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# Türkiye: The Implication of Iraq Conflict on the US–Türkiye Strategic Relationship

Levent DUMAN

Mehmet Emin ERENDOR

**Abstract:** The main purpose of this article is to investigate the foundations of relations between Türkiye and the US and to analyze the impact of the Iraq War on relations between the two countries. The relations that developed in the context of security after the Cold War were naturally supported by economic aid. Although there were many problems in the fragile relations during the Cold War, the ties between the two countries were never completely severed. While frequent occurrences strengthened Türkiye's significance in the area, the divergent interests of the two nations have only recently begun to come into focus. The developments taking place in Türkiye's neighboring countries also attract the attention of the United States, and the repercussions of events in these regions are reflected in Türkiye, especially concerning conflicts involving Russia. In this context, although the relations between the two countries are often touted as an alliance,

it highlights the fact that it leans more towards a necessity. At this point, the Iraq War has had a significant impact on the relations between the two countries and has led to the emergence and increase of problems between the two countries.

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## Introduction

The end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a new era in Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP). Since its foundation in 1923, Türkiye has adhered to a neutral international policy under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's leadership. İsmet İnönü, the

successor, effectively maintained a similar foreign policy until the conclusion of the Second World War (SWW). Despite İnönü remaining in the presidency post-war, the shifting global landscape and the deepening divide between the Eastern and Western blocs compelled Türkiye to align itself with one of the existing alliances of that era. Given the perceived primary threat to its security posed by the Soviet Union, Turkish policymakers saw limited alternatives beyond aligning with the Western powers, particularly the US.

The US, emerging as one of the two dominant powers post-SWW, recalibrated its policies, adopting a more active stance in Europe and the Middle East under the frameworks of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Naturally, this shift significantly impacted Türkiye's significance at the onset of the Cold War.

Since the end of the SWW, political, military, and economic ties between the US and Türkiye have gone through various phases, intensifying over time as allies. During this alliance era, unprecedented relations were achieved. However, despite improvements, the US and Türkiye also faced serious crises and setbacks. The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a new chapter in their relations. Over the last thirty years, due to changing international relations in the post-Cold War era, the US-Türkiye relations have become more fragile.

Over the past three decades, the US-Türkiye relationship has undergone deterioration due to shifts in global politics in the post-Cold War era. This has rendered the relationship between the two somewhat more fragile. While Türkiye played a significant role in safeguarding American interests in the Middle East during the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union raised uncertainties about the future of American-Turkish relations. However, especially in the period following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US, the significance of US-Türkiye relations once again surged in importance for American foreign policymakers. Throughout and after the 2003 operations in Iraq, Türkiye's influence in re-establishing regional stability remained profoundly significant to the US. Divergent priorities in the Middle East and the Caucasus consistently presented challenges for cooperation between the US and Türkiye in the post-Cold War era. Despite these differences, pivotal events like the 2003 Gulf War, the Arab Spring, and Russian aggression in the Caucasus underscored the potential for significant US-Türkiye cooperation, aiming to advance the national interests of both states.

This paper contends that the US military intervention in Iraq, coinciding with the end of the Cold War, and subsequent policies toward Iraq have stood as one of the most enduring areas of conflict and cooperation between the US and Türkiye. Despite shared interests across various domains, Iraq remains a focal point of discord in the US-Türkiye relations due to conflicting priorities.

To comprehensively address Iraq's significance in the US-Türkiye relations, this paper is structured into three sections and a conclusion. The initial section analyzes US-Türkiye relations during the Cold War, highlighting both cooperative efforts and areas of conflict. The second section focuses on US policy toward Iraq in the post-Cold War era. Finally, the third section examines the effects of US policies on US-Türkiye relations, particularly concerning Iraq.

## **Evolution of an Alliance:**

### **The US-Türkiye Relations during the Cold War**

Following the War of Liberation, the Turkish Republic was established in 1923 under the guidance of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. As the predominant leader of the nascent nation, Atatürk personally influenced both domestic and foreign policies. In its infancy, Türkiye embraced a foreign policy approach aimed at preserving independence and safeguarding the new regime (Karpas, 1996). Consequently, right from its inception, the core tenets of TFP revolved around the protection of international peace and order through global collaboration and diplomatic resolution of international problems (Aykan, 1999). Even following Atatürk's passing, these principles remained central to the decision-making process among Turkish policymakers (Hale, 2000).

The foreign policies formulated by Atatürk persisted even after his death in 1938. İsmet İnönü, his successor, assumed the presidency in 1938 and held office until 1950. İnönü, as the new president, navigated a policy aimed at safeguarding the country's security during the SWW. From his perspective, Türkiye wasn't prepared to engage in a conflict between major powers and required both economic and military support (Zürcher, 2007). Throughout the war, Türkiye managed to walk a delicate line between warring nations. İnönü successfully negotiated agreements with both Great Britain and Germany while the conflict raged (Deringil, 1989). Türkiye's wartime policy was grounded in pragmatic principles, taking into consideration the prevailing realities of the international arena (Weisband, 1973).

Despite intense pressure from the British Prime Minister Churchill for Türkiye to join the Allies during the war, İnönü successfully kept Türkiye out of the conflict until February 1945, when the war's outcome became apparent. Türkiye received military aid from the Allies to bolster its armed forces. Simultaneously, until April 1944, Türkiye maintained its trade relations with Germany (Weisband, 1973).

Türkiye's declaration of war against Germany and Japan on February 23, 1945, occurred when İnönü had limited room to maneuver between the major global powers of that era. Türkiye was faced with the choice of either declaring war on the Axis countries or abstaining from participation in the impending United Nations Conference (Deringil, 1989).

At the end of the SWW, Türkiye faced a series of demands from the Soviet Union that posed a significant threat to Türkiye's security and integrity. Confronting such demands from one of the victorious powers, Türkiye felt an urgent need to foster strong relationships with powerful nations to counterbalance the Soviet threat. Under these circumstances, Turkish leaders viewed establishing close ties with the US as highly advantageous. From the perspective of the US, the Soviet Union emerged as a new and evolving threat in the post-war period. Hence, the policy of establishing good relations with countries neighboring the Soviet Union, aimed at containment, appeared to be strategically beneficial (Armaoğlu, 1994; Sander, 1996; Oran, 2009).

