustrated by the graph, wars fought near failed states have a much longer lifespan than conflicts that are not waged next to collapsed regimes. Furthermore, our data suggest that conflicts that are fought on the periphery of collapsed states are 40 percent less likely to terminate as compared to conflicts that are not fought near failed states. In practical terms, these results suggest that ongoing insurgencies in Turkey, Kenya, and Egypt are likely to continue and persist for a number of years. As long as governments are weak or absent in Libya, Syria, and Somalia, these states will provide the necessary shelter, smuggling routes, and market for arms that insurgents can rely on to prolong their insurgencies.

Conclusions

This section focuses on one element of civil war dynamics, specifically an examination of how rebels choose to prosecute their war: either through conventional or asymmetric modes of warfare. Largely, rebel groups tend to wage asymmetrical insurgencies, pursuing guerilla warfare that ensures a greater likelihood of survival for the organization. On the other hand, though asymmetric armed conflicts represent the modal strategy for rebel groups, international developments often provide an opportunity for insurgents to pursue conventional wars against the state or rival organizations. State collapse often provides rebels with the opportunity to engage in more aggressive campaigns. As underscored by past trends in conventional war, critical international events (such as the collapse of the Soviet Union) also produce an opportunity for rebels to wage these aggressive campaigns.

A look at more recent conflicts suggests that continued instability in Syria, South Sudan, Somalia, and Libya has fostered more conventional wars (though asymmetric insurgencies still represent the lion's share of current armed conflicts). Our analysis also suggests that state collapse also has reverberating effects for neighboring conflicts. Wars fought in countries that are contiguous with failed states are significantly longer than wars that are not fought on the periphery of

collapsed governments. These findings may be particularly troublesome for peacebuilding efforts in Colombia, Pakistan, and Uganda. For instance, if the fragile Venezuelan government collapses, it may generate a greater opportunity for violent non-state actors in Colombia to use the instability within the neighboring country to gain more military capacity and expand their influence.

The conclusions generated from this analysis also point to a number of immediate policy implications and solutions.

1. Monitor and Halt Arms Flows in Fragile/Failed States

While the international community has long known that the flow of arms into war-torn countries is a salient and risky issue, our findings underscore clear risks associated with the sale of weapons into fragile states and the offer of military aid. Military support offered by foreign powers to buttress weak security forces, for instance, may fall into the hands of violent non-state actors as the government begins to crumble. Weak regimes are weak for a reason, and the supply of military hardware may not ameliorate more systemic factors that prevent government troops from being effective on the battlefield. Equally, the sale of weapons to fragile states may continue as weapons are resold to militants in neighboring countries, thereby exacerbating regional instability.

2. Increase International Pressure to Resolve Armed Conflicts Diplomatically Rather Than Militarily

Though the international community is clearly committed to offering diplomatic interventions as a strategy to end armed conflicts, many major powers also view military interventions (and military support more broadly) as a sufficient strategy to end armed conflicts in failed states. Though third-party interventions into civil wars may decrease the duration of conflicts, this is heavily dependent on foreign powers committing troops to the cause. The sale of weapons, on the other hand, has been demonstrated to significantly increase the duration of civil wars (fueling more intense fighting). Furthermore, military interventions rarely address the systemic factors that led to instability in the first place. The international community should be admonished to seek diplomatic solutions to armed conflicts. For instance, while the United States has sought diplomatic solutions to the Syrian Civil War, it has poured significantly greater resources into military solutions rather than empowering mediators to find peaceful solutions.

3. Identify Strategies to Stymie Rural Insurgencies

It should not be overlooked that the modal strategy for many rebels is a prolonged guerilla war. If members of the international community are intent on stymieing armed conflicts militarily, they should focus on how to prevent rural insurgencies from taking root. Many strategies focus on building capacity and joint operations to identify and sanction militants in loosely controlled territories (such as operations in Mali and Niger). While these may play an effective role in preventing the expansion of groups, they may not address the root cause of these insurgencies. Insurgents often are critically dependent on a civilian population for shelter, manpower, and financial assistance (either through assistance with smuggling or through rents extracted). International partners should also push conflict-affected states to improve governance in order to reduce popular demands for armed violence.

4. Broad International Cooperation on Border and Maritime Security

It is important for the international community to cooperate more broadly on preventing the spillover effects of state failure. Countries bordering fragile states or who have shared waterways should be particularly concerned with the flood of illicit goods, human trafficking, or the transnational movement of violent non-state actors. While this point may seem obvious, the solution to this problem generally requires collective action on the part of countries operating within the region. To assist in managing the problem, greater cooperation between international actors is necessary for states to ensure that fragile or failed governments do not generate reverberating effects for neighboring countries. Joint border exercises, cooperation on maritime security, and agreements to codify future cooperation will be invaluable in helping to ensure international stability.

III. TRENDS IN REBEL USE OF CIVILIAN VICTIMIZATION

Introduction

Though key features of civil wars are evolving (such as rebel group organization and the location of violence), our findings from this report also suggest that key features of civil wars are often relatively static. This is especially true for civilian victimization in civil wars. As the second part of this report, we examine the recent trends in rebel violence, specifically exploring the degree to which rebel organizations target civilians and what can be gleaned from the general trends as well as outliers of rebel violence. Though civilian victimization may take numerous forms, this report focuses specifically on rebel one-sided violence (killings of civilians), sexual violence, and the use of terrorism. For instance, as opposed to the previous section, which used terrorism as a metric to evaluate asymmetric tactics, this section of the report provides much more context as to the logic behind rebel terrorism and the differences between soft targets and hard targets.

The first part of this section examines the rebel use of one-sided violence. Through examining the average use of one-sided violence by all rebel groups for the years that we have available data, the trends suggest that the period between 1994 and 1997 witnessed an unparalleled number of killings by non-state actors. The report then digs into the major historical events that drove such brutality. The second part of this section examines the use of sexual violence by non-state actors. While there has been growing media attention on the use of sexual violence, the available cross-national data suggest that cases of widespread sexual violence are somewhat rare (with most rebel groups abstaining). The section continues with a more thorough examination of why certain rebel groups would engage in the brutal practice. Finally, this section includes a brief discussion of why rebels use terrorist violence as a weapon of intimidation. In particular, this portion compares the use of hard and soft-target terrorism. This section then concludes with a list of policy recommendations to reduce civilian victimization in civil war.

Characteristics and Drivers of One-Sided Violence

Although one-sided violence is often explained as a consequence ensuing the chaos that unfolds on the battlefield, there are multiple factors that influence both the likelihood and severity of one-sided violence. Schneider, Banholzer, and Haer argue that one-sided violence can be understood according to three main logics; the first logic is situated "within the wider strategic context in which armed groups operate."[43] According to this view, the perpetration of one-sided violence is driven by the explicit aim of achieving military advantages to tilt the balance of power, measuring out retribution, or is used as part of a survival strategy in the face of a counter-insurgency military campaign.[44] Though quantitative studies suggest that one-sided violence is generally perpetrated by weaker rebel groups,[45] anecdotally there are numerous examples on both sides of the spectrum. For instance, in the Mozambican civil war, the weaker opposition rebel force RENAMO was well-known for its violence against

Bosnian fighters exit a civil van as they arrive in the western suburbs of Sarajevo on June 09, 1992 during heavy fighting with Serbian irregulars. Photo: Georges Gobet/AFP/Getty Images

civilians. In the Bosnian civil war, government forces who were winners on the battlefield were documented as the primary users of one-sided violence.[46]

Regime type matters, too, with a U-shaped correlation between regime type and one-sided violence; rebels are more violent in democracies than in autocratic regimes.[47] An additional factor concerns foreign state funding for the rebel campaign, an aspect which negates the need to "win the hearts and minds" of civilians.[48] Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood argue that this dynamic must be understood within principal–agent terms. In addition, where multiple principals are involved in supporting a rebel campaign, the prospect for civilian abuse increases due to no single principal being able to restrain the rebel organization,[49] and once started, this type of one-sided violence is hard to tame.[50]

The second logic of one-sided violence concerns the organizational structure of militant groups, specifically the "lack of sanctioning mechanisms within rebel or governmental organizations."[51] Here, the method of recruitment for an armed group, the way an organization trains its combatants, and aspects of renumeration play a determining role in whether these fighters will commit violence against civilians. Though generally, strong recruitment mechanisms reduce the willingness of organizations to engage in one-sided violence,[52] it has also been the case that deeply committed recruits are more susceptible to putting personal and moral convictions aside and committing violence against civilians without the expectation of personal gain.[53] Forced recruitment of civilian populations is also an important consideration in shaping the outcomes of a conflict.[54] Although it is not the most efficient mechanism for rebel recruitment, coercion is often employed in accordance with the changing dynamic of a specific conflict, but it is one component that, according to Eck, "has vital security implications for the countries in which armed conflict takes place."[55] Group hierarchy also plays an important role, with evidence pointing to horizontally organized or "flat" groups as being more susceptible to perpetrating one-sided violence than vertically organized groups.[56]

The third logic concerns the type of response and reaction by international actors to the anticipated or realized atrocities. Interventions at various levels, including unarmed interventions by the international community, have a statistically significant impact on reducing the likelihood of large-scale one-sided violence occurring. This includes actions taken by the international NGO community and multilateral peacekeeping missions, and holding perpetrators to account through mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court.[57] Placing pressure on governments to cease supporting armed groups through sanctions can also play an important role in reducing one-sided violence.[58]

An additional factor fueling rebel one-sided violence concerns the economic motivations often inherent in many conflicts; specifically, the role played by natural resources. For Le Billon, the control of natural resources has become increasingly important in a post-Cold War context. Natural resources that can be easily looted and transported, such as gems and minerals, are playing a strategically significant role in providing revenue to fund rebel campaigns.[59] In particular, rebel groups that rely less on a civilian base for support are more likely to engage in one-sided violence.[60] Similarly, rebels who are able to smuggle natural resources rather than extort revenues from sites of production ensure that armed conflicts are prolonged as rebels are afforded the flexibility and mobility to resist government repression.[61]

Competition between rebel groups may also significantly increase the use of one-sided violence by rebel groups.[62] For instance, another dynamic to the natural resources and conflict nexus concerns inter-rebel conflict and violence over control of natural resources, as demonstrated in drug cultivation zones in weak state contexts, with Colombia a case in point. This non-state actor rivalry is in part explained by rebels who specifically seek to exert control over a given territory, including the rents generated from the illicit activity.[63] Other characteristics of inter-rebel conflict include group size and power: a large and powerful group is more likely to engage in attacking weaker rebel groups, and conversely, weaker groups face a greater risk of being attacked.[64] Further considerations shaping rebel one-sided violence concern the role of ethnicity. Ethnic affiliation is often used to identify enemy collaborators or supporters, with rebel groups more likely to perpetrate violence against civilians in an area where there is a concentration of the enemy's ethnic constituency.[65]

Trends in Rebel One-Sided Violence

The UCDP data has recorded a total of 590 non-state conflicts in the period 1989–2015, averaging 35 conflicts per year since the start of the dataset. Interestingly, the data indicate, with the exception of the periods 1994 to 1996, 2001 to 2004, and 2011 to 2015, average rebel one-sided violence is less than 100 incidents per year since the start of the dataset until 2015 (calculated by total killings divided by active rebel groups). A possible explanation for this low average rate of one-sided violence could be that targeted killings of civilians is less common for the majority of insurgencies captured by the data.

FIGURE 3.1: GLOBAL AVERAGE ONE-SIDED VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY REBEL GROUPS FROM 1989–2015.
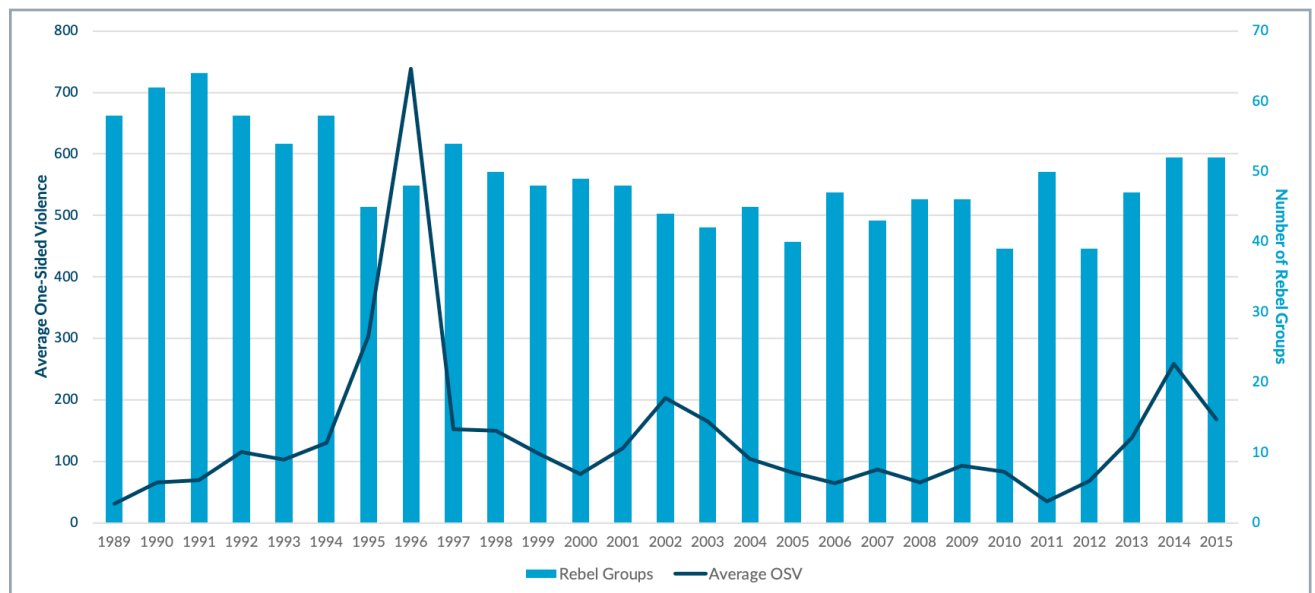
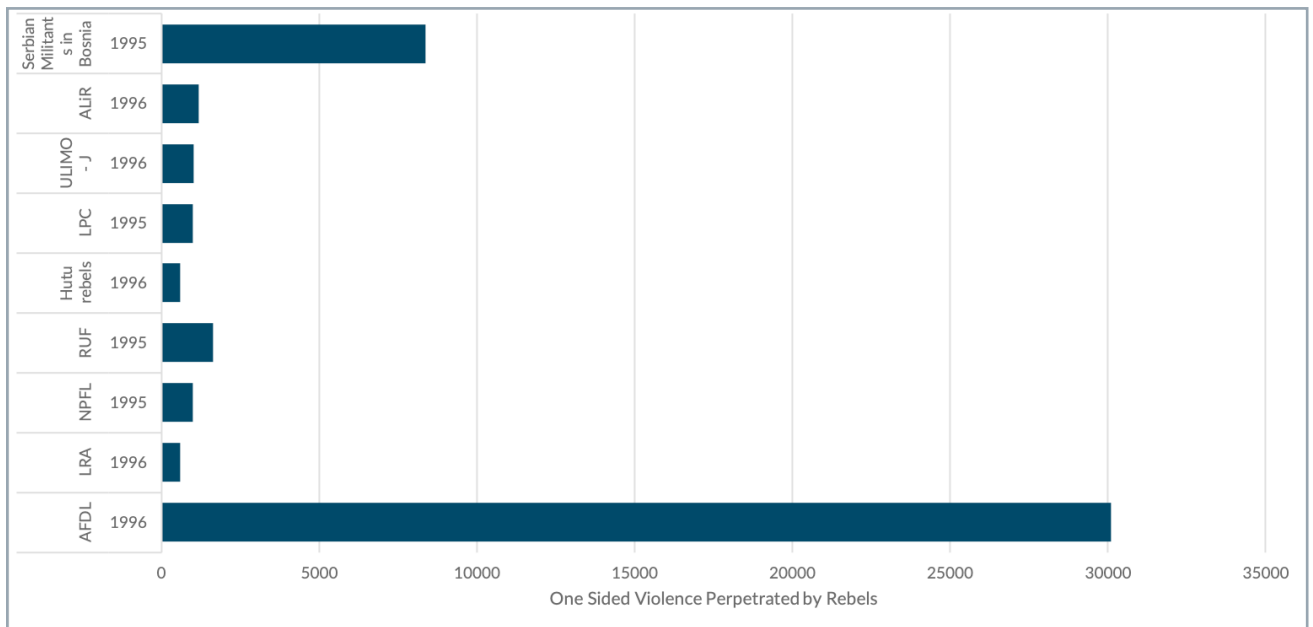*Data drawn from the UCDP One-Sided Violence dataset.*

1995 & 1996: Post-Cold War Trends or Anomalies?

These results clearly demonstrate a significant rise in one-sided violence perpetrated between 1995 and 1996. To assess why this spike occurred, it is important to examine the events that led to this surge in violence as compared to other mass killings by rebel groups. Eck and Hultman, in their New Fatality dataset spanning 1989–2004, characterize the post-Cold War period with fairly low levels of violence against civilians "punctuated by occasional sharp increases in violence against civilians,"[66] with only 1 percent of fatalities occurring in countries not at war. Looking at the Eck and Hultman data, the small jump in 1992 is attributed to the violence perpetrated by Serbian forces in Bosnia. The spike in one-sided violence experienced in 1994 is explained largely by massacres associated with the Rwandan genocide in 1994 perpetrated by the Hutu government of Juvénal Habyarimana, which resulted in the deaths of between 500,000 and 800,000 people.[67] Schneider et al. note that single events such as the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and the revenge killings that followed in its wake are rare; however, single events "dramatically influence our perception of the frequency and magnitude of one-sided violence."[68] This perception is partly explained by the operational characteristics of rebel groups that, since the end of the Cold War, have posed a primary threat "to the human security of local civilian populations, rather than the military security of states."[69]

The spike in 1995 is explained by the Srebrenica massacre perpetrated by Serbian "irregular" forces from both Bosnia and Serbia. It also included forces from the nationalist and anti-Muslim Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as ex-Yugoslav National Army members. What followed in the town of Srebrenica in 1995 was the systematic rounding up and execution of over 8,000 ethnic Bosnian Muslims, mainly boys and men, in what has been labeled genocide by the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.[70]

Of additional particular interest is an abnormally large spike in 1996. This surge in violence is largely attributed to the actions in eastern Zaire by the rebel group Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre that resulted in 30,110 one-sided violence fatalities. The relatively high death toll in 1998 is the result of Taliban forces killing over 4,000 people in Afghanistan, and the small jump in 2001 is explained by the attacks on September 11, 2001, resulting in 2,996 fatalities.[71] The rapid escalation of one-sided violence in the 2012 to 2015 period—the highest increase since the start of the dataset in 1989 —is explained in large part by the escalating drug cartel violence in Mexico and the conflict in Syria.[72] However, Africa is still most impacted by non-state conflicts and associated civilian fatalities—even with the Rwanda conflict excluded from the data. This is as a result of the numerous ongoing conflicts in central Africa including in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, Nigeria, and the Central African Republic. The Middle East is the second most affected as a result of the ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.[73]

FIGURE 3.2: MAJOR MASS KILLINGS BY REBEL GROUPS BETWEEN 1995 & 1996.

