

The Internationalisation of Civil War: How External States Shape Rebel Dynamics

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I, Kit Rickard, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

Why do states provide different forms of support to rebels fighting in foreign civil wars? How can external support band disparate rebels together in some conflicts but lead to bloody fratricide in others? My thesis aims to answer these questions. To do so, I make a two-step argument. First, I argue that civil wars are opportunities for states to improve their place in the global balance of power, and they provide different forms of support depending on the risk of retaliation from other states. Second, I argue that different forms of support have heterogeneous effects on rebel dynamics. The influx of money and weapons—which are fungible and exchangeable—induces a competitive conflict environment and leads to greater splintering and rebel infighting as groups compete over important resources. Nonfungible support such as troops shifts the balance of power, alleviates the systemic effects of anarchy, causes bandwagoning among and within rebel groups, and leads to more allying and less splintering. This argument provides the first holistic account of how the international system shapes cooperation and competition in rebellions.

I test the empirical grounding of the argument as part of a mixed-method nested research design. First, I conduct two large-N analyses: a temporal network analysis to explain how external states support rebels and a matching analysis of rebel group behaviour on how different forms of support affect the propensity that rebels fight, form alliances, and splinter. Second, I conduct a theory-testing case study of the conflict in Northern Ireland (1968-1998) and a cross-case comparative study of Libya (2011-2019) and Syria (2011-2019). Drawing on archival evidence, secondary and grey literature, and micro-level conflict data, I demonstrate the causal mechanisms underpinning the results of the large-N analyses. I find support for key parts of the argument.

Impact Statement

My doctoral advances academia in civil war research and provides insights that have high policy relevance. The research makes four important contributions to academia. First, I disaggregate external support and therefore do not assume that safe havens, troops, weapons, and funding have the same—or at least very similar—effect on rebel dynamics. Second, I provide an account of why external states provide external support in the first place. When existing work does not do so, it cannot account for potential selection effects. Third, I provide a theory of competition between external states over control of rebel groups which allows us to predict when this may occur and how it shapes rebel dynamics on the ground. Finally, in making these contributions, I provide a holistic account of how international competition between states shapes conflict dynamics on the ground that bridges research from international relations and civil war studies.

Knowing when conflicts will become internationalised and whether it will lead to greater competition among and within rebel groups has policy implications at two levels. The first regards how changes in the conduct of international contentious politics may prevent such dynamics in the future. While fungible support violates the international norms of sovereignty and non-intervention, current international law gives greater leniency to states that provide covert forms of support. My work indicates that fungible support, especially from several external states, can have unforeseen and disproportionate impacts on civil wars. While sending arms and money is legally considered less of a violation than sending troops, it is important that the heterogeneous impact of such support is considered in future rulings. The second level is on the impact of such dynamics in contemporary conflicts. Knowledge of the internationalisation of civil war is crucial for the international community to effectively channel limited resources to high-risk areas. For responders, the ways in which external states are involved or not provides some indication of potential future paths of the conflict. Responses that aim to alleviate human suffering, specifically one-sided violence aimed at civilians, should focus on areas where multiple groups are active and linked to different external states. The devastation and suffering inflicted on civilians in the Syrian city of Aleppo is testament to this risk.

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Thank you to my parents, Louise and Paddy, without whom none of this would have been possible. Finally, my deepest appreciation is for Soanne Berner for putting up with me when others would not.

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my brother, Jemmie Rickard.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In January 2018, Turkey launched a ground offensive to fight the Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG) in Afrin, the northern province of Syria. They fought alongside their proxy rebels the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and were assisted by Russia, who also supported the Assad regime and controlled the airspace above the region. With such rapid changes in international bedfellows, one could quickly forget the 2015 crisis which saw Turkey down a Russian jet flying too close to its airspace. The crisis was widely reported as the most serious publicly acknowledged clash between a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member and Russia in over 50 years (Tattersall & Soldatkin, 2015). A mere three years of rapprochement later, the world was witnessing a Turkey-led offensive on the YPG, a group openly backed by the United States of America (US), Turkey's NATO ally. The situation was almost dystopian: "two NATO members—the US and Turkey or at least their proxies—could end up pitched into a very bloody and protracted conflict" (Stansfield, 2018). Although the YPG and the FSA are nominally on the same side, they have very different objectives for a post-war Syria and so do their external backers.

External states clearly shaped—and, at the time of writing, continue to shape—the conflict in Syria. Not only was their influence felt by the warring parties in the form of

different types of support, but also by those who were trying to relieve the suffering of civilians. For instance, in 2016 only humanitarian organisations approved by Turkey were permitted to help civilians in the Jarablus district, 125 kilometres northeast of Aleppo where Turkey was heavily involved in governing the town formerly held by the Islamic State (IS) (Haid, 2017). Moreover, peace talks in Sochi, Tehran, and Geneva were led by international backers on different sides of the conflict, where external powers like Russia played an important role in bringing ‘their’ party—in this case the Syrian government—to the negotiating table. External states gained control over important aspects of the conflict by virtue of their support to the warring parties.

Below I show how this research is justified by the gaps in the literature on the internationalization of civil wars and rebel dynamics. However, my research is also a reaction to world affairs (Geddes, 2003). Over the past decade, conflicts in Libya, Yemen, Ukraine, and Syria have demonstrated the ever-confusing role that regional and major powers play in internal conflicts. The conflicts exemplify two important trends. While the most common type of armed conflict in the world today is conflicts within rather than between states, internal conflicts are increasingly marked by high levels of external involvement. The top pane of figure 1.1 shows that the proportion of civil wars that include the involvement of foreign governments with troops are increasing, especially since 2010. According to global data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (Pettersson et al., 2021), 50 percent of conflicts were coded as internationalised in 2020 compared to just 6 percent in 1990. The proportion of internationalised conflicts has never been so high, not even during the Cold War which saw the US and the Soviet Union play out their rivalry through armed proxies across the globe. This trend is worrying policymakers and the public. Indeed, as alluded to above, the role of external states in civil wars has led to political events that onlookers have struggled to comprehend and explain.

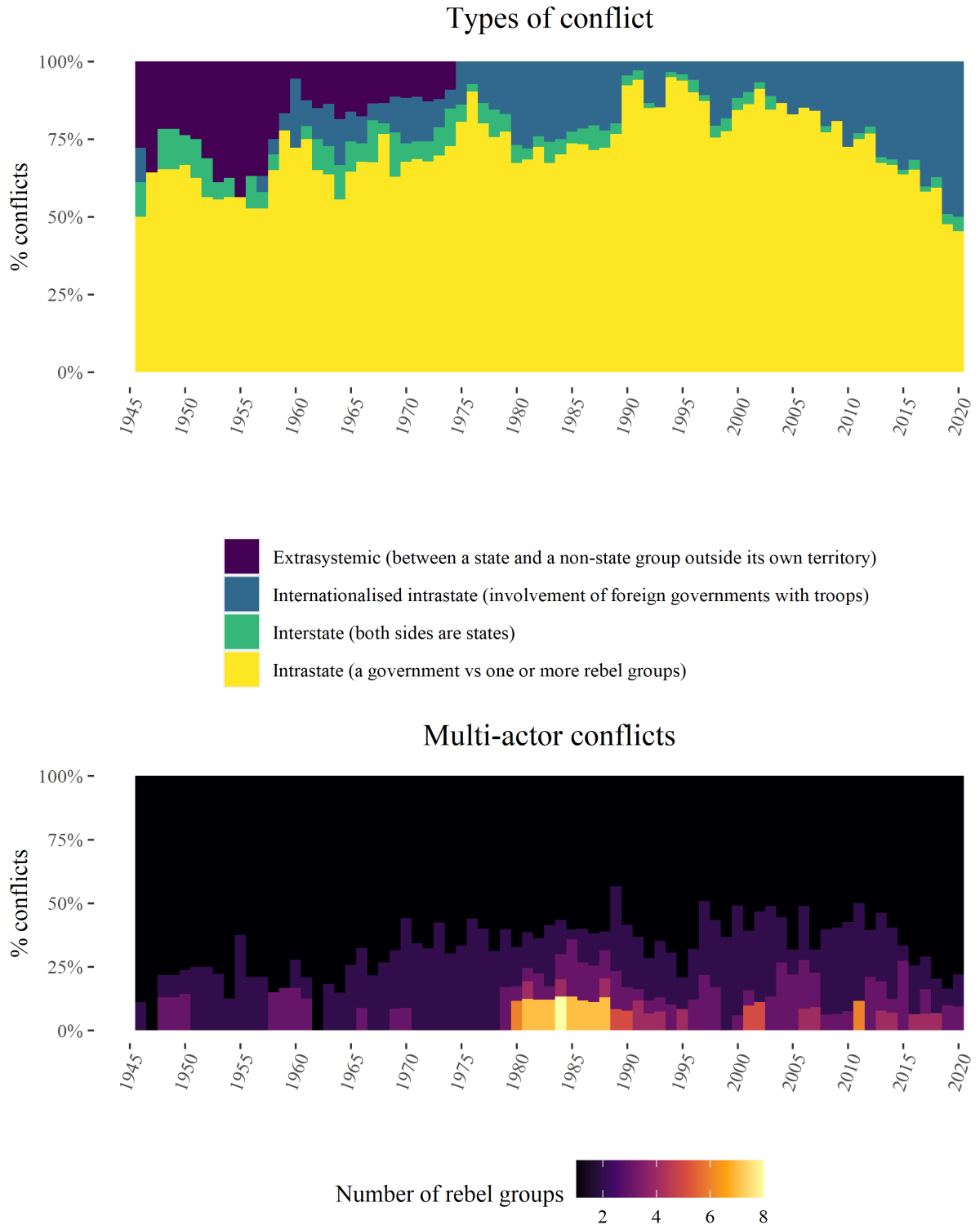


Figure 1.1: Conflict trends according to the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset version 21.1. The top pane shows the increasing proportion of internationalised intrastate conflicts. The bottom pane shows a greater proportion of multi-actor conflicts since the end of the Cold War.

At the same time, multi-actor armed conflicts around the world appear to be increasingly frequent. The bottom pane of figure 1.1 shows a high proportion of multi-actor civil wars. Except for the Soviet-Afghan conflict in the 1980s, the post-Cold War period has experienced a greater number of multi-actor conflicts than during the Cold War. Are the trends related? While rebels in Yemen and Ukraine form relatively cohesive rebellions represented by few rebel groups, rebellions in Libya and Syria have been plagued by internecine fighting and the proliferation of armed groups. Against this backdrop, the overarching question motivating my research asks, why do states provide different forms of external support to rebel groups in civil wars and how do different forms of external support shape rebel dynamics? To answer these questions, I propose a two-step argument for (1) why external states provide different forms of support and (2) how this shapes conflict dynamics, focusing on rebel infighting, allying, and splintering.

1.1 Argument

I seek to explain how involvement from external states shapes relations within and among rebel groups in order to better understand the process through which civil wars become internationalised and how it shapes conflict dynamics. By conflict dynamics, I am specifically interested in the organisation of rebellion and patterns of violence or non-violence between rebel groups. The UCDP defines civil war or intrastate conflict as a “conflict between a government and a non-governmental party with no interference from other countries” (Harbom, Melander, & Wallensteen, 2008). This definition neglects the fact that civil wars do not occur within the borders of a “closed polity” (K. S. Gleditsch, 2007). The UCDP considers a conflict to be internationalised when troops from an external state are engaged in fighting. However, I argue that external state involvement in foreign civil wars is best understood as a spectrum. On

one end, states are not involved at all. On the other, external states intervene to become active warring parties in the civil war. The space between these two extremes is filled by different degrees of involvement and support to warring parties, from money and weapons to safehavens, air support, and troops. Movement along this spectrum represents the process through which civil wars can become increasingly internationalised.

Why do states provide different forms of support to rebels fighting in foreign conflicts? How can external support band disparate rebels together in some conflicts but lead to bloody fratricide in others? How can both these dynamics be apparent in the same conflict at different times? To understand how the internationalisation of civil war shapes civil wars, we must further our understanding of the international system, the motivations of external states to provide different forms of support, and the trickle-down effect on rebel dynamics.

Civil wars are deadlier and last longer when external states intervene, and yet there is no account of how or why they these conflicts become internationalised and what effect this process has on the cohesion and fragmentation of rebel actors. This research therefore sheds light on the likely outcomes of civil war and, ultimately, the chances of rebel success. To answer these questions, I propose a comprehensive account of how external actors shape foreign wars by providing support to rebel groups and how this affects rebel dynamics. I identify the risks of punishment as central to states' strategic decision of whether to provide support and, if so, in what form. The likelihood of punishment is a function of bilateral and multilateral relative strength. States are often part of military alliances and can therefore count on their allies to shield them, or at least ignore their transgressions. When this is not the case, they rely on more covert forms of support to achieve important foreign policy objectives while avoiding backlash from the international community. Therefore, states support rebels with low-risk forms of support such as money and weapons to avoid detection and costly

punishment from stronger states or the allies of their rivals. This support is ‘fungible,’ or easily exchangeable. Stronger states that do not fear retaliation provide more militarily effective but less covert forms of support, such as safe havens, airstrikes, and even troops. Forms of support that cannot be exchanged—‘nonfungible’—give rebels the best chance of victory and provide external states with greater control over their rebel proxies, thus giving them a greater say over the future orientation of the conflicted state.

Different forms of support have heterogeneous effects on the organisation of rebellion. Rebel factions and groups are not self-contained. They are embedded in an environment compromised of other factions or organisations which they depend on for resources. Nonfungible support shifts the balance of power, alleviates the systemic effects of anarchy, and causes bandwagoning among and within rebel groups, which ultimately leads to more allying and less splintering. The influx of fungible support induces a competitive conflict environment, which leads to greater splintering and rebel infighting as groups compete over important military resources. When multiple external states provide nonfungible support to different rebel groups, rebels are more cohesive but more likely to fight as the conflict takes the combat appearance of an interstate war. This argument, firmly based within delegation and organisational theory, provides the first holistic account of how the international system shapes cooperation and competition in rebellions.

My research makes four important contributions to existing literature. First, I disaggregate external support and therefore do not assume that safe havens, troops, weapons, and funding have the same (or at least very similar) effect on rebel dynamics. Second, I provide an account of why external states provide external support in the first place. When existing work does not do so, it cannot account for potential selection effects. Third, I provide a theory of competition between external states over control of rebel groups which allows us to predict when this may occur and how it shapes rebel

dynamics on the ground. Finally, in making these contributions, I provide a holistic account of how international competition between states shapes conflict dynamics on the ground that bridges research from international relations and civil war studies. My research has the potential to inform policymakers and actors aiming to relieve the human impact of conflicts. A better understanding of conflict dynamics is crucial to the study of civil wars, as the presence of multiple rebel groups and external states make conflicts more difficult to resolve (D. E. Cunningham, 2006; A. Kydd & Walter, 2002) and affects important conflict characteristics, such as outcome of conflict (D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2009; Nilsson, 2008), civilian victimisation (Salehyan, Siroky, & Wood, 2014), and severity (Lacina, 2006). The study suggests that actors aiming to relieve civilian populations or end hostilities must pay close attention to how external states contribute to the cohesion and fragmentation of the warring parties involved in civil wars, as discussed in greater detail in the concluding chapter.

1.2 The state of the art

The empirical reality of contemporary conflicts justifies the need for a theory that accounts for the diverse ways in which external actors increase their influence in civil wars. Aerial support from the US, France, and the United Kingdom (UK) to anti-Gaddafi rebels in 2011 under the NATO banner was overt, military, and crucial in dethroning the long-time dictator (Fahim, Shadid, & Gladstone, 2011). Support to the pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine was covert at first, and although its extent is debated and remains a politically sensitive issue, the origins of the “little green men” are now well-known (Walker, 2015). Syria has matured into a tenacious civil war marked by the involvement of regional states vying to secure their ‘part of the pie’ (Phillips, 2020). The outbreak of the Syrian war was marked by a reluctant

international community and the cross-border influx of support to an increasingly fragmented opposition. Recent and salient cases show how a binary understanding of the process through which conflicts become internationalised cannot capture the complexity of external support. I propose that we can further our understanding of how the international sphere shapes conflict by focusing on why states provide different forms of support and how these different forms of support affect the organisation of rebellion. There are three bodies of relevant research: (1) international interventions, (2) external support, and (3) interrebel dynamics. I draw on these diverse literatures to develop my theoretical argument in Chapter II. In this section, I lay out the field and identify the contribution of my research.

The intervention literature argues that external states become involved in foreign civil wars to produce an outcome that is in line with their preferences (Rosenau, 1969), often by targeting international rivals (Colaesi, 2014). The intervention literature finds that states with more to gain tend to intervene, whether that is a function of their proximity (Kathman, 2010) or economic interests (Aydin, 2020; Bove, Gleditsch, & Sekeris, 2016). Furthermore, certain types of relations between external states and the rebels are found to increase the likelihood of intervention. For example, a body of work finds that intervention is more likely if the intervener and opposition are from the same ethnic group (Nome, 2013; Saideman, 2002). A greater focus has been on the impact of such interventions, and much work is specifically interested in the mixed track record of interventions in ending hostilities.

The research agenda has homed in on how intervention by external states affects the capabilities of opposing sides in a conflict and, ultimately, what effect this has on conflict duration. Theories tend to focus on a balance of power logic between government and rebel forces, which is often measured in troop numbers, military capabilities, and resources (P. Collier, Hoeffler, & Söderbom, 2004; Mason, Weingarten, & Fett, 1999; Record, 2006). Findings are mixed. Although Regan (2002) shows

that interventions prolong civil wars, he also finds that not all interventions are equal. Similarly, P. Collier & Hoeffler (2004) find that support “to the rebel side” may shorten conflicts, but that support to the government has no effect. Balch-Lindsay, Enterline, & Joyce (2008) show that one-sided interventions lead to shorter civil wars, while Cunningham’s (2006, 2010) work, firmly situated in the bargaining literature (Fearon, 1995; Powell, 2002; Wagner, 2004), shows that as the number of potential veto players increases, a solution to the conflict becomes more difficult to reach and, subsequently, conflicts are longer. Although there is variation in these works, a consensus has emerged that civil wars last longer and are harder to resolve when external states intervene. However, exactly why and under which conditions states opt to intervene is less developed. Equally, external support has been found to increase the probability of rebel victory (Akcinaroglu, 2012; Gent, 2008) but this may depend on whether rebels lack war-fighting capacity (Sullivan & Karreth, 2015). The processes through which civil wars become internationalised is thus a missing step and can help us understanding mixed findings on important conflict characteristics, including the duration of conflict or the likelihood of rebel victory.

Direct, large-scale military interventions, like that those conducted by NATO in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, or Libya, are not the only way that external states influence civil wars. States often support warring parties in ways that fall short of what is considered “direct” (Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan, 2001; Carson, 2018), primarily to avoid the potential of conflict escalation (G. Hughes, 2012; Mumford, 2013; Tamm, 2014). For example, the UCDP External Support Data (Högbladh, Pettersson, & Themnér, 2011) visualised in Figure 1.2 shows important temporal variation in the forms of external support provided by states. Although 38 percent of intrastate conflicts saw external state support in the form of troops in 2016 (Allansson, Melander, & Themnér, 2017), trends over time show important variation in the forms of support provided by external states (Högbladh, Pettersson,

& Themnér, 2011).

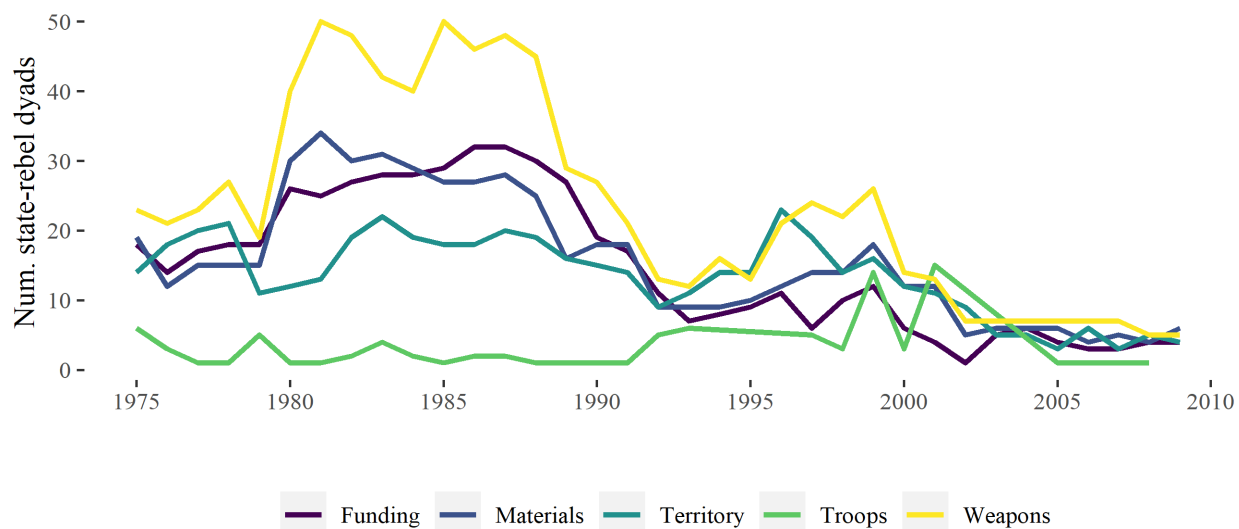


Figure 1.2: Variation in forms of support provided according to the UCDP External Support Dataset.

Similar to the intervention literature, the external support literature identifies the types of states which provide support and the warring parties that are most likely to receive it. Scholars have sought to understand when states provide external support by examining ethnic and ideational ties between supporter states and the rebels (Ives, 2019, 2021), whether supporters are engaged in international rivalries with the targeted state (Akcinaroglu & Radziszewski, 2005; Maoz & San-Akca, 2012), stability within the external state (Borghard, 2014; San-Akca, 2016), and the goals of warring parties (Salehyan, Gleditsch, & Cunningham, 2011; San-Akca, 2016). A separate but related literature on proxy conflict has emerged, which focuses predominantly on why states often provide covert support to rebels in order to achieve foreign policy objectives (Groh, 2019; G. Hughes, 2012; Mumford, 2013). Existing work on external involvement agrees that external support can affect the behaviour of warring parties (Salehyan, Siroky, & Wood, 2014; Sawyer, Cunningham, & Reed, 2017). Indeed, even the mere presence of international rivalries and the potential for external support can affect

the behaviour of rebel groups (Akcinaroglu & Radziszewski, 2005; D. E. Cunningham, 2016). Despite a greater focus on less direct ways that states can intervene in conflict and a growing attention on the strategic interactions between external supporters and rebel groups, existing work rarely investigates why states provide different types of support—although different types of support are shown to shape conflict duration (Sawyer, Cunningham, & Reed, 2017) and post-conflict elections (Marshall, 2019). Additionally, while some research refers to environments where multiple external actors are present (Salehyan, Siroky, & Wood, 2014), existing theories only briefly refer to the possibility of multiple external states and rebel groups. Therefore, current theories struggle to account for the wide range of support options available to external states and the fluidity of relations between armed groups and external states over time.

A key missing element is the role of the international system. Kalyvas & Balcells (2010) note that existing research is surprisingly neglectful of the international system, focusing instead on the role of conflict contagion (Buhaug & Gleditsch, 2008; Hegre & Sambanis, 2006; Salehyan, 2008a). However, this review indicates that there is a large body of work on how external states shape civil war. The focus on states is well-warranted, as they have significant resources to commit to foreign conflicts that are often unavailable to other actors, such as diasporas or other rebel groups (Manekin & Wood, 2020; Petrova, 2019). Warring parties recognised this, which is why armed groups engage in direct diplomacy with them (Huang, 2016). However, this focus is not on the system *per se*. Instead, the focus is on bilateral relations between states—often rivals—and between external groups and rebels—often based on shared kinship, either ethnic or ideational.

Works on the system level focus on shifts in the norms surrounding intervention (Howard & Stark, 2017) or the conduct of war (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010) caused by important historical turning points, such as the end of the Cold War (Anderson, 2019; Grauer & Tierney, 2018; Rauta, 2020). The end of the Cold War in 1989 clearly

coincides with a change in external support patterns that is visible in Figure 1.2. It represents a dramatic shift in the balance of power, and the hegemonic rise of the US. As such, it is akin to a sudden change in the international structure, described by Waltz (2010) as a “revolution.” Such radical shifts are relatively rare. Instead, states decline and grow over several years and decades. Existing research on intervention, external support, and rebel dynamics does not account for states’ place within the international system, namely through the role of security communities and military alliances. While there is a rich literature in international relations on the importance of military alliances in deterrence and conflict escalation, this has been overlooked in the intervention and external support literature. Why does this matter? As alluded to in the examples provided above—interventions in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Libya—external states often intervene under the banner of military alliances, and previous research concludes that balancing and bandwagoning also pertain to the geopolitics of civil war intervention (Anderson, 2019; Findley & Teo, 2006; Saideman, 2002; Toukan, 2019). Indeed, both Bapat & Bond (2012) and San-Akca (2016) note that states are often motivated by geostrategic interests rather than normative concerns, and it is likely that these extend beyond bilateral relations. By theorising about how system-level international dynamics shape the provision of support, my work aims to fill this important gap in our understanding of how civil wars become internationalised.

Civil war scholarship has moved towards a nuanced approach which disaggregates conflict actors, notably rebels but also increasingly civilians (Arjona, 2016; Balcells & Stanton, 2021; O. Kaplan, 2017; Mampilly, 2012), and calls into question assumptions that these actors are unitary and cohesive (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012; Christia, 2012; Kalyvas, 2006; Metternich, Dorff, Gallop, Weschle, & Ward, 2013; Staniland, 2014; Weinstein, 2006). This work has found that the composition of the opposition influences conflict onset (D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2013), the conduct of belligerents (Balcells, 2017), and how conflicts end (Driscoll, 2012;

Staniland, 2012b). An important finding is that although rebel groups are engaged in competition with the government of the state, they are also in competition with other rebel groups. This is part of what Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour (2012) describe as a “dual contest,” where rebels compete with the government and other rebel groups for political relevance.

Rebel competition affects groups in two ways. There is competition *within* rebel groups, namely between factions that are part of a named organisation. Factions in groups vie for control over the direction of the organisation which, in extreme cases, can lead to splintering and the creation of new groups or rebel coups where one faction attempts to wrest overall control. Groups can also compete over the direction of the anti-government or revolutionary movement as a whole. There is therefore competition *among* rebel groups over who gets to speak and act on behalf of the rebellion. Rebels play a two-level game, and the success of a national movement often depends on the structure within which groups cooperate or compete (Krause, 2017, p. 21). Rebel groups therefore face a collective action problem (Frohlich & Oppenheimer, 1970; Olson, 1965). In extreme circumstances, this competition may lead to internecine violence and death. However, rebel groups can also overcome these challenges and form rebel alliances or even amalgamate their forces into new organisations. Rebel groups recognised that they often have a better chance of winning if they cooperate. Sometimes they do, but they often do not (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Lawrence, 2010; Nygård & Weintraub, 2015).¹ High competition among groups can therefore lead rebels to refuse to cooperate with other groups, compete over important resources and, in extreme cases, to fight each other. Low levels may lead to cooperation and, in extreme cases, the formation of fronts, alliances, or unified groups.

My research contributes to a growing body of work on rebel dynamics which

¹Bargaining literature is not surprised by interrebel competition. As noted by Savage (2020, p. 34), a large body of work shows that stable bargains (in this instance, rebel alliances) are hard to reach when the object of contention can influence the future distribution of power (Fearon, 1995; Powell, 2004; Walter, 1997).

currently does not account for the role of external state support (Christia, 2012; Krause, 2017; Pischedda, 2020; Staniland, 2012a). There is a small body of work that focuses specifically on the effect of external support on rebel fighting, allying, and splintering. Bapat & Bond (2012) and Popovic (2018) find that a common external sponsor can improve the environment for alliances by providing a space for reiterated talks and mitigate information and commitment problems between rebel groups. Mirroring this, Fjelde & Nilsson (2012) find that rebel groups are not more likely to engage in rebel infighting when they receive external support. In terms of competition within groups, Tamm (2016) finds that external support can affect the internal cohesion of rebel groups. Namely, support to certain factions can undermine the cohesion of groups and lead to splintering. Olson Lounsbury (2016) finds that rebels tend to coalesce when a foreign power intervenes on their behalf but does not find support for a splintering effect. I build on this research in three ways. First, I disaggregate external support. In doing so, I do not assume that safe havens, troops, weapons, and funding have the same—or at least very similar—effect on rebel dynamics. In Chapter II I provide a theoretical account for why this is unlikely. Second, I provide an account of why external states provide external support in the first place. Failing to do so, previous work struggles to account for potential selection effects. Without this first step, there is a strong assumption that external support is randomly distributed. Finally, I provide a theory of competition between external states over control of rebel groups which allows us to predict when this may occur and how it shapes rebel dynamics on the ground.

Kalyvas & Balcells (2010) stress the need to connect the complex conflict processes taking place at the subnational, national, transnational, and international systemic levels. In this section, I have identified several avenues that merit further research. Key among them is that although external powers feature throughout exiting theories of interrebel dynamics, their role within the international system is not explicitly

theorised. Existing accounts focus either on external state intervention or rebel dynamics, rarely bridging the two bodies of work. While work on rebel relations does not adequately account for the role of external states, literature on the role of external states fall short of a full-fledged theory on the internationalisation of civil wars. This doctoral research aims to fill this gap in our knowledge.

1.3 Research design and plan

My work poses the following research questions:

1. Why do states provide different forms of external support to rebel groups in civil wars?
2. How do different forms of support shape intra- and intergroup rebel dynamics?

The questions are directly related as the dependent variable (forms of support) for *research question 1* is the independent variable for *research question 2*. In Chapter II, I present a novel theoretical argument for the trickle-down effect of competition in the international system on the conflict environment and rebel dynamics, and I outline several testable hypotheses. To answer both research questions, I develop a nested research strategy (Lieberman, 2005) in which I first conduct two large-N analyses. In a second part, I conduct three case studies which focus specifically on *research question 2*.

Large-N analysis

I employ a large-N cross-national network and regression analysis to explore the competitive dynamics among external states and how different forms of support shape rebel dynamics (Chapters III and Chapter IV). For both questions I outline the main methodological challenges and, in light of these, I present appropriate research designs.

In Chapter III, I note that the international system is a network. I therefore present a statistical approach that not only controls for network effects—such as a friend of a friend is more likely to be a friend—but also exploits them to shed light on the underlying data generation processes. I conduct a temporal network analysis of external state support to rebel groups (1975-2009) and show that weaker states are more likely to provide fungible support, while stronger states—both militarily but also in terms of alliance strength—are more likely to provide nonfungible support. Building on these findings, in Chapter IV, I note that the provision of support is not random. In light of this, I present a statistical approach that matches similar conflicts but where rebel groups received different forms of support. I find that fungible support leads to greater infighting and nonfungible support leads to greater allying. However, I also find that fungible support leads to greater allying and no support for how different forms of support affect rebel splintering. I focus on these puzzling results in subsequent chapters.

Case studies

I conduct three theory-evaluating case studies in which I analyse how different forms of external state support shape conflict dynamics in three conflicts. The cases are selected to test hypothesis related to *research question 2* on how different forms of support shape intra- and intergroup rebel dynamics.²

The case studies aim to achieve a representative sample and useful variation on the dimensions of theoretical interest (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). I conduct a single

²An alternative approach could include the selection of states for which the key independent variables, military and alliance strength, vary over time. Such an approach would avoid selecting cases on the dependent variable and omitting observations, for which the pitfalls are well known (Geddes, 1990; King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994; Lustick, 1996). The risks are particularly pronounced for this research project, as even in the most internationalised conflicts the number of states that do not become involved in the conflict always outnumbers those that do. In the study of the provision of support or intervention, the risk is to focus on the states that become involved and ignore those who do not (e.g. Straus, 2015). A research project with two separate case selection strategies was beyond the scope of this doctoral research.

case study of Northern Ireland (1968-1998) and a comparative case study of Libya (2011-2019) and Syria (2011-2019). In the single case study, I focus on the actor-level. The comparative case study allows me to compare civil wars where the conflicts experienced different forms of external support (diverse) and in similar contexts (most similar). The most similar cases allow me to overcome potential endogeneity between the forms of support provided and the number of rebel groups. More generally, as conflict environments develop over time, all three cases allow me to analyse changes in levels of external involvement and the conflict environment, thus increasing the number of observations and leverage. This allows me to test several hypotheses as it represents the full variation of the general population of internationalised civil wars. In my case selection, I also considered within-case variation in the number of external supporting states over time, within-case variation in the types of support provided, and across-case dissimilarity in terms of time and geography in order to increase the generalisability of the findings and identify potential scope conditions for the theoretical argument. The case selection strategy is outlined in detail in Appendix I.

In Chapter V, I conduct a case study of external support and rebel dynamics during the conflict in Northern Ireland known as ‘the Troubles’ (1968-1998), which is selected as a case in which rebel groups received fungible support. I adopt an actor-centric approach to understand the process within the rebel groups (E. J. Wood, 2007). Drawing on primary and secondary sources, I employ process tracing (A. Bennett & Checkel, 2015; D. Collier, 2011) to test the effect of fungible support on rebel dynamics, focusing specifically on splintering and interrebel fighting.

Process tracing of the Northern Irish case is employed for several methodological reasons. It is particularly useful due to the nature of the research topic. External state support is inherently covert, but this is particularly the case for fungible support such as weapons and money. Although there have been incredible data collection efforts, large datasets often suffer from missingness. Even where the nature of external

support is known, measuring its extent is equally problematic. As sure as airstrikes are different to weapons, it will shock no one that the provision of several thousand weapons will matter more than a single revolver. An in-depth case study of the Northern Irish conflict allows me to account for the quantity of support, not just its presence, and thus to conduct a more nuanced testing of the theoretical argument. Although the case study deals with measurement error, claims of support are often difficult to determine due to their political implications and a substantial amount of political and academic debate remains regarding their origin and their quality.

In Chapter VI, I conduct a within- and cross-case comparison of the Libyan (2011-2019) and Syrian (2011-2019) civil wars. In both conflicts, at least one rebel group received nonfungible support. I exploit variation in the sequencing of external support across the cases to identify the mechanisms through which different forms of support shape interrebel dynamics. Unlike in my study of the Northern Irish conflict, in this final chapter I conduct a system-level analysis. The number of active armed groups and external states was high, and it is therefore more informative to analyse how external stimuli affected system-level characteristics. To do this, I visualise political event data and identify temporal correlations between the forms of external support and interrebel dynamics, focusing on the number of battle-related deaths from fighting and the number of active rebel groups. Finally, I present support for the causal mechanisms by focusing on four of the main rebel groups that are known to have received external support. I show how interrebel dynamics were shaped by external support in ways that support my theoretical argument.

Research designs including discussions of methods and data are described in greater detail in subsequent chapters. All share a common approach. I first analyse external support by identifying external supporting states, types of support, timing, and the motivations driving supporters' decisions to intervene. This first step allows me to determine periods in which support was provided, which then allows me to test

the effects of different forms of support on rebel dynamics. Therefore, I outline the strategic interactions at the state-level, namely, between potential external states, the target government, and the supported rebel group. I focus on relations between states that indicate their willingness to accept risk and expectation of costly punishment. Within the nested research design, it allows me to provide further evidence of the causal mechanisms underpinning the findings of the large-N analysis. This ensures that I overcome potential biases, clarifying spurious findings, and identify the causal mechanisms underpinning the quantitative analyses of large-N conflict data (Lieberman, 2005). In a second step, I test how different forms of support shaped rebel dynamics. My goal is that evidence from multiple research methods and sources of data provide robust tests of the theoretical argument.

In my concluding chapter, I present an overview of the findings, as well as the policy and the theoretical implications of my research.

Chapter 2

Theory

Why do states provide different forms of external support to rebel groups in civil wars? How do different forms of external support shape intra- and intergroup rebel dynamics? To answer these questions, I explore the range of ways in which a state can intervene to support non-state actors fighting the government of a state.¹ As researchers increasingly appreciate the importance of disaggregating conflict actors in space and time, a similar trend is emerging in research on external support (Keels, Benson, & Widmeier, 2020; Marshall, 2019; Pearlman & Cunningham, 2012; Petrova, 2019; Sawyer, Cunningham, & Reed, 2017). I take a broad definition of external support to better understand the strategic logic of providing different forms of support. I define support as material aid that aims to contribute to the overall military objectives of a rebel group. It can include safehavens, military equipment (for example, personnel carriers), logistical equipment (for example, medical supplies), weapons, ammunition,

¹I focus on what Little (1975) describes as “partial” interventions on the side of the rebels. He distinguishes between impartial—those that aim to end fighting without taking sides in the conflict such as UN peacekeeping operations (Fortna, 2004; Hultman, Kathman, & Shannon, 2013)—and partial interventions—where external states form alliances or commitments with actors involved in a civil war in order to increase their chances of victory. Similarly, Regan (2002) refers to “biased” interventions, where an external actor provides resources to shift the balance of power in favour of the preferred conflict actor. Other sources of external support exist, namely from non-state actors such as diasporas or wealthy individuals (Manekin & Wood, 2020; Petrova, 2019). I focus on state support because few actors have more significant resources to commit to foreign conflicts and therefore, they are uniquely placed to shape conflict dynamics on the ground.

money, airstrikes, and troops. Therefore, external support ranges from financial and military equipment to boots on the ground and airstrikes—i.e., the full spectrum from covert support to what is commonly referred to as proxy conflict (Groh, 2019; G. Hughes, 2012; Mumford, 2013; Rauta, 2020) and direct military intervention (Regan, 2002).

To account for how the international environment shapes subnational conflict dynamics, I make a two-step argument. First, I argue that some states provide low-risk forms of support such as money and weapons in order to avoid detection and punishment. They do this because they expect costly retaliation from the target—the government that the rebels are fighting—or its allies. Other states do not expect retaliation or are confident that it will not be costly. They take greater risks to provide riskier support such as safehavens, airstrikes, and troops. I argue that the riskier forms of support cannot be exchanged but are more effective—they are *nonfungible* support. They give rebels the best chance of victory and provide the external state with greater control over their rebel proxies. Support that can be easily exchanged—*fungible* support—is crucial for the survival of rebel groups but external states have less control over their actions. Multiple states vying for influence over the outcome of a conflict may escalate their involvement.

Different forms of support have different effects on the conflict environment and rebel dynamics at the intergroup and intragroup levels. Nonfungible support tips the balance of power to cause bandwagoning among and within rebel groups, but the influx of fungible support like money and weapons—especially from numerous sources—causes competitive relations. Greater intergroup competition leads to more interrebel fighting, while greater intragroup competition leads to splintering. A less competitive environment leads to more allying and less splintering. When multiple external states provide different forms of support to multiple rebel groups, civil wars are best understood as systems. When support is predominantly fungible, the conflict

system becomes more competitive, while nonfungible support to different rebel groups causes greater competition among rebel groups but greater cooperation within them as the conflict takes the combat appearance of an interstate war.

2.1 Why do states provide different forms of support?

External state support is often analysed within the context of strategic rivalries, whereby states that are dissatisfied with the status quo but lack the capabilities or will to directly confront their rivals are more likely to support rebels in rival states (Asal, Ayres, & Kubota, 2019; Byman, 2013; Maoz & San-Akca, 2012; Salehyan, Gleditsch, & Cunningham, 2011). Therefore, states that engage in providing external support want to achieve certain goals but not enough to warrant directly confronting rival states. Delegating the fight is a way for states to avoid the costs of war and is often used to achieve political objectives instead of the traditional ‘carrots and sticks’ of international relations, such as economic sanctions, diplomacy, or interstate war. Why do states provide different forms of support? This question is important because there is evidence that variation in support affects conflict characteristics such as duration (Sawyer, Cunningham, & Reed, 2017) and sexual violence (Johansson & Sarwari, 2019), but also characteristics of post-war society, such as the electoral success of rebel parties (Marshall, 2019). Furthermore, the effects of different forms of support are not only heterogeneous, but they are also widely felt. According to UCDP data, 43.7 percent of conflicts received some form of external state support from 1989 to 2009. Finally, the complexity, severity, and duration of modern conflicts such as Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Libya appear to be related in part to the involvement of external states.

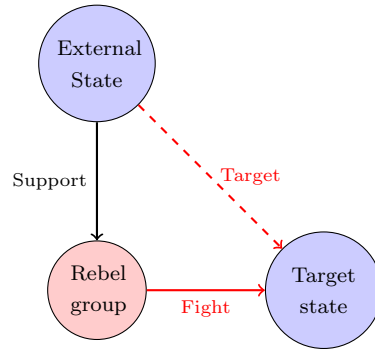


Figure 2.1: Existing literature’s understanding of how external states support rebels that target their rivals.

Providing external support to a rebel group is commonly understood as a substitution strategy carried out to drain the target state of valuable resources, and ultimately, to decrease their relative strength in an ongoing interstate rivalry (Salehyan, 2010; Salehyan, Gleditsch, & Cunningham, 2011; San-Akca, 2016) (see Figure 2.1). States provide external support as part of a “high risk, high reward game” (Marshall, 2019, p. 6). High risk because external meddling can result in direct military confrontation between states, but high reward because supporting states can achieve important foreign policy objectives. However, this is not always the case. Some forms of support are low risk, and the potential rewards are lower. States that provide external support accept a certain level of risk in order to avoid the costs of conflict escalation and direct interstate conflict while still achieving important foreign policy objectives.

International rivalries alone do not explain variation in forms of support—why is it that not all rivals provide support and how can we account for different forms of support? To understand why states provide different forms of support, I examine their expected costs and benefits. I argue that civil wars are opportunities for states to improve their place in the international balance of power, and they provide different forms of support depending on their perceived risk of retaliation from other states.

Different forms of support and risk

States are motivated by a logic of consequences (March & Olsen, 1998) and make strategic choices: they first decide whether to provide support and subsequently what type of support.² Different forms of support have varying risks and payoffs. Byman (2005, 2013) claims that the most beneficial support to rebel organisations are safehavens, providing them with a place to train, recruit, and launch attacks, but also to rest which can boost the morale of fighters. Supporting states may also fight alongside rebels, as was the case in Afrin where the Turkish state fought alongside its rebel proxies (Al-Khalidi, 2018). States that support rebel groups violate the principle of non-intervention, and risk paying the price in reputation, balancing behaviour by other states, and armed opposition (Berman & Lake, 2019). Indeed, support in the form of troops constitutes a serious violation of sovereignty and often entails significant costs to the intervening state (Forsythe, 1992; K. S. Gleditsch, 2007; Krasner, 2004). States recognise this risk. For instance, during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), President Bourguiba of Tunisia feared that France would reoccupy his country if he provided support that was too overt, deciding instead to limit Tunisian support (Horne, 1996, p. 130). If external support is known, states risk interstate conflict with the target government or its allies, as was the case for Jordan's support of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), Laurent Kabila's support for the Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR), or the Taliban's support of Al-Qaeda (Bapat & Bond, 2012; K. S. Gleditsch, Salehyan, & Schultz, 2008; Schultz, 2010). Indeed, it can amount to direct military action, as was the case when Uganda entered Sudan to fight the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Rwanda carried out military operations in Eastern Congo (Hazen, 2013, p. 45). Short of the use of force, targeted governments and the international community can also retaliate by using political or economic

²Although political actors are also guided by a logic of appropriateness, like Krasner (1999), I assume that states are driven by the logic of consequences in international politics, especially when it comes to the act of undermining rivals and bolstering allies in civil wars.

instruments. Russia's support for Ukrainian rebels in the Donbass region of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 illustrates these retaliatory options: Russia was excluded from the G8 and hit by a range of economic sanctions imposed by the European Union (EU) and the US (Smale & Shear, 2014). In this case, armed retaliation was notably absent. Naturally, when states decide whether to support a rebel group, they are not immune to miscalculations and mishaps. The Taliban in Afghanistan may not have thought that harbouring Al Qaeda terrorist in the wake of the 9/11 attacks would be detrimental to their political objectives.³ External states also risk losing control of their agent. Betrayal is the ultimate loss of control over an agent, as was the case when Kabila expelled Rwandan advisors from the DRC in 1998 (Roessler & Verhoeven, 2016). Finally, leaders risk losing domestic support if their involvement in foreign civil wars is perceived as a failure by the voting public or small groups of supporters (Carson, 2018; Weeks, 2008). Despite the risks and potential costs of these types of support, they can drastically alter a conflict. Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan (2001, p. 91) attribute the military victories of the Taliban, Bosnian Croats, the Abkhaz, and the forces of Laurent Kabila to the fact that they received direct military support in the form of troops. Rebel access to foreign territory is detrimental for most counterinsurgency strategies (Staniland, 2005) and can prolong the conflict (Salehyan, 2008a).⁴ Therefore, providing rebel groups with troops or a safehaven is a high risk but potentially rewarding strategy.

Sending a limited and hardly traceable amount of money through informal ties with a rebel organisation is less risky. Much of the risk rests on whether the sponsoring of a warring party is traceable and known. Certain forms of support are less likely to push target states to respond militarily, attract international condemnation, economic sanctions, or exclusion from international organisations. Money and weapons, in

³This is true in the short to medium term, at least. At the time of writing, American troops have left Afghanistan and the Taliban regained power (Gibbons-Neff & Schmitt, 2021).

⁴Foreign territorial control also increases rebel violence against civilians (Stewart & Liou, 2017), which may undermine the government's ability to protect people within its borders.

particular, can be supplied covertly. Forsythe (1992, p. 385) describes covert interventions as difficult to pinpoint in time, place, and detail. For instance, in 2003 Russia accused two NGOs tied to the Kuwaiti government of sponsoring terrorism in the North Caucasus. The Kuwaiti government shrugged off the accusations by claiming that the organisations only supported charitable activities, to which Russia could do little in response (Charap, 2015, p. 156). States can provide forms of support that are difficult to trace and prove such as money and weapons in order to mitigate the potential backlash of sponsoring a rebel group. The key benefit of providing money or weapons is that they are cheap and relatively risk-free compared to other more overt forms of support.

Different forms of support are associated with different levels of risk. Certain forms of support such as safehavens, troops, and airstrikes are difficult to conceal (Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan, 2001).⁵ Other forms of external support such as money and weapons are more easily concealed and refutable. Therefore, external support represents a spectrum of relatively risk-free to more risky forms of support. The idea that state support is a “matter of degree” (Hegghammer, 2010) is not new, however I explicitly link the degrees to different levels of risk.

The logic of external support

The principal-agent approach is often employed to understand the lines of control between different actors. In the study of conflict, it has shed light on relations between groups like states and rebel groups (K. S. Gleditsch, Salehyan, & Schultz, 2008; Salehyan, 2010; Salehyan, Siroky, & Wood, 2014), terrorist organisations (Byman & Kreps, 2010), militia groups (Carey & Mitchell, 2017; Clayton & Thomson, 2016; Eck, 2015; Jentzsch, Kalyvas, & Schubiger, 2015) or private military companies (Cockayne, 2007), but also the internal lines of command in state forces (Butler, Gluch, & Mitchell,

⁵Although the risk of safehavens may be mitigated by the sponsor if they plead ignorance or claim that it is unable to expel the group.

2007; N. J. Mitchell, 2004) and rebel groups (Green, 2018; Weinstein, 2006; E. J. Wood, 2009). In rebel sponsorship literature, it has been used to great effect to understand the motivations of both external states and rebel groups. For external states, there are several military advantages in supporting rebels. Salehyan (2010, p. 636) points to the rebel group's greater access to important military information, knowledge of the terrain, and legitimacy among the local population. As is true in security delegation more generally, delegating the fight to agents also allows the principal to shift blame in the future (Carey & Mitchell, 2017; Cockayne, 2007; N. J. Mitchell, 2004). Therefore, providing external support to rebel groups is best understood as a potentially cheap but risky strategy for states to achieve their own objectives.

For rebel groups, foreign powers have always been an important source of support.⁶ Due to the great power asymmetry between rebel groups and the central government, additional military resources often have the greatest impact on battlefield success (Gates, 2002; Gent, 2008; Hirshleifer, 2000). However, as noted by Horowitz (2000, p. 230) success is not only a function of the “the balance of forces” but also “interests that extend beyond the state.” These two features are often directly related in the form of external support, which has the potential to drastically tip the balance in the favour of the opposition. For instance, the Soviet Union's provision of surface-to-air missiles to rebels in Guinea-Bissau was the beginning of the end for the Portuguese, which had relied heavily on their air superiority (Westad, 2005), the US's provision of stinger missiles to the Mujahedeen in the 1980s gave them the upper hand against Spetnaz's low flying helicopter assault tactics (Coll, 2005, p. 150), and Russian support to Dniestrian elites ensured their victory in the Moldova civil war in 1991-1992 (Kaufman, 1996). In light of great power asymmetry between the state and rebel

⁶This has been noted by scholars throughout history. Machiavelli (1995) claimed that “it will always happen that some powerful foreigner will be invited in by those who are unhappy with the prince.” According to Morgenthau (1966, p. 425) “from the time of the ancient Greeks to this day some states have found it advantageous to intervene in the affairs of other states on behalf of their own interests.”

forces, rebel groups seek to maximise resources in order to achieve their objectives (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Salehyan, Gleditsch, & Cunningham, 2011). External support can increase rebels' military effectiveness (with a greater military budget and troop size), their position in geographic space (by means of a safehaven) and their ability to target the government (with military technology). Military strength is context dependent, but resources from external supporters are often crucial in increasing their firepower, while money can be used to pay combatants and training can improve organisation structures of control—both of which are key measures of rebel strength (Clayton, 2013; Record, 2006). It is no surprise that rebels often seek out external support to bolster their ability to mount effective challenges against the government.

External support is rarely free. Rebels face a trade-off between resources and autonomy, as the external state assumes an element of the rebel group's agenda setting in exchange for its support (Salehyan, 2010) (as shown in Table 2.1). With greater say in their agenda-setting, external states can impose their preferences on the rebellion. They can manipulate, divide, or weaken a movement in order to promote their political agenda. This was evident during the Kashmiri insurgency, where the Pakistani government favoured groups that wanted to unite with Pakistan over those that were fighting for independence, and thus changed the character of the insurgency as a whole (Byman, 2013; Kiss, 2014). Due to this trade-off, rebel groups favour sources of support which have fewer strings attached when they are available, such as support from diaspora who are unable or unwilling to control the group (Byman, 2013; Petrova, 2019), or in the case of safehavens, spaces where the territorial reach of the state is limited (Lindemann & Wimmer, 2018). However, there are few nonstate actors that can provide the type and amount of support that states can, and areas of weak state control are not always available to rebels.

Moreover, rebel groups risk becoming dependent on their sponsor. This can lead to audience costs, as rebel groups that rely on external support may be seen by

the local population as agents of a foreign power (Allansson, Melander, & Themnér, 2017; Byman, 2013; Salehyan, 2010). However, not all rebel organisations are merely the ‘pawns’ of external patrons. Successful rebel organisations often have a flexible and diverse portfolio of sources of income (Conrad, Greene, Walsh, & Whitaker, 2019; Weinstein, 2006), and the extent to which they have access to other resources will affect their bargaining position vis-à-vis potential sponsors. A major risk of external support—especially when a rebel group comes to rely heavily on their external supporter—is betrayal. No group has come to embody this risk more than Kurdish rebels who were betrayed by Syria in 1996 (Tejel, 2018, p. 373) and by the US over two decades later.

Table 2.1: Trade-offs for both states and rebels depending on types of support.

Support	Type	State control	Rebel autonomy	Rebel strength
Funding	Fungible	Low	High	Low
Weapons	Fungible	Low	High	Low
Territory	Nonfungible	High	Low	High
Troops	Nonfungible	High	Low	High

External support represents a trade-off for both the external state providers and rebel group recipients. The supporting state risks military retaliation, international condemnation, political isolation, and economic sanctions. The rebels risk losing autonomy and becoming the pawns of third parties.

A solution to a problem: more information

Principals delegate to an agent when there is the possibility of benefiting from a division of tasks or the principal lacks the time or ability to perform the task itself (Arrow, 1985; Hart & Bengt, 1986; Laffont & Martimort, 2009). The delegation of authority from the external state to a rebel group is best explained by reference to the

functions performed by rebels, and the value of these actions for the external state (Tallberg, 2000). The primary reason to delegate is because the agent has advantages in terms of expertise and information. However, these sources of strength also lead to principal-agent problems. These problems stem from the asymmetric distribution of information in the pre-contractual phase, which may lead to adverse selection, and the post-contractual phase, which may lead to agency slack (Hart & Bengt, 1986).

Adverse selection is when a principal chooses an ineffective agent or one with different preferences. Although adverse selection is omnipresent in contracting situations, it is especially relevant for external state support due to the inherent lack of information in conflict zones (Schelling, 1980). States often try to get more information about the rebel group's 'type' by screening the groups through training and selecting agents with common political objectives, ethnicity, religion, or language (Salehyan, 2010). Groups that engage in 'rebel democracy' to lobby foreign states, gain international recognition and attract external support are signalling to international and domestic audiences that they can adopt state-like behaviour, but they are also signalling their 'type' to potential external patrons (Huang, 2016, p. 91; Jones & Mattiacci, 2019), often even before conflicts even begin.⁷ Despite external states' attempts to screen rebel groups, both parties rarely have fully aligned goals, and adverse selection is often aggravated because rebels pretend to be a certain type in order to attract external support (Jones & Mattiacci, 2019; Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010).⁸

Agents therefore have incentives to slack or shirk off certain responsibilities, leading to suboptimal outcomes for the principal. Agency slack is aggravated by adverse selection and the private information of agents. An agent is able to slack because their actions are often unobservable from the principal (Arrow, 1985). In conflict,

⁷As noted by Kaufman (1996, p. 110), external support is often crucial in the outbreak of conflict, as it provides "the means for extremists to cause war."

⁸For example, Wilhelmssen (2004, p. 25) argues that Chechen warlords adopted Wahhabism—a strand of Islam foreign to Chechen tradition—in order to attract resources from Islamic actors and organisations in the Middle East and Asia. Bakke (2013) also notes that funding incentivised an Islamist framing of the conflict.

rebel groups may redirect support in order to pursue alternative goals. For example, during the Soviet–Afghan War rebels ignored orders to target local infrastructure in order to maintain supply routes (Coll, 2005, p. 134). Rebels may redirect support to target other rebels in order to become the most politically relevant group. The rebel group is expected to use its private information when making decisions, but the external state cannot be certain that this information has been used in a way that best serves its interests. The solution for agency slack is more effective monitoring.⁹ However, because external states cannot monitor the group’s actions and information without incurring high costs, they are often faced with problems of inducement (rewarding good behaviour) and enforcement (sanctioning bad behaviour). Byman & Kreps (2010) claim that sanctioning is done *ex post* by ending or withdrawing support, while rewarding is done *ex ante*. For example, in 1987 India punished the LTTE *ex post* for not surrendering its arms as part of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord (Pfaffenberger, 1988). Salehyan (2010) claims that joint military operations and foreign advisors are monitoring methods, whereas the withdrawal of support or crackdowns are sanctioning methods. I argue that certain forms of support provide the external state with continuous flows of information, which means better monitoring and—by extension—more timely and effective sanctioning mechanisms.

Agency slack is enabled by greater agent autonomy, which varies depending on the control mechanisms operated by the principal (Tallberg, 2000). Information is central to the principal-agent relationship, as adverse selection is accentuated by poor information and the agent’s asymmetric access to information. Therefore, in order to mitigate against principal-agent problems, principals attempt to increase their information of the agent (Laffont & Martimort, 2009). Monitoring, rewarding, and sanctioning mechanisms are crucial because the principal’s bargaining strength derives from its ability to control the agent (Salehyan, Gleditsch, & Cunningham,

⁹Arrow (1985) argues that delegation problems can be solved if the principal can tap into the agent’s knowledge.

2011, p. 505). These mechanisms are in fact closely related, since the principal must know that the agent is slacking before effectively sanctioning or rewarding behaviour. The potential of technology to reduce information asymmetry is well-established in the business world, where communications technology, video cameras, and computer software are increasingly used to prevent employees from slacking in the workplace (e.g. Pachirat, 2011). Certain forms of support provide external states with more control over their agent because they enable more effective monitoring techniques, namely through oversight. Police-patrol oversight is “comparatively centralised, active, and direct” but costly (Balla & Deering, 2013; McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984, p. 166). In terms of external support, safehavens, airstrikes, and troops provide states with this option, primarily because principals retain ownership and direct control of their support. Principals are regularly updated and informed on the actions of the rebels, who must work with the principal to coordinate the airstrikes and military operations of troops.¹⁰ For instance, there were high levels of coordination between Kurdish ground troops and US airstrikes during the battle for Kobani in 2015.¹¹ Direct contact and coordination means that states have a greater ability to detect, discourage, and, if need be, punish behaviour that is inconsistent with its preferences. Generally, additional personnel will not only bolster the rebel group in terms of skill and military intelligence, but they will also alert the external state if the rebel group is slacking. Other forms of support such as weapons or funding do not provide continuous information on the actions of the rebel group.

The distinction between levels of control and forms of support is reflected in International Humanitarian Law, specifically regarding state responsibility over the

¹⁰In the case of a safehaven, monitoring might not be improved because rebels operate in remote border regions. However, the sponsors ability to punish is significantly improved because the physical location of rebels can easily be determined and doing so does not violate international norms of non-interference.

¹¹A senior American military commander stated that: “When they call and say: ‘We need you to drop ordnance,’ we know exactly what they are talking about” (Albayrak, Trofimov, & Abdulrahim, 2015).

actions (and especially crimes) of non-state armed actors operating in foreign states. Known as the “overall control” test, it was elaborated as part of the United Nations (UN) International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) which itself was building on earlier cases, notably the Nicaragua Case (Nicaragua v United States, 1986). The Nicaragua Case concluded that US exercised effective control over *Contra* groups by “recruiting, training, arming, equipping, financing, supplying, and otherwise encouraging, supporting, aiding, and directing military and paramilitary actions in and against Nicaragua” (Nicaragua v United States, 1986, para. 15), but concluded that the US was not legally accountable for their actions. The ICTY’s Tadic Appeal Judgement (Prosecutor v. Tadic, 1999) is the first judgement to clearly distinguish between effective and overall control. Overall control exists when the external state “has a role in organising, coordinating, or planning the military actions of the military group, in addition to financing, training, and equipping or providing operational support”) (Prosecutor v. Tadic, 1999, para. 137). Although the distinction is established on a case-by-case basis by the UN, the presence of troops has emerged as a key factor for establishing overall control in many cases. For example, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that the South Lebanese Army acted on behalf of Israel because Israel provided assistance as well as “a small military presence” (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1999). Jordash, Aysev, & Mykytenko (2020) claim that Russia has overall control of pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine due to “the direct participation of Russian troops in hostilities in support of DPR/LPR forces (including by cross-border shelling from Russian territory), as well as the provision of military training and the transfer of large quantities of advanced weaponry, including defence systems, artillery, tanks, and armoured personnel carriers.” In sum, the relationship between control and types of support exists in international law, reflecting my discussion on risk, types of support, and control (see Table 2.2). Although the level of control that patron states have over rebel clients is case specific

the provision of territory or troops is a strong indication of overall control.

Table 2.2: Oversight and control depending on support type. I discuss the fungibility of support below.

Support	Type	Oversight	Control
Funding	Fungible	None	Effective
Weapons	Fungible	None	Effective
Territory	Nonfungible	Police-patrol	Overall
Troops	Nonfungible	Police-patrol	Overall

Ownership, covertness, and fungibility

The distinction between different oversight techniques draws attention to the relationship between the principal and the support it provides. Different forms of support represent varying levels of ownership, fungibility, and covertness (see Table 2.3). All resources have different levels of *fungibility*, defined as an asset's exchangeability with other individual assets (Sawyer, Cunningham, & Reed, 2017). Certain types of support are difficult to trace (covert) and easily diverted from the war effort (fungible) (Byman, 2013; Sawyer, Cunningham, & Reed, 2017). Money can be used to buy food, weapons, pay informants, and recruit combatants, but it can also be diverted from the war effort to supply public goods or enrich individuals in pursuit of private or club goods (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Sawyer, Cunningham, & Reed, 2017; Weinstein, 2006). Weapons, too, are covert and fungible. External actors that provide weapons and ammunition deliberately conceal their involvement by repacking ammunition or destroying factory marks on weapons and ammunition, and weapons often change hands (Carson, 2018; Elbagir, Abdelaziz, Abo El Gheit, & Smith-Spark, 2018). Weapons are easily diverted, and their use is difficult to control. For example, Sikh nationalists in the 1990s received weapons that Pakistan siphoned-off from the weapon pipeline between the CIA and the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan (Human Rights

Watch, 1994, p. 8). The Islamic State (IS) captured weapons from fleeing Iraqi and national stockpiles, weapons originally sourced from foreign countries, including the US and Russia (CAR, 2017). During the Libyan civil war, pick-up trucks provided by Saudi Arabia were used by armed groups “as barter items in exchange for weapons and ammunition and as payment to mercenaries” (UN, 2017, p. 43). Weapons and other military resources also move from one conflict to another with relative ease. For example, the 1960s Anya-Nya resistance movement in Sudan captured and bought weapons from groups involved in the failed Simba rebellion in Eastern Congo (Johnson, 2011, p. 30; Rolandsen & Daly, 2016, pp. 33–35), while many weapons recovered from IS forces between 2014 and 2016 originated from Libyan national stock piles (CAR, 2017).¹² The fungibility of military equipment was evident when footage of Taliban “special forces” emerged wearing looted uniforms, boots, night-vision goggles, and body armour shortly after the US pulled out of Afghanistan in August 2021 (Horton, 2021).