At the end of the SWW, the US and Türkiye didn't have a significant history of cooperation. In fact, from the founding of the Turkish Republic until the end of the war, relations between the two countries remained at a minimal level. Despite Türkiye's efforts to foster good relations with the US during this period, primarily due to America's isolationist policy, such attempts yielded little to no results. Even in early 1945, the US did not appear interested in supporting Türkiye against the demands made by the Soviet Union (Kirişçi, 1998). Apart from the renewal of the 1936 Montreux Convention, which regulated the İstanbul and Çanakkale straits, the Soviet Union also laid claim to two eastern provinces of Türkiye, Kars, and Ardahan, demanding their incorporation into Soviet territory (Karpas, 1975; Çelik, 1999; Hale, 2000).

From İnönü's perspective, who adeptly kept Türkiye out of the war by skillfully navigating between warring nations, forging a close alliance with the US appeared to be the sole means of averting Soviet demands. However, the US maintained its stance of not opposing the Soviet demands on Türkiye, even during the Potsdam Conference. The change in the US attitude toward Türkiye came after President Truman shifted his position regarding the Soviet Union. Truman altered his stance due to the hostile policies adopted by Soviet leader Stalin in the period following the conference. This prompted President Truman to adopt a confrontational policy. As part of this shift, in early 1946, Truman recognized the need to support Türkiye against Soviet aggression (Hale, 2000).

In the post-SWW period, Türkiye's foreign policy primarily centered around aligning itself with various Western alliances to bolster its strength against the demands imposed by the Soviet Union. On August 7, 1946, the Soviet Union issued a strong note to Türkiye, reiterating its demands regarding the administration of the Straits and proposing joint control of the waterway. Faced with this, Türkiye sought to synchronize its response with those of the US and British governments. On August 15, President Truman, along with Under Secretary of State Acheson, Secretary of Navy Forrestal, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, convened at the White House to formulate a policy regarding the Soviet demands on Türkiye. Following this meeting, a decision was made to firmly support Türkiye against the Soviet demands (Türkmen, 2000).

Great Britain played a pivotal role in the formation of an alliance between Türkiye and Western countries. On February 21, 1947, the British government formally informed the US that it wouldn't be able to continue providing military and economic aid to Greece and Türkiye beyond March 31, 1947. The British authorities expressed hope that the US would assume this responsibility in both countries (Athanassopoulou, 1999). By then, leaders from both the US and Britain had concluded that defending Türkiye and Greece against Soviet aggression was crucial for safeguarding Western interests in the region. President Truman, despite facing domestic opposition, decided to act in this direction (Hale, 2000). President Truman sent a message to the US Congress on March 12, 1947, later labeled as the Truman Doctrine, seeking authorization for \$400 million in military and economic assistance to Greece and Türkiye. The message explicitly stated that the assistance to Türkiye aimed to enhance its capacity to resist Soviet pressure and bolster its military capability against potential Soviet attacks or various forms of aggression (Athanassopoulou, 1999).

The Truman Doctrine marked a significant milestone in both the history of the Cold War and Türkiye's attainment of security through close ties with the US (Hale, 2000). This doctrine relieved Türkiye from the sense of isolation in international affairs. Under the Truman Doctrine, Türkiye received support to build a robust military force in preparation against the Soviet Union. The foreign aid from the US was allocated to various branches of the Turkish Military Forces to modernize and enhance Türkiye's military capabilities (Athanassopoulou, 1999). Faced with substantial threats, Türkiye sought a 'powerful friend' against the Soviet Union and was willing to assume any role to garner US support at that critical juncture.

The Truman Doctrine marked just the inception of a lasting cooperation between the US and Türkiye. In July 1947, the two nations signed a military assistance agreement. This agreement involved the provision of weaponry, military equipment, and personnel training by the US. Additionally, plans for road and harbor construction and the establishment of various strategic installations were developed with guidance from the US and implemented using financial aid from the US (Vali, 1971). In September 1947, Türkiye made a request to the US government for an additional \$100 million in aid. The US initially rejected this request, leading to disappointment in Türkiye. Subsequently, Türkiye's exclusion from the Marshall Aid scheme stirred strong reactions within the country. However, following negotiations between the two nations, the US agreed to include Türkiye in the Marshall Plan and provide further economic assistance (Athanassopoulou, 1999).

The formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 stood as a pivotal step in uniting the Western world against the Soviet aggression. However, the exclusion of Türkiye from the North Atlantic Treaty signed on April 4, 1949, to formalize the new alliance led to disappointment within Türkiye. The NATO membership was

viewed by the Turkish government as crucial to securing US assistance in the event of a Soviet attack on Türkiye. Despite the Truman Administration's establishment of close ties and provision of military and economic aid to Türkiye, Western Europe remained their primary focus. Consequently, the US chose to concentrate its forces in Western Europe, leaving Türkiye in a less prioritized position. Initially, Great Britain did not support Türkiye's NATO membership during the early stages of the alliance. However, Turkish leaders from the outset perceived NATO membership as the sole means of guaranteeing Türkiye's security against potential Soviet aggression. Therefore, Türkiye applied for full membership in NATO in May 1950 (Hale, 2000). At that juncture, the US aimed to sustain its relations with Türkiye without entering into a defense agreement (Athanassopoulou, 1999).

In 1950, after 27 years of single-party rule, the Democrat Party (DP) won the first democratic elections in Türkiye, ending the Republican People's Party (RPP) one-party regime. Shortly after Adnan Menderes became the new prime minister, the Korean War erupted. Menderes, akin to the preceding government, was determined to establish a security agreement with the US. The outbreak of the Korean War provided Menderes with an opportunity to bring Türkiye's concerns to the attention of the US (Athanassopoulou, 1999). In late July 1950, Menderes announced Türkiye's decision to send 4,500 soldiers to Korea. Türkiye viewed its contribution to the Korean War as a means to secure NATO membership. Shortly after announcing the deployment of troops, Menderes' government officially requested to join NATO. However, some NATO members were apprehensive about extending the alliance's reach to the borders of the Soviet Union by admitting Türkiye. The US also did not favor Türkiye's immediate membership. Consequently, Türkiye's request was declined (Hale, 2000).

