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HERE TO STAY: FOREIGN FIGHTERS &
THE DURATION OF CIVIL CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

Since the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), foreign fighters have played an increasingly visible role in sustained intrastate conflict. The expansion of mass communication, improved methods of transportation, and rapid globalization have vastly improved the ability of people to easily move across borders. This has not only fundamentally changed the nature of civil conflict itself, but also the overall presence and impact of foreign fighters – thanks to social media, the internet, and safer methods of travel, we see more the engagement of foreign fighters in civil conflict more today than ever before in history.

Despite this, contemporary international relations and conflict studies research has largely focused on foreign fighters and civil conflict as two entities independent of one another. The two concepts remain largely unlinked, and no clear relationship has been thoroughly addressed by area experts. This hole was the inspiration for my senior thesis, which will attempt to explore one particular facet of the relationship between civil war and the engagement of foreign fighters: duration. More specifically, my project will seek to answer the following question: how does the involvement of foreign fighters impact the duration of civil conflict? I will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses to identify patterns (if any) and use Cunningham's Veto Player Theory to explain potential links between foreign fighter engagement in civil conflict and the total duration of prolonged intrastate violence.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In August 2014, members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) posted a four minute and forty second Youtube video entitled “A Message to America” (Callimachi, 2014). The video depicts the gruesome execution of American journalist James Foley, who had been kidnapped in Syria nearly two years prior to the release of the video. The executioner speaks in near perfect English with a distinct East London accent, and addresses President Obama directly, referencing a second prisoner, American journalist Steven Sotloff: “The life of this American citizen, Obama, depends on your next decision” (Callimachi, 2014).

The video sparked worldwide interest because, unlike many of ISIL’s previous propaganda videos, it was clear that the main culprit was not Syrian. Western media sources picked up on the accent almost immediately in the days following the video’s initial release, and headlines condemning the inhumane treatment of American journalists were soon accompanied by calls to identify and punish the “Westerner” who had joined ISIL’s ranks (Chan, 2015). Two weeks later, ISIL released a second video depicting the beheading of Sotloff at the hands of the same masked individual (Chan, 2015). Yet again, Western news outlets focused on the executioner's accent and increased global interest in identifying the man who, based on his language skills, was presumed to be a foreigner deeply entrenched in the Syrian conflict.

Nicknamed “Jihadi John,” the unidentified man continued to appear in ISIL propaganda and execution videos alongside countless other Syrian militants until January 2015. He was later identified as Mohammed Emwazi and is now largely recognized as one of ISIL’s “most notorious executioners” (Casciani, 2015). A naturalized British citizen born in Kuwait, Emwazi radicalized and left his home in the United Kingdom for Syria in 2013 (Casciani, 2015). Like the

thousands of other men and women who have also left their home countries to fight in Syria since the outbreak of violence in 2011, Emwazi willingly took up arms without expectation of any payment. Despite having no prior connections to the violence in Syria, he was drawn by the ideology preached by ISIL and its affiliates, and thus willingly crossed dozens of borders to engage in the conflict. In more ways than one, he was a textbook example of a foreign fighter.

We see examples of the diverse roles foreign fighters have played in sustained intrastate conflict dating back to at least 1936, when nearly 3,000 Americans took up arms in order to assist Spanish Republicans in defending their control of Spain against General Francisco Franco (Malet, 2013). For this reason, Emwazi's case is not without historical precedent – it is, however, important because it underscores the increasingly large influx of foreign fighters to contemporary civil conflict theaters around the world.

Over the past few decades, new generations of foreign fighters have flocked to conflict theaters in places like Syria, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Libya, and Iraq. The expansion of mass communication, improvements in transportation, new technology, and globalization continue to improve the ease by which people can cross international borders – thus making the engagement of foreign fighters in civil conflict much more likely. As a result, it becomes imperative that contemporary conflict studies acknowledge and analyze the potential of foreign fighters to fundamentally change the outcome of intrastate violence to an extent never previously seen.

Despite the clear need to reevaluate our conventional characterizations of intrastate conflict, conflict studies to date have largely focused on foreign fighters and civil conflict independently of one another. Due to the complexities and difficulties associated with measuring foreign fighter involvement, few researchers have attempted to fully evaluate the potential causal

mechanisms between the inherent characteristics of civil war and the participation of foreign fighters in said conflict.

For this reason, my thesis will seek to better understand and contextualize the engagement of foreign fighters within historical and ongoing cases of civil conflict in one particular facet: the conflict's duration. Using Cunningham's Veto Player Theory as the foundation of my argument, I propose that viewing foreign fighters as engaged non-state actors able to continue war unilaterally – in other words, as veto players – allows me to theorize that the involvement of foreign fighters is closely linked to increased civil conflict duration. I will review all episodes of intrastate violence between 1946 and 2013 quantitatively using a series of multinomial logit regressions. Given the limitations of quantitatively measuring the presence of foreign fighters in intrastate conflict, I will also use qualitative case studies to supplement and further evaluate the results of my statistical analysis. In comparing civil conflicts in Iraq (1972-2001) and Iran (1961-1991), I will further explore my proposed theories by distinguishing the impact foreign fighter presence has on conflicts of longer durations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review first offers a definition of the term *foreign fighter* – it is based on previous literature and will be used throughout the duration of my paper to add consistency to my quantitative and qualitative analyses. Further to this, as I stated previously, literature seeking to link civil conflict duration and foreign fighters is limited in scope. There is, however, readily available empirical research that focuses on each topic independent of the other. Given this, the remainder of my review focuses on civil conflict duration and foreign fighter engagement in civil war as two separate entities. I then highlight certain commonalities between the two subjects, as well as key takeaways which serve as the foundation for the theories I propose throughout the rest of my paper.

The Definition of Foreign Fighter

First and foremost, it is imperative to outline a clear, concise, and universal definition of the qualities that distinguish a “foreign fighter” from a “rebel” or “state actor” across all cases of civil conflict. Historically, a foreign fighter was defined as a “non-citizen of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflict” (Hegghammer, 2010). In *The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad*, Thomas Hegghammer builds upon this traditional definition of a foreign fighter to describe a foreign fighter as follows:

an agent who has joined, and operates, within the confines of an insurgency, lacks citizenship of the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions, lacks affiliation to an official military organization, and is unpaid (Hegghammer, 2010).

This definition specifically ensures that mercenaries, soldiers, returning diaspora, previously exiled rebels, and transnational terrorists are excluded from the classification of foreign fighter

(Hegghammer, 2010). Hegghammer also goes on to distinguish foreign fighters among themselves based on the degree of state sponsorship they receive and “how foreign” various groups are, as indicated by their nationalities and geographic origins (Hegghammer, 2010).

Hegghammer’s definition is similar to those used in other projects. Chu and Braithwaite, for instance, emphasize that these individuals are people who “enter conflicts as combatants with no apparent link to the conflict, are unpaid, and non-nationals” (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017).

Malet (2013) uses a comparable definition but goes one step further to create four typologies that distinguish groups of foreign fighters participating in civil conflict from each other: *diasporans*, *liberationists*, *encroachers*, and *true believers* (p. 42). He offers the following definitions:

1. Diasporans: foreign fighters who seek to support nationalist rebels with nationalist goals;
2. Liberationists: foreign fighters who seek to support anti-colonial rebels with common ideological goals;
3. Encroachers: foreign fighters who seek to support secessionist rebels in an adjacent state with the goal of expanding their political control);
4. True Believers: foreign fighters who seek to support ideological rebels in order to protect institutions that shape their shared identity) (Malet, 2013, p. 42).

In their work, Chu and Braithwaite (2017) use Malet’s definitions to operationalize two variables: *co-ethnic foreign fighters* and *beyond neighboring foreign fighters*. As the name suggests, beyond neighboring foreign fighters are defined as foreign fighters who originated from a country farther than a bordering country of the conflict theatre; co-ethnic foreign fighters are defined as foreign fighters who are co-ethnics (or of the same ethnicity) of the rebel group they support (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017).

Throughout this paper, I will rely on Hegghammer and Chu and Braithwaite's definition of foreign fighter. Further to this, I will use Chu and Braithwaite's typologies (co-ethnic and beyond neighboring) to further describe the foreign fighters in my cases. This definition is flexible enough to permit the analysis of different historical cases of civil war without sacrificing a clearly outlined structure to focus my research.

The Duration of Civil War

Throughout the late 20th and 21st centuries, a significant portion of conflict studies research has focused on the specific variables that influence the duration of civil conflict. This work is largely motivated by the desire of states and non-state actors to identify and explain which factors and/or conditions can lengthen or shorten a particular incident of intrastate violence, given that this knowledge will improve the ability of involved actors to navigate the often-tenuous conflict resolution process. Generally speaking, literature focusing on civil conflict duration can be divided into two distinct camps: theories surrounding conflict-specific qualities and theories surrounding actor-specific qualities.

Conflict-Specific Qualities

Technologies of Rebellion. Balcells and Kalyvas (2014) hypothesize that, in addition to severity and outcome, the duration of a particular civil war is partially determined by how said war is fought. They argue the following:

...irregular conflicts are likely to last longer compared to other conflicts;
symmetrical non-conventional conflicts are likely to last longer than conventional conflicts but likely to be shorter than irregular ones (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2014).

Using two different datasets to quantitatively test the impact of the technologies of rebellion (defined by the relative military capacity of the government and the rebels) on their dependent

variables, and controlling for the end of the Cold War, Rough Terrain, Population, Ethnic Fractionalization, Democracy, Oil Exporter, and GDP per capita (among others), Balcells and Kalyvas conclude that technologies of rebellion are a robust variable for explaining intrastate conflict duration, and that irregular conflicts last longer than all other genres of civil conflict (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2014).

Geography. Buhaug, Gates, and Lujala focus on terrain, location, and natural resources as key factors impacting civil conflict duration, arguing that civil conflicts last longer when they are further from the capital city (“absolute distance”), when they occur in rough terrain (used as context for relative distance), or when they occur near an international border (2009). They also suggest that the presence of weak rebels (defined by rebel fighting capacity) and valuable natural resources (limited to gemstones, drug cultivation, and oil/gas fields) will also increase the duration of conflict (Buhaug, Gates, & Lujala, 2009). Their statistical models ultimately show significant and robust results confirming their theory that civil conflicts that occur away from a capital city or closer to an international border are more likely to last longer than those that do not. Their models also suggest that the stronger the opposition or rebel group, the shorter the conflict (Buhaug, Gates, & Lujala, 2009). Finally, they find that intrastate conflict in regions characterized by the presence of gemstones and petroleum last longer than those that do not contain these resources. They were, however, unable to either prove or disprove their theory that rugged terrain and mountainous regions influence the total duration of intrastate conflict (Buhaug, Gates, & Lujala, 2009).