Table 2.3: Forms of external support, state ownership, covertness, and fungibility.

Support	Principal ownership	Covertness	Fungibility
Funding	Low	High	High
Weapons	Low	High	High
Territory	High	Low	Low
Troops	High	Low	Low

Other forms of support, such as airstrikes, safe-havens, or troops are less covert and nonfungible. External states maintain ownership of this support and can retract it. Furthermore, these forms of support also provide police-patrol oversight. Not only

¹²There are many examples of rebel groups selling weapons to other rebel groups. For example, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) sold weapons to the short-lived Free Wales Army in the 1960s (McGuire, 1973, p. 37).

does the external state's ability to sanction bad behaviour increase, they are also more aware of bad behaviour. On the contrary, once an external state provides a rebel group with funding or weapons, it loses ownership of the support, rendering sanctioning less effective.¹³ It is also important to note that monetary support is often provided in a decentralised manner. For instance, while Saudi Arabia funded Islamic rebels (notably in Chechnya and Afghanistan), it "did not appear to control the use of its funds closely" (Dorrnsoro, 2005, p. 133). Although the external state can stop the flow of support, it cannot easily reclaim weapons or money.¹⁴ The external state cannot be certain that fungible resources are being used according to its preferences. Without the ability to effectively monitor the group's actions, the external state can only observe the outcome of the actions.¹⁵ If the rebel group does well, it is also unclear whether this is due to the effort of the group or luck (Grossman & Hart, 1992, p. 10). In this case, the external state cannot be certain that rewarding the rebels is the best option. On the other hand, nonfungible support allows external states to punish rebels if they do not cooperate. Not only do they have quasi-continuous flow of

¹³Coll (2005)'s account of the Salang highway during the Soviet-Afghan War in 1990 demonstrates these dynamics well. The United States wanted its rebel proxies to close the highway because it was the main supply route from the Soviet Union to Kabul. Massoud, a prominent Mujahedeen leader, received \$500,000 to do just that. However, during the winter the highway was closed for only a few days. The CIA suspected that Massoud had not sent all his forces. For Massoud, the highway was an ideal target for ambushes and taxation which provided a constant and important revenue and source of military equipment for his men. Later, Massoud claimed that the mission failed because the winter of 1990 was particularly bad. The CIA could never know, but "suspected they had been ripped off for a half a million dollars" (Coll, 2005, p. 8).

¹⁴Again, Coll (2005, p. 387) outlines a relevant case. The CIA's stinger missile recovery programme aimed to revoke some of the 2,300 stinger missiles provided to the various Mujahedeen leaders during the Soviet-Afghan war. The US feared that they could be used by non-state actors to shoot down commercial aircraft or that the technology might fall in the hands of rival states. According to Coll, Iran purchased up to 100 missiles. The scramble to buy back missiles caused their prices to soar between \$70,000 to \$150,000 per unit. In the end, they became an important source of unrestricted cash for the Taliban (Coll, 2005, p. 338). A similar problem emerged in the wake of NATO's intervention in Libya.

¹⁵Groh (2019, p. 3) refers to this type of support as a donation because the external state "cedes any control over how the local actor uses the support provided." However, there are ways for states to retain some control over fungible support. For instance, they can provide weapons or military systems but limited ammunition so that recipients continue to depend on the external state. Control over the rebel agent is lower because ownership of support is lost and information quality of support is low, but it is not null.

information, external states can punish the rebels by turning their support on them¹⁶ or, for the case of safehavens, expelling them.¹⁷

In relations between employees and employers, limits can be put on owner's rights and agreed upon contractually. The contract between external states and rebel groups is an extreme example of an incomplete contract with no external enforcer, aggravating issues of ownership. The question then is why do states provide suboptimal fungible support when nonfungible support is more effective in achieving foreign policy objectives?¹⁸ The next section will outline the conditions under which states are more likely to provide fungible or nonfungible support.

The risk of retaliation

According to Rosenau (1964), when a social system is dislocated by violence, the larger system of which it is part is also disrupted. Civil wars often lead to international crises, whereby the probability of military hostilities between states is heightened and the structure of the international system is destabilised (Brecher, 2008). International crises generate perceptions of threat. For external states, civil wars across borders are opportunities to empower allies or weaken rivals (Daxecker, 2011), thus increasing their share of world power (Mearsheimer & Alterman, 2001, p. 30). States are mainly

¹⁶Many suspect Russia of eliminating pro-Russian rebel leaders in Eastern Ukraine, some of whom have died far from the front line. For example, in 2016 a prominent rebel commander, Arsen Pavlov, died in a bomb blast in his home. Ukrainian officials deny killing him, and claim that he was purged by Russian special forces because accusations that he had committed war crimes were making him a liability during peace talks between Russia and Western powers (Kramer, 2016). Another prominent rebel leader, Alexander Zakharchenko, died in a bomb blast in the centre of Donetsk in August 2018. Although there are numerous theories of who killed him, the Chief of Staff of the Ukrainian security services, Igor Guskov, claimed that he was eliminated by his Russian backers for "interference" (Twickel, 2019).

¹⁷For example, withdrawal of Iranian support for the Iraqi Kurdish Pesh Merga guerrillas in 1975 had devastating effects on the rebels, who ultimately lost the Second Iraqi-Kurdish War (Brynjar & Kjøk, 2001, p. 23).

¹⁸A 2013 CIA study on the history of US covert support operations found that they were less effective when the US did not provide direct troop support on the ground (Mazzetti, 2014). Even the most famous successful case of covert support to rebels fighting in the Afghan-Soviet War was only successful due to the role of Pakistani special forces on the ground, and the operation is partly blamed for the rise of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The report was important in Barak Obama's decision not to roll out weapons and funding to Syrian rebels in 2013.

concerned about the “posture” which a state will take toward the outside world once the conflict ends (Rosenau, 1964, p. 62; Saideman, 2002), and states prioritise the future posture of conflicted states as part of their “grand strategy” (Walt, 1987), the “supergame of international security” (Snyder, 1984), or their “vital interests” (Fearon, 1998; George, 1991).¹⁹ Indeed, rebels that achieve regime change or independence are often dependent upon and indebted to their supporters (Hager Jr & Lake, 2000, p. 113). The ongoing relationship between Russia and *de facto* states in the former Soviet Space, such as Abkhazia, Nagorno Karabakh, or Transdniestria, as well as the US relationship with the Iraqi and until recently Afghani governments illustrate this dependence well (Ahram, 2019; Florea, 2017). Because states are uncertain of the intention of other external states, they are incentivised to shape the outcome of the conflict in order to mitigate or pre-empt similar action by other states (Mearsheimer & Alterman, 2001, p. 31). Intervening pre-emptively for fear that “rivals will themselves become involved and thus secure an increasing measure of influence in the domestic affairs of another state” is not a novel insight (C. R. Mitchell, 1970, p. 172), and explains why major powers “drag one another into wars” (Corbetta & Dixon, 2005, p. 54; Anderson, 2019; see also Weisiger, 2013). States fear that powerful rivals will expand influence through their involvement in civil wars.

The strong incentives for states to intervene to shape the outcome of conflict are often outweighed by significant risks. The nature of their intervention and thus the type of support that they are willing to provide rebel groups is calibrated with the risk of expected punishment, whereby “states elude punishment by anticipating the level that would provoke a response and limiting their role accordingly” (Byman, 2013, p. 999). Supporting states may be punished politically (through exclusion from certain institutions or cutting diplomatic relations), economically (through sanctions

¹⁹State’s interest in the “posture” that a state will take in the future is true also for new states. For example, Coggins (2011) argues that an aspiring state’s membership to the international system depends on the acceptance of its peers, and that state leaders use decisions regarding new members strategically to advance their own interests.

or suspended trade) or militarily (through armed opposition). For the supporting state, the costliest form of punishment is military, either by retaliation in the form of reciprocal proxy conflicts (Brewer, 2011), mutual interventions (Duursma & Tamm, 2021) or armed opposition, all of which may lead to conflict escalation and potentially costly interstate conflict (D. E. Cunningham, 2016). Indeed, states pursue limited objectives because of the need to avoid large-scale confrontations (Anderson, 2019; Groh, 2019). However, the expected costs of military escalation between states are not equally shared. While weak states might provide fungible support in order to evade punishment, strong states might not expect or fear military retaliation, and are thus more likely to accept the risks of nonfungible support.

The risks of retaliation depend on the relative strength between the supporting state and the targeted state. Consider Turkey's troop support to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in 2019 fighting the Syria regime, as shown in Figure 2.2. Turkey did not expect Syria to retaliate given the ongoing civil war and weakened government forces. In this case, a relatively strong state did not expect the target state to retaliate because the target state could not accept the costs of doing so. Even if Syria were to retaliate, Turkey was less likely to suffer the consequences of conflict escalation. In this case, even if conflict were to escalate between the two states, Turkey could expect to emerge on the winning side. The internationalised civil war in Eastern Ukraine serves as a further example, where the target state (Ukraine) did not retaliate directly against the supporting state (Russia) because the costs of doing so were simply too high. Therefore, all else equal, relatively strong states are more likely to provide risky nonfungible support.

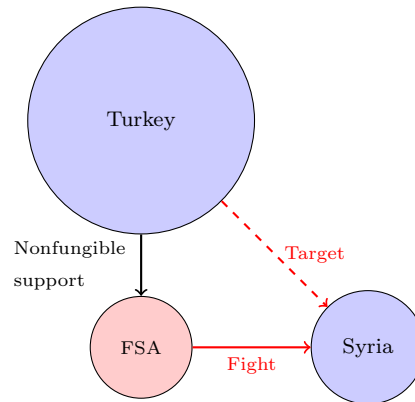


Figure 2.2: A stylised representation of Turkey’s support to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) during the Syrian civil war. State power is represented by node size.

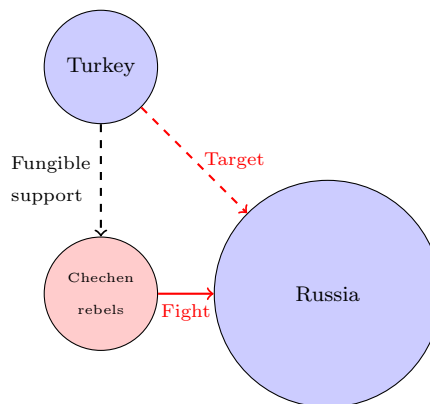


Figure 2.3: A stylised representation of Turkey’s support to Chechen rebels targeting Russia during the First Chechen War. State power is represented by node size.

The opposite is true for weak states, which are likely to pay a higher price and potentially lose out from conflict escalation. In order to mitigate these risks, they are more likely to provide covert and fungible forms of support that will not be detected and allow them to plausibly deny involvement. This dynamic was clear during the Chechen civil wars, where states like Turkey, Iran, and China could have benefited from intervening, but made a strategic choice not to do so because “possible gains were weighed against the risk that perceived interference into Russia’s traditional zone of control would empower hard-liners in Moscow” (Driscoll, 2015, p. 9). Indeed,

caught between doing nothing, and thus not affecting the outcome of conflict, and not willing to accept the risks of sending their own forces, “an intervening state will look for opportunities to advance its vital and desirable interests” somewhere in the middle (Groh, 2019, p. 8). Instead, states provided fungible support as shown in Figure 2.3. This expectation is different from Saideman (2002), who argues that rebels in strong states are more likely to receive support as states try to weaken their most threatening adversaries. It is, however, similar to Maoz & San-Akca (2012), who find that dissatisfied states who are relatively weak tend to use rebel proxies as a tool for harassing rivals and potentially weakening their capability and resolve. However, I argue that weak states are more likely to provide a certain type of support—fungible support—in order to avoid punishment.

I argue that, all else equal, states that are relatively stronger are more likely to provide nonfungible forms of support to rebels targeting their rivals, while relatively weak states are more likely to provide fungible support. This focus on bilateral relations between the external supporting state and the target state is similar to the existing approach in the literature, as outline in Chapter I. From it, I form my first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: (A) external states are more likely to provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively stronger in terms of military power; and (B) external states are more likely to provide nonfungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively weaker in terms of military power.

State strength is not simply a measure of their military power, but also that of their allies. States are embedded in global alliance networks (Cranmer & Desmarais, 2011; Diehl & Goertz, 2001). They balance against rival states by forming alliances (Walt, 1987; Waltz, 2010), in what Snyder refers to as the “alliance game” (Snyder, 1984, p. 461). Indeed, even lesser members of alliances can depend on “the protection of their

larger supporters” (C. R. Mitchell, 1970; see also Morrow, 1991). Military alliances are important from the perspective of both the supporting state and the target state. It is both theoretically interesting and empirically accurate to move beyond rival state dyads to look at networks and communities of alliances or rivalries (Hafner-Burton, Kahler, & Montgomery, 2009).

Most states in the international system want to punish states who support rebel groups and violate long-standing norms of non-intervention and sovereignty. However, punishment is costly, and states thus have strong incentives to freeride (Frohlich & Oppenheimer, 1970; Olson, 1965). Economic sanctions may negatively impact the punishers, while military intervention and the ensuing risk of interstate conflict is a potentially costly foreign policy option. These expected costs are likely to be considerable, especially for states that may not consider themselves directly affected by the transgression of the supporting state. Although the stability of military alliances and coalitions are not a priori fact (Weisiger, 2016), they help solve collective action problems in several ways. First, freeriding is costly due to the reputational costs of not fulfilling commitments (Crescenzi, Kathman, Kleinberg, & Wood, 2012; Gibler, 2008b; Morrow, 1991).²⁰ Second, the institutions developed as part of military alliances such as NATO can also coordinate responses so that states share the costs of punishment (Keohane, 1985). Combined, this means that calls by the targeted state to punish the supporting state are less likely to fall on deaf ears.

Crucially, military alliances signal to potential supporting states that other states are prepared to defend their allies (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1948; Waltz, 2010). This signalling value is an important reason for why states enter military alliance in the first place: to deter enemies from challenging them (Leeds, 2003, p. 805). Therefore, similar to how states in alliances are less likely to experience militarised interstate disputes (Benson, 2011), states with more allies are less likely to be targeted

²⁰Military alliances are not free of freeriding, but members are still more likely to act collectively when defending states that are in their alliance.

by nonfungible support. Instead, states that wish to shape the outcome of a civil war but fear retaliation and punishment are more likely to provide fungible support.

States also enter alliances in order to compel enemies to agree to their demands. Like security dilemmas more generally, it is difficult to know when military alliances are intended only for defensive purposes (Snyder, 1984). States that provide external support can also be part of strong military alliances. When this is the case, their allies are more likely to support their transgressions, reducing the pool of states that are willing to punish the supporting state. Their membership in a military alliance also improves their war fighting capability by aggregating military capabilities (Waltz, 2010), thus deterring states that might want to punish them. Even if they were to be punished, the transgressing state will be more confident that it can emerge on the winning side of a potential conflict.

From this discussion emerge two expectations: supporting states with more allies are more likely to provide nonfungible support, while states with more allies are more likely to be targeted by fungible support. Again, strength is a relative concept. This means that states that are central in alliance communities are more likely to provide nonfungible support to rebels targeting peripheral states, as they do not anticipate punishment. This expectation is contrary to previous work, which posits that states support rebel groups in order to compensate for their lack of allies (Saideman, 2002; San-Akca, 2016). I argue that states with few allies provide fungible support in order to avoid detection and punishment, while states with allies provide nonfungible support because they do not expect or fear punishment. Unlike existing work, by focusing on military alliances, I bring the international system into the study of the internationalisation of civil war. From this, I develop the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: (A) external states are more likely to provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively stronger in terms of military alliances; and (B) external states are more likely to

provide nonfungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively weaker in terms of military alliances.

2.2 How do different forms of support shape conflict dynamics?

Research increasingly focuses on how the behaviour of groups is shaped by their relations with other rebel groups, leading to important findings on the onset, duration, and intensity of civil wars. Rebels often spend as much time fighting each other as the government (K. G. Cunningham, Bakke, & Seymour, 2012; Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; A. H. Kydd & Walter, 2006; Nygård & Weintraub, 2015), but there are mixed findings on how rebel competition and cooperation is related to the international system (Bapat & Bond, 2012; Popovic, 2018; Tamm, 2016). I argue that different forms of external support have heterogeneous effects on conflict dynamics. Different types of support shape conflict by inducing competition or cooperation among and within rebel groups.

The conflict environment

Consider the following two interviews with Chechen and Irish rebels:

... Then the war began, and I had not even a Kalashnikov, so I went back to town. I managed to get around for a while but could not find a gun. Once I saw some fighters closing in on a sniper in a ruined house. When they discovered him, he began running from one window to another—he was a skilled son of a bitch and hit two of our guys. Finally they got hit with a grenade rifle shot. When the flame flared up in the window, they paused a moment—they did not see at once that they had hit him. Otherwise they would have got there first: a sniper's gun is a valuable. But I saw my

*chance and rushed in from the other side through a gap in the wall. They were still running up the stairs when I got there ahead of them. The sniper was still alive, it seemed. I grabbed the gun and also his money and leapt out through the same gap. Our guys must have been surprised to find that there was no gun there. Served them right for dawdling. That is the law of wartime.*²¹

*... The feuds were driven by competition, especially over guns and money. Sometimes one side or the other would find out where the other side's weapons were and would lift them. Other times the groups would raise money for prisoners or the organisation, but the other group would claim that that was a Provo shop or a Stickie pub and tell them to stay away. Sometimes fights would break out between those trying to sell the Republican News and the United Irishman in the same spot. The rivalries were over building organisations. It was stupid but understandable, because you saw them as competitors and as a responsible for the failure of 1969.*²²

Both accounts show rebel competition over resources, including weapons and money. Examples of competition between rebels are common in accounts of civil war. The first quote shows how competition shapes intragroup behaviour, while the second sheds light on similar dynamics at the intergroup level. Actors in both accounts are on the same side in that they share a common enemy—the central government of their state. They lend credence to the statement that “‘actorness’ is seldom something we can take for granted in politics, especially civil wars” (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012, p. 265).

To understand how the conflict environment affects the behaviour of rebel groups and factions, I draw on the seminal work of Pfeffer & Salancik (1978). Their central

²¹Chechen rebel called Khalid interviewed by Tishkov (2004, p. 97).

²²Irish Republican called Danny Morrison interviewed by Krause (2017, p. 160).

thesis is that to understand the behaviour of an organisation we must understand the context of the behaviour, or “the ecology of the organisation” (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 1). Rebel groups, like other organisations, are not self-contained. They are “embedded in an environment comprised of other organisations which they depend on for many of their resources” (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 3). For rebel groups, success or failure is measured in terms of its ability to attain their stated political ends (Crenshaw, 1987, p. 15). This is reflected in their ability to extract meaningful concessions from the target government, the ultimate concessions of which are often maximalist goals such as secessionism, independence, or regime change. However, these goals are only possible if the organisation exists long enough to achieve them: survival is therefore paramount (Christia, 2012; Krause, 2017).²³ In civil wars, survival is a function of a group’s ability to extract resources from its environment. Indeed, previous work demonstrates that a group’s survival increases if they can exploit resources from their physical and social environments (Conrad, Greene, Walsh, & Whitaker, 2019; D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2013; Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson, 2013).²⁴ This is true for all resources that contribute to the war effort. Like Christia (2012), I employ a neorealist understanding of multi-party civil wars: the conflict environment is anarchical and rebels strive to survive. However, I propose that the systematic effects of anarchy can be mitigated by powerful external states in certain conditions.

²³This is noted in the writings of prominent insurgent military strategists (Townshend, 1979). For instance, IRA commander during the Irish War of Independence (1920-1921), Tom Barry (1946) noted that the rebel group’s main objective is “not to fight but to continue to exist” and Che Guevara (1961) claimed that the “essential task of the guerrilla fighter is to keep himself from being destroyed.”

²⁴Conrad, Greene, Walsh, & Whitaker (2019) find that natural resources increase groups’ “ability to resist,” especially for groups involved in the smuggling of natural resources. D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan (2013) also note that “power to resist” increases for rebels who control territory outside the reach of government forces. Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson (2013) argues that resilient information, finance, and supply apparatuses built on social ties was central to the sustainability of Palestinian rebels in Lebanon.

Resources: a basis of power

Power—be it through influence, coercion, control, or authority—is the ability one actor to get another actor to do something that they would not otherwise do (Dahl, 1957). There are multiple dimensions of power, and the distinction between power relations and the resources on which the power relations are based is crucial (Baldwin, 2016, p. 53). I assume that power in civil war is a measure of the armed actors' control over the means and tools of violence relative to that of other armed actors.²⁵ The importance of a resource is a measure of the extent to which organisations depend on it to survive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 45). In civil war, money, weapons, ammunition, recruits, and other military supplies ensure the survival of rebel groups, especially in periods of heavy fighting (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012, p. 271) or at the outset of the conflict when groups are often at their weakest.

The importance of specific resources shifts as conflicts evolve. For instance, although popular support ensures information, sanctuary, money, and recruits, external support or natural resources mean that not all rebel groups require popular support. Often, acquiring weapons is more important than winning the support of the greater population, especially at the outset of conflict (Moore, 2012, p. 327). Combatants, an important indicator of rebel strength are important provided they can be armed. Indeed, Duquet (2009, p. 171) notes that “before weapons become available for combatants, a broad range of activities need to be undertaken such as exploring various sources, securing the necessary financial and logistic resources, and distributing weapons to combatants.” Rebel groups “engage in a process of constant adaptation to the strategic environment” (Crenshaw, 1987, p. 16). As conflicts progress and the rebel challenge amounts to what Kalyvas & Balcells (2010) describe as conventional

²⁵This is similar to other scholars who assume that the power of rebel groups' is a measure control an organisation has over military resources (Gates, 2002; Gent, 2008; Hirshleifer, 2000; Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010). In the sociological tradition, power as a function of access to important resources is distinguished as “base resources,” where an actor's properties or facilities “may be converted into power of influence” (Clark, 1975, p. 274).

warfare, resources—especially heavy weapons like tanks and anti-aircraft missiles—are increasingly important for rebels to achieve parity with the government.

Rebel groups rely on weapons to conduct violent campaigns. As noted by J. B. Bell (1998, p. 138) light weapons “. . . are crucial, hard to acquire, difficult to maintain and dangerous to use.” This importance is clearly stated in the seminal works of Mao Zedong and Che Guevara.²⁶ Even at the most fundamental level, group membership—the number of active rebel combatants—is often a function of the number of arms available (Guevara, 1961, p. 21).²⁷ The pursuit of control over weapons may even shape the role of individual combatants. Guevara’s description of the guerrilla band includes unarmed men who “will recover the guns of companions who are wounded or dead” and “guns seized in battle or belonging to prisoners” (Guevara, 1961, p. 53).²⁸ Constraints in the availability of weapons and ammunition inform military strategy. For instance, Irish guerrilla leader Tom Barry recalls occasions when ambushes had to be called off because “all the rifles were required for the next camp” (Barry, 1946, p. 55) or, like Zedong and Guevara, targets were selected based on the potential material gains, such as military convoys or barracks. Both Guevara (1961, p. 13) and Zedong (1937, p. 83) claim that the enemy is the principal source of weapons and ammunition. This is a common finding in recent research too (T. Jackson, 2010; Marsh, 2007). No one resource trumps all others, but the importance of military resources like money, weapons, ammunition, and combatants are fundamental for the survival and success of rebel groups.

²⁶Guevara describes arms and ammunition as “extremely precious elements of the fight” (Guevara, 1961, p. 16), claiming that ammunition “must be cared for like gold” (Guevara, 1961, p. 40).

²⁷The number of combatants is a common measure of rebel strength (D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2009; see for example R. M. Wood, 2010). I note here the relationship between military materials and the number of combatants. For example, while the Provisional IRA had an influx of men and women who wanted to fight in the early 1970s, they did not have enough weapons to arm them. This is also clear in the account of Tom Barry during the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921), when captured material “increased the strength of the column to forty men” (Barry, 1946, p. 66).

²⁸Similarly, in 1968 unarmed IRA members ran alongside armed IRA members during gun battles to pick up their weapons if they were wounded (Hanley & Millar, 2010, p. 127).

Pfeffer & Salancik (1978) outline two ways for organisations to control resources: (1) possession and (2) the ability to regulate possession. Both are undermined in civil war. Possession is secured by ownership rights, which are dependent on a social-political conception and enforceable social consensus (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 48). Ownership is rarely absolute but depends on the consensus of other actors—a consensus that often breaks down in the “law of wartime,” as alluded to earlier by the Chechen rebel. Furthermore, institutions developed in times of peace to control the distribution of resource often cease to exist or function in the anarchic system created by civil war. In this context, there is a clear link between the possession of important resources, the distribution of resources in exchange for support, and the ability to make rules. The lack of a centralised authority with a monopoly of violence means that power is more than ever linked to controlling resources. Because violent actors depend on the same finite resources to survive, they are in a “competitive relationship” (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 40), where higher income for one actor results in lower income for others.²⁹ In this context, Simmel’s (1955) comment that “besides giving, theft is the most natural form of transfer of property” is especially germane. The observable implications of competition over external support are splintering within rebel groups and interrebel fighting between groups. Increased cooperation leads to greater group cohesion and the formation of rebel alliances.³⁰ The next section will outline how different forms of external support lead to these outcomes.

Intragroup dynamics: splintering and cohesion

External support can cause competition or cooperation within rebel groups. Existing work shows how external support can cause splintering, focusing on the overall

²⁹This is opposed to a symbiotic relationship, where the income of one group increases the outcome of another. The competitive environment is similar to the common resource problems described by Ostrom (1990).

³⁰Like George Simmel (1955, p. 24), I conceptualise cooperation (*amenity* and *unification*) and competition (*enmity* and *conflict*) as two sides of a sociological spectrum.

allocation of resources (Asal, Brown, & Dalton, 2012; Tamm, 2016). Looking at the distribution of power within groups, it finds that rebels are more likely to split if external support shifts the power distribution within rebel groups and among factions. However, they do not consider the effect of different forms of support. This section will outline how different forms of support can lead to splintering, or not. I conclude with a discussion of alternative explanations.

Rebel groups are organisations that are made up of coalitions or factions that cooperate to achieve a common goal. Like organisations within a larger political movement, rebel factions within rebel groups also strive to survive, and although they cooperate in the group, they are also in competition over resources that ensure that they have their say on the overall direction of the group. Within rebel groups, the accumulation of these resources can cause competitive tensions that lead to factionalism, “the conflict that develops between groups” (Balser, 1997, p. 200), and splintering, “when a faction formally breaks its membership ties to the organisation” (Balser, 1997, p. 200). Indeed, according to Marsh (2007, p. 63) “the ability of combatants to autonomously obtain on their own, with little effort, weapons, and ammunition dramatically increases the likelihood that relatively small groups of fighters may coalesce around various charismatic leaders.” Furthermore, strong factions might attract support from other factions, which switch sides “in exchange for arms, ammunition, supplies, and military backing” (Seymour, 2014, p. 104). The ability of rebel factions to obtain important resources allows them to challenge rebel leaders and, ultimately, to go their own way by attempting to splinter away or organising a rebel coup. Rebel leaders who observe factions accumulate resources might fear for their position and crack down on them.

These dynamics appear to have affected several insurgencies. Syria provided the Abdullah Öcalan’s Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) with funds, arms, and other logistical support, but also provided a safehaven and allowed them to establish training

camps in South Lebanon alongside Palestinian organisations (Bishku, 2018, p. 223; Jongerden & Akkaya, 2018, p. 279). The group also received financial support from the large Kurdish diaspora in Europe. High in recruits and resources, the decentralised PKK faced internal competition in the form of “feudal fiefdoms” (Aydin & Emrence, 2015, p. 30). To counter this, Öcalan implemented large centralisation efforts which ultimately ensured that the growing organisation remained cohesive. Efforts by the rebel leadership to tackle internal competition are not always effective. In 2007, members of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) split and formed the United Baloch Army (UBA), accusing the BLA’s recent leader of stealing three million dollars from BLA funds. In the process, the UBA took half of the BLA’s weapon stash, estimated at 800 million rupees (Nabeel, 2017). Similar dynamics may have been at play in the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army—which formed through a split from the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement in 2011. According to the Small Arms Survey, the group was plagued by internal fighting over control of weapons which it described as the “most significant stockpile ever observed in Southern insurgent hands” (LeBrun, 2013). External states may contribute to these dynamics when providing support (Tamm, 2016), especially if they redirect support as punishment. For example, in 2015 Iran sought to punish Hamas its main proxy in Palestine, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, for refusing to support Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian civil war (Yaari, 2015). It provided substantial funding to a small faction, causing the organisation to split.

I argue that fungible external support induces competition within rebel groups because factions can accumulate resources, which creates tensions within the group and generates rivalries. This is even more pronounced in environments where multiple external states provide external support, as factions have more options. It is important to note that although factions are in a competitive relationship over resources, unlike individual rebel groups in the conflict more broadly, they remain members of a group with more or less established ways of centralising and distributing resources.

Therefore, organisational characteristics of the group may be an important factor in mitigating competition over resources. There should be observable differences in intragroup competition caused by fungible support depending on internal organisation characteristics of the group. Groups where the distribution of resources is centralised will be able to benefit from fungible external support and mitigate intragroup fighting.

Conversely, nonfungible support induces cooperation between factions within rebel groups. External states accept greater risks in order to provide nonfungible resources. They seek to counteract internal feuding that weakens rebel groups. To do so, the external state punishes or eliminates factions that cause dissent within the movement. Unlike fungible support, the external state retains possession of nonfungible support and therefore can repossess it, either by calling back its troops or expelling rebels from its territory. No one rebel faction ever has control over this support. External states, equipped with better ways to monitor, reward, and sanction, have greater control over the group as a whole. From this argument, I draw the following propositions:

Hypothesis 3: (A) rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to splinter; and (B) rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are less likely to splinter.

Existing literature provides several alternative explanations for why rebel groups splinter or remain cohesive. The first strand identifies ethnic factionalisation as an important feature of competition, as factions and groups attempt to outbid each other in order to appeal to the same ethnic group (Pearlman, 2009). Second, pre-existing conditions or the social origins of rebel groups may increase their propensity to splinter (Kalyvas, 2006; Staniland, 2014; Weinstein, 2006). Finally, government action may also cause rebel groups to splinter when the government offers concessions to one faction or hardliners break away during peace negotiations (K. G. Cunningham, 2011; Stedman, 1997).

Intergroup dynamics: interrebel fighting and rebel alliances

Different forms of support have the potential to cause competition or cooperation among rebel groups. Fungible and nonfungible external support have different effects on (1) the balance of power and (2) the cost-benefit of interrebel fighting. This section will outline both in turn and conclude with a discussion of alternative explanations.

Fungible external support creates a competitive environment and increases rebel infighting. When rebel groups receive fungible support, it creates incentives for them to eliminate rivals. For other groups, it incentivizes them to fight for control over the resource, similar to gaining control of natural resources or territory (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012). There is existing support for the second proposition. For instance, Duquet (2009, p. 182) shows that arms acquisition shaped the power balance between armed groups in the Nigerian delta region and led to rebel infighting. I argue that “wars of position” (Krause, 2017, p. 25) are accentuated when rebel groups receive fungible support because fungible support increases the potential benefits of fighting. Fighting is more likely as actors attempt to increase their relative power—by curbing potential hegemonic groups or challengers as part of a “dual contest” (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012)—but it is also a means of increasing their absolute power by capturing resources. Indeed, fungible support is a private good, characterised by excludability and solitary supply (Shepsle, 1997, p. 261). This was the case in the First Algerian Civil War, when the strongest rebel group, the National Liberation Front (FLN), eliminated the newly formed Maquis Rouge in order to take 200 semi-automatic weapons, ammunition, and grenades—weapons which were credited for the bloodiest attack on French army later in the year (Horne, 1996, p. 137). This was not only an opportunity for the FLN to curb the emergence of a potential challenger, but also to capture important resources and increase its absolute power. Fungible support increases the likelihood that rebel groups will fight other rebels.

Nonfungible support creates a cooperative environment and facilitates rebel al-

liances. External states that provide nonfungible support take great risks to affect the outcome of the conflict. Therefore, they prefer strong rebels and promote rebel alliances as opposed to interrebel fighting. Akcinaroglu (2012) and Bapat & Bond (2012) argue that the strength of a rebel group not only derives from their military power, but also from their network with other rebel groups. As an external enforcer, a state can improve the environment for alliances by providing a space for reiterated talks and mitigate information and commitment problems between rebel groups (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981; Bapat & Bond, 2012; Popovic, 2018). External states that provide nonfungible support have more control over their rebel group due to the increased information and better sanctioning mechanisms. The external state maintains control over support and can punish actors who defect, thus increasing the costs of interrebel fighting. Therefore, not only are they more likely to want cooperation among rebel groups, they are more likely to succeed in getting them to cooperate. The conflict environment is one marked by anarchy, but the external state acts as a central power. Furthermore, nonfungible support, similar to a public good, is non-excludable and jointly supplied (Shepsle, 1997, p. 261). Therefore, it will not incentivise other groups to target the recipient group because it is not possible to take and redirect the external support. Instead, receiving nonfungible support is a strong signal of rebel strength and potential success. Combined, nonfungible support has an effect similar to that described by Waltz (2010, p. 126): “as soon as someone looks like the winner, nearly all jump on the bandwagon.” Instead of attempting to fight and balance the emerging power, losing rebels “throw in their lots with the winner.” This dynamic is also described by S. W. Thompson (1977):

*Momentum accrues to the gainer and accelerates the movement. The appearance of irreversibility in his gains enfeebles one side and stimulates the other all the more. The bandwagon collects those on the side-lines.*³¹

³¹Cited in Walt (1987, p. 19).

Nonfungible support has positive externalities for all rebel groups who are, after all, fighting a common enemy—the target government. Nonfungible forms of support shift the balance of power and, by drastically improving the chances that the recipient will achieve its objectives, causes a bandwagon effect where other rebel groups join the ascending rebel power. Other groups will benefit from the support and be more inclined to cooperate—or at a minimum freeride—in order to be on the winning side. From this I develop the following propositions:

Hypothesis 4: (A) rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to fight other rebels; and (B) rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely to form alliances with other rebels.

Again, existing literature provides several alternative explanations. Existing explanations can broadly be grouped into three main strands: resource competition, balance of power dynamics, and rebel characteristics.

A large body of work looks at how rebel groups compete over natural resources and territory (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Gates, 2002; Le Billon, 2012; M. L. Ross, 2004). Territory also includes civilians, which are an important source of information and support (Kalyvas, 2006; Mampilly, 2012). However, as noted by Pischedda (2018), these are relatively static resources and are not good at explaining variation in rebel behaviour across time.

Christia (2012) and Krause (2017) both employ the balance of power concept to understand when rebel groups will fight or cooperate. However, the concept of power for both scholars is often blurred as a combination of resources, influence, and trust. Furthermore, both Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour (2012) and Krause (2017) include violent and nonviolent groups, which leads to uneasy comparisons of group strength.³² Krause's theory predicts different behaviour depending on where

³²For instance, Krause (2017, p. 151) described the Social Democratic and Labour Party in Northern Ireland—a nonviolent political party—as the hegemon of the Republican movement in 1971.

the groups are situated in the rebel movement's hierarchy of power, while Christia's balance of power includes that of the target government. She argues that minimum winning coalition approach best explains rebel cooperation, where groups join and leave alliances that are strong enough to succeed but small enough to avoid sharing all the profits of defeating the government. While both note the importance of external states in selecting winners and losers, neither exploit the variation in external support to understand how it shapes rebel behaviour beyond simply making one side stronger than the other. My theoretical argument does not necessarily have different empirical implications based on balance of power, but I am explicit in the role of important military resources and home in on the heterogeneous effects of external support.

The actions of the target government also provide an alternative explanation. If strong governments employ force rebels more likely to cooperate (Christia, 2012; McLauchlin & Pearlman, 2012), but strong government might have more information on rebel motivations and therefore attempt to strike deals with certain groups in order to undermine the moment as a whole (K. G. Cunningham, 2014). Furthermore, rebel groups might exploit periods of low state repression to eliminate rivals (Pischedda, 2018). Therefore, the action of the state in terms of how actively it is attempting to repress the rebel groups, its attempts to strike deals with certain groups, and general level of military activity must be accounted for when analysing the effect of external support on rebel dynamics.

Finally, rebel characteristics are important in understanding why groups fight. Recent work finds that ideology may drive interrebel fighting in Syria (Gade, Hafez, & Gabbay, 2019). While ethnicity could improve prospects for rebel alliances, Pischedda (2020) argues that a shared ethnic group might cause intense competition over control and support, similar to the outbidding logic that occurs between factions within ethnic groups (Bloom, 2004; Horowitz, 2000; Pearlman & Cunningham, 2012). Therefore, the

He also notes that it is "difficult to compare the strength of these competing groups directly" because Provisional Sinn Fein did not run for elections.

role of ethnicity and ideology can explain why rebels compete, with the intuition that groups that share any of these are more or less likely to fight one another and form alliances. Of all these alternative explanations, the only one that exploits variation over time is Pischedda's work. However, his work is not explicit about which external stimuli might lead to infighting or alliance formation beyond fighting the government.

2.3 Theorising multiple external supporters

The mechanisms outlined above will play out differently when there are multiple principals. In principal-agent theory, it is conceptually important to distinguish between single, collective, and multiple principals (Kiewiet & McCubbins, 1991, p. 26). Arrow (1985) argues that information problems become more complicated when multiple principals compete for agents. Although scholars have alluded to multiple principals in state sponsorship research, none have explored the phenomenon in great detail and limit their theorisation to multiple principals and one agent (Salehyan, 2010; Salehyan, Siroky, & Wood, 2014).

The overarching argument is that multiple principals reduce the reliance of agents on any one patron, thus reducing the principal's ability to sanction the agent, as the rebel groups can simply turn to a different principal for better terms. By losing their ability to sanction, principals lose an important way of controlling agents. Until now, my theory has focused on a bilateral relationship between a single principle and multiple agents. I theorise that multiple principals will matter on three levels: (1) competition between external states, (2) bargaining between principals and agents, and (3) competition among rebel groups. In order to develop this argument, I shift the theoretical lens to consider the civil war as a system (M. A. Kaplan, 1957). A system is an entity formed through the relational organisation of pre-existing elements. As the civil war becomes more complex, it is more informative to examine how different

inputs or external factors (Balsler, 1997) produce a change in the characteristics of the system and the actors within it. This section first outlines characteristics of multiple principals before analysing how different forms of support shape the behaviour of rebel groups in the system.

Competitive international and subnational systems

Certain civil wars experience interventions from several external states, a context in which external states may compete for control over rebel groups. Agents may be approached by multiple principals. As the potential supply of support is high, it becomes a seller's market where agents can get better deals from the principals. Rebel groups will have strong bargaining positions and the ability to extract better contracts, i.e., contracts where they receive more support but forego less autonomy.

Salehyan, Siroky, & Wood (2014, p. 643) describe this situation as one where rebel groups can play the external states "off against one another to extract a better bargain on more favourable terms." Rebel groups that rely on multiple external states are less dependent on one single principal and can renege on terms or betray their principal. Therefore, external states will have less control over the rebel group when their agent receives support from other principals. This was apparent in Gaza, where Iran supported Hamas financially and through the provision of weapons—but Hamas was not a "surrogate" of Iran because Syria's political and logistical support was "crucial to balancing Iran's influence" (Harik & Johannsen, 2012, p. 189; see also Ostovar, 2018, p. 1243). Scholars deduce that when there are multiple principals, rebel groups have a greater bargaining position and are empowered. But what does a better bargaining position mean? Agents with greater bargaining positions can acquire more resources by giving up less autonomy. However, greater rewards and fewer strings attached accentuate competitive dynamics within and among rebel groups. Rebel group and factions will suffer from commitment problems, as they compete for external

resources that can influence the future distribution of power. I argue that although the agents are empowered vis-à-vis external principals, the influx of support undermines collective action and the rebellion as a whole (Lichbach, 1996; Olson, 1965).

Due to the competitive dynamics between multiple external states, principals are reluctant to provide nonfungible resources and thus less capable of screening and monitoring agents. In this context, external states are more likely to provide fungible resources and less likely to devote resources to screening their agents. Laffont & Martimort (2009) claim that when punishment is infeasible, the principal is restricted to using rewards to induce effort. Unable to determine the type of agent and prevent adverse selection, external states will be reluctant to provide more risky forms of nonfungible support. The relationship between multiple principals, weak lines of control, and resource fungibility is unique to a civil war environment. Groups are more likely to compete for control of the resources. With greater volatility and shifts in the power balance among rebel groups, fighters are more likely to defect to the power of the day which undermines long-term allegiance to particular groups (Gates, 2002; Seymour, 2014). This dynamic is similar to one outlined by Weinstein (2006), whereby rebel groups well endowed in natural resources attract members who are interested in private material gain, are unable to punish abuses by those within their ranks, and lack discipline. I propose that the ability of multiple rebel groups to get favourable terms from multiple states induces a competitive environment which ultimately has the perverse effect of undermining the movement as a whole. The competitive environment will increase competition among, but also within groups.

Dominant principals

The presence of multiple external states shifts the costs and benefits of providing different forms of external support. The provision of nonfungible support is a way for external states to signal their willingness to accept risk to other external states.

Indeed, covert (which is often fungible) support signals a “legible and credible indicator of both resolve and restraint” to other external states, while overt support (which is often nonfungible) sends “the broadest and strongest indication of resolve” (Carson, 2018, pp. 13–14). Therefore, external states signal their willingness to escalate the conflict in order to achieve their goals.

External states that provide rebels with nonfungible support can foster a cooperative environment among rebel groups. They will seek to avoid a situation where principals compete over agents and agents play principals against one another for better terms. Instead, it will be in their interest to become what I call a dominant principal. Dominant principals will signal their willingness to accept risk to the target government and its allies. Therefore, it is in their interest to have the strongest possible rebel group.

In order to become dominant, the principal must dissuade the involvement of other external states by signalling their resolve (Bapat & Bond, 2012; Carson, 2018; Fearon, 1997). I contend that this is also true in relation to other potential interveners. Dominant principals provide nonfungible resources to dissuade other states from supporting rival rebel groups or the target government. Eastern Ukraine illustrates this: a strong external state (Russia) willing to accept risk backed rebel groups with nonfungible support (troops), making other states reluctant to become involved while fostering an environment of cooperation among the rebels and a relatively cohesive rebellion. When external states signal their resolve and become dominant states, other states can either continue, de-escalate, or escalate their involvement. If other states escalate their involvement to provide nonfungible support to competing rebel groups they also seek to become a dominant principal. These states may not have considered the conflict in their interest initially but seek to curb the increasing influence of a rival state. Toukan (2019, p. 813) refers to this as a ratchet effect, whereby the “prospect of one’s involvement in a conflict makes it more likely that the other becomes involved.”

If external states escalate their support to competing rebels, the conflict becomes highly internationalised. The conflict becomes an especially risky environment as nonfungible support such as troops or airstrikes come into contact with those of other external states, increasing the risk of conflict escalation and interstate war. In the Syrian civil war, the presence of US military advisers in 2018 among Kurdish forces made its ally, Turkey, reluctant to enter certain areas such as Manjib in Northern Syria (Nordland, 2018). These areas became meticulously demarcated in order to prevent nonfungible support coming into direct contact. An external state can signal their commitment to one or more rebel groups by promising more attractive nonfungible support, whilst also signalling their resolve to other external states.

A situation where multiple external states attempt to exert control on the outcome of a civil war in this way will increase rebel infighting but decrease rebel splintering, as shown in Table 2.4. The external state provides nonfungible support in order to have greater control over the rebel groups and to give them the best chance of winning. Nonfungible support ensures that rebel factions are cohesive, as the external state retains ownership of their support and can act as a third-party enforcer (Bapat & Bond, 2012). However, the conflict has become a theatre for external states to compete, or, in the words of Small & Singer (1982, p. 219), the international aspect of the war overshadows the internal aspect and “internal factions do less of the fighting” as the war takes on the combat appearance of an interstate war. External states provide nonfungible support to different rebel groups and direct ‘their’ rebels to fight forces supported by other dominant principals. When external states provide nonfungible support to multiple rebel groups, rebel groups are thus less likely to splinter but more likely to fight one another. Therefore, my expectations for competitive relations—splintering and fighting—are unchanged, although competition will be more pronounced as multiple external states play factions and groups off each other. The key difference is for the provision of nonfungible support from multiple states to different rebel

groups, for which I develop the following expectation:

Hypothesis 5: rebel groups in conflicts where multiple external states provide nonfungible resources are more likely to fight other rebel groups.

Table 2.4: Probability of the score on the dependent variable (rebel infighting and splintering) shown as either high or low.

Support	Dependent variable	Single external supporter	multiple external supporters
Fungible	Rebel infighting	High	High
Fungible	Rebel splintering	High	High
Nonfungible	Rebel infighting	Low	High
Nonfungible	Rebel splintering	Low	Low

2.4 Summary

My argument outlines five hypotheses at three levels of analysis. I argue that states with will provide different forms of support depending on their expectation of being punished. Nonfungible forms of support ensure greater control by the external state and gives rebels the best chances of victory. Relatively weak states in terms of military power but also alliance strength are more likely to provide fungible forms of support in order to evade detection and punishment. Different forms of support shift the balance of power among groups. Although all support increases a recipient group's overall power, fungible support increases competitive dynamics within and among rebel groups, while nonfungible support induces a cooperative environment. Therefore, fungible support leads to greater rebel splintering and rebel infighting, but nonfungible support increases cohesiveness of rebel groups and the formation of rebel alliances. The presence of multiple external states accentuates these dynamics, explains the emergence of dominant states and, ultimately, can lead to intense conflict among rebel groups.

In the next chapter, I conduct my first test of the theoretical argument focusing on the first research question: Why do external states provide different forms of support to rebels in foreign civil wars?

Chapter 3

A Global Analysis of External Support Provision

When the Sandinistas came to power in Nicaragua in 1979, future US President Ronald Reagan described them as “Cuban-trained, Cuban-armed, and dedicated to creating another Communist country in this hemisphere,” stating that if the Soviet Union “weren’t engaged in this game of dominoes, there wouldn’t be any hotspots in the world” (Sklar, 1988, p. 57). The US’s subsequent decision to support the *Contras* was driven by the perceived threat of a growing coalition of rival states. While Cuba and the Soviet Union provided weapons and money, US support to the *Contras* famously culminated in CIA commandos mining Nicaragua’s harbours late in 1983 (Doyle & Toth, 1985). The operation was a failure, sparked outrage in Central America, and ultimately ended their involvement in the country. But why do states provide different forms of support to rebels in foreign civil wars?

Civil wars are conflicts fought between the government of a state and one or more non-state armed actors, but they often involve varying degrees of external state interference. This is because civil wars are threatening. They can upset the regional and global balance of power, belligerents may ignore international borders (Buhaug

& Gleditsch, 2008), and civilians may flee conflict zones (Salehyan, 2008b). For some states, friendly regimes might be replaced by rivals. But civil wars are not threatening to all states all the time. For other states, they represent opportunities to shift the status quo in their favour. The question then is, in light of the threats and opportunities presented by foreign civil wars, why do external states provide different forms of support?

Civil wars present some states with unique opportunities (Daxecker, 2011). States can pick “losers and winners” and thus affect the future orientation of the conflicted state, secure their vital interests, and increased their spheres of influence. However, strong incentives for states to intervene are often outweighed by risks. I argue that key to understanding a state’s decision to provide support to rebels is their expectation that they will be punished for doing so. The nature of their intervention, and thus the type of support that they are willing to provide rebel groups, is calibrated with the risk of expected punishment. As noted by Byman (2013, p. 999), “states elude punishment by anticipating the level that would provoke a response and limiting their role accordingly.” For the supporting state, the costliest form of punishment is military in nature, either by retaliation in kind or armed opposition, both of which may lead to conflict escalation, entanglement, and potentially costly interstate conflict.

The expected costs of military escalation between states are not equally shared. While weak states are more likely to provide fungible support in order to evade punishment, strong states might not expect or fear military retaliation, and are thus more likely to accept the risks of nonfungible support. In the case of Nicaragua, for example, US support was “as overt as a covert policy can be” (Forsythe, 1992, p. 390) and included money, weapons, and limited troop support in the form of CIA commandos. State strength is not only a function of relative army size. The international community of states is, after all, a community. As such, there are groups of states that join forces to balance rivals. I expect that states’ strategic decisions to

support rebels is informed by their position in the global network of military alliances. States with strong allies are less likely to fear costly retaliation, which shapes their acceptance of risk and, by extension, the types of support that they are prepared to provide to secure their interests in foreign civil wars.

I argue that the risks of retaliation depend on the relative strength between the supporting state and the targeted state. Strong states are less likely to expect or fear retaliation from the target state. The opposite is true for weak states, which are more likely to be punished for supporting rebel groups. In order to mitigate these risks, they provide fungible forms of support that are less detectable and provide plausible deniability. From this, I developed the following hypothesis in Chapter II:

Hypothesis 1: (A) external states are more likely to provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively stronger in terms of military power; and (B) external states are more likely to provide nonfungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively weaker in terms of military power.

States are embedded or “nested” in global alliance networks (Cranmer & Desmarais, 2011; Diehl & Goertz, 2001) in what Snyder (1984, p. 461) refers to as the “alliance game.” Military alliances signal to potential supporting states that other states are prepared to defend their allies (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1948; Waltz, 2010), which is an important reason for why states enter military alliance in the first place—to deter enemies from challenging them (Leeds, 2003, p. 805). States in relatively weak alliances fear retaliation and punishment, and are more likely to provide fungible support. States in relatively strong alliances, on the other hand, are more likely to provide nonfungible support. From this I develop my second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: (A) external states are more likely to provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively stronger in

terms of military alliances; and (B) external states are more likely to provide nonfungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively weaker in terms of military alliances.

In this chapter, I test the first step of the two-level theory developed in Chapter II: (1) states provide different forms of support depending on their relative strength, both in terms of military power and alliance power; and (2) different forms of support have different effects on the conflict environment and rebel dynamics at the intergroup and intragroup levels, whereby nonfungible support such as troops leads to greater cooperation among and within rebel groups, but fungible support such as money and weapons causes competitive relations. In chapter, I focus on competitive and cooperative relations between states and rebels. With such a strong theoretical focus on why actors form different types of relations, I develop a research design that can both account for and exploit relational structures among actors.

To test the hypotheses, I conduct a temporal network analysis of large-N external support data from 1975 to 2009. The network approach not only allows me to control for interdependence in the network relations. It can also shed light on the conditions under which states provide different forms of external support, thus lending further support to several key assumptions that underpin the theoretical argument. Previewing the results, I find some support for both hypotheses. For *hypothesis 1*, I find that weaker states are more likely to provide fungible support to target stronger states, but relative strength is not significant predictor of nonfungible support. For *hypothesis 2*, I find that states are more likely to provide nonfungible forms of support to rebels targeting rivals in relatively weaker alliances. Therefore, the findings underscore the added value of disaggregating external support into its different forms. Additionally, the results of the network analysis reveal the varying levels of risk associated with different forms of support. However, I also find that relatively stronger states in terms of military alliances are more likely to provide fungible support, albeit to a lesser

extent.

The chapter is structured as follows: First, I outline why I adopt a network research design and introduce exponential random graph (ERG) models. Second, I present the results of the network analysis of interstate relations and the provision of different forms of external support. I conclude with a discussion of the findings and outline the next steps.

3.1 A relational approach

State alliances and external state support to rebels are, like military alliances (Cranmer, Desmarais, & Menninga, 2012) or the international arms trade (Thurner, Schmid, Cranmer, & Kauermann, 2019), nested hierarchical structures involving more than just dyads. Indeed, this is clear in Figure 3.1 which shows external support from 1975 to 2009. Network analysis techniques allow researchers to measure and account for characteristics of actors (*nodes*), the relationship between them (*edges*), and characteristics of the overall system (*networks*). Although international networks of states represent complex systems, it is possible to model their key attributes and those of the actors within them (Maoz & San-Akca, 2012). In order to analyse external support networks between states, I employ a temporal extension of the exponential random graph (ERG) model (Lusher, Koskinen, & Robins, 2013; Wasserman & Pattison, 1996) which allows for the analysis of longitudinal network data (Leifeld, Cranmer, & Desmarais, 2018). This section will first introduce ERG models, outline why they are the most appropriate model to analyse these types of relations, and describe important trade-offs and limitations.

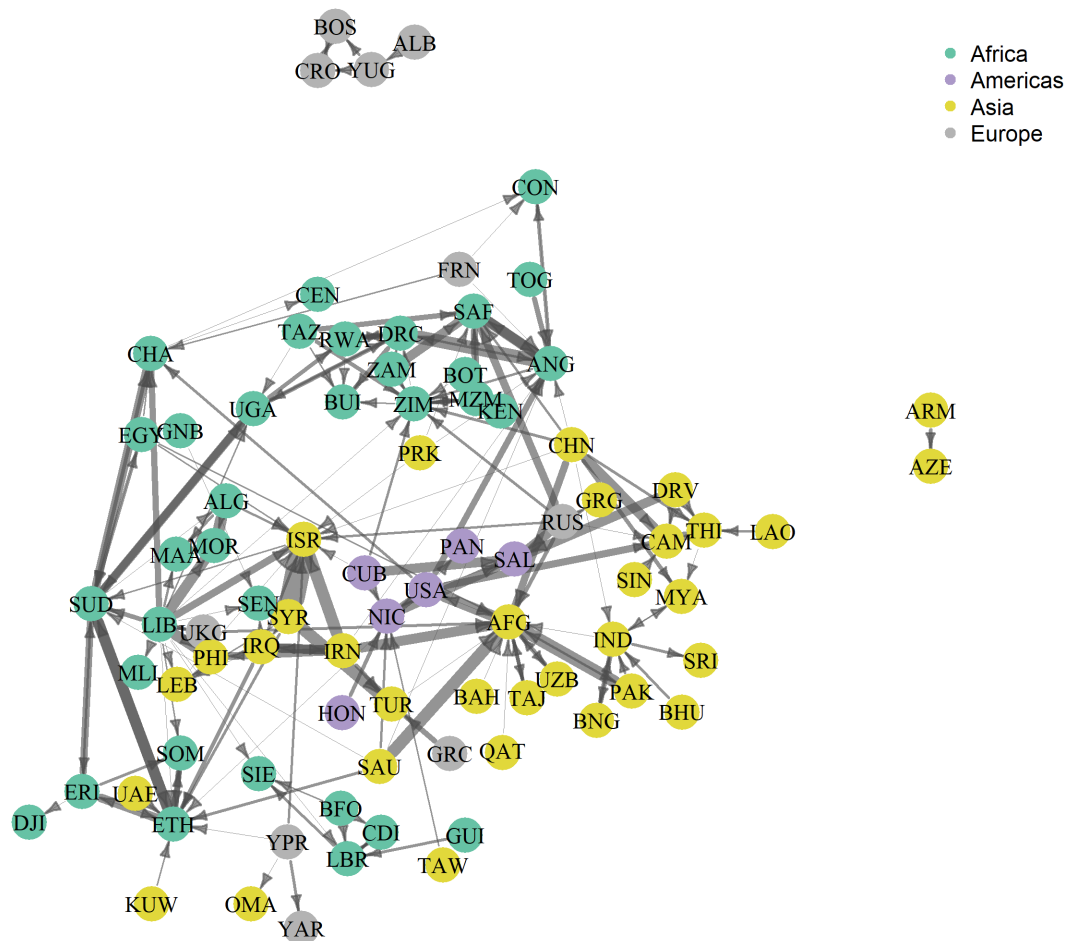


Figure 3.1: The global network of external support provision according to the UCDP External Support dataset (1975-2009). Countries are coloured by region according to Correlates of War (COW) coding of regions: purple nodes are in America, green nodes are in Africa, yellow nodes are in Asia, and grey nodes are in Europe. Edge thickness represents the number of years of support over the entire period.

Network analysis allows researchers to capture interdependence structures in systems of actors which can be as “important as, if not more important than, attributes of individual units” (Hafner-Burton, Kahler, & Montgomery, 2009, p. 561). It explores relationships among actors while accounting for network structures. This is important for my research because state i 's decision to provide support to rebel groups in state j may depend on other relations, such as whether other states already provide support to the rebels, whether state i provides support to state k , or whether state j provides support to a rebel group in state i . Decisions to provide external support to a rebel groups targeting other states are therefore interdependent and strategic, i.e., they are conditioned on the actions and expected actions of other states. This is not a novel idea. Indeed, as noted by Waltz (2010, p. 65), “decisions are shaped by the very presence of other states as well as by interactions with them.” In Figure 3.1, for example, Uganda (UGA)'s decision to provide support to rebels fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was informed by the latter's provision of support to rebels within its borders, but also its provision of support to groups targeting Rwanda (RWA) and other states in the African Great Lakes region.

Crucially, the assumption underpinning regression analyses that observations are independent is violated if the actions of one actor affects the actions of another (Ward, Stovel, & Sacks, 2011, p. 252). Cranmer, Desmarais, & Menninga (2012, p. 280) claim that regression analysis of dyadic variables is problematic because the theoretical story represented by the empirical model is often inaccurate while confidence intervals are underestimated due to interdependence of observations. As noted by Waltz (2010, p. 68), “causes at the level of units and of systems interact, and because they do so explanation at the level of units alone is bound to mislead.” Cranmer & Desmarais (2011) illustrate this point with the example of World War II: the UK's choice to declare war on Germany was related to Germany's invasion of Poland, the UK's ally. Traditional regression analyses overlook this interdependent relationship between two

observations. Similar strategic interdependences were no doubt at play in Figure 3.1 between Bosnia (BOS), Croatia (CRO), Serbia (YUG), and Albania (ALB) during the Balkan wars in the 1990s.¹ More generally, omitting network effects such as the triadic effect of a “friend of a friend is more likely to be a friend” may lead to model misspecification in less obvious ways (Cranmer & Desmarais, 2016).

For this analysis, I require network statistical models that can account for interdependences between observations because they resolve issues faced by more commonly employed statistical models. Cranmer & Desmarais (2011) identify two common approaches in the statistical analysis of dependence: (1) to capture them as a covariate in a dyadic regression model² and (2) to control for them by using random effects. The first approach is problematic because it does not account for the interdependences of observations, while the second does not shed light on the nature of this interdependence. Other network approaches exist, for example latent space network models (Hoff, Raftery, & Handcock, 2002), but they tell us little about the interdependencies which may be of theoretical interest (Cranmer, Leifeld, McClurg, & Rolfe, 2017). It is no surprise that international relation scholars and conflict studies scholars are increasingly adopting network approaches. For instance, Cranmer, Desmarais, & Menninga (2012) employ temporal ERG models to model the complex process of alliance formation between states, Duque (2018) employ the same models to show that structural effects drive state status recognition rather than state attributes, and Pomeroy, Dasandi, & Mikhaylov (2019) use temporal and multiplex ERG models to show that communities of diplomatic affinity in the UN are negatively associated with the onset of conflict. Interdependencies are important in my theoretical argument, where a state’s decision to provide different forms of support (the formation of edges) is informed by whether other states are also intervening in the conflict. Although this

¹Correlates of War code Serbia as the continuation of Yugoslavia. They also code Russia as the continuation of the Soviet Union.

²For a recent example, see J. A. Jackson, San-Akca, & Maoz (2020).

is often explicit in existing single-case work,³ these strategic interdependencies have not been modelled in a large-N global analysis of external support. This chapter thus presents the first global large-N network analysis of external state support to rebel groups in foreign civil wars.