Data drawn from the UCDP One-Sided Violence dataset.

FIGURE 3.3: ONE-SIDED VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY ACTORS OPERATING IN RWANDA AND ZAIRE (DRC) FROM 1994–1996.

Mass Killings in the Congo River Basin (1994-1996)
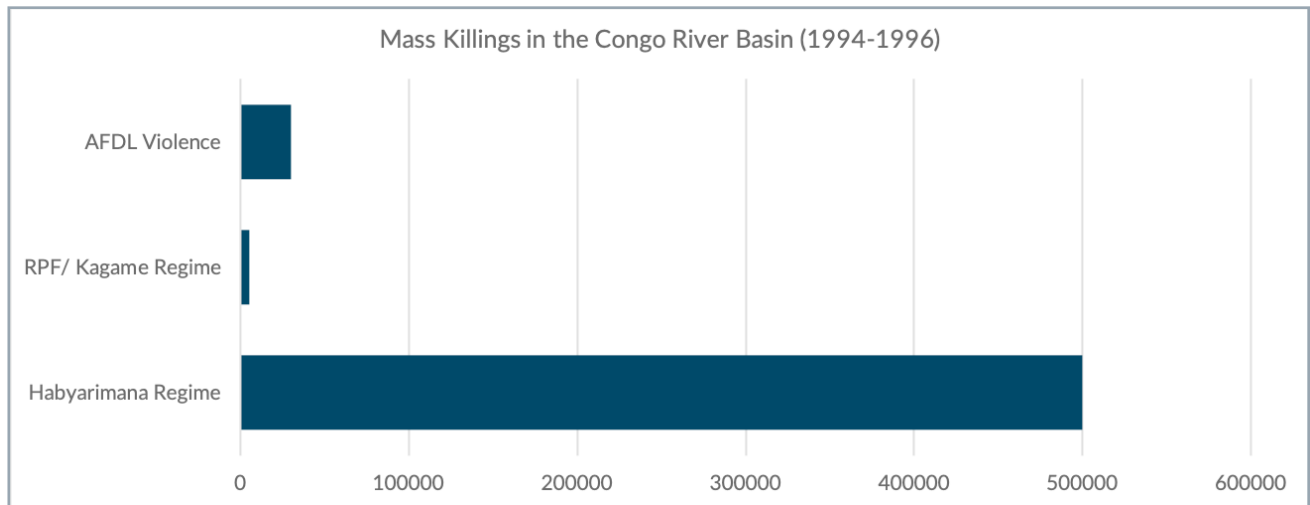
Data drawn from the UCDP One-Sided Violence dataset.

Rebel One-Sided Violence in the DRC, 1996

Since the release of the Eck and Hultman study in 2007, new findings concerning one-sided violence in the eastern DRC in 1996 resulted in revisions from 6,000 to a total of 41,040. The Congolese rebel group the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre (AFDL) was responsible for 35,126 fatalities in a series of massacres of ethnic Hutus who had fled to the eastern DRC in the wake of the Rwandan genocide.[74]

The genesis of the AFDL included ethnic Tutsis/Banyamulenge in eastern Zaire, who were supported by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UDPF), and the Burundian Armed Forces (FAB). There are claims that upwards of 20,000 of the 40,000 members of the group were initially comprised of Paul Kigame's RPA. Other estimates indicate the group was only 3,000 to 10,000 strong.[75] The AFDL comprised four groups: the Alliance Democratique des Peuples (ADP)—an ethnically Tutsi group; the Conseil National de la Resistance pour la Démocratie (CNRD) —a group created in eastern Zaire in 1993 and inspired by Patrice Lumumba; the Mouvement Révolutionnaire pour la Libération du Zaire (MRLZ) —an opposition group based in the south of Kivu Province; and last, the Parti de la Révolution Populaire (PRP), established by Laurent-Désiré Kabila in 1967.[76]

Timeline of AFDL Massacres

The original intention of the incursion into the eastern DRC in 1996 was not regime change in Zaire, but rather to destroy the defensive positions of the ex-Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR)/Interhamwe militia in North and South Kivu, which had previously been used to stage attacks against Rwanda.[77] Starting in July 1996, Zairian Tutsis/Banyamulenge who had previously undergone training in Rwanda and Burundi in an alliance of the RPA, UDPF, and FAB began infiltrating South Kivu via Burundi and North Kivu via Rwanda. Clashes with Mobutu's Armed Forces of Zaire (FAZ) ensued in what would later become known as the start of the First Congo War.[78]

The initial motive of the military operation was to ensure the safe return of over two million Rwandan refugees who were facing persecution and prevented from returning by ex-FAR/Interhamwe's stranglehold over strategic border

corridors and refugee camps in eastern Zaire.[79] Estimates indicate there were approximately 500,000 armed and trained ex-FAR/Interhamwe in the region; 300,000 in Zaire, 50,000 each in Burundi and Tanzania, and 100,000 in Rwanda.[80]

Soon after the foray into the Kivus, phase two started, requiring the Tutsi coalition of forces to move deeper into the eastern parts of Zaire. After reaching Goma and being met by local anti-Mobutu militia, including Kabila's PRP, on October 18, 1996, the AFDL was formed, with Kabila becoming the official spokesperson.[81] The UN Democratic Republic of Congo 1993–2003 Mapping Exercise report notes that it was in this period, starting in October 1997, that Rwandan Hutu and Burundian Hutu refugee camps centered around Uvira, Bukavu, and Goma were destroyed by the AFDL, APR, and FAB.[82] The report also notes the presence of Ugandan army troops. Although several hundred thousand Rwandan Tutsi refugees were able to return to Rwanda, Hutu refugees including ex-FAR/Interhamwe combatants who were able to escape fled towards Walikale in North Kivu and Shabunda in South Kivu. Mobutu responded by flying in his elite presidential guard in an attempt to rebuff the military advance of the AFDL alliance; however, his troops were soon defeated.[83]

Phase three involved seizing towns in North and South Kivu. The fleeing Hutus and suspected collaborators were relentlessly pursued by the AFDL, APR, and FAB.[84] Phase four entailed marching across Zaire towards the capital of Kinshasa, with many demoralized Mobutu forces joining the ranks of the AFDL. After successfully wresting control of Kisangani from Serbian mercenaries who had been mining under concessions from Mobutu, the siege of Kinshasa lay ahead.[85]

With the help of Angola's Goverment, the AFDL met little resistance against Mobutu's troops in the capital, Kinshasa, who were initially supported by the Angolan opposition group UNITA. On May 16, 1997, Mobutu Sese Seko was ousted and on May 17, 1997, the AFDL alliance entered Kinshasa. On May 25, 1997, Kabila declared himself president.[86] Soon thereafter Kabila ordered the AFDL out of the country, not wanting his country dictated to by foreign proxies.[87] The refusal of the AFDL to vacate the eastern parts of the DRC led to the start of the Second Congo War in 1998, which lasted until 2003.[88]

The AFDL massacres in the eastern DRC were particularly brutal, accounting for 76 percent (30,110) of global one-sided fatalities (39,184) for 1996.[89] As of 2015, the AFDL still ranks as being responsible for the greatest number of one-sided violence fatalities globally since the start of the UCDP dataset in 1989, with a total of 35,126 fatalities, followed by the Islamic State at 18,500, the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina at 12,500, and Boko Haram at approximately 8,000.[90]

Most notable were the massacres in eastern Zaire at the start of the AFDL's incursion into South and North Kivu. According to the UCDP dataset there were 120 AFDL conflict events in 1996 resulting in the deaths of 30,110 civilians. The average number of fatalities per conflict event was 252, with a range of 0 to 3,200 killed per conflict event. There were 18 conflict events where more than 500 civilians were killed, 47 conflict events where between 100 to 499 were killed, 17 conflict events where between 50 and 99 civilians were killed, and 21 conflict events where 10 to 49 civilians were killed.[91]

TABLE 3.1: 1996 AFDL ONE-SIDED VIOLENCE

FATALITIES COUNT (RANGE)	NUMBER OF CONFLICT EVENTS
2,000–4,000	1
1,000–1,999	5
500–999	12
200–499	30
100–199	17
50–99	17
10–49	21
1–9	15
0	2

Source: UCDP (2018). "AFDL." Retrieved from http://ucdp.uu.se/#actor/422.

Sexual Violence in Civil War

Another form of civilian victimization that has become more apparent is the use of sexual violence by rebel groups. Recent reports out of the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, highlight this troubling feature of modern insurgencies, where the use of sexual violence is employed to brutalize civilians.[92] Though a relatively new topic in the quantitative study of armed conflict, recent studies have pointed to a few key drivers of this unique form of abuse. For example, the literature largely confirms that sexual violence often emerges when rebels have little or few connections with the civilian population.[93] Forced conscription of civilians into rebel forces often accompanies a rebel group's use of sexual violence during armed conflict.[94] New work by Whitaker et al. finds that rebel groups whose financing is intimately tied with civilian cooperation (such as smuggling networks) are much less likely to engage in sexual violence as such heinous actions will alienate their civilian counterparts.[95]

Still, there may be wide disparities between the uses of sexual violence across different conflicts. As noted by Koos, "recent empirical studies have shown that sexual violence is not perpetrated in all conflict contexts. Sometimes there is even variation within the same conflict, where some armed actors commit sexual violence while others refrain from it."[96] While rape became a systematic weapon of war during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia (specifically in Bosnia), this may not be a common driver of sexual violence across all conflicts, where poor military discipline and little reliance on the civilian population may contribute more to the occurrence of sexual violence in war. As noted by Wood, sexual violence by rebels may be the product of poor leadership as opposed to systemic strategies to sanction civilians.[97] The perpetration of rape by rebel groups may largely be indiscriminate, as was the case during the civil war in Sierra Leone.[98] Equally, shifting battlefield dynamics (such as biased third-party military interventions) may increase the willingness of desperate rebel groups to engage in sexual violence.[99] What remains unclear, though, is how pervasive sexual violence is in modern insurgencies.

Data and Analysis

To examine the frequency of sexual violence, we rely on the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset.[100] Building on the UCDP/Armed Conflict Data project, the SVAC includes 129 conflicts between 1989–2009. While this limits our temporal domain, the data is broken down by actor for each year under observation. This allows us to examine the total prevalence of sexual violence by rebel groups identified within the UCDP sample population. As noted by Cohen and Nordas,[101] the SVAC accounts for rebel use of rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization or abortion, mutilation, and/or sexual torture. Of the indicators provided by Cohen and Nordas, we focus specifically on their measure of prevalence. Specifically, prevalence captures the magnitude of sexual violence perpetrated by rebel groups. Cohen and Nordas's measure of prevalence ranges from zero to three, with zero indicating no observed sexual violence and three indicating massive sexual violence. As opposed to generating averages of the use of sexual violence (which may obscure vital data along the ordinal scale), we categorize each group based on their score for the year under observation. We then generate a count for the number of rebel groups that fall into that category. Using the ordinal scale provided by Cohen and Nordas, we generate three categories of rebels engaging sexual violence. Rebels may engage in some sexual violence (a score of one on the scale), widespread sexual violence (a score of two on the scale), or systemic sexual violence (a score of three on the scale). We specifically use the term "systemic" to describe this last category, given the coding criteria offered by Cohen and Nordas. The authors note that actors receive this score in a given year if an "actor used sexual violence as a 'means of intimidation,' 'instrument of control and punishment,' 'weapon,' 'tactic to terrorize the population,' 'terror tactic,' [or] 'tool of war,' on a 'massive scale.'"[102]

FIGURE 3.4: COUNT OF REBEL GROUPS ENGAGED IN SEXUAL VIOLENCE.
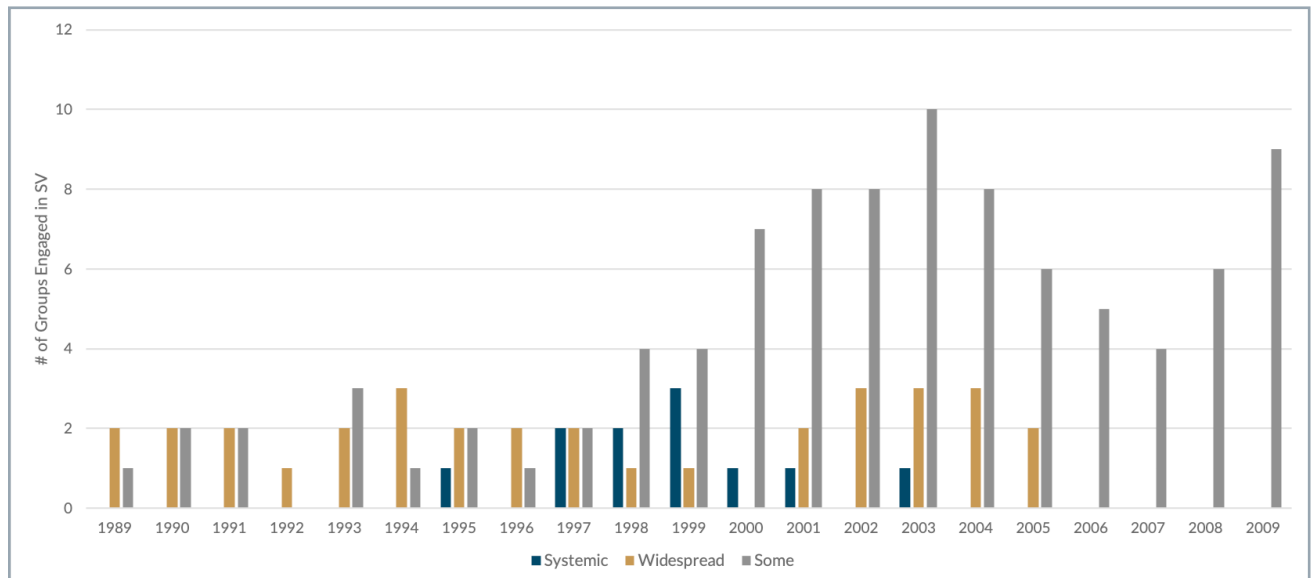
Data drawn from SVAC dataset.

According to Cohen's data, the use of rebel sexual violence remained relatively rare up until the end of the twentieth century. Those groups that did engage in sexual violence unfortunately often used widespread sexual violence during the period leading up until the twentieth century (with the number of groups ranging from one to four). Though not systemic, this rate of sexual violence is categorized by Cohen and Nordas as groups "routinely" engaging in this form of victimization where the practices are "commonplace."[103] On the other hand, the number of groups engaging in

sexual violence began to spike following the advent of the twenty-first century, with a greater number of rebel groups engaging in some form of sexual violence. These numbers peaked in 2003, when roughly 20 percent of active rebel groups in the UCDP sample population were engaging in some form of sexual violence. Still, for many of the years that data is available, sexual violence as coded by Cohen and Nordas was a relatively rare practice employed by rebel organizations. Those groups that do engage in sexual violence largely engage in some sexual violence, with only one to four groups per year engaging in either widespread or systemic sexual violence. Intuitively, this makes some sense. As noted in the previous section, the vast majority of rebel groups wage irregular conflicts where many must operate among the civilian population. As noted by Whitaker et al., groups that rely heavily on civilians for support are much less likely to use this form of violence.[104] Rebels are therefore often less willing to participate in sexual violence, on average, than other actors in armed conflicts (such as pro-government militias or criminal bandits).

This generates an interesting question, though. Given the rarity of widespread and systemic practices of sexual violence, which groups are engaging in this deeply troubling form of civilian victimization? Importantly, is there anything to be learned from the occurrence of this rare but troubling phenomenon?

To explore this question further, we isolated the perpetrators of widespread and systemic sexual violence within the SVAC dataset. In all, we found 18 separate rebel groups engaging in this type of large-scale sexual violence. Table 3.2 includes this list of rebel groups, the country they operated in during the perpetration of this violence, whether or not they engaged in widespread or systemic sexual violence, and the year(s) that this violence occurred. Again, the majority of sexual violence pursed by these worst actors was widespread, not systemic. Equally, it is notable that these incidents of widespread sexual violence often occurred within one to two years during which these organizations were operating, as opposed to over the course of the entire conflict. This is particularly true for certain rebel groups that maintained reputations for highly organized insurgencies. For instance, the SPLM/A operated for over two decades (1983–2005) but engaged in this brutal form of widespread sexual violence only in 1991 and in 1993. This was around the same time that the organization experienced splintering in its ranks from the emergence of the rival rebel leader, Riek Machar.[105] Equally, Sendero Luminoso, known for its disciplined and clandestine organization, appeared to engage in widespread sexual violence in Peru in 1991. This occurred during President Fujimori's severe crackdown on the insurgency, and two years before the organization's leadership was captured by the Peruvian state.

TABLE 3.2: SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY REBEL GROUPS: MAJOR INSTANCES

REBEL GROUP	COUNTRY	SCALE OF VIOLENCE	YEARS
Palipehutu-FNL	Burundi	Widespread	2003–2005
CNDD-FDD	Burundi	Widespread	2003–2004
Sendero Luminoso	Peru	Widespread	1991
Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/ Army	Sudan	Widespread	1991 & 1993
Holy Spirit Movement	Uganda	Widespread	1989-1990
Lord's Resistance Army	Uganda	Widespread	1994–1998, 2001, 2004–2005
Alliance of Democratic Forces	Uganda	Widespread	1997

Renamo	Mozambique	Widespread	1989–1990
United Somali Congress	Somalia	Widespread	1991
United Somali Congress/ Somali National Alliance	Somalia	Widespread	1999 & 2001
National Patriotic Front of Liberia	Liberia	Widespread	1993 & 1995
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	Sri Lanka	Systemic	1995
Movement of the Democratic Forces of the Casamance	Senegal	Widespread	1992
Revolutionary United Front	Sierra Leone	Widespread	1996 & 2002–2003
Revolutionary United Front	Sierra Leone	Systemic	1997–2001
Armed Forces Revolutionary Council	Sierra Leone	Systemic	1997–1999
Republic of Abkhazia	Georgia	Widespread	1994
Kosovo Liberation Army	Serbia (former Yugoslavia)	Systemic	1999
Forces of Francois Bozizé	Central African Republic	Widespread	2002
Forces of Francois Bozizé	Central African Republic	Systemic	2003

Data drawn from Cohen and Nodas's (2014) SVAC dataset

Surprisingly, the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) are listed in Cohen and Nordas's dataset as engaging in systemic sexual violence in 1995. This occurrence is shocking, in part, given that the organization is often described as a highly disciplined insurgency. Wood even goes as far as to note that, despite systematic one-sided killings and forced displacement of Muslim and Sinhalese civilians, the LTTE largely avoided sexual violence as a form of civilian victimization.[106] Still, at the time that Cohen and Nordas record the LTTE engaging in systemic sexual violence, the group was engaged in fierce battle with the Sri Lankan government to establish its own semi-autonomous region. Taken together, it appears that the occurrence of widespread and systemic sexual violence perpetrated by organizations may occur during periods of great pressure on these organizations. These anecdotal examples fit well with the conclusions of Johansson and Sarwari that rebel groups may engage in sexual violence when faced with a sudden shift in the balance of forces.[107]

Other groups, on the other hand, appear to be more habitual practitioners of sexual violence in armed conflict. For instance, organizations such as the Lord's Resistance Army and the Revolutionary United Front have engaged in years of significant sexual violence over the course of their insurgencies (with the latter engaging in systemic sexual violence). It is difficult to assume that the use of sexual violence by these organizations, given the duration and magnitude of their efforts, is the product of poor leadership or shifts in the balance of forces. Rather, such habitual use of brutal civilian

victimization is most likely a deliberate strategy employed by these organizations in their war against the state. Equally, given the clustering of sexual violence in Somalia, Burundi, Uganda, and Sierra Leone, it may be that such actions taken by rebel organizations may shift certain norms surrounding armed conflict. Groups engaging in the habitual use of sexual violence may lead other organizations to adopt those practices (such as the Revolutionary United Front and Armed Forces Revolutionary Council in Sierra Leone). This trend may also be reflected in the emergence of widespread sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where evolving norms of armed conflict encourage rebel groups to adopt more brutal tactics as a way to intimidate isolated communities.