Veto Players. Cunningham’s (2006) approach to explaining the duration of civil conflict is based on Veto Player Theory. Traditionally, this theory was used to explain how institutional actors impact the implementation of new policy – when there are more actors with divergent

preferences (“veto players”) who must all approve the same new policy, it is harder to change the status quo and influence change (Cunningham 2006, p. 877). Cunningham applies this veto player framework to civil war negotiations, effectively arguing that state and non-state actors can be viewed as veto players in the sense that they have unique, divergent interests that must be met or compromised on in order to change the status quo – which in this case, would mean the end of ongoing conflict. He theorizes that more parties (and thus potentially more veto players) involved in a civil war, the more difficult it will be to resolve it, which by default increases the total duration of the sustained violence. He hypothesizes that the larger number of veto players in a particular civil conflict, the greater amount of diversity in preferences among veto powers, and thus the more difficult it will be to come to a multilateral decision to lay down arms (Cunningham, 2006).

To test this theory, he uses a Binary Time-Series Cross-Sectional (BTSC) analysis to look at the probability a conflict ends in a certain month. With this model, he was able to show that as the number of veto players increases, the duration of conflict also increases (Cunningham, 2006). Furthermore, he determines that adding just one more veto player will also decrease the probability that a civil conflict ends, which increases the overall duration (Cunningham, 2006). Neither population size nor ethnic fractionalization (two of his control variables) influence the duration of intrastate conflict (Cunningham, 2006). In testing veto player preferences, Cunningham’s results suggest that adding splinter factions could potentially more strongly influence the duration of civil conflict than other variables, but the lack of statistical significance and large standard error mean that the results could not be accepted. Finally, the higher average strength of veto players could also increase the duration of civil conflict, but because the results

were not statistically significant, there is not enough empirical evidence to make that conclusion at this time (Cunningham 2006).

Actor-Specific Qualities

Leadership Tenure. Uzonyi and Wells (2015) expand beyond these exogenous factors, arguing that it is also important to consider the potential of factors endogenous to the actors themselves to impact conflict duration. They hypothesize that the longer the tenure of a state's leader (i.e time spent in office since taking power), the longer the duration of conflict. They further expand this theory to hypothesize that a longer leadership tenure will increase the duration of civil conflict when there are no democratic constraints acting on said state leader (Uzonyi & Wells, 2015). To test this hypothesis, Uzonyi and Wells used a proportional hazard model with three dichotomous control variables: whether the leadership group has a clearly defined leadership structure, whether the rebels have a political wing accepted by the opposing government, and whether other dyads were involved in the same conflict (Uzonyi & Wells, 2015).

Uzonyi and Wells make the case that the duration of a civil conflict can be in part determined by the specific nature of rebel groups. They find that long-tenured state leaders facing democratic constraints are nearly two times as likely as those lacking constraints to end a civil conflict. Long-tenured leaders with no democratic constraints will increase the duration of civil conflict because they fail to build necessary credibility with rebel groups in order to overcome the commitment and bargaining problems associated with peace agreements or cease fires (Uzonyi & Wells, 2015).

Dyadic Analysis (Relative Strength of an Actor Dyad). Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2009) attempt to redefine and expand the studies of civil war duration by analyzing

the conflict from a dyadic perspective focused on the combination of the state and non-state actors in conflict. Their three hypotheses regarding conflict duration propose that a conflict between a government actor and a strong rebel group will be shorter, a conflict between a government actor and a rebel group that controls territory “in the periphery” will be longer, and that a conflict will have a shorter duration if rebels have more opportunities to use non-violent action instead of violent action (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2009). Their model was designed to estimate how rebel group strength (measured as the ability to target government forces, ability to resist repression, and existence of nonviolent, political alternatives) as well as a series of control variables (GDP per capita, type of conflict, whether the war involves anti-colonial conflict and/or ethnic conflict, the ethnic and linguistic fractionalization index, and whether there are separated actors) affect the likelihood a civil conflict terminates – which, by extension, helps determine the total duration of said conflict (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2009).

While the indicators of strong non-state actors do not have significant coefficients, the results do increase the hazard rate and thus indicate that it is more likely for a conflict to end when strong non-state actors are involved (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2009). Furthermore, the model suggests that conflicts in dyads where both sides have equal power will be shorter than when there is a power imbalance or asymmetry, and thus no incentive for unilateral laying down of arms (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2009). The results also suggest that a civil conflict tends to be longer when the government cannot efficiently and successfully target a rebel group within their territory (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2009). Finally, even when controlling for democracy, the analysis reveals that the presence of alternative means to political violence increases the probability a conflict will be terminated, and

thus decreases the duration of civil conflict. In terms of the included control variables, the research is on par with the conclusions of other work: higher populations and lower income correspond to longer lasting conflict, while ethnic diversity (fractionalization) does not impact duration (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2009).

Foreign Fighters in the Context of Civil War

The relatively new addition of foreign fighters to the sphere of international relations research means that literature on foreign fighters is evidently less readily available than literature on the duration of civil conflict. The majority of the research that does exist tends to focus on the outcome of civil conflict in which foreign fighters participated – in other words, how the presence of foreign fighters and type of foreign fighters involved can change the probability of rebel group victory.

Framing and Tactical Innovation. In 2014, Bakke published significant research on how the presence of foreign fighters strengthened or weakened a domestic insurgency movement. Her main argument suggests that while transnational insurgents (i.e. foreign fighters) potentially impact the strength of a domestic insurgency by bringing resources to the conflict (fighters, weapons, money, etc.), the entrance of transnational insurgents also threatens to undermine the rebel group's movement (Bakke, 2014). This is due to the fact that many transnational insurgents will bring their own conceptualizations of the conflict as well as opinions on how the rebels should strategize their fighting – this is referred to as “framing” and “tactical innovation” (Bakke, 2014). Bakke argues that if a local population refuses to adopt these new ideas, the arrival of transnational insurgents will negatively affect the movement by increasing the difficulties faced by rebel groups in amassing public support and maintaining effective organizational structure (Bakke, 2014). The loss of public support and organizational cohesion,

by extension, further decreases the strength of the rebel group (Bakke, 2014). Furthermore, this theory also suggests that transnational insurgents thus contribute to the division of insurgent movements. Prior research suggests that such divisions may in turn lead to increased conflict duration and complications in the mediation process (Bakke, 2014).

To test her theory, she uses a process-tracing approach to examine conflict between Chechen citizens and the Russian federal government (Bakke, 2014). Her analysis focuses on the interwar years between 1997 and 1999 when the influx of foreign fighters to the region was highest (Bakke, 2014). She discusses how the arrival of foreign fighters increased divisions within the conflict before resulting in visible public backlash, then goes on to explain how growing tensions in Syria between Islamist foreign fighters and domestic rebels have created a similar situation today (Bakke, 2014).

Co-Ethnic and Neighboring Foreign Fighters. In “The Impact of Foreign Fighters on Civil Conflict Outcomes” (2017), Chu and Braithwaite seek to explain the relationship between foreign fighters and the outcomes of the conflicts the fighters are involved in. Their end goal is to determine whether certain types of foreign fighters affect the success or failure of a particular rebel group (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017). They propose two main hypotheses: rebel groups are more likely to benefit from co-ethnic foreign fighters than from non-co-ethnic foreign fighters, and rebel groups are more likely to benefit from foreign fighters that have traveled greater geographic distances than from those who have traveled from neighboring countries (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017). Their variable *Foreign Fighters* is binary and is coded as 1 when foreign individuals participate in a rebel group’s insurgency (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017). To address how the characteristics of a foreign fighter affects the context, they created a new dataset and operationalized three key variables: one variable to indicate foreign fighter participation in an

episode, one to indicate whether the foreign fighters came from a beyond neighboring country, and a third to indicate whether the foreign fighters have the same ethnicity as the rebel group they join (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017).

After running a multinomial logit model and competing risks models, Chu and Braithwaite ultimately observe that foreign fighters tend to support the efforts of rebel groups rather than the government and its groups (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017). Foreign fighter presence is associated with an increased probability of rebel victory and a decreased probability of government victory when foreign fighters come from outside neighboring regions of a particular state (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017). They, however, found no statistical evidence to support the initial hypothesis that the entrance of co-ethnic foreign fighters to civil conflict increases probability of rebel victory (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017). Further to this, their work is unique in that, unlike previous research on foreign fighters, it offers an example of how statistical analysis can be used to examine the impact of foreign fighter presence in civil war and provides an initial dataset by which to pursue such a project.

Transnational Recruitment. In his book, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflict*, Malet (2013) seeks to understand how rebel groups are able to recruit foreign fighters across national borders – or in his words, “sell” what he describes as “high-cost, high-risk behavior” to foreign individuals when their interests are not directly affected by the intrastate conflict in question (p. 8). After developing a new dataset to determine whether foreign fighters are more likely to be recruited in non-ethnic civil conflicts than ethnic civil conflicts, and whether foreign fighters have been recruited in more civil conflicts over time, Malet (2013) offers extensive case studies on four cases of transnational recruitment in insurgencies: the Texas Revolution (1835-1836), the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Israeli War of Independence

(1947-1949), and Afghanistan (1978-1992) (p. 12-13). These questions are designed to evaluate the relationship between a recruiter/target within the context of civil war, as well as how the influence of globalization and modernization impacts foreign fighters (Malet, 2013, pg. 41).

He comes to several key conclusions that are relevant to this paper. First, he finds that “insurgencies employing foreign fighters tend to be disproportionately successful” (Malet, 2013, p. 52). While insurgencies with a foreign fighter component still lose the majority of the time, their success rates are significantly better than those of rebel groups that do not employ foreign fighters (Malet, 2013, p. 52). His case studies reveal in great detail that recruitment of foreign fighters follow “strikingly similar patterns” in regard to “target audience selection, framing and messaging, mobilization mechanisms, and relative disharmony in the field between local and transnational insurgents” (Malet, 2013, p. 206). These conclusions underscore both the importance of viewing the involvement of foreign fighters in civil conflict as the result of strategic efforts instigated by rebel groups rather than a “spillover” effect, as well as the evident influence of globalization and modernization on the decisions to join a particular civil conflict.

Key Takeaways

First, this review highlights the adequate pool of resources focused on explaining civil conflict and its termination. Researchers have identified both exogenous and endogenous variables and factors that can explain (with an impressive degree of statistical significance and robustness) why certain incidents of intrastate conflict last longer than others. These factors can often be grouped into two sets of factors: actor-specific and conflict-specific. Furthermore, most literature on this topic uses similar control variables – including but not limited to ethnic fractionalization, religious divisions, rebel capacity/size, intensity of conflict (deaths/casualties), and income (GDP per capita). There appears to be little direct disagreement over whether these

factors affect the duration of civil conflict, but some contradicting opinions over the extent to which a certain factor may affect the duration of intrastate conflict.