Exponential random graph (ERG) models

Writing five decades ago, C. R. Mitchell (1970) claimed that in order to understand why and how external states become involved in civil wars, analysts must explore factors (1) within the conflict state, (2) within the external state, (3) associated with the links between the two, and (4) of the international system. ERG models offer the unique possibility of modelling these four factors at once. ERG models are edge-based models for understanding how and why edges arise which allow for the modelling of complex relationships while accounting for nodal and dyadic characteristics (Lusher, Koskinen, & Robins, 2013). They estimate the probability of observing the network given all the possible networks that one could observe. First called *Markov Graphs* by Frank & Strauss (1986) and specified as ERG models by Wasserman & Pattison (1996), there have been several extensions. Most ERG models to date have been applied to cross-sectional data (Lusher, Koskinen, & Robins, 2013, p. 15), but recently they have been extended to multiple layers (Kivelä et al., 2014), weighted edges (Krivitsky, 2012), multiple levels (Wang, Robins, Pattison, & Lazega, 2013), Bayesian modelling (Caimo & Friel, 2018), and, importantly for this research, temporal networks (Cranmer, Desmarais, & Menninga, 2012). In this section I present the ERG model and the temporal extension. I also outline several trade-offs.

³For example, Phillips (2020) claims that regional states in the Middle East provided support to rebel forces *because* the United States left a power vacuum when it chose not to provide support.

The ERG model is defined as follows:

$$P(N, \theta) = \frac{\exp\{\theta^T h(N)\}}{c(\theta)} \quad (3.1)$$

Where N is a network in which the adjacency matrix (i, j) is $N_{ij} = 1$ if an actor i sends a tie to j and 0 otherwise. θ is a vector of model coefficients, $h(N)$ is a vector of statistics computed on N that are endogenous and exogenous dependencies (Leifeld, Cranmer, & Desmarais, 2018, p. 3). The ERG model therefore predicts edges as a function of individual covariates and network structure, treating the entire network as an observation and making no assumptions about the independence of actors or edges. The probability of a network depends on the endogenous network configurations called *network terms*. The parameters of the model show the importance of each configuration, which allows for inferences about the types of processes that create and sustain the observed network (Lusher, Koskinen, & Robins, 2013, p. 9).

Leifeld, Cranmer, & Desmarais (2018) extend this to account for temporal dependencies by introducing T for the number of time steps so that:

$$P(N^t | N^{t-k}, \dots, N^{t-K}, \theta) = \frac{\exp\{\theta^T h(N^{t-1}, \dots, N^{t-K})\}}{c(\theta, N^{t-1}, \dots, N^{t-K})} \quad (3.2)$$

where K includes the temporal dependencies of N^t . They then model the joint probability of observing the networks between times $K + 1$ and T by taking the product of the probabilities of the individual networks conditional on the others. This means that the temporal ERG model accounts for time dependence over a series of networks so that:

$$P(N^{k+1}, \dots, N^T | N^1, \dots, N^K, \theta) = \prod_{t=K+1}^T P(N^t | N^{t-K}, \dots, N^{t-1}, \theta). \quad (3.3)$$

Despite progress in ERG models in recent years, they still have limitations. As

highlighted above, there are extensions to the ERG model, but choosing between them involves several trade-offs. I initially planned to tackle both research questions (why do states provide different forms of support and how do these shape interrebel dynamics) in one model by analysing both international and sub-national conflict networks as part of a multi-layered network approach (Chen, 2021; Wang, Robins, Pattison, & Lazega, 2013). In this analysis, external support would be measured as cross-layer relationships similar to bipartite and multiplex networks. However, applying multi-layer ERG models to this study is not possible for two reasons. First, as I show in Appendix III, the rebel layer is sparse. In any given year there are relatively few rebel groups fighting or forming alliances which leads to convergence issues for multi-layer ERG models. Second, it is not yet possible to model time and layers simultaneously in a multi-layer framework. Scholars have noted that the nature of support to rebel groups and proxy conflicts have changed over time, especially since the end of the Cold War (Anderson, 2019; Asal, Ayres, & Kubota, 2019; Grauer & Tierney, 2018; Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010; Rauta, 2020). Aggregating the networks over the 35-year period from 1975 to 2009 would ignore the dynamic nature of these networks. Additionally, it is not yet possible to include weighted edges in temporal ERG models. This is important because fungible and nonfungible support could be modelled as the same type of edge but with different weights: fungible support is a weak edge while nonfungible support is a strong edge.⁴ Alternatively, they could be modelled as multiplex networks where different forms of support are not weighted but treated separately. Faced with these trade-offs, I opt to model fungible and nonfungible support networks between states separately. However, the networks are likely to be highly interdependent. This represents a limitation of the study. Future research should develop an approach which can account for both networks simultaneously and model relations between them. Ultimately, modelling time outweighs the potential

⁴On the importance of weak and strong edges, see the seminal work of Granovetter (1973).

benefits of either modelling the multi-layered nature of internationalised civil wars or conducting a weighted analysis of external support.

3.2 The data

I test the hypotheses that relative state strength (*hypothesis 1*) and alliance strength (*hypothesis 2*) determines the type of support external states provide rebels. Specifically, I argue that relatively strong states, both in terms of military power and alliance power, are more likely to provide nonfungible support, while relatively weaker states are more likely to provide fungible support. To do so, I construct a dataset for timeseries network analysis where the unit of analysis is the state-year. States are identified from the Correlates of War State System Membership dataset (COW, 2017),⁵ which records the changing composition of the state system since 1816.

Dependent variables

The dependent variables are fungible and nonfungible forms of external support. They are based on the UCDP external support dataset (Högbladh, Pettersson, & Themnér, 2011), which provides information about different forms of external support to rebel groups targeting governments.⁶ The dataset provides itemised support from external actors (both state and non-state) to warring parties. I restrict the data to support from states to rebel groups by removing support from non-state actors, such as diaspora groups and other rebel groups. I code fungible support if a state provides weapons, material/logistics, or funding/economic support; and nonfungible support if a state provides troops as secondary warring party, access to territory, or access to military

⁵Like K. S. Gleditsch & Ward (1999), I do not include *micro-states* which have a population of less than 250,000.

⁶In Appendix II, I discuss the possibility of using other datasets on external support. For instance, the Non-State Armed Actor (NSA) dataset (D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2013) also codes for external support, but does so in spells—some of which are coded for periods spanning multiple decades.

or intelligence infrastructure (henceforth, joint operations) as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Coding of support types from the UCDP external support dataset.

Fungible support	Nonfungible support
Weapons	Troops
Material/logistics	Access to territory
Funding/economic	Joint operations

The fungibility of support is the extent to which it can be exchanged, and is related to the levels of risk the external state is willing to accept and the control that the external state has over the rebel group. States that provide nonfungible support accept higher risks of costly military retaliation and potential conflict escalation, but have greater control over their rebel proxies. Fungible support is less risky, but states have less control over their proxy. Sawyer, Cunningham, & Reed (2017, p. 1185) describe weapons as fungible because “they can be traded for other goods, or used [against] alternative targets (such as competing rebel groups).” I also code material/logistics support as fungible. The UCDP describes it as including “vehicles, uniforms, tents, field hospitals,” but also “repair and support facilities for advanced weaponry (such as aircraft, rocketry, tanks)” (Högbladh, Pettersson, & Themnér, 2011). Troop support and access to territory⁷ are nonfungible forms of support. The UCDP describes joint operations as “when a supporter allows a warring party to use its own military infrastructure as if it would be integrated within the warring party’s chain of command” while stopping short of sending troops to fight alongside the primary warring party (Högbladh, Pettersson, & Themnér, 2011). For my theoretical argument, it is situated between troops support and a safehaven both in terms of the external states monitoring capabilities and the fungibility of the support: it is

⁷Access to territory is commonly referred to as a “safehaven” in the external support and sponsorship literature. See for example Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan (2001) and Salehyan (2008a).

nonfungible because it cannot be exchanged and rebels cannot compete for control over it. It is relatively rare compared to other forms of support.⁸ For example, Syria provided joint operations support to the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) which was targeting Israel in 1996.

By coding external support as either fungible or nonfungible, I reduce the dimensionality of external support. There are six types of support included in the two key dependent variables. I argue that external support is more or less risky at an international level and more or less fungible at a conflict level. I verify that this is a meaningful basis for re-coding the data by employing Principal Component Analysis (PCA), presented in Appendix II. The data is used to construct two networks, where states are represented as *nodes* and different forms of external support are represented as directed *edges* between states. Directed edges are explicit about the asymmetric nature of the relationship: if there is an edge from state i to state j , then state i provides support to a rebel group that is targeting the government of state j (i to j), but not vice versa (j to i). For example, the data includes a directed edge from Afghanistan to the US in 2001 because Afghanistan provided a safehaven to Al Qaeda which was targeting the US. Figures 3.2 shows fungible support and nonfungible support in 1990.⁹

⁸Most cases of joint operation support in the UCDP data are between states or between rebels, neither of which are included in this analysis.

⁹I use the *R* (R Core Team, 2020) packages *Statnet* (Butts, 2008) to construct networks and *Igraph* (Csardi & Nepusz, 2006) for network visualisations.

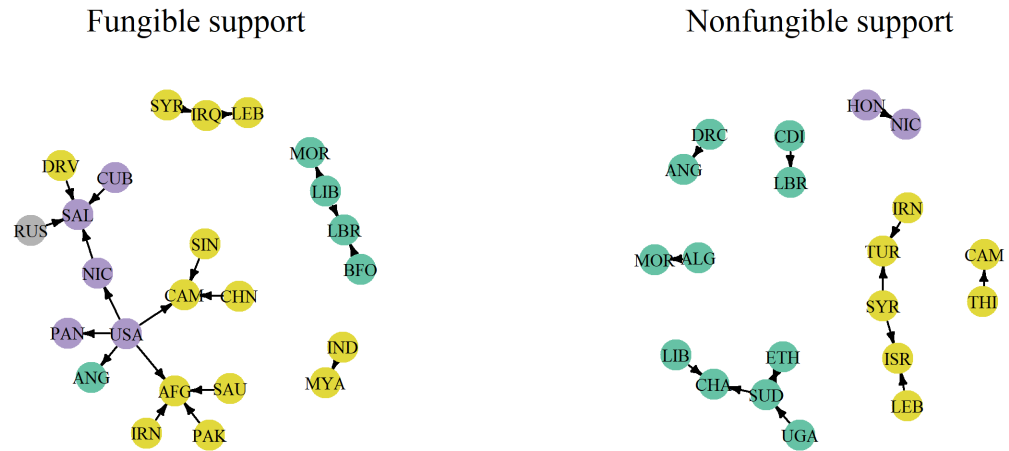


Figure 3.2: Fungible and nonfungible support in 1990. Isolates (nodes with no edges) are not included. To capture space, nodes are coloured by region as defined by the Correlates of War (COW).

Key independent variables

The key independent variables aim to measure two concepts: Relative military strength and relative alliance strength. Indicators for absolute military and alliance strength are measured at the nodal level. Nodal covariates are specific to the actor and are similar to those included in regression models, while edge level covariates are relational and similar to those included in dyadic analyses. Indicators of relative power are measured as the difference in scores between state i and state j .

To measure power, I include two variables: (1) an indicator for state strength and (2) an indicator of alliance strength. I measure strength by number of *military personnel* variable in the National Material Capabilities (NMC) dataset from the

Correlates of War (COW) (Singer, Bremer, & Stuckey, 1972).¹⁰ I measure alliance strength by including defence pact treaties from the COW Formal Alliances dataset (Gibler, 2008a). Defence pact treaties are an important signal that states are prepared to defend their allies militarily. To measure alliance strength, I create a variable which is the sum of the military personnel in a state’s network of allies, similar to D. S. Bennett (1998).¹¹

I measure difference in military strength as an edge covariate measuring the difference in military personnel between states, which has a simple interpretation: it is the absolute difference in the sizes of their armies ($X_i - X_j$). Negative scores indicate that state i (sender) is weaker than state j (target), while positive scores indicate that state i is stronger than state j . The measure for alliance strength does not include the state’s own military personnel. It only includes the sum of a state’s allies’ military personnel. For instance, states with an alliance strength of 0 have either no allies or allies that have no military personnel. Relatively strong states (measured by both the size of their armies and alliances) are more likely to provide nonfungible support because they do not expect to be punished, while weak states are more likely to provide fungible support to avoid punishment. I argue that it is not just absolute power that explains whether states choose to provide support to rebels in other states, but relative power. Relatively strong states are more likely to provide nonfungible support in order to achieve their preferred outcome—expecting that retaliation from

¹⁰Missing values often appear when a state experiences a civil war. I replace them with the most recent score. For example, Afghanistan has missing values from 1995 to 1998. In this case, it receives the score from 1994 (45,000 military personnel) for these years. The NMC dataset includes the CINC score, which is an index of state power based on military, economic, and demographic strength. This measure is less intuitive and interpretable than military personnel, but it might capture what Mearsheimer & Alterman (2001, p. 45) describes as “latent power.”

¹¹Alliance strength could be measured by the Freeman centrality (Freeman, 1978) of states in the global military alliances network. Freeman centrality is a relative measure of centrality calculated as a state’s number of edges divided by the total number of other nodes. It can be interpreted as the local centrality of states within the global alliance network, which means that states with high scores have many allies and are central to alliance communities. However, this would ignore the *quality* of military alliances. For example, while North Korea has only one ally, their Chinese ally is extremely powerful in terms of military strength.

the target state or its allies is not likely—while weaker states are more likely to provide fungible resources in order to avoid costly retaliation. Combined, node and edge covariates measure sender and receiver effects caused by the balance of power.¹²¹³

Figure 3.3 shows adjacency matrices for the key independent variables. Due to space and interpretability, I plot only a sample of African states from 1975 to 2009. For each state, I show the difference in their mean state and alliance strength over the entire study period which is disaggregated to the year level for the statistical analysis. In terms of state strength (top pane), most African states over the period are much weaker than Egypt. However, Egypt is not relatively strong in terms of military alliances (bottom pane).

¹²Sender effects are covariates that cause states to send ties, i.e., provide support to rebel groups targeting other states. Receiver effects are covariates that cause states to receive ties, i.e., be targeted by external states.

¹³By including covariates that capture the international military alliance structure, this model is similar to a multiplex network analysis (Chen, 2021; Kivelä et al., 2014; Lazega & Snijders, 2015; Wang, Robins, Pattison, & Lazega, 2013). The key difference is that in this analysis the military alliance network is treated as exogenous to the support structure (similar to Pomeroy, Dasandi, & Mikhaylov, 2019). This is an important assumption necessary for a temporal network analysis, but it can be tested when conducting multiplex network analysis.

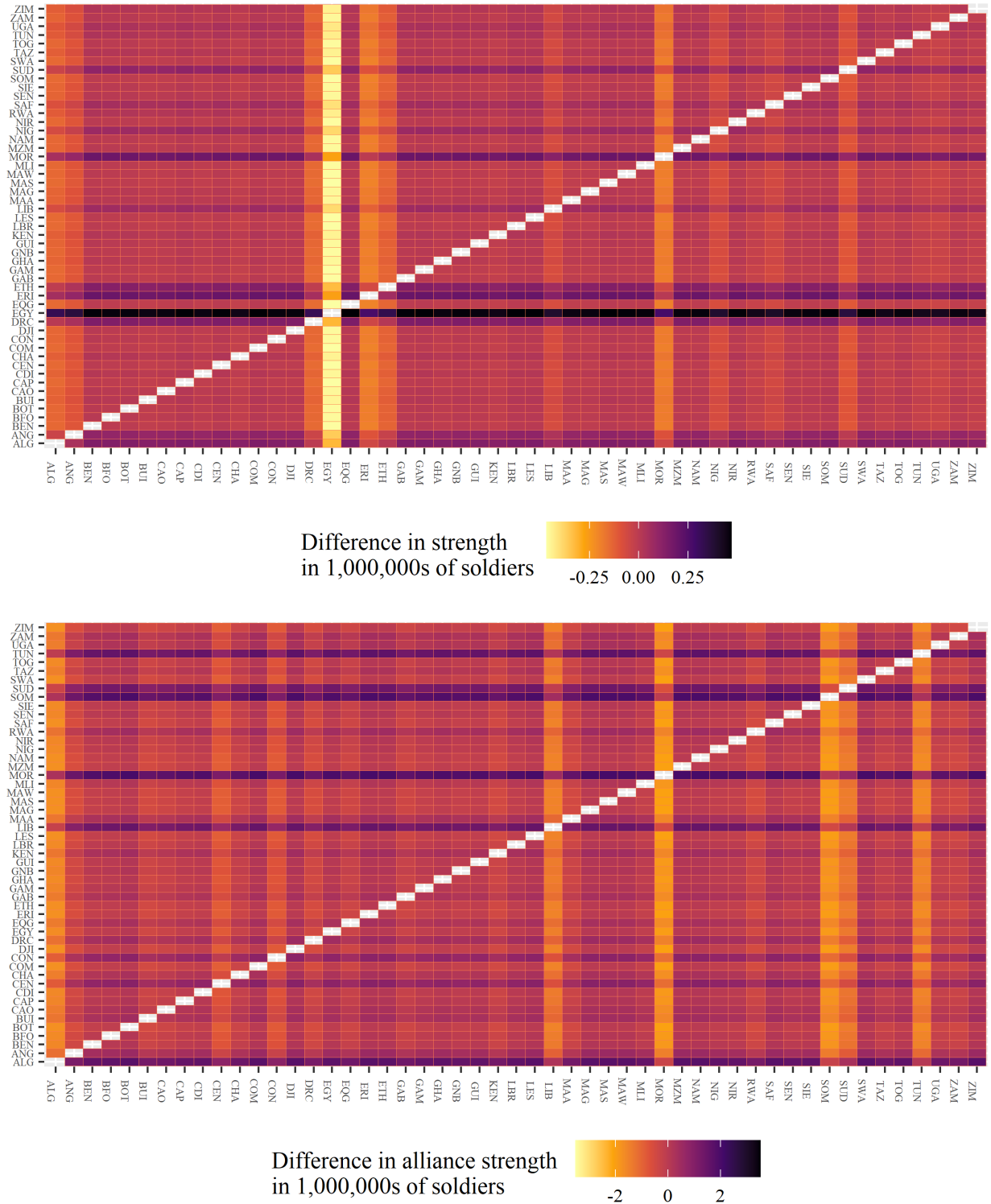


Figure 3.3: Adjacency graphs of the difference in state strength (top pane) and alliance strength (bottom pane) for African states averaged over the period from 1975 to 2009. In both instances, strength is measured in millions of soldiers.

3.3 Control variables

I include several exogenous (nodal and dyadic) and endogenous (network) controls that may confound the estimates of the effect of strength on the types of support provided by external states. Nodal and dyadic controls are exogenous controls because they are not affected by the edge formation process. For example, the distance between states is exogenous because although it is likely to affect the structure of the fungible and nonfungible networks, the support networks have no effect on the distance between states. Endogenous terms, on the other hand, represent processes of network self-organization (Lusher, Koskinen, & Robins, 2013, p. 91) which I describe in greater detail below. Table 3.2 shows the summary statistics for the control variables.

Table 3.2: Descriptive statistics for control variables.

	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
Alliance similarity	0	1.00	0.09	0.25
MIDs	0	1.00	0.01	0.11
Distance	0	55.00	6.86	5.29
Trade	0	575.00	1.05	8.88
Transnational ethnic kin	0	1.00	0.04	0.20
Military personnel	0	4.75	0.24	0.49
Difference in polity	0	20.00	7.54	5.81
Polity	-10	10.00	1.64	7.27
Major powers	0	1.00	0.08	0.28

Nodal controls

State strength: First, I control for *state strength* by including the number of military personnel. While I expect that states are generally more likely to provide support to rebels if they are militarily strong, I argue that the strategic decisions to provide different forms of support is a function of their relative strength. When

including differences as edge covariates, Lusher, Koskinen, & Robins (2013) also recommend the inclusion of the nodal covariate.

Regime type: I include a nodal covariate for *regime type*. Existing work shows that different regime types intervene in different types of civil war (Koga, 2011), while authoritarian governments may be less risk averse and therefore more likely to provide nonfungible forms of support to rebels (De Mesquita & Siverson, 1995; Fearon, 1994; Lake, 1992). I use the *Polity2* variable from the Polity V dataset, which is a polity scale that ranges from +10 (strongly democratic) to -10 (strongly autocratic).

Major power: Finally, I include a control for *major powers*, as coded by the Correlates of War (COW, 2017). Major powers may have the military capabilities to support groups that are more distant and may provide nonfungible forms of support not available to other states, such as airstrikes. The variable also controls for their tendency to undertake off-shore balancing.

Edge controls

Alliance similarity: The key independent variable, *difference in alliance strength*, ignores whether states are in the same alliance community. For example, Romania is relatively weak in terms of alliance strength compared to the US, but it is in the same military alliance community (NATO) and so one would not expect them to target each other. To account for this, I include *alliance similarity* which is the Jaccard similarity scores for military alliances. The Jaccard similarity of two nodes is the number of common neighbours divided by the number of nodes that are neighbours of at least one of the two nodes being considered (Jaccard, 1912). It is included as an undirected edge covariate. To illustrate the alliances similarity scores, maps in Figure 3.4 show the UK (blue) and Libya's (red) most similar states in 1990. Libya has similar allies to several neighbouring states, but not Chad, where it was providing

nonfungible support to forces fighting the government between 1978 and 1987. The UK shares a high similarity score with other NATO member states. The *alliance similarity* between the US and the UK is lower than between the UK and France because France and the UK have near identical allies while the US has alliances with states in South and Central America not shared with the UK.

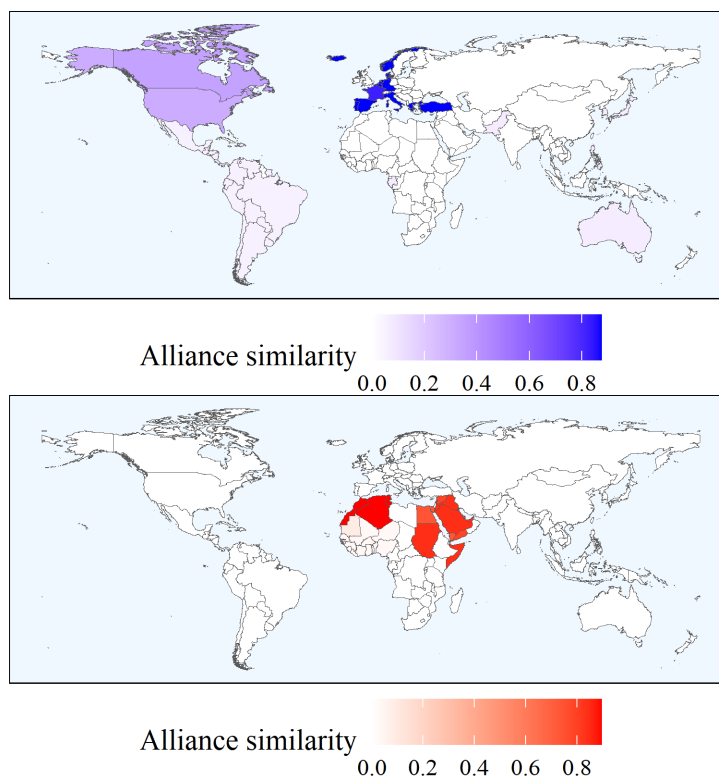


Figure 3.4: The UK (top pane in blue) and Libya's (bottom pane in red) most similar states as calculated by their Jaccard similarity scores in the global alliance network.

Distance: I control for *distance* as a dyadic covariate measuring the minimum distance between two states (K. S. Gleditsch & Ward, 2001). According to Bremer (1992, p. 313), neighbours have an enforced “common fate” which breeds frustrations and rivalries. Additionally, proximity allows even weak states which can be relatively stronger than their targets to provide nonfungible support, such as allowing rebel actors to use their territory or sending troops. This is compounded by the fact that closer states will be more affected by the change in power distribution and therefore will

have greater incentives to shape the outcome of civil wars. Finally, proximate states are also more likely to suffer from the spillover effects of civil war (K. S. Gleditsch, Salehyan, & Schultz, 2008; Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006), therefore increasing the incentives for states to intervene.

Shared ethnic kin: I control for *shared ethnic kin* for several reasons. External states may want to provide either form of support in order to defend their ethnic kin (Buhaug & Gleditsch, 2008; Ives, 2019). Defending ethnic kin in foreign civil wars might be a more salient issue for states, and thus explain their willingness to accept the greater risks of providing nonfungible support. They may also reduce the risks associated with providing support because the external state does not need to spend resources in screening potential clients and shares goals with the group, thus mitigating potential delegation problems (Salehyan, 2008a). Shared ethnic groups may increase incentives for external states to intervene because the external state considers co-ethnic rebels to be suitable future state allies. Finally, shared ethnic kin, often a function of proximity, is also a mechanism through which conflict may spread across borders (Cederman, Girardin, & Gleditsch, 2009; Forsberg, 2014; Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006), which may incentivise intervention from states in an attempt to end hostilities. All reasons indicate that they should increase the likelihood that external states will provide both fungible and nonfungible support. To control for these effects, I include an undirected edge covariate for the presence of transnational ethnic kin based on the Ethnic-Power Relations (EPR) Transborder Ethnic Kin dataset, which codes all politically relevant ethnic groups living in at least two countries (Vogt et al., 2015).

Rivals: Most of the existing literature shows that states are more likely to provide external support to rebels targeting their rivals. To account for this, I include a dyadic covariate if there were any *militarised interstate disputes (MIDs)* between states in

the previous five years. I use the *hostility level of dispute* variable to restrict the data to MIDs that involve a threat to use force, a display of force, the use of force, or war. The data is from Militarised Interstate Disputes (MID) dataset (Maoz, Johnson, Kaplan, Ogunkoya, & Shreve, 2019).

Trade: While military retaliation is the costliest form of punishment for states that provide support to rebel groups, economic sanctions are also employed to punish transgressors. States can also employ economic networks as coercive tools in order to achieve foreign policy objectives, in what Farrell & Newman (2019) call “weaponised interdependence.” Furthermore, states may want to avoid disrupting international trade (Maoz, 2009). Indeed, Chacha & Stojek (2019) find that the strength of economic relations is particularly salient. When states depend on other states for certain goods, they may be more sensitive to shocks (Keohane & Nye Jr, 1973). Combined, high levels of trade between states means that potential supporting states need not resort to supporting rebels in order to coerce rivals and may also be reluctant to bear the costs of disrupted trade. To account for this, I control for *trade* as an edge covariate from the COW Trade Data Set (Barbieri, Keshk, & Pollins, 2009). Specifically, I include the smoothed total trade values between states for each year.

Different regime types: Finally, I include an edge covariate for the absolute *difference in polity* score, which controls for the tendency for states with different political systems to target each other. It is based on the *Polity2* variable described above.

Network controls

ERG models can control for endogenous network characteristics, referred to as *network terms*, that affect whether states provide support to rebels in foreign civil wars. Network terms are endogenous because they are processes of network self-organization, i.e.,

“the presence or absence of individual ties is affected by a surrounding neighbourhood of other ties” (Lusher, Koskinen, & Robins, 2013, p. 91). Network terms shed light on the process through which civil wars become internationalised. Terms are selected based on what is theoretically relevant, and multiple attempts are often required to find the best fitting model that does not suffer from convergence issues. The terms used in the model were selected for theoretical reasons and because they improve model fit. During the iterative process of fitting appropriate network terms, it became apparent that goodness-of-fit statistics improved drastically for fungible support when different measures of activity and popularity were included. This demonstrates the risk that, if unaccounted for, endogenous network terms can lead to misspecified models.¹⁴ The fact that the models require different network statistics further justifies a statistical approach that distinguishes between different forms of support, as they do not have the same underlying data generation processes.

Isolates: The *isolate* term includes a measure for isolated nodes, or nodes that send or receive no edges. It improves model fit and controls for the fact that in any given year most states do not provide external support. Indeed, the networks are increasingly sparse over time, experiencing a significant drop at the end of the Cold War. While the number of fungible edges was as high as 24 in 1977, it was just three in 2009.¹⁵

Reciprocity: State i is more likely to provide support to rebels targeting state j if state j is providing support to a rebel group targeting state i . This is evidenced in the use of external support to target rivals, for example, between India and Pakistan, Israel and Iran, Libya and Sudan, Morocco and Algeria, or Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (W. R. Thompson, 2001). In network terminology, this is called

¹⁴The main findings for the key independent variables are unchanged when using different terms for popularity and activity.

¹⁵Summary statistics for each network year are presented in Table 8.3 in Appendix II.

reciprocity. It captures the likelihood that a state responds in kind i.e., given that i supports a group in j , how likely is it that j supports a group in state i . It is an integral part of most models for directed networks (Lusher, Koskinen, & Robins, 2013, p. 60).

Activity: Some states are known to provide support to several groups.¹⁶ In network analysis, this is called an *activity* effect. Activity effects exist if states that provide support in one conflict are more likely to provide support in other conflicts. For fungible support, the marginal cost of additional edges is low. It is likely that certain states develop techniques to avoid detection. Once developed they may be rolled out for relatively low additional risk. As the risk of retaliation is low, states may be more likely to develop several such relations. In a similar vein, it may be that the reputational costs of providing one group with fungible support, which can be mitigated due to its covert nature, is not dissimilar to the cost of providing more than one group with fungible support. On the other hand, activity is likely to be negative for nonfungible support. Because nonfungible support is costly and risky, it is unlikely that states will risk several such relations.

To measure *activity*, I include *out-2-star* and *geometrically weighted outdegree*. They measure a node's tendency to have multiple outgoing edges. A negative *activity* effect indicates that states are less likely to send multiple edges, while a positive effect indicates that states are more likely. A positive effect for fungible support and negative effect for nonfungible support would provide further support for the assumptions about the costs and risks of different forms of support that underpin my theoretical argument.

¹⁶These include 'usual suspects' like Libya, Syria, Sudan, and Iran—which have featured at different times on the US state department's State Sponsors of Terrorism list. For the current list, visit <https://www.state.gov/state-sponsors-of-terrorism/>. This is also apparent in the UCDP data, where the same states feature in the top external supporters alongside the US, China, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the DRC.

Popularity: Conflicts in some states, such as Afghanistan and Syria, attract support from several external states because they are considered to be geo-strategically important to multiple states. This is known as a *popularity* effect. It is likely that states provide support to rebels in conflicts to prevent rivals from gaining influence. I control for popularity effects, expecting this to matter most for nonfungible support. States that provide nonfungible support in a foreign civil war signal to other potential supporters that they are prepared to escalate the conflict, which is likely to reduce the likelihood that other states will provide similar support. Furthermore, the potential for conflict escalation in civil wars with many external supporters providing nonfungible support is high, which might deter additional states from intervening. Other states might be more likely to become involved in order to affect the outcome of the conflict, knowing that the potential for retaliation is low.

To control for *popularity* effects in the fungible and nonfungible networks, I include *in-2-star* and *geometrically weighted indegree*. They measure a node's tendency to have multiple incoming edges. A negative coefficient for *popularity* indicates that additional edges are less likely, while positive signs indicate that they are more likely. It can be interpreted as i supports rebels in j when others also support rebels in j . Once more, a positive effect for fungible support and negative effect for nonfungible support would provide support for the assumptions about the costs and risks of different forms of support underpinning my theoretical argument.

Triadic closure: State i is more likely to be an ally of state j if they share an ally in state k . The idea that nodes with common edges are more likely to form an edge, known as *triadic closure*, has long roots (Granovetter, 1973; Rapoport, 1957; Georg Simmel, 1908). In non-cooperative networks like external support, triadic closure is expected to be negative because an enemy of an enemy is often not an enemy, but a friend. Therefore, state i is less likely to support rebels targeting state j if state

j is supporting rebels targeting state k which is, in turn, supporting rebels in state i . I capture this interdependence by including the *geometrically-weighted edgewise shared partnerships (GWESP)* term (Hunter, 2007). The GWESP term, as opposed to a simpler *triangle* term, is shown to overcome model degeneracy in ERG models (Goodreau, 2007).

Temporal dependencies: The strength of temporal ERG models over other ERG models is that they also allow researchers to capture dynamic changes in the network over time. To capture temporal effects, I include two covariates. *Reciprocity (lagged)* captures the tendency for reciprocity across two time periods. I also include a term for *dyadic stability* which counts the number of stable dyads, both persistent edges and persistent non-edges, between two time periods. It is shown to improve model fit in sparse networks and control for temporal autocorrelation (Cranmer & Desmarais, 2011, p. 5).

3.4 Results

Table 3.3 shows the results of two temporal ERG models. Columns one and two show the results for fungible and nonfungible support, respectively. The models are estimated using bootstrapped maximum pseudolikelihood, a technique developed by Cranmer, Desmarais, & Menninga (2012).¹⁷ Confidence intervals are reported in the square brackets and are obtained from 100 bootstrapped pseudolikelihood replications. Effects are significant at 95 percent confidence levels (p-value < 0.05) if 0 is outside the confidence intervals (indicated in the table with a star). The interpretation of the results is similar to a logistical regression model. Coefficients provide estimates for the change in the log-likelihood of there being a directed edge between two states

¹⁷I use the *btergm* package (Leifeld, Cranmer, & Desmarais, 2016) in R (R Core Team, 2020) to conduct the analysis.

given a one-unit change in the independent variable. Similar to the interpretation of logistical regression outputs, effect size cannot be interpreted directly from these tables. The *edges* coefficient can be interpreted similarly to the intercept in logistic regression models. The table lists the main effects, endogenous network dependencies, and exogenous control variables, which include both edge and nodal covariates. I will analyse the results in this order. The results presented in Table 3.3 include all control variables. Models with fewer controls do not yield substantively different results. To ensure the robustness of these findings, I conduct a goodness-of-fit analysis and replicate the analysis as a dyadic regression, both presented in Appendix II.

Main findings

Difference in state strength for fungible support (column one) is negative and statistically significant, providing support for *hypothesis 1A*, which expects that weaker states are more likely to provide fungible support to rebels targeting stronger states. *Difference in state strength* for nonfungible support (column two) is positive, but fails to reach traditional levels of statistical significance. With this finding, I fail to reject the null hypothesis for *hypothesis 1B*, that relatively external states are more likely to provide nonfungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively weaker in terms of military power. Turning to *hypotheses 2A* and *2B* on the effect of alliance strength, *difference in alliance strength* for fungible support (column one) is positive and statistically significant. This goes against *hypothesis 2A*, that states are more likely provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting stronger states in terms of alliance strength. *Difference in state strength* for nonfungible support (column two) is positive and statistically significant, lending support for *hypothesis 2B* that states provide nonfungible support to rebels targeting states that are weaker in terms of alliance strength. The results provide mixed support for the theoretical argument.

Figure 3.5 shows the marginal effects for the main independent variables. For each

	Fungible support	Nonfungible support
Main effects		
Difference in state strength	-0.15* [-0.27; -0.04]	0.08 [-0.15; 0.26]
Difference in alliance strength	0.02* [0.01; 0.05]	0.05* [0.03; 0.08]
Endogenous control variables		
Isolates	2.15* [1.95; 2.39]	0.41 [-0.30; 1.07]
Edges	-9.93* [-18.00; -9.38]	-2.12* [-17.75; -1.62]
Reciprocity	1.19 [-14.28; 2.42]	5.65* [4.67; 6.72]
Popularity	0.63* [0.60; 0.69]	-2.45* [-3.26; -1.71]
Activity	0.54* [0.51; 0.60]	-1.39* [-2.21; -0.51]
GWESP	-15.75* [-16.04; -15.19]	-0.52 [-16.45; 0.11]
Reciprocity (lagged)	-6.83* [-7.26; -6.31]	-0.85* [-7.01; -0.56]
Dyadic stability	2.19 [-6.00; 2.74]	2.66 [-6.88; 3.10]
Exogenous control variables		
Military personnel (i → j)	0.45* [0.14; 0.67]	0.02 [-0.54; 0.31]
Polity	0.00 [-0.01; 0.01]	-0.01* [-0.02; -0.00]
Major power (i → j)	-1.18* [-1.86; -0.45]	-2.01* [-14.68; -0.82]
Alliance similarity	0.62 [-0.08; 1.09]	-0.19 [-0.72; 0.15]
Rivals	0.58 [-0.31; 1.26]	-0.72* [-14.65; -0.05]
Distance (in 1000 km)	0.01 [-0.00; 0.02]	-0.01 [-0.04; 0.01]
Shared ethnic kin	-0.81* [-2.41; -0.22]	0.84* [0.34; 1.18]
Trade	-0.00 [-0.03; 0.00]	-0.07* [-0.34; -0.01]
Difference in polity (i → j)	-0.02* [-0.04; -0.01]	-0.02* [-0.04; -0.01]
Num. obs.	874708	874708

* Null hypothesis value outside the confidence interval. Bootstrapping sample size: 100. Time steps: 35.

Table 3.3: Results of temporal ERG models for external support (1975-2009).

pane, the y-axis shows the probability of providing support while the x-axis shows the differences in the main indicators in 100,000s of military personnel. The effects are visualised for states that are coded as rivals, while other variables are held at their mean or median values. These graphs are important for several reasons. First, they show that significant effects for fungible support are relatively weak compared to those for nonfungible support. Indeed, the left plots show almost horizontal lines. While they are significant, they are weak effects. Second, while *difference in state strength* fails to reach statistical significance for nonfungible support, the marginal effects in the top-right plot are in the expected direction. The decreasing probability of a state sending fungible support as state strength increases (top-left plot), and the increasing probability of states providing nonfungible support as alliance strength increase (bottom-right pane) provide some support for the theoretical expectations. Finally, much of the existing literature identifies rivalries as a key condition for the provision of external support in the first instance, regardless of the form of support being provided. The main results indicate that rivalries are not particularly good predictors of external support, while these graphs show that for rivals, it is strategic considerations regarding relative strength, both in terms of individual state and collective alliance strength, that explain the forms of support provided. Crucially, rivalries alone cannot explain the different slopes for the key independent variables shown in Figure 3.5.

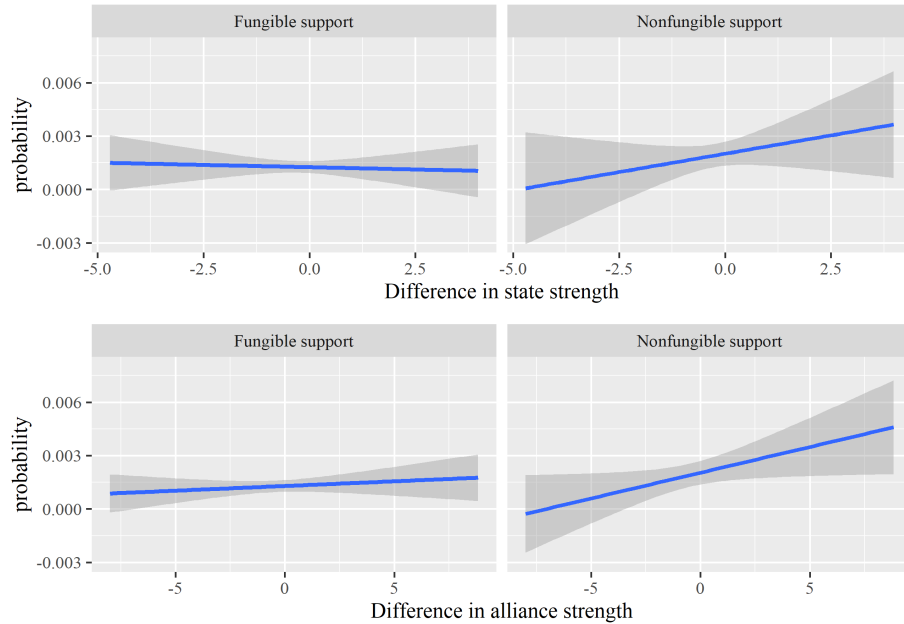


Figure 3.5: Marginal effects of the key independent variables—difference in state strength (top row) and difference in alliance strength (bottom row)—for the model for fungible (left column) and nonfungible support (right column). Marginal effects are calculated for states in Militarised Interstate Disputes (MID), with all other variables held at their median and mean values.

It is important to note that the probabilities are generally low, which is a reflection of the sample size and number of edges. The baseline is extremely low, and so marginal effects appear negligible. In light of this, it is common practice to calculate probability change as a function of the baseline. Table 3.4 shows the change in probability as a percentage of the baseline probability for a 100,000 increase in military personnel in terms of state strength or alliance strength. The probability of stronger states providing fungible support decreases by 4 percent but increases by 4 percent for states in stronger alliances. The change is particularly strong for the provision of nonfungible support. The probability that states in stronger alliances provide nonfungible support increases by 14 percent. While the percentage increase is highest for states that are relatively stronger (21 percent), this finding is not statistically significant. I discuss these findings further in the conclusion.

Table 3.4: Probability change for a 100,000 increase in relative troops size.

Support type	Strength indicator	Significant	Percentage change
Fungible	State	Yes	-4
Fungible	Alliance	Yes	4
Nonfungible	State	No	21
Nonfungible	Alliance	Yes	14

Control variables

The control variables yield several findings. I employ ERG models to shed light on the interdependent edge formation process which may provide support for assumptions of the theoretical argument. The network terms go in the expected directions. The direction and significance of the *isolates* and *edges* terms shed light on why the fit of the fungible network is improved with different *activity* and *popularity* terms. A significant and strong negative *edge* term, combined with the significant sign for the *isolate* term, indicates that the fungible network is particularly sparse.¹⁸ The *reciprocity* term is positive and significant for nonfungible support. This underscores the risky nature of nonfungible support, which is likely to lead to punishment in kind and conflict escalation. *Reciprocity (lagged)* is negative and significant for both forms of support, indicating that states respond in the short-term.

Popularity effects are positive for fungible support and negative for nonfungible support. The effect indicates that in conflicts where one state becomes involved with nonfungible support, other states are less likely to become involved. This is the opposite in conflicts where states provide fungible support. This supports the idea that nonfungible support signals to other states not to get involved and that states are reluctant to get involved in conflicts where other states are already providing nonfungible support due to the risk of conflict escalation. Nonfungible support indicates that the external state is willing to escalate its involvement, signalling resolve to other

¹⁸The sparsity of the fungible network is evident in Table 8.7 in the Appendix.

states, and deterring them from intervening. *Activity* effects are significant for both forms of support, but with opposite signs. States that provide fungible support to one rebel group are more likely to provide fungible support to rebel groups in other conflict zones. The effect is opposite for nonfungible support, for which the cost and risks of retaliation are too high. *GWESP* is negative for both forms of support, but does not reach statistical significance for nonfungible support. There is no tendency towards triadic closure, which is expected for networks of relations which are considered to be negative—i.e., the target (enemy/rival) of a target (enemy/rival) is less likely to be a target (enemy/rival). The *memory term* is positive but not significant in either model. This indicates that there is little temporal correlation between edges and non-edges, i.e., both edges and non-edges are not likely to persist.

Most of the control variables are in line with the expectations outlined in existing literature. Generally, strong states, as measured by their *military personnel*, are more likely to provide fungible forms of support but this is not necessarily true for nonfungible support, which does not reach statistical significance. It is often weaker states that provide nonfungible support. This justifies the focus on relative strength to understand why states provide different forms of support, as the intuition that only strong states can provide meaningful support defies empirical evidence from, for example, the Great Lakes Region in Africa. *Polity* is negative and statistically significant for nonfungible support, indicating that more democratic states are less likely to provide nonfungible forms of support. While being a major power is significant, the effect is negative. It is likely that, once controlling for relative and absolute strength, being a major power reduces the likelihood of providing support. Indeed, from 1991, both Japan and Germany are coded as major powers, neither of which provide support during the period.

Alliance similarity fails to reach significance in either model. *Rivals* yields a particularly puzzling finding. Unlike existing literature, I find mixed results for

support between rivals depending on the form of support. I find that fungible external support is neither more or less likely between rivals, but that nonfungible support is less likely between states that experience an MID in the past 5 years. While *rivals* are often strong predictors of external support, it is possible that relative strength considerations are better predictors once we disaggregate external support. The negative effect for nonfungible support might indicate that the risk that this form of support may lead to conflict escalation is simply too high within the context of an international rivalry. For instance, the USSR and the US would not target each other directly with nonfungible forms of support from fear of conflict escalation. *Shared ethnic kin* is negative for fungible support but positive for nonfungible support. It is likely that shared ethnic kin increases a state's willingness to accept the risks of conflict escalation, but this may also be capturing spatial proximity. *Trade* is negative and statistically significant only for nonfungible support: states are reluctant to bear the costs of trade loss or sanctions by providing nonfungible support. To avoid these costs, states may provide fungible support instead. *Difference in polity* is negative and significant for both forms of support. A key assumption theoretically is that the choice to provide support is driven by inter-state relations, not characteristics within the external supporting state or the target state. *Distance* is not statistically significant for either form of support. It is likely that certain aspects of distance are captured by other variables, such as trade, rivalries, and shared ethnic kin. Once these are included in a model along with power consideration, distance is not an important predictor of different forms of support.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I conduct a network analysis that allows me to examine how relative strength and relative military strength inform states' strategic choices to provide

support to rebels and, if so, in which form. I argue that key to understanding why states provide different forms of support are the risks of punishment, and by extension, relative military and alliance strength. When a state decides to support rebels fighting the government of another state, it is conscious of being discovered and punished, either by the target state or its allies. I also note that these decisions are interdependent. The interdependence sheds light on the process through which civil wars become internationalised.

I find support for *hypothesis 1A*, that external states are more likely to provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting states which are relatively stronger in terms of military power. As argued, relative strength is an important factor for states when deciding on the type of support to provide. As the difference in military personnel increases, weaker states are more likely to provide fungible support. I do not find support that external states are more likely to provide nonfungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively weaker in terms of military power (*hypothesis 1B*). The coefficient is positive but does not reach traditional levels of significance. In a dyadic regression set up shown in Appendix II, it is significant but at 90 percent confidence intervals. Combined, there is suggestive evidence that relative military power informs the conditions under which states will provide support to rebels. The fact that weaker states are more likely to provide fungible support shows how states aim to evade punishment from more powerful states while still trying to achieve important foreign policy objectives. Null results for stronger states in terms of relative military strength indicates that a key factor driving states' decisions to provide nonfungible support is not relative military strength, but relative alliance strength.

I find that external states are more likely to provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively weaker in terms of military alliances. This does not provide support to *hypothesis 2A*, which states that fungible support will be

more likely. I discuss this finding more in the case studies. For instance, in Chapter V I find a similar dynamic when Libya provided support to Republican groups targeting the UK government in Northern Ireland. I conclude that weaker states can rely on the protection of strong allies to target rivals. In the Northern Irish case, a dynamic similar to state-rebel delegation emerged where the Soviet Union wanted to undermine the UK and its allies but did not want to accept the level of risk associated with supporting rebels that directly targeted them (Karlen & Ruata, 2021). Libya furthered Soviet geopolitical objectives by supporting rebels in Northern Ireland, but also in Chad, Sudan, and Egypt (Gwertzman, 1981). The analysis in this Chapter provides strong support for *hypothesis 2B*, that external states are more likely to provide nonfungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively weak in terms of military alliances. Together, these findings indicate that key to understanding states' strategic choice to provide different forms of support is not only dyadic relative military strength, but also the power dynamics induced by the international military alliance network. A state's place in the international network of military alliances seems to be the main force driving the strategic choice of states to provide external support. Most notably, states with stronger allies are more likely to provide both forms of support, although the marginal effect is over three times stronger for nonfungible support.

Finally, an important contribution of this analysis regards the process through which states become internationalised. The network models employed are uniquely designed to shed light on the edge formation processes. In this case, I find that different forms of support have opposite popularity and activity effects. States are more likely to provide fungible support to rebels targeting other states if other states are already providing fungible support but less likely to provide nonfungible support if other states are providing such support. This finding provides support to key assumptions underpinning the theoretical argument and echoes Carson (2018, p. 14) when he claims that covert (which is predominately fungible) support signals a "legible

and credible indicator of both resolve and restraint,” while overt (often nonfungible) support sends “the broadest and strongest indication of resolve.” Different forms of support signal an external state’s willingness to accept risk, and thus shapes the strategy of other states. The finding suggests, like Saideman (2002), Findley & Teo (2006), and Anderson (2019), that balancing and bandwagoning also pertain to the geopolitics of civil war intervention.

Chapter 4

A Global Analysis of Rebel Dynamics

In times of conflict, power is a function of armed actors' control over the means and tools of violence relative to that of other armed actors. Rebels compete for resources in order to improve their position in the balance of power vis-à-vis the government (Christia, 2012) but also each other (Krause, 2017). External states have the ability to drastically shift the “strategic environment” (Crenshaw, 1987) in which rebels operate. Few forces can shape the conduct and course of civil wars more than external states, and the main way in which they do so is by providing material resources to armed actors. In the knowledge that survival and success is a function of rebels' control over important military resources, but also that states are uniquely positioned to provide these resources, how does external support shape civil wars? Specifically, how do different forms of external support—fungible and nonfungible—affect interrebel dynamics?

I argue in Chapter II that not all external support is equal. External support has the potential to both cause competition or cooperation within and among rebel groups. Civil wars are often a patchwork of rebel factions, groups, and coalitions.

Each group is nominally opposed to a central government, and yet they have their own, sometimes very distinct, political preferences and objectives. Rebels can bully, intimidate, and fight each other. Rebels can also form cohesive and united fronts capable of militarily challenging, and sometimes defeating, government forces. In some conflicts, the entire spectrum of these possibilities is visible, from bloody internecine fighting to joint operations against a common foe. I argue that key to understanding this variation is not just whether rebels receive support, but the extent to which external support is fungible. Highly fungible resources include money and weapons, while troops, airstrikes, and territory are nonfungible because rebel groups do not own the support or have the ability to exchange it and therefore compete for control over the resource. Existing work shows how external support can cause splintering, focusing on the overall allocation of resources within groups (Asal, Brown, & Dalton, 2012; Tamm, 2016). However, it does not consider the effect of different forms of support. I argue that fungible external support induces competition within rebel groups because factions can accumulate resources, which creates tensions within the group and generates rivalries. Conversely, nonfungible support induces cooperation within rebel groups. Not only do rebels never truly own nonfungible support, external states accept greater risks in order to provide nonfungible resources and thus seek to counteract internal feuding that weakens rebel groups. From this, I developed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: (A) rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to splinter; and (B) rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are less likely to splinter.

Support also affects competitive dynamics among rebel groups. The fungibility of support determines its effect on the balance of power and the cost-benefit of interrebel fighting. An influx of money and weapons creates a competitive environment among rebel groups. Not only can rebel groups eliminate rivals, fungible resources increase

the absolute benefits of fighting as rebels capture valuable resources in the process. Nonfungible support, on the other hand, has the opposite effect: it fosters a cooperative environment among rebel groups. The external state takes greater risk in providing nonfungible support and will direct the rebel groups to fight specific actors (most often the government), while promoting rebel alliances to increase the strength of their proxy. Greater oversight allows the external state to punish actors who defect, thus increasing the costs of interrebel fighting. While the conflict system is anarchical, external states can monopolise violence and thus mitigate the systematic effects of anarchy, which are well developed in the traditional international relations scholarship (Mearsheimer & Alterman, 2001; Waltz, 2010). Furthermore, as opposed to fungible support, external states retain ownership of nonfungible support, and so rebels cannot easily capture the resources. Finally, receiving nonfungible support is a strong signal of rebel strength and potential success. Combined, nonfungible support has an effect similar to that described by Waltz (2010, p. 126): “as soon as someone looks like the winner, nearly all jump on the bandwagon” and instead of attempting to fight and balance the emerging power, losing rebels “throw in their lots with the winner.” From this, I develop the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: (A) rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to fight other rebels; and (B) rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely to form alliances with other rebels.

As demonstrated in Chapter III, states provide external support for strategic reasons, many of which are related to the conflict environment. This presents an important methodological challenge to the study of how external support affects conflict characteristics because external support is not randomly assigned. While this has emerged as an important consideration when studying interventions that aim to promote peace (Fortna, 2004; M. J. Gilligan & Sergenti, 2008; M. Gilligan & Stedman, 2003; Hultman, Kathman, & Shannon, 2013), it has largely been ignored in the study of external

support. In order to overcome the selection issue, I employ coarsened exact matching (CEM). CEM approximates random treatment by matching rebel groups that receive certain types of support (fungible or nonfungible) with other rebel groups that are similar and fighting in similar environments but that do not receive any external support.

The chapter is structured as follows: First, I outline two emerging issues related to the study of external support and rebel behaviour: (1) rebel strategic interdependence, and (2) selection effects. I then present a research design aimed at overcoming selection issues. Next, I describe the data used to conduct a large-N matching analysis and present the results. Previewing the results, the analysis provides no support for *hypothesis 3*. I identify data limitations as a potential weakness for a large-N test of *hypothesis 3*. Considering these limitations, I focus on *hypothesis 3* in a case study of the Northern Irish conflict (1968-1998) in Chapter V. I find support for *hypothesis 4*. Rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to engage in rebel infighting and rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely to form rebel alliances. However, I also uncover a puzzling result. The models show groups that receive fungible support are also more likely to form alliances. In the conclusion, I discuss this finding and set out the next steps. Ultimately, this chapter justifies further case analysis which I conduct in subsequent chapters.

4.1 Causal identification

There are two challenges to identifying the causal effect of external support on rebel behaviours. First, rebel groups and factions, like states in international alliances or rivalries, represent networks of actors that cooperate and compete with one another. They are therefore strategically interdependent. The outcomes of interest (fighting, allying, and splintering) are therefore not independent. Second, as shown in Chapter

III, different forms of external support are strategically provided to rebels due to characteristics which may also shape competition and cooperation among and within rebel groups. In this section, I describe both issues. I conclude that both present challenges to the study of external support and rebel dynamics, but I argue that the main hurdle to causal identification is selection bias. In the subsequent section, I outline a research design based on matching that can overcome the selection effects of different forms of external support.

Research on interrebel dynamics, be it cooperative or competitive, is often based on the logic of a balance of power between more than one rebel group (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012; Christia, 2012; Krause, 2017). Scholars are increasingly aware of the “complex character of nonstate actors” (Pearlman & Cunningham, 2012), which includes greater interest in the fragmented nature of rebel movements and interrebel relations. A key aspect of this complex character is that they condition their behaviour on that of other groups and factions (Dorff, Gallop, & Minhas, 2020; Gade, Gabbay, Hafez, & Kelly, 2019; Metternich, Dorff, Gallop, Weschle, & Ward, 2013; Metternich & Wucherpfennig, 2020). Recent research shows that these strategic interdependencies are important in explaining other conflict outcomes, such as conflict duration (Metternich & Wucherpfennig, 2020). However, existing large-N quantitative research on interrebel fighting and interrebel alliances rarely account for strategic interdependencies, often adopting monadic or dyadic regression analysis techniques¹ that are ill-equipped at modelling the interdependence between observations (Cranmer, Leifeld, McClurg, & Rolfe, 2017). Similar to how states’ decisions to provide support are interdependent, the same is true for rebel groups’ decisions to fight, ally, or splinter.

How are rebels strategically interdependent? In a civil war involving three rebel groups i , j , and k , Rebel group i ’s decision to fight group j is, at a minimum, informed by whether i or j are fighting a third group k . This interdependence matters for how

¹See for example, Akcinaroglu (2012); Bapat & Bond (2012); Fjelde & Nilsson (2012); Popovic (2017).

we theorise about rebel behaviour, but also how we model it statistically. Civil war studies increasingly employ network theory to understand rebel dynamics and network statistics to account for these strategic interdependencies. For instance, Metternich, Dorff, Gallop, Weschle, & Ward (2013) use latent space network models to show that network structures affect conflict behaviour, while Gade, Hafez, & Gabbay (2019) and Gade, Gabbay, Hafez, & Kelly (2019) show that ideological homophily, the tendency for similar actors to form relations, is the primary driver of interrebel fighting and alliance formation in the context of the Syrian civil war. To bridge international relations and civil war research, J. A. Jackson, San-Akca, & Maoz (2020) employ a network approach to understand how the potential of external support determines the strategy employed by anti-government actors.² Dorff, Gallop, & Minhas (2020) also employ network statistics to answer the question “who fights whom and when?” Focusing on the case of Nigeria, they show the importance of network effects like reciprocity and transitivity to not only better test relational patterns, but also better predict interrebel dynamics. These studies employ novel network approaches to conflict but are limited to single cases. No one has employed network approaches to understanding why rebels fight or form alliances at a global level. Future research on interrebel dynamics, therefore, should employ network statistics to account for the strategic interdependence of rebel groups.³

States provide support to rebel actors to undermine rivals and empower allies. Civil wars cause great uncertainty, which present substantial risks to external states, especially neighbours that are more likely to be affected by conflict diffusion (K. S. Gleditsch, 2007) and migration flows that may include rebel actors (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006). However, they also present states with unique opportunities to

²The authors employ logistic regression analysis where the unit of analysis is the triad-year—i.e., the target state, rebel group and potential external supporter state. Although a step towards modelling triadic and network relationships, their approach still ignores interdependence between triads.

³In the appendix, I present an attempt to do so but I am not confident in the results due to potential selection effects of external support and sparsity of the network.

drastically shift their regional and global spheres of influence. Whether they are primarily motivated by the risks or the opportunities presented by civil wars, I argue that states' decisions to provide support are informed by their expected likelihood of being punished by other states for doing so. Thus, I argue that strength relative to the target government and its allies is central to understanding variation in the forms of support provided. States that are relatively weak fear retaliation and thus provide fungible forms of support. This is evident in Middle Eastern state support to rebels in Chechnya where, due to the fear of costly retaliation from Russia, states provided funding through religious charities and organisations.⁴ As noted by J. Hughes (2013, p. 129), the US and European powers were also reluctant to challenge Russia, “a nuclear and strong military power, with a Security Council veto.” Previous works show that external state support is provided strategically, often to undermine rival states. The non-random provision of support, and I argue different forms of support, must be accounted for especially if it is related to characteristics that are, in turn, related to the dependent variable. In Chapter III, I show that different forms of support are provided as a function of state strength.

The types of rebel groups that receive external support and conflict environments in which they operate may be imbalanced on variables that affect the dependent variables (Agresti, 2018, p. 29): rebel fighting, allying, and splintering. Thus, the analysis of how external support affects conflict dynamics is prone to selection bias, when “the non-random selection of cases results in inferences, based on the resulting sample, that are not statistically representative of the population” (D. Collier, 1995, p. 462). Existing research identifies several avenues through which the key independent variable may be assigned due to other confounding variables. For instance, Fjelde &

⁴The most notable source of external funding came from states in the Islamic world like Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. They operated behind the veil of Islamic charities which funnelled large amounts of cash into the region, estimated to be at \$100 million by the US State department or \$6 per month in 2000 by the FSB (Souleimanov & Ditrych, 2008, p. 1206).

Nilsson (2012) find that rebel groups in weak states⁵ are more likely to engage in rebel infighting. Substantively, they find that rebels are four times more likely to engage in interrebel fighting in weak states compared to states that are not coded as weak. However, I argue that external states are more likely to provide support to rebels targeting weaker rivals. This complicates efforts to establish a causal relationship between different forms of external support and rebel dynamics.

Figure 4.1 is a directed acyclic graph (DAG) showing how confounding variables may lead to selection bias. DAGs provide visual representations of causal assumptions and are a powerful way to think clearly about interrelations between variables (S. Cunningham, 2021; Morgan & Winship, 2015; Rohrer, 2018). I argue that different forms of support (D) have a causal effect on rebel behaviour (Y). The causal relationship and direction are shown as an arrow between the variables ($D \rightarrow Y$) which are represented graphically by nodes. Additionally, reflecting the above discussion on the relation between state strength, external support, and rebel fighting, Figure 4.1 includes state strength as an additional variable (I). The arrow between state strength and external support shows the correlation and causal assumption in research by Fjelde & Nilsson (2012) ($I \rightarrow Y$). State strength is shown to have a causal relationship with rebel behaviour, but I also show in Chapter III that the provision of support is a function of relative state strength. This graph shows a concern central to many observational studies regarding the presence of a common cause that “lurks behind

⁵Fjelde & Nilsson (2012) measure state weakness as a binary variable, in which states are coded as being weak if they have “incoherent political institutions.” While this operationalisation of state weakness is in line with Fearon & Laitin (2003, p. 83) argument that the mix of different political institutions indicates “political contestation among competing forces and, in consequence state incapacity,” it is distant from measuring state strength in terms of capacity. For instance, state strength is often captured in real GDP. Although it remains a debatable metric for state capacity (P. Collier, 2003; Hegre, 2001), it is a standard proxy included in civil war models (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010). In testing the robustness of their findings, they run the same models with GDP as an indicator of state weakness. Specifically, they code 1 for all countries with a GDP per capita below the 25th percentile. The results are the same. Other variables may also provide indirect support to the hypothesis that rebels are more likely to fight in weak states. For instance, whether rebels control territory, especially in the peripheries of the state, might also be a proxy of state weakness, the logic being that states with weak capacity may not be able to project military power in the entire geography that the state is internationally recognised to control (Lee, 2020).

the potential cause of interest” (Rohrer, 2018, p. 31).