The Strategic Logic of Terrorism

As noted earlier, terrorism as a weapon of war goes beyond asymmetric violence. As a strategy, bombings (especially on civilians) are meant to also inflict psychological trauma on the target population. As noted by Stanton, "What differentiates terrorism from other forms of violence against civilians is the target audience for violence: the group whose behavior a rebel group aims to change through the use of violence."[108] While the previous section used terrorism as a way to measure asymmetric political violence, it did not elaborate on the key motivations to use terrorism. Equally, the previous section did not draw a distinction between the use of hard targets versus soft targets with regard to rebel terrorism. In order to understand why, when, and how rebel groups use terrorism we need to understand the strategic logic of using terrorism as a tool for achieving a group's goals. Too often, terrorism is described as senseless bloodshed; illogical brutality committed by madmen with an irrational propensity for violence. But terrorism, for all its brutality, is not illogical. Rather, our understanding of terrorist violence is much clearer when we approach terrorism as a violent tactic used by actors strategically in an attempt to realize their political and social goals. The indiscriminate killing of civilians is therefore a rational strategy with the goal of instilling fear. As noted by Hoffman, terrorism is "designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s). It is meant to instill fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider 'target audience.'"[109]

Most of the research on the logic of terrorism has described it as a tool for costly signaling. It is an attempt to use violence not as a step towards direct military victory, but as a means of signaling to supporters, local governments, government supporters, and the international community their intent and resolve in an effort to bring about their objectives. Kydd and Walter sum this costly signaling into five interrelated mechanisms.[110]

- *Attrition*: Groups demonstrate their ability to impose significant costs on their enemies and supporters.
- *Intimidation*: Groups signal their strength to impose future costs on noncompliance and highlight the inability of a government to stop attacks.
- *Provocation*: Groups seek to trigger a government overreaction which mobilizes support for their cause.
- *Spoiling*: Groups seek to undermine efforts towards a negotiated settlement between the government and more moderate forces.
- *Outbidding*: A group attempts to signal to a constituency that they have a stronger resolve to fight government forces than internal rivals within their broader cause.

Most descriptions of the strategic logic of terrorism use some variant of these costly signaling mechanisms to explain terrorist violence. Given this understanding, how does terrorist violence fit into the larger repertoire of violent and non-violent tactics utilized by rebel groups to achieve their political and military objectives?

Terrorists, Rebels or Both?

Academic and policy conversations both tend to treat as separate entities terrorists and insurgents as actors and terrorism and insurgency as actions. In reality, this picture is much more complex. Most of the entities we think of as large-scale terrorist organizations could also be classified as insurgents, and use terrorist violence alongside more traditional insurgent activities as part of a larger violent campaign towards their goals. As noted in the previous section, terrorism

is often perpetrated by rebel groups seeking to avoid conventional confrontations with government forces. ISIS and Al Qaeda are not only some of the most prominent terrorist organizations, they could also be described as rebel groups carrying out more traditional insurgent campaigns across several states. And these hybrid violent campaigns are not restricted to the largest of terrorist groups. Of all the groups in the Global Terrorism Database between 2002 and 2012, all but one also engaged in more traditional insurgent violence not targeting civilians.[111] Rebel groups too often resort to acts of terrorist violence in addition to more traditional insurgent activities.

Even more problematic, what constitutes an act of terror versus an act of insurgency is not a universally accepted distinction. Not all attacks, for instance, fit Hoffman's description of terrorism as instilling psychological fear. Some feel that acts of terror must target civilians. Others include in this definition actions which engage military targets but which use tactics that fall outside the bounds of international humanitarian law.[112]

Finally, the term terrorism may be used for political purposes, equating all actions against the state as an act of terror. We do not attempt to resolve definitional disagreements within the literature, but it is incumbent upon the authors of this report to offer some caution in interpreting terrorism data given that there is little consensus on what officially constitutes terrorism in armed conflicts.

The Dynamics of Rebel Terror

Based on available data, rebel use of terrorist violence generally increased in recent years. Similar to the previous section, we limit our analysis to only terrorist attacks that can be attributed to rebel groups, as opposed to all terrorist violence that occurs during civil wars. As noted in the previous section, the average number of terrorist attacks perpetrated by rebel groups grew from the early 1970s to a peak in the early 1990s; this was followed by a decline until the late 1990s and a gradual increase until the end of available data in 2010. Given this recent upward trend, what do we know about the conditions under which rebels are likely to use terrorist violence and how this tactic impacts conflict outcomes?

The use of terrorism or insurgency by rebel groups is rarely an absolute. Very few rebels refrain from any form of violence that could be deemed terrorism and very few rely on its use almost exclusively. Rather, the use of terrorism as a tactic to achieve larger political/social goals varies based on the rebel group's characteristics, relative strength, and the dynamics of the larger conflict setting.

First, the dynamics of the conflict setting matter. Conflicts which are characterized by strong ingroup/outgroup identities are more likely to see higher levels of rebel use of terrorism. One of the deterrents for rebel use of terrorism is the potential to turn the civilian population against their cause. In conflicts with strong ingroup/outgroup dynamics, both the government and rebel groups have more static, entrenched bases of public support, meaning the potential cost of terrorist violence on public support and the potential to recruit neutral civilians to their cause are lower.[113] Alternatively, rebel groups which seek to cultivate a broad public appeal, such as politically motivated (left or right) and/or secular groups fighting for control of a national government, may be more restrained in their use of terror.

The relationship between regime type and rebel use of terrorism is less clear, with some studies finding that rebel groups which are faced with more repressive governments are more likely to use terrorism as they are likely to lose comparatively less support because of the use of arbitrary violence by the state.[114] Conversely, others have found empirical support for the claim that rebel groups are more likely to use terrorism against democratic governments, as they are more likely to make concessions in response to targeting of civilians.[115]

Looking at the characteristics of the rebel groups themselves, another important factor in rebel group use of terror may be their source of income. If rebel groups rely on civilians to support their material needs, they are less likely to commit violence against civilians through acts of terror. Those who do not have this dependence on the voluntary support of the civilian population, whether they receive significant external funding or have access to lootable resources such as minerals, gems or drugs, face lower potential costs of committing violence against civilians. These theories, well-established in the context of

broader violence against civilians,[116] have also begun to be tested in the specific context of rebel terrorist violence. Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin explore the relationship between the use of terrorist violence by rebel groups and the primary sources of financial support. As expected, rebel groups which rely primarily on local civilians are least likely to use terrorist violence, those who rely on foreign financial assistance are slightly more likely to use terrorist violence, and those who rely on lootable resources are significantly more likely to use terrorism.[117] What's more, this research finds a positive relationship between the use of terrorist violence and the level of centralized leadership.[118] This suggests that terrorist violence by rebel groups is more likely to emerge from strategic decision-making by rebel leaders than from a lack of control of rank-and-file soldiers, which diverges from much of the literature on broader violence against civilians (as noted in previous sections).

Finally, much of the existing literature on the use of terrorist violence by rebel groups focuses on relative strength. As noted in the previous section, rebel groups often use terrorist violence against militarily stronger opponents. Often, the use of this kind of violence is abandoned as they approach military parity with the opponent, or may remain as part of a broader mix of violent strategies.[119] Weak rebel groups may find the use of terrorist violence at the early stages of an insurgency strategically appealing, as it may provoke a disproportionate response by armed forces which is then used to mobilize nascent support. However, relatively stronger, more traditional rebel groups may continue to use terrorist violence intermittently as a strategy to keep opponents off balance militarily or undermine civilian support for continued conflict. This inverse relationship between the use of terrorism and the relative strength of rebel groups may be more complex than initially perceived,[120] but it does provide a valuable framework for thinking about the use of rebel terrorism and it seems to support what we know about the relationship between relative strength and rebel violence against civilians more generally.[121]

As part of this section of the report, we are primarily interested in when rebels are using terrorism as a form of asymmetric warfare and when rebels are using terrorist violence as a way to instill fear and intimidate the civilian population. In other words, when do rebel groups use terrorism as a form of civilian victimization?

"Hard" versus "Soft" Targets of Rebel Terrorist Violence

Polo and Gleditsch have undertaken research which both attributes actions within the Global Terrorism Database to individual rebel organizations and classifies them as directed at either hard targets (government, police, military, and infrastructure) or soft targets (businesses, media, civil society, religious entities, etc.), which helps us study this distinction. As mentioned, since the early 2000s the use of terror by rebel groups has risen significantly. However, as Figure 3.5 below demonstrates, much of this recent upward trend can be attributed to an increase in rebel terrorism against hard targets. For the years that we have reliable data for, soft-target terrorism tracks well with all forms of terrorism. Though the numbers diverge in 1982 and 1988, the data suggest that terrorist attacks are largely on soft targets as opposed to hard targets. This trend appeared to shift, though, in 2004. The average use of terrorism among all active rebel groups for which we have data begins to focus less on civilian centers as a target. This occurs despite a significant rise in terrorist attacks following the US occupation of Iraq. Rather, globally, rebel groups have begun to focus more on hard targets as opposed to soft targets.

It should be noted that the data on soft targets should be interpreted with caution. Specifically, it is important not to conflate soft-target attacks with total civilian casualties. Incidents of terrorist attacks may include bombings that lead to few actual casualties; rebel groups may alert news agencies as well as government officials of the bomb in order to evacuate targets before attacks occur. This may be driven by the fact that rebel groups often maintain parallel political organizations that push the military wings to abstain from killing civilians. For instance, though the Provisional Irish Republican Army intentionally targeted civilian centers as well as hard targets, they were under pressure from their political wing to ensure a low body-count of civilians (particularly later in the conflict).[122] As noted earlier in this section, many rebel groups tend to avoid mass killings and widespread civilian victimization.

FIGURE 3.5: TERRORISM PERPETRATED BY REBEL GROUPS ALL TERRORISM VS. SOFT TARGETS
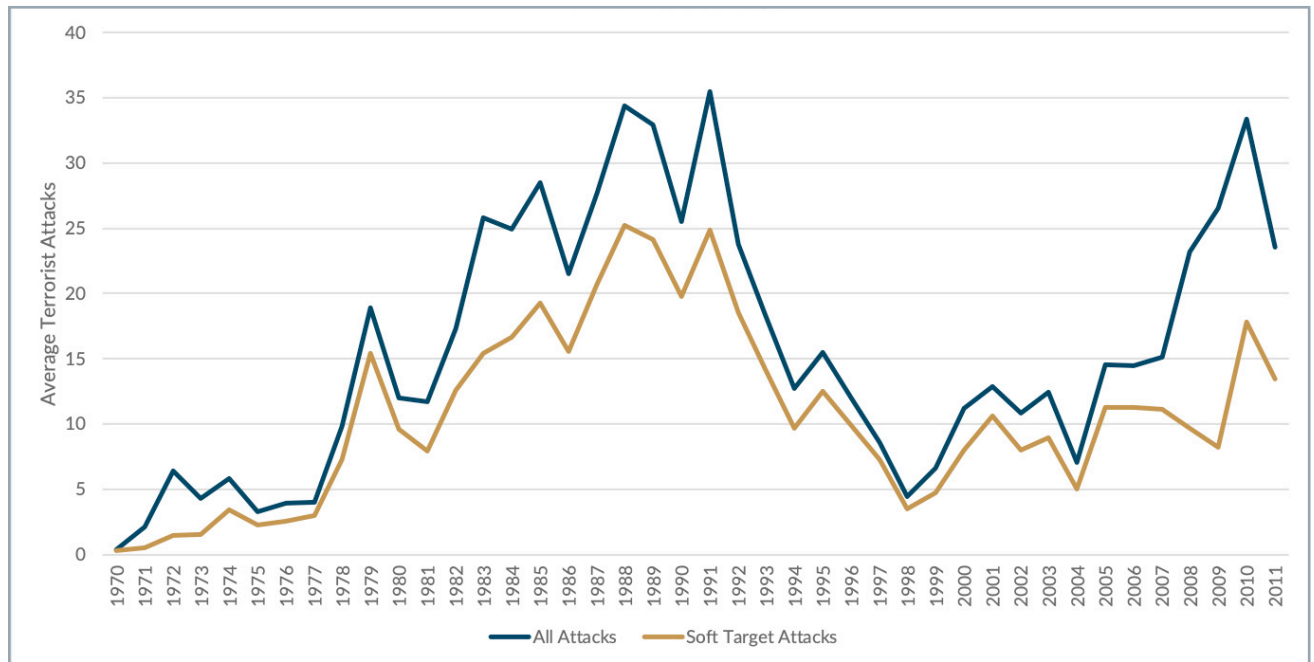
Data drawn from the Polo and Gleditsch (2016) ACD2GTD dataset.

It is important to acknowledge a degree of definitional ambiguity, though, when examining rebel targets of terrorism. Nothing about setting definitions in the study of terrorism is straightforward. Making the distinction between what is terrorism directed at hard targets and what is insurgency is incredibly difficult in many instances. With that said, the ambiguity inherent in the distinction between hard-target terrorism and insurgency is also likely at the root of the increased share of rebel terrorism directed at hard targets. Since the early 2000s counterinsurgent/counterterrorist campaigns in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and more recently, places like Nigeria and Mali have seen the rise of "complex attacks" as a preferred tactic of rebel groups. Complex attacks are called so because they involve multiple forms of violence—some of which are usually considered terrorism, while others are more standard insurgent tactics—within the same attack. For example, the Taliban may send fighters to attack a government target in Kabul in an event that ends with the detonation of suicide vests. Equally, militants in Mali use an IED targeting a military convoy to initiate an armed ambush. These events straddle the definitions of terrorist and insurgent tactics. These hybrid tactics have become increasingly common and likely account for much of the increased share of rebel terrorism directed at hard targets.

Conclusion

This section focuses largely on the use of civilian victimization pursued by rebel groups. Though the targeted abuse of civilians in armed conflict is far from uncommon, our review of available data suggests that many organizations often abstain from the most egregious forms of civilian victimization. For instance, while the available data suggest that soft targets often represent the majority of terrorist attacks, rebels tend to avoid mass killings. Equally, the majority of rebel groups avoid sexual violence as a weapon of war. Unfortunately, this trend appears to be changing as a greater share of active rebel groups are engaging in some form of sexual violence (though it is too early to see if this is a consistent trend). These results may indicate organizational shifts within groups of violent non-state actors as opposed to changes in

deliberate strategies. Increased rebel use of sexual violence may suggest that there is a decline in centralized leadership or a breakdown in command structure. Trends in rebel group structure and ideology will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

The results from this section also offer a few policy options that are available to the international community to curb civilian victimization by non-state actors during war.

1. Though the quantitative literature suggests that weaker organizations are more likely to engage in greater one-sided violence than stronger rebel groups, the largest mass killings perpetrated by non-state actors appear to be committed when rebels are fighting against fragile or collapsed governments (e.g., Mobutu's Zaire or Bosnia). Political upheaval may generate opportunities for militants to engage in substantial violence against civilians. Violence has been magnified in these areas (particularly in present-day Democratic Republic of Congo) in part by the fact that many civilians were unable to flee rebels at the start of the massacres. In an effort to curb significant violence against civilians in Yemen, Syria, and South Sudan, the international community should assist in providing safe havens for refugees fleeing violence.

2. Given the regional concentration of widespread and systemic sexual violence, our findings indicate that such violence may reshape the local norms of armed groups. If this is the case, shifting trends in norms will not bode well for the behavior of armed groups operating in areas where there has been a steady increase in sexual violence perpetrated by rebels, such as Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, and the DRC. Local actors may be best situated to prevent changes in social norms as they have the credibility to critique the practices of armed groups. The international community may therefore wish to generate regional solutions to these problems by emphasizing the importance of local actors and customs as well as regional leaders in dissuading armed groups from engaging in sexual violence.

Our results also seem to suggest that increased military pressure may push rebels to engage in greater sexual violence. While the international community may wish to offer military support to end prolonged insurgencies, such actions may increase the willingness of rebels to victimize civilians. Diplomatic solutions (such as third-party mediation) may offer an alternative to the international community to assist with the slowing or stopping of fighting without incentivizing rebels to sanction civilians.

IV. LOCATION OF ARMED CONFLICT

Introduction

As opposed to modes of warfare as well as rebel victimization of civilians, the location of armed conflicts has been evolving significantly over the last twenty years. Concurrent with the evolution of rebel organizations, we note that rebel groups have begun to operate farther from major cities (instead seeking to contest state control on the periphery). This section explores the variation in where civil wars are being fought as well as where governments and rebels are employing civilian victimization. Though analysis of trends in the occurrence of conflict events is instructive, international observers should also be aware of where violence is occurring during civil wars. Building on the two previous sections, this section examines the location of civil war battles and one-sided violence in relation to major cities within conflict-affected countries. This section also provides an in-depth analysis of the recent battlefield dynamics in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Taken together, the results present a complicated story wherein global trends may be masking more subtle variations occurring subnationally.

Location and Geography in Armed Conflict

Though recent, there has been a substantial increase in the work that examines the connection between geography and armed conflict. For instance, separatist conflicts are often fought on the periphery of states, much farther from the capitals of countries.[123] As noted by Butcher, though, this finding tends to not be especially shocking, given that separatist conflicts are often waged by self-determination movements that have historically been excluded by a central government.[124] More interestingly, recent studies have sought to explain when rebels seek to contest state control closer to the capital. As noted by Buhaug et al., conflicts fought closer to the capital often carry significant risks for rebels, as governments tend to have greater military strength near their major cities (and conversely lose military strength as they attempt to remove rebels from remote areas).[125] Given this point, stronger rebel groups often attempt to contest state control closer to capitals.[126] Equally, greater fractionalization of military forces within armed conflict (such as having multiple rebel groups) often increases fighting around capital cities.