Despite the initial setback, Menderes' government persisted in its diplomatic endeavors to secure NATO membership for Türkiye, even as Turkish troops were engaged in the Korean War. In early 1951, there was a shift in the US position regarding Türkiye's NATO membership. The US Secretary of State Dean Acheson emphasized the significance of Türkiye in preventing the spread of communism into new areas, successfully persuading President Truman to support Türkiye's NATO membership. Consequently, in May 1951, President Truman announced his backing for granting NATO membership to Greece and Türkiye (Athanassopoulou, 1999). Subsequently, the British government withdrew its opposition to Türkiye's membership, and in February 1952, Türkiye officially became a NATO member (Türkmen, 2000).

Following its NATO membership, Türkiye emerged as one of the alliance's most pivotal members, owing to its strategic geographical position. Türkiye assumed crucial roles in shaping NATO's security policies. Particularly, during the US adoption of the "massive retaliation" policy against the Soviet Union, the utilization of Turkish airbases became important. As early as 1956, the US deployed U-2 aircrafts to İncirlik Air Base in Adana,

and an array of surveillance systems were established in Türkiye's Black Sea region. In line with a 1957 agreement, the US stationed aircrafts equipped with tactical nuclear weapons in Türkiye. Leveraging Turkish facilities and territory significantly bolstered the US capabilities in the rivalry against the Soviet Union (Kuniholm, 1996). This positioning and cooperation with Türkiye provided strategic advantages to the US in the context of the Cold War dynamics.

The US-Türkiye relations remained intact even after the military coup that ousted the Menderes Government in May 1960. The leaders of the coup promptly declared their commitment to maintaining close ties with the US. In return, the US did not oppose the emerging regime in Türkiye (Demirel, 2016). Throughout this period, numerous agreements were signed between the two states concerning the US military presence on Turkish territories. The US displayed a particular interest in enhancing Türkiye's air force capabilities and continued providing military assistance, even after Türkiye became a NATO member in 1952 (Vali, 1971). This ongoing collaboration underscored the consistent cooperation between the two countries in military affairs and defense strategies.

When Sputnik heightened concerns about the Soviet Union's long-range missile capabilities in October 1957, the US urged the NATO members to agree on deploying missiles and nuclear warhead stockpiles in Europe to restore confidence in the US commitment to European security. While most NATO allies were hesitant to accept this additional responsibility, Türkiye was open to hosting these weapons. In October 1959, the US and Türkiye agreed on deploying a squadron of Jupiter missiles without making a public announcement. However, the installation of these missiles did not occur until the fall of 1961, and they became operational around spring 1962 (Kuniholm, 1996). The formal handover of the Jupiter missiles to the Turkish authorities took place on October 22, 1962, amidst the Cuban missile crisis. This situation placed Türkiye in a pivotal position between the negotiating tables of the US and the Soviet Union. Following negotiations, it was evident that the Soviet Union withdrew its missiles from Cuba without requiring the US to make any concessions regarding the missiles in Türkiye. In a private negotiation, however, President Kennedy assured the removal of the missiles from Türkiye. Consequently, the missiles were withdrawn from Türkiye in April 1963 (Kuniholm, 1996). This event underscored Türkiye's strategic significance in Cold War negotiations and its role in global geopolitics during that period.

Despite the collaboration achieved between the US and Türkiye in the post-1945 era, the two countries encountered significant crises. A major rupture in the US-Türkiye relations arose due to the events in Cyprus. In 1958, the British government relinquished its sovereignty over Cyprus, and negotiations among Britain, Türkiye, and Greece led to the establishment of an independent state in 1960. However, this Republic of Cyprus was short-lived as inter-communal violence erupted between the Greek and Turkish

communities in 1963. With violence escalating, Türkiye considered military intervention on the island. By the spring of 1964, Türkiye was preparing for potential military involvement. In June 1964, US President Johnson conveyed a stern warning, known as the “Johnson’s Letter,” to Turkish Prime Minister İnönü. The letter cautioned Türkiye against utilizing any US-supplied equipment in an invasion of Cyprus. Johnson also raised doubts about the US obligations under NATO if Türkiye’s actions led to Soviet intervention. Consequently, in response to Johnson’s letter, the Turkish government abandoned its plans for a military intervention in Cyprus (Vali, 1971; Armaoğlu, 1994). This episode underscored the complexities in the US–Türkiye relations and the delicate balance between their strategic interests within the NATO alliance.

Johnson’s letter had a profound impact on the nature of US–Türkiye relations, leaving lasting effects on both countries. Following the 1964 Cyprus crisis, there was a noticeable rise in anti-US sentiment within Türkiye, accompanied by opposition parties demanding the reconsideration or annulment of bilateral agreements with the US. Various accusations were leveled against US policies, leading to heightened opposition during the 1960s. This deterioration in relations prompted the Turkish government to seek improved ties with nations outside the NATO alliance, including the Soviet Union (Armaoğlu, 1994; Oran, 2009). Despite Türkiye’s efforts to strengthen relations beyond NATO, the Turkish policymakers primarily aimed to overcome the country’s isolation caused by the Cyprus crisis (Harris, 1975). This period marked a shift in Türkiye’s diplomatic approach, as it sought to navigate challenges within the alliance and explore avenues for broader international engagement.