My review of foreign fighter literature also reveals several observations useful to the study of foreign fighters in the context of intrastate conflict. Primarily, there is little to no currently published research that addresses whether or not foreign fighters impact the duration of civil war – the literature that does exist tends to highlight how they impact the particular *outcome* in terms of rebel or government victory. While outcome does not necessarily define duration, this remains relevant to my study because there can be obvious links between how a conflict ends and when it ends. Further to this, there is little continuity between what data and conclusions are individually identified by each of the noted sources. We see little disagreement on foreign fighter centered research in general only because there appears to be too little information for contrasting theories to actually develop. Finally, the majority of research on foreign fighters is qualitative and has an end goal of explaining some aspect of the phenomenon rather than drawing commonalities across cases. There are some exceptions (such as Chu and Braithwaite), but most research relies on descriptive case studies as a method of analysis.

These takeaways and trends ultimately lend themselves to several key conclusions relevant to this project. First, the robust and detailed results of research on civil conflict termination ensures that we can be confident in our reasoning behind the use of control variables. This research provides the necessary foundation to define and support a clear, unambiguous dependent variable, which is important given the limitations associated with using a relatively new independent variable. Further to this, there is a clear and present need to expand research on the relationship between foreign fighter presence in civil war and the duration of said conflict. This will allow my project to provide original work and perspective not only to a well-

established field (conflict studies) but also to a slowly growing one (foreign fighter studies). Finally, expanding the scope of this project to include both quantitative and qualitative components will further complement published findings on foreign fighters in intrastate conflict, as well as provide more information and context for my final analysis. Given that previous researchers in this field have tended to pick one method over the other in their projects, using a mixed method will add an element of robustness, complexity, and replicability to my project.

CHAPTER 3

THEORIES AND HYPOTHESES

After examining the theories presented in the aforementioned literature, I expect that my quantitative and qualitative analyses will highlight a trend in which the involvement of foreign fighters in intrastate conflict is associated with prolonged conflict duration. I propose the following hypotheses based on the application of basic Veto Player Theory, essentially framing foreign fighters as non-state actors whose diverse preferences will influence the process by which mediation occurs (2006).

Cunningham's Veto Player Theory

Veto Player theory is traditionally used to explain the difficulties faced by institutional actors seeking to alter the “status quo” through a policy change; it essentially argues that when each actor with a divergent preference and the unilateral ability to maintain the “status quo”(i.e. veto players) must agree on the policy change, it is more difficult to achieve said shift (Cunningham, 2006). The theory also suggests that the more veto players in a particular institution, the more difficult it is to achieve a change in the status quo. This is due to the fact that more players increase the diversity of preferences, and thus, by extension, the difficulty of achieving the approval of each actor for the proposed policy change (Cunningham, 2006).

Cunningham (2006) applies this theory to the context of civil war mediation and suggests that both state and non-state actors involved in intrastate conflict can be viewed as individual entities with specific preferences that are particularly visible during multilateral attempts at conflict mediation. In this context, ongoing violence is the status quo, and a peace treaty or armistice is the desired policy change. Thus, the involvement of any additional state/non-state actors in an ongoing conflict (such as in the form of foreign intervention) in theory will further

complicate the conflict resolution and mediation process and ultimately prolong the duration of said conflict by increasing the difficulty by which involved actors can successfully come to the permanent multilateral decision to lay down arms (Cunningham, 2006).

Foreign Fighters: A New Breed of Veto Players?

My research is based on the proposition that we can understand foreign fighters to function as a unique breed of Veto Players given that they meet both conditions of Cunningham's definition: they seek a change in the status quo and have divergent preferences in what this "desired change" should look like.

Like Cunningham's Veto Players, foreign fighters can be considered actors seeking a change in the conflict theater's status quo for two reasons. First and foremost, foreign fighters, by the nature of their involvement, can change the status quo of the conflict itself. Their arrival and engagement in conflict – whether for a short duration or for a prolonged duration that lasts through conflict mediation – impacts the nature of the war and the state/non-state actors fighting. As previous literature suggests, their arrival can systematically alter the nature of the violence in a variety of ways – including, among others, altering the strength of either side, influencing which side is declared to be the winner, or introducing new resources (Bakke, 2014).

Given that foreign fighters do not have any visible ties to the conflict theater, they are motivated by a preferred outcome. For example, a civil war between non-state and state actors is generally caused by the aforementioned non-state actor's desire for some new reality – whether this new reality is motivated by political, economic, or cultural interests will vary across conflict cases. Thus, by supporting either the rebel or government actors, foreign fighters are also supporting a visible change in the status quo (a new societal reality in the case of non-state actors, and an end to rebellion and ongoing violence in the case of state actors). Similarly,

foreign fighters can also choose to enter conflict theaters to pursue their own personal political or ideological agendas. The foreign fighters still seek a shift in status quo in the conflict theater – it is a shift linked to a change in their personal status quos.

Further to this, as unpaid individuals lacking affiliation to a military body as well as kinship or citizenship in the conflict theater, it should not be surprising that foreign fighters often enter intrastate conflict with divergent agenda, interests, and priorities, especially as compared to the rebel and state actors already engaged in fighting. Bakke (2014) explains that these “transnational insurgents” (foreign fighters) can influence the civil war by introducing unique conceptualizations of the conflict via “framing” and “tactical innovations.” She goes as far as to suggest that these differences can be so divergent that they create sharp divisions between the general population and rebel groups, as is seen in historical cases of conflict in places such as Chechnya (Bakke, 2014). As she and others have highlighted in their research, while foreign fighters make an independent decision to support one side of a civil war, there is no guarantee that they will unconditionally support the strategic goals of their chosen side. Given this, there is a space for strong divergent preferences among foreign fighters – strong preferences that will prolong intrastate conflict by increasing the difficulty of achieving a permanent, multilateral negotiated settlement in a timely manner.

Hypotheses

The following three hypotheses link the engagement of foreign fighters in civil wars to the total duration of said wars. Each is based on the understanding that foreign fighters can be understood to function as veto players in the context of the intrastate conflicts they join.

The first hypothesis forms the basis of my paper. This paper seeks to compare civil wars with engaged foreign fighters to those without a foreign fighter presence; the application of Veto

Player Theory to foreign fighter engagement allows us to attempt to explain in the most basic sense whether or not the presence of foreign fighters can change the duration of civil conflict. That being said, Veto Player Theory could also be used as an explanation for the evaluation of difference in duration between cases of all civil wars with a foreign fighter presence – hypotheses 2 and 3, which are not the primary focus of my paper, offer such explanations and thus are important for future work on the topic.

H1: The engagement of foreign fighters in intrastate conflict will increase the duration of prolonged violence by complicating efforts to negotiate a peace settlement.

My primary hypothesis anticipates that there will be a positive causal relationship between the engagement of foreign fighter in civil conflict and the total duration of said conflict because their engagement is motivated by some shift in the status quo. We can assume that this results in the introduction of new, divergent preferences among all actors involved in the conflict, which, by extension, will increase the difficulty of peace negotiations between the state and non-state actors. As Veto Players, they thus increase the overall duration of conflict by prolonging a successful mediation agreement. This paper will seek to test the above hypothesis through a combination of quantitative analysis and a qualitative case study of two countries: Iran (1972-2001) and Iraq (1969-1991).

H2: Intrastate conflicts whose non-state actors are supported by coethnic foreign fighters will be shorter than those intrastate conflicts where non-state actors are supported by non-coethnic foreign fighters.

This hypothesis builds upon my primary hypothesis, arguing that in considering only conflicts with engaged foreign fighters, the ethnicity of the foreign fighters may influence the degree to which foreign fighter engagement in turn influences overall conflict duration. If we

assume that coethnic foreign fighters will share more preferences with the side they support, we can propose that these conflicts will, overall, see less divergent preferences. By extension, this suggests that non-coethnic fighters will have more divergent preferences from the other actors in the conflict – according to the application of veto player theory, this will increase the difficulty in achieving mediation between all actors, again increasing the overall duration of the civil war.

H3: Intrastate conflicts whose non-state actors are supported by beyond neighboring foreign fighters will be longer than those intrastate conflicts where non-state actors are supported by neighboring foreign fighters.

This hypothesis offers an alternative argument to the second hypothesis, suggesting that geography also impacts the preferences of foreign fighters, and thus their strength as potential veto players in the conflicts they join. If we assume that regional interests can help to shape a foreign fighter's political or ideological stakes in a conflict, we can also propose that foreign fighters from neighboring states share more preferences with the non-state actors they support, thus having less divergent interests. Similarly, we can suggest that those foreign fighters who come from “beyond neighboring” geographic regions will have more divergent preferences because they may not share the same regional interests or understandings. Thus, intrastate conflicts with beyond neighboring foreign fighters will see the existence of more divergent preferences among involved actors as compared to conflicts with neighboring foreign fighters. Per Veto Player theory, this will make a change in the status quo (conflict mediation) more difficult, and the more difficult the mediation process, the longer the conflict.

CHAPTER 4

DATA AND METHOD

Dataset

The basis of this project is a dataset originally compiled by Chu and Braithwaite in 2017. Using the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v. 4-2016 (2016) and the Non-State Actor Data Set v. 3.4, Chu and Braithwaite (2017) created a dataset designed to test the impact of foreign fighters on civil conflict outcome. The data consists of all civil conflicts between 1946 and 2013, including 192 intrastate conflicts and 497 rebel-government dyads. The episodes are based on the standardized UCDP definition of civil conflict based on a 25-battle deaths threshold:

a contested incompatibility where the use of armed force between two parties, of which one is the government of a state and the other(s) are any non-governmental group of people having announced a name for their group, results in at least 25 battle deaths (Kreutz, 2010).

My unit of analysis is the rebel-government dyad-episode, identified by both the state actors (*SideA*) and non-state actors (*SideB*) and the UCDP Dyad Episode ID (*dyadep*).

As discussed previously, Chu and Braithwaite use a definition of foreign fighters similar to Hegghammer (2010) and Malet (2013), defining them as individuals who “enter conflicts as combatants with no apparent link to the conflict, are unpaid, and non-nationals” (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017). In using the UCDP dataset, they also intentionally exclude any and all interstate wars where foreign fighters entered the conflict on behalf of either side. Chu and Braithwaite code for the presence of foreign fighters using the binary variable *ForeignFighters*, which is coded as 1 if foreign fighters participated in a conflict on behalf of the rebel (non-state

actor) group against the government (state actor). The dataset also includes two variables to differentiate between the types of involved foreign fighters based on Malet's research and typologies. *Co-ethnic_ff* is a binary variable coded as 1 if the participating foreign fighters had the same ethnicity as the rebel group they supported, and 0 if otherwise; *beyondneighboring_ff* is a dichotomous variable coded as 1 if the participating foreign fighters traveled from a distance further than the neighboring states of the conflict theater (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017).