The focus on capital cities, though, often distracts from the subtler ways that battle locations affect civil war dynamics as well as other targets of rebel violence. For instance, wars fought farther from capital cities often last significantly longer than conflicts fought closer to the capital.[127] This finding is compounded by other geographic elements such as battle distance from the country's border, mountainous terrain, or the presence of lootable goods, all of which increase the duration of civil wars. Fighting near or around capital cities often plays a key role in how conflicts terminate. Work by Greig as well as Greig, Mason, and Hamner demonstrates that fighting around capital cities may differ from fighting around other cities that have strategic or economic value.[128] In particular, as rebel forces push closer and closer to economic centers (operationalized as the five largest cities within civil war states), states are much more likely to seek a peaceful settlement to the conflict.[129] On the other hand, fighting that approaches the capital city quickly reduces the likelihood that a settlement will be reached. As rebels gain traction on the battlefield, their perceived chance of success increases significantly. By nearing the capital, rebel groups expect to win the war outright, and therefore have little incentive to come to the bargaining table.

While this research has significantly expanded our knowledge of the role geography and location plays in shaping civil war dynamics, this research is often limited solely to capital cities as the location of interest. As noted by Greig, violence in relation to other large cities often plays a critical role in affecting the course of the war.[130] When Boko Haram bombs Maiduguri in Nigeria, the attack is troubling for urban residents despite it not being carried out in Lagos. Equally, the effects of that violence should carry a different form of salience as compared to killings perpetrated in remote areas along the Cameroon border. This point also underscores another salient aspect of civil wars that is generally overlooked: violence in civil wars is not just limited to battles between rebels and the government. For instance, a cursory look at trends in civil war violence should also explore how the location of one-sided violence (such as civilian killings) and fighting between non-state actors has shifted over time. To address this, we provide an overview of trends in the location of civil war dynamics.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS ANALYSIS

Given that this section relies heavily on event data, it is incumbent upon us to lay out the limitations of this analysis. A key criticism concerns the integrity of the data reported, given that most, if not all, conflict-event databases are premised on media-based accounts.[210] For instance, recent research has demonstrated that the proliferation of access to information and communication technologies, specifically cellphones, is central to the discussion on the potential of bias in conflict-event reporting. The role of cellphone coverage in facilitating armed conflict by overcoming collective action for rebel group problems has been demonstrated.[211] Focusing on a possible correlation between cellphone coverage and conflict-events reporting, Weidmann notes a statistically significant relationship between the geographic locations that have cellphone coverage and the geographic location of conflict events reported. This geographically induced reporting bias results in approximately only one-third of conflict events being reported.[212] In analysis of conflict-event data in Afghanistan, Weidmann notes cellphone coverage bears a statistically significant effect on conflict-event reporting in that country. Similar reporting bias effects were noted in Africa by using the Pierskalla and Hollenbach data.[213]

Regime type matters too. The effects of underreporting vis-a-vis the role of media reporting have been documented in the study of terrorism, noting that the distribution of underreporting of terrorist attacks is concentrated in countries that do not have a free press.[214] Broader aspects of conflict-event reporting bias, too, need to be acknowledged, including the lack of media coverage for so-called forgotten or low-interest conflicts, such as in the Central African Republic. Battle size, number of deaths, and government involvement in conflict, as Hendrix and Salehyan have demonstrated, also result in reporting bias. Larger battles, resulting in a high number of casualties and with government involvement, have a higher incidence of being reported and verified by multiple media outlets than smaller, low-casualty and non-state-actor-related conflict events.[215] A further factor concerns the increasing proliferation of fictitious media reports depicting atrocities and armed conflict events. The fake news phenomenon, enabled by social media, has the potential to have a distortionary effect on conflict-event reporting.[216] With these considerations in mind, there is an onus on researchers and analysts of media-based conflict events to remain vigilant to the potential of reporting bias. As Weidmann notes, at the very minimum researchers should remain reflexive by asking "how" or "whether" their main independent variable(s) could be influencing conflict-event reporting.[217]

We are cognizant of these limitations and have adjusted our claims for this report. For example, we are not offering causal claims, but identify relations generated from the available trends data. Equally, we have included both qualitative and quantitative data to elucidate the mechanisms that we are discussing. Still, it is important to note that any event data may have some clear limitations and underlying biases, and it is incumbent on researchers to discuss these before any analysis.

Data and Trends

The quantitative study of conflict began with large-scale interstate disputes being the primary focus. A recent shift has led to increasingly fine-grained event-level data. This specificity allows for moments of conflict to be classified into typologies, and certain characteristics are distinguishable. Conflict-event precision allows for better understanding in both the temporal and spatial domains. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) together have generated some of the most comprehensive conflict datasets to date. In an effort to unify these data at an event level, the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset (UCDP GED) was generated. The UCDP GED defines a conflict event as: "The incidence of the use of armed force by an organized actor against another organized actor, or against civilians, resulting in at least 1 direct death in either the best, low or high estimate categories at a specific location and for a specific temporal duration."[131]

In addition to the date on which an event occurs, the features coded in the UCDP GED important for this report are conflict type, actors, and location. First is the differentiation of conflict. The UCDP GED contains state-based violence (fighting between government and rebels),[132] non-state violence (fighting between non-state actors),[133] and one-sided violence (targeted violence against civilians by either the government or rebels),[134] all of which are mutually exclusive at the event level. It is possible for multiple conflict types to be perpetrated by an actor, however these would register as unique data points. Over 1,600 unique actors including governments, non-state groups, and civilians are coded within this data. Finally, the dataset includes specific latitude and longitude coordinates for every event. This creates the opportunity for an analysis of spatial trends.

After identifying conflict events at a specific location, the next step is to determine the nearest urban center. We identified the five most populated cities within a country by utilizing the World Cities Database,[135] a source based on US government agency distinction. This coding criteria is based on the operationalization of major cities employed by Greig.[136] Latitude and longitude of a center point in the city are then passed to a distance function. To determine the distance between two points on Earth, the haversine formula was applied.[137] This formula utilizes the radius of the earth (6,371 km), the conversion of latitude and longitude to radians, and trigonometric functions to attain the distance between two points. We chose to find the distance to the nearest city for this report. Each UCDP GED conflict event was paired with all five cities within the referent country. The distance was calculated for all city–event parings and then the minimum was chosen. This gives a continuous distance measure in kilometers for just how urban or rural a conflict event is.

FIGURE 4.1: DISTANCE OF CONFLICT EVENTS FROM MAJOR CITIES.
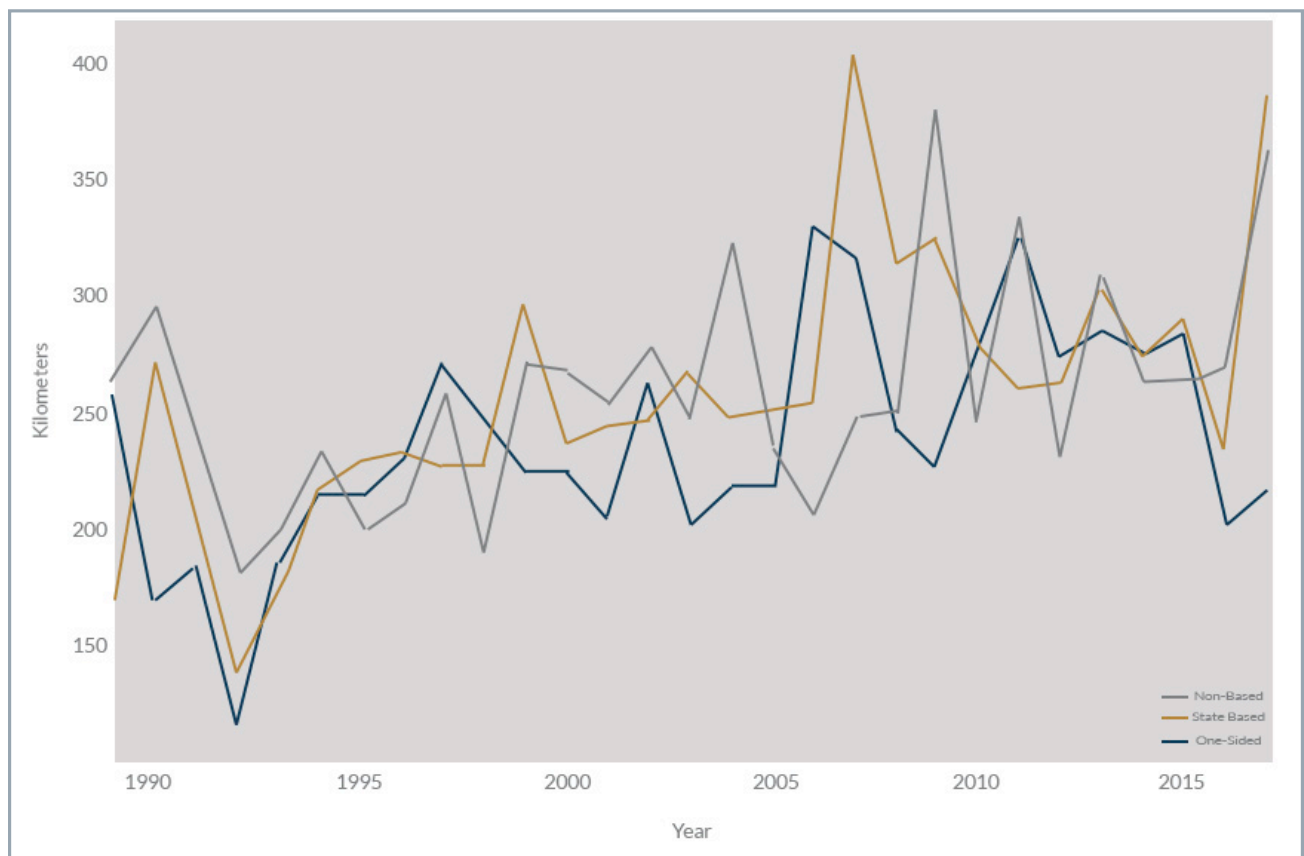
Data drawn from UCDP GED.

Figure 4.1 includes the average annual distances from major cities for each form of violence from 1989 through 2017 at the global level. Specifically, the graph includes the distance of state-based violence (or fighting between rebels and the government), non-state violence (fighting between non-state actors), and one-sided violence (civilian killings perpetrated by either rebels or the government). An initial look suggests that, across all measures, there is a significant amount of volatility in the average distances from major cities. Across the three measures, non-state violence appears to fluctuate the most across years, suggesting that there may be significant variation in what is driving this measure. For instance, the determinants of inter-clan disputes in Hargeisa, Somaliland, (a relatively urban center,) may be radically different than land disputes in Nigeria between Fulani herdsman and Christian farmers. Equally, fighting between rival armed groups may be intimately tied with changing battlefield dynamics that emerge from fighting between certain armed groups and the government.

**FIGURE 4.2:** AVERAGE BATTLE DISTANCE FROM MAJOR CITIES.
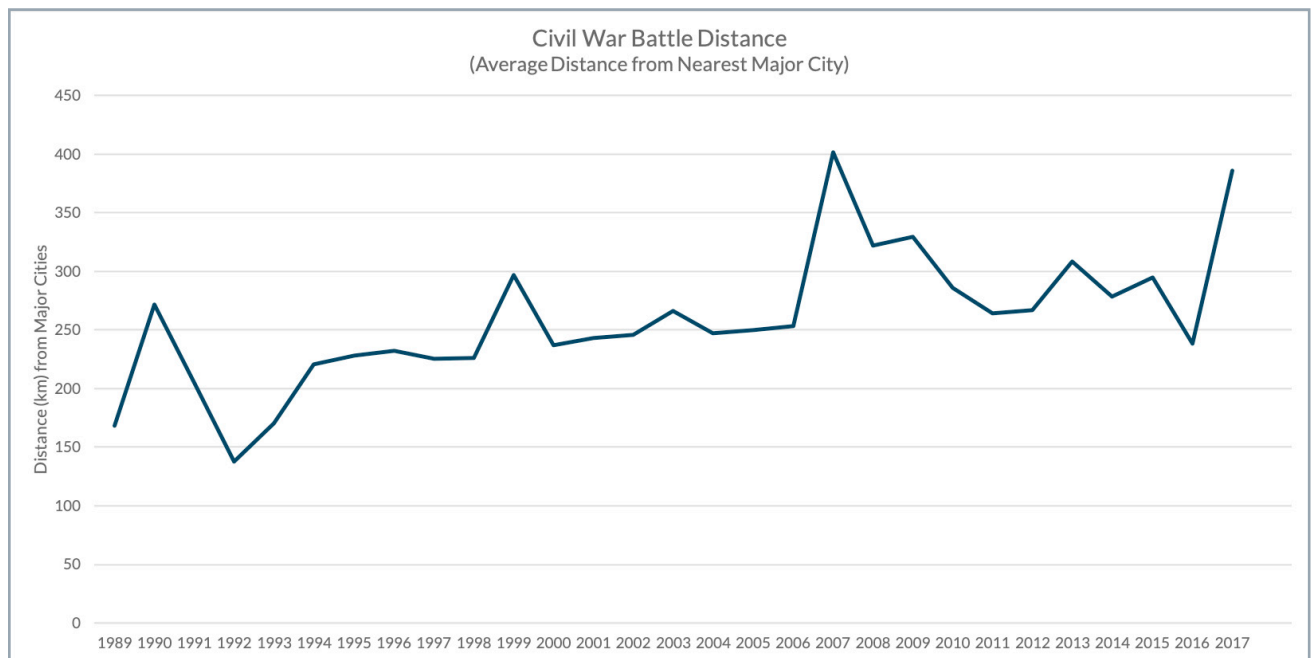
Data drawn from UCDP GED.

Focusing specifically on the trends for fighting between rebels and the government, the trendline tends to be fairly clear (with some degree of volatility). In short, fighting appears to be moving farther away from major cities. At the start of available data (1989), the average distance from the nearest major city was 168 kilometers. Ten years out, battles between rebels and government forces were, on average, 297 kilometers from the nearest major city. By 2009, fighting had moved farther away from major cities, with the average distance reaching 329 kilometers. By the last available year, fighting between rebel groups and government forces had moved to 386 kilometers. Though there are clear fluctuations in the average distance, the trendline demonstrates that fighting appears to be moving farther away from major cities. This occurs even in 2017 (with the second greatest average distance), when almost a quarter of all conflict-affected countries are experiencing conventional armed conflicts where rebels maintain the capacity to push closer to city centers, thereby threatening major cities (see Section II).

There are, of course, clear points of departure from the general trendline. Following the end of the Cold War, there was a steep drop in the average distance of civil war battles from major cities. Again, this coincides with a significant rise in conventional armed conflicts that pushed into city centers. On the other hand, 2007 marked a significant increase in the average distance for armed conflicts. This jump coincides with renewed insurgencies in Mali, the DRC, Peru, and Darfur (to name just a few), increasing the number of rebellions being fought on the periphery of society. Following a correction in the trendline in 2008, the subsequent downturn in the average distance of battles from major cities began in 2009. This shift is particularly interesting given that it occurred two years prior to the start of the Arab Spring (and the following civil wars in Libya and Syria). Even though battles throughout this period were centered near major cities (such as Hama, Tripoli, Damascus, Aleppo, and Benghazi), across the global sample population, fighting had already begun to move closer to major cities. Notably, 2013 marked a return to increasing distances between civil war battles and major cities (the same year that major fighting broke out in the Central African Republic and South Sudan).