In a relatively short span, the US and Türkiye worked toward mending the rift caused by the Cyprus crisis in their relations. Following negotiations initiated in 1966, it was announced in January 1969 that discussions regarding the basic agreement had been finalized. Subsequently, on July 3, 1969, the Cooperation Agreement Concerning Joint Defense was signed in Ankara. This agreement, which replaced the 1954 Military Facilities Agreement, introduced revisions to some bilateral arrangements while aiming to provide clarity on others. Broadly, it specified that any military installation within Türkiye and its utilization must obtain approval from the Turkish government. Türkiye retained ownership rights over the land designated for joint defense installations, granting Turkish authorities the right to inspect these areas and assign Turkish military or civilian personnel to oversee them. Furthermore, the US military and civilian personnel were obligated to abide by Turkish law within these installations (Vali, 1971). This agreement sought to establish clearer terms and reinforce mutual respect and adherence to national laws between the two nations.

In contrast to the events of 1964, when inter-communal clashes reignited in Cyprus in 1974, the Turkish government opted for intervention, deploying troops on July 20 to safeguard the rights of Turkish Cypriots residing in Cyprus. In response to this military

operation, the US imposed an arms embargo on Türkiye in February 1975. In retaliation, Türkiye terminated the 1969 Defense Cooperation Agreement and assumed control of US installations, placing them under the jurisdiction of the Turkish armed forces. This led to a temporary deterioration in relations between the two countries. However, in September 1978, the US decided to lift the embargo on Türkiye. As a result, Türkiye reopened the US bases on its soil, and a new Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement was signed between the parties. The removal of the embargo swiftly revitalized relations between the US and Türkiye, marking a renewed phase of cooperation (Zürcher, 2007; Armaoğlu, 1994). This turn of events showcased the resilience of their diplomatic ties despite intermittent strains.

The military coup in Türkiye in September 1980 didn't disrupt the relations between the US and Türkiye. The leadership of the military junta sought immediate support from the US following the coup, which was readily provided. Throughout the 1980s, the US-Türkiye relations maintained a cooperative stance. Even after a civilian government assumed power following the 1983 general elections, the relationship between the two countries remained robust. During this period, the US saw Ronald Reagan take office as president, advocating for heightened pressure on the Soviet Union. Consequently, the early 1980s witnessed intensified Cold War tensions between the US and the Soviet Union. Türkiye's growing defense needs, coupled with the US policy shift, led to a further strengthening of relations between the two states. This culminated in the signing of a new "Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement" in March 1980, establishing a fresh framework for the US military activities in Türkiye and pledging military support to the Turkish armed forces. Throughout the 1980s, the US extended substantial assistance to Türkiye. However, Reagan's policy stance softened toward the Soviet Union in his second term, causing some adjustments in the dynamics of the US-Türkiye relationship (Kuniholm, 1996). This evolving context influenced the trajectory of their interactions during this period.

### **The US's Iraq Policy in the Post-Cold War Era**

The Middle East holds a paramount position in the US foreign policy due to a multitude of reasons. Foremost among these is the region's control over more than half of the world's proven oil reserves. Maintaining the smooth flow of oil and gas from the Persian Gulf at reasonable prices is widely acknowledged as one of the most critical national interests of the US. However, beyond oil, the Middle East remains crucial for various other national interests of the US. Ensuring the security of Israel, preserving stability across the region, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and averting the rise of a dominant power hostile to the US are among the key concerns (Nuechterlein, 2001; Preece, 1986; Friedman, 1993; Seward, 1992; Perle, 2000; Bennis, 2000). Given this array of interests, any destabilizing events or movements within the region are

considered highly significant and cannot be overlooked by any US administration. The multifaceted nature of the US interests in the Middle East ensures the region remains a focal point in American foreign policy decisions.

The concerns of the US regarding the Middle East have evolved in response to changes in the global landscape. In the Cold War era, a primary focus was preventing Soviet dominance in the region. The Middle East was a pivotal theater for the superpower rivalry, and the US was heavily invested in countering Soviet influence to maintain its own interests and strategic leverage. As the Cold War came to an end and the world moved into the post-Cold War era, there was a shift in focus for the US. The emergence and rise of regimes hostile to American interests became a central concern for US policymakers. The region witnessed the rise of regimes or entities perceived as threats to US security, stability, and influence. Addressing and managing these hostile regimes became a top priority for the US policy in the Middle East during and after the Cold War.

Indeed, after the SWW until around 1970, the US heavily relied on Great Britain to safeguard the uninterrupted flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to global markets. When Britain withdrew its forces from the Persian Gulf in 1970 due to financial constraints, this shift prompted the United States to reassess its strategy for ensuring the security of oil flow from the region to international markets. In response to this necessity, President Nixon collaborated with the Shah of Iran to establish shared policies aimed at enhancing security in the Persian Gulf region (Nuechterlein, 2001).

The alliance between the US and Iran aimed at securing the Persian Gulf collapsed following the Shah's fall from power during the 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution. The new Iranian regime adopted a hostile stance toward the US, which culminated in the seizure of the US embassy staff in Tehran during the power transition. In response to this situation, the US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski made a critical decision by publicly endorsing Iraq to initiate an attack on Iran. The Iraqi invasion of Iran in September 1980 served the interests of the US by weakening the new Islamic government in Iran (Clark, 1998). Consequently, Iraq swiftly emerged as the primary partner for the US in the Persian Gulf region (Friedman, 1993).

Indeed, Iraq had its motivations for initiating the war with Iran. From the U.S. perspective, the principle of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' played a significant role, leading to support for Iraq in its conflict with Iran. Although the U.S. officially maintained neutrality during the Iran-Iraq war, military assistance to Iraq began when Ronald Reagan assumed office in 1981 (Jentleson, 1994). This support resulted in the Reagan Administration removing Iraq from the list of states supporting international terrorism in March 1982, allowing the legal provision of credits to Iraq. In 1983, Iraq received over \$400 million in guarantees from the US Agriculture Department Commodity Corporation (Jentleson, 1994). The US-Iraq rapprochement continued to strengthen.

In 1984, diplomatic relations were resumed, and the US expanded its support to Iraq, sharing military intelligence and providing economic assistance (Clark, 1998).