Chu and Braithwaite's dataset also includes a variety of additional variables that I used to control for the factors outside of foreign fighter engagement that may increase or decrease the duration of a civil war. These conflict-specific variables include the number of rebel groups fighting the government (*numdyads*), the rebel group's mobilization capacity (*mobilization*), the rebel group's fighting capacity (*fighting*), the logged population of the conflict theater at the year of conflict episode termination (*elogged_pop*), the logged Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country at the year of conflict episode termination (*elogged_gdp*), and the polity score of the country at the year of conflict episode termination (*epolity2*) (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017). The variables *eColdWar* and *e_post911* are dummy variables that are coded 1 if the conflict ended during the Cold War or 1 if the conflict ended after September 11, 2001, respectively (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017). Finally, Chu and Braithwaite include the variable *outcome*, which indicates the outcome of a conflict, coded as 1 for a peace agreement, 2 for a government victory, 3 for a rebel victory, and 4 if the conflict is ongoing, the rebel group no longer exists, or the fighting gradually stopped by itself, independent of formal mediation or intervention. This variable was the dependent variable of Chu & Braithwaite's original research (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017).

While Chu and Braithwaite include a variable to measure the duration of each conflict episode in years, I created my own dependent variable (conflict duration) by supplementing the

replication data with additional data from UCDP (Melander, Pettersson, & Themnér, 2016). UCDP uses an episode system to measure the duration of a conflict, which is defined as a “continuous period of active conflict years in the UCDP-PRIO armed conflict dataset” (Kreutz, 2010). An episode is considered to be complete when an “active year” (one that meets the 25 battle-death casualty threshold) is followed by an “inactive year” (one that does not meet the 25 battle-death casualty threshold) (Kreutz, 2010). Thus, conflict episodes are based on the use of force alone – all active conflict years are considered to be part of the same conflict episode if they concern the same incompatibility, even if the belligerents involved in the fighting change (Kreutz, 2010).

Using the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v. 4-2016 (Melander, Pettersson & Themnér, 2016), I coded four additional variables to measure civil conflict duration: *Start Date*, *End Date*, *Duration_Days*, and *Duration_Years*. *Start Date* indicates the first date that a particular conflict reached the three criteria of UCDP’s definition of civil conflict: a stated incompatibility, organized groups (one of which is a state), and armed activity that meets the 25 battle-related deaths threshold (Kreutz, 2010). *End Date* indicates the termination of an episode, determined as the date after which an active year is followed by a year in which the above criteria are not met (i.e the dissolution of a rebel group/government force or when the 25 battle-death threshold is not maintained). The end date of a particular episode is coded as 31 December if no precise end date is known. UCDP also includes variables to measure the precision of episode start/end dates, but I chose to exclude them from my final dataset, given that doing so would not significantly alter the impact of the existing limitations of my data on my final results.

Using these dates, I coded one variable to measure the duration of each conflict in days by calculating the number of days between the start and end date in UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict

Dataset v. 4-2016. Any conflict less than one day has a total duration of “0.” In addition, any ongoing conflict was left as incomplete, given that an unresolved and ongoing civil war cannot be used to evaluate the overall impact of foreign fighters on the total duration of civil war. My second duration variable measures the length of the conflict in years, which I calculated by dividing the total duration in days by 365 rounded to three decimal places. Given that the duration measure in days results in more observations than the duration measure in years, I ultimately chose to use days as the main measure of duration for my statistical analysis.

Finally, I used *Resort to War: 1817-2007* to code an additional control variable, *COW*, based on the Correlates of War (COW) Dataset (Sarkees & Wayman, 2010). This is a binary variable designed to indicate the severity of the intrastate conflict. Any episode that reached the 1,000-battle death threshold – and thus was included in the COW Dataset – was coded as 1. Any episode that did not reach the 1,000-battle death threshold – and thus was not included in the COW dataset – was coded as 0. The variable, while subject to some human error bias, achieves two goals. First, it eliminates episodes that only qualify as civil war because of the low battle-death threshold. Adding this variable effectively allowed me to remove high casualty single events that do not qualify as an intrastate war – for instance, many acts of terrorism that had been previously marked as civil war thus were marked appropriately with the addition of this variable. Second, as current literature suggests, it accounts for the fact that more severe conflicts are more likely to have an effect on civil war duration than less severe conflicts. In this regard, the variable acts as a control for conflict episode severity in my statistical analysis.

Limitations

It is important to note that there are several key limitations to my data. First, data on foreign fighters as compiled by Chu and Braithwaite, who source their dataset to Malet, are

limited in scope. The use of a binary variable to indicate foreign fighter presence does not account for the entrance and exit dates of the foreign fighters engaged in each conflict, a precise estimate of the foreign fighter population who participated in the violence, and the geographic origins of the fighters. These limitations result directly from the challenges of estimating foreign fighter participation. It is difficult to accurately measure the number and background of foreign fighters given that there are no formal records of their involvement (as compared to, for instance, formal military enlistment records or payment schedules for mercenaries in the case of interstate wars). Similarly, the dataset has no measure of the ideological or political goals of foreign fighters. While the main focus of this project is to understand whether or not foreign fighter engagement in general will impact duration in the broader sense, understanding the motivations (or in terms of Veto Player Theory, preferences) of foreign fighters would be helpful to further expand the scope of this project in the future.

Additionally, as with any project that uses conflict duration data, there is a certain degree of inaccuracy associated with measuring the start and end dates. Despite this, UCDP's episode measurement system based on a consistent battle-death threshold increases the reliability of the calculated duration. Given their universality in the field of international relations research, these data are highly compatible with this type of research.

Finally, the dataset's dependent variable is incomplete for two reasons. First, the 25 battle-death threshold allows for the inclusion of mass casualty events or episodes that last for one day or less; when the total duration is calculated, this results in a measure of "0." The addition of the variable *COW* minimizes some of this error by eliminating less severe episodes from the dataset. In a similar vein, ongoing conflicts do not have a final duration – because they have not yet been terminated, they are left as incomplete as it would be impossible to assess the

impact of foreign fighters on total duration without a final outcome. In my statistical analysis, this causes a drop in the overall number of observations for my regressions.

Case Studies: Iran (1972-2001) and Iraq (1961-1991)

To account for these limitations, I chose to supplement my quantitative analysis with two case studies: Iran (1972-2001) and Iraq (1961-1991). I selected these case studies by highlighting the five longest and five shortest civil conflicts with durations longer than 1 day that had significant foreign fighter engagement. I then paired these dyads based on the nature and geographic location of the conflict in order to identify two pairs: one pair of civil conflicts with short duration, and one pair of civil conflicts with long duration. This resulted in two pairs: Iran/Iraq and Mali/Nigeria.

Given that my statistical analyses did not produce the expected results (see Chapter 5: Results), the goal of my cases studies is to evaluate why quantitative analysis failed to explain a tangible relationship between foreign fighter engagement and longer civil conflict duration. Thus, I will only focus on the Iran/Iraq pairing, or the dyad pairing with longer duration. My qualitative analysis will first provide an overview of each individual conflict and its intrinsic and endogenous properties, as well as a characterization of the foreign fighter involvement. I provide basic background on each conflict, the nature of foreign fighter engagement, and the ultimate outcome (focusing specifically on duration). I then compare the conflicts to one another, evaluating both differences and commonalities between the role and impact of foreign fighters in violence. Finally, I connect this study back to my original hypothesis, and introduce several other theories that may explain why I do not see a quantitative result between foreign fighter engagement and civil war duration.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Overview

Tables 1-3 display the results of my multinomial logit regression models. To complete my analysis, I ran a total of 8 regressions. I ran three models with no control variables: one to determine if there was a causal relationship between foreign fighters and conflict duration and two additional regressions to determine if either beyond neighboring or co-ethnic foreign fighter typologies impact the duration of civil conflict. These serve as baseline models for the subsequent models, during which I re-ran the three regressions while controlling for the fighting capacity of the rebels, the mobilization capacity of the rebels, whether or not the conflict terminated after September 11, 2001, the population of the conflict theater, the GDP of the conflict theater, and the polity score of the theater. In all of the models, I clustered the standard errors at the conflict level to correct for the fact that my cases are not all independent of each other. These results are displayed in Table 1.

Following this, I then ran five more models controlling for the severity of conflict. Table 2 displays the results of my fourth and fifth models, which seek to determine if there is a causal relationship between foreign fighters and the severity of the civil conflict episode. Table 3 displays the results of three additional regression models that evaluate whether or not a specific foreign fighter typology has an impact on duration in severe intrastate conflicts. Similar to the previous models, I clustered the standard errors at the conflict level to correct for the fact that my cases are not all independent of each other.

As explained in greater detail below, while the coefficient signs in each model matched the expected results, the lack of statistical significance means that none of my eight models can

confirm my hypothesis that the engagement of foreign fighters in civil conflict will increase the total duration of the conflict.

Model 1: All Foreign Fighters

In the first model, the coefficient for *foreignfighters* was positive, thus suggesting that the proposed positive relationship is supported by available data. The coefficient, however, was highly insignificant. Even after increasing the number of control variables, it remained insignificant and thus could not confirm the hypothesis.

Model 2: Beyond Neighboring Foreign Fighter Typology

The coefficients for each model using *beyondneighboring_ff* were positive and highly insignificant, and thus could not provide additional insight into the impact of foreign fighters from non-neighboring (“beyond neighboring”) states or territory on civil conflict duration. It does however, create an interesting question related to my second hypothesis. Although this paper focuses on comparing differences in duration between civil conflicts with and civil conflicts without foreign fighters, it does not explore how different typologies of foreign fighters cause differences in duration among only those conflicts with foreign fighter engagement. The positive coefficient here implies that beyond neighboring could increase duration. If we assume that geographic location is linked to preferences, we can propose that beyond neighboring foreign fighters may change duration by increasing divergent preferences and hence the number of veto players; future research may look to focus on this as an unexplored area within the field of civil conflict studies.

Model 3: Coethnic Foreign Fighter Typology

The coefficients for each model using *co-ethnic_ff* were negative and highly insignificant, and thus could not confirm the hypothesis as proposed. Similarly to the my model using

beyondneighboring_ff, however, the negative coefficient aligns with the third proposed hypothesis, which suggests that among civil conflicts with a foreign fighter presence, co-ethnic typologies may decrease duration by creating a common background between foreign fighters and rebel groups, which we assume may ultimately decrease the overall number of divergent preferences. With less divergent preferences, we would see a decrease in the number of veto players in this context, and an overall decrease in duration due to the improved ease of conflict mediation. Again, this provides an interesting space for further expansion in any future research on the relationship between civil war duration and foreign fighter involvement.

Model 4 and 5: Conflict Severity

My fourth and fifth models added an additional control variable: conflict severity (*COW*). I ran my first model (using *foreignfighters* and the same controls) twice: once for conflict episodes that did not reach the 1,000 battle-death threshold for *COW* standards, and once for conflict episodes that did reach the 1,000 battle-death threshold and thus are considered civil wars by the *COW* dataset. While the signs of each coefficient were as expected, none of the variables had any statistical significance. For this reason, the data is inconclusive on the question of how foreign fighters impact the duration of civil conflicts varying in severity.

Model 6 - 8: Foreign Fighter Typologies in Severe Conflicts

For my final models, I added the conflict severity control variable. I reran the multinomial regressions for all of the foreign fighter typologies reflected in the data (*foreignfighters*, *beyondneighboring_ff*, and *coethnic_ff*) using only observations where the 1,000-battle death threshold was met. Similar to the previous models, none of the variables had any statistical significance. These results could not confirm whether the type of engaged or involved foreign fighter influences the duration of severe intrastate conflict.