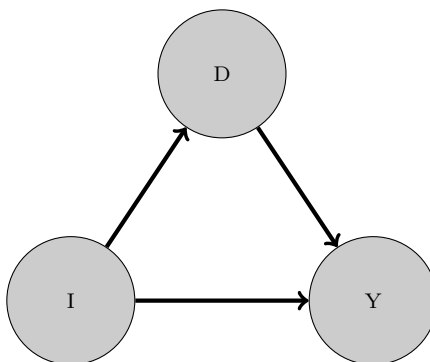


Figure 4.1: The DAG shows how state characteristics may lead to selection bias.

In this case, state strength may be a common cause of both external support and rebel dynamics, constituting a ‘backdoor path’ or confounding variable ($D \rightarrow Y \leftarrow I$). Backdoor paths are not causal. They are processes that create spurious correlation between the key independent variable and dependent variables (S. Cunningham, 2021, p. 99). There are in fact multiple potential backdoor paths that indicate the potential for selection effects. External support may be related to rebel group characteristics, including ideological or ethnic foundations. However, these covariates are also found to shape rebel dynamics.⁶ Previous work shows how competition between rebel groups might also be shaped by state behaviour and conflict severity. First, periods of low conflict may increase the likelihood that rebel groups fight each other, what Pischedda (2020) refers to as “windows of opportunity.” Conflict severity may also be related to external support, as external states intervene in more severe conflicts to end violence and ending refugee outflows (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006). Therefore, factors that determine the provision of external support are complex, but likely result in selection

⁶For example, Gade, Hafez, & Gabbay (2019) find that ideologically distant groups are more likely to fight each other in the context of the civil war in Syria. While they find that their propensity to fight is not associated with whether or not they receive external state support, it is possible that these are endogenous. Indeed, the fear that rebel groups might pretend to be a certain type in order to attract external support is well-established (Jones & Mattiacci, 2019; Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010). In Syria, as noted by Hokayem (2014, p. 86), many groups took on “an Islamist identity to appeal to conservative audiences abroad receptive to providing funding, especially in the Gulf states.”

effects. Typically, one can control for the confounding variable by including a third variable in regression models. However, there are two reasons for why this is not suitable in this case. Including all variables in a parametric regression model can lead to “over-control” bias, where the process of interest is controlled away (Rohrer, 2018). Second, considering the likely selection effects, controlling for confounding variables in a regression set up will produce biased results if the treatment is biased towards certain strata in the data (S. Cunningham, 2021, p. 178). This is the case, for instance, if there are selection effects, as the provision of fungible support is more or less likely depending on state strength.

Faced with two issues, strategic interdependence, and selection effects, I opt for a research design that accounts for the latter for two main reasons. First, while data collection of global conflict datasets has led to important findings over the past two decades, I show in Appendix III that a global rebel dynamics network relying on existing datasets is both sparse and likely to suffer from missing data. Network models are particularly susceptible to missing data (Cranmer & Desmarais, 2011), while certain models struggle to converge for sparse networks (Cranmer, Leifeld, McClurg, & Rolfe, 2017). Second, even if network models account for the strategic interdependence among rebel groups, modelling the effect of different forms of support will still suffer from selection bias. While selection bias cannot be accounted for in the network models, it is possible instead to compare groups in conflict environments in which we might expect similar strategic interdependencies to control for these effects. As noted by S. Cunningham (2021, p. 135), “causal inference is about developing a reasonable strategy for negating the role that selection bias is playing in estimated causal effects.” Therefore, I opt for a research design that can negate the role of selection bias instead of network effects, which are likely to be at play but pose a lesser obstacle to causal inference.

Research design

Causal inference is about how to estimate the counter-factual outcomes by comparing alternative causal states, known as the potential outcomes framework (S. Cunningham, 2021, p. 125; Imai, 2018, p. 475). My research design thus seeks to compare similar rebel groups in similar conflicts with variation on the key independent variable, different types of external support. Randomization, the ‘gold standard’ for causal inference, is often not possible in studies that rely on observational data. Yet randomization can break paths in DAGs. As opposed to experimental studies, with observational data the researcher has no control over the assignment of the treatment of interest. This is clearly the case for studying the effects of external support on rebel dynamics.

While treatment is not random, pre-processing the data and matching similar cases creates a quasi-experimental analysis, where different forms of support represent alternative causal states and allow for counterfactual reasoning. The goal is to compare the behaviours of groups (their likelihood of fighting, allying, and splintering) that receive a treatment (fungible or nonfungible support) with the behaviours of similar groups fighting in similar conflict environments, but which do not receive any support in order to estimate the average treatment effect (ATE) of support. We do not know how a rebel groups that did not receive external support would have behaved had the group received support because we do not have data (it never happened) on the counterfactual outcome (S. Cunningham, 2021, p. 126). Instead, we assume that if the groups had received the support, the effect on their behaviour would have been the same to similar groups that did receive support.

To conduct a potential outcomes approach, I employ an approximate form of matching called coarsened exact matching (CEM). Approximate matching is necessary when it is not possible to find exact matches between units in the treated (those that receive support) and control groups (those that receive no support) (S. Cunningham, 2021, p. 199). CEM is a multidimensional exact matching algorithm. Exact matching

matches each treated unit to all possible control units with the same values on all the covariates. While this is possible in studies with relatively few matching variables or large samples, it is often not applicable because exact matches do not exist. The issue is particularly affected by continuous variables, such as GDP or the number of battle-related deaths, which prevent matches due to small differences that are theoretically unimportant. CEM overcomes this issue by coarsening continuous variables to theoretically meaningful categories. It then matches observations so that substantively indistinguishable values are grouped and assigned the same numerical value (S. M. Iacus, King, & Porro, 2012, p. 8). Once pre-processed, I calculate the ATE of different forms of external support using regression models.

The data

I build a dataset where the unit of analysis is the rebel group-year based on the UCDP Termination of Conflict (Kreutz, 2010), which identifies continuous periods of conflict years in UCDP-PRIO armed conflict dataset. The unit of analysis is rebel groups involved in armed conflict, that is, “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar-year” (N. P. Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Eriksson, Sollenberg, & Strand, 2002). Observations end either through peace agreements, ceasefire agreement, victory by one of the sides, or low activity. The dataset includes 1052 rebel-year observations for 259 rebel groups from 1989 to 2009.

I do not build a dyadic dataset where the unit of analysis is a rebel dyad for several reasons. First, the UCDP codes rebel groups from the moment they exceed a 25 battle-related deaths threshold. However, rebel groups can and often do fight other rebel groups before passing this threshold and after they are no longer coded as active. Low activity is coded when a conflict continues but does not reach the UCDP’s deaths

threshold. Problematically, data on interrebel fighting and alliance formation includes relations between actors that are not coded as active in the UCDP Termination of Conflict dataset. For example, according to the UCDP nonstate conflict dataset, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) fought its largest faction Fatah in 1990, 2006, and 2007, but the PLO is only coded as active from 1965 to 1988. To prevent omitting important observations, I would need to include dyads between the PLO and Fatah until at least the last time they fought, which may lead to sampling bias. I opt to focus on rebels that are in active conflicts in a monadic dataset similar to Fjelde & Nilsson (2012). Their study is not dyadic because, according to them, that would require identifying all the relevant pair of dyads—or the “universe of cases” (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012, p. 615)—which is difficult due to the number of rebel groups that are active below the 25 battle-death threshold. As noted, it is also clear from data on interrebel fighting and alliance formation that groups are active outside of these years. At this stage of my research, it is sufficient to study the effects of external support on rebel dynamics as a first test of the theoretical argument. The case studies then allow me to identify the mechanisms underpinning the finding while including rebel groups that do not exceed the threshold of deaths.

Dependent variables

My dependent variables measure the outcome of competition and cooperation in three ways: interrebel fighting, alliances formation, and splintering (shown in figure 4.2). There are many ways in which rebels can cooperate that fall short of forming rebel alliances, while rebel competition can take different forms that do not amount to physical fighting or splintering into new organisations. However, fighting rebels is the most serious consequence of competition between groups, splintering is the ultimate outcome of intragroup competition, and rebel alliances are a consequence of cooperation short of unification.

To test *hypothesis 3*—rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to splinter (*A*) or less likely to splinter if they receive nonfungible support (*B*)—I use Olson Lounsbury (2016)’s Foreign Military Intervention, Power Dynamics and Rebel Group Cohesion dataset. Specifically, I use the *splinter* variable, which she identifies as groups that form from an already existing group. The coding excludes the emergence of new groups. She identifies splintering by drawing on the narrative information available through the UCDP and other scholarly sources. As a test of *hypothesis 4A*—rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to fight other rebels—I code a dichotomous variable for rebels that fight any other rebel group in a year based on the UCDP Non-State Conflict dataset (Sundberg, Eck, & Kreutz, 2012; see also, Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012). I remove cases of fighting between rebel groups and militia groups aligned with the state, such as the Janjaweed in Sudan or the Mayi Mayi in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Finally, to test *hypothesis 4B*—rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely to form alliances with other rebels—I code a dichotomous variable which is one if the group formed at least one alliance in a given year or zero if they did not. The data is collected by Bapat & Bond (2012) and extended by Popovic (2018). Building on work by Bapat & Bond (2012), Popovic (2018) codes instances where there was “resource-sharing or tactical co-ordination between the groups at sometime during a year” (Bapat & Bond, 2012, p. 19). Popovic (2018, p. 14) updates this dataset by coding as an alliance any instance where a rebel group provides support to another group “active in the same territory and year” using the UCDP external support dataset. Popovic does not code alliances between transnational rebel groups because “transnational alliances may entail different alliance dynamics and foreign sponsors may not hold the same influence on rebel groups” (Popovic, 2018, p. 15). However, rebels can and do fight rebels in other states and to conduct a comparable global analysis of interrebel dynamics, I do not limit cooperative relations to national borders of the conflict state. I update the

dataset drawing on the UCDP external support data and following Popovic's coding: where there was evidence of one group providing any support to another rebel group, an alliance was coded.⁷ This means that support from rebel groups active in foreign conflicts is coded as a rebel alliance.

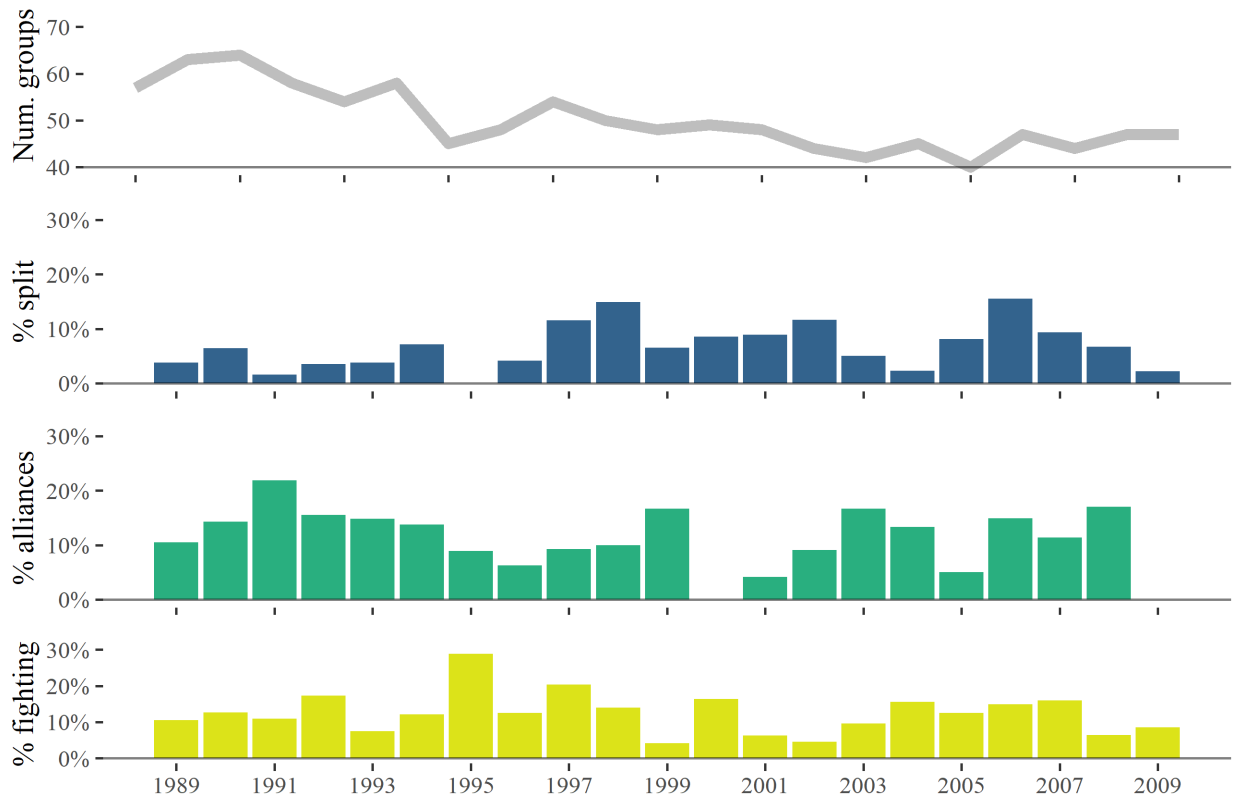


Figure 4.2: The top plot shows the total number of rebel groups over the study period. The first bar plot shows the percentage of groups that experience a splinter; the second shows the percentage of groups that form alliances; and the final plot shows the percentage of rebels that engage in interrebel fighting.

Figure 4.2 shows the distribution of the dependent variables during the period of study. Over 12.5 percent of observations ($N = 131$) fight, while 23.6 percent of rebel groups ($N = 61$) fight at least once in this period. A smaller percentage of yearly-rebel observations are coded as alliances (11.4 percent, $N = 120$), which means

⁷Unlike Akcinaroglu (2012), this analysis does not differentiate between formal or informal alliances.

that 17.4 percent of rebel groups ($N = 45$) form at least one alliance in this period. The relatively less common behaviour is splintering: 6.6 percent ($N = 67$) of observations experience a splinter.

Independent variable

The key independent variables are different forms of external state support, which are coded in the same way as in Chapter III: fungible support is coded as present if a rebel group received materials, weapons, or funding; and nonfungible support is coded as present if it received territory, joint operations, or troops. Over 20.9 percent of observations ($N = 220$) are coded as receiving fungible support, while 18.4 percent ($N = 194$) of rebel groups are coded as receiving nonfungible support in at least one year. Rebel groups cannot be coded as having received both fungible and nonfungible support. When this is the case, they are coded as receiving nonfungible support. In the analysis, groups that receive different forms of support are only compared to similar groups in similar conflicts that did not receive any support. It is likely that the amount and quality of support will be important in shaping splintering, fighting, and allying. This is especially true in cases where rebels receive both forms of support. For instance, there may be cases where rebels receive tonnes of weaponry and a limited number of foreign troops. This is a limitation of the large- N approach. Due to the covert nature of external support in civil wars, a qualitative assessment of external support is only possible through in-depth case studies as part of a nested research strategy. For example, in the cross-case comparison of the Libyan and Syrian civil wars conducted in Chapter IV, I show that while competitive dynamics were apparent when the National Transitional Council (NTC), the National Libyan Army (LNA), and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) received both forms of support, they were overcome in part due to the cooperative environment fostered by nonfungible support from NATO forces, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey, respectfully.

Pre-treatment variables for matching

The aim of the pre-treatment variables is to create two groups of rebels which are similar in all theoretically relevant aspects except in the key independent variables. Below, I describe matching variables specific to the rebel groups and the conflict environment. Summary statistics for all pre-treatment matching variables are shown in Table 4.1. Time variant characteristics are lagged by one year so as to not capture post-treatment effects.

Table 4.1: Summary statistics for matching variables.

Variable	Mean	SD
Ethnic	0.54	0.50
Ideology	0.82	0.38
Strong rebels	0.09	0.29
Loot	0.91	0.29
Ceasefires	0.06	0.24
Battle-related deaths	607.53	1,675.69
Real GDP	471,052.62	1,322,019.49
Num. Rebels	2.44	1.81

Rebel group characteristics

Existing work points to several rebel group characteristics that shape interrebel behaviour: strength, ideology, and ethnicity.

Rebel strength: Rebel strength is likely to be endogenous to certain forms of external support, and therefore controlling for rebel strength in a standard regression analysis is likely to mask the correlations between support and rebel fighting or alliance making. I use the indicator of rebel strength (*rebstrength*) from the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2013). I code a binary

variable if the NSA codebook lists the rebels as “strong” in terms of their ability to fight conventional wars against government forces.

Ideology: Gade, Hafez, & Gabbay (2019) and Gade, Gabbay, Hafez, & Kelly (2019) find that ideologically distant groups have a higher propensity for interrebel fighting while ideologically similar groups are more likely to form alliances, at least in the context of the civil war in Syria. They find no relationship between external support and rebel infighting in Syria. However, rebel groups might change or adopt ideologies to attract foreign support from states (Huang, 2016; Jones & Mattiacci, 2019). Indeed, it is not uncommon for rebel leaders to manipulate ideological and ethnic divides for strategic reasons (Christia, 2012; Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010). For example, Wilhelmsen (2004) argues that Chechen warlords tapped into the resources offered by Islamic actors and organisations in the Middle East and Asia, which explains why Wahhabism was adopted in Chechnya. These dynamics were clearly at play in Libya and Syria studied in Chapter VI, where groups became increasingly Islamist to attract support from Qatar. To account for this, I control for whether rebel groups are founded around a specific ideology (*ideological foundation*) from the FORGE dataset (Braithwaite & Cunningham, 2020). Coding whether rebel groups were motivated by an ideology at the point of their foundation mitigates the potential of measuring a post-treatment effect (Acharya, Blackwell, & Sen, 2016; Rosenbaum, 1984), although it remains imperfect as rebel groups may attempt to attract external support from before the outset of conflict (Kaufman, 1996).

Ethnicity: Finally, common ethnicity is shown to affect interrebel dynamics, although its exact role is debated. Shared ethnicity might facilitate cooperation due to shared values, but Bloom (2004) shows that groups with shared ethnicity may also compete in a process of outbidding to attract resources and recruits from shared sources. To account for this, I match on whether rebel groups are explicitly founded

around an ethnic identity using the *ethnic foundation* variable from the FORGE dataset.

Conflict environment

Previous work shows competition between rebel groups is also shaped by state characteristics and behaviour, as well as important conflict characteristics: state strength, lootable resources, battle-intensity, negotiations, and the number of other rebel groups.

State strength: As noted previously, Fjelde & Nilsson (2012, p. 613) find that rebels fighting a weak state will be more concerned about their relative position vis-à-vis other groups. As a measure of state capacity, I include the *real GDP* of the state that the rebel groups are fighting. The expectation is that rebels are more likely to form alliances when fighting strong governments as a way to aggregate their fighting capabilities and improve their chances of survival and victory, while infighting is more likely against weak governments as rebels jostle for a better bargaining position as part of a dual contest (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012).

Lootable resources: P. Collier & Hoeffler (2004) emphasise the lootability and rebel financing capability of natural resources. Research by Ross (2006; 2004) and LeBillon (2008, 2010) support this finding, while Azam (2002) and Fjelde & Nilsson (2012) also argue that lootable natural resources can lead to fighting among rebels. To account for this, I match on whether rebels are fighting in a state where there are lootable natural resources, which are coded as present if there are diamonds (Gilmore, Gleditsch, Lujala, & Ketil Rod, 2005), gems (Paivi Lujala, 2009), or petroleum production in the state (Päivi Lujala, Ketil Rod, & Thieme, 2007). The expectation is that rebels in states with lootable resources are more likely to fight other rebels to control valuable resources.

Battle intensity: Periods of low conflict may increase the likelihood that rebel groups fight each other (Pischedda, 2020). I control for conflict intensity by drawing on yearly *battle-related deaths* data from the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset (Pettersson, Högladh, & Öberg, 2019). Battle-related deaths measures the number of deaths between the rebels and the target government that are directly related to combat. This is not necessarily a measure of success, as the data does not differentiate between rebel casualties or government casualties. Instead, it captures how actively rebels fight the target government. The expectation is that high battle-related deaths will decrease fighting between rebel groups. Importantly, this is a measure between the specific rebel group and the target government, and it does not capture deaths resulting from rebel infighting.

State negotiations: States employ negotiations to undermine the rebel movement (Clayton & Sticher, 2021; K. G. Cunningham, 2014). To control for this, I include a state-level covariate for the number of ceasefires drawing on the PA-X Dataset (C. Bell & Badanjak, 2019). I code it as one if there was at least one ceasefire, expecting that rebel groups are more likely to fight each other in years where the state is negotiating ceasefires and form alliances when they are not.

Number of rebels: I match on the total number of rebel groups, which is a count of the number of groups fighting the same government that exceed the 25 battle-related deaths with the government. Note that rebels can fight other groups that do not exceed 25 battle-related deaths, but that these would not be counted in this measure. Rebels are expected to fight and ally more if there are more rebels engaged in fighting the same government, while multiple rebel groups might attract more external support or different types of support. Matching rebel groups that are fighting in conflicts with a similar number of other groups ensures that matched groups are affected by comparable strategic interdependencies.

Coarsened exact matching

I match observations in cells generated by dividing continuous variables into discrete intervals. I employ the following set of pre-treatment variables:

1. Whether rebel groups are founded around an *ethnicity*;
2. Whether rebel groups are founded around an *ideology*;
3. Whether rebel groups are *strong* (compared to the government);
4. Whether there are *lootable* resources;
5. Whether there was a *ceasefire*;
6. *Battle-related deaths* (versus the government);
7. *Real GDP* of the state they are fighting;
8. The *number of rebel groups*.

CEM involves “pruning” observations that have no close matches on pre-treatment covariates in both the treated and control groups (S. Iacus, King, & Porro, 2009, p. 2). With exact matching, most rebel groups will not match due to small differences in continuous variables used to conduct the matching. For instance, theoretically insignificant changes in the GDP of a conflict state will prevent rebel groups similar on other dimensions from matching. CEM increases the number of matches by coarsening continuous variables so that matches remain theoretically justifiable. By theoretically justifiable, I refer to the trade-off between matching and model dependence. The maximum number of matches would be achieved by coarsening a continuous variable to include its full range, but there is no theoretical reason to do so. In this analysis, I coarsen battle-related deaths, Real GDP, and number of rebel groups.

I conduct two separate matching strategies. The first matches rebel groups that receive fungible support with those that receive no support. The expectation is that

groups are more likely to splinter (*hypothesis 3A*) and fight other groups (*hypothesis 4A*) if they receive fungible external support compared to similar groups in similar conflicts that receive no support. The second strategy matches rebel groups that receive nonfungible support with those that receive no support. The expectation is that groups are less likely to splinter (*hypothesis 3B*) and more likely to form alliances (*hypothesis 4B*) if they receive nonfungible support. I also test for the intuition underpinning the hypotheses. If groups are more likely to fight other groups when they receive fungible support, I also expect that they are less likely to form alliances. This is because relations between rebels are a spectrum, on one end they cooperate and on the other they compete. As the competitive environment among rebel groups increases, this logically decreases the propensity for groups to form alliances. The opposite is true for nonfungible support. I expect that groups are less likely to fight if they receive nonfungible support, as the conflict environment is more cooperative. While I do not explicitly state these hypotheses, I include these models as additional tests of the logic underpinning the argument.

Coarsening is conducted by automated matching. The number of matches is verified using the progressive coarsening procedure as described by S. Iacus, King, & Porro (2009), which indicates how many more observations can be recovered by increasing the coarsening level for each variable.⁸ Coarsened values and their cut points are shown in Figure 4.3. Observations can only be matched if they are in the same breaks, which are shown as vertical red lines. For example, rebels in a conflict with no or one other rebel group can only be matched with rebels in a conflict with one or no other rebel group. The coarsening only differs for *battle-related deaths* when matching nonfungible and no support, which is shown as blue lines in the middle pane. This indicates that more severe conflict are more likely to experience external interventions in the form of nonfungible support, potentially undermining the causal story behind

⁸Different cut-off points yield similar results.

findings by Lacina & Gleditsch (2005) and Lacina (2006) that interventions lead to more severe conflicts. *Real GDP* is coarsened such that groups active in states with the highest real GDP can be matched. This is important because the data is skewed towards rebels active in states with low GDP.

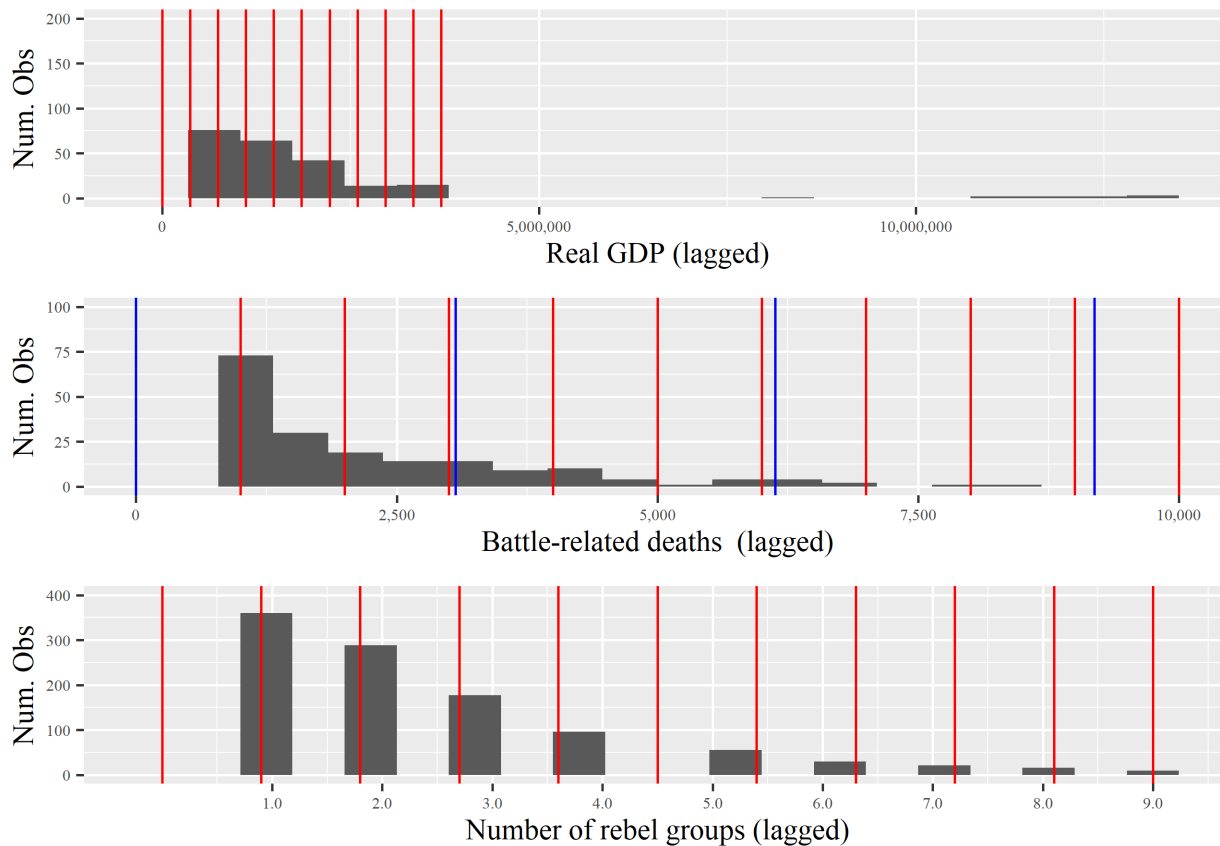


Figure 4.3: Each pane represents a variable that is coarsened as part of the matching strategy. Red lines show break points in coarsening and are overlaid on histograms.

Table 4.2 shows the number of matches. Most cases are matched when matching across fungible to no support (77 percent) and nonfungible to no support (80 percent). It is possible to coarsen the continuous variables further, but this could introduce model dependence in the analysis. The fact that not all observations can be matched underlines the importance of conducting a matching approach, as rebels and the environments in which they act are different on pre-treatment characteristics and

matching is therefore difficult.

Table 4.2: Breakdown of matches per CEM procedure.

Matching procedure		Control group	Support group
No support vs. fungible support	All	656	102
	Matched	351	79
	Unmatched	305	23
No support vs. nonfungible support	All	656	83
	Matched	364	66
	Unmatched	292	17

The first four columns of table 4.3 show imbalance before matching. The L measure is the difference between the multi-dimensional histogram of all pre-treatment covariates in the treated group and in the control group (S. M. Iacus, King, & Porro, 2011). Its interpretation is simple: higher values indicate imbalance. *Statistic* reports the difference in means for numeric values or chi-square difference for categorical variables. *Type* indicates whether values are numeric (*diff*) or categorical (*Chi2*). The table shows high levels of imbalance before matching of both forms of support, and that it is particularly high for the number of rebels and the presence of lootable resources. The high discrepancy for lootable resources is likely driven by interventions from external actors who aim to exploit the resources or have economic incentives to bring the war to a rapid close (Humphreys, 2005). However, as lootable resources and weak state capacity are often correlated (Mehlum, Moene, & Torvik, 2006; M. L. Ross, 1999) and linked to interrebel fighting (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012) and side-switching (Seymour, 2014), it is important that we compare the effect of fungible or nonfungible support on groups within similar environments. The last four columns of table 4.3 shows balance after matching. The L statistic has improved in all variables to the point that rounding to two decimal points reduces the L statistic to 0. With coarsening, it is possible that some imbalance remains in the matched data, but it can be accounted

for in the statistical model when testing the difference in means (S. M. Iacus, King, & Porro, 2012). In this case, there is little remaining imbalance.

Table 4.3: Balance before and after CEM.

Balance before matching				Balance after matching			
Matching variable	Statistic	Type	L	Matching variable	Statistic	Type	L
Fungible support vs no support							
Ideology	2.03	(Chi2)	0.06	Ideology	0.00	(Chi2)	0
Ethnicity	0.13	(Chi2)	0.02	Ethnicity	2.43	(Chi2)	0
Strong rebels	12.12	(Chi2)	0.10	Strong rebels	2.36	(Chi2)	0
Lootable resources	0.38	(Chi2)	0.02	Lootable resources	0.14	(Chi2)	0
Number of rebels	0.19	(diff)	0.17	Number of rebels	0.00	(diff)	0
Battle-related deaths	11.31	(diff)	0.00	Battle-related deaths	21.81	(diff)	0
Real GDP	398,225.33	(diff)	0.00	Real GDP	57,006.83	(diff)	0
Ceasefires	0.27	(Chi2)	0.02	Ceasefires	2.02	(Chi2)	0
Nonfungible support vs no support							
Ideology	0.17	(Chi2)	0.02	Ideology	0.13	(Chi2)	0
Ethnicity	2.05	(Chi2)	0.09	Ethnicity	6.22	(Chi2)	0
Strong rebels	0.00	(Chi2)	0.00	Strong rebels	206.52	(Chi2)	0
Lootable resources	13.78	(Chi2)	0.13	Lootable resources	18.71	(Chi2)	0
Number of rebels	0.35	(diff)	0.15	Number of rebels	0.00	(diff)	0
Battle-related deaths	-861.27	(diff)	0.00	Battle-related deaths	-66.16	(diff)	0
Real GDP	229,250.44	(diff)	0.00	Real GDP	10,365.88	(diff)	0
Ceasefires	0.03	(Chi2)	0.01	Ceasefires	0.44	(Chi2)	0

4.2 Results

Regression analysis

I first conduct a logit regression analysis. By replicating existing studies, I can compare the result and how they are different when accounting for selection effects. Table 4.4 shows the results of three logit regression models. I log both real GDP and battle-

related deaths to account for skewness in the data. I include robust standard errors to account for heteroskedasticity and cluster standard errors to the county-level in an attempt to account for strategic interdependencies between rebel groups active in the same geographic space. As expected, fungible support correlates with rebel infighting and is statistically significant (column 1). However, it also positively associated with allying (column 2), which undermines the intuition underpinning *hypothesis 4A*. Nonfungible support is in the expected direction—positive for allying (*hypothesis 3B*) and negative for infighting—but it does not reach traditional levels of statistical significance in either model. Finally, the signs for the key independent variables are not as expected for splintering (column 3), but neither effect is statistically different from zero.

Table 4.4: Results of logit regression.

	Infighting	Allying	Splinter
Main effects			
Fungible support	0.596*	1.124**	-0.403
	(0.254)	(0.278)	(0.388)
Nonfungible support	-0.106	0.103	0.078
	(0.262)	(0.284)	(0.367)
Controls			
Founded on ideology	0.488	-0.490	-0.585
	(0.308)	(0.319)	(0.374)
Strong rebels	0.648*	-0.232	-0.823
	(0.301)	(0.386)	(0.555)
Number of rebels	0.020	0.314**	0.414**
	(0.073)	(0.066)	(0.090)
Real GDP (logged)	-0.081	-0.050	-0.311**
	(0.080)	(0.083)	(0.113)
Battle-related deaths (logged)	0.153**	-0.013	0.040
	(0.051)	(0.055)	(0.072)
Ceasefire (lagged)	-1.063	0.185	-1.048
	(0.617)	(0.393)	(0.768)
Num.Obs.	957	957	942
AIC	712.8	629.4	454.0
BIC	761.4	678.1	502.5
Log.Lik.	-346.394	-304.717	-217.011

Robust standard errors are clustered at the country-level.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

	Fighting	Allying	Splintering	Fighting	Allying	Splintering
Fungible support	0.07 (0.04)	0.19*** (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)			
Nonfungible support				-0.03 (0.05)	0.11** (0.03)	-0.00 (0.04)
Intercept	0.13*** (0.02)	0.09*** (0.02)	0.10*** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.02)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
Num. obs.	430	430	430	430	430	430
Num. treated	79	79	79	66	66	66
Num. controls	351	351	351	364	364	364

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; \cdot $p < 0.1$

Table 4.5: Results of CEM.

CEM

Table 4.5 shows the results of the CEM matching. I estimate the difference in means of the dependent variable between the treatment groups and the control group. Column 1 shows the results for fighting. The coefficient for *fungible support* is positive and significant, albeit at just 90 percent confidence levels ($p < 0.10$). This result provides support for *hypothesis 4A*, that rebel groups are more likely to fight other rebels when they receive fungible support. The coefficient indicates that fungible support is associated with a 7 percentage point increase in the probability of fighting, an almost 50 percent marginal increase (13 to 20 percent). I conceptualise rebel cooperation and competition as a spectrum. It follows that what increases a group's likelihood to fight other groups will also decrease their likelihood to form alliances, on average. As a more general test that fungible support increases the competitive environment, column 2 shows the effect of fungible support on allying. The results go against the intuition underpinning *hypothesis 4B*. The coefficient for fungible support is positive and highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). On average, groups that receive fungible support are 19 percentage points more likely to form alliances than groups that do not receive fungible support. I return to this finding in the next section.

Columns 4 and 5 show the results for nonfungible support. The main results for *hypothesis 4B* are presented in column 5. There is a positive and statistically

significant ($p < 0.05$) relationship between nonfungible support and rebel alliance formation. This provides support for *hypothesis 4B*—rebel groups are more likely to form alliances with other rebels when they receive nonfungible support. On average, groups that receive nonfungible support are 11 percentage points more likely to form an alliance than similar groups that receive no support, a marginal increase of over 80 percent (6 to 11 percent). Note that the effect of nonfungible support on allying is not significant in a traditional logistic regression, shown in Table 4.4. As above, the intuition is that nonfungible support will decrease the likelihood that rebels will engage in interrebel fighting, as the competitive dynamics among groups is reduced. While the coefficient for nonfungible support is negative for rebel fighting, the effect is not statistically different from zero.

Finally, according to *hypotheses 3*, I expect groups that receive fungible support to be more likely to splinter (*A*) and groups that receive nonfungible support to be less likely to splinter (*B*). The coefficients shown in columns 3 and 6 are both negative, but neither is statistically significant. I focus on the lack of findings for *hypothesis 3* in the next section.

Puzzles

Null results for splintering

I hypothesise that different forms of support shape the competitive environment, which also affects groups' likelihood to splinter or remain cohesive. In the models, I find no support for *hypotheses 3A* or *3B*, that fungible and nonfungible support makes rebels more or less likely to splinter, respectively. There are methodological reasons for why this may be the case. First, there is no global dataset that effectively captures splintering of rebels at the group-level. Existing work relies on coding splinters based on groups that emerge from existing groups. For example, one can code splintering from the Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence (FORGE) Dataset

(Braithwaite & Cunningham, 2020). It contains two variables—whether a group was created from a splinter of an existing organisation (*preorgreb*) and the year it was founded (*foundyear*)—which taken together show when rebel groups that are coded by the UCDP splintered. However, this data, similar to Olson Lounsbury (2016), records successful splits only. The split must result in new and separate organisations which are subsequently active enough (more than 25 battle-related deaths in a year) to be included in UCDP datasets. No data exists on rebel coups, failed attempts to split, or splits that result in weak rebel groups. In light of this, I contend that the findings from existing work that uses similar data are specific to successful splinters only (Duursma & Fliervoet, 2021; Olson Lounsbury & Cook, 2011). In some cases, this work refers to successful splinters when discussing the findings. For example, Burch & Ochreiter (2020) refer to “viable” rebel splinters, although their theoretical argument is not explicitly about successful splinters. My theory does not specify rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to *successfully* splinter and create new organisations strong or active enough to be recorded in UCDP datasets. Therefore, existing data sources are not ideal to test my theoretical argument.

Although there may be some debate about what amounts to intergroup competition, it is more difficult to measure and code rebel coups or failed attempts of factions to break away due to the inherently secretive nature of rebel groups. Qualitative research methods are better suited to understand the “internal process of a group” (E. J. Wood, 2007, p. 127). Due to these limitations, I am not confident in the results for splintering in this chapter. In Chapter V, I conduct an actor-centric case study of the civil war in Northern Ireland (1968-1998) which allows me to delve into the internal competition that leads to splintering whether it results in a successful separate organisation or not. I provide evidence that fungible support allowed a faction of the Official Irish Republican Army (IRA) to break away and set up a new organisation, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). I also show that the Continuity IRA

broke away from the Provisional IRA, but did not declare its existence until almost six years later in order to avoid being attacked by its parent organisation. Despite the important role all organisations played in the Northern Irish conflict known as the Troubles (1968-1998), only the Provisional IRA and the Real IRA are coded in the UCDDP data. This is not a critique of existing datasets, but further justifies qualitative work for my project. Future statistical analyses of rebel group fragmentation should explicitly develop theories on what leads to successful splinters.

Fungible allying

In this chapter, I show that external support has heterogeneous effects on rebel dynamics. Nonfungible support is associated with more allying, while fungible support is associated with more fighting. Contrary to my expectations, fungible support is also associated with a greater propensity to ally. How can fungible support lead to both rebel fighting and rebel allying? The focus in this analysis is on how external support shapes the rebel group, but it is likely that the types of support provided shape the conflict environment as a whole. While a rebel group that receives fungible support may be attacked and more likely to fight other groups, it is also the case that it can exchange its newly acquired resources or share them in short-term alliances. In Chapter VI, I show that rebel group fragmentation is associated with rebel group fighting but also allying during the Syrian conflict. It is likely that certain types of support may lead to differing numbers of rebel groups to emerge (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2018), which then subsequently engage in splintering, fighting, and allying simultaneously (Christia, 2012; Seymour, 2014).

The analysis presented in this chapter is actor centred as it compares how similar actors behave in similar settings. To understand how fungible support shapes the setting itself, one must shift the analysis of conflicts as systems of armed actors (M. A. Kaplan, 1957). The actor-centric approach adopted by in this chapter is a

potential shortcoming, although this is evident only in light of these results. The results encourage us to think theoretically about how external interventions shape the conflict as a whole. Ultimately, they underscore the need to shift the analysis to a case-oriented work, thus further disaggregating temporal, spatial, and organisational boundaries. I conduct such an analysis of Libya (2011-2019) and Syria (2011-2019) in Chapter VI.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented a global analysis of interrebel dynamics. First, I outline important challenges in the study of how different forms of support shape interrebel dynamics. I note that strategic interactions among groups is emerging as an important methodological hurdle in the analysis of interrebel dynamics. In light of this, studies are increasingly employing statistical models that can account for network effects. However, I also outline what I argue is a more pertinent issue: selection bias. As shown in Chapter III, external support is not randomly assigned. It is likely that external states provide support in part due to group and conflict characteristics that are related to the outcome of interest. In this case, models that can account for strategic interdependencies will still struggle to account for selection bias.

To overcome the issue of selection bias, I conduct coarsened exact matching. I find some support for both *hypothesis 4A* and *4B*—rebels that receive fungible support are more likely to fight other rebels and groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely to form alliances. The key contribution of this analysis is that different types of support have heterogeneous effects on interrebel dynamics.

There are some limitations. I find no support for *hypothesis 3* that different forms of support are associated with different levels of splintering. I outline important methodological hurdles that indicate an alternative approach is necessary. Ultimately,

data on splintering is difficult to collect at a global level because it is difficult to observe rebel splits and coups unless they result in other militarily successful rebel groups. Any analysis of available data is either an analysis of successful splinters or an analysis that is affected by sampling bias.

Additionally, further analysis uncovers a puzzling finding for *hypothesis 4A* which my theoretical argument struggles to explain. The large-N analysis indicates that rebels receiving fungible support are more likely to fight other groups as expected, but they are also more likely to form alliances. While I control for the number of other active groups in a conflict, it is likely that the fungible support has an effect on the conflict environment as a whole which an actor-centric large-N analysis struggles to capture.

I propose that further qualitative work is necessary to resolve both puzzles. First, due to the methodological issues in collecting large-N data on rebel group splintering, I conduct a theory-testing case study of the conflict in Northern Ireland (1968-1998). Focusing on the internal processes of rebel groups, process tracing shows how fungible support can be accumulated by factions that lead to splintering. In order to understand the mechanisms through which different forms of support can lead to different outcomes at a system-level, I conduct a comparative case study of the Libyan (2011-2019) and Syrian (2011-2019) conflicts.

Chapter 5

The Northern Irish Conflict (1968-1998)

On Halloween night 1992, members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) launched an attack against the Irish People's Liberation Organization (IPLO). Members of the dominant Republican group shot the leader of the IPLO, before entering their pubs, social clubs, and homes, dragging members into the streets, and shooting them in attacks known colloquially as "kneecappings." Others were told to leave Northern Ireland or face death. The event became known as the 'Night of the Long Knives.' While ostensibly fighting on the same side and with shared political ambitions of uniting the island of Ireland, relations among and within rebel groups during the Northern Irish conflict known as 'the Troubles' were tense and often surged to levels of violence that one would expect between enemies. Like many civil wars, the conflict did not occur in an international vacuum. While rarely considered a proxy or internationalised conflict, Libyan military support to the Provisional IRA made it one of the best equipped terrorist organisations in the world and was pivotal in forcing the UK government to negotiate a peace agreement in 1998. Yet, as I will show, fungible external support caused tensions among and within rebel groups that

at times undermined the Republican movement as a whole.

External state support can foster unity or breed rivalries. In this chapter, I focus on how fungible support such as money or weapons shapes relations within and between groups. I argue that fungible external support induces competition within rebel groups because factions can accumulate resources, which creates intragroup tensions, and can ultimately lead to splintering. The ability of rebel factions to obtain important resources allows them to challenge rebel leaders and break away or attempt a rebel coup. Fungible support also generates competition between groups that can lead to rebel infighting. Why would a rebel group fight other rebels when they share a common, often much stronger, enemy? There are two logics underpinning this argument. First, external support shifts the balance of power among groups, leading to “wars of position” (Krause, 2017, p. 25) as groups attempt to increase their relative power as part of a “dual contest” (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012). Indeed, while rebel groups are all fighting the state, they are also competing with one another for their say on the posture of the post-conflict state. Key to securing their goals is control over important military materials. This logic is not new and underpins several theories of interrebel fighting. Second, fighting also increases rebels’ absolute power. Fungible support is a private good, and so rebels fight to capture important resources, which increases the potential benefits of fighting. From this discussion in Chapter II, I develop two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: (A) rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to splinter; and (B) rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are less likely to splinter.

Hypothesis 4: (A) rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to fight other rebels; and (B) rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely to form alliances with other rebels.

To explain how external support can lead to competition within and between rebel

groups, I make a two-step argument. First, I argue that relatively weak states—both in terms of military strength but also alliance strength—are more likely to provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting international rivals, while stronger states are more likely to provide nonfungible support. In Chapter III, I tested this argument by conducting a temporal network analysis of large-N data. In Chapter IV, I focused on the second step of the theory, namely that different forms of support have heterogeneous effects on rebel dynamics focusing on their propensity to fight, ally, and splinter. I found rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to fight and form alliances, while groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely to form alliances. My large-N analysis of how external support shapes splintering was inconclusive. I conclude that the large-N analysis of processes internal to rebel groups is affected by several methodological issues, which I describe further below.

This chapter is designed to identify the causal mechanisms theorised in Chapter II and underpinning the findings of the large-N analyses conducted in Chapter III and Chapter IV. Second, I test *hypotheses 3A*, that fungible support causes rebel groups to splinter, and *hypotheses 4A*, that fungible support causes rebel groups to fight. *Hypotheses 3B* and *4B* both stipulate that nonfungible support has an opposite effect, namely that it makes rebel splintering less likely and increases rebel alliance-making. I will not test these hypotheses in this chapter because nonfungible support was not provided to armed actors in this case. The Northern Irish case was selected to focus on the effect of fungible support and to leverage its provision over time, enabling me to trace causal processes. The causal mechanisms underpinning the effects of nonfungible support will be explored in Chapter VI.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I outline the research design. Second, I explore which states provided support and why they did so. This is important because I identify periods of high levels of fungible external support. Third, I conduct process tracing to test how this support affected relations within and among rebel groups.

I conclude with a discussion on potential scope conditions of the argument and the motivation to conduct a within- and cross-case analysis of the Libyan (2011-2019) and Syrian (2011-2019) conflicts.

5.1 Research design

This case study is part of a nested research design. In Chapter IV, I conducted large-N analysis in which I show that there is a statistically significant relationship between the forms of support that rebels receive and their propensity to ally and fight with one another. The first step is crucial, as it ensures the generalisability of the theoretical argument, while the subsequent case studies can overcome potential biases, clarify spurious findings, and provide greater causal inference (Lieberman, 2005). The case study is specifically designed to test *hypothesis 3A*—rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to splinter—because the study of external support and intra-group dynamics is prone to two methodological issues.

First, due to its covert nature, external support is often hard to detect and, even when detected, it is difficult to find the source (Forsythe, 1992; G. Hughes, 2012). Therefore, datasets used to conduct the large-N analysis may miss some cases of fungible support. This is evident with support from the Soviet Union to armed groups in Northern Ireland which remains shrouded in mystery. It is also clear in other cases. For example, Saudi Arabia provided the Southern forces with Soviet-built fighter-bombers during the three-month civil war broke out in Yemen in 1994 in an attempt to see Yemeni President Salih “punished, weakened and possibly overthrown” (Al-Suwaidi & Hudson, 1995, p. 82 & 84). Certain cases are not included in large-N datasets. Second, rebel groups rarely keep records due to security concerns, and qualitative methods are necessary to understand the “internal process of a group” (E. J. Wood, 2009, p. 127). Taken together, the best strategy to test *hypothesis 3A* and

identify the causal mechanisms underpinning the findings of the large-N analysis is to conduct case-based research drawing on various data sources. Indeed, in this chapter I find unique and reliable sources on the origin and extent of external support to the Provisional IRA from Libya.

While the statistical analysis conducted in Chapter IV focused on identifying the effect of different forms of support on rebel dynamics, the case studies focus instead on the causal mechanisms underpinning these effects. To identify them, I trace the possible causes and observed outcomes between the key independent variable, fungible external support, and the dependent variables, rebel splintering and infighting (George & Bennett, 2005). To test the logic of the theoretical argument, I derive observable implications as part of a theory testing case study.

My theoretical argument suggests several observable implications for *hypothesis 3A*, which stipulates that rebels are more likely to splinter when they receive fungible support. First, if fungible support allows rebel factions to challenge rebel leaders, I expect that factions will attempt to accumulate resources from external states if they are dissatisfied with the direction or tactics of the group. Second, knowing that factions may accumulate resources to challenge their leadership, the group's leadership or dominant faction will attempt to prevent factions from accumulating military resources from external states and pre-empt a rebel coup. In some instances, this will result in actions that aim to remove the military resources from the factions. If this is not possible, the rebel leadership may expel factions or members of certain factions in order to stop the accumulation of external support. Clearly, the sequencing of external support is crucial in evaluating these implications. I expect that internal tensions over the distribution of resources are particularly heightened when groups receive fungible support.

There are several observable implications of *hypothesis 4A*, which stipulates that rebels are more likely to fight other groups when they receive fungible support. First,

if the influx of weapons increases competition between rebels, I expect that rebel groups will compete over these important resources. This will manifest in the form of feuds over control of weapons and money. Feuding is the result of potentially several causal paths, but evidence in support of the observable implication will be that control of weapons and money is a key feature of rebel fighting. Groups will fight to improve their relative power but also as an attempt to gain control of weapons and improve their absolute power. The observable implications of my theoretical argument will be that groups make an effort to gain control of weapons and money, and that these important materials are motivations to fight in the first instance.

The observable implications are summarised in Table 5.1. I include alternative explanations but do not claim that these explanations are incorrect. Case studies are particularly apt at exploring many aspects of complex causality. Rebel competition is the result of several potential casual paths, combinations, and sequences—defined as equifinality (George & Bennett, 2005; Ragin, 1987). There are periods in which rebel competition may be the result of pre-existing social networks (Staniland, 2014), outbidding co-ethnic groups (Bloom, 2004; Horowitz, 2000; Pearlman & Cunningham, 2012), deals with the government (K. G. Cunningham, 2011), or lulls in fighting (Pischedda, 2020). George & Bennett (2005) and Brady & Collier (2010) argue that process tracing can be valuable in weighing theories against one another. I show that existing explanations alone cannot explain the temporal variation in splintering and rebel infighting observed in the Northern Ireland case, whereas competition and control over important military resources can.

5.2 Conflict background

Although conflict in Northern Ireland has long roots, the most recent and longest episode of violence known as ‘the Troubles’¹ started in 1968. Inspired by the civil

¹Henceforth, ‘the conflict.’

Table 5.1: Observable implications.

Hypothesis	Proposition	Observable implications that would support the general implication:	Alternative explanations
3A	Rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to splinter.	Rebel factions seek to control external support before splintering; rebel leaders attempt to repress factions that attempt to control external support; internal tensions increase over the distribution of resources after receiving support.	Splits are caused by factions outbidding over support from a particular ethnic group; splits are caused by pre-war characteristics of the rebel group; splits are caused by counterinsurgency tactics of the target government; splits are less likely in periods of increased fighting with the target government.
4A	Rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to fight other rebels.	Recipient groups will use support to eliminate rivals; rival rebel groups will fight recipient groups for control of support.	Rebels fight over natural resources and territory; rebels fight when one group enters peace negotiations with the target government; rebels fight more in periods of low fighting with the government; rebels fight less in periods of high fighting with the government.

rights movement in the US, the Northern Irish civil rights movement emerged in 1964 and sought to end the discrimination of Catholics, especially in public service provision and political institutions (Lebow, 1976). The Unionist community, predominantly Protestant, feared that the provision of equal rights and greater political representation to the Catholic minority would undermine its dominant economic and political position while promoting Irish nationalism and the eventual re-unification with the Republic of Ireland to the south.² Violence broke out when civil right marches were broken up by the police and counter marches, the most famous of these was the Civil Rights March in Derry on 5th October 1968.³ Ethnic rioting broke out in Derry and quickly spread across Northern Ireland and its capital city Belfast. Violence between the Protestant and Catholic communities in urban areas led to the re-emergence of paramilitary groups on both sides: Republican paramilitary groups that aimed to establish a 32-county United Ireland and Loyalist paramilitary groups that aimed to maintain the union between Northern Ireland and the UK. The Westminster government deployed the British Army in August 1969. The conflict lasted 30 years and cost the lives of 3,637 people (McKittrick, 2001). It ended in 1998 when the main parties involved in

²Henceforth, ‘Ireland’ and ‘the South.’ I refer to Northern Ireland as ‘Northern Ireland’ and ‘the North.’

³Members of the Nationalist community refer to ‘Derry,’ while members fo the Unionist community refer to ‘Londonderry.’ For simplicity, I refer to ‘Derry.’

the conflict signed the Belfast Agreement, also known as the Good Friday Agreement.



Figure 5.1: Map of Northern Ireland with counties, main towns, and two cities (Belfast and Derry) indicated. Border counties south of the border are also indicated.

During this 30-year period, the Soviet Union and Libya provided fungible support to different Republican groups, while members of the Irish government promised support at important times. Although the Republican movement was more cohesive than its Loyalist counterpart, the IRA underwent several splits and infighting occurred at different periods between groups.⁴ The first split occurred in 1970, when the IRA splintered into the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA. Both groups continued to exist until the end of the conflict. The Provisional IRA later emerged as the most powerful Republican group and became signatories of the Good Friday Agreement.

⁴Irish poet and novelist Brendan Behan famously remarked that the first item on the agenda of any new Irish organisation was the split. Sanders (2011) adds that the second item must be the feud.

The Official IRA split again in 1974, leading to the formation of the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). The INLA suffered its own split in 1986 when a faction called the Irish People’s Liberation Organisation (IPLO) broke away. In the same year, a faction broke away from the Provisional IRA to form the Continuity IRA. In 1997, the Real IRA broke away from the Provisional IRA. In all, there were five major splits in Republican movement that can be traced back to the IRA split in 1970. The groups, the date they emerge, and their end (where applicable) during the conflict is shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Rebel groups and their parent groups during the Northern Irish conflict. End years are shown only for groups that ended during the conflict.

Parent Group	Group	Start	End
Irish Republican Army (IRA)		1968	1970
Official IRA	Irish Republican Army (IRA)	1970	-
Provisional IRA	Irish Republican Army (IRA)	1970	-
Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)	Official IRA	1974	-
Continuity IRA	Provisional IRA	1986	-
Irish People’s Liberation Organisation (IPLO)	Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)	1986	1992
Real IRA	Provisional IRA	1997	-

5.3 External state support

This section will outline external state support during the conflict. I focus on why, how, and what support was provided by external states to the rebel groups. This analysis is important in first identifying the key independent variable for the subsequent analysis. Additionally, I explore the conditions under which external support was provided to explore the mechanisms underpinning the findings of the large-N analysis conducted in Chapter III, in which I find that relatively weak states are more likely to provide

fungible support to rebels. Key to understanding why states provide different forms of support is their expectation of being punished by the target state, in this case the UK and its allies. In this case, it is evident that the decision to provide support from both states is not related to rebel dynamics, which overcomes potential endogeneity concerns.

Ireland

The Republic of Ireland did not actively support the IRA or other Republican groups for two reasons. First, despite shared cultural and religious ties, Republican groups posed a significant security threat to the Irish government. In 1969 the IRA called on the “Free State” south of the border to intervene in the North, framing it as a mission to save “our people” (Hanley & Millar, 2010, p. 132). The term “Free State” hails from the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, when Michael Collins agreed to the partition of Ireland and for the South to become a Free State that remained a dominion of the British Empire and member of the Commonwealth. The treaty led to the Irish Civil War, where the anti-treaty IRA led by Eamon de Valera fought the newly formed and pro-treaty Irish Army led by Michael Collins. The term “Free State” is used to undermine the legitimacy and republican credentials of the Republic of Ireland. Republican groups were most active in the North of Ireland during the conflict, but they were structured as whole-island entities in keeping with their political aspirations. This enmity between Republican groups and the Irish government meant that the latter was reluctant to provide fungible support. There is evidence that Taoiseach⁵ Jack Lynch and other ministers met delegations from the IRA demanding weapons and supplies in 1970. However, any plans to support the IRA were quashed later that year when two ministers were sacked and accused of arms smuggling. The ministers were put on trial in a political scandal that became known as the Arms Crisis. During

⁵Taoiseach is the head of the Irish Government, equivalent to the role of Prime Minister in the UK.

the trial it emerged that Captain Kelly, a former Irish Army Intelligence officer, told the IRA leadership in 1969 that the Irish government was willing to provide them with arms and financial support as long as the support would not be used south of the border (Hanley & Millar, 2010, p. 138). Although the trial shows that elements of the government wanted to arm the IRA, ultimately it shows that the risk of providing support were too great. The Irish government publicly suppressed these attempts in a signal aimed at its own government but also the UK, describing the actions of Captain Kelly as an “embarrassment.”⁶ Most evidence indicates that the Irish government did not provide fungible support to the IRA, although money was made available to victims of 1969 attacks, which the IRA may have diverted to buy weapons, but even this support ended once the Provisional IRA emerged and declared a war against Britain (English, 2003, p. 119).

Second, the state may have been able to gain greater control over the Republican groups by providing nonfungible support, but supporting groups that were directly targeting the UK was too risky. In February 1970, the Irish Military Chief of Staff was told “to prepare and train the Army for incursions into Northern Ireland” if and when such a course was judged necessary, but the threat of military retaliation by the UK made this a “military unsound” option (English, 2003, p. 118). Instead, non-state support from Ireland was especially important along the border, although it did amount to voluntary state support. The borderlands became an important place to hide weapons and other military equipment in so-called “dumps” or “caches.” These rural areas were less secured by the state than in the North and there were fewer Unionist supporters who might inform state forces of their location (J. B. Bell, 2000, p. 137). Republican groups often retreated south of the border to escape, rest, and resupply. Like in Algeria, El Salvador, Lebanon, and Sudan, armed groups reaped

⁶Note for Minister for External Affairs, Dr Patrick Hillery, in relation to Dáil questions regarding Irish Army Intelligence Officers in Northern Ireland", 26 May 1970, The National Archives of Ireland (NAI).

the benefits of sanctuary, diaspora funding, and recruitment across the border in Ireland (Staniland, 2005, p. 22). As the conflict progressed, Ireland actively sought to repress Republican groups and increased security cooperation with the UK. Even as early as 1970 harsh security policies (including internment) were being considered by the Irish government (Hanley, 2018). Clearly, the risks of retaliation from the UK were too high for nonfungible support to be considered. As I describe later, the Arms Crisis played an important role in the first IRA split in 1970 but most likely did not materialise into support. This provides some support for *hypothesis 1B* because the UK was simply too powerful compared to Ireland, and the risks of providing support were too great. However, *hypothesis 1A* states that weaker states are more likely to provide fungible support. This was not a viable option for the Irish state due to its pre-existing relationship with Republican groups because it could not be certain that the weapons would not eventually be used to target Irish state forces.

The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union quickly emerged as a potential source of support for the IRA. The late 1960s and 1970s were the peak of the Cold War. Indeed, the UK formed a crucial part of the Western Bloc, the informal alliance of states headed by the US in their rivalry against the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union provided support to the IRA in the 1920s, but by 1969 ties between the IRA and the Soviet Union were almost non-existent. During the 1960s, the South-based leadership of the IRA was increasingly engaged in left-wing politics and seeking to form alliances with socialist and communist parties across Ireland (Hanley & Millar, 2010). Although this created tensions within the IRA, it is thanks to this network that the IRA Chief of Staff Cathal Goulding reached out to the Soviet Union for military support. In 1969 General Secretary of the Irish Communist Party Michael O’Riordan forwarded Goulding’s request to Yuri Andropov,

Chairman of the KGB.⁷ The request was for “2,000 assault rifles (7.62 mm) and 500 rounds of ammunition for each; 150 hand-held machine guns (9mm) and 1,000 rounds of ammunition for each” (Andrew, 2000, p. 377; Yeltsin, 1994, p. 311).⁸ At this time, the Soviet Union was reluctant to risk actions that directly targeted its rivals in the West, favouring conflict theatres in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but it was willing to undermine the UK if the risks were low (Andrew, 2000, p. 384). This reluctance was clear when it was first approached by the IRA. According to Yeltsin, the “years pass and we’re still trying to decide how to send the damned weapons to the Irish, because we really don’t feel like it” (Yeltsin, 1994, p. 301). Andropov insisted that if the Soviet Union were to supply weapons, the “secret of their source of supply” had to be preserved (Hanley & Millar, 2010, p. 141). Andropov, not certain that the operation would not be discovered by British authorities and reluctant to risk supporting a group directly targeting the UK, stalled the request for two years during which, in Yeltsin’s words (1994, p. 309), the IRA was “begging” for weapons “year in and year out.”