The US support for Iraq continued even after the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, extending into economic, political, and military assistance until the invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. George Bush's presidency followed the policy trajectory set by the Reagan Administration toward Iraq. In a continuation of this stance, President Bush signed National Security Directive (NSD) 26 on October 2, 1989. This directive aimed to offer various incentives to maintain close relations with Iraq (Jentleson, 1994). NSD 26 emphasized the importance of fostering good relations with Iraq, citing their significance for national interests and the maintenance of stability in the Middle East.

The Iran-Iraq War had far-reaching implications for Iraq's military capabilities and strategic positioning in the Middle East. Throughout the conflict, Iraq acquired extensive stocks of conventional weaponry. However, notably, Iraq also directed substantial efforts toward the development of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons during this period. Saddam Hussein's regime prioritized acquiring the necessary equipment and materials for producing these weapons. Iraq infamously used chemical weapons against Iran during the war and subsequently deployed them against its Kurdish minority in northern Iraq following the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq conflict.

The Iraqi regime's use of chemical weapons against the Kurdish population in northern Iraq was indeed a grave violation, but unfortunately, it did not receive widespread attention or prompt action from Western countries, including the US. The media coverage of Iraq's attacks on the Kurds was limited, and many nations, including the US, did not take substantial action against Iraq's genocidal campaign targeting the Kurds (Rezun, 1992). Despite the unanimous passing of the Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988 by the US Senate, which called for economic sanctions against Iraq, the Reagan Administration strongly opposed this legislation. This opposition was largely driven by considerations of US interests, and consequently, there were no significant policy changes towards Iraq despite the genocidal act against the Kurds (Jentleson, 1994).

The perception of Iraq as a potential threat to US interests in the Middle East did not receive significant attention at the beginning of the Bush Administration in 1989. There was a lack of emphasis on Iraq's possible impact on US interests in the region (George, 1993). Following the Gulf War, several scholars highlighted the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of Saddam Hussein's broader foreign policy objectives by the US. Some argued that the US's relatively mild response to Iraq before August 1990 might have contributed to Saddam Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait (Rubin, 1992).

Indeed, the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi Army on August 2, 1990, prompted swift international condemnation. President George Bush promptly voiced the US' disapproval of Iraq's actions, leading to an emergency session of the United Nations Security

Council (UNSC). Resolution 660 was adopted at the end of this session, unequivocally denouncing the invasion and demanding an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait (United Nations Security Council, 1990a). In response to Iraq's noncompliance with this demand, Resolution 661 was passed by the UNSC on August 6, 1990, imposing comprehensive economic sanctions against Iraq (The United Nations Security Council, 1990b). The persistent refusal of the Iraqi government to withdraw its troops from Kuwait resulted in the formation of an international coalition, predominantly led by the US, to respond to Iraq's aggression. This coalition aimed to enforce the United Nations (UN) resolutions and liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation.

On January 16, 1991, the Allied forces launched 'Operation Desert Storm' to free Kuwait from Iraqi occupation (Gregg, 1993). President George Bush, aware of the Vietnam syndrome, urged the military to prevent another Vietnam scenario (Freedman & Karsh, 1991). Consequently, the allied forces focused on the specific objectives of Desert Storm: compelling Saddam Hussein to withdraw his troops from Kuwait and restoring stability in the Persian Gulf. They did not aim to conquer the entire Iraqi territory. The campaign proved highly successful, achieving its goals in just forty-three days. By February 27, 1991, Kuwait was liberated with minimal casualties among the allied forces, while Iraq suffered significant losses, reaching into the thousands (Gregg, 1993).

Following the end of the Desert Storm, the Kurds in northern Iraq, encouraged in part by the US, revolted against Saddam Hussein's regime. Concurrently, the Shiites in southern Iraq also revolted against the central government, leading to approximately 70 percent of Iraq's population slipping from Baghdad's control. Instead of aiding these uprisings against Saddam, the US eased restrictions on Iraqi helicopter forces and permitted Iraq to quell the revolts (Wurmser, 1999, p. 10). Preserving Iraq's territorial integrity emerged as a paramount objective for the US at that time (Halperin & Kemp, 2001). Following the liberation of Kuwait, the US policy leaned heavily towards safeguarding Iraq's territorial unity, showing less concern about the repressive measures adopted by the Iraqi government (Wurmser, 1999, p. 130). Essentially, the US sought to restore the pre-1990/91 Gulf War balance of power among Middle Eastern states. Maintaining a robust Iraq was deemed crucial by the US to contain Iran's influence (Pipes, 1991).

Following the culmination of the 1990/91 Gulf War, the elimination of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) emerged as a key objective in the US policy towards Iraq. This issue served to sustain the international coalition against Saddam Hussein in the post-war era. Particularly highlighted in Western media after 1991, the Iraqi Army's use of chemical weapons in Halabja against the Kurds in 1988 became a focal point, especially for governments like the US and the UK, justifying their policies towards Iraq. On April 3, 1991, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 687 (United Nations Security Council, 1991a). This resolution mandated Iraq to accept the "*destruction, removal, or rendering harmless, under international supervision*" of all chemical and

*biological weapons, related subsystems, components, and facilities.* Iraq was also required to submit a detailed report regarding the locations, amounts, and types of its chemical and biological weapons. Additionally, Resolution 687 established a Special Commission for on-site inspections within Iraq to investigate WMD-related activities. Alongside the WMD issue, this resolution reshaped the sanctions regime initially imposed on Iraq by Resolution 661 on August 6, 1990.

Following the adoption of Resolution 687, the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) was established, commencing inspections within Iraq as mandated. Meanwhile, economic sanctions against Iraq persisted. However, among the permanent members of the Security Council, there existed differing perspectives on the role and purpose of these sanctions. For Russia, France, and China, the sanctions primarily aimed at ensuring Iraq's compliance with the Security Council's decisions. In contrast, the US and Britain viewed the sanctions as a means to punish Saddam Hussein and sought to use them to prompt his removal from power (Byman, Pollack, & Waxman, 1998).