Other Observations

Finally, only two of the control variables had significant results across all models: rebel fighting capacity (*fighting*) and Post 9-11 conflict termination (*post911*). In models 1-3, the coefficient for fighting capacity was significant and negative. This suggests that if a rebel group is considered to be stronger than (or at a minimum, at parity with) the government actor, the total duration of the conflict will decrease; this is consistent with previously discussed literature. The coefficient for Post 9-11 conflicts was significant and positive across all three models, suggesting that conflicts that terminate after the attacks of 9-11 are longer than those that took place prior to 9-11. One potential explanation for this is that 9-11 is often considered a turning point in Western governments' approach to fighting terrorism, including the introduction of new technology that changed the nature of traditional asymmetric warfare in intra- as well as interstate conflicts.

Table 1: The Impact of Foreign Fighters on Civil Conflict Duration

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Foreign Fighters	Foreign Fighters with Controls	Beyond Neighboring Foreign Fighters	Beyond Neighboring Foreign Fighters with Controls	Co-ethnic Foreign Fighters	Co-ethnic Foreign Fighters with Controls
foreignfighters	182.1473 (0.726)	477.7406 (0.388)				
beyondneighboring_ff			561.3322 (0.481)	529.0038 (0.571)		
coethnic_ff					-117.1577 (0.859)	-258.1462 (0.680)
fighting		-1620.741 (0.000)***		-1631.25 (0.000)***		-1608.674 (0.000)***
mobilization		396.164 (0.325)		385.4025 (0.322)		461.7365 (0.253)
post911		1462.792 (0.042)*		1463.156 (0.040)*		1525.641 (0.036)*
logged_pop		3.55799 (0.990)		2.235102 (0.993)		-5.448363 (0.985)
logged_gdp		368.2458 (0.112)		364.3861 (0.117)		369.5505 (0.127)
polity2		10.93247 (0.804)		7.630058 (0.861)		6.269813 (0.886)
	N = 633 R ₂ = 0.0004	N = 606 R ₂ = 0.1668	N = 633 R ₂ = 0.0021	N = 606 R ₂ = 0.1660	N = 633 R ₂ = 0.0001	N = 606 R ₂ = 0.1646

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Robust standard error is indicated in parentheses. Conflict duration for each model is measured in total days.

Table 2: The Impact of Foreign Fighters on Civil Conflict Duration - Control for Conflict Severity

	Model 4	Model 5
	Foreign Fighters with Controls Severe Conflicts	Foreign Fighters with Controls Less Severe Conflicts
foreignfighters	94.90374 (0.903)	325.9542 (0.560)
fighting	-1938.847 (0.000)	-1141.3 (0.048)
mobilization	484.1219 (0.318)	-9.136295 (0.988)
post911	984.1746 (0.371)	885.0485 (0.429)
logged_pop	587.971 (0.043)	-571.5484 (0.021)
logged_gdp	46.86933 (0.835)	834.9176 (0.003)
polity2	-38.47747 (0.903)	45.48478 (0.498)
	N = 268 R ₂ = 0.2309	N = 338 R ₂ = 0.2334

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

Robust standard error is indicated in parentheses. Conflict duration for each model is measured in total days.

Table 3: The Impact of Foreign Fighters on Civil Conflict Duration - Severe Conflicts

	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
	Foreign Fighters with Controls	Beyond Neighboring Foreign Fighters with Controls	Co-ethnic Foreign Fighters with Controls
foreignfighters	94.90374 (0.903)		
beyondneighboring_ff		1034.739 (0.324)	
coethnic_ff			-1437.138 (0.99)
fighting	-1938.847 (0.000)	-2028.091 (0.000)	-1900.22 (0.000)
mobilization	484.1219 (0.318)	388.6708 (0.409)	591.8712 (0.238)
post911	984.1746 (0.371)	997.5796 (0.345)	1054.357 (0.327)
logged_pop	587.971 (0.043)	559.5656 (0.030)	562.5869 (0.062)
logged_gdp	46.86933 (0.835)	57.68742 (0.32)	63.37287 (0.788)
polity2	-38.47747 (0.903)	-39.56172 (0.518)	-49.33981 (0.403)
	N = 268 R ₂ = 0.2309	N = 268 R ₂ = 0.2383	N = 268 R ₂ = 0.2444

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Robust standard error is indicated in parentheses. Conflict duration for each model is measured in total days.

CHAPTER 6

CASE STUDY: ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN vs. MUJAHEDIN-E KHALQ

Conflict Overview

My first case study is the intrastate conflict between the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and Mujahedin-e Khalq, a political dissident group formed in the 1960s in opposition to Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Although MeK first appeared in mainstream discourse in 1965 and continues to exist as an opposition entity today, the conflict episode under consideration is from 1972 (the first successful major act of terrorism targeting Iranian and American personnel) – to 2001 (alleged denouncement of violence by MeK leadership and last recorded incident of violence attributed to the group) (Mujahedin-e Khalq, 2015).

In Chu and Braithwaite’s dataset, the conflict is dyad episode 24606. The conflict duration as indicated by my variable *MM_duration* is 10,626 days, or approximately 29 years. The war outcome is coded as “4,” which here identifies the conclusion of violence as the gradual end of violence absent a formal mediation process. According to Chu and Braithwaite, the engaged foreign fighters – who engage in war against the IRI on behalf of MeK – are not beyond-neighboring and not co-ethnic with MeK (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017).

Background and Ideology of Rebel Group

Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MeK, originated as a small political dissident group founded by radical students from Tehran University who were in favor of the use of armed revolt as a means to oust the government of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was largely believed to be a puppet of the U.S government (Goulka et al., 2009). Unlike other dissident groups, MeK embraced a unique ideology that was not only pro-violence, but also mixed traditional Shiite Islamic values with Marxist ideology. MeK, which roughly translates to “God’s Warriors” or

“The People’s Holy Warriors,” initially attracted large numbers of middle-class university students and graduates, who were pulled to the radical combination of strong anti-U.S sentiments, traditional Shia belief systems, and leftist social and economic policies (Goulka et al., 2009). Despite initial Iranian government crackdowns on the group (who was by the early 1970s considered to be a severe political threat to the Shah), MeK continued recruiting from universities and prisons, and were funded by Iranian intelligentsia, *bazaaari* (middle class Shia families), and the Iranian diaspora abroad (Goulka et al., 2009).

Civil Conflict: The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) vs. MeK (1972-2001)

After a series of terrorist attacks targeting both Iranian as well as Western targets, the majority of MeK central committee members were either executed or imprisoned. The only founding member to survive, Masoud Rajavi, was eventually released from prison in January 1979 (Goulka et al., 2009). He immediately aligned his party with Khomeini; despite what appeared to be a tactical move for the MeK’s cause, Khomeini quickly alienated all remaining leftist groups and blocked MeK and Rajavi from securing power in post-Revolution Iran. Finding itself isolated, the MeK aligned itself with the opposition and declared an “armed struggle” against Khomeini and his Islamic Republican Party (IRP), vowing to topple the IRI at any cost (Goulka et al., 2009). Following a series of violent attacks against Khomeini’s government, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) quickly quelled the armed rebellion and forced Rajavi and his leaders into exile in Paris, while other rank and file members fled to Iranian Kurdistan and Iraq (Goulka et al., 2009).

While in exile, MeK leaders sought political support from Western governments, as well as financial assistance from the Iranian diaspora, European leaders and politicians, and other notable anti-Iranian figures (Masters, 2014). Using the name National Council of Resistance in

Iran (NCRI), Rajavi and his followers downplayed their Marxist-Islamic values and presented themselves as a pro-democratic group fighting for the autonomy of Kurdistan and the removal of a corrupt regime (Goulka et al., 2009). Monetary resources procured via fraudulent operations, Saudi Arabian backers, and Saddam Hussein's government allowed the group to expand rapidly; in 1986 Saddam Hussein invited the NCRI to relocate to Iraq following French attempts to expel the rebels (Goulka et al., 2009 and Mujahedin-e Khalq, 2015). The Iraqi contingent of MeK, known as the National Liberation Army (NLA), provided intelligence and operational support to Hussein until Khomeini's announcement of a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq War in 1988 (Goulka et al., 2009).

Following this announcement, Rajavi launched Operation Eternal Light. He hoped that this operation would arouse popular rebellion in Iran against Khomeini. This support, however, never mobilized largely because Iranians distrusted the NLA's willingness to support Iraq at the cost of Iranian lives, and as a result the IRGC quickly halted NLA forces. In the aftermath of the failed armed revolt, more than 4,000 MeK and NLA sympathizers were executed by the Iranian government, forcing remaining members into exile in Iraq and Europe (Goulka et al., 2009). While leaders claim to have had no continued role in Iranian-Iraqi violence, it is largely believed that MeK continued to support Hussein throughout the early 1990s in the Gulf region as well as against Shia and Kurdish dissident groups. MeK was later designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the U.S Department of State (DoS) in 1997 for their violent engagement in Iran and Iraq, particularly that which targeted the ongoing American diplomatic and military presence (Masters, 2014 and Goulka et al., 2009).

Conclusion of Violence

The failure of Iranian citizens to materialize under the group's calls for revolution during Operational Eternal Light is reflected in MeK's struggle to recruit new members following its exile. Forced recruitment of Iraqi POW and recruitment of diaspora members under false pretenses became extremely common; leaders often confiscated new members' identification and citizenship documents upon joining to prevent future dissociation from MeK (Goulka et al., 2009). According to researchers at the RAND National Defense Research Institute, MeK began adopting increasingly cultic behaviors in addition to their already "insular" habits and customs – this included but was not limited to gender-segregated communal living, forced divorce and celibacy, and constant supervision accompanied by severe levels of military-esque discipline under Rajavi and his wife (Goulka et al., 2009).

Severely lacking in manpower, violence continued only sporadically until the end of the decade. Between 2000 and 2001, MeK claimed responsibility for more than 350 violent attacks against Iranian targets. By the end of 2001, however, the group claimed to have officially renounced violence, which is still viewed as the harshest policy shift from the founding ideological tenets of the group (Goulka et al., 2009). Today, the majority of MeK followers remain in exile in Europe or Iraq; several thousand of them are located in Albania, where one *New York Times* article from 2016 ominously dubbed them "either Iran's replacement government-in-waiting or a duplicitous terrorist cult" (Kinglsey, 2020). The cultic behaviors that were first adopted in the late 1990s have since increased and thus ensure that members remain completely isolated from the outside world.

Foreign Fighter Engagement

Open source information on the involvement of foreign fighters in Iran on behalf of MeK is limited by two main factors. First, historical hesitancy from IRI leaders to allow full, unbiased

media access within the country to Western news sources will limit the scope, accuracy, and availability of open source information on MeK and their engagement in Iran – to include, of course, foreign fighters involved in MeK activity (particularly that of 1988). Second, the insular and highly cultic behaviors adopted by MeK mean that very few individuals outside of its highest-ranking leadership have access to accurate information regarding its internal functions– to include membership details, responsibilities, and activities (Kinglsey, 2020). As a result, discerning the engagement of foreign fighters and the impact they had on the conflict is a challenging prospect for anyone outside of inner circles.