In 1971, O’Riordan told Andropov that the fact that “there has not been the slightest leak of information for two and a half years proves, in my opinion, a high level of responsibility with regard to keeping a secret” (Andrew, 2000, p. 385). Reassured that they would not be discovered by the UK secret services, Andropov eventually agreed to “Plan for the Operation of a Shipment of Weapons to the Irish Friends” (codename SPLASH) which transported weapons to what had by then become the Official IRA. The weapons were dropped by a Soviet intelligence gathering vessel onto a sandbank outside Irish national waters, where they were collected by an Irish fishing trawler and handed over to Seamus Costello, the Official IRA’s Director of Operations. The first package arrived in 1972 containing two machine-guns, 70 Automatic rifles,

⁷Andropov later became Chairman of the Communist Party after the death of Brezhnev in 1982.

⁸In his memoirs, Yeltsin claims that there is no evidence that the Soviet ever supplied the Official IRA with weapons. However, intelligence files smuggled out of Russia by former spy Vasili Mitrokhin in the 1990s show that they most likely did.

ten Walther pistol, and 41,600 cartridges, all of non-Soviet origin (Andrew, 2000, p. 285; Yeltsin, 1994, p. 313). This delivery paled in comparison to the amount requested in 1969. Although an important international rival, the Soviet Union provided only limited fungible support from 1972. It did so by taking the highest precautions. Not only did it supply only non-Soviet weapons through an innovative channel, it took at least two years to screen the Official IRA in order to ensure that it could be trusted not to reveal its source. These actions ensured that the risk of discovery and retaliation by the UK and its powerful allies was minimal. Soviet support shows the mechanisms underpinning *hypothesis 2A* and *2B*. The risks of conflict escalation between the Soviet Union and the UK—but also its allies—were simply too high. To achieve limited foreign policy objectives, the Soviet Union provided fungible support. It also shows the importance of potential network effects. The Soviet Union was active in other regions of the world and therefore reluctant to provide nonfungible support to Republican groups in Northern Ireland, despite their communist credentials.

Libya

Libyan support to the Provisional IRA is undisputed. Gaddafi publicly claimed that his regime was supporting the IRA on several occasions. Two events ensured that the scale of this support would become widely known: the interception of the *Claudia* in 1973 and the *Eksund* in 1987. The *Claudia* was a ship transporting five tonnes of weaponry when it was arrested by the Irish Naval service in March 1973, including 1,000 rifles and anti-tank guns, 100 cases of landmines, 5,000lbs of explosives, and 500 hand-grenades (English, 2003, p. 161; Geldard, 1988, p. 73).⁹ It was the last of four shipments conducted over 15 months. The Libyan link subsequently became

⁹The Irish Navy had been tipped off by the UK. This event signalled to Republican groups that the Irish government would cooperate with state forces north of the border and in the UK. It was indicative of the Irish government's "no-nonsense" approach to extremists." Source: "Analysis by press agency Markpress of the significance of the arrest of the MV *Claudia* in Irish territorial waters with a cargo of arms destined for the Irish Republican Army," 13 March 1973, The National Archives of Ireland (NAI).

dormant until 1984. During this time Gaddafi claimed to only provide “moral and political support” (Bearman, 1986, p. 116).¹⁰ In 1987 the French authorities boarded the Eksund, a ship carrying an unprecedented 150 tonnes of arms and ammunition.

Unlike the Soviet Union, Libya provided fungible support to force the UK into giving concessions. This rivalry was linked to regional and global geopolitics. Regionally, Libya and Israel were rivals in the early 1970s as both states vied for regional influence.¹¹ In February 1973, a Libyan civilian airliner was shot down by the Israeli air force after it entered the airspace over the occupied Sinai Peninsula. Many in Libya saw this as an act of revenge for the Black September attacks in 1970. Popular support for Libya’s actions against Israel surged, which ultimately gave the regime *carte-blanche* domestically to target Israel and its allies (Wright, 2012, p. 114). The UK was seen as a supporter of Israel, and thus acts against the UK were justified. Furthermore, Libya held the UK responsible for the dispersion of Palestinian people and the handing over to Iran of three islands in the Arabian Gulf (Bianco & Lyle, 1975, p. 154).¹² The rivalry alone does not explain the type of support provided by the Libyan regime or its temporal variation. It does, however, draw attention to the triadic nature of international rivalries: Libya’s rivalry against Israel justified its actions targeting the UK, an ally of Israel.

For Libya, supporting the Provisional IRA was also a way to remain relevant and achieve short-term concessions from the UK. The Libyan Kingdom (1951-1969) initially “lived off its geography” as an important country for US and UK military

¹⁰There are claims that the Provisional IRA received seven tonnes of arms from Libya from 1977 to 1978, including RPG5s and RPG7s. Apparently the rocket launchers could not be used because members of the Provisional IRA could not read the Russians manuals (Geldard, 1988, p. 74).

¹¹In 1975 Israel was heavily involved in building up the military capacity of several African states. This was seen as a strategy of “encirclement” by the Libyan regime, which put in place an oil embargo on states cooperating with Israel and led 29 states to break off ties with Israel to lift the embargo. This episode shows that the rivalry between the two states was not merely anti-Zionist rhetoric, it was also geopolitical (Wright, 2012, p. 108).

¹²Historical perceptions of the misdeeds of western colonial powers were particularly aimed at the UK due to their colonial involvement in Libya. Indeed, when the UK and the US evacuated their military bases in 1970, the Libyan regime hailed it as a great victory over “Western imperialism” (Wright, 2012, p. 199).

bases, especially after the evacuation of the Suez Canal started in 1954 (Wright, 2012, p. 183). As its strategic importance faded, Libya's ability to extract concessions from Western powers shifted to its oil exports. Indeed, by 1969 Libya had become the world's 6th largest producer of oil and the 4th largest exporter (Wright, 2012, p. 177). The reliance of the US and the UK on Libyan oil ensured disposable income for the Gaddafi regime and forced them to the negotiating table. Although this was true in the 1970s, this was no longer the case in the 1980s after the UK and the US took active steps to diversify their sources of oil.¹³ According Bruce St John (1987, p. 38), promising support to terrorist groups in the Philippines, the UK, Israel, and the US enhanced the international status of an otherwise not very important state. As the conflict in Northern Ireland progressed, support to the Provisional IRA was increasingly employed as a risky strategy to coerce rival states and their allies. This is especially evident in how support to the Provisional IRA was used as a bargaining chip against the UK in the 1980s.

During the 1980s, Libya increasingly relied on supporting the Provisional IRA because the UK no longer depended on its oil. In 1982, Libya claimed that it had frozen relations with the IRA and stopped all active support, even claiming that the regime had refused to meet members of the IRA.¹⁴ However, in public addresses and private correspondences between Libyan and British officials, the Libyan regime threatened to reverse their hands-off policy if the British government did not meet several demands. For example, in June 1980, Libyan Foreign Minister Musa Kasa announced:

The revolutionary committees have decided last night to kill two more people in the United Kingdom. I approve of this... We are now seriously

¹³The UK developed production in the North Sea, while the US found alternatives in West Africa, Mexico, and Alaska (Wright, 2012, p. 210).

¹⁴"Libya and the Irish Republican Army (IRA): discussions on the Libyan position between Northern Ireland Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials," 1 Jan 1977 – 31 December 1982, The National Archives, London, UK.

thinking of cooperating with the IRA if the British Government continues to support those Libyans who are hiding here (The Times, 1980).

Demands included stopping the BBC from broadcasting interviews of Libyan dissidents critical of the regime and the withdrawal of protection to Libyan dissidents in the UK. If they were not met, the Libyan government threatened to actively support the IRA, allow them to open a branch in Libya, to train and recruit in Libya, and to give the IRA any “other help they might want.”¹⁵ British officials in Tripoli claimed that Libya could carry out such threats. Coercive diplomacy was taking place in the context of rapidly deteriorating Anglo-Libyan relations. In 1984, Britain severed diplomatic ties with Libya after the killing of WPC Fletcher by staff at the Libyan embassy which resulted in an eleven-day siege of the building (Geldard, 1988, p. 74). A year later, Gaddafi told the General People’s Congress that Libya had the right to combat dissidents in and outside of Libya, comparing these groups to the Red Army Faction, the Red Brigades, and the IRA. He once more threatened to further back these groups if European governments continued to protect Libyan dissidents (Bruce St John, 1987, p. 86). Libya provided greater support to the Provisional IRA as part of a larger campaign which included state sponsored terrorist attacks such as the Rome and Vienna airport attacks in 1985, the West Berlin dance hall attacks in 1986, and the Lockerbie bombing in 1988.

The Provisional IRA benefited from this context. Libya made little attempt to screen the rebels. In June 1972 the Provisional IRA were initially caught off-guard by a Libyan public statement in which it promised weapons and support to the group, as they had received no previous intimation of support (Geldard, 1988, p. 72).¹⁶ Two

¹⁵“Libya and the Irish Republican Army (IRA): discussions on the Libyan position between Northern Ireland Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials,” 1 Jan 1977 – 31 December 1982, The National Archives, London, UK.

¹⁶The statement read: “We support the revolutionaries of Ireland, who oppose Britain and are motivated by nationalism and religion. The Libyan Arab Republic has stood by the revolutionaries of Ireland. It maintains strong links with the Irish revolutionaries. There are arms and there is support for the revolutionaries of Ireland... We decided to move to the offensive. We have decided to fight

months later, two members of the IRA Army Council, Joe Cahill and Quartermaster General Denis McInerney, met with Libyan officials in Warsaw (Moloney, 2007, p. 9).¹⁷ The regime did not care who received their support. More generally, it also displayed a lack of knowledge of the conflict. Gaddafi had a relatively simple outlook on most revolutions. For Gaddafi, there was “violence of the oppressed and there was violence of the oppressor” (Bearman, 1986, p. 114), a simple logic that he applied to the Northern Irish context ignoring the fact that there was majority Protestant population that did not consider itself to be oppressed or oppressor. According to Wright (2012, p. 212) “there seems to have been little understanding in Tripoli of the place, role, or interests of Ulster’s Loyalist Protestant majority: all that could be seen was a ‘liberation struggle’ by a small ‘oppressed people’ against the same ‘imperialist’ Britain that had done so much evil in Libya in 1942-1951.” This lack of knowledge was clear when Gaddafi considered arming Loyalist paramilitaries and even met with their representatives in the mid-1970s (Geldard, 1988, p. 73). Archival evidence shows that British officials also felt that the Libyan regime was misinformed about Northern Ireland.¹⁸ Gaddafi’s understanding of the conflict was limited, and the extent of control that Gaddafi had over the Provisional IRA was also doubted. Although Libya claimed to have advised the Provisional IRA to show restraint during its bombing campaign in England, correspondence between British officials show that they did not think that he had the ability to do so.¹⁹

Although anti-imperialism may have led Gaddafi to proclaim a “sacred duty towards all revolutions” (Bianco & Lyle, 1975, p. 154; Wright, 2012, p. 212), variation

Britain in her own home” (Geldard, 1988, p. 72).

¹⁷The Provisional IRA later cooperated with the Libyan regime through an Irish representative in Tripoli known as “Mister Eddie” (Moloney, 2007, p. 10).

¹⁸“Libya and the Irish Republican Army (IRA): discussions on the Libyan position between Northern Ireland Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials,” 1 Jan 1977 – 31 December 1982, The National Archives, London, UK.

¹⁹Libya claimed that it had advised the IRA not to transfer bombs to London. Source: “Libya and the Irish Republican Army (IRA): discussions on the Libyan position between Northern Ireland Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials,” 1 Jan 1977 – 31 December 1982, The National Archives, London, UK.

in the support provided by the Libyan regime show that it was part of a coercive bargaining strategy to achieve short term goals. In attempts to coerce the UK, Libya provided fungible support to the Provisional IRA with little attempt to screen or control the group. It also made little attempt to conceal its support. Unlike the Soviet Union which provided non-Soviet weapons in order to avoid detection, in 1986 a large weapons cache was discovered in the Republic of Ireland marked “Libyan Armed Forces” (Geldard, 1988, p. 75). Finally, Libya publicly and privately communicated its demands to the UK and followed through on threats when they were not met. Libyan support far exceeded support from any other source, including that of the Soviet Union. Before, the Provisional IRA had a limited arsenal and used it as sparingly as possible, ruling that operations would be called off if weapons were exposed to the risk of loss (Mallie & McKittrick, 1996, p. 53). Afterwards, the group had an oversupply of weapons for the first time (J. B. Bell, 2000, p. 132 & 171).

The fact that Libya provided fungible support to the Provisional IRA provides evidence of the effect identified in Chapter III where external states are more likely to provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively stronger in terms of military power. The comparatively much lower levels of support from the Soviet Union is indicative of the risks. Despite an intense international rivalry, the Soviet Union would only provide limited fungible support. It is worth noting that Libya did not provide nonfungible support, which is likely because the risks of retaliation were too high. However, a key mechanism underpinning the theoretical argument is about evading punishment, and thus employing more covert forms of support. Libya made no attempt to deny that it was supporting the Provisional IRA. In this case, fungible support was not hidden, it was used as a bargaining strategy (San-Akca, 2016) and was therefore known to the target.

Why was Libya so hawkish compared to the Soviet Union, which was not militarily weaker than the UK? For the Soviet Union, the risks of conflict escalation with the

UK and its allies were too high. Instead, it may have used Libya as a proxy to target rivals in Europe and elsewhere. Recently released archives confirm that initial contact in 1973 between Libya and the Provisional IRA was arranged by the Soviet Union (McCullagh & McCarthy, 2021). In a dynamic like state-rebel delegation, the Soviet Union wanted to undermine the UK and its allies but did not want to accept the levels of risk associated with supporting rebels that directly targeted them (Karlen & Ruata, 2021). Instead, it developed close relations with the Gaddafi regime short of a military alliance. The backbone of this relationship was large amounts of Soviet arms. Libya furthered Soviet geopolitical objectives by supporting rebels in Northern Ireland, but also in Chad, Sudan, and Egypt (Gwertzman, 1981). The Libyan government likely profited from this relationship, as backing from the Soviet Union increased the costs of retaliation and punishment for the UK and its allies. This dynamic may explain the finding in Chapter III that states in relatively stronger alliances are more likely to provide fungible support.

5.4 Conflict dynamics

In this section, I provide evidence for the observable implications derived from *hypotheses 3A* and *4A*—rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to splinter and fight other groups, respectively. I leverage the timing of support in order to identify how it affected intra- and intergroup competition, focusing on the sequencing of events. As identified above, Libya and the Soviet Union provided support, while Ireland promised support to the IRA early in the conflict.

Temporal correlation

Libyan support was delivered in shipments, which have since become well-known. The interception of a ship called the *Claudia* in 1973 marked the end of the first period

of Libyan support. In most studies of external support it is difficult to know exactly how much and for how long support is provided. This is true for Soviet support to the Official IRA. However, Libyan support is well-known because the crews of intercepted vessels informed authorities about the contents of previous shipments. Libyan support was massive from 1985 to 1987. When 150 tonnes of weaponry (including anti-helicopter machine guns, flamethrowers, and Semtex explosives) (Mallie & McKittrick, 1996, p. 46) were found on board of the *Eksund*, authorities in the Republic of Ireland and the UK could not believe that they were destined to the Provisional IRA.²⁰ The seizure was a loss for the group but not due to lost resources (the Provisional IRA had received similar amounts from previous shipments). Instead, it sparked off years of intensive police activity by the British and Irish authorities (O'Brien, 1995, p. 142). In the immediate aftermath of the intercepted shipment, Irish authorities found three bunkers but no weapons (Mallie & McKittrick, 1996, p. 62). They were more successful later in finding large caches and dumps in Donegal and Dublin but the Libyan supplies had been broken down into smaller loads across Ireland and gradually brought into the Northern faction of the Provisional IRA (O'Brien, 1995, p. 150). By 1992, it is estimated that the Provisional IRA still controlled approximately half of the Libyan arsenal (O'Brien, 1995, p. 279).²¹ This arsenal allowed the group to consider a Tet offensive-style operation, but it decided that it would cause too many casualties and was not certain to succeed (Mallie & McKittrick, 1996, p. 48). Instead, the Provisional IRA was well armed to continue its "Long War" strategy, which I describe in more detail below. Recently released documents from the

²⁰The Republic of Ireland feared that the Provisional IRA was better equipped than the Irish army, and Minister of Justice Gerry Collins claiming that "no state can tolerate a situation where arms of the volume and power we are talking about are held by any group other than the lawful security forces" (Mallie & McKittrick, 1996, p. 62).

²¹By end of 1992, secret services estimated that the Provisional IRA possessed 650 Kalashnikov AK47-type semi-automatic rifles; more than a dozen general-purpose machine guns; about 20 of the huge DSHK Russian heavy calibre armour piercing machine-guns; 1 SAM-7 surface-to-air missile (nine others had been recovered), more than 40 RPG rocket launchers; half a dozen flame-throwers; 60-70 Webley revolvers; more than 600 detonators; about three tonnes of Semtex explosive (O'Brien, 1995, p. 150).

National Archives of Ireland reveal that the Gaddafi regime also supplied over \$12.5 million in cash (the equivalent of more than £33 million today) over similar periods (1973-75, 1985-86, and 1988-1990) (McCullagh & McCarthy, 2021).

Libyan fungible support, Republican splintering, and interrebel fighting cluster in time. Figure 5.2 shows these temporal correlations. The figure shows major arms shipments from Libya during the conflict (grey box chart indicated by the left y-axis) and deaths from interrebel fighting (red line indicated by the right y-axis). Major rebel group splits are shown as vertical dashed lines.²² The figure shows temporal correlation between the key independent variable (fungible support) and the dependent variables (rebel splintering and interrebel fighting). This appears to be true at least for the Official IRA/INLA splinter in 1974 and both the INLA/IPLO and Provisional IRA/Continuity IRA in 1986. Two other splinters, Official IRA/Provisional IRA in 1970 and Provisional IRA/Real IRA in 1997, occurred a substantial time before and after periods of external support. Figure 5.2 also shows that after periods of external support there appears to be an increase in rebel competition. Taken together, this provides suggestive evidence in support of *hypotheses 3A* and *4A*—rebels groups that receive fungible support are more likely to splinter and fight other rebel groups, respectively.

²²Data on the timing and contents of the shipments are from Mallie & McKittrick (1996). Data on deaths during the conflict are from Sutton (1994).

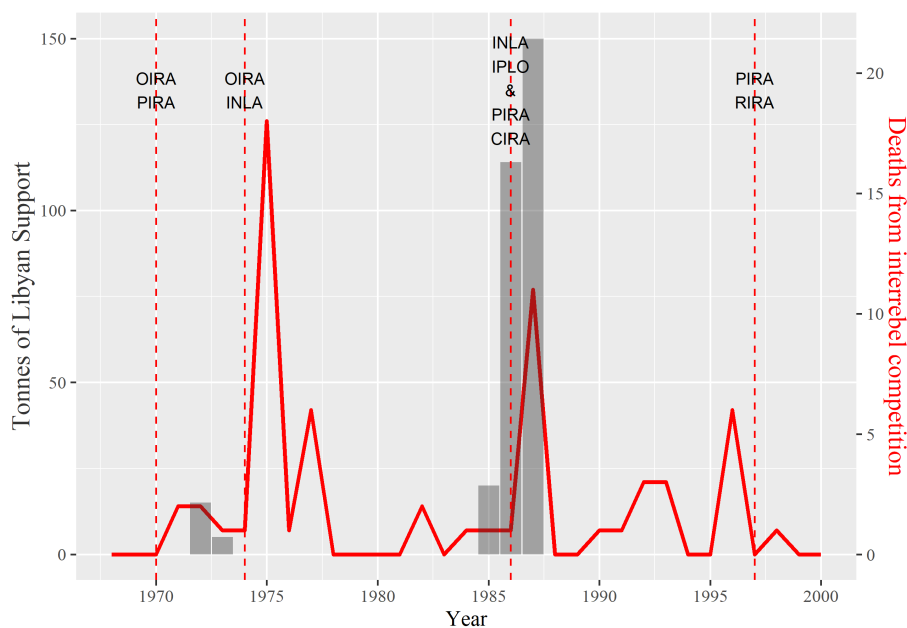


Figure 5.2: The left y-axis shows Libyan support (in tonnes of arms) to the Provisional IRA as a grey box chart based on information in Mallie and McKittrick (1997). The right y-axis shows deaths due to interrebel fighting (1968-1998) as a red line based on data from the Index of Deaths (Sutton 1994). Finally, rebel group splintering is shown as vertical red dashed lines.

In order to identify the causal mechanisms underpinning these correlations and the findings from Chapter IV, I conduct process tracing of the key events to evaluate whether there is evidence of the observable implications of my theoretical argument. I muster evidence from five splits and three periods of interrebel fighting, which are visible in Figure 5.2. In a final section, I describe moments where my theory predicts rebel groups to fight and splinter, but when it did not occur. Table 5.3 show the results of this analysis. I find support for *hypotheses 3A*, which states that rebel groups are more likely to splinter when they receive fungible support. In two instances, the interaction between fungible support and organisational structure sheds light on the splintering process, but also the extent of post-splintering fighting. This discussion identifies a dilemma for rebel groups: the centralisation of external resource control may offset splintering, but also exposes the group to potentially much more severe and

successful splits. In all splits it is apparent that factions attempted to gain control of fungible external support prior to splintering. The three instances of rebel fighting yield mixed results. For two feuds it is clear that they were continuations of the split. In these cases, factions split into two groups and the new groups continued to fight. Illuminating for my theoretical argument, in both instances the ensuing fighting is over the control of important fungible resources. For the feud between the Provisional IRA and Official IRA in 1975, I find little support for my theoretical argument. Instead, the feud is best explained as a failed attempt to eliminate a rival group during a lull in fighting (Pischedda, 2020) in light of a ceasefire (K. G. Cunningham, 2014).

Table 5.3: Overview of the results of process tracing analysis.

Event	Year	Support for hypotheses	Alternative explanation
Splintering			
OIRA/PIRA	1969	Yes	-
OIRA/INLA	1975	Yes	-
INLA/IPLO	1988	Yes	-
PIRA/CIRA	1988	Mixed	Organisational structure
PIRA/RIRA	1997	Mixed	Organisational structure
Inter-rebel fighting			
OIRA/INLA	1975	Yes	Post-split feud
PIRA/OIRA	1975	No	Ceasefire
PIRA/IPLO	1992	Yes	-

Rebel splintering

In three cases, there is strong evidence that factions attempted to accumulate resources before splintering. In all cases, a substantial amount of these resources originated from external states. While it is not possible to know whether the splits would have occurred if the USSR and Libya had not provided external support, the temporal link and evidence of the observable implications of the theoretical argument indicate

that the influx of fungible resources allowed factions to accumulate important military resources and prepare to splinter from their parent organisation. Parent organisations became aware of this danger and actively took steps to prevent or suppress the emergence of strong factions. These efforts were more evident and effective as the conflict progressed, which is indicative of a learning process.

1969: The emergence of the Provisional and Official IRA:

The roots of the first split in the Republican movement can be traced to before the conflict, although it is not clear how they relate to the pre-war social structures (Staniland, 2014). For many of the IRA leadership, the failure of the border campaign in the 1950s indicated that republican and socialist politics should be pursued instead of an armed campaign. In 1969, the IRA Chief of Staff Cathal Goulding was accused by a younger faction based in the North and led by Sean MacStiofain of being drawn into the political system of the Republic of Ireland (English, 2003, p. 106). In the words of MacStiofain at the time:

... the new leadership were heading off in a very different direction. They were becoming obsessed with the idea of parliamentary politics and wished to confine the movement almost entirely to social and economic agitation (Sanders, 2011, p. 25).

When communal violence erupted in Northern Ireland, the IRA leadership was blamed for failing to protect Catholics, especially in urban areas. By the time the IRA convention voted to drop the long-held principle of abstentionism²³ in December 1969, MacStiofain had already assumed *de jure* control over the Northern faction of the IRA.

The Provisional IRA that emerged was not ideologically dissimilar to the Official

²³Abstentionism refers to the policy of not allowing members to sit in Westminster, Stormont or Dublin Parliaments.

IRA but differed in how it wanted to achieve a Socialist and United Irish Republic. Most historians agree that the reason for the split was tactical, not ideological: “not over words but over means” (J. B. Bell, 2000, p. 66; see also English, 2003, p. 107; Sanders, 2011, p. 41). According to Joe Cahill, “the real reason [for the split] was the lack of defence for nationalists in the North” (Sanders, 2011, p. 37). This fervent desire to defend Catholic communities in Northern Ireland led many members who stayed with the Officials to suspect that the Provisionals had no politics at all (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 6). Differences over strategy were important and ideological differences became more pronounced over time, but ideology was not a driving force behind the split. The dynamic through which they became increasingly distant ideologically is similar to the process of “internal differentiation” described by Della Porta (2006, p. 196), where splinter groups employ violence to distinguish themselves from their parent organisation.

External support played a role in this process of differentiation. Support—or at the very least a promise of support—was important because it emboldened the Northern faction to break away and ensured that the split would be permanent. The public fall out over the Arms Crisis showed that there were tensions within the IRA over resources, especially weapons. The Southern-based leadership of the IRA was not prepared to make a deal with the Irish government, but MacStiofain’s Northern faction argued that weapons were more important than whims over their source. Some in the Northern faction believed that they could outmanoeuvre efforts by the Irish government in the South to control them, while others, like David O’Connell, simply shouted “We want guns!” (Hanley & Millar, 2010, p. 140).²⁴ The promise of finance and arms emboldened those who were prepared to challenge the Dublin leadership, even though most evidence indicates that support never materialised.

In December 1969 the Northern faction split and in 1970 it established the Pro-

²⁴David O’Connell went on to serve on the first Army Council of the Provisional IRA.

visional IRA. The ideological differences between the two groups were so small that many believed the split would be temporary. However, suspicion that the Provisional IRA were receiving support from Ireland proved irreconcilable and the public court case south of the border justified much of the suspicion (Sanders, 2011, p. 46). By the end of the 1970, the IRA was rebranded as the Official IRA. Although the rivalry between the two groups was bitter and at times violent, it did not escalate into a full feud until later in 1975. Similar to findings by Akcinaroglu & Radziszewski (2005), the mere expectation of external support affected conflict dynamics. There is evidence of the observable implication that factions attempt to acquire external support before splintering. This splinter shows that the potential of future support can embolden factions to split.

Although short of a feud, there were tensions and violence between the two groups which revolved around the control of weapons, however limited they were. For instance, Belfast quartermaster for the Official IRA Paddy McDermott joined the Provisional IRA during the split. According to a leading member of the Provisional IRA, Brendan Hughes:

The Official IRA arrested Paddy, looking for their weapons dumps which only he knew about, and he was viciously beaten by them. But the dump that Paddy had control of was lifted by the Provisional IRA [...] So you had this sort of conflict going on, the Official IRA trying to hold onto the weapons that they had, the Provisional IRA trying to get a hold of them. So there was this constant tension all the time (Moloney, 2010, p. 61).

This constant tension led to several killings, although both groups were quick to de-escalate tension in order to avoid a full-blown feud. An illustrative example is the murder of Francis Benson in 1973. The Provisional member's body was found stabbed and beaten in the Markets area of Belfast. The Official IRA denied involvement despite "the deep and serious differences between the Official republican movement

and the Provisional alliance” (McKittrick, 2001, p. 403). Why was there not more fighting during and after this split? Referring to the decision not to eliminate the newly formed Provisional IRA, Billy McMillen of the Official IRA claimed that “it would have been virtually impossible for us to explain in political terms [why] we had felt it necessary to kill 12 or 13 republicans, after all these people had been our comrades in arms, it just wasn’t on” (Hanley & Millar, 2010, p. 152). There was tension between the new groups, but ultimately competition over important resources did not lead to a feud.

The split in 1970 was over tactics related to the use of violence. The Official IRA still saw political engagement as a way of achieving its goals, especially in winning over the Protestant working-class population. However, early military successes saw support shift towards the Provisional IRA. In June 1970, Provisional IRA gunmen defended the small Catholic enclave of Short Strand in East Belfast from Loyalist incursions.²⁵ It succeeded where its predecessor had failed. The perception that the Provisional IRA could defend Catholic areas led to an increase in their membership, especially when internment in 1971 increased the number of potential recruits (Sanders, 2011, p. 50). By mid-1971, membership of the Provisional IRA began to surpass that of the Official IRA in Belfast, which is visible in British intelligence at the time, shown in Figure 5.3. To reverse this trend, the Official IRA launched its own attacks on British targets, but called a ceasefire in 1972 after public and embarrassing military failures.²⁶ The Official IRA declared a defensive ceasefire, the terms of which allowed the Official IRA to carry out defensive and retaliatory action but not pursue an expansionist armed campaign beyond their areas of support (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 11). Regardless of the campaign being defensive or offensive, both groups needed weapons

²⁵This became known as the Battle of St Matthews because Provisional IRA snipers defended the area from within the church (Sanders, 2011, p. 49).

²⁶The Official IRA’s main military failure was the Aldershot bombing. Carried out in retaliation for Bloody Sunday, the bombing killed seven civilians, including six cleaning staff, and one priest. Also an important failure, the Official IRA executed Willie Best in Derry, a 19-year old Royal Irish Ranger from the predominantly Catholic area of Creggan.

and money. They knew that existing arm dumps, gifts, confiscations, and theft from security forces would not suffice (J. B. Bell, 2000, p. 171). By 1973, both groups were receiving fungible support from external states, although the combination of increasing support and weapons from Libya secured the dominance of the Provisional IRA, especially in Belfast. The Official IRA, despite receiving some support from the Soviet Union, continued to rely on smuggling in weapons from the US and European arms markets. By 1974, the Official IRA was dominant in only certain areas. In Belfast, this included the Lower Falls area (and the strategically important Divis Flats), while they competed with the Provisional IRA for the Markets area. Outside Belfast, they were dominant in Derry, Newry in South Armagh, and South Down (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 9) (see the map in Figure 5.1).

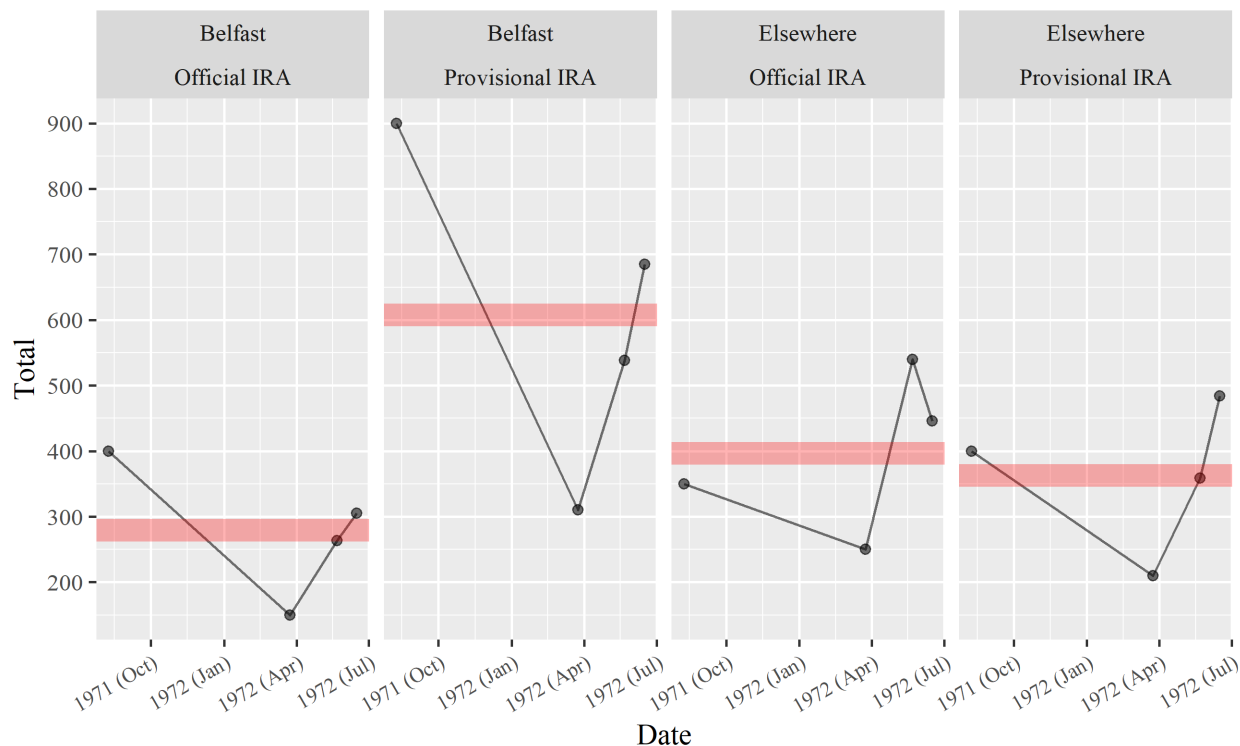


Figure 5.3: Membership of the Provisional and Official IRA in 1972 according to British secret services. The two left columns show membership estimates for Belfast and the two right columns show estimates for the rest of Northern Ireland. Red horizontal lines show the average number of members over the whole period. Source: The National Archives of the UK.

Promises of external support emboldened a faction to split from the IRA and allegations of support from the Republic of Ireland festered distrust between the two factions. Importantly, the 1970 split was due to differences over strategy, not ideology. Neither group had control over large resources, and feuding in the aftermath of the split was limited. In the next years, the Provisional IRA succeeded in attracting membership due to its perceived effectiveness in defending Catholic areas. From 1972, it was also better placed to arm their members. The Provisional IRA emerged as a powerful contender and ultimately surpassed the Official IRA. Official IRA leaders later regretted that they had not tried to crush the Provisional IRA when it broke away and were determined not to make the same mistake again (Sluka, 1987, p. 101).

The Official IRA learnt from this experience and later took steps to prevent similar splits.

1974: The emergence of the INLA

After the split in 1970, the leadership of the Official IRA continued to be based in Dublin. During a meeting of 80 delegates in December 1974, the Belfast and Derry factions accused the leadership of being too slow to send resources, noting that they only provided weapons when there were tensions with the Provisional IRA (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 6). A faction was beginning to form which called for more weapons in order to enforce the terms of the ceasefire, especially in defending communities against Loyalist paramilitary attacks and state forces. Factions in Derry started to question whether the leadership in Dublin were more interested in fighting the Provisional IRA or the British Army. The faction, led by Seamus Costello, decided that the Official IRA should end the ceasefire and pursue an armed campaign against British forces.

As expected theoretically, the leadership of the Official IRA took several steps to prevent factions from accumulating resources. First, the leadership centralised the Belfast Brigades under McMillen, who had remained loyal during the split in 1970 (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 20). Hailing from the Official IRA stronghold of the Lower Falls area in West Belfast, he commanded respect and was well-liked in the Republican movement. Second, to pre-emptively eliminate the threat posed by Costello, the leadership circulated a secret document titled “Volunteer Clancy”²⁷ in 1973, which accused Costello of not doing his job and keeping money from military operations (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 22). In 1974, Costello was suspended from Sinn Fein and court marshalled by the Official IRA. Before this point Costello had tried to reform the group from within but now decided that he would have to establish

²⁷Clancy was Seamus Costello’s codename.

an alternative organisation. At a secret meeting with his supporters, he allegedly asked those present “if I could bring the OCs [Officer Commanding] of the Belfast units and show them a thousand rifles, would they not agree that the ceasefire should be broken?” (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 26).

There is no concrete evidence that Costello was accumulating external support from the Soviet Union. However, divisions with the leadership began to surface just one year after he personally collected the first shipment from Operation SPLASH and he continued to receive weapons from the Soviet Union after the split (Andrew, 2000, p. 385). The need for money and weapons was crucial before Costello and his supporters could break away. Indeed, his supporters advised Costello to win over the support of quartermasters before splitting away from the group (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 28). Quartermasters knew the location of important “caches” and “dumps.” However, before Costello could win them over, the Official IRA forced him to act. He was prohibited from attending the Ard fheis²⁸ in 1974. One of his supporters, Tommy McCourt, tried to enter the meeting but was blocked and warned that the leadership in Dublin had concerns about Official IRA “stuff” that his men controlled in Wicklow (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 28), indicating that the faction may have been accumulating resources. Although it is difficult to establish whether this was fungible support from the Soviet Union, the fact that Costello was still receiving the support makes it likely. The split was once more driven by differences over strategy, but this time the leadership attempted to pre-emptively suppress dissent, motivated in large part by the potential loss of important resources. This was occurring in the context of an increasingly strong Provisional IRA which had split away only five years earlier and was now receiving weapons from its own external supporter, Libya. The split provides evidence of the observable implications of *hypothesis 3A*. The rebel faction sought to control important resources before the split and the leadership

²⁸This literally means “high assembly” in Irish and is the name used for annual party conferences.

attempted to pre-emptively repress the faction. This dynamic, where the leadership of a rebel group pre-emptively attempts to suppress dissent within the group, explains the null findings of the large-N analysis of splintering conducted in Chapter IV.

1986: The emergence of the IPLO

The next split occurred in 1986 when the Irish People's Liberation Organization (IPLO) broke away from the INLA. Even in 1983 it looked like a feud would erupt within the INLA partly over missing funds, but equally due to the "disintegration of discipline and comradeship" (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 268). Conflict over whether funds should be channelled towards political or military objectives caused a small internal feud, which resulted in the shooting of a Belfast City Councillor and a large security crackdown on the INLA. What followed was the arrests of both Provisional and INLA members, a serious blow to the strength of the INLA (Sluka, 1987, p. 103).²⁹ Tensions within the INLA were offset by the appointment of Dominic McGlinchey who imposed "Directed Military Rule." His first move was to control finance-raising operations, which led to the murders of INLA members who did not pay up. During the period, the political wing of the movement was cast aside. McGlinchey's tight regime ensured that the group could overcome bitter intragroup competition but resulted in a regime built on fear and violence. The group's main source of weapons at the time was the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), the US, Eastern Europe arms market, and a sympathiser in Australia (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 302). Libya approached the INLA, but the organisation did not have a ship or the capacity to absorb the amounts Libya was offering.³⁰ Although McGlinchey's reign had prevented the organisation from splintering, weapons were gradually arriving and being accumulated by different factions. According to INLA member Ta Power

²⁹Those who informed were known as "supergrasses" due to the number of people arrested.

³⁰The INLA representative that spoke with a Libyan contact was shocked when the Libyan spoke in tons of weaponry (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 304).

writing from prison in 1986 the organisation had “little central authority, coherency, accountability, discipline, efficiency, or effectiveness” because certain areas “were given weaponry and the autonomy to operate as they saw fit” (Power, 1986).

Despite these underlying issues, the INLA was the most active Republican group in 1982, killing over 30 people in a single year in attacks that included one of the biggest atrocities of the conflict, the Dropping Well bombing.³¹ By 1984 the movement had degenerated into a loosely knit group of often “mutually suspicious fiefdoms” under the authoritarian control of McGinchley (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 225), and a Belfast faction led by Tom McCartan was increasingly involved in criminality. This caused tensions within the INLA but also with other groups, especially the Provisional IRA. The Provisional IRA sentenced McCartan to death for criminality but refused to kill him in order to prevent an intergroup feud.³² Instead, it left it to the INLA leadership to deal with him.

In 1986 McGlinchey was convicted for his part in a siege and sent to Portlaoise prison.³³ The power vacuum created fertile ground for a split. Multiple factions were vying to replacing McGlinchey. The main factions were led by McCartan, John O'Reilly, Gerard Steenson, Harry Flynn, and Tom McAllister. Flynn and Steenson initially conspired to rid the organisation of criminal elements. Communications in the form of ‘coms’ between the faction leaders in 1986 show two important factors in

³¹The Dropping well as a nightclub in Ballykelly, near Derry, which was frequented by British soldiers. The bomb killed seventeen people instantly and one person later in hospital. Eleven were British soldiers and four were young women.

³²The INLA was ideologically more socialist than the Provisional IRA and, with a strong commitment to political violence and the ‘armed struggle’ (Sluka, 1987, p. 101), combined with operating in close proximity, namely in West Belfast, one might expect the Provisional IRA to eliminate them. However, there was never a feud between the Provisional IRA and the INLA. They often cooperated, most famously during the 1981 Hunger Strikes in which seven Provisional IRA and three INLA members died. As noted by Sluka (1987, p. 102), the INLA respected the Provisional IRA largely due to its military capabilities and was therefore prepared to “toe the Provos’ line.” There was a division of labour in the Divis area, where the INLA conducted military operations and the Provisional IRA provided social services and a rudimentary form of justice.

³³Portlaoise Prison, in the Republic of Ireland, is where those convicted of membership to illegal or terrorist organisations are detained.

the build up to the split.³⁴ First, they show that fiefdoms had developed around the control of important resources. Flynn describes the Belfast faction as “they draw their confidence from their apparent strength in Belfast and from their apparent legitimacy [...] through their tenuous control of structures and resources.” Second, in order to rid the organisations of “hoods,”³⁵ the faction leaders needed to secure weapons. In the communications between the faction leaders, they quickly disregard smuggling weapons from European and US arms markets, because “until they are actually here it may as well be on the moon.” Instead, the factions stole weapons and money from each other’s caches and even intercepted arms shipments. There is evidence that the factions had access to fungible support from Libya. Steenson claimed that he could acquire weapons from the Provisional IRA, which at the time was receiving huge shipments from Libya. In the coms, Steenson writes:

It is not a question of stealing their stuff. The proposition is we buy from their sources, paying their prices, unknown to them and they unwittingly transport it into the country for us... Just be very quiet about it because this person’s neck is on the chopping block if the Provies learned of his sympathy for us, especially now when the material might be used in a feud...

The correspondences indicate that factions could accumulate resources by siphoning off fungible support that was destined to other groups. In the end “a dispute broke out between the two factions in the usual way. Two of O’Reilly’s supporters lifted weapons and a sum of money from a dump that belonged to the Dublin-Munster group” (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 263). What emerged was the IPLO led by

³⁴Correspondence were written on ‘coms’ as Steenson was in prison at the time. ‘Coms’ are written on cigarette or toilet paper and smuggled out of prisons. They offer insight into conversations between faction leaders that are rarely written down. In this case, they offer primary data on discussions between two people, one of which was later killed in the feuding. All ‘coms’ are from McDonald & Holland (2010).

³⁵“Hoods” is a Northern Irish term for anyone involved in criminal activity.

McAllister, which was to launch a bloody feud against the INLA led by O'Reilly. Steenson supported McAllister. Although Steenson initially sought a pact with the O'Reilly faction, he decided to fight them instead after he saw the weaponry available to the IPLO (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 340).

The INLA/IPLO split provides some evidence for the observable implications. Factions attempted to accumulate resources, some of it from Libya, in order to break away or gain control of the leadership. Second, it illustrates the fungible nature of weapons sent from Libya. Even if factions were not themselves receiving external support, they could siphon it off other groups' sources. This second point provides evidence that the influx of fungible support may have fostered a competitive conflict environment, encouraging us to consider how fungible support affects the conflict as a system.

1986: The Continuity IRA's false start

The Provisional IRA received huge quantities of fungible support. Why did the Provisional IRA not suffer from greater intragroup competition and splintering? The Provisional IRA's ability to mitigate these dynamics reveal a potentially important scope condition: organisational structure. Theoretically, I propose that the influx of fungible external support—especially the huge amounts from Libya in the mid-1980s—can cause tensions and lead to splits within the group. However, this appears to be conditional on the organisational structure of the group. If the leadership controls the distribution of resources, then they can benefit from support and mitigate intragroup competition. This was clearly difficult for the INLA, which was beset from intragroup competition and held together only by McGlinchey's violent "Direct Military Rule." Although there were splits in 1986 that led to the Continuity IRA and later in the 1997 that led to the Real IRA, competition over resources was low within the Provisional IRA due to organisational changes that were implemented in 1975.

Control of resources was always an important organisational feature of the Provisional IRA. Although opportunistic acquisition of weapons was tolerated by members, acquiring and supplying weapons and explosive was the responsibility of the Quartermaster General, who distributed them to quartermasters in brigades, battalions, and companies. Moloney (2010, p. 74) described attempts by quartermasters to conduct their own operations as “effectively an act of defiance of the national leadership.” Organisational changes in 1975 ensured that the Provisional IRA could handle even larger amounts of resources without undermining internal group cohesion.

The Provisional IRA needed organisational change because, despite earlier success, the groups was militarily on the back foot. By 1975, the British army had a better understanding of the geography of Belfast, a “critical mass” of Provisional members were interned, and state forces had acquired high-ranking informers (McKearney, 2011, p. 115; Moloney, 2007, p. 140).³⁶ The Provisional IRA entered a truce in January 1975 with the British forces, which was also on the back foot after the Sunningdale Agreement was rejected by Loyalist communities in Belfast. English (2003, p. 179) argues that it was also an attempt to gain more intelligence on the group and split the movement by drawing members into constitutional politics. The truce was an opportunity for the Provisional IRA to regroup and prepare for the next phase of the conflict. It did so in two ways: it attacked its Republican rivals—discussed further below—and restructured its organisation.

Tensions grew within the Provisional IRA as members were growing increasingly disillusioned by the long truce, parallel talks with the British authorities in 1975, and the feud with the Official IRA (O’Brien, 1995, p. 112). In response, Provisional IRA Chief of Staff Sean Twomey, with support from Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams who was interned at the time, called to restructure the Provisional IRA. The plan came

³⁶Eamon Molloy is a known informer because he became one of the “Disappeared,” those who were killed and buried secretly by Republican groups. His remains were not recovered until 1999, when the Provisional IRA placed them in a coffin above ground near Dundalk in the Republic of Ireland.

to light in 1977 when Twomey was arrested in Dublin carrying the “Staff Report,” a document that outlined the “Long War” strategy. The Strategy included two important structural changes. First, the Provisional IRA was divided between the Northern and the Southern Command to “streamline the day-to-day management of the Republican army” (McKearney, 2011, p. 141). The Northern Command included control over eleven strategic counties: the six counties of Northern Ireland, the three border counties that made up the rest of the Ulster province, and two rural counties near the border (see the map in Figure 5.1).³⁷ This move was important as it effectively “reduced [the Southern Command] to the role of quartermaster, supplier of materials for Northern Command” (O’Brien, 1995, p. 109). Second, the provisional IRA adopted a “cell structure” to improve internal security and provide greater command and control. The cells, known as Active Cell Units (ACU), numbered between five to eight active members. According to McKearney (2011, p. 142), the changes allowed the Northern Command to penetrate “every crevice of the IRA.” Quartermasters, predominantly in the South, knew the locations of the largest caches which were buried underground in sealed silos. They would place weapons and explosives in concealed barrel-type containers for immediate collection and use by ACUs (O’Brien, 1995, p. 280). This meant that ACUs had little control over resources. The locations of all the dumps were known only to the Quartermaster General, who sat as one of the seven members of the Army Council. Resources were under tighter control than ever and the Southern Command could devote time and training to develop its ability to receive, hide, monitor, and distribute important resources, while mitigating the risk of intragroup competition.

The advantages of the new levels of resource control acquired by the leadership of the Provisional IRA was apparent during the split in 1986. The group was divided

³⁷Northern Ireland includes Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down, Fermanagh and Tyrone. Ulster includes also Donegal, Louth and Monaghan. Finally, Leitrim and Cavan in were also part of the Northern Command due to their strategic importance—they were close to the border and sparsely populated.

once more over the principle of abstentionism. After nearly five hours of “tense and at times emotional debate” delegates of the Provisional IRA elected to drop the party’s long-standing opposition to sitting in the Irish Parliament (Moloney, 2007, p. 288), an important step towards a negotiated settlement to the conflict. Unlike the IRA during the 1970 split, the Provisional IRA’s ability to defend their people was undisputed. Thanks to weapons delivered by Libya “Adams and his colleagues were promising an escalation in both the quality and quantity of IRA operations” (Moloney, 2007, p. 288). Although many in the Provisional IRA knew that there was a large haul of weapons from Libya hidden across the island, at this stage only those on the Army Council knew the origin and quality of the weapons. Despite this, word spread at the lower levels that the group had received a huge haul. Therefore, “the notion that Adams was about to sell out just seemed absurd” (Moloney, 2007, p. 292).

Like the Official IRA and INLA split, the Provisional IRA leadership actively took measures to prevent the loss of important resources. Before the Ardfheis they moved large quantities of arms and explosives to new dumps and caches while those that were too big to move were placed under armed guard (Geldard, 1988, p. 18). A faction led by Ruari O’Bradaigh, the former Chief of Staff of the Provisional IRA, opposed the change in policy. The split was at first only political, when O’Bradaigh walked away from the Ardfheis with his supporters and established the new Republican Sinn Fein (RSF) political party. The existence of its armed wing, the Continuity IRA, was announced six years later in 1994.³⁸ Not only did it fail to persuade enough members to join them, it did not reveal its existence due to the fear of reprisal from the Provisional IRA (Moloney, 2007, p. 289; Sanders, 2011, p. 147). The centralisation of control over resources ensured that the split would not undermine the power of the Provisionals and did not result in a feud. Again, the fact that factions may splinter but not become military active may explain the null findings of the large-N analysis

³⁸RSF have always publicly denied being the political wing of the Continuity IRA.

of splintering conducted in Chapter IV.

1997: The emergence of the Real IRA, the “dissidents”

Almost a decade after the emergence of the Continuity IRA, the disadvantages of centralised control in the Provisional IRA became apparent. Problems associated with the move towards a peace agreement materialised in 1997 when Michael McKevitt led a breakaway group that became known as the Real IRA.³⁹ This split was different from the Continuity IRA over ten years before for two reasons. First, the Provisional IRA were not just changing direction on a founding principle like abstentionism, they were rapidly moving towards a peace deal. Second, and most illustrative for my theoretical argument, McKevitt was the Quartermaster General of the Provisional IRA (English, 2003, p. 296) and was central in the Provisional IRA’s operation to receive Libyan arms in the 1980s. At the time, no individual possessed more information about the group’s weaponry than him, much of which was of Libyan origin (Sanders, 2011, p. 209). According to Jonathan Powell, senior adviser to the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, McKevitt was the “biggest challenge to Adams and McGuinness... he was a credible figure” (Sanders, 2011, p. 209). The credibility was not only due to his appeal to those who wanted to continue an armed campaign, but also because he had access to a huge arsenal.

Early in the renewed peace process of the 1990s, Jerry Adams and Martin McGuinness attempted to wrestle some control over military resources away from McKevitt by approaching lower ranked quartermasters. Indeed, they made efforts in 1992 and 1993 to put the right people in place and “test the loyalties of existing ones” (O’Brien, 1995, p. 279). Although centralised resource control and cell structure reduced the risk of factionalisation at lower levels of the organisation, it put the group at risk of a

³⁹The Real IRA’s real name is Oglagh na h Eireann (ONH). It later became known as the Real IRA after a video was made where a member described it as such during an illegal roadblock in South Armagh (Sanders, 2011, p. 209).

much larger split. After the split in 1997, there was significant support for the Real IRA, which had the backing of several important Republican figures.⁴⁰

The Omagh bombing in August 1998 put an end to this credible challenge. The bombing was the conflict's single largest loss of life resulting in the deaths of 29 people in a predominantly Catholic town. The Provisional IRA called on McKeivitt and followers to disband within two weeks under threat of violent action (Sanders, 2011, p. 211). The Real IRA responded by calling a ceasefire. Support for the Real IRA plummeted to the benefit of the peace process and Sinn Fein. It is difficult to know what would have happened if the Real IRA had not carried out an attack that was so detrimental to its support base. However, McKeivitt posed a real challenge to the Provisional IRA. The ensuing competition over resources would likely have been as bloody as the Official and INLA split in 1974, and as enduring as the split between the Provisional and Official IRA in 1970.

Rebel infighting

In this section, I investigate three republican feuds in order to identify observable implications of the theoretical argument. Specifically, I expect that groups receiving fungible resources to be more likely to fight other groups (*hypothesis 3A*). Feuding is the result of potentially several causal paths, but evidence in support of the observable implication will be that control of weapons and money is a key feature of the rebel fighting. Groups will fight to improve their relative power but also attempt to gain control of weapons to improve their absolute power. A key indicator of support for the causal mechanisms will be that rebel groups fight over important resources, manifested in the form of feuds over control of weapons and money from external states.

⁴⁰Arguable the most important support was from McKeivitt's wife Bernadette Sands-McKeivitt, the sister of Bobby Sands who had died on hunger strike in 1981.

1975: The Official IRA and the INLA fight over important military resources

The Official IRA forced Costello to split from the Official IRA in an effort to eliminate a potential rival from accumulating important resources. When Costello established his political party, the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), and its militant wing, the INLA, they had only few weapons. Costello attempted to deny the existence of the INLA until he could secure more. In this period, the leaders of both the Official IRA and the INLA attempted to prevent bloodshed. Indeed, Official IRA Chief of Staff Cathal Goulding said “I wanted the IRSP to take the high road and we’d take the low road,” hoping at the time that the IRSP would focus on political activity (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 42). However, rivalries on the ground became increasingly tense as members of the Official IRA broke away and declared allegiance to the INLA, the existence of which was denied by its leader Costello. In the process, they brought with them weapons, ammunition, and money. An environment of intense competition and hostility emerged because “several former Officials had taken their guns with them” (Geldard, 1988, p. 13). The biggest win for the INLA was the Divis Flats in Belfast, a strategically important housing complex situated where the Catholic Falls Road and Protestant Shankill Road meet. The entire complex left the Official IRA and declared allegiance to Costello, causing tensions in Belfast.⁴¹ According to a member of the Official IRA’s Turf Lodge Unit:

You’ve got to understand that these people were stealing our weapons, raiding our dumps, beating up our members, particularly those who refused to join them... There was no way they were going to use our weapons to

⁴¹Divis Flats became known as ‘Planet of the Irps’ and a no-go area for the ‘Sticks.’ ‘Irps’ was slang for INLA members, from the acronym of ‘Irish Republican Socialist Movement.’ ‘Sticks’ was slang for members of the Official IRA. It was first a taunt by Provisionals because Officials used adhesive lily badges during Easter Rising celebrations. Officials responded by calling Provisionals “pin heads” because they continued to use pin badges, but the name did not stick. See Sarah E. Parkinson (2016) on how informal discursive practices can maintain and reproduce of splits.

wage sectarian war (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 42).

Goulding later stated that the “confrontation between the OIRA and the IRSP was inevitable. The main reason for this was the theft of arms. . .” (Sanders, 2011, p. 79). The Official IRA, now losing members, weapons, and support, and having experienced a similar break only four years before, decided that it would eliminate its new rival. The Official IRA was the instigator of the feud (Sluka, 1987, p. 101), which was to be one of the bloodiest periods of internecine fighting of the entire conflict. They killed 19-year-old Hugh Ferguson in February 1975. From Whiterock Parade and known as “King of the Rock,” Ferguson was a popular member of the INLA and Chairman of the Whiterock IRSP (McKittrick, 2001, p. 518). Tensions were high between the groups over the Divis Flats decision to leave the Official IRA (Sanders, 2011, p. 79). The feud lasted months and led to the deaths of Sean Fox, Daniel Loughran, and Paul Crawford (McKittrick, 2001). The most prominent person to die was McMillen. He was shot dead by 16-year-old Gerrard Steenson, who was driving past in a taxi and saw McMillen by chance. Although there is evidence that previous killings had not been sanctioned by Costello, this killing deeply angered Costello who, aside from being on good personal terms with McMillen, had his attempts to find a political settlement to the feud undermined (Sanders, 2011, p. 80). This is one of many INLA actions during the feud which demonstrated that the leadership had little control over local units.

Civilians in Catholic areas of Belfast called on all groups to find a solution to the feud, but truces proposed by the INLA were rejected by the Official IRA (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 53). The situation was better for the INLA in Derry, where most members of the Official IRA switched sides. The INLA, poorly armed in Belfast, knew the locations of many of the Official IRA weapons caches. They used their weapons to attack the British army in Corrigan Park in September 1975, which led to more feuding. The feuding was causing tensions within the INLA too, especially because it

was becoming clear that Costello could not control the Belfast faction and the Belfast factions were demanding more weapons in order to defend themselves from the Official IRA (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 127). Costello was killed in 1977 by Official IRA gunmen for the murder of McMillen.

Feuding between Official IRA and the INLA suggests that there is a relationship between splintering and rebel infighting, and that tensions over control of important resources continued to undermine the new organisation. However, it is not clear that fighting was over external support specifically. There is clearly a relationship between intragroup competition that caused the split and the tensions that followed. The Official IRA had received support from the Soviet Union which may have empowered Costello's faction, but the leadership pre-emptively suppressed it. Creating a causal link between Soviet external support and the Official IRA and INLA feud is difficult. However, handguns used during the feud were Czech handguns that no arms dealer in Europe or the US stocked, indicating that they may have been provided by an STB business front called Omnipol (Geldard, 1988, p. 50). Ultimately, it is difficult to ascertain whether the feuding would have occurred if the resources controlled by the Official IRA had not originated from the Soviet Union.

1975: The Provisional IRA attacks the Official IRA

In 1975, the Official IRA had recently experienced its latest split and lost much of its support in strategic areas, such as the Divis Flats in Belfast and most of Derry. It was also engaged in a feud with its most recent splinter group, the INLA. Republican groups signed a ceasefire with the British government in 1975. According to a former Provisional IRA member "the ceasefire was a godsend. We had no weapons" (Moloney, 2007, p. 141). Most of the weapons that the group had received from Libya were lost due to seizures of arms dumps on both sides of the border.⁴² In October of that year

⁴²According to a security report by the Irish government "five times as many rifles and almost ten times as many rounds of ammunition were captured in the border areas as in the rest of the

the Provisional IRA launched an attack against the Official IRA. Although violence between the two groups was not unknown, there had not been a feud of this scale between the groups. The feud started when the Provisional IRA killed Robert Elliman in the Markets area of Belfast and injured 16 others across Belfast (McKittrick, 2001, p. 590). This was a large operation, where up to 90 provisional IRA members were part of the violence (Moloney, 2007, p. 147). Over the next weeks, 11 people died, most of whom were members of the Official IRA.

The feud was important because the failed attempt to eliminate a rival group allowed Gerry Adams to gain power in the Provisional IRA (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 414; O'Brien, 1995; Sanders, 2011). Ultimately, the feuding alienated supporters in Belfast and failed to eliminate the Official IRA, which not only fought back but dealt a huge blow to the Provisional IRA when it killed its Chief of Intelligence Officer Seamus McCusker. Although the Official IRA had been weakened by its split and feud with the INLA, the Provisional IRA was not strong enough to eliminate its rival. It learnt from this experience, when 17 years later (almost to the day) it employed the same strategy to eliminate the IPLO. Existing theories provide good insights into why the 1975 feud occurred, such as ongoing negotiations with the state (K. G. Cunningham, 2011) and the “window of opportunity” (Pischedda, 2018) that these created. It is not clear how external support can explain this feud.

1992: The Provisional IRA eliminates the IPLO

A feud started within the IPLO when the leaders of the opposing factions met at a hotel in Drogheda in the Republic of Ireland. O'Reilly and Ta Power were set up, ambushed, and shot dead. The ensuing feud cost the lives of 12 people, including Steenson. The real winner was the Provisional IRA, who at this stage had no serious contenders within the Republican movement (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 365).

Republic in the nineteen months up to 31 July, 1975.” Source: “Violence in Northern Ireland,” 6 October 1975, The National Archives of Ireland (NAI).

The IPLO became a haven for expelled members of the Provisional IRA and INLA, which conducted predominantly sectarian attacks against Loyalist paramilitaries and was heavily involved in criminality (Sanders, 2011, p. 196). This caused tensions between the groups. For example, in 1990 the Provisional IRA killed Eoin Morely because he defected from the group and took weapons over to the IPLO (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 382).