The desire to remove Saddam Hussein from power was frequently voiced by American and British officials. There was a prevailing belief, particularly among American officials, that Saddam Hussein's regime, weakened by the Gulf War defeat and compounded by sanctions, would not endure for long (Graham-Brown, 1999). Despite being labeled the "longest, most comprehensive, and severe multilateral sanctions regime ever imposed" by the UN (Cortright & Lopez, 2000, p. 8), these sanctions did not result in a regime change in Iraq. Nevertheless, the US and British authorities persisted in viewing the sanctions as a means of ousting Saddam Hussein. In November 1997, President Clinton reiterated the US stance on Iraq, asserting that "sanctions will be there until the end of time, or as long as he [Saddam Hussein] lasts").

UNSCOM conducted numerous inspections in Iraq until December 1998, when the Iraqi government halted the commission's inspections. As a result, UNSCOM departed from Iraq, prompting the US and Britain to launch a four-day air and cruise missile campaign known as Operation Desert Fox against Iraq in December 1998. This operation involved the launch of over four hundred cruise missiles and more than six hundred sorties by US-British aircraft targeting Iraqi locations (Byman & Waxman, 2000). Despite this military campaign, the Iraqi government persisted in obstructing the resumption of UN inspections. There was no inspection team in Iraq until November 2002 (The New York Times, 2002).

The effectiveness of the UN inspections in Iraq and the ensuing debate surrounding it became deeply politicized. Prior to the UNSCOM's departure in 1998, their report concluded that Iraq was mostly devoid of nuclear weapons and missiles, had considerably reduced its chemical weapons stock, but remained uncertain in terms of biological weapons (Bennis, Zune & Honey, 2001). Amid US pressure, some UN inspection team

members resigned from their roles. Before the events of September 11, French, Russian, and Chinese officials frequently expressed their concerns about the US-UK policies toward Iraq. According to these states and Resolution 687, the sanctions aimed to secure Kuwait's sovereignty, contain Iraq and eliminate its WMDs. From their standpoint, the first two objectives were achieved. Moreover, based on the UNSCOM's final report, substantial progress had been made in eliminating Iraq's WMD capabilities. However, France and Russia argued that complete assurance of WMD elimination from Iraq was challenging, and they remained skeptical about the future intentions of the Iraqi regime. Therefore, these countries, particularly France and Russia, advocated for lifting sanctions and normalizing relations with Iraq (Cortright & Lopez, 2000).

Indeed, by the end of the 1990s, the US stance on Iraq faced diminishing support on the global stage. The September 11, 2001 attacks presented an opportunity for significant shifts in the US's Iraq policy. George W. Bush's ascendancy to power followed one of the most contentious elections in the US history. Despite Al Gore winning the Popular Vote in the November 2000 elections, Bush, the Republican Party's candidate, secured the Electoral College vote after weeks of recounts in Florida and numerous legal decisions. Eventually, Bush was declared the new president. In the new administration, several key positions were occupied by individuals who had previously served during George Bush's administration, including Vice President Richard Cheney, who held the position of Secretary of Defense from 1989 to 1993. This not only tied personal connections to various foreign policy issues, particularly regarding Iraq, for the new president—son of the leader during the 1990/91 Gulf War—but also for other members of the administration.

Following the contentious elections, George W. Bush was not initially perceived as a very popular president in his early months in office. Many doubted his ability to execute the agenda he championed during his election campaign. The president's perceived lack of experience and skills across several domains was considered a major hurdle to the administration's success. Additionally, the Republican Party's loss of the majority in the US Senate after the November 2000 elections posed another challenge to Bush's pursuit of his agenda.

Amidst the administration grappling with numerous issues, the landscape dramatically shifted with the September 11th attacks, causing seismic changes in US domestic politics. There was a remarkable unity in Congress, rallying behind President George W. Bush. This newfound consensus granted Bush unprecedented leverage to pursue his foreign policy objectives. His popularity surged notably among the American populace post-9/11, and the Democrats, who held Senate control, struggled to present substantive alternatives to the administration's post-9/11 policies. With historic levels of public backing and a divided Democratic front, the president wielded considerable power in relation to the legislative branch.

The crisis with Iraq had personal resonance for George W. Bush, often referred to as “Bush’s Gulf War” due to its roots in his father’s presidency (Frank, 2002). The President held a personal investment in resolving an issue his father grappled with. Given that many in his administration had served under his father, this personal attachment was not unique to George W. Bush alone. The post-9/11 landscape provided an opportunity to recenter Iraq in the US foreign policy. Initially, there was an effort to link Saddam Hussein’s regime with *al-Qaeda* and Osama bin Laden, championed notably by figures like Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. However, when the administration couldn’t substantiate this link convincingly, the focus shifted back to the issue of Iraq’s alleged possession of WMDs as a basis for involvement in the ‘War Against Terror’ campaign.

Certainly, in the aftermath of September 11, President George W. Bush experienced a surge in popularity and wielded significant influence in the post-attack period. This period demanded a sustained foreign threat to maintain the administration’s power and deflect criticism regarding the handling of the campaign against al-Qaeda. Even before the 9/11 attacks, plans were reportedly in motion within the Bush administration to remove Saddam Hussein from power (Butt, 2019). President Bush, in a pivotal address to the UN General Assembly on September 12, 2002, accused Saddam Hussein of actively pursuing the development of WMDs and urged the UN to enforce resolutions against Iraq (Bahgat, 2002; Bush, 2002). Leveraging the argument that Hussein represented an imminent threat, the US administration pressured the UN Security Council into passing Resolution 1441 (United Nations Security Council, 2002). This resolution demanded Iraq to grant immediate and unrestricted access to the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), established in 1999 to replace the earlier UNSCOM.

Indeed, following the acceptance of UN inspectors in November 2002 as per Resolution 1441, both UNMOVIC and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) commenced their operations in Iraq. By January 2003, these organizations had submitted reports to the UN Security Council that failed to provide compelling evidence of Iraqi WMD activities. Despite these findings, President Bush continued to press allegations against Iraq for its supposed development of WMDs (NPR, 2005). Secretary of State Colin Powell presented a speech on February 5, 2003, to the UN Security Council where he claimed that the US intelligence had evidence regarding Iraqi WMDs. However, the evidence presented fell short of being convincing or conclusive (Zarefsky, 2007). Following Powell’s speech, reports from the IAEA and UNMOVIC reiterated their findings that no evidence of WMDs activities had been uncovered in Iraq (NPR, 2005).