FIGURE 4.3: AVERAGE DISTANCE OF ONE-SIDED VIOLENCE FROM MAJOR CITIES.
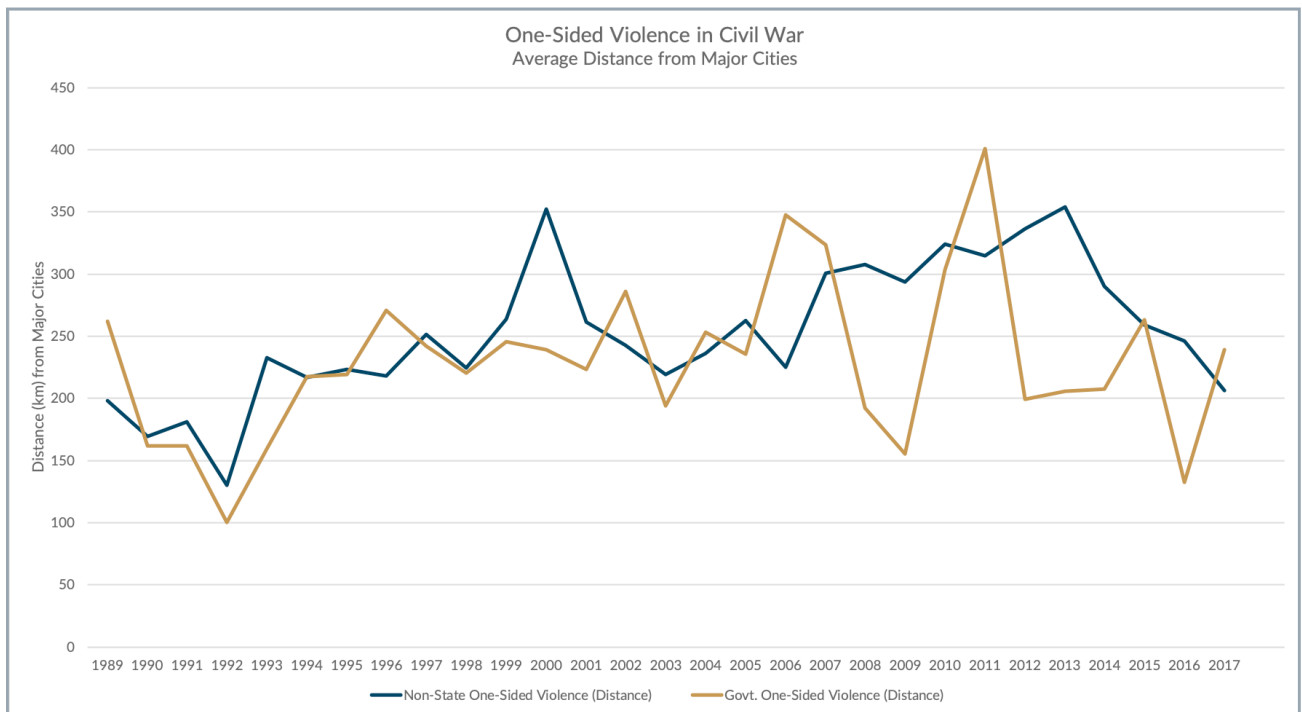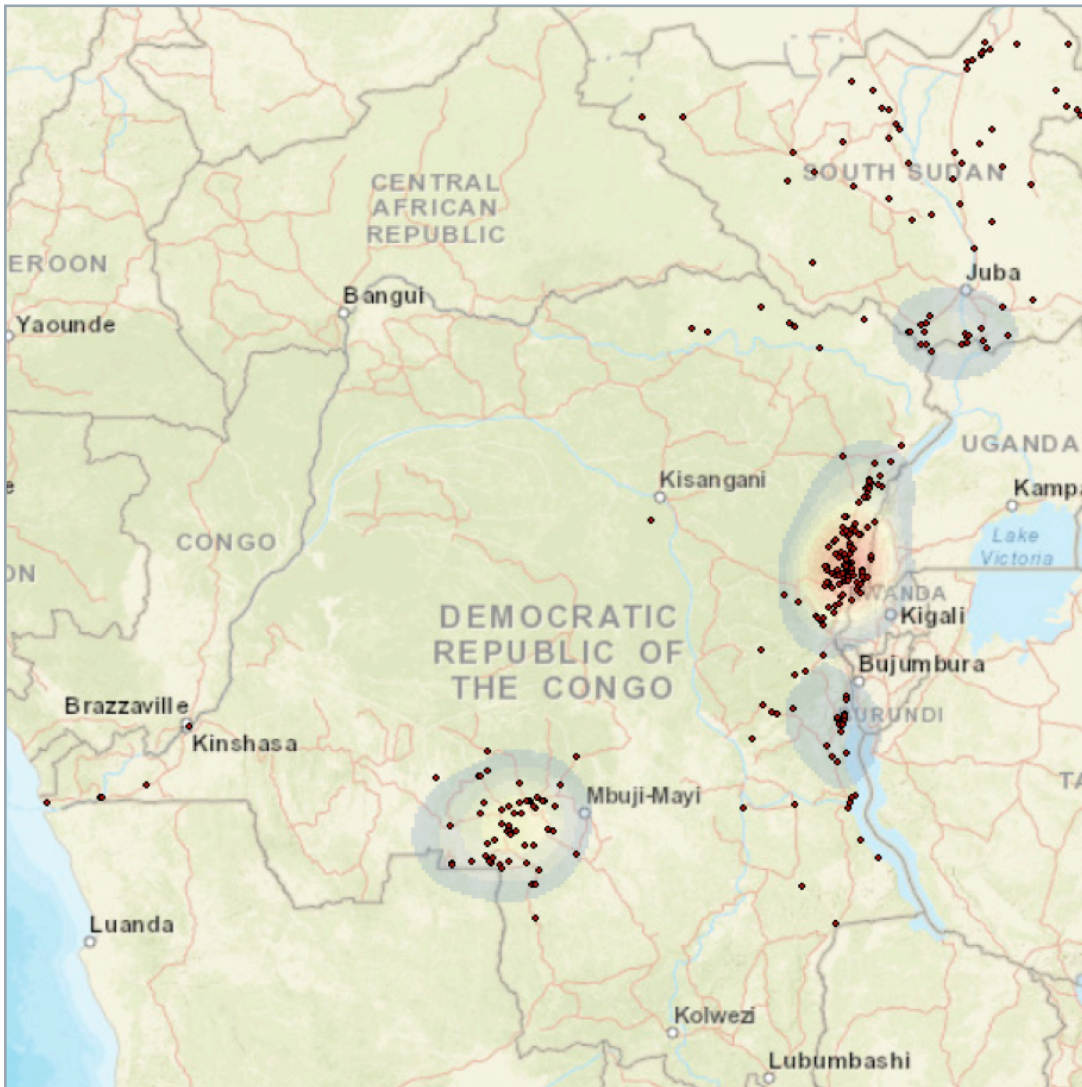

Data drawn from UCDP GED.

As noted, though, fighting between rebel and government forces only represents one form of violence that occurs during civil wars. Civil wars may also include targeted violence perpetrated against civilians. Figure 4.3 includes the average distance of one-sided violent events from major cities in conflict-affected countries. Specifically, the figure includes both government-perpetrated one-sided violence as well as one-sided violence perpetrated by non-state actors such as rebel groups or clan militias. While there is a significant amount of volatility in this measure, the data suggest that non-state-actor one-sided violence tends to be moving farther away from major centers. At the earliest point in our dataset (1989), one-sided violence perpetrated by non-state actors was, on average, 198 kilometers from city centers. Ten years later, this number increases to 263 kilometers from city centers. By 2009, one-sided violence perpetrated by non-state actors

is, on average, 293 kilometers from major cities. While this trend largely follows changes in battle distances discussed earlier, there is one key difference in the data. Specifically, one-sided violence perpetrated by non-state actors has begun to move closer and closer to major cities over the past five years. Unlike the average battle distance from major cities, it appears that the Arab Spring (and the subsequent civil wars in Libya and Syria, as well as renewed violence in Iraq) has coincided with a growing number of killings perpetrated near major cities in conflict-affected states. This finding should be somewhat unsurprising given the mass killings perpetrated by the Islamic State in cities captured by the group (as well as a slew of other atrocities perpetrated by the rebels). During the same time period, fighting in the Central African Republic was also marked by a substantial increase in killings perpetrated by militias and rebel groups in and around Bangui (the capital of the country as well as the largest city). This differs significantly from the years leading up to the Arab Spring (as well as the war in South Sudan and previous wars in the Central African Republic), when non-state actors appeared to engage in killings farther away from major cities. This is largely emblematic of the violence perpetrated in the Democratic Republic of Congo or in rural northern Nigeria, where armed groups brutalized vulnerable civilians miles away from garrisoned government troops or international peacekeepers.

As opposed to the trendline associated with one-sided violence by non-state actors, one-sided violence that is government perpetrated seems to have little or no observable trend. Rather, the measure for the average distance of government one-sided violence seems extremely volatile, with each year experiencing significant shifts towards or away from major cities. For instance, in 1989, government one-sided violence was, on average, perpetrated 269 kilometers from major cities. By 1999, the distance had fallen to 245 kilometers. Ten years later, one-sided violence drops further to 155 kilometers from major cities, and then almost doubles in the following year to 303 kilometers in 2010. At the start of the Arab Spring, government violence against civilians moves even farther away from major cities (jumping to around 400 kilometers). The following year, the average distance drops by more than half to 199 kilometers from major cities (significantly rising again three years later). While the distance of events of non-state-actor one-sided violence has some semblance of consistency, the changes in distance of government violence seem almost capricious. Intuitively, we should expect that violence perpetrated by rebels or militias will be perpetrated further from city centers. As rebel groups often operate on the periphery of states to avoid government sanction, coercive violence employed by these groups should occur in similar locations. Along similar lines, we might expect that government one-sided violence should occur closer to major cities, as states seek to target potential rebel collaborators near their own borders. This is clearly not the case, though. Rather, government-perpetrated violence may be driven by other salient features of the conflict. For instance, the Guatemalan and Salvadoran civil wars experienced significant government-sponsored killings far from major cities initiated as a way to stamp out rural insurgencies. On the other hand, during the Ethiopian civil war, the Derg government responded to a violent urban terror campaign launched by the EPRP with the "Red Terror," in which they perpetrated mass killings and arrests to stamp out insurgents.

A Closer Look: Examining Recent Trends in South Sudan and the DRC

There are significant limitations to looking at broad trends in armed conflict. Specifically, these general trends often obscure the complicated dynamics that shape when and where fighting moves closer to major cities. To address this, we take a look at two current civil wars that have received substantial attention from the international press: those of South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. This allows us to examine how shifting political dynamics, access to natural resources, and the number of actors shape the incentives for fighting to move away from major cities or push closer to large settlements. The following section examines the locations of conflict events over the course of 2017 in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These neighboring conflicts have a variety of differences in conflict dynamics, such as the number of actors, the size of the state, and the goals of the participant, which may make them particularly useful for comparison. Mapping data is taken from the UCDP GED[138] and includes an analysis of all conflict actors listed as being involved in five or more conflict events over the course of 2017.

FIGURE 4.4: CONFLICT EVENTS IN THE DRC AND SOUTH SUDAN.

Data drawn from UCDP GED.

South Sudan

In 2017 South Sudan was in the midst of a civil war which had erupted at the end of 2013. The conflict has been characterized by several ceasefires and peace processes which have failed to bring a sustained end to the fighting. In 2016 there were promising developments towards peace as rebel leader Riek Machar briefly returned to his post as vice president before renewed fighting broke out in the capital. In May of 2017 the government announced a ceasefire, but fighting between government troops and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO) continued unabated. So, what can the location of conflict events tell us about the nature of the conflict?

FIGURE 4.5: ALL CONFLICT EVENTS KERNEL DENSITY, SOUTH SUDAN, 2017
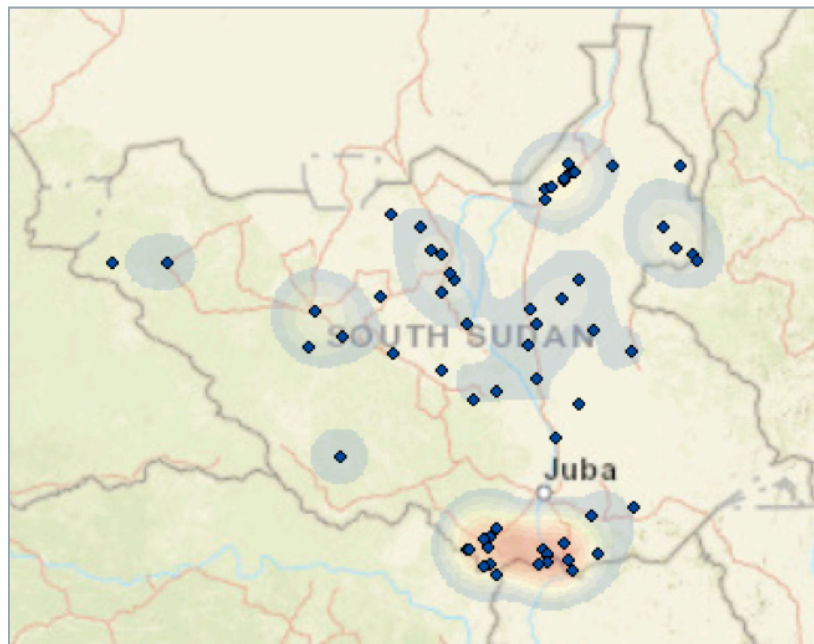
Data drawn from UCDP GED.

Conflict events in South Sudan in 2017 are widely dispersed across the country, with some degree of concentration in the south-central (particularly south of Juba) and north-central/northeast portions of the country. However, this generally even distribution obscures greater nuance when the data is further broken down by the kind of conflict event and actor. Battles (as opposed to civilian targeting) are widely distributed, with hotspots in the area south of Juba and Yei, near the city of Wau, and in the oil-rich Upper Nile region near the city of Malakal. This distribution of battle events seems to fit with the stated ambitions of both major participants, the South Sudanese government and the SPLA-IO, to control the state by concentrating military efforts on contesting the nation's capital and oil resources. Violence which targeted civilians in 2017, however, was more concentrated in the south of the country. This appears to be driven by an increased use of violence against civilians by government forces in the area. Government troops accounted for 84 percent of events targeting civilians in 2017, and 59 percent of those events happened in Central Equatoria state alone.

TABLE 4.1: SUMMARY OF EVENTS IN SOUTH SUDAN

ACTOR	# EVENTS	% ALL CONFLICT EVENTS	% BATTLES	% VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS
Gov	86	81%	57%	43%
SPLA-IO	56	53%	87%	13%
Bor Dinka	5	5%	100%	0%

Turning to the distribution of the events by conflict actor, we see that the two primary actors, the South Sudanese government and the SPLA-IO, have quite similar distributions. This is primarily because a large percentage of the conflict events involve both actors. In fact, engagements between the government and SPLA-IO represent 48 percent of all conflict events and 82 percent of battles. Therefore, the variation in where these two actors were active is primarily due to differences in where they targeted civilian populations. As mentioned previously, the South Sudanese government committed significantly more violence against civilians than the SPLA-IO in 2017 and it was primarily concentrated in the south, while what violence against civilians the SPLA-IO did commit was more dispersed across the country.

What emerges is a picture of a relatively conventional civil war in South Sudan during this time period, characterized by two primary combatants largely targeting each other for control of the state. The relatively weak nature of the central government allowed the SPLA-IO to push towards strategic targets and aggressively seek to hold territory. The South Sudanese government seems equally interested in dislodging rebel forces from territory they have captured. This is not to ignore the significant levels of communal violence in the South Sudanese conflict. This type of violence is very likely underreported in the data due to its geographic remoteness and the difficulty in distinguishing such violence from intercommunal cattle raiding, which is prevalent in South Sudan (See Box 4.1?? on bias in conflict-event reporting). That said, as we will see in comparison to the conflict in the DRC, data about the location and character of violence in the South Sudanese conflict indicates a fairly conventional civil war fought for control of the state.

The Democratic Republic of Congo

The conflict in the DRC in 2017 needs to be viewed in the context of an ongoing political crisis. Incumbent President Joseph Kabila's constitutionally allowed second term officially ended in December 2016. However, government claims of financial and logistical challenges meant that elections have been delayed and Kabila has been allowed to remain in power. While the DRC, particularly the provinces of North and South Kivu, has been impacted by a complex and large-scale conflict for decades, this new political crisis changed the conflict dynamics in 2017, including initiating the appearance of conflict in previously stable areas of the country and changes in the motivations (or perhaps the justifications) of the conflict actors. These new dynamics expanded the scope and complexity of conflict in the DRC, which in previous years had been more geographically isolated and local in nature. Mapping the intensity of conflict activity largely reflects this change.

FIGURE 4.6: ALL CONFLICT EVENTS KERNEL DENSITY, DRC, 2017
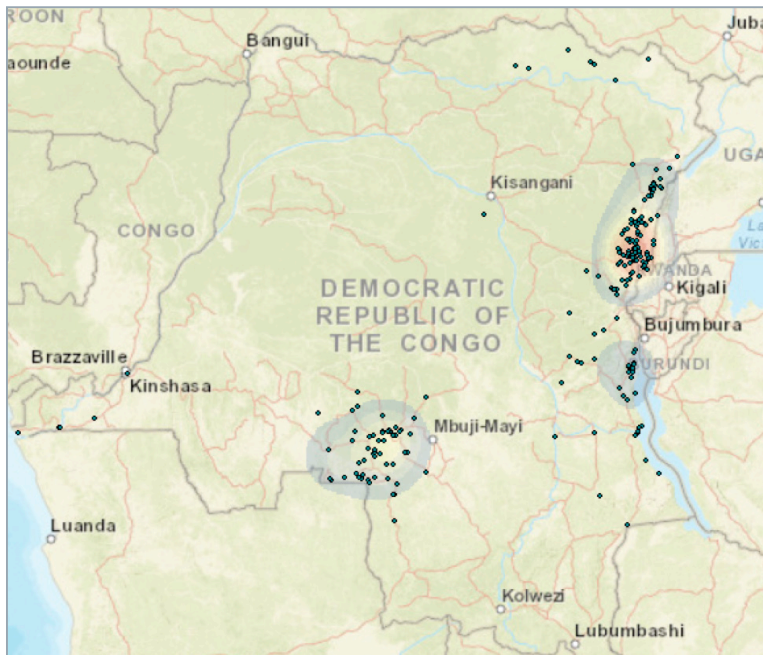

Data drawn from UCDP GED.

When looking at the distribution of conflict events in the DRC we see a far higher level of geographic concentration than the relatively evenly dispersed events in the South Sudanese conflict. There are three major areas of concentration in North Kivu/Ituri, South Kivu, and the Kasia region, with less-significant concentrations in the area near the South Sudan/

Central African Republic border, Kongo Central/Kinshasa, and Tanganyika province. However, in contrast to South Sudan, large swaths of the central, northwest, west and southeastern areas of the country record no conflict activity at all. This largely reflects the differing natures of the two conflicts, with those in the DRC being generally more localized in their underlying causes and geographic extent, as opposed to the contest for state capture seen in South Sudan.

North and South Kivu have long been the epicenter of conflict in the DRC. These two provinces see a large amount of activity by a variety of actors including Congolese government troops, a host of Mai-Mai militias, and rebel groups originating in neighboring states, such as the ADF and FDLR, which have become entrenched in the eastern DRC over a period of decades. These conflicts are incredibly complex, with a plethora of actors involved in an ever-shifting conflict. Eleven different conflict actors which met the threshold of five or more conflict events were active in North Kivu province alone in 2017. This is in comparison to just three in all of South Sudan in the same year. Despite an expanding geographic scope of conflict in 2017 (described below) these eastern provinces are still the epicenter of conflict in the DRC. In 2017 the Kivus accounted for just over half of the country's conflict events.

Despite the continued concentration of conflict in the Kivus, however, 2017 saw the geographic expansion of conflict which reflects the changes in the political context described above. This is best captured in the actions of three groups: the Mai-Mai Yakutumba/CNPSC, Kamuina Nsapu, and Bundu dia Kongo. Mai-Mai Yakutumba had operated in the Fizi area of South Kivu since the end of the Second Congo War. They are, in many ways, characteristic of the many Mai-Mai and similar small-scale armed groups in the Kivus, exploiting natural resources and the civilian population and avoiding armed confrontation with government troops through geographic remoteness and political patronage.[139] But 2017 saw the group reacting to the political crisis by reenergizing a coalition of Mai-Mai groups in the area called the National People's Coalition for the Sovereignty of Congo (CNPSC). In September of 2017 the group issued a "declaration of war" against the Kabila government for violating the constitution.[140] While this declaration rings somewhat hollow and the patchwork coalition is unlikely to pose a real threat to the state, this new narrative does seem to have impacted how the group operates.

**FIGURE 4.7:** MAI-MAI YAKUTUMBA KERNEL DENSITY, 2017
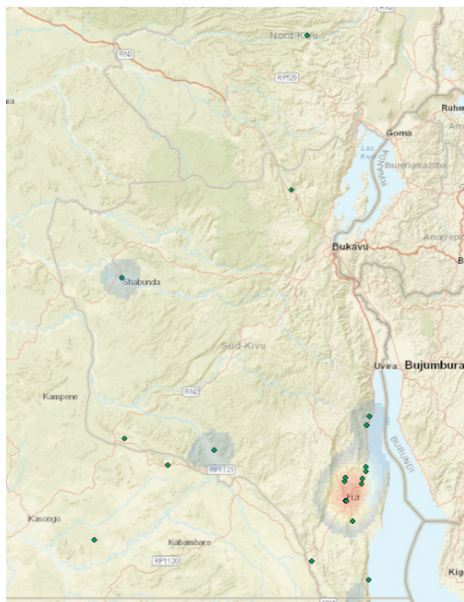
While the group still primarily operates in the Fizi area, there are also concentrations of events in neighboring provinces and other parts of South Kivu, most notably in and around Uvira, where Mai-Mai Yakutumba launched an assault on land and via Lake Tanganyika which significantly tested Congolese troops.[141] Uvira is South Kivu's second largest city, and this attack demonstrates the group's increased willingness to operate in or near urban centers and seems to reflect their new narrative about contesting state control in a significant manner. This shift also appears to be reflected in the type of conflict events the group is involved in. CNPSC is one of the conflict actors in the DRC with no recorded events targeting civilians in 2017, possibly reflecting a move towards a more conventional conflict. A similar rebel group coalition has formed in North Kivu,[142] further demonstrating the potential for the political crisis in the country to allow for previously local actors to adopt national-level political narratives in an effort to expand the conflict.