The IPLO's involvement in the drug trade sealed its faith. Two factions emerged in a dispute over profits: the Army Council and the Belfast Brigade (McKittrick, 1992). On 31 October 1992, over 100 members of the Provisional IRA carried out raids on pubs and clubs known to be frequented by IPLO members. They dragged IPLO members from their homes and shot them in the knees and hands. A hit list was distributed across Belfast and most remaining IPLO members fled to Great Britain. The Provisional IRA wiped out a small rival in what became known colloquially as the 'Night of the Long Knives.' The IPLO leadership surrendered and, illustrative of the important role of weapons, their lives were spared in exchange for their weapons (McDonald & Holland, 2010, p. 414). According to Sanders (2011, p. 196) this was a clear signal that futile feuding would no longer be tolerated by the dominant Provisional IRA. The Provisional IRA's elimination of the IPLO was a strategy to remove a group that was undermining the Republican movement and to signal its now hegemonic power to other groups. As expected theoretically, the hegemonic power, heavily armed with Libyan weapons, increased its relative and absolute power by capturing IPLO weapons.

5.5 Conclusion

External state support during to Republican groups during the conflict in Northern Ireland shows the causal mechanisms underpinning the findings of the large-N analysis

in Chapter III. First, it is evident that the Soviet Union provided fungible support in order to avoid retaliation from the UK and its allies. It took the necessary steps to conceal its involvement, which were so effective that even today it is not known when the support ended. Libya, militarily weaker than the UK and its allies, provided fungible support. However, there is little evidence that Libya was attempting to avoid punishment, a key mechanism underpinning the theoretical argument. Libya not only communicated its demands to the UK, it also made little effort to conceal its involvement. It appears that, bolstered by its military cooperation with the Soviet Union, Libya attempted to force the UK into giving concessions by providing the Provisional IRA with large quantities of fungible support. The Soviet Union avoided retaliation by targeting an important international rival through Libya.

Second, external support and promises of support created tensions within groups, emboldened certain factions to challenge their leadership, and led rebel leaders to preemptively suppress factions that they suspected of accumulating support. Although competition over resources seems to have created tensions between groups, there is weak evidence that fungible support directly led to interrebel fighting. The 1975 feud between the Provisional IRA and the Official IRA is better explained by existing theories on ceasefire negotiations (K. G. Cunningham, 2011) and “windows of opportunity” (Pischedda, 2018). The 1992 feud between the Provisional IRA and the IPLO was an attempt by the Provisional IRA to eliminate a weaker rival and increase its absolute strength by capturing important resources. The Provisional IRA was the strongest Republican group thanks to the external support, and it appears that the IPLO was formed through its ability to secure external support destined to the Provisional IRA. There are clearly multiple potential causal mechanisms underpinning this feud. Competition within the Official IRA, the INLA, and the IPLO provide some support for the theoretical argument. It allowed relatively small factions to pursue their own preferences and challenge rebel leadership, which in turn led to a spiral of internecine

violence and feuding.

As well as support for part of the theoretical argument, this case study provides avenues for future work. First, rebel groups face a dilemma over the centralisation of resource control. On one hand, it prevents the formation of fiefdoms and reduces the frequency of relatively small splits like those that affected the INLA and IPLO. On the other hand, if a split does occur at the leadership level, then there is the potential of a much bigger fallout, as is evident with the emergence of the Real IRA in 1997. Second, there is clearly a relationship between splintering and rebel infighting that is under-researched and appears to be conditional on other factors. My theory proposes that rebel groups are more likely to fight other groups and splinter when they receive fungible support, but I do not theorise about the relationship between splintering and fighting. The role of ideology does not seem to be a driving factor in feuding or splits during the conflict, despite ideological divergence as the conflict developed. Indeed, according to McDonald & Holland (2010, p. 137) “personal animosities always run deep and are often the explanation for what on the surface appear to be ideological disputes.” This finding echoes that of Christia (2012), who finds that rebel leaders manipulate ideological and ethnic divides for strategic reasons. These personal animosities can often be traced back to the most recent split and the loss of resources. If not ideology, then what? In Northern Ireland, splits were always first over the choice of violent and non-violent strategies, while enough resources allowed factions to impose their choice.

Finally, the results of this case study may not travel well to other conflicts. Feuds between rebel groups were often caused by one group stealing weapons from another group’s arms dumps and caches. I do not explicitly theorise for this dynamic. Instead, it is likely to be a feature of low intensity conflicts where rebels do not have standing armies or constant physical control over resources. This naturally leads us to consider the conflict intensity as a scope condition. It also speaks to the important distinction of

“technologies of rebellion,” which may be related to conflict duration, severity, civilian victimization, and outcome (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2014). The conflict in Northern Ireland is more akin to an urban guerrilla conflict between a conventional state army and lightly armed rebels and the effect of fungible resources might be different in conventional wars involving heavily armed opponents and clear frontlines (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2014; Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010). In the next chapter, I examine whether the dynamics identified in the Northern Irish conflict are present in more severe conflicts.

Chapter 6

The Libyan and Syrian Conflicts (2011-2019)

Conflicts in Syria and Libya are prime examples of the trends identified in Chapter I. Both conflicts have been marked by high levels of external interference and the fragmentation of revolutionary movements. Violence broke out in both states in 2011 after months of increasing repression against protesters. Inspired by events in Tunisia and Egypt where protesters successfully overthrew long-time authoritarian leaders, Libyan protesters took to the streets calling for Colonel Muammar Gaddafi to step down, while Syrian protesters broke the “wall of fear” (Malmvig, 2017; Pearlman, 2016, 2017) and called for democratic reforms under President Bashar Al-Assad. Heavy-handed repression by the leaders led to the outbreak of civil wars that quickly became theatres for competition between regional and global powers, including the US, France, the UK, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Turkey. The Syrian conflict experienced different forms of external involvement at different times and developed into a theatre for external powers to shape the regional power balance. The NATO intervention in Libya led to Gaddafi’s downfall, and subsequent external involvement from other states led to the re-emergence of conflict in 2014.

The Libyan conflict officially ended in October 2020; the Syrian conflict continues at the time of writing. High levels of external interference in both conflicts is often identified as a cause of the highly fragmented rebellions (Abboud, 2018). However, as I show in this chapter, there is significant variation in the levels of fragmentation in both conflicts. I argue that it can be explained in part by temporal variation in the types of support provided.

I theorise that the effect of different forms of support are particularly felt when multiple external states are involved. Multiple external states matter on three levels: competition between external states, bargaining between principals and agents, and competition among rebel groups. Certain civil wars experience interventions from several external states, a context in which external states compete over rebel groups and agents are approached by multiple principals. As the potential supply of support is high, it becomes a seller's market where agents can get better deals from the principals (Salehyan, Siroky, & Wood, 2014, p. 643). Rebel groups will have strong bargaining positions and the ability to extract better contracts where they receive more support but forego less autonomy. Rebel groups with greater bargaining positions can acquire more resources by giving up less autonomy. Greater rewards and fewer strings attached accentuate competitive dynamics within and among rebel groups. I argue in Chapter II that although the agents are empowered vis-à-vis external principals, the influx of support undermines collective action and the rebellion (Lichbach, 1996; Olson, 1965). The ability of multiple rebel groups to get favourable terms from multiple states induces a competitive environment which ultimately has the perverse effect of undermining the rebellion as a whole. The competitive environment will increase competition among and within groups, leading to splintering and the emergence of multiple rebel groups. When multiple external states provide nonfungible support to the same rebel group, I expect the effect on rebel dynamics to be the same as if they were a single external supporter because they act as a collective principal.

External states accept greater risks in order to provide nonfungible resources. They seek to counteract internal feuding that weakens rebel groups, and nonfungible forms of support shift the balance of power. By improving the chances that the recipient will achieve its objectives, it causes a bandwagon effect where weaker rebel groups join the ascending rebel power. From the discussion in Chapter II, I proposed two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: (A) rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to splinter; and (B) rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are less likely to splinter.

Hypothesis 4: (A) rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to fight other rebels; and (B) rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely to form alliances with other rebels.

External states that provide rebels with nonfungible support can therefore foster a cooperative environment within and among rebel groups. A situation where multiple external states provide nonfungible support to different rebel groups will increase rebel infighting but decrease rebel splintering as external states attempt to become dominant principals. The external states provide nonfungible support in order to have greater control over their rebel groups and to give them the best chance of winning. Nonfungible support such as troops or safehavens ensures that rebel factions remain cohesive, as the external states retains ownership of their support and can act as a third-party enforcer (Bapat & Bond, 2012). However, the conflict becomes a theatre for external states to compete. They direct ‘their’ rebels to fight forces supported by other dominant principals. When external states provide nonfungible support to multiple rebel groups, rebel groups are less likely to splinter but they are more likely to fight one another. From this, I developed an additional and final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: rebel groups in conflicts where multiple external states provide nonfungible resources are more likely to fight other rebel groups.

I expect the competitive environment among and within groups to increase in periods of fungible support, resulting in greater splintering and rebel fighting. However, in cases where multiple external states provide nonfungible support to different rebel groups, I expect greater rebel infighting, but less rebel splintering.

The chapter is structured as follows: First, I describe the provision of different types of external support over the course of both conflicts. By identifying which states became involved and why they did so, I provide further evidence of the mechanisms underpinning the findings of the large-N analysis conducted in Chapter III, in which I find that variation in types of support is a function of relative military and alliance strength. Second, I conduct a cross-case comparison to test hypotheses on the effect of support on rebel fighting, allying, and splintering. I compare temporal variation in rebel infighting using data on the intensity of interrebel fighting to shed light on the conflict dynamics induced by different forms of support. Finally, I analyse the main rebel groups in both conflicts to identify the causal mechanisms underpinning this variation and as further evidence of the causal mechanisms underpinning the findings of the large-N analysis on interrebel dynamics conducted in Chapter IV.

6.1 Research design

Libya and Syria were selected as part of a nested-research design (Lieberman, 2005) because they allow me to identify the causal mechanisms underpinning the results of the large-N analysis of external support provision and rebel dynamics conducted in Chapter III and Chapter IV, respectfully. Combined, they also have constellations of external support that allow me to test *hypothesis 5*. The cases were selected because they share several characteristics, thus representing most-similar cases (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Both emerged at the same time due to similar reasons, having been inspired by the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ in 2011. The authoritarian leaders of both

states cracked down on protesters, which led to the conflict escalation and eventually the outbreak of civil war.

In extending my theoretical argument to account for multiple external states, I shift the theoretical lens to consider civil wars as systems (M. A. Kaplan, 1957; R. M. Wood & Kathman, 2015). As civil war systems become complex by the involvement of multiple external states, it is more informative to examine how different inputs or external factors produce a change in the characteristics of the system and the actors within it (Balser, 1997). Unlike my analysis of rebel dynamics during the conflict in Northern Ireland where I focused on the formation of factions, their accumulation of external resources, and the subsequent splintering and infighting, in this chapter I study the effects of different forms of support from several external states on the conflict as a whole. To do this, I look at overall characteristics of the conflict, namely the number of rebel groups known to have received external support and levels of rebel infighting. I then focus on the formation and dissolution of the main rebel groups to demonstrate the causal mechanisms underpinning changes in the number of rebel groups and the competitive dynamics between them over time.

The research design combines within-case and cross-case analysis. As a first step, I analyse the involvement of external states. I combine the tracing of external support with a fine-grained measure of state alliances: the international arms trade, which forms an important part of the economy of security (Lake, 2020) and underlies informal international alliances (Beardsley, Liu, Mucha, Siegel, & Tellez, 2020). I thus provide evidence of the causal mechanisms underpinning *hypothesis 1* and *2* which propose that external states provide support as a function of their relative military strength and alliance strength. This analysis also allows me to determine the key independent variables for the second part of my analysis: types of support and number of external supporters.

In a second section, I conduct a system-level analysis of both conflicts. I employ

the UCDP Geo-reference Event Dataset (GED) (Pettersson et al., 2021; Sundberg & Melander, 2013) to create dependent variables for the number of groups and deaths from inter-group fighting at the month-level.¹ The GED codes events of lethal violence occurring in a given time and place. An event is described as “an incident where armed force was used by an organized actor against another organized actor, or against civilians, resulting in at least one direct death at a specific location and a specific date” (Sundberg & Melander, 2013, p. 2). Unlike the global analysis conducted in Chapter IV, this data provides a more fine-grained approach to group competition, as fighting need not surpass the 25 battle-related deaths threshold built into other UCDP datasets. The data does not capture all active rebel groups and may under-report deaths resulting from rebel fighting. For example, with reportedly over 1,000 armed groups in Syria, “fragmentation has made it impossible to distinguish between different armed groups in the state-based conflict, due to the difficulty of attributing events to specific actors” (Pettersson et al., 2021, p. 8). Instead, I employ the data as the best available indicator of rebel dynamics at the system-level.

I focus on the number of armed groups present in the conflict at any one time as an indicator of a splintering process due to competition within groups and the number of deaths caused by inter-group fighting is an indicator of the competitive environment among groups. Specifically, I interpret an increase in the number of groups is indicative of a splintering process within groups, while more deaths caused by interrebel fighting is indicative of competition among groups. Although there are other indicators of fragmentation, such as levels of institutionalisation and the power distribution (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012), they are often related to the types of external support provided. For instance, external supporters can create overarching institutions to coordinate factions and groups (Bapat & Bond, 2012;

¹Other sources of political event data exist, for example the Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS), the Political Instability Task Force (PITF), the Worldwide Atrocities Dataset, the Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD), and Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). However, GED contains a high number of events and fewer coding errors (Eck, 2012).

Popovic, 2018) while support can shift the distribution of power among armed groups (Tamm, 2016). Measuring group strength or the presence of overarching institutions, therefore, risks measuring both the dependent and independent variables. I exploit differences in the sequencing of external support to conduct a cross-case comparison. I perform a “pattern-matching investigation” to validate the causal mechanism of my theoretical argument (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 299). As I show later, the different forms and sequencing of support in both conflicts allow me to test *hypothesis 5* on the effect of nonfungible support from multiple external states on interrebel fighting. In a final section, I provide further evidence for the causal mechanisms underpinning the variation in both dependent variables. Specifically, I focus on the cohesion and fragmentation of the main rebel groups known to have received external support in both conflicts, which serve as analytic windows into rebel dynamics caused by different forms of external support.

6.2 External state support

The analysis of external support provided to rebel groups during the Libyan and Syrian conflicts demonstrates the causal mechanisms underpinning the findings of the large-N analysis. I show that states’ decisions to provide support were primarily driven by triadic strategic relations that transcend bilateral external-state-supporter-target-state dynamics. In the Syrian conflict, it is clear that external supporter states feared retaliation and conflict escalation by Syria and its allies, Iran and Russia. Indeed, they anticipated “the level that would provoke a response and limiting their role accordingly” (Byman, 2013, p. 999). In the Libyan case, no state was willing to defend the Gaddafi regime. External states, safe in the knowledge that they would not be seriously punished by Libya’s allies, were more willing to provide nonfungible support to impose a friendly regime.

These findings provide support for *hypothesis 2A* that states are more likely provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting stronger states in terms of alliance strength and *hypothesis 2B* that states provide nonfungible support to rebels targeting states that are weaker in terms of alliance strength. The larger geopolitical context in which the conflicts occurred trumped bilateral strength considerations. This mirrors the results of the large-N analysis conducted in Chapter III, where a state's place in the international network of alliances was the primary force driving the strategic choice of states to provide external support. Finally, both conflicts also demonstrate a ratchet effect (Toukan, 2019, p. 813), whereby the involvement of international rivals increases the potential costs of non-intervention. In the Syrian case, the role that Iran and Russia would have in deciding the faith of post-conflict Syria, as well as the emergence of the Islamic State (IS), incentivised the US to provide support to Kurdish forces in northern Syria. In Libya, Turkey's role in supporting the UN-backed government pushed Russia to intervene militarily. I do not theoretically account for this dynamic and discuss it in greater detail in my concluding chapter.

Libya

Inspired by the so-called 'Arab Spring' or 'Arab Rising,' the earliest protests in Libya took place in the Eastern city of Benghazi on 15 February 2011. Spontaneous and unorganised, the number of protesters increased drastically when state forces responded with disproportionate use of force. Gaddafi, who had ruled Libya for 42 years, saw the fall of long-standing autocrats in neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt and, in a bid to avoid the same fate, cracked down on dissenting voices in his country. On 22 February, the long-term leader of Libya made an infamous speech in which he labelled protesters "cockroaches" and threatened to "cleanse Libya house by house" (BBC News, 2011a). Violence escalated as Gaddafi sought to end the protests. Rebel forces emerged and Benghazi became their stronghold.

On the grounds of protecting civilians from Gaddafi's forces, and invoking "Responsibility to Protect" for the first time, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973 on 17 March. The resolution paved the way for a military intervention in Libya. The decision was facilitated by the "exceptional clarity of the threat of mass atrocities" (Bellamy, 2011, p. 265) in Gaddafi's speeches, although many have since cast doubt on the extent of civilian targeting (Kuperman, 2013; Roberts, 2011; Zambakari, 2016).² The UN called for a no-fly zone, an arms embargo, and authorised external states to take all necessary measures "while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory."³ The resolution marked the first time that the Security Council authorised the use of military force for human protection purposes "against the wishes of a functioning state" (Bellamy, 2011, p. 263).

Days later, NATO forces launched air and maritime strikes against government troops surrounding rebels in the cities of Benghazi and Misrata. The intervention was led by the US, the UK, and France. Until this point, Gaddafi's victory against the nascent rebels seemed imminent (Tudoroiu, 2013, p. 308). The NATO intervention drastically shifted the balance of power between the rebels and the government. Such was the intensity of NATO campaign that several states objected to what they saw as NATO overstepping the UN legal mandate by seeking regime change (BBC News, 2011c; Ulfstein & Christiansen, 2013).⁴ The most vocal opposition came from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who described the resolution as a "medieval call to crusade," arguing that NATO overstepped the UN mandate by clearly siding with one side of the conflict (Allison, 2013, p. 797). While US President Barack Obama claimed to be pursuing a non-military solution to the conflict in late March, the subsequent military

²For instance, Roberts (2011) claims that the rebel leaders had good reason to emphasise the risk to civilians in Benghazi, because they had most to lose if Gaddafi recaptured the city. He notes that Gaddafi's forces had not committed massacres when retaking other towns.

³United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011), S/RES/1973 (17 March 2011), available from [[https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20\(2011\)](https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20(2011))]([https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20\(2011\)](https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20(2011))).

⁴As noted by Kuperman (2013, p. 113), NATO attacked Libyan forces that were retreating and were not a threat to civilians, thus exceeding the use of force necessary to protect civilians.

operation by NATO allies indicated that this was never the main strategy (De Waal, 2013, p. 668).⁵

As noted by Bellamy (2011, p. 266), Gaddafi had few friends in the region. During Gaddafi's 42-year rule, relations with its neighbours were volatile. Gaddafi's history of intervening militarily in Sudan and Chad, providing support to proxies in Darfur, Somalia, and Liberia, but also further afield such as in Northern Ireland, meant that few states were willing to stand up for his regime in 2011. But relations between Libya and Western states had been normalised in the 2000s; Libya was an important partner in the US's fight against terrorism in the Maghreb and Western companies had large oil contracts in the country. Despite this, many Western states—especially the US and the UK—continued to view Gaddafi's Libya as a rogue state. According to British Prime Minister David Cameron (2019, p. 275), "... he was 'Mad Dog' Gaddafi, a horrific figure in modern history who sold semtex to the IRA, ordered the downing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in Scotland, and admitted responsibility for the murder of PC Yvonne Fletcher in London." According to Tudoroiu (2013), the US's decision to intervene in Libya through NATO was driven by geopolitical tensions with Russia. While Libya normalised economic and political relations with the US and the EU, the US, in particular, refused to increase military cooperation (Tudoroiu, 2013, p. 307). Instead, Gaddafi turned to Russia. Gaddafi welcomed Putin to Tripoli in 2008 in an effort to be less dependent on the US (Stevens, 2008). As is visible in Figure 6.1,⁶ Russia provided arms to the Gaddafi regime in the years building up to the civil war.

⁵Several authors make a similar claim. Zambakari (2016, p. 48) outlines how mediation efforts by Russia, Turkey, and the African Union (AU) were rejected not by the Gaddafi regime, but by rebel forces—thus showing how regime change through military intervention was prioritized over a political solution. Gaddafi even announced a ceasefire on 18 March 2011, one day after Resolution 1973 and in accordance with Article 1, but the NTC rejected it (Roberts, 2011).

⁶The SIPRI Arms Transfers Database provides statistics on the volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons using a common unit called the trend-indicator value (TIV), which represents the transfer of military resources rather than the financial value of the transfer. The database is available on the SIPRI website at <https://www.sipri.org/> (accessed on 12/01/2021).

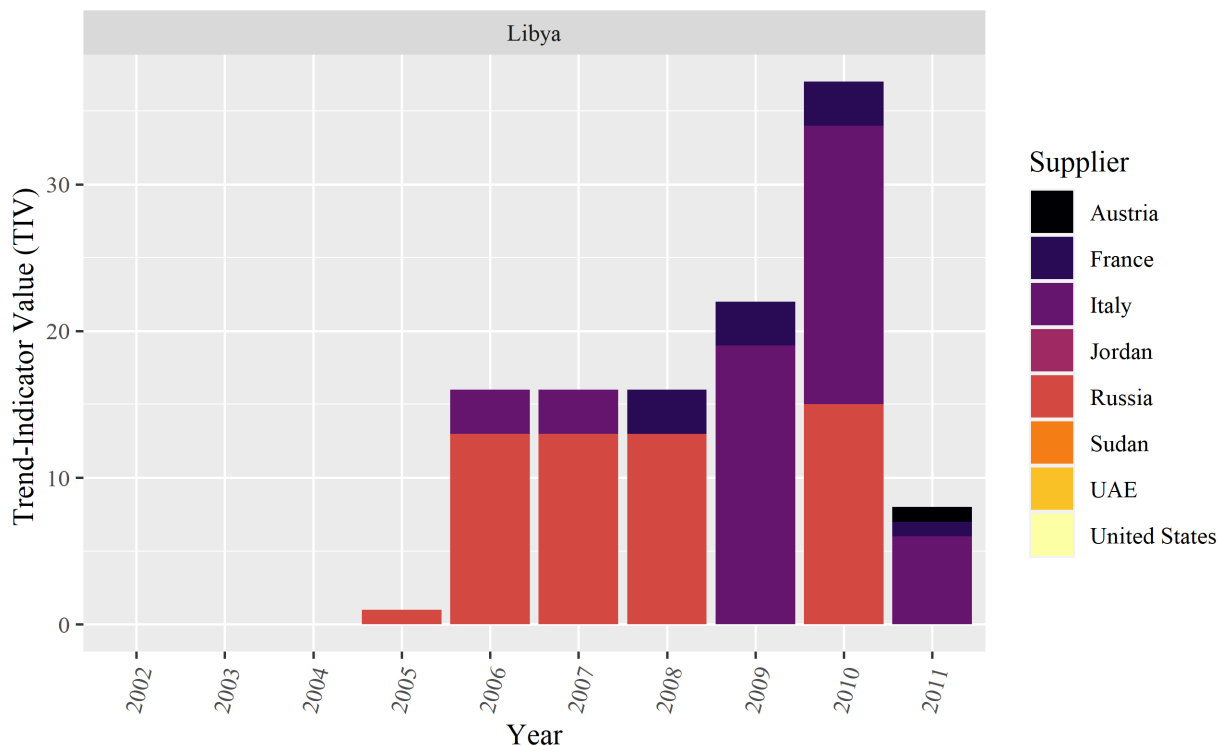


Figure 6.1: Weapon imports to Libya (2001-2011) according to the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

Strong states that may have wanted to prevent NATO from extending its sphere of influence were reluctant to defend the Gaddafi regime. Neither Russia nor China vetoed Resolution 1973 despite strong reservations which would resurface later when considering similar action in Syria (Bellamy, 2011, p. 267). As noted by Tudoroiu (2013, p. 316), “one should not underestimate how difficult it was for the Kremlin, at a cognitive level, to shift abruptly from ‘soft’ balancing the US to antagonizing it openly and aggressively in the volatile Middle Eastern arena.” Ultimately, the risks of supporting the Libyan regime were too great for Russia, while the West’s main regional challenger, Iran, was too weak to provide support to the Gaddafi region at the time (Tudoroiu, 2013, p. 316). This resulted in Russia suffering from “buyer’s remorse almost immediately” (Ahram, 2019, p. 54). In comparison, NATO members had little fear that Libya or its weak allies—only Gambia and Eritrea could still be considered allies at this time (De Waal, 2013)—would retaliate and, aiming to replace a rival state

with a potential ally, provided nonfungible support to a revolution movement which was nominally pursuing democratic goals. Although political commentators claimed that the intervention was motivated by oil resources (e.g. Borger & Macalister, 2011), others highlighted that the US's intervention in Libya was one of the “Western or Western-backed wars against hostile, ‘defiant,’ insufficiently ‘compliant,’ or ‘rogue’ regimes,” and that the new regime would become a “junior partner of the new Libya’s Western sponsors” (Roberts, 2011). Therefore, key to understanding why NATO powers intervened in Libya is their attempt to determine the future orientation of Libya, and they provided nonfungible support to rebels because there were low risks of retaliation from Libya or its allies. Libya’s relationship with Russia was too weak at the time for Russia to risk supporting the regime, but strong enough for NATO powers to pre-empt stronger relations from developing. International alliances present potential intervening states with significant risk of retaliation, and the prospect of states moving into the sphere of a rival may lead states to pre-emptively pursue regime change. NATO’s intervention in Libya thus shows the mechanisms underpinning the findings for *hypothesis 2B* that external states are more likely to provide nonfungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are weaker in terms of military alliances. It demonstrates geopolitical dynamics shaping external state support that are difficult to capture in the large-N analysis conducted in Chapter III but which may explain why relative alliance strength is a strong predictor in all models.

In July, the International Contact Group on Libya recognized the NTC as the legitimate government. According to Roberts (2011), the NTC occupied centre stage in Libya but key decisions were made in “London or Paris or Doha” as part of NATO’s “Operation Unified Protector” mission. To ensure that these decisions were carried out on the ground, Western powers provided nonfungible support which gave them greater control over the rebels. While the NTC was supported by NATO air strikes, NATO powers and other states also provided substantial fungible support. For example,

Italy, France, and Kuwait pledged over one billion US dollars to the rebels in June, while the NTC requested a further three billion to last until the end of the year (BBC News, 2011b). Qatar and Sudan provided fungible resources in the form of funding and weapons to groups in western Libya, while the UAE provided groups in Zintan, Misrata, and Benghazi with weapons (De Waal, 2013, p. 375; Lacher, 2020, p. 23). NATO states allowed Qatar to provide weapons, but they had few operatives to provide oversight of arm shipments (Risen, Mazzetti, & Schmidt, 2012). Qatar provided arms and money to various opposition and militant groups in the hope of cementing alliances with the new government (Risen, Mazzetti, & Schmidt, 2012).⁷ According to De Waal (2013, p. 376), Sudan was preparing support to groups in Libya as early as 2010 after it became clear that Libya would not support its rapprochement to Chad and would continue to provide military support to the Justice and Equality Movement in Darfur. The UK Prime Minister, David Cameron (2019, p. 284), claims that the UK, France, Qatar, and the UAE cooperated closely on military affairs, describing the quartet as the “Four Amigos.” Qatar and the UAE provided fungible support to several rebel factions under the umbrella of the NTC. Nonfungible support from NATO powers to the rebels ensured the defeat of the Gaddafi regime and other states provided fungible support during the first civil war in 2011.

After the Gaddafi regime was defeated, NATO states left the job of rebuilding the country to the UN. The interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan may have made Western leaders hesitant to intervene in Libya, but their largely failed post-intervention stabilisation operations in those countries ensured that they would not remain. Fears quickly emerged over the increasing number of Islamist militias with ties to the new government. These fears materialised in 2012 when the Islamist group Ansar al-Shariah killed US Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans

⁷For example, Qatar delivered 40 tons of military equipment to the town of Zarzis in Tunisia, which was transported (allegedly by Tunisian armed forces) to a border post with Libya (UN, 2017, p. 22).

(Kirkpatrick, 2012). Concerns over Libya's future orientation led Egypt and the UAE to support anti-government groups in the post-NATO intervention environment. The Islamist militias had strong links with the Muslim Brotherhood, and allowing them to ascend to power was considered detrimental for Egypt and the UAE's future relations with the new regime in Libya and their position in the regional balance of power. Indeed, Egypt and the UAE were competing over the future orientation of Libya with Qatar, Turkey, and Sudan, who supported the government and pro-government armed groups in Tripoli with fungible support. The Libyan state became the host of regional competitive dynamics.

During the inter-war period from 2011 to 2014, multiple external states provided fungible support to both pro-government and anti-government armed groups. Qatar, Turkey, and Sudan provided support to the internationally recognised government, seeking to bolster an Islamist state with strong ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia provided support to groups that were positioning themselves against the government (Kadlec, 2017). While it is true that external support is notoriously difficult to pinpoint in space and time (G. Hughes, 2012), support to different Libyan groups, both pro-and anti-government groups, was an open secret. For example, leaked emails between UAE diplomats show that they continued to ship weapons long after the 2011 conflict ended (Kirkpatrick, 2015). Multiple external states provided fungible resources to increasingly opposing sides from late-2011 to 2014.

The second civil war erupted in May 2014. Two blocs of external states emerged. The "Pro-Dignity" bloc compromised Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia and provided support to the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar, who vowed to rid Libya of Islamists. The "Pro-Dawn" bloc included Qatar, Sudan, and Turkey, who provided support to the coalition of pro-government militia groups, many of whom were Islamist, called the Libyan Dawn (Reeve, 2015; Zambakari, 2016, p. 54). The

political process in the inter-war years developed unfavourably for the Pro-Dignity bloc. To secure their interests, Egypt and the UAE started to provide nonfungible support.⁸ Thus, the second civil war was marked by nonfungible support from the Pro-Dignity bloc to anti-government forces led by Haftar and fungible support from the Pro-Dawn bloc to the government-aligned forces. To counter their growing influence over the future disposition of the Libyan state, Egypt and the UAE launched air strikes to support Haftar's forces (Cafiero & Wagner, 2015; Eriksson, 2016). For example, in as early as August 2014, UAE airstrikes struck positions of the Libyan Dawn near Tripoli (Lacher, 2020, p. 41). UAE forces operated from bases in Egypt, its ally who also wanted to affect the outcome of the conflict. Egypt's motivations were what Reeve (2015) refers to as "ideological": it feared that the Muslim Brotherhood would gain control in Libya. This fear was shared with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who saw their regional rival Qatar attempting to increase its influence by establishing a friendly government in Tripoli. Faced with the prospect of a state allied with their rival, the UAE and its ally Egypt provided nonfungible support. Again, external state provision was a function of geopolitical strategic interests that transcend bilateral relations between external and target state. The only way to fully understand why and in which form external states provided support to rebel groups is to look at triadic relations and regional alliance dynamics.

As Egypt and the UAE provided nonfungible forms of support to Haftar's forces, Qatar, Turkey, and Sudan increased their support to the government forces. However, their support remained largely in the form of funds and weapons, or what Cafiero & Wagner (2015) describe as "varying degrees of support." The Pro-Dawn bloc was considerably less coherent than the one supporting Haftar's forces (Reeve, 2015;

⁸Saudi Arabia is also part of the Pro-Dignity bloc, but it continued to provide mostly fungible support and did not escalate its involvement (Reeve, 2015). For instance, Haftar's forces received 549 armoured and non-armoured vehicles in April 2016 which were shipped from Saudi Arabia (UN, 2017). Instead, its ally UAE became the main external supporter in Libya while Saudi Arabia focused on the conflict in Yemen.

Zambakari, 2016). In Appendix IV I discuss how fungible support may have played a role in the fragmentation of pro-government forces.

IS emerged as a potent force in early 2015, gaining control of the city of Sirte. Their emergence in Libya prompted further interventions from Western powers, many of which feared that Libya would become a haven for transnational terrorists. The link between Misratan militias and the internationally recognised Libyan government—described by Lacher (2020, p. 49) as “lukewarm at best”—allowed Western powers to provide Misratan groups with nonfungible support without violating international law.⁹ The group was defeated in late 2016 by Misratan forces loyal to the UN-backed government in Tripoli. The pro-government forces ability to defeat IS in Sirte showed external states that not only Haftar could defeat the spread of radical Islamism in the conflict. Despite this, the UK, France, and the US stopped providing nonfungible support as the short-term goal of eliminating IS had been achieved. Instead, Western governments increasingly signalled greater political support Haftar during 2017, a year in which he personally visited both Rome and Paris.

In a final phase of the conflict, Turkey and Russia provided nonfungible support to opposite sides, in addition to the support provided by the blocs identified previously. Russia became involved in the conflict in a way that it had not done previously. Already heavily involved in Syria, Russia was beginning to expand its influence in Libya. Indeed, in as early as January 2017, Haftar was given a tour of a Russian aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean (Reuters, 2017). Nonfungible support was provided at least as early as April 2019, when Russia started to provide nonfungible support to Haftar’s forces in the form of the Russian paramilitary organisation known as the Wagner Group (Barabanov & Ibrahim, 2021). Wagner Group fighters provided Haftar’s forces with

⁹For example, the US provided nonfungible support in the form of air strikes—495 between August and December (UN, 2017, p. 40)—and the UK sent special forces (Ryan & Raghavan, 2016). In 2016, France accepted that French military personnel were present in Libya after three soldiers died fighting IS near Benghazi, seemingly there to support Haftar forces fighting Islamist forces (Chassany & Saleh, 2016).

artillery strikes and well-trained snipers (Wehrey, 2019, 2020). In April 2019, Haftar's forces launched an assault to topple the government in Tripoli. Turkey increased its support to the internationally recognised government in December 2019, when it sent military personnel, drones, and even Syrian mercenaries (Wehrey, 2020). Turkey's escalation was primarily motivated by efforts to counter the increasing influence of the UAE and Egypt, and Russia with whom it is also involved in competitive interventions in Syria. By 2020, a military stalemate emerged. A peace agreement was signed in October and an interim government was formed in early 2021. Russia's involvement in the form of nonfungible support shifted the balance of power between the sides and forced Turkey to either lose influence in Libya, or escalate its own involvement. This escalation led to increasingly competitive interventions, or "two-sided, simultaneous military assistance from different third-party states to both government and rebel combatants" (Anderson, 2019). Turkey reciprocated by providing nonfungible support to the government. Like Russia, it did so through auxiliary forces—namely the Syrian mercenaries. Importantly for the subsequent analysis of conflict dynamics, support to rebels in Libya was initially nonfungible (2011), predominantly fungible (2011-2014), and nonfungible (2014-2019).

There were escalatory dynamics on both sides of the conflict after NATO's intervention in 2011 and the defeat of the Gaddafi regime. Relative military and alliance strength were important strategic considerations when NATO forces decided to provide nonfungible support. Ultimately, no one was prepared to defend Gaddafi's Libya. Subsequent involvement by regional powers, and later Russia, are best understood in terms of the regional competition over the future of orientation of the Libyan state. While Turkey, Qatar, and Sudan promoted groups with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia perceived this as the creation of a future regional rival and took steps to prevent it. After the NATO intervention, it is difficult to analyse interventions within the prism of external states and the

Libyan state because the latter was so weak. However, the Libyan case suggests, like Saideman (2002), Findley & Teo (2006), and Anderson (2019), that balancing and bandwagoning pertain to the geopolitics of civil war intervention. Similarly, it further supports the findings of Bapat & Bond (2012) and San-Akca (2016), who note that states are often motivated by geostrategic interests rather than normative concerns. In the case, geostrategic interests extend beyond the bilateral relations between the external states and the target state.

Syria

From the start of protests linked to the ‘Arab Spring’ in Syria, Assad’s government claimed that the protesters were “foreign agents.” However, external support to rebel groups only began after soldiers defected from the Syrian Army and took up arms to protect protesters and civilians (Malmvig, 2017, p. 68). The initial months and years of the conflict were marked not so much by interventions, but the lack thereof. Indeed, Phillips (2020) contends that interventions by regional powers were informed by the lack of interventions from the US. The US was reluctant to intervening in Syria due to the costs of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq—both in terms of material and human life, but also in terms of reputation and belief in its ability to spread democratic values in the Middle East (Phillips, 2020). However, the US intervened in Libya. Why then did the same not happen in Syria? Considering regime change in Libya, Western powers were aware that Russia and China would not support similar endeavours in Syria (Dreazen, 2012). Putin claimed that the UN’s no-fly zone over Libya “overstepped” (Katz, 2013), and concluded that Libya “was a big political error, not to be repeated over Syria or anywhere else” (Tudoroiu, 2013, p. 308). Russia thus initially assumed the role of “diplomatic shield” for the Syrian state (Allison, 2013, p. 798). Russia saw the actions of Western powers in Libya as an attempt to replace the Gaddafi regime with a potential ally, and thus signalled that Russia

would not support any further UN resolutions that sought to pave the way for military interventions. Western powers recognised that Russia would not support even limited Security Council sanctions against Assad. Clearly, both conflicts are linked. Russia did not veto UN resolution 1973 to intervene in Libya, but in light of NATO's regime change in Libya, Russia would not support a similar approach in Syria.

Russia also maintained a stronger relationship with the Syrian regime. While a military alliance between the two states ended with the collapse of the USSR, Syria was Russia's main ally in the Middle East: not only did it export substantial amounts of weapons to Syria (see Figure 6.2), Damascus also granted Russian warships access to its Mediterranean through the port of Tartus (Dreazen, 2012). In 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin played down these strategic interests, highlighting the sectarian nature of the conflict and pointing to the negative outcome of the Libyan intervention (Herszenhorn & Cumming-Bruce, 2012). Allison (2013) and Phillips (2020) also play down the importance of Russia's "material interests" in Syria. Instead, they argue that Russia was motivated by greater geopolitics, and considered that Western intervention in Syria was a strategy to undermine Iran's influence in the region, which is an even more important regional ally to Russia than Syria (Allison, 2013, p. 808). This points to triadic alliance dynamics and indicates that Syria, unlike Libya, had important sources of support from powerful allies.

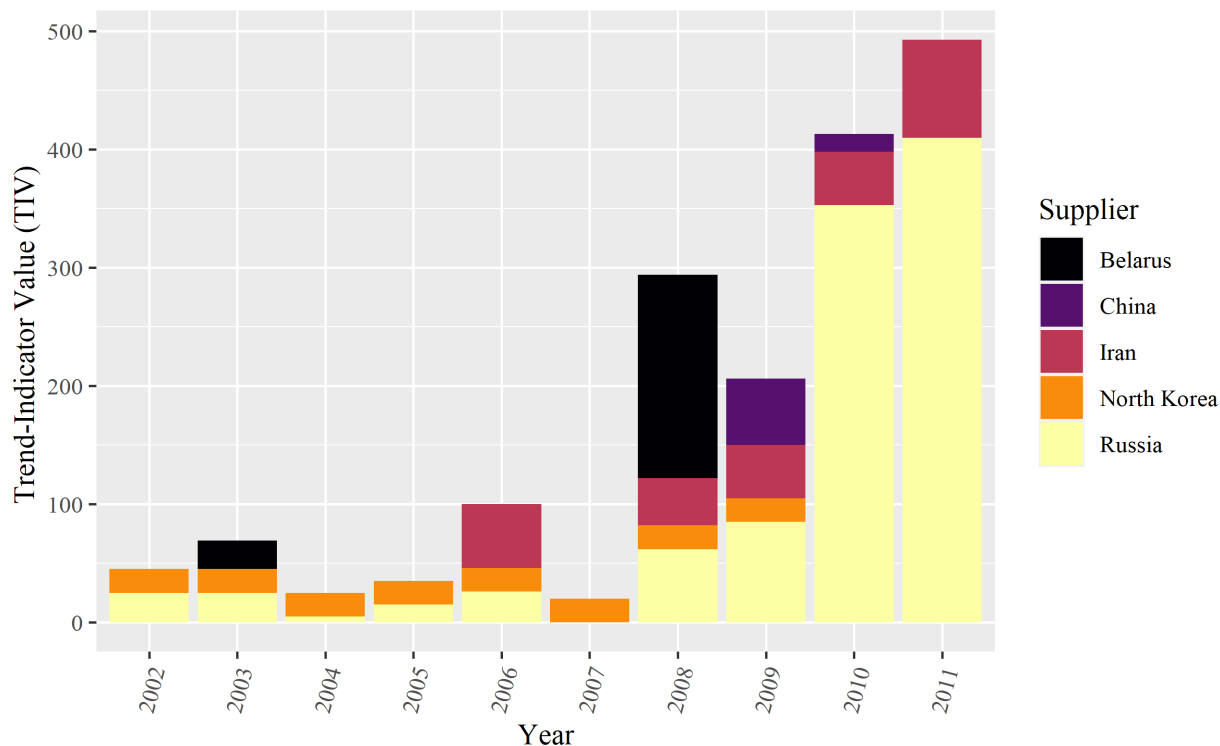


Figure 6.2: The volume of weapon imports to Syria in the lead up to the conflict (2001-2011) according to the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

The Syrian regime could count on support from its closest regional ally, Iran. Syria has been Iran's only consistent ally since the 1979 Islamic revolution (Sadjadpour, 2013, p. 11), and its military involvement in Syria began as early as 2011. Syria was Iran's only ally in the region and was key in its regional rivalry with the Gulf monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Malmvig, 2017, p. 71). Indeed, on the eve of the conflict, "Syria remained a key pillar of Iran's regional policy" (Phillips, 2020, p. 31). Therefore, Iran's support for the Assad regime was driven by concerns about the composition of a post-Assad government (Sadjadpour, 2013, p. 11). Iran supported the government with nonfungible support, predominantly by developing strong relations with Shia militias and by deploying the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to fight Syrian rebels. Hezbollah, Iran's proxy in Lebanon since 1981, also became heavily involved in Syria. Syria was an important land bridge for Iranian support, and a new regime in the country could undermine Hezbollah's position

vis-à-vis Israel (Phillips, 2020; Saade, 2017). Both Iran and Hezbollah embedded advisers, special troops, and soldiers in pro-government militias and the Syrian army (Malmvig, 2017, p. 71). The US's reluctance to intervene in Syria as it did in Libya points to an important causal mechanism for *hypothesis 2B*—relative alliance strength. Unlike Libya, Syria had committed allies that were prepared to defend it.

Despite rapprochement between Turkey and Syria since 2003 (Hokayem, 2014, p. 108), Turkey was motivated to provide external support to rebel opposition in Syria for several reasons. First, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey adopted a more active foreign policy in the former Ottoman lands of the Middle East. However, there was a “mismatch between Turkey’s regional ambitions and its capacity to bring them about” (Phillips, 2020, p. 35 & 172) and Erdogan underestimated the strength of Assad, especially with support from Russia and Iran (Hinnebusch, 2019, p. 121). Therefore, while regime change in Syria could lead to a new regional ally, the Turkish state was too weak to intervene directly, an important causal mechanism underpinning *hypothesis 1A*. Instead, early in the conflict it pressured NATO to take action, which had the effect of pitting it against Russia who strongly opposed Western military intervention (Katz, 2013). Second, Turkey feared the emergence of a strong Kurdish opposition in Syria which could lead to a renewed and reinvigorated violent campaign in Turkey by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). Finally, as the conflict developed Turkey increasingly received and hosted Syrian refugees. The latter two points worsened for Turkey as the conflict progressed: key among them was the emergence of politically and militarily powerful Kurdish rebel groups.

In August 2012, the US set out its “red line” warning to the Syrian regime. According to President Obama, the US had “communicated in no uncertain terms with every player in the region that that’s a red line for us and that there would be enormous consequences if we start seeing movement on the chemical weapons front or the use of chemical weapons” (The White House, 2012). The Syrian regime first used

chemical weapons in late 2012, but no doubt crossed the red line in August 2013 when it deployed sarin nerve gas and killed between 700 and 1400 people in the Damascus suburbs of Eastern and Western Ghouta (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Phillips, 2020, p. 177). In response, the US launched cruise missile strikes against the Syrian regime in a military operation that Phillips (2020, p. 179) describes as “enough to punish Assad, but not enough to topple him.” It also started providing fungible support to CIA vetted rebel groups. The event signalled to regional actors that the US would not intervene with nonfungible support. Its reluctance to do so resulted in a vacuum that was “filled by a chaotic influx of money and eventually weaponry from regional states like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey” (Lister, 2016a, p. 6). The US’s failure to provide nonfungible support signalled its reluctance to other potential interveners.

Fearing that Iran would increase its influence in the region, which was already tilting in Iran’s favour since its historic rival Iraq was invaded in 2003, Saudi Arabia and Qatar began providing external support to opposition movements, predominantly in the form of weapons and funding. They did so to counter the Iranian regime’s involvement and to support a predominantly Sunni opposition that could form a future ally. Ultimately, both states wished to replace Assad “with an opposition that would be sympathetic” to their interests and “guarantee an ally in the post-Assad Syrian political system” (Khatib, 2014, p. 7). While Saudi Arabia threatened direct intervention, these threats were not credible in the absence of support from the US (Malmvig, 2017, p. 69). Without greater commitment from their US allies, the Gulf states were not prepared to provide nonfungible support to the opposition. Again, key here is the relative difference in alliance strength. While Syria could rely on Iran and later Russia to defend it, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar had no such support from powerful allies. In response, they provided predominantly fungible support, as expected by *hypothesis 2A*.

It was not until early-2012 that external states started to provide fungible sup-

port to the armed opposition in Syria (Lister, 2016a, p. 7). Until this point, the opposition relied on materials that defecting officers brought with them, spoils of war, the black market, and wealthy private supporters, predominantly based in Kuwait (Dickinson, 2013; Lister, 2016b, p. 70). By 2012, the US started to provide covert support to factions within the FSA. However, by mid-2013 it was clear that the US would not intervene with nonfungible support and the coalition of states that had temporarily united to provide support to the opposition—Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar—increasingly sought to empower their own proxies. Efforts were made to maintain cooperation from external states, namely through the formation of the Military Operations Centre (MOC). Founded in the second half of 2013 with headquarters in Amman, Jordan, it only began to develop in a meaningful way in 2014 (Sadaki, 2016). However, the fungible support was not well-coordinated and external powers had different visions for the future of Syria. Qatar and Turkey regarded the Muslim Brotherhood as the natural representatives of Syria’s Sunni Arab majority (Ahram, 2019, p. 57). For example, Qatar used multiple distribution routes to support groups, but favoured groups with strong ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, such as the Tawheed and Farouq, and more radical jihadists. Saudi Arabia, however, provided support to more secular groups but ignored official FSA channels opting for “informal, tribal, and personal relationships” instead (Phillips, 2020, p. 139). Unlike NATO support to the NTC in Libya, Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia provided predominantly fungible support in an uncoordinated—and increasingly competitive—manner.

Three events caused competition between the external supporters to increase. First, the US’s reluctance to intervene with nonfungible support meant that it was not in a position to coordinate external assistance to the FSA as it was in coordinating assistance to the NTC in Libya. Second, the military coup in Egypt in 2013 increased competition between the Gulf monarchies. Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood were deposed in Egypt and replaced by Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, defence minister

and commander of the armed forces who had served as military attaché in Saudi Arabia. Finally, but related to the second point, the same actors were increasingly involved in competitive intervention dynamics in Libya.

In 2014, IS controlled large swathes of eastern Syria and, in June shocked the international community when it took control of Iraq's third largest city, Mosul. This shifted outside views of the conflict, and the US, which had a year previously refused to strike Assad for crossing the "red lines," assembled an international coalition to "degrade and destroy" IS (Phillips, 2020, p. 189). The coalition began airstrikes in August 2014, just one month after IS declared that it had established a Caliphate. Initially limited to their Iraqi based stronghold, within a month they were conducting airstrikes in Syria (Wilson Center, 2019). While the US were successful in pushing IS out of Iraq, the Islamist group made gains in Syria, especially near Aleppo and in Raqqa (Wilson Center, 2019).¹⁰ Assad's allies also reacted to IS's rise. Iran sent its prime general, Qasem Soleimani, to Baghdad to mobilise Shia militias in Iraq and coordinate military operations to recover lost land while Russia provided the Iraqi government with new attack aircraft. Saudi Arabia also closed its border with Iraq. Saudi Arabia and Russia both feared that IS success might embolden groups with similar aspirations within their borders, while Iran did not want to lose Iraq, which had become an important ally since the US withdrew troops in 2011 (Phillips, 2020, p. 207). In June 2014, the White House announced a \$500 million programme to "train and equip" a moderate Syrian force of 5000 rebels. The US paused the programme in 2015, opting for a strategy of combining weapon shipments and airstrikes to existing groups, namely the Kurdish Peshmerga or Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and some FSA-affiliated groups that would later become the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The US increased support in 2015 after Russia began providing airstrike support

¹⁰Obama ordered airstrikes against IS positions in Syria but only provided troop support to Iraqi based Kurdish forces. This potentially underscores the limits of airpower without some form of troop presence on the ground (Schinella, 2019).

to the regime and directly targeted US-backed rebel groups. Early in 2015, Assad's forces had suffered their worst losses and rebel forces captured significant territory, but Russian support turned the tide in the conflict (Phillips, 2020, p. 213). Therefore, the shift from providing fungible support to FSA-affiliated factions to nonfungible support to Kurdish forces in Northern Syria is both a function of the emergence of IS and a threat to stability in Iraq, but also the increasing likelihood that Russia would increase its influence in post-war Syria.

US nonfungible support to Kurdish forces set it on a collision course with its NATO ally, Turkey, who feared the emergence of a Syrian Kurdish entity and the example it could set for Kurdish populations in Turkey and elsewhere (Sary, 2016). In August 2016, Turkey provided nonfungible support to FSA rebels who were fighting IS in Northern Syria as part of Operation Euphrates Shield. As noted by Phillips (2020, p. 235), they were targeting the YPG and IS, not Assad. Turkey's involvement in Syria shifted from anti-Assad to anti-other rebel groups, especially after the US-supported Kurdish groups near the Turkish border. Therefore, by 2016 rebels in the Syrian conflict were receiving nonfungible support from two external states—the US and Turkey.

Like the Libyan conflict, there were several phases in the internationalisation of the Syrian conflict. The first, from 2011 to 2012, was a period of relatively low levels of external support. From 2012 to 2014, external states provided fungible support to several rebel groups. Despite a shared goal of ousting Assad, their distinct preferences led them to engage in competitive support dynamics. Finally, 2016 to the end of 2019 saw a period of nonfungible support being provided first by the US to the predominantly Kurdish forces of the SDF in Northern Syria and later to the FSA by Turkey. External support during the Syrian conflict identifies important causal mechanisms underpinning the findings of the large-N analysis conducted in Chapter III. Iran and Russia were prepared to defend their ally in order to maintain or improve

their spheres of influence in the Middle East. While the Libyan regime was relatively isolated and few states were prepared to support the Gaddafi regime in 2011, this was not the case for Syria. Iran, especially, was in a “long-standing and force-multiplying alliance with Iran” (Hokayem, 2014, p. 109). Due to retaliation from Syria’s allies, external states provided predominantly fungible support.

The internationalisation of both conflicts underscores external support as a dynamic process. Why did the US provide nonfungible support early in the Libyan conflict but only later in the Syrian conflict? Relative military and alliance strength did not change substantially in this period. Instead, the potential benefits of providing nonfungible support increased drastically in Syria. The shift in types of support is likely a function of Russia and Iran’s increasing power and influence in Syria, leading to competitive intervention dynamics (Anderson, 2019; Toukan, 2019). As noted by Hokayem (2014, p. 12), the overall state and strategic orientation of Syria mattered greatly to the overall Middle Eastern balance of power, but the costs of intervening directly for those who wanted to shift Syria’s orientation outweighed the benefits, at least initially. These calculations shifted as the conflict progressed and several states were willing to accept greater risk to ensure that they could influence the conflict and ultimately the post-war posture of the Syrian state. The emergence of dominant principals is germane to the escalation of external support in both conflicts, but it is not clear what conditions lead to this happening. My theory accurately captures why states provide different types of support at the onset of the conflict. However, it struggles to account for changes in support as the conflict progresses. I return to this limitation in Chapter VII.

6.3 Conflict dynamics

In this section, I conduct a system-level analysis of the conflict to test how different types of support shape interrebel dynamics. Like networks, systems are structures within which units interact. A systems approach is necessary if outcomes of interest are also affected by the way in which the actors are organized. Unlike an actor-based approach which reduces political entities to their “discrete parts and examines their properties and connections” (Waltz, 2010, p. 41), a systems approach analyses how changes in the system shapes outcomes at the system-level. Previous work which takes as the unit of analysis the conflict or conflict episodes are conducting system-level analyses (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2018; R. M. Wood & Kathman, 2015). In my research, I am interested in how the international system shapes rebel dynamics, from cohesion and alliances, to splintering and infighting.

The number of external states involved in the Libyan and Syrian conflicts resulted in highly internationalised civil wars. The inter-linkages between the international network of external states and armed groups on the ground represent complex systems in both conflicts. Thurner, Schmid, Cranmer, & Kauermann (2019, p. 23) define complex systems as co-evolving multilayer networks. By co-evolving, the authors refer to how the state of the network determines the future states of nodes, but also that the state of nodes determines the future state of the links in the network. Unlike Chapter V, where I show the causal mechanisms of the theoretical argument for why groups splinter and fight by focusing on the internal processes of rebel groups (E. J. Wood, 2007), in this section I first analyse the entire conflict as a system reacting to external stimuli. I operationalise splintering for *hypothesis 3A* and *B* as variation in the number of active rebel groups and fighting for *hypothesis 4A* and *B* as the number of deaths resulting from rebel infighting. To do this, I employ the UCDP GED (Pettersson et al., 2021; Sundberg & Melander, 2013) at the month-level for each conflict. I code groups as active from their first recorded incident against government forces or other

armed groups. They drop out of the dataset one month after their last incident. I limit the dataset from 1 February 2011 to 31 December 2019. As the latest version ends on 31 December 2020, including the last year of the dataset is likely to register a high drop in the number of armed actors because they are no longer militarily active and not because they no longer exist. This approach greatly reduces the likelihood of capturing a decrease in the number of armed actors that is the result of right censoring. In total, GED contains 885 incidents in Libya and 71,641 incidents in Syria from 2011 to 2019. In a final section, I identify the causal mechanisms underpinning the system-level outcomes by focusing on the main rebel groupings in both conflicts: The National Transitional Council (NTC) and the National Libyan Army (LNA) in Libya, and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria. The central rebel groups with ties to external states serve as analytical windows into the effects of different forms of support on rebel dynamics.

Cross-case comparison

Figure 6.3 shows variation from 1 February 2011 to 31 December 2019 in Libya (top pane) and Syria (bottom pane) for both dependent variables: the number of active armed groups (black line on the right y-axis) and deaths caused by inter-group fighting (red line on the left y-axis). I employ locally weighted scatter plot smoothing (LOESS) (Cleveland, 1979) to visualize trends over time. Note that the y-axes differ in scale. The Syrian conflict was more severe in both the number of battle-related deaths and active rebel groups. Over the same periods, there were 10,269 battle-related deaths from rebel infighting and maximum 12 active groups in Libya compared to 360,218 deaths and 26 active groups in Syria, according to the GED data.

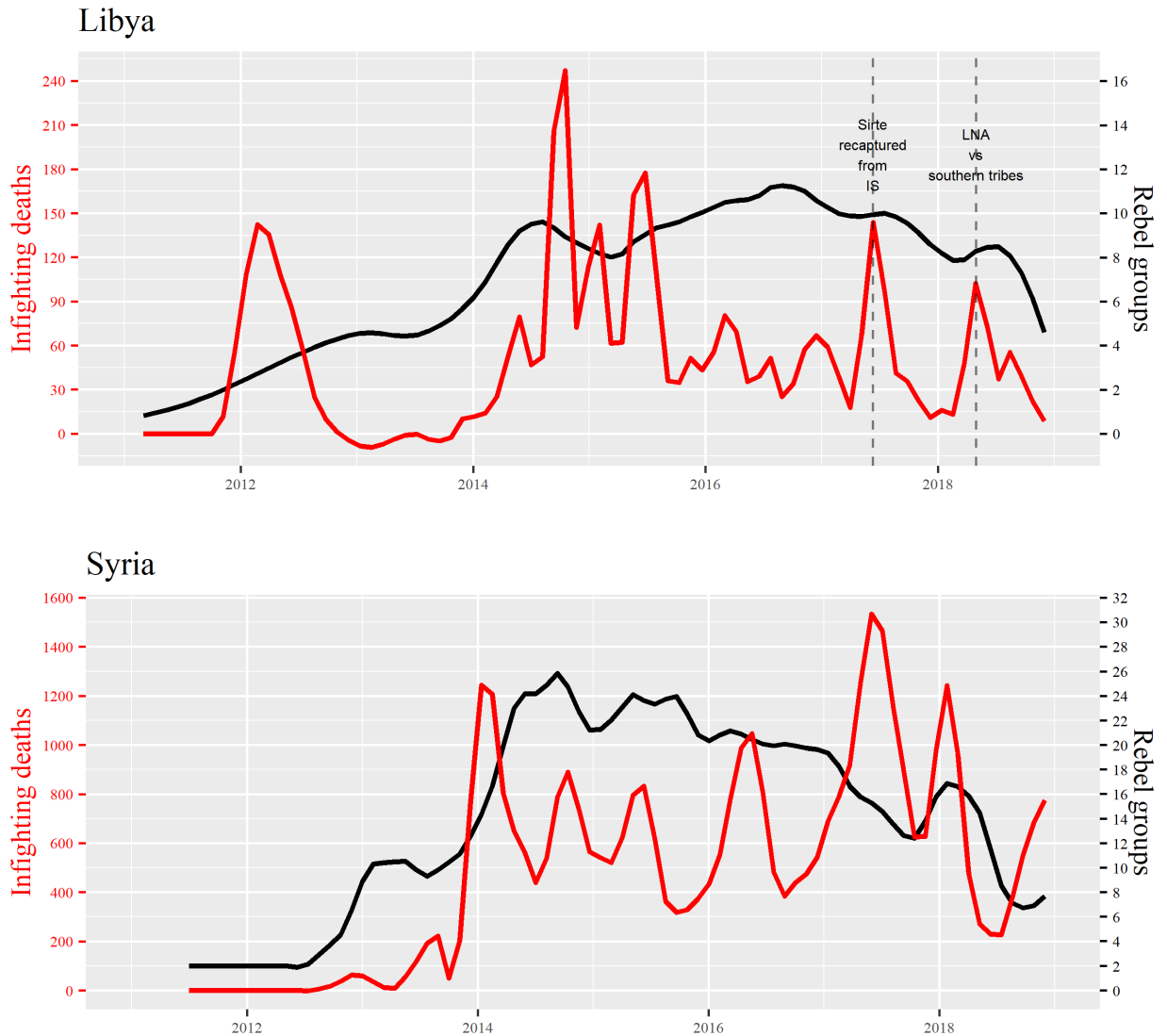


Figure 6.3: The temporal variation in the dependent variables for Libya (top pane) and Syria (bottom pane). Both panes show the number of deaths resulting from interrebel fighting (red on the right y-axis) and the number of active armed groups (black on the left y-axis). All data is measured at the monthly level and based on the GED dataset. Variables are plotted at a 15-to-1 ratio for Libya and 50-to-1 ratio for Syria.

In Libya, the number of active rebel groups and interrebel fighting is low during the NATO intervention. During the interwar period (2012-2014), there is a jump in deaths linked to interrebel fighting and the number of groups steadily increases from this point. When conflict erupts once more in 2014, both dependent variables increase

drastically. As rebel groups receive greater levels of nonfungible external support from the UAE and Egypt (2014) and later Russia (2019) the number of active rebel groups and the number of deaths resulting from interrebel fighting decrease, despite two increases in rebel infighting in 2017 and 2018, as shown in Figure 6.3. However, this violence can be explained. IS emerged as a potent force in early 2015, gaining control of the city of Sirte. According to Kirkpatrick (2015), they emerged because other armed actors were “so entangled in internal conflicts over money and power.” Rebel infighting peaked in July 2015 between Islamist militias in the eastern city of Derna, which was surrounded by Haftar’s forces at the time (Zuber, 2015). IS’s emergence in Libya prompted further interventions from Western powers, many of which feared that Libya would become a haven for international terrorists. Peaks in rebel infighting in 2017 and 2018 identified in Figure 6.3 are due to the LNA fighting Islamist forces in Benghazi and tribes aligned with the Tripoli based government in Southern Libya. In 2017, the LNA led a large military operation against the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council which included fighters affiliated to IS and al-Qaeda in Benghazi. The coalition of Islamist groups, which came together to resist the LNA in 2015, was defeated militarily in their last stronghold (BBC News, 2017). There were also interrebel clashes in militarily strategic and oil-rich central and southern Libya in 2018 (Ghaddar & Lewis, 2019). Groups in Southern Libya were independent but aligned with the government forces in Tripoli. The government forces were too weak to project power in the region, relying instead on groups based on tribal affiliations that benefited from lucrative smuggling routes (Wilson Center, 2019). The southern city of Sabha became a flashpoint for clashes between LNA brigades and groups affiliated with the Tripoli-based government (Eriksson & Bohman, 2018). Therefore, peaks of infighting visible in Figure 6.3 are not indicative of a greater conflict environment among rebel groups. In the first instance, they capture the LNA’s effort to eliminate radical Islamist groups that emerged in the interwar period and in the second case they

fit within the larger rebel-government cleavage.