The George W. Bush administration, despite the absence of evidence concerning WMDs in Iraq, chose to initiate military actions against Saddam Hussein. This was done without securing the approval of the UN Security Council, forming an international coalition

led by the US and the UK (Karaalp & Okuduci, 2021). Their argument revolved around Iraq's perceived failure to comply with Resolution 1441, justifying their actions based on that resolution. In a public address on March 17, 2003, George W. Bush gave Saddam Hussein and some of his family members a two-day ultimatum to leave Iraq. When these demands were disregarded, military operations began on March 20. The US-led coalition swiftly gained control of Iraqi territory, declaring a rapid victory. On May 1, George W. Bush announced the conclusion of major combat operations in Iraq, proclaiming "Mission Accomplished". Over the subsequent weeks and months, many key figures from Saddam Hussein's regime, including Saddam's sons and Saddam himself, were either captured or killed (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011).

The aftermath of the 2003 Gulf War marked a significant shift in Iraq, leading to the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime and the Baath Party's longstanding rule. The US found itself tasked with establishing a sustainable political framework in Iraq, one that reflected the country's diverse population and accommodated historically marginalized groups—the majority Shiite population and the Kurdish people in northern Iraq. Following the war, the newly formed "Coalition Provisional Authority" assumed direct governance during the transition phase, lasting until 2007. Throughout this period, insurgencies persisted in various regions, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives. Under the US supervision in the post-Saddam era, Iraq underwent substantial political restructuring. New political parties emerged, while fresh military and police units were established, accompanied by the implementation of new legislation. In 2005, Iraqis voted on a new constitution designed to balance power among the country's major religious and ethnic factions. The Shiite community, representing the largest demographic, secured the position of prime minister along with key ministerial roles. The presidency was allocated to the Iraqi Kurds, granting autonomy to the Kurdish Regional Government and formal recognition to the Peshmerga forces. In contrast to the Saddam era, Iraqi Sunnis no longer held dominant political sway and were relegated to the parliamentary speaker position (Hamasaheed & Nada, 2020).

However, this transition phase witnessed a surge in sectarian tensions within Iraq. These internal clashes, combined with the turmoil, provided an opening for Al-Qaeda to gain a significant foothold in the country. Al-Qaeda evolved into the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) and later expanded its influence beyond Iraq's borders. The US managed to contain ISI by deploying additional troops and forming alliances with Iraqi Sunni tribes. President Obama unveiled a plan to withdraw forces, and by December 2011, aside from a few hundred trainers, all US troops had exited Iraq. Yet, sectarian tensions resurged following the US withdrawal, bolstering ISIS recruitment among Iraqi Sunnis due to policies favoring Shiite dominance in the central government. In 2013, ISIS broadened its operations into Syria and rebranded itself as the "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" (ISIS). By mid-2014, ISIS controlled a significant portion of Iraqi territory and proclaimed

the establishment of an Islamic State. To counter escalating tensions and the growing influence of ISIS, a US-led international coalition formed in September 2014, resulting in the redeployment of the US troops to Iraq. Over the next two years, this coalition successfully reclaimed territories held by ISIS. Presently, the future of the US forces in Iraq remains uncertain, with no definitive agreement reached between the US and Iraq (Hamasaed & Nada, 2020; Berger, 2020).

### **The US's Iraqi Policy and the US-Türkiye Relations**

The US-Türkiye relations faced restructuring amid the changing international landscape in the 1990s. At the outset of the decade, the George Bush administration hesitated about the future direction of relations with Türkiye (Kuniholm, 1996). Some analysts believed that Türkiye's significance to Washington might diminish after the end of the Cold War, as sustaining relations had been crucial during that era. However, the rupture of the 1990/91 Gulf War highlighted the enduring importance of maintaining strong ties. In the post-Cold War era, the Middle East grew notably more unstable, emphasizing the ongoing value of a robust relationship between the US and Türkiye. This transition signaled a shift beyond Türkiye's traditional roles within the NATO alliance (Kramer, 2000).

Since the outset of the crisis triggered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, Türkiye adhered to a policy of backing the UN decisions. Under President Turgut Özal's leadership, Türkiye swiftly stood by the US-led UN coalition (Çelik, 1999). When the UN Security Council passed Resolution 661 to impose economic sanctions on Iraq (United Nations Security Council, 1990b), Türkiye promptly endorsed these measures. Prior to the enforcement of sanctions, Türkiye had maintained extensive trade ties with Iraq. However, the enduring sanctions took a toll on Türkiye's economy, causing significant losses in the ensuing years (Aydın & Aras, 2004; Zürcher, 2007).

Since the onset of the crisis, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein consistently defied UN decisions. In response, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 678 on November 29 (United Nations Security Council, 1990c), providing Iraq a final chance to comply with prior resolutions. This resolution authorized member states to use "all necessary means" if Iraq didn't adhere to decisions by January 15, 1991. As previously discussed, Iraq continued to resist UN Security Council Resolutions, prompting the commencement of "Operation Desert Storm" on January 16, 1991. The military campaign to liberate Kuwait spanned 43 days before a ceasefire was declared. While Türkiye didn't deploy military troops, it contributed to the international coalition's efforts by allowing the use of Turkish bases, opening its airspace, and deploying a significant number of ground troops to the Iraqi border. This strategic move compelled Iraq to allocate some troops to the north rather than concentrating entirely on the southern conflict with coalition forces (Cleveland, 2008; Oran, 2009).