Data drawn from UCDP GED.

TABLE 4.2: SUMMARY OF EVENTS IN DRC

ACTOR	# EVENTS	% ALL CONFLICT EVENTS	% BATTLES	% VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS
DRC Gov	192	54%	73%	27%
Kamina Nsapu	96	27%	72%	28%
CMC	51	14%	67%	33%
MM Mazembe	36	10%	58%	42%
MM Yakutumba	28	8%	100%	0%
NDC-R	21	6%	100%	0%
Uganda Gov	21	6%	100%	0%
Batwa	16	5%	100%	0%
Baluba	16	5%	100%	0%
ADF	15	4%	87%	13%
FDLR	13	4%	38%	62%
LRA	12	3%	67%	33%
BDK	10	3%	100%	0%
CNRD	8	2%	100%	0%
Bana Mura	6	2%	0%	100%

In addition to triggering changes in existing armed groups, the political crisis in the DRC seems to have been important in catalyzing the emergence of new armed groups in areas of the country which had previously experienced relative stability. The most prominent example of this is the Kamuina Nsapu (KN) in the Kasia region. The group emerged in the second half of 2016 in response to the government's attempts to strip a traditional leader of his authority. However, Kasia has long been a stronghold of opposition politics in the DRC and the group soon adopted, at least in rhetoric, national-level political demands.

FIGURE 4.8: KAMUINA NSAPU KERNEL DENSITY, 2017

Data drawn from UCDP GED.
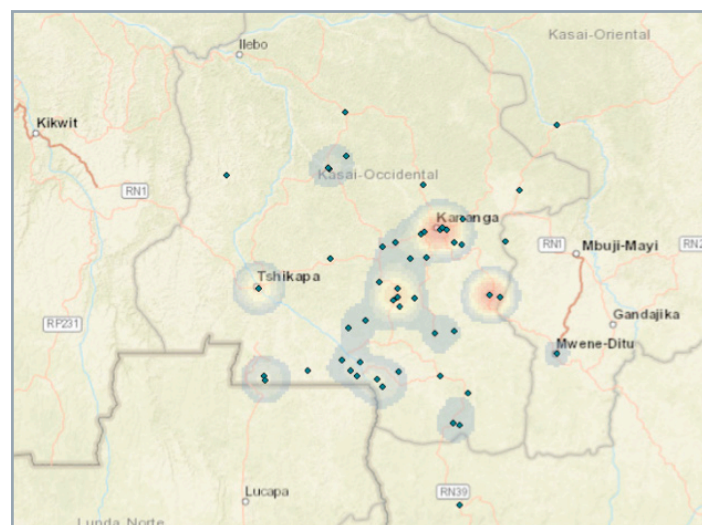
Another interesting geographic trend brought into focus in 2017 is that new armed actors were shifting conflict closer to the nation's largest cities. The DRC's recent history of conflict has been concentrated in the Kivus, an area of high population density, but far removed from the country's- largest urban centers. This is in contrast to the South Sudanese case described above, where conflict events were concentrated around some of the county's largest cities. However, 2017 saw a shift towards more urban-proximate conflict events in the DRC. The aforementioned KN rebel group was directly involved in 27 percent of conflict events in 2017 and nearly all of these happened in or near the cities of Kananga and Mbuji-Mayi, two of the country's largest. This trend towards urban

conflict is also reflected in the activity of another emergent armed group, the Bundu dia Kongo (BDK). The BDK has been in existence for decades as a religious/cultural/political movement which seeks greater autonomy for the Kongo ethnic group.[143] Relations between the movement and the government have long be fraught, but in recent years have involved armed confrontations. While much smaller in scale than the KN, the BDK's operations in 2017 were largely urban, with more than half of the conflict events they were involved in taking place in Kinshasa, including an audacious armed assault on a prison in the capital to free their leader which left 80 dead and freed thousands of inmates.[144] Whether 2017 was an anomaly in the generally rural character of conflict in the DRC or was the beginning of a trend towards more urban conflict events is yet unclear.

While the majority of groups in the DRC have fought regional conflicts on the periphery of the country, it appears that the political crisis of 2016 (continuing into 2017) has reshaped the dynamics of the conflict. Rebel groups that had traditionally sought few engagements with the central government began fighting closer to larger cities. Equally, the BDK seems to have exploited the current instability and pushed for a more aggressive strategy within the country. The DRC case underscores that shifting political dynamics may reshape the incentive for rebel groups to move closer to major cities as a way to dislodge their opponents. For instance, the advance of Houthi rebels on the Yemeni capital city of Sana'a occurred following a surge in anti-government protests and political instability under President Hadi and the transitional government.[145] These findings may have critical importance for predicting when fighting will intensify during civil wars.

Conclusion

This section of the report examined recent trends in the locations of armed conflict events. In particular, this portion of the report provided recent data on the average distance of armed conflict events from major cities in conflict-affected countries. Though recent coverage of civil wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen has highlighted large-scale urban warfare, the global trends suggest a more complicated story. On average, battles between rebels and the government have moved farther away from major cities. Trends on targeted violence against civilians, though, are not so clear-cut. Government violence seems to vacillate, with some years involving killings farther away from major cities and subsequent years moving closer to large metropolitan areas. Rebel one-sided violence had historically moved farther away from major cities, but recent years have led to a return to targeted killings closer to large cities. To explore the complicated nature of these results, we provide an in-depth look at battlefield dynamics in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The findings suggest that while global trends may be moving events farther from major cities, battlefield locations and targeted violence are driven by many country-specific (and even subnational) factors. Taken together, our findings generate a few policy suggestions for decisionmakers involved in conflict management.

1. Political Instability May Shift the Nature of Armed Conflicts

Though fighting may be moving farther from major cities, this trend is somewhat tenuous. As noted in Section II, rebel groups may be limited only by means and opportunity to wage more aggressive campaigns against the central government. Political instability in the form of coups, constitutional crises, or sudden domestic unrest may allow rebel groups to push closer to major centers with little concern that the regime can wage a robust counteroffensive. This may heighten political instability, adding greater pressure on an already fragile state. To address this problem, international observers should be especially concerned with domestic unrest and political instability occurring during civil wars. Early diplomatic interventions, aid to restive communities, and additional peacekeepers may be particularly useful in order to dissuade rebels from seeking to launch more aggressive campaigns against the state.

2. Be Wary of Rebels on the Move

Our results also demonstrate that rebel one-sided violence is moving closer to major cities. As noted earlier, this may be the result of rebels targeting civilians as they begin to approach large cities. Equally, governments under threat from an approaching rebel army may react by targeting civilians. Therefore, as rebel forces move closer to major cities, the international community should be wary of potential one-sided violence perpetrated against vulnerable civilians. As noted by Greig, both rebels and the government tend to be more amenable to international mediation when insurgents approach major cities.[146] In order to head off the risk of increased civilian victimization, international organizations and concerned foreign governments should act quickly with diplomatic interventions when rebels push towards major cities. Though a military response by third parties may have the potential to offset rebel gains, such an action will alter the balance of power, increasing rebel incentives to target civilians anyway.

V. ORGANIZATION OF REBEL GROUPS

Introduction

Similar to the results in the previous section, the most noticeable evolution in civil wars has been the shifting organizational dynamics of rebel groups. While many studies on armed conflict have focused increasingly on the dynamics of civil wars, relatively few studies have sought to examine the organizational nature of rebel groups. These factors are often used as explanatory variables in research on civil war, where rebel group strength, financing, ideology, or command structure are posited as reasons for why rebels eschew settlements, engage in terrorism, or perpetrate violence against civilians.[147] Clearly these factors play a significant role in shaping the nature of armed conflict. On the other hand, it remains less clear how these factors have shifted over time, as well as what questions we can ask about why rebels elect to use a decentralized command structure, adopt extremist ideologies, or avoid building strong ties with local communities. It is important to explore how rebels choose to prosecute civil wars not only on the battlefield, but within their own ranks as well.

This section of the report will primarily examine the historic trends in rebel group ideology and organizational structure. Specifically, the survey of past trends in rebel ideologies will underscore the relative decline in leftwing ideological goals as well as the significant increase in the religious nature of rebels. The findings will also highlight that in terms of religious armed conflicts, the past decade has experienced a significant increase in Islamic ideological goals on the part of insurgents. The second part of this section will look specifically at how the organizational structure of rebel groups has shifted significantly over time, with fewer and fewer organizations maintaining highly centralized control. Rather, most organizations appear to be highly decentralized. This shift in rebel group structure may have serious implications for the ability of the international community to bring these rebels to the negotiating table, as insurgents may not be able to credibly commit to settlements. To investigate this shift, we discuss how changes in rebel group financing and more aggressive counter-insurgency tactics may be fueling this transition in rebel group structure. Finally, we end this section with a discussion of how these trends may undermine the agency of the international community to peacefully resolve disputes as insurgencies have less incentive to bargain and are less reliable when bargaining.

Rebel Group Ideology

A key component of rebel group organizations is their ideological orientation. As compared to military strength, degree of centralized control, or whether they maintain territorial control, the ideological goals of rebel organizations play a key role in how they mobilize support domestically as well as from foreign patrons. For instance, leftwing insurgencies throughout Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia were able to draw support in the form of weapons, training, or financial assistance from sympathetic communist states. Equally, current civil wars in Yemen and Syria are defined, in

part, by foreign patronage provided to co-sectarians operating in those theaters. Though the term "ideology" can often encompass many different definitions, we rely on the conceptualization offered by Sanin and Wood.[148] Specifically, the authors note that,

> "By ideology [emphasis in the original], we mean a more or less systematic set of ideas that includes the identification of a referent group (a class, ethnic, or other social group), an enunciation of the grievances or challenges that the group confronts, the identification of objectives on behalf of that group (political change – or defense against its threat), and a (perhaps vaguely defined) program of action."

In other words, ideology is often used (instrumentally) to identify a constituency, clarify (or manufacture) grievances held by that constituency, and offer a specific set of policy goals to address the grievances of that constituency. For rebel groups, one motivation behind generating strong ideological positions is to use the ideological goals that they espouse to mobilize support.

Though the ideological orientation of a rebel group is an intimate part of their organizational structure, it has not been well studied in the quantitative literature on civil war. As noted by Walter, recent studies on the role of ideology in civil war remain very few.[149] With that said, what studies that have been done have often demonstrated that the ideological orientation of rebels often shapes their behavior during civil wars. Polo and Gleditsch suggest that certain ideologies (particularly leftist and religious groups) may push rebels to engage in greater terrorist attacks as compared to other rebel ideologies.[150] Along similar lines, Hirose et al. have demonstrated that rebels may use ideological cues to identify outgroups within the civilian population to target with terrorist violence (thereby reducing indiscriminate violence against their own supporters).[151] Furthermore, in her work on extremist positions in civil war, Walter suggests that rebels may adopt more radical positions (particularly for religious organizations) in order to attract recruits and overcome principle–agent problems that emerge on the battlefield.[152]

Ideology may also play a critical role in determining how rebel groups are structured. As noted by Sanin and Wood,[153] certain rebel group institutions and structures are "embedded" into the ideologies maintained by insurgents. Marxist organizations, for instance, are more likely to structure the rebel group to wage low-level guerilla campaigns. Equally, these groups are more likely to operate a parallel political wing.[154] Leftwing rebel groups are also more likely to recruit female combatants to assist in the insurgency, particularly compared to religious rebel groups.[155] Given the relatively important nature of ideology in shaping how rebels prosecute wars as well as the goals they seek, an examination of how ideologies have shifted over time would be warranted.
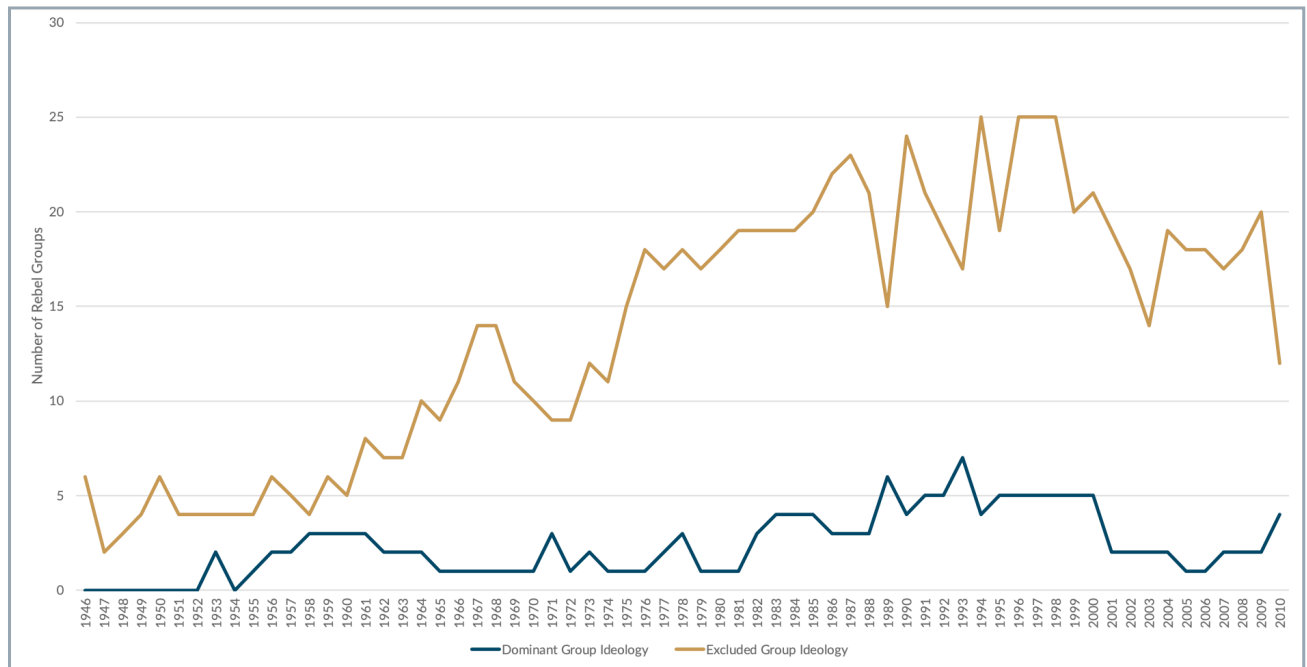
Trends in Rebel Group Ideology

At the first stage of this analysis, we examine the shifting trends in rebel group ideology across three main orientations: economic (specifically, leftwing), ethno-nationalist, and religious ideological orientations. Leftwing ideologies are operationalized as whether the rebel group identifies as a Marxist, socialist, or communist rebel group. These data are drawn from the ACD2GTD dataset on rebel group terrorism as well as from the UCDP Non-State Actors in Civil Wars dataset.[156] Ethno-nationalist ideologies are operationalized as whether there is explicit evidence that a rebel group claims to represent the interests of an ethnic group. These data are drawn from the Armed Conflict Dataset to Ethnic Power Relations (ACD2EPR) dataset.[157] Finally, religious ideology data are drawn from both the ACD2GTD dataset as well as from the Religion in Armed Conflict (or RELAC) dataset.[158] As with many other sections of this report, our sample of rebel groups is drawn from the UCDP Conflict Termination dataset.

FIGURE 5.1: TRENDS IN REBEL IDEOLOGY.
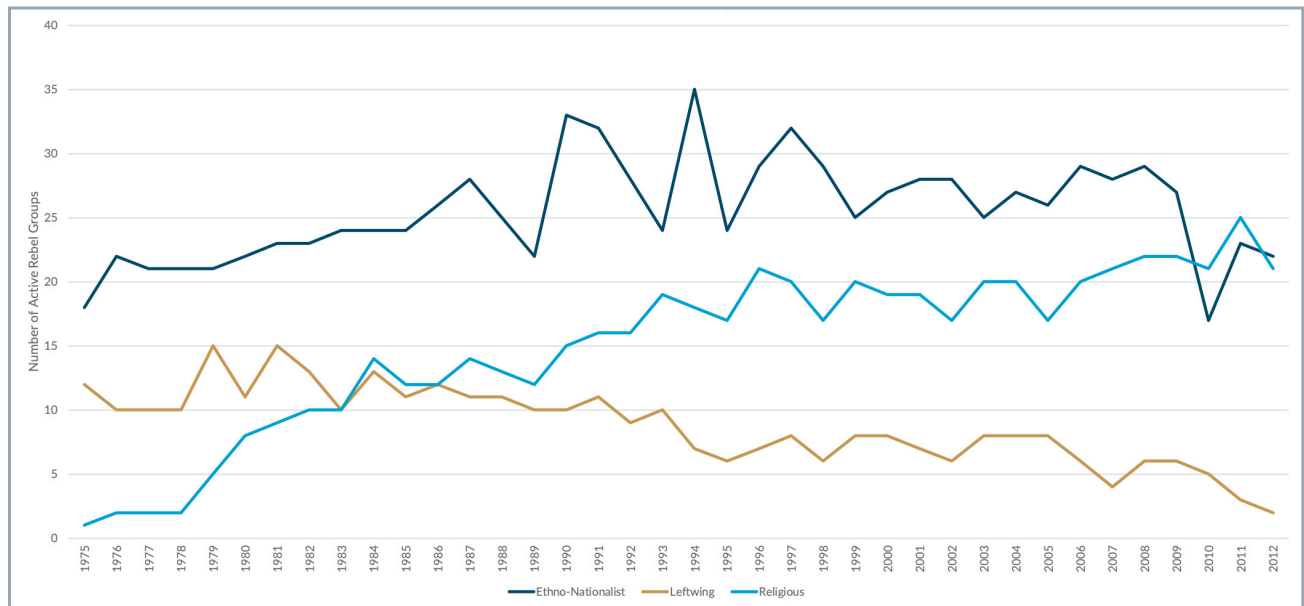
As demonstrated by Figure 5.1, there has been a precipitous decline in leftwing ideological groups while there has been a steady rise in rebel organizations that maintain a religious ideological stance. What is interesting in the historic trends of rebel group ideology is that a decline in leftwing ideologies began prior to the end of the Cold War. Specifically, 1985 marked a steady decline in the number of active rebel groups espousing a leftwing ideology. For religious ideologies, there was a steady rise in the number of sectarian rebel groups following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The number of religious armed groups, though, did not decline following the defeat of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Rather, religiously motivated groups continue to represent a greater share of active rebel groups in the international system.