I argue that nonfungible support to rebel groups produced a cooperative conflict environment among rebel groups. Hence, interrebel competition (measured by infighting) and factionalisation (measured by the number of active groups) decrease as external states provide rebels with greater levels of nonfungible support. While Figure 6.3 does not measure rebel alliances directly, it is telling that the number of active rebel groups in Libya increases from 2014 to 2017 but that deaths resulting from interrebel fighting decrease from as early as 2015. This provides suggestive evidence in support of *hypothesis 4B*, which states nonfungible support causes rebels to ally more. Rebel groups are only coded as active from the first time they are recorded in the GED. However, it is likely that rebel groups emerged during the interwar period and became active only when the second civil war broke out. After a period of interrebel fighting in late 2014, the amalgam of rebel groups remain active but fighting between them reduces. In the Libyan case, nonfungible support was provided by multiple external states to the same side. The temporal trends in the number of active groups and interrebel fighting therefore provide support to *hypotheses 3B*, that rebel groups are less likely to split when they receive nonfungible support.

A similar trend is visible during the Syrian conflict. Interrebel fighting and the number of active rebel groups was relatively low in the first two years of the civil war. There was a significant increase in both variables in 2013, when it became evident that the US would not provide nonfungible support to the FSA. The maximum number of active rebel groups peaks in 2015. After this point, there is a steady decrease in the number of active groups. However, interrebel fighting peaks in 2017. In contrast to Libya where fighting and the number of groups decrease in unison, Syria experiences its highest periods of interrebel fighting after external states provide nonfungible support to different groups. This provides support to *hypotheses 5*, that rebel groups in conflicts where multiple external states provide nonfungible resources are more

likely to fight other rebel groups. In the words of Small & Singer (1982, p. 219), the international aspect of the war overshadowed the internal aspect and “internal factions [did] less of the fighting” as the war took on the combat appearance of an interstate war. This is echoed in the Syrian context by Pettersson et al. (2021, p. 8), who noted that the Syrian conflict resembled a conventional war “rather than the more common counterinsurgencies that intrastate conflicts often are characterized by.” External states provided nonfungible support in order to direct their increasingly cohesive rebel groups to fight those supported by other dominant principals.

There are several alternative explanations for the trends in the political event data. The first concerns endogeneity. Did the fragmented nature of the Syrian revolution lead to the influx of fungible support? A cross-case comparison is particularly apt at identifying the directionality of this relationship. Fragmented rebellions provide external states with more options, but may also prevent them from providing non-fungible support as it becomes difficult to screen potential proxies. However, in both conflicts external states provide nonfungible support to what were already fragmented rebellions. A key alternative explanation for rebel infighting and alliance building is ideology. While ideology is a no doubt a strong predictor of interrebel competition and cooperation, it is a weak alternative argument in the Syrian and Libyan conflicts for several reasons which become more evident in the next section. First, it does not explain why rebels with similar ideologies fought at some times, but formed alliances in others. Abboud (2018) points out that the structure of the rebellions (units formed into battalions formed into fronts) meant that in many instances, the ideological commitment of the units and battalions towards the fronts was questionable. The fluid movement of units across brigades and fronts underscores problems that ideology alone struggles to explain. Ultimately, as noted by Abboud (2018, p. 110), “factors beyond ideological coherence, such as resource access, criminal opportunities, and battlefield prowess, shape networks of violence.”

Ideology also struggles to predict temporal variation in conflict dynamics due to a methodological concern. The ideological positions of different groups changed over the course of the conflict. The changing ideologies was potentially related to a number of conflict characteristics. Indeed, the emergence and increasingly strict interpretation of Islam and Sharia Law by IS is potentially due to the groups' attempt to differentiate itself within a larger, predominantly Sunni, pool of rebel groups and factions. However, more problematic for my research question is the influence of external states on the ideological positions of rebel groups. In the Syrian case, I find evidence that external states pressured groups to alter their ideological positions. For example, Phillips (2020) argues Syrian groups that received external support were 'nudged' by their backers into moderation. A clear example of this is Qatar's influence over Islamist coalitions in mid- to late-2013. Qatar exerted pressure on their groups to take explicitly more moderate ideological positions in a bid to prevent the US listing the groups as international terrorist organisations, which it later did for Jabhat Al-Nusra (JAN) and IS (Pierret, 2014, p. 49). In a further example, Phillips (2020, p. 426) shows how some states sought to moderate the slogans of their rebel groups to make them more inclusive. The Kurdish forces supported by the US are also testament to this. The US was keen to emphasise the inclusive and democratic nature of the Kurdish forces, and thus pushed them to rename their increasingly autonomous area Rojava to the 'Democratic Federation of Northern Syria' in 2016. They aimed to limit fallout with their NATO ally Turkey. Whether changes in ideology are real or declared is not certain. Indeed, Phillips (2020) questions the extent to which the US managed to shift the YPG towards a more inclusive ideology. However, external state pressure on rebels to shift their ideological position presents an important methodological issue. If we rely on rebel groups' public pronouncements to measure the ideological leanings of rebel groups (Gade, Gabbay, Hafez, & Kelly, 2019; Gade, Hafez, & Gabbay, 2019), then there is evidence that foreign powers shaped rebel ideology.

The Syrian conflict shows how a fragmented rebellion can lead to sectarian violence. In both conflicts rebel groups formed around salient social cleavages (Christia, 2012), be they predominantly tribal in Libya or ethnic in Syria. However, as I discuss later, Kurdish rebels in Syria demonstrate how group structures within an ethnic group have the potential to lead to internecine violence. In both conflicts, there is evidence of cooperation as well as competition across and within ethnic and tribal divides. These characteristics do not change, but they can become salient as a conflict progresses. It is possible that increases in interrebel fighting reflect the point at which the Syrian conflict turned into a sectarian war. I cannot and do not seek to rule out ethnicity as an important factor in shaping rebel dynamics. However, my analysis of both conflicts shows how external support shaped the saliency of ethnic and tribal divides, but also overcame them.

In this section, I exploited differences in the sequencing of external support to compare the heterogeneous effects of external support. NATO intervened in Libya and provided nonfungible support to the rebellion under the banner of the NTC. After the opposition defeated the Gaddafi regime, NATO ended its nonfungible support to the rebellion, but other states continued to provide fungible support to factions of the NTC and conflict broke out again in 2014. The conflict developed into a proxy war where the UAE, Egypt, and later Russia provided nonfungible support to the same rebel groups. External states initially provided fungible support to rebels in Syria and the main opposition body, the FSA, at the outset of the war. As the Syrian conflict developed, regional and international powers provided increasingly nonfungible support to different rebel groups. While nonfungible support to a single rebel group in Libya is associated with less splintering and rebel infighting, nonfungible support to several groups in the Syrian conflict is associated with less splintering but more rebel infighting. This provides support to *hypotheses 5*, that rebel groups in conflicts where multiple external states provide nonfungible resources are more likely to fight

other rebel groups. More generally, periods of nonfungible support are associated with less interrebel fighting and splintering in support of *hypothesis 3b* and *4b*. On the other hand, periods of fungible support are associated with greater rebel infighting and splintering in support of *hypothesis 3A* and *4A*.

Identifying causal mechanisms

When the Libyan regime cracked down on anti-regime protests, groups of protesters coalesced around defected officers. Entire military units disintegrated and joined the protesters (Gaub, 2013, p. 234), but they were not unified. This led to a fragmented revolution from the start. Indeed, as noted by Ahram (2019, p. 46), “military defections did not come *en masse* but in splinters.” This is often identified as a direct result of coup-proofing under Gaddafi, which weakened the military and created a “parallel security sector” (Gaub, 2013; Lacher & Cole, 2014, p. 20).¹¹ The protesters and dissidents set up “Revolutionary Committees” to defend themselves and their towns from government forces. Nascent rebel groups emerged and took control of cities and towns across the country, and established the NTC on 5 March 2011. Set up to govern over the Libyan rebellion, it was undermined by internal competition between rebel factions early on, and the extent to which the leadership of the NTC had control over the myriad of factions and groups was not clear. Abdul Fateh Younis, a former interior minister, was named commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA), the most powerful faction under the NTC banner. By March, Gaddafi’s forces were pushing a disparate rebellion back to its stronghold in the Eastern city of Benghazi (see Figure 8.13 in the Appendix).

Protests in Syria began in February 2011 in response to regime repression of school children in the southern city of Deraa for writing anti-regime graffiti. Sent in to repress the protesters, several military commanders refused to attack civilians

¹¹For more on the relationship between coup-proofing and militia groups in conflict, see G. Hughes (2016).

and defected. Similar to the Libyan case, the opposition formed around several high ranking defectors. The Syrian opposition formed the Syrian National Council (SNC) in 2011 to represent the uprising politically on the international stage. As noted by Hokayem (2014, p. 73), the SNC was beset by internal dysfunction and personal rivalries from its inception, but its main downfall was the lack of political influence within Syria as it had little control over the nascent rebel groups or the LCCs (Ahram, 2019, p. 48). It aimed to increase legitimacy by securing more funds and military resources, but ultimately struggled to secure sufficient external backing. Armed groups bypassed the SNC in an effort to secure much needed resources from external patrons, which allowed Gulf states to funnel material support to groups that shared their vision for a future Syria (Hokayem, 2014, p. 74). Disconnected from the resistance on the ground from the beginning, the organisation was supplanted by the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (SOC) in 2012.

The Libyan and Syrian conflicts were similar from the outset. However, as noted above, rebel groups received different forms of support at different times. In the next sections, I provide evidence of the causal mechanisms underpinning my hypotheses. To do so, I focus on the main rebel groupings known to have received external support in both conflicts: The National Transitional Council (NTC) and the National Libyan Army (LNA) in Libya, and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria.

Rebel splintering

According to *hypothesis 3*, I expect rebel groups to be more likely to splinter when they receive fungible external support (*A*) and less likely to splinter when they receive nonfungible support (*B*). Different forms of support to rebel groups in both conflicts provide substantial evidence that these causal mechanisms were at play.

Had NATO not intervened in Libya, it is likely that the rebels would have been

defeated militarily by the Gaddafi regime.¹² Indeed, many commentators note how the intervention prolonged what would have been a short conflict (Kuperman, 2013). Had the rebels survived the siege of Benghazi, it is likely that the already apparent tensions within the NTC would have led to the emergence of multiple groups. The influx of fungible support from Sudan, Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia may have resulted in a conflict system similar to that which emerged in Syria in 2013. Not only would the number of rebel groups have been higher, but I would expect higher deaths caused by intergroup fighting too. I argue that fungible external support induces competition within rebel groups because factions can accumulate resources, which creates tensions within the group. There is some evidence that this occurred. Pre-existing intragroup tensions were exacerbated by multiple external states' provision of fungible support. Lacher (2020) notes that the emergence of competing factions with their "own local and international connections" thwarted efforts to fight the Gaddafi regime, and rivalries between factions over weapons exacerbated tensions within the NTC leadership. This illustrates the causal mechanism behind *hypothesis 3A*, that fungible support increases the propensity of rebel groups to splinter which, I argue, is more pronounced in environments where multiple external states provide external support because factions can approach multiple external states for support.

Despite divisions from the outset and tensions exacerbated by the provision of fungible support from multiple states, by May 2011 the NTC had organised a relatively cohesive force to fight the government, while the government's capacity to fight was reduced by NATO airstrikes. Qatar provided fungible support to different armed factions,¹³ but NATO support allowed the NTC to expand its organizational capacities

¹²See Tetlock & Belkin (1996) and George & Bennett (2005) on counterfactual thought experiments. For an application of counterfactual thought experiments, see Howard & Stark (2017).

¹³Qatar may have provided limited nonfungible support in the form of troops. Qatari officials claimed that the conquest of Tripoli was thanks to special forces that "supervised the rebels' plans because they are civilians and did not have enough military experience... We acted as the link between the rebels and NATO forces" (Ahram, 2019, p. 55). The bulk of evidence, however, indicates that Qatari support was predominately fungible in the forms of weapons and funding.

and incorporate them (Ahram, 2019, p. 53). By September 2011, the NTC had emerged as the main rebel group and the Gaddafi regime was increasingly on the back foot. On 20 October, Gaddafi was captured and killed in his hometown of Sirte. NATO terminated its mission eleven days later. Low numbers of active rebel groups and few reports of interrebel fighting indicate that the nonfungible support from NATO, which was provided from a secret cell in Paris in order to steer what UK Prime Minister David Cameron (2019, p. 284) described as a “ramshackle Libyan rebel army,” helped overcome divisions within the NTC. This is strong evidence of the casual mechanisms underpinning *hypothesis 3B*, that groups that receive nonfungible support are less likely to splinter. Furthermore, while there is evidence for *hypothesis 3A*—groups that receive fungible support are more likely to splinter—the first Libyan civil war shows how nonfungible support can trump the effect of fungible support alone.

The NTC formed a temporary government after the fall of the Gaddafi regime. It handed power over to the General National Congress (GNC) after what were widely considered to be successful and democratic elections in July 2012. However, by December 2013 the UN mission to Libya were raising the alarm. The political situation was worsening, and the UN stressed the need to disarm, demobilise, and reintegrate armed groups into the state security apparatus (UN, 2013). The divisions present during the civil war re-emerged in the post-2011 period as former rebels vied over the Libyan state, its institutions, and control over the natural resources within its borders (ICG, 2018). Indeed, most armed groups operated autonomously and continued to compete over state assets and energy facilities, as factions used oil facilities as bargaining chips to press financial and political demands (Ghaddar & Lewis, 2019). When the Gaddafi regime fell, rebel factions affiliated with the NTC became increasingly autonomous militia groups and refused to disarm. Instead, they strengthened militarily by taking control of state arsenals and continuing to receive

fungible support in the form of military materials, weapons, and money from Sudan and Qatar. There is a strong relationship between the fragmentation of the security apparatus and the role of external states providing fungible support during the 2011 conflict. With an influx of predominantly fungible support, competitive dynamics trickled down to create a competitive conflict environment among and within armed groups. While the groups supported by Sudan and Qatar during the civil war in 2011 were too weak to become allies in the new government, they constituted a “destabilising force” once the Gaddafi regime had fallen (Risen, Mazzetti, & Schmidt, 2012) and the government was unable to disarm them. These competitive dynamics led to battles between rival tribes and commanders (Kuperman, 2013) in a process described by Gaub (2013, p. 238) as “Somalization.” Again, even in the interwar period, the causal mechanisms underpinning *hypotheses 3A* are evident. The number of armed groups increased, indicative of a splintering processes within the forces that fought as part of the NTC in 2011. Fungible support to factions of the NTC allowed groups to break away.

By 2014, two governments had emerged in Libya—the GNC based in Tripoli and the House of Representatives (HoR) in the Eastern city of Tobruk. As political dialogue by the UN failed to reach an agreement, the UAE began to provide nonfungible support to Haftar’s forces which enabled them to tilt the balance of power in their favour. However, Haftar’s coalition was initially weak and suffered from intragroup competition. There were tensions between different factions that had joined him, with some commanders openly contesting his authority and accusing him “of withholding ammunition from them” (Lacher, 2020, p. 40). Haftar’s forces continued to rely heavily on its patrons for weapons, but the supply was “closely managed by Haftar’s inner circle” and supply to groups fighting under him was “conditional on full commitment to the national ambitions” of the LNA (UN, 2017, p. 12). Haftar used support to secure loyalties from armed groups, while airstrikes conducted by the UAE and Egypt

halted major operations by the government and pro-government militias (Lacher, 2020, p. 48 & 185). Haftar's forces, who received nonfungible support from their dominant external patrons, displayed greater coherence despite what was more akin to a rebel coalition of diverse actors than a cohesive rebel group. In October, the HoR aligned itself with Haftar and in March 2015 the HoR appointed him general commander of Libya's armed forces (al-Warfalli & Bosalum, 2014). From this point, Haftar forces became Libya's National Army (LNA), which in reality was an "amalgam of formal units of mixed tribal composition" (Eaton, Alageli, Badi, Eljarh, & Stocker, 2020). Tensions on Haftar's side were overcome due to increasingly nonfungible support to the Haftar's growing coalition. Analysing similar political event data, Carboni & Moody (2018, p. 469) also note that fragmentation was low in Eastern Libya due to Haftar's emergence as a strongman "cementing local and international alliances and preventing substantial challenges to his predominance over the region and the proliferation of armed groups witnessed in North-West Libya." the LNA's cohesiveness, in a big part secured by Haftar's international connections, provides support for *hypothesis 3B* that rebel groups are less likely to splinter when they receive nonfungible support.

In Syria, the FSA was announced in July 2011. It is debatable whether the FSA ever existed as a coherent rebel force, as alluded to by Schulhofer-Wohl (2020) when claiming that it existed in "label only." The grouping, more akin to an umbrella organisation uniting various rebel factions, included defected military and moderate Islamist groups. The FSA leadership was closely linked to the SNC and was mostly based in Turkey and Jordan where it developed funding and supply networks (Hokayem, 2014, p. 82). Turkey turned a blind eye to the operations of the FSA leadership within its borders and provided fungible support in the form of weapons and funding. There is strong evidence that groups' ability to secure important military support outside the control of the FSA leadership gave them significant autonomy. The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Qatar led the latter to support more Islamist factions that

had ties with the Muslim Brotherhood (Khatib, 2014). The Muslim Brotherhood had little support in Syria before the conflict emerged due to decades of repression under Ba'athist rule (Abboud, 2018, p. 55), but fungible support from Qatar empowered Islamist factions. By mid-2012, there were 30,000-60,000 rebels fighting in Syria in as many as 1,000 factions, half of which were outside the umbrella of the FSA (Hokayem, 2014, p. 84). The FSA attempted to regain control of the increasingly fragmented opposition by establishing military commands in each province in 2012. Their main role was to organise the allocation of resources and facilitated national coordination (Hokayem, 2014, p. 85). However, the military command struggled to impose authority over well-resourced units, many of which already developed their own supply networks. By 2013, the FSA was increasingly beset by “corruption, intra-opposition rivalries and the emerging, often bitter competition between Saudi Arabia and Qatar” (Lister, 2016b, p. 84).

Factionalism within the FSA was due to competition between factions that were receiving fungible support from different external states, namely Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. While they all publicly recognised Salim Idriss as the leader of the FSA, they continued to provide support in the form of funding and weaponry to their respective factions (Pierret, 2014, p. 46). Multiple external states provided fungible support. As the potential supply of support was high, it became a seller's market where armed groups could get better deals from the external states. By March 2013, the FSA existed in name only. Instead, hundreds of autonomous battalions operated under their banner and had little to no relationship with the FSA leadership based in Turkey (Lister, 2016b, p. 97). According to secondary literature, the number of factions operating autonomously increased between 2011 and 2014. Due to the coding of the GED data, these groups are not visible in Figure 6.3 until they are identified as fighting either the government or other rebel forces. However, secondary literature indicates that the influx of fungible support from multiple external states

caused greater competition over resources. Within rebel groups, the accumulation of these resources led to factionalism and ultimately splintering. The fragmentation of the FSA shows how factions can gain control of important resources and splinter. This is a similar dynamic identified by Marsh (2007, p. 63), where “the ability of combatants to autonomously obtain on their own, with little effort, weapons, and ammunition dramatically increases the likelihood that relatively small groups of fighters may coalesce around various charismatic leaders.” The influx of fungible support, heightened competition within the FSA, and the emergence of increasingly autonomous factions shows the mechanisms underpinning *hypothesis 3A*, that rebel groups are more likely to splinter when they receive fungible support. It is revealing to compare the early years of the FSA with the NTC in Libya. The emergence and initial organisational structure of the FSA were similar to the NTC. Both were set up by defecting military officers and beset by internal competition early on. While the NTC received nonfungible support from NATO and remained cohesive, the FSA received fungible support from several states and was increasingly fragmented. This cross-case comparison sheds light on the role of different forms of external support in shaping intragroup competition.

Later in the conflict, the Kurdish forces in Northern Syria became stronger and Turkey responded by providing nonfungible support to the FSA. In mid-2016, Turkey intervened militarily in Syria as part of “Operation Euphrates Shield,” which officially aimed to aid operations against radical Islamist groups in Northern Syria, but is often considered a veiled attempt to restrict the PKK and the YPG (Kaya & Whiting, 2017, p. 85; Plakoudas, 2017, p. 112). Turkish forces raided YPG positions and captured villages from the SDF, leading the US to call on its proxy to retreat east of the Euphrates River. What effect did nonfungible support have on the fragmented FSA? In the beginning of the intervention, the FSA “lacked a fixed structure,” but there was also a “lack of discipline and reluctance to work under a single command-and-control

structure” (Gurcan, 2019, p. 19). Indeed, this was a legacy of years of fungible support from several external states. Turkish nonfungible support brought the FSA under almost full Turkish control through the provision of “training and equipment, salary payments and the creation of new organisational structures” which transformed the group into a rebel proxy that was no longer “fragmented and decentralised” (Yüksel, 2019, p. 16). FSA and Turkish forces constituted a “mixed force,” where Turkish special forces were “embedded with FSA groups[...] directing tank fires, artillery fires, and airstrikes” (Cantenaar & Kozera, 2021, p. 1). Therefore, nonfungible support increased cohesion within the FSA. Turkish nonfungible support to the FSA provides evidence of the mechanism underpinning *hypothesis 3B*, that rebel groups are less likely to splinter when they receive nonfungible support.

In sum, the main rebel actors in both conflicts provide evidence of the causal mechanisms underpinning *hypothesis 3A* and *3B*. The NTC, the LNA, and the FSA demonstrate the full spectrum of the heterogeneous effects of different forms of support. While they were relatively cohesive rebel actors when they received nonfungible support, the FSA and the NTC were beset by internal competition when they received fungible support, especially from several external states.

Rebel infighting

In Syria, competition within the FSA was high between 2011 and 2013 but it did not translate to increased numbers of rebel deaths from interrebel fighting. Until September 2013, armed groups on the ground were still expecting and calling for the US to intervene. The US’s refusal to do so had an impact on the opposition as ideologically moderate armed groups—or at least those not hostile to US—were more vulnerable to the hands of Islamist groups. This led to a spate of organisational mergers and rebel infighting (Schulhofer-Wohl, 2020). The number of active rebel groups and deaths resulting from interrebel fighting increase drastically in 2014 as the

GED begins to record active rebel groups. Accounts of the effect of fungible support from multiple external states agree that instead of fostering a strong and united Syrian revolution, it helped create a “rebel marketplace that saw militia groups compete for resources rather than unite” (Phillips, 2020, p. 145). While the influx of military resources increased the absolute power of rebels, it undermined collective action and the rebellion as a whole (Lichbach, 1996; Olson, 1965). There is evidence that groups also fought in attempts to increase their military power. In many instances, fungible external support directly caused rebel infighting due to efforts by groups to capture important military resources from newly equipped forces. For example, in April 2014 Harakat al-Hazm, an FSA battalion that received fungible support from the US and Saudi Arabia as part of the US vetting programme, was repeatedly attacked by JAN. Phillips (2020, p. 209) claims that their weaponry (including the prized TOW anti-tank missiles) was seized and the group was disbanded in March 2015. Other groups that benefited from the US’s Train and Equip programme experienced similar fates. Their weapons were “coveted” by Islamist groups in Syria (Phillips, 2020, p. 208), and US-backed groups were quickly attacked, disbanded, and had their weapons taken, or simply handed over their weapons “in exchange for safe passage” (Al Jazeera, 2015). The US’s later reluctance to provide weapons increased in part due to their fear that weapons would end up in the hands of Islamist groups. These examples show the mechanisms underpinning *hypothesis 4A*. Rebel groups are more likely to fight other rebels when they receive fungible support, as identified in the large-N analysis in Chapter IV and the temporal variation in deaths caused by rebel infighting identified in Figure 6.3. Fungible military resources are private goods, and there is evidence that rebel groups competed over them. Attacking rebel groups shifted the attacker’s relative strength but also increased their absolute power by capturing important military resources.

The relationship between the competitive environment and emergence of powerful

Islamic groups in Syria potentially explains the puzzling findings in Chapter III, that fungible support increases rebel fighting and rebel alliance making. Pierret (2014, p. 48) describes how in the summer of 2013 IS gained control of a large swathe of Idlib in the North East, which meant greater control over the Turkish border and posed a significant threat to important supply routes of external support for other groups. In January 2014, a coalition of Islamist and FSA factions formed to fight and oust IS from the strategic province. The Islamist rebels regrouped in the Euphrates valley in urban centres like Raqqa and Deir ze-Zor. The re-emergence of IS in eastern Syria led it to confront several rebel groups. As IS expanded its territory and captured greater military capabilities, rebel groups such as JAN, the FSA, and the YPG established short-lived alliances to fight back against IS (Phillips, 2020, p. 197). Other so-called ‘military operation rooms’ that brought together groups from different political, religious, and ethnic backgrounds abound in the secondary literature. For example, in November 2012 JAN and thirteen Aleppo-based factions signed an agreement to establish an Islamic state. At least six factions were nominally loyal to the FSA. Lister (2016b, p. 97) identifies the FSA leadership’s failure to unite the group and provide meaningful support as the main factor that forced FSA factions to join alliances with Islamic groups. FSA factions aimed to topple the regime and short-term alliances with the militarily ascending Islamic groups, especially JAN, was seen as a way of achieving this ultimate goal. This dynamic shows that, while fungible support leads to fragmentation, a volatile balance of power among rebel groups may also have led to more frequent rebel allying. As powerful groups emerged, other rebel groups cooperated in attempts to balance against them (Jervis, 1978). This explains why, in light of an increasing number of rebel groups and heightened competition, there was cooperation between the groups.

Two instances of nonfungible support provide evidence of the mechanisms underpinning *hypothesis 4B*—rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely

to form alliances with other rebels. First, Turkish nonfungible support to the FSA from 2016 allowed it to force the FSA to merge with other armed groups, including Islamist groups. For example, in 2018 Turkey encouraged Islamist armed groups in Idlib to form the National Liberation Front (NLF), which Turkey subsequently merged with the FSA (Yüksel, 2019, p. 4 & 17). Through the provision of nonfungible support, Turkey gained greater control over FSA-affiliated groups and empowered a rebel force capable of fighting the YPG. Yüksel (2019, p. 19) identifies significant Turkish material support, partnering with its military, and centralisation of control as key factors to Turkey's ability to influence conflict dynamics in Northern Syria.

Second, in light of gains by IS and the failure of the US-led coalition in defeating the group with airstrikes alone, the US started providing nonfungible support to Kurdish forces in October 2015. The Kurdish forces merged into the SDF and evolved into a powerful actor in the Syrian conflict. The Kurds were not united at the outset of the conflict, or historically for that matter (Allsopp, 2016). At the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the main Kurdish powers in the region were the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Northern Iraq, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Northern Syria, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey. Importantly, all had affiliations in neighbouring states. For example, the Iraqi KDP provided limited support to the Kurdish National Council (KNC), a group founded in October 2011 as an organisation of Kurdish political parties opposed to the Assad regime. Support from the KDP led to "clashes, assassinations, kidnappings and other forms of harassment" between the KNC and the PYD (Kaya & Whiting, 2017, p. 81). After the YPG suppressed KNC demonstrations in Amude in June 2013, killing three men and detaining 50 YPG supporters, the KNC withdrew its participation from the Rojava regional government (Khalaf, 2016, p. 8). The PYG claimed that the KNC was attempting to establish a competing military force and divide Rojava. Cooperation in form of alliances was also not the norm prior to US nonfungible support. For example, while the PKK, YPG,

and other smaller Kurdish factions based in Iraq would unite to fight IS, they quickly fell into bitter rivalry over the control of regained territory (Kaya & Whiting, 2017, p. 83). Therefore, there were substantial levels of competition within the Kurdish ethnic group prior to nonfungible support from the US that led to violent clashes. The IS affront on Kurdish areas after 2014 gave the KDP little option but to pledge support to the PYD. The defence of Kobani, in particular, led to a shift in allegiance in Iraqi Kurdistan and further afield. As IS were expelled from Idlib and grew more powerful in Eastern Syria, they increasingly attacked predominantly Kurdish areas. The KRG in Iraq sent Peshmerga forces with heavy weaponry to help fight IS forces (Kaya & Whiting, 2017, p. 83). The armed struggle with IS gave the PYD and its YPG armed forces international legitimacy, and eventually resulted in greater external support from the US. Until this point, the US was prepared to cooperate with the KDP in Iraq, but was reluctant to cooperate with groups in Syria after its failed vetting programme. However, the US started to provide the YGP with nonfungible support in the form of airstrikes during the Siege of Kobani, which is largely credited for the highly symbolic military victory against IS (Plakoudas, 2017, p. 106). The YPG's victory against IS in Kobani in early 2015 and its subsequent ability to provide protection and basic services to returning civilians was key to the US's decision to increase nonfungible support.

Cooperation among the different Kurdish groups increased after the US started providing nonfungible support to the YPG. For example, after the victory in Kobani, the YPG cooperated closely with the US Air force and factions of the FSA to recapture the strategic town to Tal Abyad, which connected the Kobani and Qamishli cantons (Plakoudas, 2017, p. 106). This cooperation occurred despite continued accusations that the YPG was tacitly cooperating with the Assad regime (Plakoudas, 2017, p. 106). To make the YPG more palatable to Turkey and to institutionalise cooperation among the armed groups, the US encouraged the formation of the Syrian Democratic Forces

(SDF) in October 2015. While it was an alliance between several Arab, Turkmen, and Kurdish armed groups, the YPG was by far its most prominent force. The US “built the SDF” by recruiting Arab, Syriac, and Turkmen groups to fight alongside the YPG and the YPJ (Casagrande, 2016). In 2016, not only did nonfungible support in the form of airstrikes and limited special operation forces foster cooperation among SDF factions, it also ensured military success, most notably in retaking Manjib (Sly & DeYoung, 2016). It is interesting to compare the faiths of the FSA with the YPG. The influx of fungible support from multiple external states led to a more competitive environment among FSA rebel groups. This competition may have allowed more extreme groups to emerge. Indeed, Phillips (2020) alludes to this when discussing how certain ethnic groups produced relatively coherent rebel forces while others did not. He concludes that Kurdish cohesion may have been the result of having just one patron, while Sunni Muslims received support from multiple external states, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, which “pulled them in different directions” (Phillips, 2020, p. 428). The Kurdish forces show that competition within the ethnic group was common. However, nonfungible support from the US demonstrates the causal mechanism underpinning *hypothesis 4B* that rebel groups are more likely to form alliances with other rebels when they receive nonfungible support. In this case, the US attempted to make the SDF more acceptable to its NATO ally Turkey. It did so by encouraging the YPG to form military alliances with other armed groups from other ethnic groups.

In sum, the FSA and the SDF demonstrate how different forms of support are associated with different interrebel dynamics. In periods of the influx of fungible support, rebel fought for control of important resources. Nonfungible support allowed external states to merge their rebels with other groups. Combined, this section provides support for *hypothesis 4A* and *4B*.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter describes external support provision during the Libyan and Syrian conflicts. In a first part, I identify the causal mechanisms underpinning the findings of large-N analyses presented in Chapter III. Building on these results, I show how the geopolitical context in which the conflicts occurred trumped bilateral strength considerations. Indeed, the strategic decision to provide different forms of support are a function of relative military, but more importantly, alliance strength. The analysis thus provides support for *hypothesis 2A* that states are more likely provide fungible support to rebel groups targeting stronger states in terms of alliance strength and *hypothesis 2B* that states provide nonfungible support to rebels targeting states that are weaker in terms of alliance strength. Finally, both conflicts demonstrate a ratchet effect (Toukan, 2019, p. 813), whereby the involvement of international rivals increases the potential costs of non-intervention. I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter VII.

In a second part, I build on findings from Chapter IV on how different forms of external support shape rebel dynamics. I argue that rebellions fragment when multiple states provide fungible support. As external states compete over the loyalties of different groups, the potential of support is high and agents can get better deals from their principals. Perversely, agents with greater bargaining positions can acquire more resources by giving up less autonomy. Greater rewards and fewer strings attached undermines collective action, and accentuates competitive dynamics within and among armed groups. In both conflicts, fungible support from multiple states allowed factions to become increasingly autonomous groups. The within case analysis provides evidence of the causal mechanisms underpinning *hypotheses 3* and *4*. It is clear that nonfungible support allowed external states to ensure the cohesion of rebel groups. Faced with increasing fragmentation and faltering anti-government forces, external states attempted to become dominant principals by providing nonfungible support. Not only did this support increase the groups' strength, it also gave external

states greater control over their proxy forces. Doing so fostered a cooperative conflict environment. The Libyan conflict shows how nonfungible support increased the power of Haftar's forces and cohesion in what was a coalition of loosely affiliated military factions. In Syria, nonfungible support from Turkey and the US built cohesive rebel groups in the FSA and the SDF, respectively. Less likely to splinter, the number of active groups recorded in the GED decreased in both conflicts. However, in line *hypothesis 5*, I find that nonfungible support from different external states to different rebel groups in Syria increased the likelihood of rebel fighting.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I provide an overview of my findings, their theoretical implications, and policy implications that ensue.

7.1 Theoretical approach and main findings

My dissertation presents a novel and holistic account of how the international sphere shapes micro-level conflict dynamics. To do so, I propose that we must move beyond the analysis of bilateral state relations to advance our understanding of when and how states intervene.

I argue that the likelihood of punishment is a function of bilateral and multilateral relative strength, and thus integrate the systematic effects of the international balance of power on external support provision and civil war intervention. The risks of punishment are central to states' strategic decision of whether and in which form to provide military support. States are often part of military alliances and can therefore count on their allies to shield them, or at least ignore their transgressions. When this is not the case, they rely on more covert forms of support to achieve important foreign policy objectives while avoiding backlash from the international community. States support rebels with low-risk forms of fungible support such as money and weapons to

avoid detection and costly punishment from stronger states or the allies of their rivals. Stronger states that do not fear retaliation provide nonfungible support such as safe havens, airstrikes, and even troops. Nonfungible support gives rebels the best chance of victory and provide external states with greater control over their rebel proxies, thus giving them a greater say over the future orientation of the conflicted state. By accounting for both bilateral power dynamics and multilateral alliance dynamics, my theory explains why states provide different forms of support.

Second, I argue that different forms of support have heterogeneous effects on rebel dynamics due to their fungibility. Nonfungible support shifts the balance of power, and causes bandwagoning among and within rebel groups, which ultimately leads to more allying and less splintering. The influx of fungible support induces a competitive conflict environment, which leads to greater splintering and rebel infighting as groups compete over important military resources. When multiple external states provide nonfungible support to different rebel groups, rebels are more cohesive but more likely to fight as the conflict takes the combat appearance of an interstate war. This argument, firmly based within delegation and organisational theory, provides the first holistic account of how the international system shapes cooperation and competition in rebellions.

I find support for key parts of the theoretical argument. My first research question asks why states provide different forms of external support to rebel groups in civil wars. In Chapter III, I find support for *hypothesis 1a* that the provision of fungible support is more likely from external states that are relatively weaker militarily than the civil war state. However, I reach mixed findings for the role of military alliances. External states are more likely to provide nonfungible support if they are in relatively more powerful alliances, but this is also true for fungible support. This goes against *hypothesis 2b*, in which I expect external states to provide nonfungible support to rebel groups targeting states that are relatively weaker in terms of military alliances.

As a possible explanation for this puzzling finding, I propose that powerful states might rely on weaker allies to provide fungible support as proxies, which explains why both fungible and nonfungible support are more likely for states in relatively stronger military alliances. This dynamic seems to have been at play in my analysis of the conflict in Northern Ireland conducted in Chapter V, where Libya provided fungible support to the Provisional IRA in order to coerce the UK government in the knowledge that it was shielded by the Soviet Union. This dynamic is not unique to the Irish conflict. For instance, Karlen & Ruata (2021) argue that the US channelled support to the Mujahideen through its regional ally Pakistan and to UNITA with its regional ally Zaire, both in the 1980s. Furthermore, in Chapter III I measure the process through which civil wars become internationalised using network terms for activity and popularity. My findings suggest, similar to Saideman (2002), Findley & Teo (2006), and Anderson (2019), that balancing and bandwagoning also pertain to the geopolitics of civil war intervention. Specifically, I find that fungible support begets more fungible support, but the opposite is the case for nonfungible support. While this is not explicitly developed in my theoretical argument, the finding provides support to key assumptions underpinning the theoretical argument and echoes Carson (2018, p. 14) when he claims that covert (or fungible) support signals a “legible and credible indicator of both resolve and restraint,” while overt (or nonfungible) support sends “the broadest and strongest indication of resolve.” Crucially, different forms of support signal an external state’s willingness to accept risk and shapes the strategies of other states.

My second research question asks how different forms of support shape intra- and intergroup rebel dynamics. In a global analysis of rebel dynamics conducted in Chapter IV, I find support for *hypothesis 4A* and *B*, that rebel fighting is more likely when rebel groups receive fungible support and allying is more likely when rebel groups receive nonfungible support. I unveil a second puzzling finding: fungible support is also

associated with high levels of rebel allying. While not explicitly stated as a hypothesis, it is counter-intuitive and seemingly undermines my theoretical argument. However, a within- and cross-case comparison of the Libyan (2011-2019) and Syrian (2011-2019) civil wars conducted in Chapter VI indicates that competition leads to a greater number of rebel groups and volatility in the balance of power, which in turn leads to greater cooperation between groups that seek to balance emerging powers. Ultimately, the case studies provide strong evidence of the causal mechanisms underpinning the more general effects uncovered in the large-N statistical analysis. In phases of predominately fungible support both conflict environments were highly competitive, leading to greater interrebel fighting and splintering. In phases of nonfungible support, rebels were less likely to fight each other and there were fewer groups, which is indicative of a cooperative conflict environment. The cross-case comparison allows me to test *hypothesis 5*, which states that rebel groups in conflicts where multiple external states provide nonfungible resources to different groups are more likely fight each other. Indeed, the Syrian conflicts shows how external states directed their rebel proxies to fight the proxies of other states, and the war took on the combat appearance of an interstate war.

Returning to the global analysis of rebel dynamics, I find little evidence to support my theoretical argument regarding splintering. Recall that I expect greater splintering if rebels receive fungible support (*hypothesis 3A*) and less splintering if rebels receive nonfungible support (*hypothesis 3B*). However, I argue that the data on rebel splintering is not suitable for a large-N analysis. Acknowledging that qualitative research methods are better for understanding the “internal process of a group” (E. J. Wood, 2007, p. 127), my case studies shed light on how different forms of support shape intragroup dynamics. In my study of the Northern Irish conflict known as ‘the Troubles’ (1968-1998) in Chapter V, I find evidence of the causal mechanisms underpinning *hypothesis 3A*. Specifically, I show how fungible support created tensions

within groups, emboldened certain factions to challenge their leadership, and led rebel leaders to pre-emptively suppress factions that they suspected of accumulating support. In my analysis of the Libyan and Syrian conflicts, I also find support for *hypotheses 3A* and *3B*. The case of the FSA is an incredibly clear picture of the various effects of external support on competitive and cooperative dynamics within rebel groups. Beset by intragroup competition from years of external meddling in the form of fungible support, Turkish nonfungible support drastically increased the cohesiveness of the group while promoting alliances. Indeed, this group alone demonstrates the full spectrum of competitive and cooperative relations both within the group and with other groups. Existing theories which focus on relatively static variables such as ideology or ethnicity struggle to account for this variation. A greater focus on the variation of support provision and the heterogeneous effects of different forms of support is key to understanding rebel dynamics in both conflicts.

7.2 Theoretical implications

My research makes several contributions to existing research. First, I combine insights from several literatures to develop my theoretical argument. Specifically, I bridge literatures on international relations and conflict studies, which are often interested in similar outcomes but operate within distinct literatures. This allows me to develop a theory on how relations among states shape conflict dynamics on the ground. Second, I provide the first theoretical account for why external states provide different forms of support. Conflict studies research tends to focus on the effects of support once it is provided, while international relations research focuses on the conditions under which external states intervene directly. Third, methodologically my work tackles key issues which cast doubt on existing findings, namely that states' decisions to provide external support are strategically interdependent and that external support is not

randomly provided. Combined, not only does my doctoral research contribute to our understanding of how the international sphere shapes civil war processes, it also provides an externally valid analysis in light of important methodological challenges. Therefore, my work makes an important contribution to a growing literature on intervention, external support, and conflict dynamics.

A large motivation in understanding how the international sphere shapes conflict dynamics is to advance our understanding of the causal mechanisms underpinning more aggregate conflict characteristics. For instance, rebel competition and external support are important in shaping conflict outcome. The interest in the effect of intervention on civil war outcomes is in part attributed to the peace accords that were achieved by the international community in conflicts such as Cambodia, Guatemala, Angola, and Northern Ireland (Mason, Weingarten, & Fett, 1999). Therefore, in order to evaluate the record of third-state interventions in conflict, scholars have not only looked at how effective they are in ending fighting, but also how they lead to different outcomes. Mason, Weingarten, & Fett (1999) finds that interventions have a positive effect on the likelihood of a negotiated settlement, but De Rouen Jr & Sobek (2004) shows that UN interventions decrease the time for a truce or treaty. Furthermore, while biased interventions on the side of the rebels may increase their chances of winning, this is not the case with interventions on the side of the government (Gent, 2008). My research shows that the internationalisation of conflict can lead to very different paths. While nonfungible support is associated with a cooperative environment, fungible support leads to the fragmentation of rebellion. As both these outcomes are associated with shorter and longer wars respectively, it is important to identify the causal processes underpinning more aggregated outcomes. This matters also after conflict ends, as different types of support might lead to important post-conflict outcomes. For example, interventions are associated with longer periods of peace (Walter, 2002) while external support and rebel fragmentation

are associated with greater risks of conflict re-occurrence (Karlén, 2017; Rudloff & Findley, 2016). My research speaks to these works, highlighting that interventions in the form of troops are just one of many ways in which states can shape conflict, potentially beyond the point after which belligerents put down their weapons. My work demonstrates two paths through which the internationalisation of conflict can shape the organisation of rebellion, thus shedding light on an important missing causal link between the international sphere and conflict outcomes.

There are several implications for future research. First, future work on intervention and external support should incorporate greater insights from international relations to understand how the international sphere shapes civil wars. An important part of this effort rests on the importance of moving beyond specific historical turning points, such as the end of the Cold War, and bilateral state relations to understanding why and how states become involved in civil wars. There are clearly network dynamics that transcend the external-state-target-state dyad. I do not explicitly theorise why and when external states provide support to the target government but I do refer to the risk of this occurring when discussing relative alliance strength. Indeed, in the Libyan and Syrian case studies, the expectation that the target governments' allies would support them, or not, affected external states' decision to provide support and in what form. Toukan (2019) and Anderson (2019) have made important findings on the competitive dynamics among multiple external interveners, but future work can advance this research agenda by incorporating a network account of relationships between the interveners and the target government. Furthermore, my theoretical argument cannot explain changes in the strategic choice to intervene as the civil war progresses. My key independent variables—relative military and alliance strength—vary slowly over time. But the case studies demonstrate that states' decisions to provide external support can be a dynamic process. In the Libyan and Syrian conflicts, it is obvious that events occurred during the civil wars that drastically shifted external

states' willingness to intervene and in what form. Sometimes it was related to my theoretical focus. For instance, when rivals intervened the costs of non-intervention increased. Russia's support to the Assad regime no doubt shaped the US's willingness to provide support to Kurdish forces. However, as demonstrated by the US and Turkey's interventions in Syria, it may also be a function of the type of rebels that emerge. The costs of not intervening were too high for the US and Turkey after a powerful IS and YPG emerged, respectively. These considerations may outweigh greater alliance dynamics. Indeed, in the Syrian case it amounted to proxy conflict between NATO allies. Future work should theorise about conflict characteristics which may explain temporal variation in types of support within conflicts.

The case studies highlight that future work should also think carefully about the relationship between intragroup and intergroup competition. Often, the logics underpinning our theoretical accounts for competition within and among rebels are similar (Christia, 2012; Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Krause, 2017; Tamm, 2019; R. M. Wood & Kathman, 2015), yet we have little understanding of how they interact. In my research, I turn to a system-level analysis in order to capture a highly endogenous relationship between splintering and fighting. In the same vein, future work should think carefully about when theories of rebel dynamics pertain to the group or the conflict environment. Analytically, this affects whether we focus on agents or systems. Finally, I echo Pischedda (2020)'s call to focus more on theorising about temporal variation in rebel dynamics of interest more generally. Ideological and ethnic divisions can lead to fighting and allying, but they are not particularly good at identifying when it will occur. An important finding in my work is that these divides are made salient at certain points, and I identify external support as a force that can affect the saliency of pre-existing cleavages.

7.3 Policy implications

My dissertation is a theory driven exercise, in which I employ logic and existing theoretical frameworks to develop an argument that I test empirically. However, as noted in Chapter I, my motivation to conduct this research project is not only the gap in existing research, but also a reaction to troubling trends and events in the world. Thus, while my work does not aim to be prescriptive, I hope that my findings can help policy-makers and practitioners in non-governmental organisations to avert the negative consequences associated with highly internationalised civil wars. In this final section, I outline the negative consequences associated with the internationalisation of civil war and how my findings can inform international responses aimed at alleviating them.

Previous research shows that external support and rebel competition leads to more violence in terms of battle-related deaths and civilian victimisation. Salehyan, Siroky, & Wood (2014) find that rebel groups that receive external support have fewer incentives to “win the hearts and minds” of civilians which encourages civilian targeting by supported groups. Della Porta (2006) finds that splinter groups of larger social movements are also more violent. Internal contestation can lead to civilian victimisation, as rebel factions attempt to signal their dominance by attacking other factions as well as civilian populations (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012; Hultman & Peksen, 2017; Kalyvas, 2006; R. M. Wood & Kathman, 2015). Recent work also shows that intragroup violence may have particularly negative effects on people after war ends. A growing body of work shows that experiences of conflict-related violence increases individuals’ pro-social characteristics post-conflict. For example, victims are more cooperative and altruistic (Bauer et al., 2016). However, the opposite might be true for victims after fragmented conflicts that experience high levels of intragroup fighting. For example, Cassar, Grosjean, & Whitt (2013) find that people were less trusting a decade after the civil war in Tajikistan, especially in places that

experienced high levels of intragroup violence. My research shows that external state involvement in the form of fungible support leads to rebel competition and potentially similar outcomes in terms of civilian victimisation and conflict severity.

Therefore, knowing when conflicts will become internationalised and whether it will lead to greater competition among and within rebel groups has policy implications at two levels. The first regards how changes in the conduct of international contentious politics may prevent such dynamics in the future. While fungible support violates the norms of sovereignty and non-intervention, rulings by the ICJ discussed in Chapter III have led to greater leniency towards states that provide these more covert forms of support than those that provide nonfungible support. While sending arms and money is legally considered less of a violation than sending troops, it is important that the heterogeneous impact of such support are considered in future rulings. My work indicates that fungible support, especially from several external states, can have unforeseen and disproportionate impacts on civil wars. Reducing legal incentives for states to provide highly fungible resources rooted in international law seems an obvious place to start. The second is on the impact of such dynamics in the here and now. Knowing when and how external states may lead to greater competition is crucial for the international community to effectively channel limited resources to high risk areas. For responders, the ways in which external states are involved or not provides some indication of potential future paths of the conflict. My findings indicate that fungible forms of support, especially from several external states, leads to high levels of competition, rebel infighting, and splintering, which are also associated with severity and civilian targeting. When looking at the Syrian conflict for example, it is likely that rebel fragmentation and sectarian violence are related. Responses that aim to alleviate human suffering, specifically one-sided violence aimed at civilians, should focus on areas where multiple groups are active and linked to different external states. The devastation and suffering inflicted on civilians in the Syrian city of Aleppo

is testament to this risk.

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Chapter 8

Appendices

8.1 Appendix I

Case selection strategy

The case studies aim to achieve a representative sample and useful variation on the dimensions of theoretical interest (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). I conduct a single case study and a comparative case study. In the single case study, I focus on the actor-level. The comparative case study allows me to compare civil wars where the conflicts experienced different forms of external support (diverse) and in similar contexts (most similar). The most similar cases allow me to overcome potential endogeneity between the forms of support provided and the number of rebel groups. More generally, as conflict environments develop over time, all three cases allow me to analysis changes in levels of external involvement and the conflict environment, thus increasing the number of observations and leverage. This allows me to test several hypotheses as it represents the full variation of the general population of internationalised civil wars. The cases are selected based on two essential criteria:

Criteria 1: External state support was provided to at least one rebel group over the conflict.

Criteria 2: Variation in the key independent variable. This means that in the first case, rebel groups only receive fungible support over the course of the conflict (diverse). In the other cases, at least one rebel group receives nonfungible support at any stage of the conflict but the sequencing of external support was different (most similar).

I also considered within-case variation in the number of external supporting states over time, within-case variation in the types of support provided, and across-case dissimilarity in terms of time and geography in order to increase the generalisability of the findings and identify potential scope conditions for the theoretical argument. The key independent variable is ordinal: Groups either receive no support, fungible support, or nonfungible support. The dependent variables are alliance formation, rebel infighting, and splintering. In order to test these, I require conflicts in which there were at least two rebel groups at any one time. I rely on two existing datasets to conduct the case selection. I first identify all active civil wars using the dyad-year version of the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Harbom, Melander, & Wallensteen, 2008), which identifies armed conflict as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year” (Pettersson, Högbladh, & Öberg, 2019). From this list, I omit conflicts where there were never more than one rebel group over the course of the conflict. The resulting list provides a representative sample of the population of interest.

Using the UCDP External Support Data (Högbladh, Pettersson, & Themnér, 2011), I code whether rebel groups receive no support, fungible support, or nonfungible support. Support is coded as nonfungible if rebels received troops, safehaven, or joint operations (as defined by the UCDP External Support dataset). Support is coded as fungible if rebels received funding, weapons, or material/logistics. As well as type of

support from states, I code the name of the external state. If there are more than one, the rebel group is coded more than once. Therefore, each observation represents a state-rebel group dyad. I limit the external support to state support by removing support from non-state actors such as rebel groups, diaspora, and if the UCDP coded the external actor as “elements of” certain governments. This results in a datasets of 1970 observations, representing 271 rebel groups from 1975 to 2009.

The UCDP External Support dataset only codes conflicts up to 2009. However, the most recent UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Pettersson et al., 2021) (see Figure 1.1 above) shows that the proportion of internationalised intrastate conflicts—civil wars that include the involvement of foreign governments with troops—are increasing, especially since 2010. According to Pettersson et al. (2021), over 50 percent of conflicts were coded as internationalised in 2020 compared to just 6 percent in 1990. While the large-N analyses conducted in *Chapter III* and *Chapter IV* relies on data limited to 2009, I extend the external support data for the case selection. I manually code 368 years of conflict for 107 rebel groups involved in multi-actor civil wars between 2010-2018. I followed the coding procedure for the UCDP external support data, but only code whether support was fungible or nonfungible as opposed to itemising each type of support. This is less rigorous than the UCDP coding procedure, but sufficiently reliable for the purpose of case selection. I encountered several hurdles. There was very little information on several groups and conflicts, while for others there was a lot of conflicting information. An example of a case with conflicting data was the Syrian conflict (shown in Table 8.1).

Table 8.1: Coding of external support in the Syrian civil war.

Year	Rebel name	External support state	Type of support
2011	Syrian insurgents	Jordan	fungible
2011	Syrian insurgents	Qatar	fungible
2011	Syrian insurgents	Saudia Arabia	fungible
2011	Syrian insurgents	Turkey	nonfungible
2012	Syrian insurgents	Qatar	fungible
2012	Syrian insurgents	Saudia Arabia	fungible
2012	Syrian insurgents	Turkey	nonfungible
2013	Syrian insurgents	United States	fungible
2013	Syrian insurgents	Saudia Arabia	fungible
2013	Syrian insurgents	Qatar	fungible
2013	Syrian insurgents	Turkey	nonfungible
2014	Syrian insurgents	Saudia Arabia	fungible
2014	Syrian insurgents	Qatar	fungible
2014	Syrian insurgents	United States	fungible
2014	Syrian insurgents	Turkey	nonfungible
2015	Syrian insurgents	Saudia Arabia	fungible
2015	Syrian insurgents	Qatar	fungible
2015	Syrian insurgents	United States	nonfungible
2015	Syrian insurgents	Turkey	nonfungible
2016	Syrian insurgents	Saudi Arabia	fungible
2016	Syrian insurgents	United States	nonfungible
2016	Syrian insurgents	Turkey	nonfungible
2017	Syrian insurgents	Saudi Arabia	fungible
2017	Syrian insurgents	United States	nonfungible
2017	Syrian insurgents	Turkey	nonfungible
2018	Syrian insurgents	Saudi Arabia	fungible
2018	Syrian insurgents	United States	nonfungible
2018	Syrian insurgents	Turkey	nonfungible

Rebel groups are identified from the dyadic UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, which for the case of Syria, codes all rebels as “Syrian insurgents.” The Syrian civil war illustrates a potential problem with this coding, which is that “Syrian insurgents” represent several rebel groups. Indeed, the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) for Syria which includes all clear events from 2016 to 2019—not just those that pass the threshold of 25 battle-related deaths during one calendar year—lists 50 non-state actors (Sundberg & Melander, 2013). As the selection is based on variation in the key independent variable—external support—this is not an issue. However, it is problematic if employed for the large-N analysis conducted in *Chapters III* and *Chapter IV*.

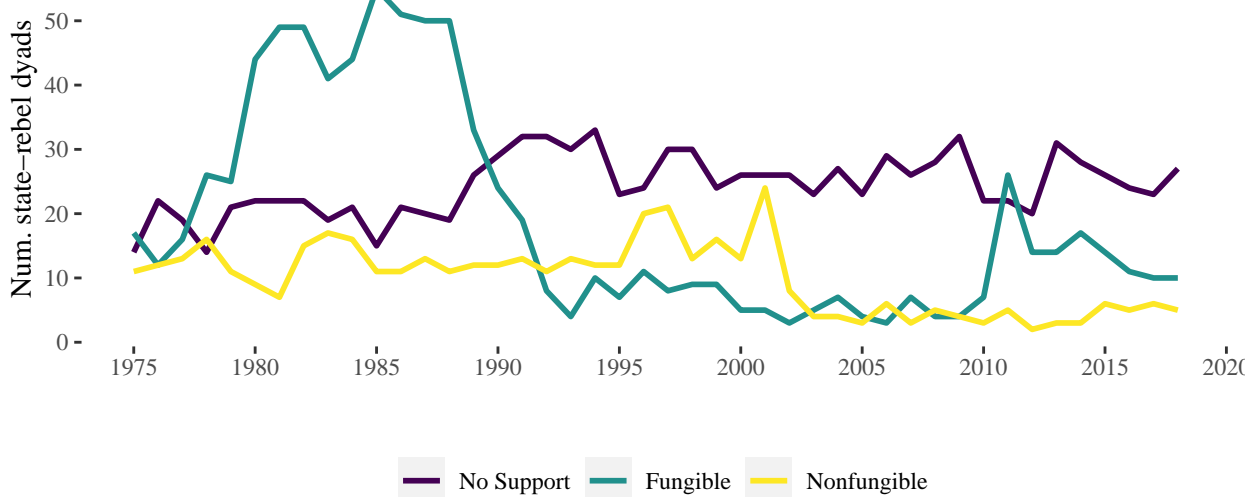


Figure 8.1: Types of external support in multi-actor civil wars (1975-2018).

The final data contains 336 rebel groups active in 76 conflicts from 1975 to 2018. The trend in the number of fungible and nonfungible support relations are presented in Figure 8.1 above. The increasing line for nonfungible support reflects the trend visible in recent UCDP data (see Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1). I employ data visualisations to identify cases based on the two essential criteria. I code the type of support received by each rebel group and aggregate to the conflict (using the UCDP’s *Conflict id* variable) and country levels (using the *Location* variable), which is the country whose government or territory is disputed. The UCDP defines a conflict as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths.” Coding support at both levels is important as some states experience multiple conflicts over the period of study. Rebels that receive external support from numerous external states are coded once only. In cases where rebel receive both fungible and nonfungible support, they are coded as receiving nonfungible support.



Figure 8.2: Rebels that receive no support or fungible support at any stage in a conflict are shown in blue (1975-2009). Red rectangles show active rebel groups that receive no support. The numbers below country names represent UCDP unique conflict IDs.

Fungible case

To select my first case, I visualise conflicts in which rebels received only fungible support. As shown in Figure 8.2, there are few cases where external rebels only received fungible external support. It is likely that there is some measurement error, and within the cases there may be fungible support that the UCDP dataset does not report. There are two reasons for why this is the case. First, there may be a floor effect from the criteria of 25 battle-related deaths. Some groups may receive limited fungible support but never surpass the UCDP criteria to be included in their datasets. Second, it is likely—due to the covert nature of fungible support—that the data suffers from missingness. For example, the dataset does not record Saudi Arabia military

support to the Southern Forces during the 1994 civil war in Yemen, despite it being substantial (Al-Suwaidi & Hudson, 1995, p. 82).

From inspecting Figure 8.2, I select the United Kingdom, and the conflict in Northern Ireland specifically. It has multiple rebel groups and temporal variation in the key independent variable, having received fungible external support at different times in the conflict. There are therefore methodological reasons to select this case. It allows me to trace the effect of fungible resources on intergroup and intragroup dynamics, which may not be an option for other civil wars which receive fungible support throughout the conflict, such as South Sudan or El Salvador. Furthermore, I know the Northern Ireland case well having researched it in the post-conflict period of 1998 to 2018. I am also from the Republic of Ireland, which means that I have relevant expertise and access to the field, as well as pre-existing knowledge of the island's history and social context. These are legitimate factors for case selection (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), which combined with methodological reasons, justify the case. Furthermore, while fieldwork was not possible due to the global Covid-19, it is a historic case in a country where there have been extensive interviews with former combatants and rich collection of secondary resources, including archival evidence to which I have access as I am based in London.

The UCDP data shows that Libya provided the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) with weapons in 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989, and 1991. The shipments of weapons from Gaddafi to the Provisional IRA are well documented, but how it affected relations among the main active republican groups—such as the Provisional IRA and the Real IRA, but also groups that are not coded by the UCDP such as the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), the Irish People's Liberation Organisation (IPLO), and the Continuity IRA (CIRA)—has not been analysed systematically. The case allows me to test whether and how groups and factions competed over fungible support in the form of funding, military materials, and weapons from external state actors.

Nonfungible cases

The next step is to select diverse cases from the Northern Ireland case, i.e., cases in which rebels received nonfungible support at least once during the conflict. As shown in Figure 8.3, there are many more cases from which to choose. Note that I aim to select diverse and most-similar cases. The cases should be similar in many respect but the sequencing of external support differed, which allows me to account for potential endogeneity between rebel competition and external support.



Figure 8.3: Rebels that receive nonfungible support at least once during the conflict. Numbers under country names represent UCDP unique conflict IDs.

There are many possible cases for nonfungible support. I select Libya and Syria because they meet the essential criteria, they are important cases (George & Bennett, 2005), and they vary in the extent and form of external support. Although both conflicts became highly internationalised, this process was markedly different in both

conflicts. NATO intervened with nonfungible support (air-strikes and heavy artillery) shortly after the conflict broke out. After the opposition defeated the Gaddafi regime, NATO's support stopped. After the Gaddafi regime fell, other states continued to provide fungible support to different actors and conflict broke out again in 2014. The role of external states in Syria's civil war went through an opposite process. Whereas the early years of the Syrian civil war were marked by high levels of fungible support from multiple external states, Turkey and then the US provided support to the rebels in a conflict that, at the time of writing, remains highly internationalised. This temporal and sequencing variation is crucial in tackling legitimate endogeneity concerns. It is possible that external states provide fungible support to rebel groups because they are highly fragmented. The sequencing of support sheds light on the direction of this causal relation.