Despite this, MeK remains an interesting case study for this project if we make several key assumptions about the engagement of foreign fighters in MeK’s armed revolt against IRI. First and foremost, the majority of MeK’s recruitment outside of Iran and Iraq was among members of the Iranian diaspora in Europe. Its exile in Paris lent itself to targeting Western backers and supporters, particularly among the high diasporic populations in the city. In addition to this, MeK leadership also forced membership on Iranian prisoners of war in Iraq and sought out the support of other political dissident groups in the Middle East, including Saudi groups and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Goulka et al., 2009). This recruitment largely occurred after 1979, when the group’s main focus shifted from the overthrow of the Shah to the complete overthrow of IRI. It is after 1979 that we also see the manifestation of violence considered to be a civil war (beginning with Operation Eternal Light, for instance) – thus, we can also assume that foreign fighter engagement in the conflict was linked to this uptick in MeK-organized violence and is more present during the second half of this conflict episode.

Given the nature of MeK and its aims, there are also several other important factors that may shape the characteristics of foreign fighters engaged in this conflict. First, MeK’s exile in

Paris and Iraq mean that the organization's reach – while mainly focused on the state of Iran itself – was more widespread than some other non-state actor groups. This suggests that foreign fighters supporting MeK may have been involved not just within Iran, but also abroad in Europe and other parts of the Middle East. Unlike standard intrastate conflict, the conflict theatre for violence between MeK and IRI technically encompassed more than geographic territory – reports of MeK involvement in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Palestine, and Europe (to include France, Germany, and Albania) mean that MeK's foreign fighters could be either Iranians fighting abroad or most likely Iranian diaspora (who are citizens of other countries) fighting in Iran/Iraq. This adds an interesting level of complexity to what on paper appears to be a simple conflict caused by the unification of political dissidents.

Second, the foreign fighters who likely supported MeK took on diverse roles. The group's approach to dissidence had three aspects: terrorism, more “traditional” armed revolt, and lobbying abroad during periods of exile. This is indicated in the division of MeK's wings: a paramilitary wing and a political wing (Mujahedin-e Khalq, 2015). First, as mentioned previously, MeK was designated by DoS as an FTO in 1997 following ongoing targeting of American personnel in Iran and Iraq (Masters, 2014). Between 1971 and 2001, MeK engaged in ongoing terrorist activity in Iran and abroad, mainly targeting Iranian leadership as well as occasional Western targets (primarily before the 1979 Islamic Revolution) (Mujahedin-e Khalq, 2015). At the same time, their engagement in traditional, symmetric warfare was limited to supporting Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war (until 1988) as well as in the Gulf region (until 1991). Its only attempt at armed revolt (in the traditional sense) was Operation Eternal Light, which, as noted above, failed almost immediately due to effective IRGC response (Goulka et al., 2009). Finally, MeK was known for its lobbying efforts, propaganda, and fraudulent activity

abroad – by engaging with leaders and businesspeople, MeK leaders in Paris and elsewhere relied heavily on connections in the West to finance and support their efforts. Thus, in line with this behavior, we can safely assume any foreign fighters supporting MeK did so by participating in terroristic activities, engaging in recruitment or propaganda schemes abroad, or being involved with Operation Eternal Light/ongoing support for Saddam Hussein’s army in Iraq.

Characteristics of Foreign Fighters

Based on these assumptions and the characteristics of Iranian MeK members and the group’s political aims, we can make several key observations about foreign fighters involved in this conflict.

1. *Preferences and Ideology*: MeK is a non-state actor/rebel group known for its radical and very strong ideology – all of its members believed in its cause or were forcibly convinced to do so via recruitment. Thus, we can assume that foreign fighters supporting MeK also shared this strong ideology, given that their support would not have been welcome under any other circumstances.
2. *Strength*: Although foreigners may have supported MeK financially, politically, or physically through participation in violence, per my definition of foreign fighter and veto player, I consider only their engagement in conflict as an indicator of their strength in this intrastate conflict. The exact number of foreign fighters engaged in this conflict is unknown and undocumented. Given that MeK was defeated by the IRGC almost immediately, however, it is safe to assume that their forces were not strong enough to single handedly alter the fighting and mobilization capacity of MeK to unilaterally maintain sustained violence against the IRI. While their support was most likely an asset

to MeK, there is no indication that they fundamentally changed the outcome of the conflict in a measurable way.

3. *Beyond Neighboring*: The method of recruitment used by MeK suggests that the foreign fighters who supported the group could be described as a mix of beyond neighboring and non-beyond neighboring foreign fighter typologies.
4. *Co-ethnic*: Because recruitment targeted either Iranian diaspora in Europe or Iraq, as well as potentially other citizens from the Middle East (including Iraqis and potentially Palestinians), we can assume that the foreign fighters were a mix of co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic individuals.

CHAPTER 7

CASE STUDY: IRAQ vs. KURDISH DEMOCRATIC PARTY (KDP)

Conflict Overview

My second case study is the intrastate conflict between Iraq and the Kurdish Democratic Party, or KDP, a party founded on strong Kurdish nationalism and the desire to earn independence and autonomy for Kurds in Iraq. This particular conflict episode (1961-1990) covers a thirty year period of prolonged violence between the Iraqi government and the Kurds, beginning with the uprising that sparked the first Iraqi Kurdish Civil War (1961-1970) and ending with the United Nations-led implementation of a no-fly zone in Iraq in 1991 that essentially allowed for the de facto autonomy awarded to the Kurds following the Gulf War (The Kurds' Quest For Independence, 2019).

In Chu and Braithwaite's dataset, the conflict is dyad episode 27904. The conflict duration as indicated by my variable *MM_duration* is 10,957 days, or approximately 30 years. The war outcome is coded as "4," which here identifies the conclusion of violence as the gradual end of violence absent a formal mediation process. According to Chu and Braithwaite, the engaged foreign fighters – who engage in war against Iraq on behalf of the KDP – are not beyond-neighboring but are co-ethnic with KDP (Chu & Braithwaite, 2017).

Background and Ideology of Rebel Group

The question of Kurdish nationalism dates back to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, which left the future of nearly 4 million Kurds across Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey uncertain. In Iraq, Kurds made up approximately 20% of the population during the 1930s and 1940s – while technically still a minority group, their presence and control of oil fields created significant

tension with Iraqi leaders, who, throughout the mid-20th century, repeatedly failed to reach a permanent solution to demands for Kurdish autonomy (Paul et al., 2013).

In response to this, Mulla Mustafa Barzani established the KDP was established in 1946. Inspired by the establishment of the Iranian KDP equivalent, Barzani's party unified the Kurds based on their central goal: obtaining Iraqi recognition of Kurdish nationalism and the right for self-government in an autonomous state (Paul et al., 2013). The group remained largely inactive and ineffective until 1958, when the overthrow of the Iraqi Monarchy – coupled with the return of Barzani from exile in the Soviet Union and new promises of Kurdish autonomy and recognition – dramatically increased the role and reach of the KDP in Iraq's domestic politics (Paul et al., 2013).

Today, Iraqi Kurdish politics are defined by the existence of two major political parties: the KDP (under the Barzani family) and its splinter group, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, or PUK (under the Talabani family) (Beauchamp, 2014). While the divide initially caused serious issues (including a four-year civil war between the two entities in the late 1980s and early 1990s), the two groups share similar ideologies, and thus today generally maintain what some experts describe as a “tactical alliance” (Beauchamp, 2014). This case study will focus only on the KDP and its conflict with Iraq between 1961 and 1991, given that KDP has historically been the predominant Kurdish political entity even prior to the outbreak of violence.

Civil Conflict: Iraq vs. KDP (1961-1991)

Over the course of this 30-year episode, the KDP and Iraq engaged in a series of civil conflicts that are often identified as separate events but are inherently linked to one another in one prolonged period of violence. In 1961, tensions between the highly nationalist Iraqi government and the KDP reached a peak as the government failed to maintain promises of

increased Kurdish political autonomy and state sovereignty (Paul et al., 2013). Following a series of small-scale armed clashes between government forces and the Kurds, Iraq launched a series of airstrikes in the Kurdish regions. In response, Barzani led the KDP in a violent rebellion (Paul et al., 2013). The mobilization of the *peshmerga* (as the Kurdish armed forces are called) initiated what is referred to as the first Iraq-Kurdish Civil War (1961-1970). The *peshmerga* relied heavily on support from Iranian and Turkish Kurds, as well as Kurdish defectors from the Iraqi army. Using guerrilla warfare tactics such as raids and ambushes, they were initially successful in targeting government and military interests; the Iraqi government responded with a small-scale COIN operation that relied heavily on aerial bombardment and military occupation of Kurdish villages. The violence reached a stalemate, however, by 1963 and tentative negotiations for ceasefire began as early as 1964 (Paul et al., 2013).

After a tenuous negotiation process worsened by the internal politics of both the Baa'th party as well as the KDP, a fragile agreement awarding Iraqi Kurds limited autonomy went into effect in March 1970 (Schmidt, 1970). The resulting peace, however, was short lived. Kurdish appeals to the American government for aid and the KDP's continued recruitment of *peshmerga*, as well as a failed assassination attempt on Barzani's life, contributed to rising tensions in the region. Foreign engagement in the conflict further contributed to the destabilization of the fragile peace. The Shah of Iran, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Israeli government agreed to provide weapons and monetary support to the KDP, while the Soviet Union also increased its support for the Iraqi government (Paul et al., 2013).

The autonomy agreement rapidly fell apart in 1974 after Barzani rejected the proposed agreement because it failed to cede Kirkuk to the Kurds, effectively prompting the Second Iraqi-Kurdish War. With the backing of Iran, the United States, and Israel, Barzani organized the

peshmerga into more traditional military units, and operationalized them in an attempt to engage in more symmetrical warfare with the Iraqi military (Paul et al., 2013). In 1975, Iran and the United States withdrew support for the Kurds following negotiations between Iraq and the Shah of Iran at the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in Algiers (Paul et al., 2013). This allowed Baghdad to violently crush the remaining *peshmerga* and force the remaining KDP members to flee or go underground. The Baathist regime effectively attempted to Arabize the region and resettled millions of Kurds in order to replace them with pan-Arab nationalists from Egypt and other Arab countries (Paul et al., 2013).

Throughout the late 1970s, the KDP continued to engage in violent clashes not only with the Iraqi government, but also the newly formed PUK. The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 further increased violence as remnants of the *peshmerga* and KDP supporters fought alongside Iranian troops on the Northern front (Iraq-Kurdistan Profile: Timeline, 2017). Continued Iraqi repression forced the KDP and PUK into a tactical alliance known as the Kurdistan Front; with support from Iran, the two parties continued to fight against Iraqi-initiated violence (The Kurds' Quest for Independence, 2019). In 1988, the Iraqi government operationalized the military to launch the Anfal Campaign, a systematic attempt to end the Kurdish resistance movement that led to the genocide of between 50,000 and 180,000 Kurdish civilians in more than 2,000 villages (The Kurds' Quest for Independence, 2019 and Wong, 2005).