Ethno-nationalist rebel groups clearly represent the most common ideological orientation as compared to the three normative goals that are compared here. It should be noted, though, that ethno-nationalist rebel groups reached a high point in 1994 and have been declining somewhat since that point. From the data, it appears that the rise in ethno-nationalism began during the collapse of the Soviet Union, as newly independent states began negotiating the transition from Soviet rule. Still, ethno-nationalist ideologies represent the modal position for many rebel groups that adopt a clear ideological position (as compared to rebels that do not espouse a specific ideology). Looking closer, it appears that ethno-nationalist ideologies are often adopted to mobilize groups that face persecution from the state. Using the ACD2EPR dataset, we look specifically at groups that claim to represent the interests of ethnic groups that are excluded from the political process as compared to groups that claim to represent the interests of dominant ethnic groups. Unsurprisingly, violent non-state actors seem to attempt to mobilize politically disaffected ethnic groups more often than those groups that claim to represent dominant ethnic or sectarian groups. Interestingly, rebel groups fighting on behalf of politically dominant ethnic groups appear to emerge in the late 1950s and the late 1980s, as well as throughout the 1990s. These periods overlap with substantial political change occurring throughout Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia. Rebels representing the interests of dominant ethnic groups may therefore emerge in order to preserve the status quo in the face of significant political change. This is reminiscent of the civil war in Iraq following the United States invasion in 2003. Mobilized Sunni Muslims began to violently protest the critical political changes that emerged under the US occupation.

FIGURE 5.2: ETHNO-NATIONALIST IDEOLOGIES OF REBEL GROUPS

Data drawn from the ACD2EPR dataset.

The trends in religious ideologies are even more clear. Relying specifically on the RELAC dataset, we look at the variation in religious ideological goals claimed by each rebel group. As noted by Svensson and Nilsson in their work on the subject, Islamic ideologies are by far the modal religious position of sectarian rebel groups.[159] Though there do appear to be other religiously motivated rebel groups (particularly Christian and Hindu), much of the variation in the rise of religious ideologies seems to be explained by the rise in Islamic rebel groups. These rebel groups appear to have grown exponentially since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Though instability in the Middle East may account for many of these rebel groups, the prominent rise in Islamic insurgencies extends well beyond Iraq and Syria. Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya, and the Alliance of Democratic Forces in Uganda represent just a few of the religiously inspired rebel groups that emerged in the twenty-first century.

FIGURE 5.3: TRENDS IN RELIGIOUS GOALS OF REBELS.
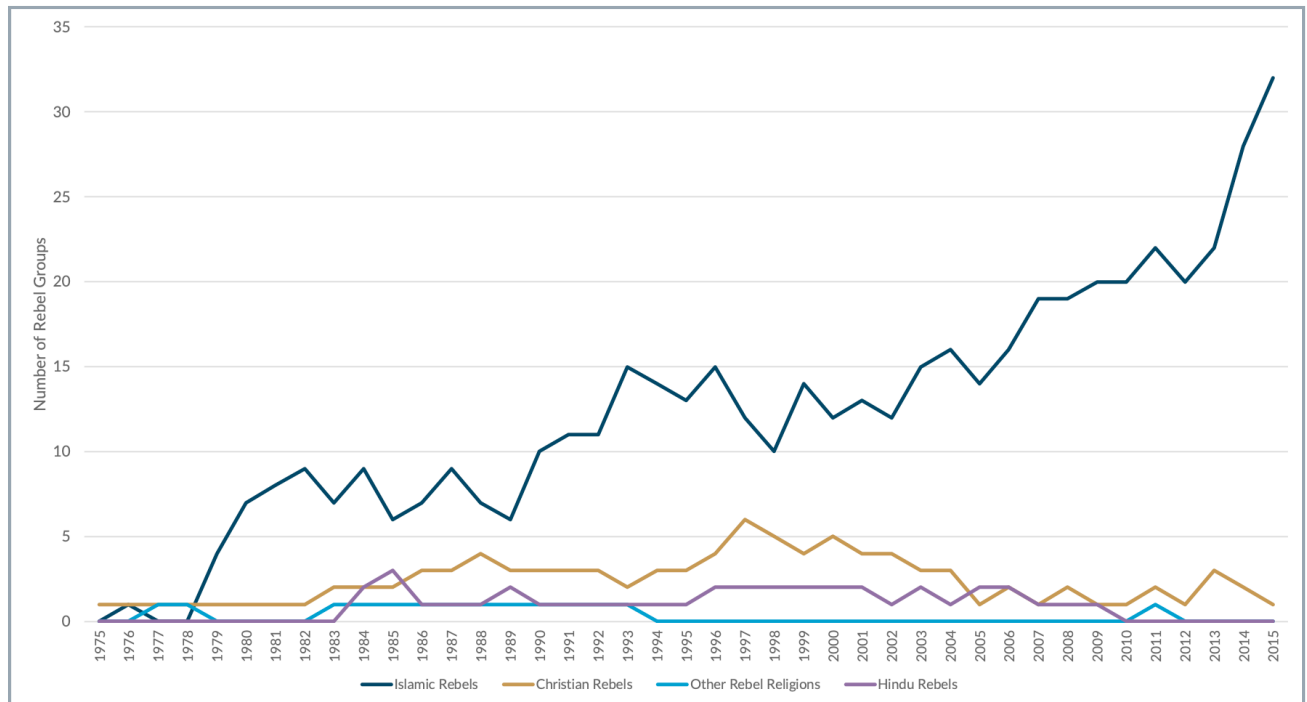
Data drawn from the RELAC dataset.

The trends in religious ideologies underscore an interesting puzzle. Though there is significant variation in the types of religions practiced around the globe, few religions end up being used as a way to mobilize support by insurgents. Though religious differences are often posited as being a primary driver of armed conflict globally, religious differences do not appear to be a historic driver of rebel mobilization. This clearly has changed, though, in recent years, as a greater number of rebel groups appear to be mobilized around Islamic religious goals. Still, other rebel groups are not attempting to replicate this trend using Buddhist, Animist, Christian, or Hindu faiths. Rather, many rebel groups opt to mobilize based on ethno-nationalist identity, or economic discontent, or simply choose not to offer a salient ideological goal. Future research should examine why some rebel groups elect not to pursue religious goals in favor of other salient features.

These findings offer a more pessimistic view of managing conflicts in the future. Past work on resolving armed conflicts has noted that religious disputes are, in general, more difficult to resolve through a negotiated settlement as compared to conflicts not fought over contentious religious issues.[160] Equally, work by Wucherpfennig et al. demonstrates that rebels who campaign on the grievances of politically excluded ethnic groups often fail to reach political settlements with dominant groups who have little or no interest in abdicating political power.[161] As demonstrated by the historic trends in rebel group ideology, more and more rebels have adopted ethno-nationalist positions that advocate for politically excluded ethnic groups. This may reduce the likelihood that the international community can effectively negotiate a settlement to armed conflicts.
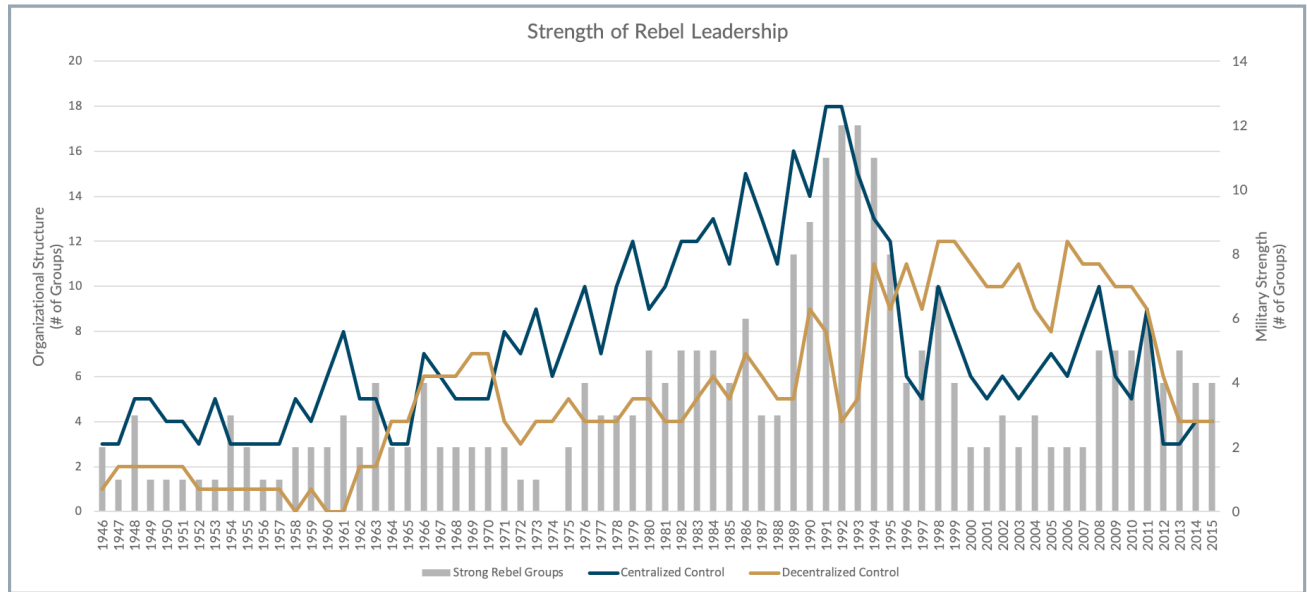
Rebel Group Structure

Past work on rebel group structure has overwhelmingly looked at rebel relationships with the civilian population. A number of factors may influence a rebel group's organizational characteristics. The geographical dispersion of rebels, preexisting local networks, current relationships with local leaders, and revenue streams may all shape how dissidents structure their organizations.[162] For instance, a significant body of work has examined how rebels draw revenue from civilians to maintain their war effort.[163] In general, rebels that maintain predatory relationships with the civilian population or draw their resources from abroad are far less likely to co-opt civilian support for the war effort.[164] Rather, these rebels often view civilians as a source of goods and services to be extracted at gunpoint. Rebels who build strong ties with the local population, on the other hand, tend to view disaffected civilians as a source of shelter from government sanction and as a pool of potential recruits to draw from as part of the war effort. Work by Keels and Kinney, for instance, suggests that rebels may utilize parallel political wings to identify and aggregate civilian grievances into policy promises to mobilize civilian support.[165] Along similar lines, past work has noted that rebels may generate social service and governance mechanisms to ensure the loyalty of civilians throughout the course of the war.[166]

While this research has significantly expanded our understanding of how societal, economic, and strategic factors (such as mobilization mechanisms) affect rebel group structure, this body of work provides little in the way of explaining how rebel group structure has evolved over time. Historically, have rebel groups relied heavily on mass mobilization strategies? Equally, given the clandestine nature of insurgency, how many rebel groups elect to centralize control as opposed to operate highly decentralized networks of affiliated militant groups? To explore these questions further, we provide a brief look at how rebel groups have structured themselves since the end of World War II. Additionally, we offer two preliminary explanations for why rebels have begun to change the structure of insurgency.

Data and Trends in Organizational Structure

For rebel group structure, we limit our review of historical trends to the degree of control exerted by rebel leadership (i.e., centralized versus decentralized control). These data are drawn from the UCDP Non-State Actors in Civil War dataset.[167] Our sample population of rebel groups is generated from the UCDP/ACD list of rebel groups that are included in the UCDP Conflict Termination dataset. As the centralized control may be tied intimately with a rebel group's military capacity, we include data on rebel military strength. Specifically, we use Cunningham et al.'s dyadic measure of rebel group strength, where rebels are much weaker, weaker, at parity, or stronger than the central government. For simplicity, we only include a count of rebel groups that are either at parity with the central government or stronger than the central government. In short, these rebels are classified as Strong Rebels.

FIGURE 5.4: REBEL GROUP STRUCTURE.

Data drawn from UCDP Non-State Actors in Civil War dataset.

As suggested by Figure 5.4, the number of rebel groups that maintain centralized control tracks fairly closely with rebel group strength. This makes intuitive sense, as rebels who maintain a large number of troops and operate in multiple areas across the conflict zone must direct and monitor their forces closely. As noted by Gates, as rebel forces become more geographically diffuse, there is a significant increase in the risk of principal–agent problems, complicating the war effort.[168] This is not to say that only strong rebels maintain centralized control. It is notable that throughout much of the post-WWII era the norm was more centralized control for rebel organizations. Following the end of the Cold War, though, there has been a steady decline in the number of rebel groups that operate centralized control networks. At the same time, the number of rebel groups with decentralized command structures has increased significantly and is now the modal category for many rebel groups. Though fewer, there are still strong rebel groups operating throughout the globe. What, then, explains the increase in the number of rebel organizations adopting decentralized command systems? To address this puzzle, we offer two possible explanations for what has led to the recent change in rebel command structure. The first deals with the shifting overlap of rebel and criminal organizations. The second discusses the role of more aggressive counter-insurgency measures that have significantly altered how rebel groups operate today.

Criminal Activities and Decentralized Control

One driving factor in the transition from centralized control to decentralized command structures may be the increasing connection between rebels and criminal networks. Kalyvas and Balcells find that in the period 1944 to 2004, 66 percent of all civil wars fought during the Cold War period were irregular wars, compared with only 26 percent of wars fought after 1991.[169] This shift is explained by the significant and continuous augmentation of military capacity during the Cold War period collectively raising the military capacity of rebel groups. Conversely, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet system witnessed a marked decline in military support for many rebel groups, which impacted both their mobilization capacity and organizational structure.[170]

State legitimacy and state capacity also play a key determining role in the type of rebel campaign, the geographic location of the conflict, and the type of change experienced in rebel group organizational structure. Kalyvas and Balcells note that the shift in the majority of internal conflicts from Asia in the mid-1970s to sub-Sharan Africa in the early 1990s is symptomatic of a crisis in legitimacy facing many developing states plagued by high levels of corruption, public disaffection, and the collapse in provisioning of basic services.[171] The high degree of state fragility in sub-Saharan Africa,[172] combined with the lack of state sponsorship after 1991, resulted in rebel groups lacking the necessary capacity and resources to wage sustained and well-coordinated campaigns.[173] As they adapt to the changing environment, one also witnesses rebel groups taking on increasingly criminal group characteristics, seeking to control territory or resources as a means of survival.[174]

It is in this fragile state context, also referred to as the Black Hole thesis by Makarenko, that non-state armed groups initially rely on civil war to achieve objectives, but then shift to an agenda where political objectives are superseded by the allure of illicit-proceed profiteering. [175] In these fragile states, the state is governed under a hybrid arrangement of armed non-state actor and political elite coexistence, with both sets of actors thriving on state dysfunction and fragility.[176] Present-day examples of states under this form of governance include the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Libya, to name but a few. Conversely, in other state contexts where the states do not suffer from fragility, the crime–terror nexus manifests in different ways, viewed best as existing on a continuum, "precisely because it illustrates the fact that a single group can slide up and down the scale"—adapting to environmental changes including counter-insurgency responses and shifting priorities and objectives.[177]

Globalization of Crime

Shelley, commenting on the proliferation of "new" transnational organized criminal groups in the post-Cold War period, argues that the end of the Cold War marked the retreat of the state and "the diffusion of economic and political order in the world."[178] Coinciding in this period was a marked change in rebel group organizational structure from hierarchal to networked. This structural change was made possible by the advances in communication technology, as well as adaptation strategies in the face of counter-insurgency strategies requiring rebel groups to become increasingly disaggregated at a tactical level and financially self-reliant.[179]

This changing environment, referred to as the emergence of "netwar" by Arquilla and Ronfeldt, places a preeminence on exploiting "knowledge" by groups who are organized in a networked structure. Past rebel organizational models based on centralized command and control structures gave way to dispersed small groups, or cells, "who communicate, coordinate and conduct their campaigns in an 'internetted' manner."[180] Supporting the networked nature of armed non-state actors, Asal, Milward, and Schoon demonstrate that the propensity for terrorist organizations to engage in narcotics trafficking is influenced most by the degree of "network connectivity to other terrorist organizations."[181] Premised on empirical evidence of 395 terrorist organizations, Asal et al. go further, arguing the significance of networks as having the most effect, superseding ideology and material resources, which stand at the center of the debates over the crime–terror nexus and thus are the focus of most analyses.[182]

This in no way asserts that material and ideological characteristics do not play a role in influencing involvement of terrorist organizations in the narcotics trade. In fact, Asal et al. demonstrate a positive effect with both ethnopolitical ideology and material factors such as organization size and prior control of territory.[183]

It is no coincidence that in the waning years of the Cold War, Afghanistan, under various guises of Islamic control and in partnership with Pakistani organized crime groups, emerged as a key global source for heroin production and trafficking. Currently accounting for 75 percent of the world's heroin supply, the vitality of heroin production in Afghanistan has withstood concerted efforts by both the Taliban and US coalition forces to curb and eradicate production and trafficking.[184] Similarly, in this period Colombian rebel groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the

National Liberation Army (ELN) secured a foothold in the narcotics trade in the geographic areas under their control—a trade that they had in former years disapproved of.[185] It is also here that one witnesses the emergence of so-called "new" transnational organized crime groups in Colombia, such as the Medellín and the Cali narcotics cartels, deploying terror tactics and waging exceptionally violent insurgency campaigns against the state.[186] These campaigns were met by the same counter-insurgency strategies used by the Colombian state to suppress rebellions during the Cold War period, however proving ineffective at curbing this new threat.[187] Although Colombia has reached a peace agreement with the FARC, discussions are underway for a similar agreement with the ELN, and in spite of significant efforts to eradicate coca cultivation, cocaine production is at record levels, accounting for 69 percent of global cultivation.[188]

Thanks in part to a continued crisis of intra-state governance in Afghanistan, heroin production has been allowed to sustain decentralized radical Islamic terror cells, including Al Qaeda. In Colombia, the continued vacuum of state control in historically marginalized territories has facilitated the proliferation of new second- and third-generation organized criminal groups such as the BACRIM[189] and the Urabeños.[190] In the case of Colombia, these new transnational organized crime groups comprised of former rebel and paramilitary combatants run sophisticated transnational trafficking operations, selling cocaine in bulk quantities to Mexican cartels.[191] It is within this context that the move to a decentralized command structure could in part be explained as the "logical" evolution of non-state armed groups existing in the age of globalization—moving along the crime–terror continuum in accordance to changing environmental context.[192]

Counter-Insurgency Narrative

As noted, outside of the expansion of global criminal networks, rebel groups may be adopting more decentralized command structures in response to more aggressive counter-insurgency tactics. In particular, this section explores how the decapitation of rebel groups may be spurring organizations to decentralize control. Since the beginning of the War on Terror, decapitation—the targeted killing or capture of top leaders of violent non-state actors—has become increasingly common. Research indicates there has been a large spike in decapitation attempts and a significant increase in the number of successful decapitations since 2001 and the War on Terror (though the practice did existed previously).[193] These tactics have been the subject of intense debate, with many questioning both the utility and the morality/legality of targeting leaders.[194] While these normative questions are incredibly important to shaping the future course of counterinsurgent/counterterrorist strategies, they fall outside the scope of the impacts on conflict outcomes that are the focus of this section.