Although the conflicts differ, they also share a number of important characteristics which I aim to exploit. Violence erupted for similar reasons in both repressive states. Indeed, the conflicts were so similar that many scholars and journalists quickly added them to the lengthening list of conflicts part of the *Arab Spring*. At the start of the research, both were ongoing conflicts and field research was not possible. Instead, I rely on grey literature, secondary literature, and political event data to conduct a cross-case comparison of the conflicts.

8.2 Appendix II

External support data

There are several potential sources of data on external support to rebel groups. In this section, I discuss them and outline why I chose to use the UCDP external support dataset (Högbladh, Pettersson, & Themnér, 2011).

Regan & Aydin (2006) collect data on external interventions—specifically diplomatic

third party interventions—but codes interventions into conflicts, not support to different rebel groups. The Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2009) has information on external support. However, external support is not itemised, which prevents me from separating support into its component parts. Furthermore, the NSA dataset is temporally separated into *spells*. According to D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan (2013, p. 519), many of the measures that they are interested in do not change over time but when they do they are coded as a new spell for a group. New spells are also coded if there is a period exceeding two calendar years in which the level of conflict falls below 25 battle deaths in a year. There is significant variation in the duration of a conflict dyad and spells. The longest dyad in the NSA dataset restricted to only conflicts with more than one rebel group over the course of the conflict (and therefore could have fought other rebels) is 42 years between the government of the Philippines and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) (1969-2011). This is also the longest spell, which means that there is no variation in the rebel group characteristics over this period—including external support for which the CPP received none. A second notable group is the 32-year dyad between the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (1978-2011). Over this entire period, the FARC is coded in two spells (1964-1977 and 1978-2011) and received support from Cuba for both. For the period of the study (1989-2008), other lengthy dyads in multi-actor civil wars include the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda which received support from Sudan from 1988 to 2001 but no support from 2001 to 2011; the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka which received support from India from 1989 to 1991 but no support from 1991 to 2009; and the Oromo Liberation Front in Ethiopia which received no external support from 1989 to 2009. Some dyads—such as Angola and UNITA (dyad ID 7)—are coded into many spells over this period. In the case of Angola and UNITA, the periods are 1989-1991, 1991-1992, 1993-1997 and 1998-2002. Of all these

periods, the dataset indicates that UNITA received support from South Africa, the US and Zaire from 1989 to 1992 only. The spell structure is problematic for this analysis because it is not clear whether groups received support for the entire period, which is accentuated for groups that are coded into longer spells.

The Non-State Armed Groups (NAGs) dataset (San-Akca, 2016) is more similar to the UCDP External Support Dataset but coding starts in 1922. I draw on the UCDP because it is more compatible with other UCDP datasets from which I code dependent variables for rebel dynamics in subsequent chapters. It is important to note that while they have similar coding procedures, they code slightly different information. I include only support from the NAG dataset that is voluntary (defined as *State Selection Cases*). The UCDP codes *troop* support when a state “sent combat troops to fight alongside a primary warring party” and the NAGs when states “allow their troops to fight on the side of the rebels against their targets.” The UCDP codes *Territory* if an external state “allows a warring party to set bases on the territory it controls, permits sanctuary or cross-border military action for the supported warring party or in any other way concedes its full sovereignty in favor of a supported party.” NAGs codes safehavens for rebel group members and leadership separately. I include only safehaven for members, which is when a “certain number of militants are present within the territories of a state or they establish some bases.” The UCDP codes funding when economic aid is “extended by an external supporter in order to be used to fund the waging of the armed conflict or is given to the warring party” and NAGs codes *FinAid* when groups receive money “from the supporter state’s government.” The UCDP codes *material* and *weapons* support separately, but NAG codes *weapons and logistics aid* as a single variable. To increase potential overlap, I code the UCDP as either material and weapons. In any case, for groups that appear in both datasets between 1975-2009, there is overlap but also important differences. Correlations, presented in Table 8.2, are highest between overt forms of support, which echoes researchers who

emphasize that external support is difficult to detect and code especially when it is covert (Forsythe, 1992; G. Hughes, 2012).

Table 8.2: Correlations in coding between the UCDP External Support dataset and the NAGs dataset, calculated at the group level (N = 137).

Support type	Correlation
Troops	0.35
Territory	0.101
Funding	0.231
Weapons and material/logistics	0.134

Coding support

I employ principal component analysis (PCA) to verify whether my coding of different forms of support is justified. PCA is used in both unsupervised learning and as a data reduction technique for regression. I expect that states will not provide any one single type of support, but that they provide them in strategic combinations that reflect their willingness to accept risk in order to achieve their desired outcome. If a state is willing to risk sending troops into a foreign conflict, it is likely that they will also provide fungible support. This is supported by the high correlation between several forms of support, as shown in Figure 8.4. It shows that fungible support like materials, weapons, and funding are highly correlated. This is especially true for weapons and materials (correlation = 0.7). Nonfungible forms of support like joint operations, access to territory, and troops are not highly correlated. This indicates that different forms of riskier support are provided as a replacement strategy and not cumulatively. However, troop support correlates with fungible forms of support. For instance, there is a positive correlation between troops and weapons, funding, and materials.

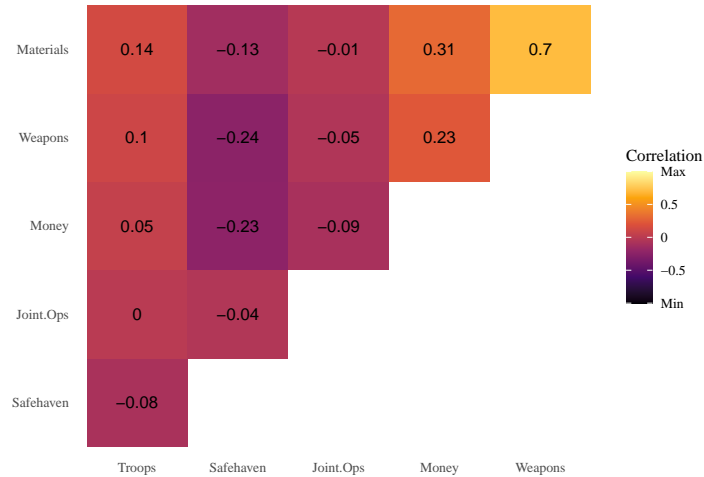


Figure 8.4: Correlation between the provisions of different forms of external support. Red indicates that different support types are positively correlated.

PCA can summarise a set of correlated variables into a smaller amount of representative variables that collectively explain most of the variability in the data (James, Witten, Hastie, & Tibshirani, 2013, p. 374). In the first instance, it can reduce complex data in order to reveal underlying structures. There is no single way of identifying the appropriate number of components. One technique is to examine how much variance each component explains using a scree plot. Figure 8.5 shows that there is an ‘elbow’ in the data after the second and fourth components.

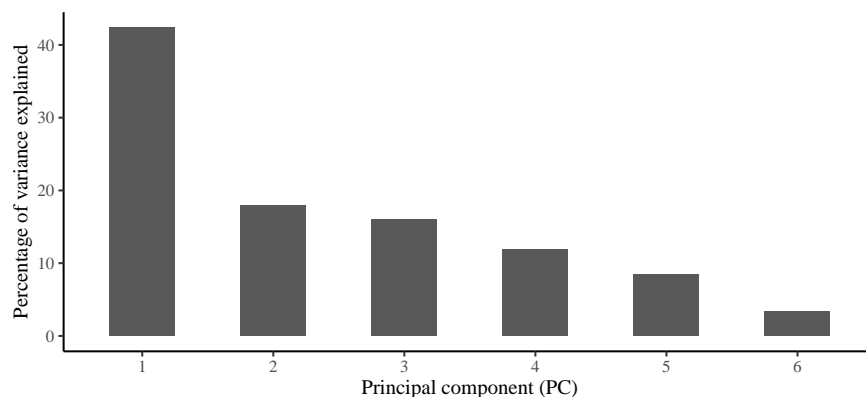


Figure 8.5: A scree plot shows an elbow after the fourth component.

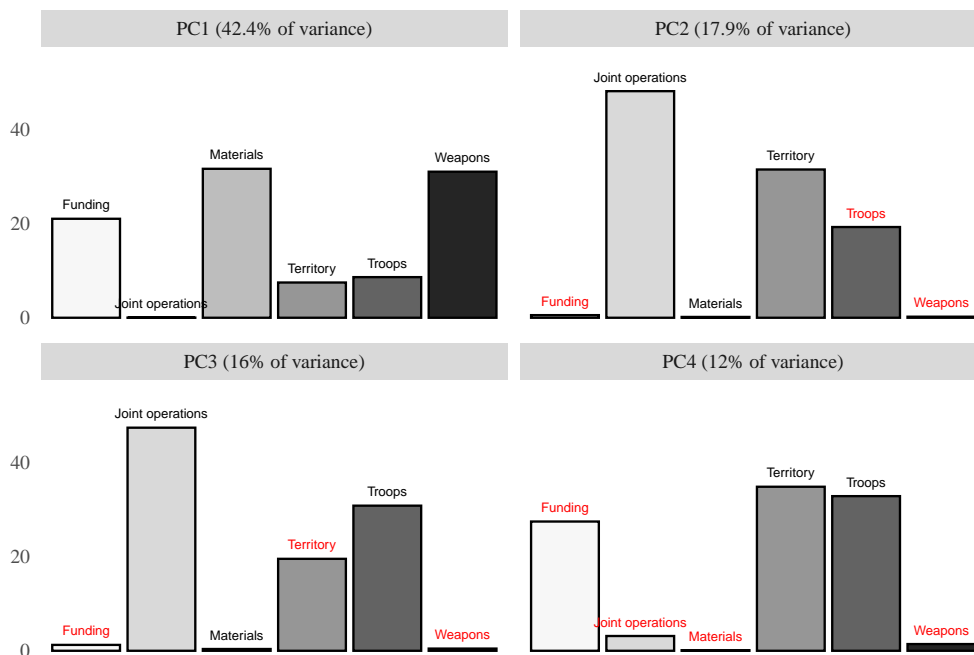


Figure 8.6: Principal component analysis of external support provision to rebel groups (1989-2009).

Taken together, the first four components account for over 75 percent of the total variance.] An additional approach is to look for patterns in the first components. If none are found, then further components are not likely to contain any either (James, Witten, Hastie, & Tibshirani, 2013, p. 384). Figure 8.6 shows the composition of the first four components. The sign of a loading indicates whether a variable and a principal component are positively or negatively correlated. In Figure 8.6, columns labelled in red are negative loadings. The plots show that principal component 1 (PC1), which accounts for over 40 percent of the total variance, is composed predominantly of fungible forms of support such as weapons, material, and funding. Principal component 2 (PC2) is composed of joint operations and territory; while principal component 3 (PC3) and (PC4) are composed of joint operations and troops, and troops and territory, respectively. Therefore, states appear to provide either fungible support or some combination of nonfungible support. Taken together, the correlation plot and PCA analysis indicate that reducing the six items to either fungible or nonfungible

support is an appropriate strategy.

Network panel descriptive statistics

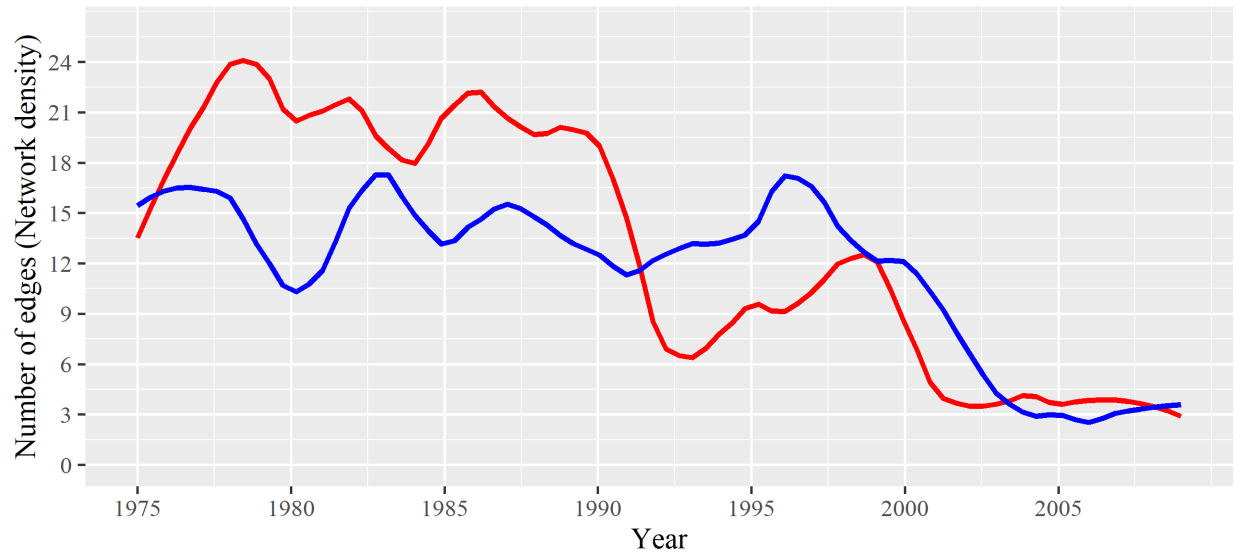


Figure 8.7: Both fungible (red) and nonfungible (blue) networks are sparse, as represented by low density scores, defined as the ratio of extant edges to potential edges.

Table 8.3: Statistics for yearly network panel dataset.

Year	Num. fungible edges	Num. nonfungible edges	Num. nodes	Fungible density	Nonfungible density
1975	14	16	148	0.0006435	0.0007354
1976	17	15	147	0.0007921	0.0006989
1977	19	17	148	0.0008733	0.0007814
1978	25	16	149	0.0011337	0.0007256
1979	24	13	149	0.0010883	0.0005895
1980	20	10	149	0.0009069	0.0004535
1981	20	11	150	0.0008949	0.0004922
1982	24	16	150	0.0010738	0.0007159
1983	18	18	150	0.0008054	0.0008054
1984	17	15	151	0.0007506	0.0006623
1985	22	12	151	0.0009713	0.0005298
1986	22	15	151	0.0009713	0.0006623
1987	21	16	151	0.0009272	0.0007064
1988	19	14	151	0.0008389	0.0006181
1989	20	14	151	0.0008830	0.0006181
1990	20	12	154	0.0008488	0.0005093
1991	14	12	164	0.0005237	0.0004489
1992	8	11	167	0.0002886	0.0003968
1993	4	15	170	0.0001392	0.0005221
1994	11	12	170	0.0003829	0.0004177
1995	7	14	170	0.0002436	0.0004873
1996	11	17	170	0.0003829	0.0005917
1997	9	18	170	0.0003133	0.0006265
1998	12	12	170	0.0004177	0.0004177
1999	14	13	171	0.0004816	0.0004472
2000	7	12	171	0.0002408	0.0004128
2001	5	10	171	0.0001720	0.0003440
2002	3	7	171	0.0001032	0.0002408
2003	4	4	171	0.0001376	0.0001376
2004	4	3	171	0.0001376	0.0001032
2005	4	3	171	0.0001376	0.0001032
2006	3	3	172	0.0001020	0.0001020
2007	5	2	172	0.0001700	0.0000680
2008	3	5	173	0.0001008	0.0001680
2009	3	3	173	0.0001008	0.0001008

Goodness-of-fit

The key strength (but also difficulty) of ERG models over other inferential network approaches—such as Quadratic Analysis Procedures (QAP) and the Latent Space Model (LSM)—is that the researchers must specify endogenous dependencies as network terms. Therefore their strength—that researchers can explicitly test or control for network dependencies—is also a source of weakness—it increases the risk that models will be misspecified (Cranmer, Leifeld, McClurg, & Rolfe, 2017, p. 241). In order to account for this, I conduct a goodness-of-fit test outlined by Cranmer & Desmarais (2011). Similar to Czarna, Leifeld, Śmieja, Dufner, & Salovey (2016), I simulated 100 networks instead of each network based on the model parameters and compared these to the observed networks. As shown in figures 8.8 and 8.9, the distribution of the network characteristics of the simulated networks generally match those of the observed networks for fungible and nonfungible support. An important note here is that the statistics show the sparsity of the networks, especially for nonfungible support networks. Despite the sparsity of the networks, the simulated models are similar to the actual networks. The distributions of typical network characteristics are similar to the observed distributions of the same statistics, which ensures that the models do not suffer from omitted variable bias due to unmodelled endogenous network dependencies. Based on the goodness-of-fit graphs, I am confident that the models do not suffer from omitted endogenous variables.

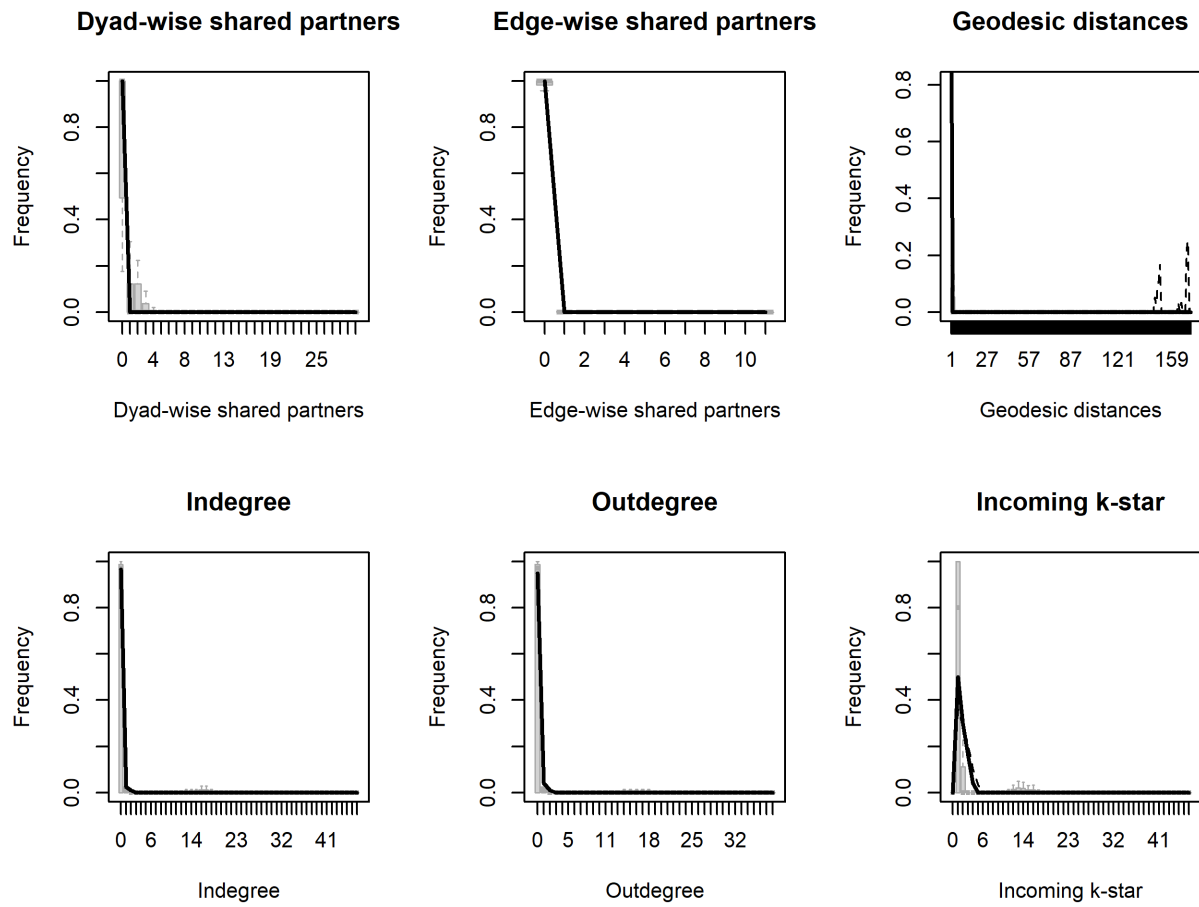


Figure 8.8: Goodness-of-fit for the fungible support model. The grey boxplots represent the simulations, and the solid and dashed black lines represent the median and mean of the observed networks, respectively.

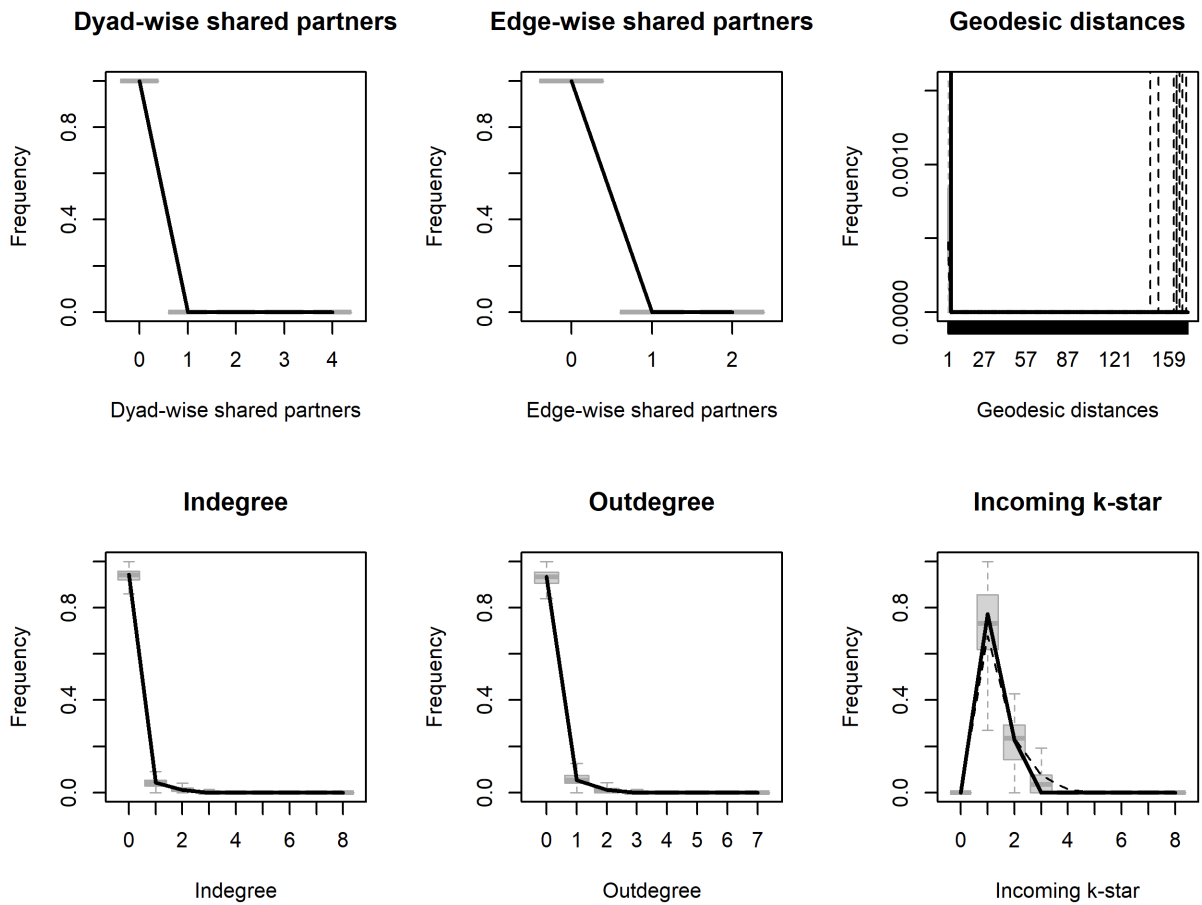


Figure 8.9: Goodness-of-fit for the nonfungible support model.

Dyadic regression analysis

To test the robustness of the results of the temporal ERG models, I replicate the analysis as a dyadic regression analysis. The underlying data is the same: the provision of fungible and nonfungible support from 1975 to 2009, which amounts to 874,708 observations. The dependent variables are rare events. As shown in table 8.4, less than half a percentage of observations are coded as fungible and nonfungible support, respectively. To account for the skewed distribution, I run binomial-response generalized linear regression models that account for bias reduction which return estimates estimates with improved frequentist properties (Kosmidis & Firth, 2021).

However, I do not account for interdependence. To account for correlated controls, I include robust standard errors. Finally, I account for temporal trends by including year fixed-effects.

Table 8.4: Percentage of fungible (column 1) and nonfungible (column 2) dyads.

	Fungible	Nonfungible
No support	99.95	99.96
Support	0.05	0.04

The results presented below mirror those of the temporal network analysis. It shows that states are less likely to provide fungible support to relatively weaker states (column 1) and more likely to provide nonfungible support to weaker states (column 2). This is in line with my theoretical expectations. However, similar to the temporal ERG models, it shows that states are more likely to provide fungible support to relatively weaker states both in terms of military strength and alliance strength. I do not expect this for fungible support. The similarity in results increases confidence, however the dyadic regression analysis does not account for important network effects and it is likely that the coefficients are inaccurate.

8.3 Appendix III

A network approach to rebel relations

This section presents a longitudinal network analysis of interrebel relations from 1989 to 2009 in order to test *hypothesis 4A* and *4B*, focusing on how different forms of external support increase the likelihood that rebels engage in interrebel fighting and alliance formation. No one, to my knowledge, has employed network approaches to understanding why rebels fight or ally at a global level.

Table 8.5: Dyadic regression results for external support provision.

	Fungible support	Nonfungible support
Main effects		
Difference in state strength	-0.204* (0.079)	0.346* (0.169)
Difference in alliance strength	0.076*** (0.017)	0.033+ (0.019)
Controls		
Military personnel (sender)	0.676*** (0.141)	-0.301 (0.269)
Polity	-0.013+ (0.007)	-0.008 (0.008)
Alliance similarity	0.340 (0.228)	-0.461+ (0.249)
Rivals	1.020* (0.397)	0.949** (0.340)
Distance (in 1000 km)	0.026** (0.010)	-0.032** (0.012)
Shared ethnic kin	-0.218 (0.351)	1.403*** (0.199)
Trade	0.008* (0.004)	-0.096 (0.082)
Difference in polity (sender)	-0.022** (0.008)	-0.035*** (0.009)
Num.Obs.	874 708	874 708
AIC	7315.8	6634.4
BIC	7841.4	7160.1
Log.Lik.	-3612.875	-3272.208

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

The data

I construct a yearly panel network dataset. *Nodes* are rebel groups from the UCDP Termination of Conflict dataset (Kreutz, 2010), which identifies continuous periods of conflict years in UCDP-PRIO armed conflict dataset.¹ Yearly observations are made for all rebel groups that fight the government of a state which results in over 25 battle-related deaths at any point in a conflict. The UCDP codes rebel groups from the moment they meet the 25 battle-related deaths threshold. However, rebel groups can (and sometimes do) fight other rebel groups before passing this threshold. Therefore, rebel groups that ever meet the 25 battle deaths threshold are active from the start of

¹The dataset is first restricted to conflicts coded as civil wars or internationalised civil wars.

the conflict unless they were founded after the conflict began, in which case they enter the dataset the year they were founded.² For example, the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) was only founded in 1994 according to the FORGE dataset, and so could not fight or form alliances with the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) in 1989, or the five other rebel groups active in India from 1989 to 1994.³ Rebel groups drop out of the dataset according to the UCDP Termination of Conflict dataset or at least a year after the last time they form alliances or fight other rebels.⁴ The second criteria is necessary for a two reasons. First, data on interrebel fighting and alliance formation included relations between actors which are not coded as active in the UCDP Termination of Conflict dataset, as described previously. Secondly, but related, is that omitting these types of relations makes the networks too sparse to fit ERG models, which suffer from convergence issues for networks which are either very sparse or very dense (Cranmer, Leifeld, McClurg, & Rolfe, 2017, p. 242). The dataset includes 2536 rebel-year observations, 269 rebel groups from 1989 to 2009.⁵

The structure of the dataset is important, as it differs in important ways from previous research. Fjelde & Nilsson (2012) construct a monadic dataset where rebel groups enter the dataset the first year that they are active in an armed conflict with a government (when the state-rebel dyad reaches at least 25 battle-related deaths).⁶ Their dataset is restricted to conflicts where there were more than one rebel group from 1989 to 2009. The study is not dyadic because, according to them, that would

²Data rebel group year of foundation is from the FORGE dataset (Braithwaite & Cunningham, 2020).

³The five other groups were the People's Liberation Army of Manipur (PLA), the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the People's War Group (PWG).

⁴The UCDP Termination of Conflict dataset codes the end of conflicts if they are resolved through peace agreements, ceasefire agreement, victory by one of the sides, or low activity. Low activity is coded when a conflict continues but does not reach the UCDP threshold of fatalities (25 battle-related deaths).

⁵In network terminology, this dataset is the *nodelist* on which interrebel fighting and interrebel alliance networks are built.

⁶The authors code low activity as five years of less than 25 battle-related deaths, which is a long period considering the full temporal range of the study is 20 years.

require identifying all the relevant pair of dyads—or the “universe of cases” (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012, p. 615)—which is difficult due to the number of rebel groups that are active below the 25 battle-death threshold. As noted above, it is also clear from data on interrebel fighting and alliance formation that groups are active outside of these years. This is of course a limitation of a large-N dyadic analysis, and by extension, this global network analysis approach. It is important to note that the universe of cases in my study is rebel groups that reach the threshold of 25 battle-related deaths fighting any government at any point in their conflict, while the group they can fight need not be active in that specific civil war, or even necessarily in that year. However, this setup is necessary because much of the research on rebel alliances is based on dyadic data, for which the universe of cases could also be incorrect (Bapat & Bond, 2012; Popovic, 2018). An exception is Akcinaroglu (2012)’s research, which adopts a monadic in design and is restricted to conflicts where governments faced more than one rebel group. Here, I sacrifice the generalisability of the findings, as my study is restricted to groups that surpass the 25 battle-related deaths at some point and rebels can remain in the dataset if they engage in rebel fighting or alliance formation at points beyond the official end of their conflict.

The key independent variables are different forms of external state support, which are coded as fungible if a rebel group received materials, weapons, or funding, and nonfungible if it received territory, joint operations, or troops, according to the UCDP External Support Dataset (Högbladh, Pettersson, & Themnér, 2011). 7 percent of observations ($N = 173$) are coded as fungible support, while 10 percent ($N = 249$) are coded as nonfungible support.

The edges are interrebel fighting and rebel alliances, therefore representing the extreme end of possible relations between groups. In order to test *hypothesis 4a*—that rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to fight other rebels—I create

a yearly dyadic list of interrebel fighting⁷ between rebel groups identified in the dataset described above. Data on interrebel fighting is from the UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset (Sundberg & Melander, 2013).⁸ Therefore—unlike Fjelde & Nilsson (2012) and the matching analysis above—rebels are only coded as fighting other rebel groups that also reach the 25 battle-related deaths threshold.

In order to test *hypothesis 4b*, that rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely to form alliances with other rebels, I create a network of rebel alliances where alliance edges are coded from a dataset collected by Bapat & Bond (2012) and Popovic (2018). The coding of these variables is not different to that described in this chapter. The key difference is that rebel groups can only ally or fight with other rebels groups, as opposed to other non-state armed actors.

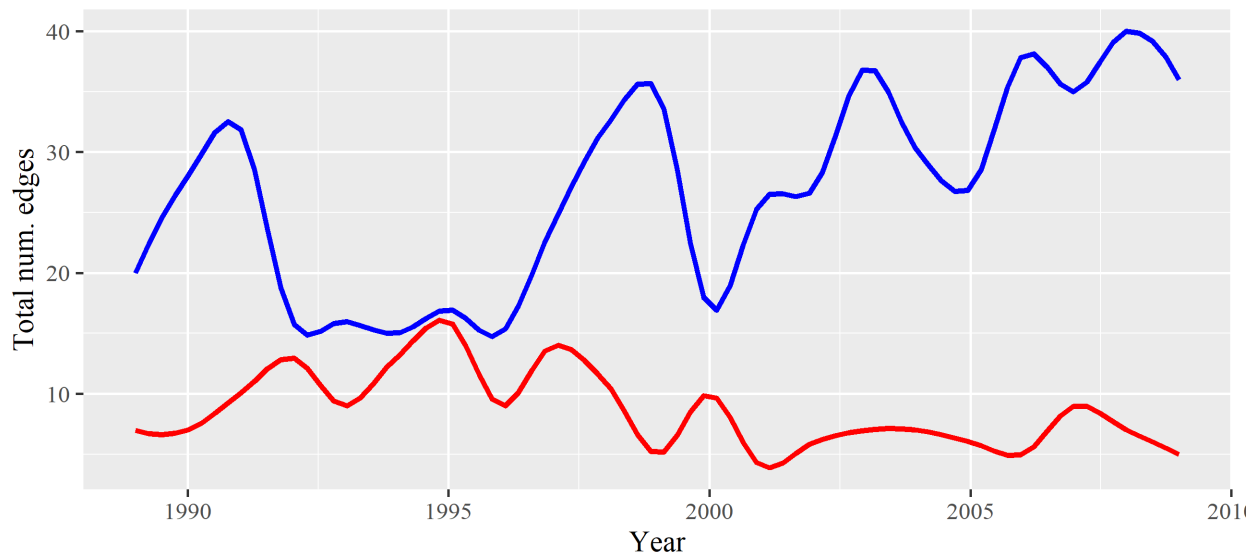


Figure 8.10: Total number of interrebel fighting and alliance edges (1989-2009).

As is clear in figure 8.10, there are relatively few edges in any given year, which means that both rebel alliance and interrebel fighting networks are sparse. This is particularly true for the rebel fighting network. Indeed, the total number of rebel

⁷These are referred to as *edgelist*s in network terminology

⁸I remove cases of fighting between rebel groups and militia groups aligned with the state, such as the Janjaweed in Sudan or the Mayi Mayi in the DRC.

fighting edges never exceeds 16 per year, while the number of rebel alliances peaks in 2008 with 40 rebel alliances. In these conditions, it can be difficult for ERG models to converge and network terms often correlated across time periods.⁹

I include a number of control variables to account for characteristics that may affect interrebel dynamics. First, to measure state capacity, I include the real GDP of the main state that the rebel groups are targeting. The expectation is that rebels are more likely to form alliances when fighting strong governments as a way to aggregate their fighting capabilities and improve their chances of survival and victory, while infighting is more likely against weak governments as rebels jostle for a better bargaining position as part of a dual-contest (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012). I also control for group level characteristics, including rebel strength, ideology, and ethnicity. I use two indicators of rebel strength from the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2013). The first—*rebel strength*—is relative to the state measured as a nodal covariate. Rebel groups can be weaker, on parity with the state, or stronger than the state. The second indicator is relative to each other. I include the *rebel estimate* variable, which records the number of rebel fighters, and calculate the absolute difference between rebel groups. The variable contains missing values, which ERG models cannot handle. To account for this, I conduct multiple imputation using classification and regression trees (CART) matching (Breiman, Friedman, Olshen, & Stone, 2017).¹⁰ CART matching is a machine learning technique widely used for multiple imputation as it is robust against outliers and deals well with multicollinearity and skewed distributions (Van Buuren, 2018). Recent work by Gade, Hafez, & Gabbay (2019) and Gade, Gabbay, Hafez, & Kelly (2019) shows that ideologically distant groups have a higher propensity for interrebel fighting while ideologically similar groups are more likely to form alliances, at least in the context

⁹See Table 8.8 for network summary statistics.

¹⁰Leifeld, Cranmer, & Desmarais (2018) recommend either removing nodes with missing observations or replacing missing values with the modal value (or, in this case the mean).

of the civil war in Syria. They find no relationship between external support and rebel infighting in Syria. To account for this, I include a nodal covariate (*ideological foundation*) for rebel groups that are founded around a specific ideology from the FORGE dataset (Braithwaite & Cunningham, 2020). Finally, common ethnicity might increase cooperation or competition. I include a node covariate from the FORGE dataset (*ethnic foundation*) for rebel groups that are explicitly founded around an ethnic identity and an edge covariate (*shared ethnicity*) between rebel groups if they share a common ethnic group according to the ACD2EPR dataset (Vogt et al., 2015). Finally, an important predictor of both fighting and alliance formation is distance. Previous dyadic research often restricts data to the same conflict (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Popovic, 2018). Visualisations of the data (Figure 8.11 and 8.12) indicate that these will be important variables. However, as indicated by the alliance between AMAL and Hezbollah in 1989 in Figure 8.11, it is not a given that rebels must be in the same country in order to fight one another. To account for distance, I include three edge covariates: whether rebels are in the same country, whether they are in the same continent, and the distance (in 1000km) between their main countries in which they are most active.

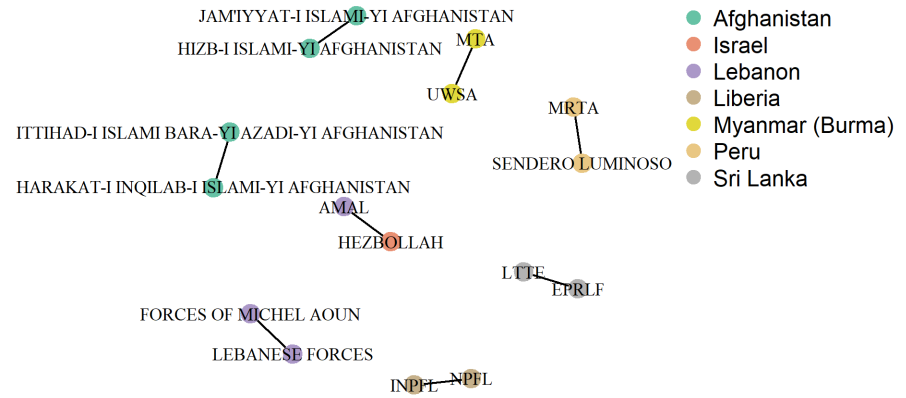


Figure 8.11: Interrebel fighting in 1989. Nodes are coloured based on the location of the groups.

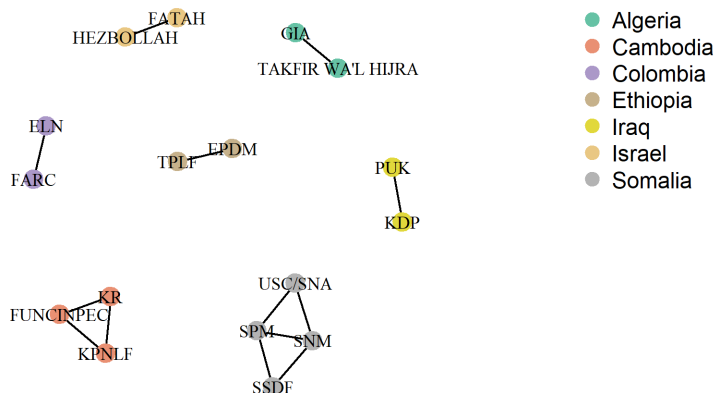


Figure 8.12: Rebel alliances in 1989. Nodes are coloured based on the location of the groups.

Previous work shows competition between rebel groups is also shaped by state characteristics and state behaviour. I include a control variable for lootable natural resources. I control for conflict intensity by drawing on yearly *battle-related deaths* data from the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset (Pettersson, Högladh, & Öberg, 2019). Battle-related deaths is a nodal covariate for the number of deaths between the rebels and the target government that are directly related to combat. I also include a term for dyadic stability which counts the number of stable dyads—both persistent edges and persistent non-edges—between two time periods (Cranmer & Desmarais, 2011, p. 5). This improves model fit because the networks are relatively sparse. I include two endogenous network terms. The first is *geometrically weighted degree* (GWD), which captures the tendency of the network towards centralisation—the tendency for edges to accrue among a small number of popular nodes. The second is *geometrically-weighted edgewise shared partnerships* (GWESP), which models triad

closure. Together, positive coefficients indicate that networks tend to cluster, while negative coefficients indicate that they not. GWESP and GWD are not as interpretable as terms used in the analysis conducted in Chapter IV, but they are more robust to convergence issues (Hunter, 2007).

Results

Table 8.6 shows the results for interrebel fighting in column one and for rebel alliances in column two. The key independent variables are listed under the *main effects* heading. The coefficient for fungible support is positive for rebel infighting (column 1), but it is not statistically significant, failing to reach the 95 confidence levels ($p < 0.05$). This does not support *hypothesis 4a*, that rebel groups that receive fungible support are more likely to fight other rebels. The coefficient for nonfungible support is positive for rebel alliances (column 2), but it is not statistically significant. This does not provide support for *hypothesis 4b*, that rebel groups that receive nonfungible support are more likely to form alliances with other rebel groups. Although I do not formulate the opposite hypotheses—for example, that fungible support would decrease the likelihood that rebels will form alliances or that nonfungible support would increase rebel infighting—the models show that different forms of support have effects that go against my theoretical expectations. This is especially true for rebels that receive nonfungible support, who are more likely to fight other rebels (column 1). A *shared external supporter* was expected to improve rebel alliances but have little effect on rebel infighting. Although sharing an external supporter appears to increase the likelihood that rebel groups will form alliances, it also increased the likelihood that rebels will fight. The mixed results might reflect the fact that sharing a supporter depends on the type of support. However, it is not possible to disaggregate this variable as there are so few rebels that share supporters providing nonfungible support. Finally, the results for nonfungible support might be capturing the theoretical expectations for *hypothesis*

	DV: Rebel infighting	DV: Rebel alliances
Main effects		
Fungible support	0.16 [-1.10; 1.11]	0.80 [-0.15; 1.62]
Nonfungible support	0.96* [0.60; 1.41]	0.82 [-0.39; 1.86]
Shared external supporter(s)	1.64* [0.99; 2.22]	2.45* [1.33; 4.29]
Endogenous network dependencies		
Edges	-7.75* [-10.62; -6.23]	-11.69* [-23.32; -7.51]
GWD	-0.65 [-1.75; 0.86]	0.35 [-1.50; 3.62]
GWESP	-6.25* [-7.42; -4.31]	1.24 [-0.52; 3.66]
Memory term (dyadic stability)	3.78* [3.44; 4.54]	3.94* [3.57; 5.17]
Exogenous state-level controls		
Real GDP	-0.00* [-0.00; -0.00]	0.00 [-0.00; 0.00]
Loot	-0.05 [-0.54; 0.61]	0.84 [-0.27; 1.92]
Exogenous group-level controls		
Absolute difference in rebel size (in estimated rebel numbers)	0.00 [-0.00; 0.00]	-0.00 [-0.00; 0.00]
Parity rebels	-0.17 [-0.78; 0.42]	-0.47 [-1.65; 0.48]
Stronger rebels	0.10* [0.01; 0.17]	0.02 [-0.17; 0.49]
Battle-related deaths (vs. government)	-0.00* [-0.00; -0.00]	0.00 [-0.00; 0.00]
Ethnic foundations	-0.17 [-0.71; 0.46]	0.01 [-0.65; 0.53]
Shared ethnic support base	1.81* [0.69; 2.73]	-0.09 [-1.32; 1.59]
Ideological foundations	0.34 [-0.00; 0.79]	-0.07 [-0.87; 0.72]
Distance between rebel groups	-0.10 [-0.36; 0.14]	-0.11 [-0.70; 0.24]
Same region	4.30* [3.83; 4.95]	4.24* [4.00; 16.01]
Same location	1.69* [0.93; 2.76]	1.95* [1.17; 2.87]
Num. obs.	300550	300550

95Bootstrapping sample size: 500. Time steps: 20.

Table 8.6: Temporal ERG model results for rebel dynamics.

5, that rebel groups in conflicts where multiple external states provide nonfungible resources are more likely to fight other rebel groups. However, it is difficult to assess this due to the empirical set up. Ultimately, the results for the main effects provide no evidence for the theoretical argument. Other variables are better at explaining whether or not fighting occurs between rebel groups, but also shed some light on serious endogeneity concerns.

The endogenous control variables show that edges are rare, indicated by a negative *edges* coefficient.¹¹ *GWD* is not significant, but *GWESP* is negative and significant for rebel fighting. This indicates rebel groups who are engaged in fighting are less likely to fight other rebels than rebels who are not already engaged. Finally, the memory term indicates that these relations are temporal: rebel groups that were fighting or forming alliances in $t-1$ are more likely to continue to do so in t .

The exogenous state-level controls indicate that rebels in weak states are more likely to fight, as indicated by a negative and statistically significant coefficient for *real GDP*. As expected by existing literature, rebels are more likely to fight other rebels in weak states and less likely to fight rebels in strong states. *Loot* is insignificant in both models, indicating that the presence of lootable natural resources is not related to the propensity of rebels to fight or form alliances.

Rebel covariates to measure strength indicate that the relative difference between rebels in number of fighters (*absolute difference in rebel size*) is not significant in either model. However, similar to findings by Fjelde & Nilsson (2012), rebels that are relatively stronger than the government forces are more likely to fight other rebels. This is likely in an effort to eliminate rebel rivals which might get a disproportionate share of the political power in the post-conflict state. Rebel groups are less likely to fight other rebels in periods of intense fighting with the government. Similar to Pischedda (2018)'s "windows theory," rebels are therefore more likely to fight rebels

¹¹The *edges* coefficient can be interpreted similarly to the intercept in logistic regression models.

in periods of relative calm. However, this variable could capture a number of other effects. First, it could be that groups in peripheral regions with little state control are less likely to fight the government but more likely to fight other rebels. This would support findings by Fjelde & Nilsson (2012), that groups with territorial control are more likely to fight other rebels. It could also be that rebels are more likely to fight other rebels in low intensity conflicts more generally, as opposed to periods of low intensity. In other words, this variable could be capturing a cross-conflict effect. In any case, rebel military relations with the state appear to be an important factor for determining the likelihood that rebels engage in interrebel fighting.

Unlike Gade, Hafez, & Gabbay (2019), I find that *ideology foundations* is not an important feature of interrebel fighting or alliance formation.¹² While groups founded around an ethnicity (*ethnic foundations*) are not statistically more likely to fight or form alliances, rebels that share ethnic support (*shared ethnic support base*) are more likely to fight. This supports previous findings that co-ethnic rebels attempt to outbid each other over support (Bloom, 2004; Pearlman & Cunningham, 2012).

Finally, the best predictors for why rebels fight or form alliances are those that capture geographic space. These covariates may help shed light on the confusing findings for the main effects. While distance between rebels does not reach statistical significance, rebels in the same country or region are much more likely to fight and form rebel alliances (*same location* and *same region*). These variables are the best at explaining the network structure, and ERG models simply do not converge without including them. This is not surprising. Rebels form alliances when they are in the same country targeting the same state, potentially in order to aggregate military capabilities to form rebel coalitions large enough to win (Christia, 2012). They are also more likely to fight each other as part of a dual-contest (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012; K. G. Cunningham, Bakke, & Seymour, 2012). Clearly, the biggest

¹²I do not measure if fighting is more likely between groups that share the same ideology, but this may be a rich avenue for future work.

indicator of whether groups fight or ally is whether they are fighting the same target government and whether they are near each other. Moreover, while the controls are quite good at explaining rebel fighting, only *shared external supporter* and covariates that capture space (*same location* and *region*) are significant in explaining why rebels form alliances. This is an important limitation of a global network approach. Previous dyadic analyses overcome this issue by only considering dyads between rebels fighting the same government (Akcinaroglu, 2012; Bapat & Bond, 2012; Metternich & Wucherpfennig, 2020).

Ultimately, a global network analysis of rebel fighting and alliance formation using novel temporal ERG models is not yet feasible for several reasons. First, there are too few fighting and alliance making edges. This is not likely to be caused by the lack of such relations, but due to limitations with the available data. Again, one must note that these models only capture the relations between groups that surpass the 25 battle-related deaths threshold to be coded by the UCDP. This is a problem for this analysis, but can be remedied by case based research. Second, while time is clearly important, as indicated by significant memory term in both models, it means that one cannot yet also model the multi-layered nature of internationalised civil wars. In my case, it means that it is particularly difficult to pull apart the effects of nonfungible support in conflicts where there is only one dominant external state and those where there are many, as outlined in Table 8.7.

Table 8.7: Probability of rebel infighting and splintering.

Support	Dependent variable	Single external supporter	Multiple external supporters
Fungible	Rebel infighting	High	High
Fungible	Rebel splintering	High	High
Nonfungible	Rebel infighting	Low	High
Nonfungible	Rebel splintering	Low	Low

Finally, there is an important problem of endogeneity in these models that is difficult to overcome. In light of the importance of geographic space, a serious concern is regarding the relationship between the number of parties involved in a conflict and external intervention. In order to overcome these issues, the best empirical strategy is to employ matching and revert to a monadic analysis of rebel infighting and alliance formation, as conducted in this Chapter.

Table 8.8: Statistics for yearly network panel dataset.

Year	Num. fighting edges	Num. alliance edges	Num. nodes	Fight net. density	Ally net. density
1989	8	13	153	0.0006880	0.0011180
1990	10	17	163	0.0007574	0.0012876
1991	8	17	155	0.0006703	0.0014244
1992	9	8	147	0.0008387	0.0007455
1993	11	7	137	0.0011808	0.0007514
1994	11	6	143	0.0010834	0.0005910
1995	13	9	142	0.0012986	0.0008990
1996	11	8	142	0.0010988	0.0007991
1997	9	7	141	0.0009119	0.0007092
1998	6	5	138	0.0006347	0.0005289
1999	3	5	133	0.0003418	0.0005696
2000	5	3	126	0.0006349	0.0003810
2001	3	6	122	0.0004064	0.0008129
2002	4	9	126	0.0005079	0.0011429
2003	6	10	122	0.0008129	0.0013548
2004	6	9	120	0.0008403	0.0012605
2005	5	6	112	0.0008044	0.0009653
2006	4	8	98	0.0008416	0.0016831
2007	4	6	100	0.0008081	0.0012121
2008	1	5	95	0.0002240	0.0011198
2009	1	1	91	0.0002442	0.0002442

8.4 Appendix IV

Map of Libya and Syria



Figure 8.13: Libya's (left) and Syria's (right) main towns and cities.

Extending the argument

To what extent does the theoretical argument generalise to government forces? Due to emergence of numerous pro-government militia groups in both conflicts and the high levels of side-switching in the Libyan conflict, one could analyse the conflicts as a system of armed actors (M. A. Kaplan, 1957), as opposed to focusing exclusively on a fragmented rebel side fighting government forces. Research on pro-government

militias¹³ emphasises the important distinction between government forces and “armed groups that are linked to governments but exist outside the regular security apparatus” (Carey, Mitchell, & Lowe, 2013, p. 250). However, especially in the Libyan case, the distinction between the government and the pro-government militias was so stark and the lines of control often so weak that the groups share more similarities with anti-government rebels.¹⁴ Groups even crossed the “grand cleavage” (Kalyvas, 2006)—between anti- and pro-government—over time.¹⁵ Once the Gaddafi regime had fallen, the central government never truly had control of the security apparatus. Thus, in this section I focus on the dynamics between nominally pro-government armed groups.

In Libya, the government side received predominantly fungible support. Lacher (2020, p. 153) identifies the “growing role of financial incentives” as key to the process of fragmentation pro-government forces in the city of Misrata, where the government relied on external funding and weapons from states like Qatar in exchanged for loyalties from local armed groups. The division of these funds were a source of contention, with some commanders demanding that the government hand over all the money so that they could distribute it themselves (Lacher, 2020, p. 153). A similar dynamic occurred in 2019, when the commanders of pro-government groups received lump-sum payments and distributed the money “among their networks with little, if any, oversight and control” (Eaton, Alageli, Badi, Eljarh, & Stocker, 2020, p. 13). Pro-government armed groups were increasingly fragmented as they received predominantly fungible support, thus creating a competitive environment within and among armed actors. Indeed, rifts started to form within the *Libyan Dawn*—the “tactical alliance between diverse actors”—when it achieved its initial objective of removing the Zintanis militia from Tripoli (Lacher, 2020, p. 40).

¹³For example, see Carey, Mitchell, & Lowe (2013); N. J. Mitchell, Carey, & Butler (2014); Jentzsch, Kalyvas, & Schubiger (2015); Carey, Colaresi, & Mitchell (2016); Clayton & Thomson (2016)

¹⁴For example, Aliyev (2020) describes such groups as “pro-government anti-government armed groups.”

¹⁵On side-switching in the context of a weak government and security apparatus, see Seymour (2014).

The conflict became a stalemate in 2017 and secondary literature points to increasing tensions within both alliances (Lacher, 2020). This provides some evidence that external threats to armed groups fostered a cooperative environment among the groups, a dynamic not dissimilar to that described by Pischedda (2020). The threat posed by a common enemy has the ability to bring groups together in an effort to balance against the threat, which has the effect of reducing infighting. Pischedda (2018) proposes that rebels will exploit times of low state repression to eliminate rebel rivals. GED data seems to support this. However, plotting the number of active groups from 2017 to 2019 in the top pane of Figure 8.14 shows increases in government fighting (blue line), while the number of active anti-government groups is generally in decline, despite bouts of fighting in late-2017 and mid-2018 (red line). If the stalemate was an opportunity for the amalgam of pro- and anti-government groups to eliminate rivals, then GED data and secondary literature shows that dynamic was more pronounced within the pro-government forces, which were receiving fungible support, than the anti-government forces, which were receiving nonfungible support.

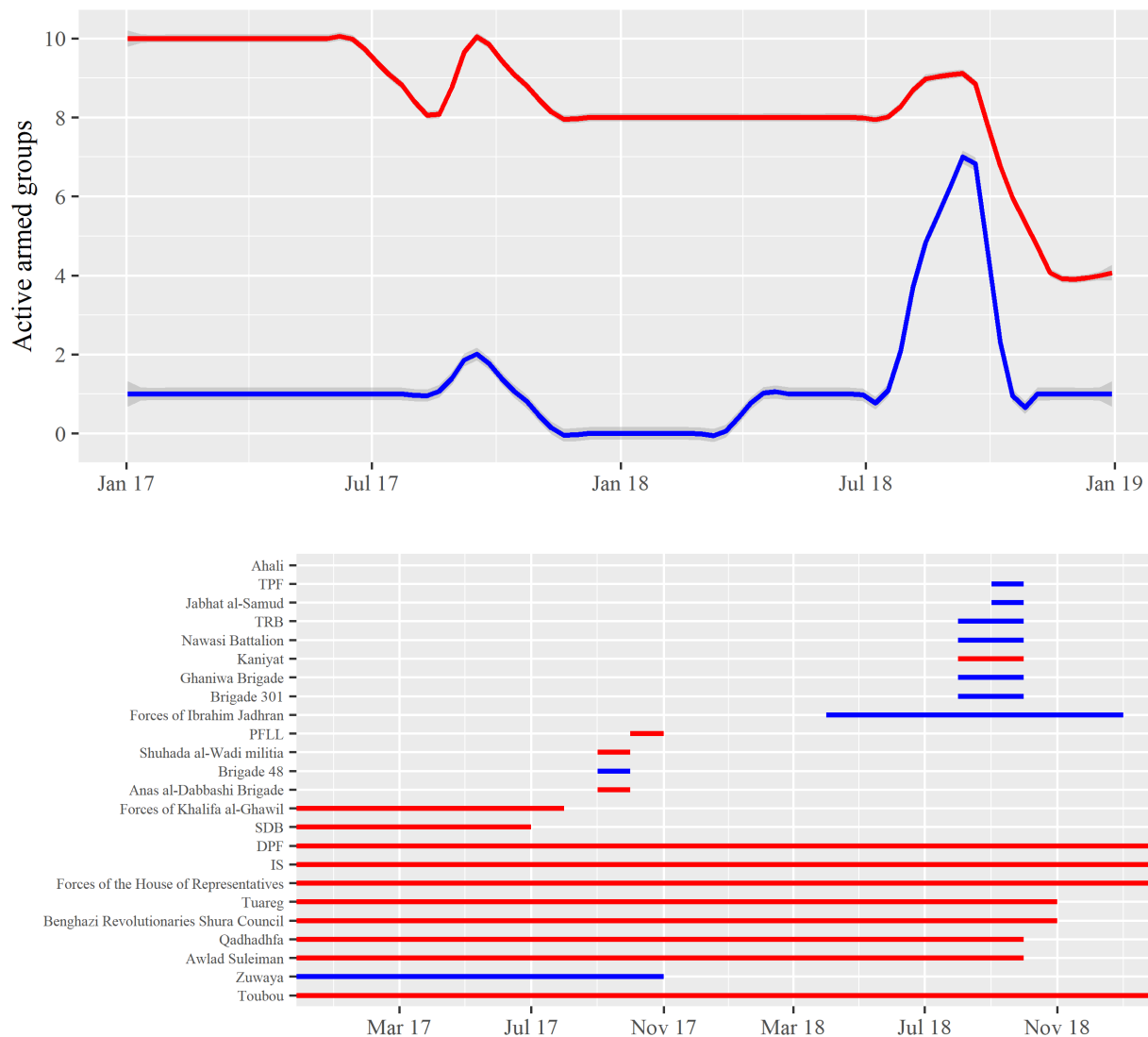


Figure 8.14: The top pane shows the number of active groups from 2017 to 2019 with the number of active pro-government militia (blue line) and the number of active anti-government groups (red line). The bottom pane shows exactly which groups were active at this time. Again, pro-government groups are shown in blue.

The emergence of active pro-government militias in September 2018 is due to Salah Badi's attempt to seize control of Tripoli from a coalition of other militias. Badi was a prominent rebel commander in the 2011 conflict at the head of a powerful Misrata militia. In 2012 he was elected as part of the national elections and in 2014 he fought as part of the *Libyan Dawn* against Haftar's forces. However, in September

2018 Badi's *Jabhat al-Samud* militia joined the *Kaniyat* militia to fight the Tripoli Revolutionaries Battalion (TRB) in Tripoli. TRB leaders were forced into exile in an internal "purge" (Lacher, 2019). This fighting was part of a long trend. As noted by Lacher (2019, p. 9), there are several reasons for the distrust between the government and the militias. Most illuminating for my argument, Lacher (2019, p. 10) notes that competition over the distribution of Turkish support among the militias is a cause of tension between the groups:

The distribution of the [armoured personnel carriers (APCs)] and [anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs)] has increased tensions among GNA-affiliated forces. The APCs were distributed in equal proportion to the commanders of the three military regions—Western, Tripoli, and Central. Some Misratan commanders, however, complained that since they had deployed far more forces, they should also be given a much greater number of APCs than Tripoli armed groups. Similar tensions have also emerged over the allocation and control of funds for the treatment of wounded fighters abroad... Commanders with privileged access to state budgets and foreign support could seize the opportunity to strengthen their own forces, potentially creating new, more powerful militias. (Lacher, 2019, p. 10).

Furthermore, Lacher (2019, p. 10) claims that the government received drone support from Turkey, but that the armed groups did not compete over them because they lacked the expertise to operate them. Turkish provision of drones that were likely piloted by Turkish military personnel had limited impact on the battlefield, as UAE drones—more technologically advanced—eliminated them quickly. However, it emphasises the nonfungible nature of this support. Because the external state retained ownership and control over the support, competitive dynamics that they could instigate were less pronounced.

Lacher (2019, p. 10) also notes that competition over military resources undermined

their ability to fight a common enemy because “some groups suspect others of seeking to conserve their own arsenals and let their allies exhaust theirs, in anticipation of a future struggle among themselves.” This point is illuminating for my theoretical argument for two reasons. First, it illustrates that the balance of power among pro-government militias was founded on their military resources, and that using or losing these resources would weaken their position. Second, while the “dual contest” (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012) has been well articulated for rebel groups, it is clear in the Libyan context that many of the interrebel dynamics exist among armed groups that a nominally pro-government.

A similar dynamic existed in Syria, at least until the intervention of Russia in 2015. As noted by Hinnebusch (2019, p. 122) while “the proxies of the Sunni powers were uncontrollable jihadists or ineffective warlords, at odds with each other, Iran’s proxies, under its effective control, played a major role in buttressing Assad and fighting IS.” Indeed, unlike the tapestry of more-or-less pro-government militias in Libya, pro-government militias in Syria were assisted and in many instances by fighters from Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah. In 2013, the Syrian regime and its allies established the National Defence Force (NDF) as an umbrella organisation to control armed groups loyal to Assad which were trained by the IRGC and its Quds Forces (Lister, 2016b, p. 90). The international allies of Syria—at first Iran and later Russia—provided nonfungible support in the form of troops and airstrikes, unlike the pro-government militia groups in Libya which received predominantly fungible support. While the Libyan regime was constantly hindered by competition within its militia groups, the Assad regime relied heavily on the militarily capable and relatively cohesive NDF.