Conclusion of Violence

In 1991, following the conclusion of Operation Desert Storm and the withdrawal of American troops, Saddam Hussein continued his harsh crackdown on Iraqi Kurds, causing more than one million Kurds to flee to Syria and Turkey (The Kurds' Quest For Independence, 2019) and Ball, 2012). In response to the rapidly worsening humanitarian crisis, a U.S led coalition

launched Operation Provide Comfort. This operation, which implemented a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) no-fly zone, effectively ended Iraqi repression in the region by granting de facto autonomy to Kurdish civilians by the end of 1991 (Ball, 2012).

Foreign Fighter Engagement

Like in the previous case study, while we know foreign fighters regularly participated in intrastate conflict between the Kurds and Iraq, open source information with specific details on the role and presence of said foreign fighters is somewhat limited. The complexity of the conflict and lack of formal documentation (for example, military enlistment records) and informal documentation (for example, social media) mean that we must make several educated guesses about the role of foreign fighters in this conflict episode.

First, similar to my first case study, the conflict episode is closely tied to questions of ideology – in this case, questions of nationalism and patriotism linked to ethnicity. Given the presence of strong shared identity across geographic borders – as well as the relative ease with which other Kurds could travel into Iraq – it is likely that recruitment of foreign participation largely focused on individuals from these regions. Further to this, open and academic sources suggest that many of the foreign fighters who did participate were not sought out but volunteered. Unlike in the case of MeK, there was a much less targeted effort to obtain the support of non-Iraqi citizens for rebellion against the Iraqi government.

Based on the nature of the conflict, we can also assume that foreign fighters in Iraq took on one of two roles. Foreign fighters participating in the first half of the conflict episode were likely guerilla fighters, while foreign fighters involved in the second half of the episode probably engaged in more traditional, systematic warfare. This reflects the transition between warfare

styles, which, as noted earlier, was largely tied to increase in foreign backing for the KDP (Paul et al., 2013).

Like with my previous case study, there is no accurate data on the arrival and concentration of foreign fighters supporting the KDP. Overall global trends, however, can provide some interesting insight into the increasingly important role of foreign fighters in Iraqi-Kurdish intrastate conflict. Generally the concentration of foreign fighters participating in intrastate and interstate conflicts throughout the Middle East has generally increased with time (Noonan, n.d). Until the late 1980s, for instance, foreign fighters in the Middle East were generally viewed as “logistics middlemen,” not fighters. In Iraq in particular, reports do not mention foreign fighters actually fighting in intrastate conflicts until the 1990s (Noonan, n.d). While not necessarily relevant to this particular study, it is interesting to note that the American Invasion of Iraq in 2003 is largely considered a turning point in foreign fighter engagement in support of Iraqi Kurds and other opposition groups – it is after 2003 that we see foreign fighters transitioning from “being an auxiliary force to shapers of a transnational political agenda” (Noonan, n.d). For my project, this suggests that while there was absolutely a foreign fighter presence in the conflict at this time, the impact may be greater and more visible in future iterations of the Iraqi-Kurdish violence, given that foreign fighter concentration increases over time in the region. Similarly, this also suggests that the presence of foreign fighters in the 1990s did not fundamentally alter the strength of rebel groups, since they did not initially take on key military roles. Future research could use this as a springboard to explore how changes in foreign fighters in Iraq may have altered conflict duration later on.

Characteristics of Foreign Fighters

Based on the above assumptions and the characteristics of KDP members and the group's political aims, we can reach several conclusions about foreign fighters' involvement in this conflict.

1. *Preferences and Ideology*: The KDP's entire ideology and goals were based on the group's desire for formal recognition of an ethnic identity. As a result, it is highly unlikely that the foreign fighters who joined the *peshmerga* would have opposed Kurdish autonomy. These foreign fighters were motivated by the desire to support people to whom they felt ties, and thus would have shared similar preferences to the KDP.
2. *Strength*: The KDP was hesitant to take military action unless they had verified backing and support – in particular, this is visible in the 1974 conflict when international backing caused leadership to operationalize a more traditional military body. Hesitancy to engage suggests the KDP knew the limits of their manpower – something that evidently was not improved with the engagement of foreign fighters. Similarly, even with foreign backing, the KDP was ruthlessly crushed by Iraqi forces which again suggests that the engagement of foreign fighters was not strong enough to change the outcome of the violence for the Kurdish forces.
3. *Beyond Neighboring*: Due to the nature of the ongoing conflict along the Iraqi-Iran border and in Northern Iraq, the most likely foreign fighters were from the immediate geographic locale. Given the proximity of Iran, Jordan, and Syria, we assume it would be easiest for foreign fighters to enter via the border; thus, the fighters were most likely not beyond neighboring. These nations also have large Kurdish populations – because of this, we again see a potential for overlap between regional and ethnic group preferences and can support the idea that the majority of these fighters came from a neighboring country.

4. *Co-ethnic*: Finally, per the above discussion, the foreign fighters who supported the KDP during this conflict episode were co-ethnic (i.e of Kurdish heritage) due to both the platform and preferences of the KDP, as well as the geography of the conflict theatre.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

After running a series of statistical regressions and completing two case studies, it is evident that my hypothesis – the engagement of foreign fighters in intrastate conflict will increase the duration of prolonged violence by complicating efforts to negotiate a peace settlement – cannot be confirmed by either existing or new research at this time.

Statistical Analysis

Using Chu and Braithwaite’s data, I ran a series of regressions to determine if there is a correlation between foreign fighter engagement and conflict duration. I also controlled for typology to look at if a certain typology of foreign fighters changed the results at all. In both situations, the results were highly insignificant, suggesting that there is no correlation between engagement of foreign fighters and the length of violence. Even the addition of a control for conflict severity failed to yield significant results that would suggest a causal relationship between foreign fighter engagement and civil conflict duration.

These results, however, do not indicate there is no relationship between foreign fighter engagement and civil conflict duration – rather, they indicate that there is no evidence supporting my hypothesis of a positive correlation between foreign fighter engagement and episodes of the duration of intrastate war. Veto player theory essentially describes a veto player as any actor/group that meetings the following conditions:

1. Non-state actor groups with distinct preferences;
2. Non-state actors that seek a change in the “status quo”;
3. Non-state actors with the ability to unilaterally maintaining violence/fighting against a state actor (Cunningham, 2006).

Chu and Braithwaite's dataset did not account for any of these three qualities. While it did have variables indicating the presence of foreign fighters, the foreign fighter typologies, and the strength of the non-state actor (rebel group) in general, there is no variable that discusses the preferences of foreign fighters, the status quo change they seek, or their relative strength. Future statistical research should focus on expanding this or similar datasets to include more variables that specifically measure the inherent qualities of foreign fighters potentially capable of qualifying them as veto players. Doing so would not only improve the reliability of the measurement of foreign fighters as veto players, but also could increase the accuracy of the data and the probability of producing significant results.

Case Studies

To account for the limitations of Chu and Braithwaite's data, my case studies focused specifically on four qualities of foreign fighters: ideology (preferences), strength, whether they were beyond neighboring, and whether they were co-ethnic. Analysis of ideology provided insight into their preferences or desired change in status quo, while my analysis of their relative strength allowed me to evaluate whether they had the capability to change or prolong the nature of the intrastate conflict. Finally, I focused on co-ethnic and beyond neighboring typologies given that they were an independent variable in my original analyses. The results of both case studies are displayed below in Table 4 and Table 5.

In both cases, we assume that the foreign fighters had strong political motivations given that the ideology of the rebel groups they supported were strongly political. The MeK's goals were tied to an extreme form of dissidence and desire to overturn government leaders, while the KDP being characterized by strong nationalism and patriotism in the face of an unfair political system. Given the nature of these strong preferences, it is highly unlikely any engaged foreign

fighters would have differed on the desired changes in status quo expressed by each rebel group. Further to this, open source information detailing the relative cohesion of the MeK and KDP's efforts at violence backs up this theory and suggests there were few, if any, foreign fighters who sought a different "change in status quo."

The co-ethnicity of foreign fighters, as well as whether they were beyond neighboring, differed slightly in both cases. In the conflict between Iran and MeK, open source information indicates that some foreign fighters were co-ethnic to members of the non-state actor group, while some were not. Similarly, while the vast majority of the fighters were most likely from neighboring states, some evidence suggests that fighters may have relocated to the conflict theatre from Western Europe. In the conflict between Iraq and KDP, foreign fighters were overwhelmingly co-ethnic with the members of KDP and the vast majority came from neighboring territories. As explained previously, this is largely due in part to the transnational ethnic identity shaping the KDP's desire to fight the Iraqi government.

In both cases, the strength of the foreign fighters did not seem to have any impact on the overall strength or success of the non-state actor groups they were supporting. The MeK and KDP saw harsh defeats at the hands of the Iranian and Iraqi governments, respectively, and the addition of even a few more forces did not seem to fundamentally alter this. Further to this, without specific documentation, there is no way to count the number of foreign fighters or calculate the length of their presence – meaning that this is at best an estimate based on empirical observations.

Thus, it is evident that in both civil conflicts, the engaged foreign fighters fail to meet two of Cunningham's key criteria: neither of them has differing preferences than the non-state actor they support, nor do they have capacity to unilaterally continue violence against the government

actor. As a result, the engagement foreign fighters in either conflict did not increase the total number of veto players in either conflict – rather, in both cases, it simply supported an existing veto player. Consequently, while the arrival of foreign fighters has the potential to increase or change the nature of MeK and KDP as the primary veto players in their respective conflicts, what academic research and open source information is available indicates that their engagement does not create a new, distinct veto player group. As a result, I can neither prove nor disprove my hypothesis that foreign fighter engagement increases civil conflict duration based on Cunningham’s Veto Player theory.

Issues with Research Design

As reiterated throughout the duration of this paper, there are several key issues with my research design, mainly related to the available data.

First, error in the data may have skewed the results. Much of the information Chu and Braithwaite used to craft the dataset was open source, historical data – when we account for the difficulty in counting foreign fighters (due to the lack of consistent and reliable documentation of their involvement), it should not be surprising to assume there is a certain degree of human error. The same applies to “duration variable,” which I coded based on the UCDP dataset. Given these errors, it is difficult to discern whether the results do not match the hypothesis simply because it is incorrect, or because the data does not allow for reliable analysis. Further to this, as noted above, the dataset does not include variables that directly measure the characteristics of Cunningham’s veto player. Variables indicating either “co-ethnic” or “beyond neighboring” allow us to make certain assumptions about preferences, but the data does not provide a way to determine if the foreign fighters involved in conflict had the key qualities that distinguish the veto players from belligerents: distinct preferences and a desire for a change in status quo. In a

similar vein, there are also no variables discussing the strength of the foreign fighter, the arrival of foreign fighters (i.e the length of their engagement), and the military strength of foreign fighters – all of which would be important controls for the aforementioned regressions.