Assessing the impacts of leadership removal is incredibly complex, and effects appear to vary based on the definition of success, the time period after the event, and the characteristics of the group being targeted.[195] While much of the early literature on terrorist and rebel group decapitation argued that the strategy was ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst, a series of more recent empirical analyses are beginning to reshape our understanding. There are several theoretical reasons why rebel group decapitation might be effective as a counterinsurgent strategy. The loss of key leaders in a group may negatively impact moral, degrade organizational/logistic expertise, and hamper the ability to communicate and coordinate operations. These are likely to be particularly impactful in groups with highly centralized leadership structures that serve as the central node of communication to lower-level commanders.

These theoretical impacts have been the subject of recent empirical cross-case research which indicates that decapitation may have some of the intended impacts on violent non-state actors. Tiernay finds that when a rebel group leader is captured or killed, conflicts are 398 percent more likely to end, and that conflicts are less likely to end while led by their founder.[196] However, this impact of leadership removal appears to fade significantly over time,[197] becoming less effective as the armed groups age and become more institutionalized and durable.

This research also indicates that founding leaders seem to play a particularly important role in a group's survival. This may be because of the significant organizational and motivational skills necessary to overcome the challenges of starting an armed group from scratch. [198] Similarly, Johnson finds that decapitation increases the chance of conflict termination,

increases the likelihood of government victory, and reduces the frequency and intensity of armed-group attacks.[199] These findings would indicate that leadership removal can have a variety of advantageous counterinsurgent impacts; however, decapitation is likely to be of varying utility depending on the characteristics of the targeted armed group. There is evidence to suggest that decapitation is more effective against rebel groups which are young, small, and motivated by political ideology, while groups which are more established, larger, and organized around religious ideology are more resilient to the strategy.[200]

Could Decapitation Lead to Decentralization?

Beyond the larger question of utility, it may be useful to look at the narrower impact of leadership removal strategies on a rebel group's leadership structure. How armed groups organize their leadership structures has significant impacts on their operations and behavior. Therefore, any event which may change how leadership is organized is very likely to have follow-on impacts on the course of the conflict.

Since the mid-1990s a larger share of rebel groups have organized via decentralized networks than in previous decades (see Figure 5.4). Some have speculated that the increased use of leadership-removal tactics in countering insurgency is behind this shifting distribution in rebel leadership structure. Many have suggested that as the scope of leadership removal of rebel groups grows, insurgents are likely to react by adopting more decentralized, networked leadership structures. This may happen in two ways.

First, the change could be forced through decapitation itself. If a rebel group lacks a clear line of succession or remaining leaders capable of maintaining unity, the loss of top leaders may mean that previously subordinate commanders assume increasing autonomy in their operations, leading to a more decentralized network structure, or in more severe cases, group splintering. Alternatively, rebel groups observing leadership targeting or being targeted themselves may choose to preemptively adopt more decentralized network structures in an attempt to build resilience and ensure group survival in the face of decapitation efforts. As noted by Linebarger, proto-rebels often learn from the experiences of other, similar insurgencies.[201] It would therefore make intuitive sense that certain rebel organizations would insure against the risk of leadership removal by structuring the insurgency in a way that makes the survival of the group not reliant on any one figure.

At this point, though, the evidence to suggest that decapitation causes rebel group decentralization through either of the mechanisms described above is piecemeal and incomplete. Researchers have pointed to individual cases in which decapitation leads to less hierarchical leadership structures and many have pointed to the increasing prevalence of network leadership structures among terrorist organizations, but more empirical cross-national analyses need to be done to demonstrate a clearer causal link between decapitation and rebel group decentralization.

The Case of Al Qaeda

Perhaps the most famous example of the decapitation of a leader of an armed group is the 2011 operation which killed Osama Bin Laden. There is evidence that in the wake of his killing, the terrorist/insurgent organization was forced to adopt less centralized leadership structures. Though Al Qaeda has always had a complex structure utilizing a hybrid hierarchical and networked organization, there are strong indications that the core of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan had a fairly centralized structure prior to the death of Bin Laden. The 9/11 Commission described the group as a "hierarchical top-down group with defined positions, tasks, and salaries."[218] The period prior to Bin Laden's death was characterized by coordinated planning and facilitated large-scale targeted violence such as attacks against US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the USS Cole, and those on 9/11.[219]

photo: Arif Ali/AFP/Getty Images

The killing of Bin Laden appears to have forced the group to become a less centrally controlled entity. In the face of the continued targeting of the group's leaders, there are indications that action has been taken to geographically disperse leadership.[220] According to Brookings, after the death of Bin Laden, "the organization had to cut communications, increase counterintelligence, avoid large gatherings, and otherwise become less effective."[221] This led to Al Qaeda franchises like AQIM and AQAP operating more independently, and fissures developed which eventually led to group splintering and the formation of ISIS.[222] According to the CNA, this decentralization means that "far-flung franchisees now operate outside of the core's control, sometimes with negative consequences for the Al-Qaeda brand."[223]

Al Qaeda's operations post-Bin Laden appear to fit with the findings regarding the particular importance of a founding leader, as well as decentralization's impacts on the intensity of violence. Osama's successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, does not have the same "mythical status" among supporters and is thus unable to exert the same level of control over disparate affiliates.[224] In addition, the group does not appear to have the consistent ability to undertake the coordination and planning necessary to conduct large-scale violence as it has in the past. However, the case also demonstrates the complex impacts of targeting leadership, as the individual affiliates do not appear any less capable of sustaining their individual insurgent campaigns in recent years, muddying the waters around the overall utility of the tactic for ending conflicts.

Conclusion

Overall, the trends in rebel group organization are pretty clear: rebels are getting more religious and more decentralized. As compared with past mobilization strategies, rebels are moving away from issues surrounding economic grievances and are instead seeking to draw support by fighting for divine goals. Equally, rebel groups are seeking to operate with organizations being less centrally organized, moving towards highly decentralized networks that operate more autonomously. With regard to the latter trendline, there may be a few drivers of this change. We explore how fiercer counter-insurgency tactics may be fueling this transition (particularly with regard to the decapitation of rebel leaders). As targeted strikes on rebel leaders become more common, organizations may be shifting their structures to hedge against the risk of sudden leadership loss. Groups may also be forming more decentralized networks to enhance profits from illicit activities. Local rebel leaders may see greater profit in engaging in lucrative smuggling and sales of lootable goods than in offering support to a centralized leader.

Given these points, we highlight two key policy recommendations for leaders in the international community:

1. Localize Negotiations

As discussed, rebel groups becoming more decentralized and more religious should have a very deleterious effect on the prospects for negotiations to resolve conflicts. In addition to the challenges of finding equitable solutions in religiously motivated armed conflicts, a greater decentralization of rebel groups may also heighten the primacy of local issues for rebel factions. As noted by Kalyvas, local leaders often have an incentive to utilize civil wars as an opportunity to settle personal scores and increase their control of particular areas.[202] This should be heightened following the decentralization of rebel groups, as local leaders will have greater control over the particular issues that insurgents may be claiming to fight over.

In the face of more decentralized insurgencies, localized peacebuilding efforts may be more useful. National-level talks are more useful when all parties can agree that rebel leaders speak for the movement in general. This may clearly not be the case when rebels operate a highly decentralized network, when local issues may be the motivating factor for many dissidents. Assessing local options (cooperating with civil society members) may help international actors find new avenues to sue for peace in war-torn countries. Equally, local religious leaders may assist in identifying equitable solutions if they are included in peacebuilding efforts.

2. Greater International Cooperation on Security

In addition to fostering localized peacebuilding efforts, the international community may attempt to mitigate the effects of decentralized insurgencies by promoting greater interstate cooperation on regional security. The decentralization of rebellion may make it easier for disaffected groups in neighboring states to be co-opted by insurgencies operating in conflict-affected states. For instance, both Al Qaeda and the Islamic State have had unsettling success in generating affiliated organizations throughout Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Equally, Al Shabaab has benefited in spreading its network into Kenya, where the group has spurred significant unrest. The spread of decentralized networks may also allow certain organizations to leverage these loose affiliations to easily smuggle weapons and illicit goods in and out of conflict-affected countries. Increased international cooperation may help stymie this threat by effectively coordinating information between regional actors, jointly monitoring large, porous borders, and prioritizing regional security in addition to domestic security.

VI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

As noted at the start of this report, there is clear evidence that civil wars have begun to evolve. This conclusion is drawn from analysis of the shifting trends in civil wars, particularly in the twenty-first century. As opposed to previous reports, which focus broadly on the total number of armed conflicts globally or on all facets related to global security, this document is narrowly crafted to examine how civil war dynamics are evolving over time. To that end, this report examines whether rebels are engaging in conventional or irregular (i.e., guerilla) warfare against the government; the use of civilian victimization by rebel groups during the course of the war (as well as the underlying logic behind such tactics); the location of civil war events relative to major cities in conflict-affected countries; and finally, the shifting organizational structure of rebel groups in the twenty-first century. In all, the report points to evolving features in both the organization of rebel groups and where rebels are seeking to contest state control.

The key findings of each section provide room for both optimism and concern in evaluating rebel behavior. For instance, based on available data, the report suggests that most rebel groups tend to avoid civilian victimization as a weapon of war. This stands in contrast to the severely troubling accounts of major rebel groups perpetrating widespread abuses in the Central African Republic, Syria, Iraq, and Nigeria, to name a few. While clearly some rebel groups are engaging in major human rights abuses, most rebel organizations tend to avoid the brutalization of civilians. Equally, the results suggest that political instability from certain armed conflicts may be having reverberating effects for the rest of the world (particularly for contiguous countries with their own insurgencies). State collapse (or major fragility) allows rebels to adopt more conventional modes of warfare, and for insurgents in contiguous countries to benefit from a lack of government. These factors increase the severity and duration of armed conflict. Finally, the increasingly religious and decentralized nature of insurgent organizations presents challenges for states seeking to find a diplomatic solution to armed conflicts.

Assessing New Rebellions

The results from this report allow us to form a composite image of what a rebel group will look like in the twenty-first century. To do this, we draw on the modal findings, or growing global trendline, from each section to identify the likely characteristics that a future rebel group will have.

- *Structure of the Rebel Group*
  Based on recent trends, we expect that a future group will likely be highly decentralized, as well as religious in its ideological goals. Though some rebel groups may operate a highly centralized organization, the number of these groups has fallen significantly in the last few years. Furthermore, we expect that the rebel group will most likely adopt an Islamic ideology. Outside of religious goals, the group will also likely claim to represent the interests of excluded groups in society. This profile, in part, fits the characteristics of the Free Aceh Movement (or GAM) that operated in Indonesia, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, and the Patani insurgents in southern Thailand. Though these examples are concentrated in Asia, similar patterns can be found in Mali, and it is reasonable that such mobilization strategies will continue to persist in other countries.

- *Tactics of the Rebel Group*
  We expect that the prototypical rebel group in the twenty-first century will likely engage in a rural insurgency, far away from major cities. This may be as part of a secessionist civil war, as is the case with the Somali or Oromo insurgencies in Ethiopia, or it may be part of an (ostensibly) center-seeking organization claiming to contest state control, as is the case for Hutu rebel groups operating in the eastern DRC. As opposed to the Hutu groups fighting

in the DRC, though, many rebel groups will avoid civilian victimization as a strategy of war. This should be especially true for rebel groups waging an irregular war (such as a guerilla campaign) against the state, as the rebel group will rely heavily on the civilian population for shelter, material support, and recruitment of new fighters. When the rebel group does engage in civilian victimization, as is the case historically, these killings will be perpetrated far from cities in places where the rebel group is hoping to consolidate its control.

- *The Changing Nature of Rebellion in Failed States*
  These trends shift when we look at insurgencies operating in fragile or failed states. Absent a strong coercive apparatus employed by the state, insurgents are more likely to operate freely, generating an incentive for dissidents to wage more open operations (relying less on hit-and-run tactics). The effects of a limited central government go far beyond an inability to sanction violent non-state actors. As the state abandons its outposts in small and medium cities, rebel groups will gather military hardware that is left behind and use it to increase their capacity to wage more aggressive campaigns. This increased capacity will heighten the severity of armed conflicts and may lead to a greater brutalization of the civilian population. Recent trends in the locations of rebel-perpetrated civilian victimization suggest that rebels have begun engaging in one-sided violence closer to major cities. As rebel groups gain the capacity to push closer to major cities, rebels may victimize civilians caught in the crossfire.

Summary of Policy Options for the International Community

While each section ends with specific policy solutions for each aspect of civil war dynamics, there are clear themes related to what agency the international community has in mitigating the effects of these shifting trendlines. The policy recommendations offered in this report tend to fall into three broad camps: limiting military interventions (as opposed to using diplomatic solutions), strengthening international cooperation, and enhancing the agency of local actors to address complicated problems. In the following section, we examine these three broad solutions.

Diplomatic versus Military Solutions

Our work on trends in civil war seems to underscore a common theme echoed in academic work on civil war dynamics. Specifically, militarized interventions, either indirectly in the form of weapons or through actual deployment of troops, significantly complicate civil war dynamics and undermine efforts to peacefully resolve disputes. Work by Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed demonstrates that the funneling of weapons and money to rebel groups (what they term "fungible" support) often prolongs fighting and undermines the ability of insurgents to win in the long run.[203] Our findings suggest that a similar process may be occurring more broadly in armed conflicts (though further research is needed). In particular, military support that is offered to either side may be easily repurposed by rival parties for their own ends. Weapons, for instance, that are provided to the Free Syrian Army may be easily looted by other rebel groups and used to undermine the interests of the patron states that provided the support in the first place. Equally, military support to weak regimes may also lead to adverse outcomes when the state begins to crumble in the face of more aggressive insurgents. For instance, weapons provided to the Saleh regime in Yemen could fall into the hands of the Houthi rebels as they storm Sana'a.[204]

While armed interventions address this problem to some extent by ensuring that weapons stay in the hands of more professional troops, there are often unintended consequences of these interventions. First, past academic work has suggested that these third parties complicate the ability of diplomats to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict (acting as veto players to the peace process). More importantly, armed interventions shift the incentive structure of armed actors to engage in greater civilian victimization. While past academic work has consistently shown that interventions significantly increase the amount of civilian victimization perpetrated by both the rebels and the government, our findings from Section

III would seem to suggest that such interventions may alter the willingness of belligerents to engage in sexual violence. In our examination of the worst actors, we found troubling evidence that rebels who had historically respected the physical integrity of civilians engaged in widespread sexual violence during periods of great strain on the organization. As noted by Johansson and Sarwari, sexual violence is much more likely to occur following military third-party interventions.[205] Taken together, the international community should be wary of employing militarized interventions to help end armed conflicts.

Diplomatic interventions, on the other hand, tend to offer a less risky alternative to militarized efforts to end ongoing conflicts. Outside of being a cheaper alternative to economic and military interventions,[206] diplomatic efforts are unlikely to radically alter the balance of forces on the ground, reducing the incentive for belligerents to engage in civilian victimization. Equally, such efforts are unlikely to increase the number of weapons (such as small arms) in the civil war state, thereby limiting the risk that such weapons will be repurposed by violent non-state actors. It should be noted, though, that there are clear limitations to what can be accomplished diplomatically. Diplomatic solutions require belligerents to be willing to come to the negotiating table, and there is no guarantee that disputants will have an interest in a settlement. As suggested in Section V, the general trends in rebel group structure and ideology may make negotiations more difficult. Given these limitations, the international community may consider military interventions an option of last resort.

International Cooperation on Security

As compared to an assessment of diplomatic versus military interventions, our second broad policy recommendation is rather straightforward. International cooperation on security may represent one of the most effective measures that states can take to help mitigate the effects of armed conflict. As demonstrated in Section II, state collapse may generate reverberating security challenges for the region more broadly. Dissidents in neighboring countries may use unmonitored territory as a safe haven to organize attacks in their home states. Equally, weapons and illicit goods may be trafficked through states on the brink of collapse as there is little or no oversight of these materials. Unmonitored trafficking routes may significantly increase the utility of engaging in the illicit sale of lootable goods, enhancing the criminal–rebellion nexus. These factors significantly complicate conflicts in neighboring states, as rebels can prolong their war with less concern that they will be sanctioned by the central government.

Greater cooperation by neighboring countries may assist in limiting the deleterious effects of fragile conflict-affected states. Joint monitoring of borders and maritime channels may allow states to help prevent cross-border raids and the smuggling of weapons and illicit goods. This is particularly useful for weaker states, where governments lack the capacity to solely monitor their own borders (especially for wide swaths of land). International organizations and major powers can assist in this process by offering technical expertise and aid for building capacity and facilitating greater coordination on multiple security-related fronts. For instance, the One Earth Future Foundation's Stable Seas program has assisted East and West African countries to approach their own maritime security with a holistic approach including considering economic development, mixed migration, and environmental degradation in their own assessment of maritime security.[207] A similar program may greatly assist countries attempting to mitigate the spread of conflict and illicit trade from war-torn neighboring countries.

Engaging Local Actors

Finally, our report underscores the potential benefits of utilizing local actors for countering shifting norms surrounding sexual violence as well as disrupting decentralized networks of rebel groups. Within the peacebuilding community, there has been a growing appreciation for supporting grassroots initiatives to foster conflict resolution. Autesserre has intuitively noted that international missions are often unaware of contentious localized political issues that drive disputes.[208] Kalyvas has often suggested that civil wars can be co-opted by local actors seeking to settle scores with rivals rather than national-

level disputes.[209] As noted in Section V, as rebel groups become more and more decentralized, these local issues, as opposed to national-level policies, may be the driving motivation for continued violence. Therefore, international efforts to help stop ongoing conflicts may be ineffective given their unfamiliarity with the local drivers of instability.

Engaging with grassroots peacebuilding initiatives may offer a more fruitful avenue to reducing armed conflict, as these peacebuilding initiatives may utilize local knowledge on the persistent grievances, intransigent parties, and location of violent non-state actors uninterested in the peace process. Equally, as noted in Section III, local leaders and civil society organizations may play a critical role in shifting regional norms surrounding the use of sexual violence, thereby mitigating the regional spread of persistent perpetration of sexual violence in armed conflict. While local actors may have the skills, regional knowledge, and willingness to assist in peacebuilding, civil society organizations in conflict-affected areas may suffer from a dearth of resources (limiting their ability to utilize their unique skills). Support for these organizations may pay dividends for international peacebuilding.

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