In regard to the case studies, lack of information was also a key factor in the results. It was extremely difficult to obtain any reliable details about the arrival of foreign fighters, the concentration of foreign fighters, and the distinct roles of foreign fighters in both conflict episodes. All of these are factors that could explain the function of foreign fighters in a veto player capacity – without them, I made assumptions explaining my theories and Chu and Braithwaite's data based on the information available. The lack of specificity can largely be attributed not only to the fact foreign fighters are not regularly documented (like mercenaries or military personnel are) but also that the political climate (two conflict theatres known for their governments' strict regulation of press access) and the time period (pre-social media and internet) – both of which increase the difficulty of obtaining specific and accurate information about individuals supporting non-state actors in civil war.

Additionally, as mentioned in the previous chapter, global trends in civil conflict suggest that the role and presence of foreign fighters in intrastate and interstate conflicts in the Middle East drastically increased after 2003 – the invasion of Iraq very much is a turning point in the size, scope, and strategies of modern warfare in the region (Noonan, n.d). For this reason, while these two case studies offer interesting insight into the early history of foreign fighters in civil conflicts throughout the Middle East theatre, future research should focus on later civil conflicts with documented foreign fighters.

Table 4: Case Study 1: Mujahedin-e Khalq (MeK) vs. Iran (1972-2001)

Case Study 1: Mujahedin-e Khalq (MeK) vs. Iran (1972-2001)			
CHU AND BRAITHWAITE DATA			
Conflict Duration	Foreign Fighters	Beyond Neighboring Foreign Fighters	Co-Ethnic Foreign Fighters
<p>1972-2001 (10, 626 days or approximately 29 years)</p>	<p>Yes Exact number is unknown and unreported by Chu and Braithwaite.</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Yes</p>
CASE STUDY FINDINGS: FF Typologies & Characteristics			
Preferences & Ideology of Foreign Fighters	Strength of Foreign Fighters	Beyond Neighboring Foreign Fighters	Co-ethnic Foreign Fighters
<p>Politically Motivated (Dissident Group) MeK was originally a political dissident group founded on a combination of Islamist and Marxist values. Foreign fighters likely joined MeK for one of two reasons: they were coerced into doing so by MeK forces in Iraq, or they were recruited by MeK leadership in diaspora communities (outside of Iran). Further to this, because of the groups very insular and borderline cultic behaviors, all members – including foreign fighters – would have subscribed to the following goals:</p> <p>Pre-1979 goal: overthrow of the Shah</p> <p>Post-1979 goal: overthrow of IRI</p>	<p>Weak The MeK was almost immediately crushed by the IRGC during the conflict, suggesting that the addition of Foreign Fighters to MeK forces did not fundamentally change or improve the nature of the group's ability to counter the Iranian military.</p>	<p>Mixed Reports suggest that foreign fighters were mainly recruited from Iranian diaspora at Western universities (beyond neighboring), from dissident groups in other countries (non-beyond neighboring), and Iraqi prisons (non-beyond neighboring).</p>	<p>Mixed The majority of involved foreign fighters were likely members of the Iranian diaspora, Iranian prisoners of war in Iraq, Iraqis fighting for Saddam Hussein, or individuals recruited from neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq.</p>

Table 5: Case Study 2: Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) vs. Iraq (1961-1991)

Case Study 2: Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) vs. Iraq (1961-1991)			
CHU AND BRAITHWAITE DATA			
Conflict Duration	Foreign Fighters	Beyond Neighboring Foreign Fighters	Co-ethnic Foreign Fighters
1961-1991 <i>(10,957 days, or approximately 30 years)</i>	Yes <i>Exact number is unknown and unreported by Chu and Braithwaite.</i>	No	No
CASE STUDY FINDINGS			
Preferences & Ideology	Strength of Foreign Fighters	Beyond Neighboring Foreign Fighters	Co-ethnic Foreign Fighters
Nationalism/Patriotism <i>KDP is a Kurdish nationalist party that strives to earn recognition and autonomy for the Kurdish living in Northern Iraq. Foreign fighters who supported the KDP likely were Kurdish and thus in favor of an autonomous Kurdistan and formal constitutional recognition from the Iraqi government.</i>	Weak <i>The KDP was immediately crushed by Iraqi forces in every conflict or violent episode within this episode. Furthermore, the KDP was regularly hesitant to take action without clear foreign backing. This suggests the engagement of foreign fighters did not change the ability of the KDP to unilaterally maintain sustained fighting with the Iraqi government.</i>	No <i>Given the large populations of Kurds in neighboring countries and the nature of the conflict itself, it is likely the majority of fighters came from neighboring countries like Iran, Syria, and Jordan.</i>	Yes <i>The Kurds are considered the largest, stateless Ethnic group in the world. Given that the goal of KDP is to promote the status of Kurds in Iraq, we assume most foreign fighters are Kurdish and thus co-ethnic to the non-state actor in this conflict (KDP).</i>

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

In November 2019, Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) Director Dr. Michael P. Noonan moderated an online roundtable with several senior fellows and other field experts entitled “The Future of the Foreign Fighters Problem.” While the discussion mainly focused on Islamist foreign fighters supporting ISIL in Syria, the conversation also touched more broadly on the question of global security as it relates to the influx of these fighters. At the end of the conversation, Dr. Noonan asked the participants to talk about their thoughts on new and emerging transnational campaigns drawing in foreign fighters across the globe. Senior fellow Barak Mendelsohn put it best: “the foreign fighters problem is not going away” (Noonan, n.d).

It is for exactly this reason that the question of foreign fighters and the extent to which they influence the nature of civil war has very quickly become a question of the future of our global society. In today’s civil conflict studies, cases like that of Mohammed Emwazi – although extreme – highlight how gaps in research have not only limited our understanding of foreign fighters in conflict, but also have created space for one of today’s most pressing universal security threats. My thesis is no exception – the significance of my results was not necessarily the insignificance of my coefficients, but rather the questions they created as the foundation for future research: Why does the data not match our understanding that foreign fighters should impact the duration of conflict? Do foreign fighters universally function as veto players across all civil conflicts? Why or why not? How does foreign fighter engagement impact the mediation process – which by extension, changes the length of conflict episodes? Is there a more efficient way to record and analyze foreign fighter presence across the world?

To end civil wars, we must understand them. To understand civil wars, we must first understand the nature of all involved parties – including foreign fighters. They are not a problem that is going away with time. On the contrary, they are a problem that is here to stay – a problem that cannot and will not be resolved until continued research on these so-called “friends” of rebel groups can explain *why* they stay and *how* their stay continues to fundamentally alter our most basic understanding of intrastate conflict.

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MEGHAN MCNICHOLAS

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EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University

College of Liberal Arts

Schreyer Honors College | Paterno Fellow

B.A International Politics | B.A French Literature

Minors: Arabic | History

University Park, PA

Graduation: May 2020

Honors Thesis

Here to Stay: Foreign Fighters and the Duration of Civil Conflict

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Douglas Lemke, Professor of Political Science

Honors Advisor: Dr. Michael Berkman, Professor of Political Science

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

U.S Government

Student Trainee

Washington D.C

June 2019 – Aug 2019

June 2018 – Aug 2018

Penn State Learning Center

Peer Tutor in Writing

Aug 2017 - present

Lisa Borowski's Campaign for Commissioner

Campaign Staffer — Editorial and Social Media

Radnor Township

May 2017 - Nov 2017

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Relay For Life – Penn State Chapter

Executive Event Director

University Park, PA

April 2019 – May 2020

- Oversees an Overall Committee of 12 Directors and approximately 30 committee members involved in student-run year-long fundraising effort to raise \$80,000 benefiting the American Cancer Society that culminates in an annual 12-hour community walk-a-thon; serves as a liaison to the Penn State administration, community groups, and both individual as well as corporate donors.

Entertainment Overall

April 2018 - April 2019

- Organized the creation of the 12-hour event timeline, organized all entertainment activities including performers and games; served as a liaison to student performance groups, Penn State administrators, and sponsors.

Previous: Administrative Liaison (Entertainment Committee, 2017-2018), Activities Chair (Entertainment Committee, 2016-2017)

Lion Ambassadors - Penn State Student Alumni Corps

Tour Guide, Co-Service Chair, and New Member Education Chair

University Park, PA

January 2019 – May 2020

- Provided tours to prospective students and alumni and assisted with various campus projects to promote Penn State pride and tradition among current, past, and future Penn Staters.
- Assisted University Relations Director and Service Co-Chairs with planning and implementing internal service opportunities for Lion Ambassadors.

- Worked with Administrative Vice-President and other co-chairs to plan a New Member Education session on Professionalism.

Penn State International Debate and Affairs Association

University Park, PA

Vice-President for Membership

April 2019 – May 2020

- Oversees club recruitment and retention efforts, including the coordination of weekly social events, monthly professional development events, regular service opportunities, and one club retreat per semester.
- Works with other members of the Executive Board to enhance the membership experience of all active members.

Integrity Counselor

Dec 2018 – April 2019

- Appointed by the 2018-2019 Executive Board to serve as the official reporting mechanism for complaints from the General Membership Body; provided monthly reports on the status of the organization and its culture and climate to the President and Executive Board.

Secretary-General, Pennsylvania High School United Nations Conference

Dec 2017 - Nov 2018

- Organized PSIADA's annual debate competition, the Pennsylvania High School United Nations Conference (PHUNC) that is attended by 200 high school students and 20 advisors each year
- Fostered a competitive and educational environment for students and staffers to develop global perspective through friendly debate, competition, and realistic crisis simulations.

Director of Logistics and Events

Jan 2017 - March 2018

- Managed all logistics involving facility reservations, lodgings, social events, and conference schedule for the 2017 Pennsylvania High School United Nations Conference (PHUNC) and the 2018 Pennsylvania United Nations Conference (PUNC).

Schreyer Honors College Orientation (SHO Time)

University Park, PA

Team Leader, Community Builders/Finale Committee

Jan 2017 - August 2019

- Worked with co-Team Leaders and Schreyer Honors College staff to plan and organize three days of orientation programming for first year students.

Previous: Student Mentor (2018 and 2019)

Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon

University Park, PA

Committee Member

Oct 2016 - February 2019

- Helped to create an engaging and fun atmosphere at THON events and THON Weekend by providing unique and memorable experiences for all families, volunteers, and stakeholders.

Previous: Entertainment Committee (2018-2019), Donor and Alumni Relations Committee (2017-2018);

Committee Member, Rules & Regulations Committee (2016-2017)

Schreyer Scholar Ambassador Team

University Park, PA

Schreyer Scholar Ambassador

May 2018 – May 2019

- Met on a monthly basis to assist in the planning and implementation of special events, programs and receptions for current Scholars, Alumni, and prospective Scholars; participated in Admissions student panels, information sessions, and receptions.