Despite the cessation of military operations against Iraq, long-term stability in the country remained elusive even three decades after the initial conflict. Following Operation Desert Storm, the enduring economic sanctions against Iraq inflicted considerable economic strain on Türkiye. More critically, these sanctions posed new security threats for the nation. When Saddam Hussein utilized his helicopter forces to quell revolts by the Shiite population in the south and the Kurdish population in the north at the conclusion of Desert Storm, Türkiye was directly impacted. The Iraqi Army's aggressive actions in northern Iraq led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Kurds, more than a million Kurds fled to the Turkish and Iranian borders for refuge (Wright, 2002). In response to this humanitarian crisis, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 688 on April 5, authorizing the use of force to protect the Kurds in northern Iraq (United Nations Security Council, 1991b). This resolution led to the establishment of a 'safety zone' by US, French, and British forces in northern Iraq under 'Operation Provide Comfort'. In April 1991, the US deployed approximately 10,000 troops to safeguard the Kurds, with an additional 11,000 troops sent by allied countries. This security intervention facilitated the return of most displaced Kurds to their homes by the end of May 1991 (Byman & Waxman, 2000). Simultaneously, the coalition forces, while deploying ground troops, issued a directive to Saddam Hussein to cease flying aircraft in the area north of the 36th parallel (Nelan, 1992). In response to the US's threat of force, Iraq halted its offensive against the Kurds, and Saddam Hussein complied with this order in northern Iraq until 1996.

Operation Provide Comfort was primarily launched by the US to safeguard the Kurds in northern Iraq from Saddam Hussein's regime. Concurrently, the operation aimed to reassure Türkiye, a long-standing and strategically crucial ally (Byman & Waxman, 2000). Türkiye's paramount concern was to prevent the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, which posed a direct threat to its territorial integrity. Throughout the 1990s, the US officially pursued a policy advocating a unified Iraq. Consequently, Türkiye and the US appeared to align, at least in principle, on the fundamental aspects of their approach toward Iraq.

After the withdrawal of ground troops from Northern Iraq, the establishment of no-fly zones remained intact, covering regions north of the 36th parallel and south of the 32nd parallel. Originally, these zones were implemented to shield the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south from Iraqi air assaults. While the US asserted that these zones were established based on UN Security Council Resolution 688, some authors argue otherwise, suggesting that the no-fly zones lack a solid foundation in international law and were not explicitly authorized by the UN (Bennis, Zune & Honey, 2001; Graham-Brown, 2001). France's decision to cease participation in enforcing the no-fly zone in the north in late 1996 and in the south by the end of 1998 (Graham-Brown, 2001) led to the US and British aircraft being the sole patrollers of these zones until the onset of

the 2003 Gulf War. Following France's withdrawal, the US and UK implemented more assertive strategies while policing the no-fly zones. Throughout the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, these nations escalated their use of firepower during these enforcement operations. Preceding the declaration of war against Iraq in 2003, the George W. Bush administration initiated attacks on Iraqi targets beyond the confines of the no-fly zones (Bennis, Zune, & Honey, 2001).

Before commencing operations to remove Saddam Hussein on March 20, 2003, the George W. Bush Administration sought military support from Türkiye. The US requested Türkiye's involvement in the operations by sending troops and opening Turkish territory for the deployment of US forces against Iraq. A bill addressing these requests was presented for a vote at the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) on March 1, 2003, but it failed to gather enough votes to pass. Subsequently, prominent US officials, including President George W. Bush, publicly criticized Türkiye, leading to a surge in anti-Türkiye sentiment in the US. The strained relations between the two countries led to several confrontations between their respective military forces. One notable incident occurred on July 4, 2003, when US forces detained 11 Turkish Special Forces officers in the northern Iraqi city of Süleymaniye and placed sacks over them. This incident significantly damaged the relationship between Türkiye and the US, escalating anti-US sentiments in Türkiye to a peak. Consequently, the George W. Bush Administration decided against further exacerbating the tension with Türkiye (İşyar, 2005; Duman, 2011).

During the period of the no-fly zone from 1991 to March 2003, the Kurds residing in northern Iraq leveraged this situation to advance their own interests. In October 1991, the Iraqi government opted to withdraw its troops and funding from three governorates in northern Iraq. Consequently, this area fell under Kurdish control without a formal status. When the Iraqi central government imposed a blockade on the Kurdish region and halted the payment of salaries to government officials there, various Kurdish parties and factions formed a coalition called the "Kurdistan Front". This coalition took charge of governing the region and ensuring the payment of civil servants' salaries (Myloie, 1992). Additionally, an agreement was established under the oil-for-food program, allocating approximately 15% of the total revenues from the oil trade to be spent in northern Iraq (Feuilherade, 1996). Until the commencement of the 2003 Gulf War, northern Iraq remained outside the control of the central government in Baghdad, although it was formally acknowledged as part of Iraq.

The US and British aircraft patrolling northern Iraq successfully neutralized the threat posed by Iraqi aircraft to the Kurds. However, this restriction did not extend to Turkish and Iranian aircraft. Throughout the 1990s, Türkiye frequently utilized northern Iraq's airspace to counter the activities of the terrorist organization PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), conducting airstrikes and deploying ground troops on temporary missions in the region. The primary objective was to prevent increased attacks and infiltrations from

the PKK terrorism, safeguarding Türkiye's territory and preventing terrorist activities within its borders. These actions were carried out within the legal framework outlined by the UN treaty, aimed at protecting Türkiye's territorial integrity. Despite objections from the UN and the European Union (EU) regarding Türkiye's operations in northern Iraq, the US did not strongly oppose these actions (Graham-Brown, 2001).

Following the 1990/91 Gulf War era, Turkish President Turgut Özal instigated a shift in Türkiye's Northern Iraq policy. Özal actively sought to cultivate strong ties with Iraqi Kurdish leaders, particularly Massoud Barzani, head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). By fostering relations with both Barzani and Talabani, Özal aimed to gain insight into Northern Iraq, exert influence on the region's future, and collaborate with these factions against the PKK. To this end, Özal invited representatives from the KDP and PUK to Ankara in March 1991. Additionally, Türkiye provided Turkish diplomatic passports to Barzani and Talabani, permitting them to establish party offices in Ankara (Kayhan Pusane, 2017).

Despite Türkiye's continued apprehensions about certain regional situations, it maintained a policy of cultivating positive relations with Iraqi Kurds even after 2005. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) representatives conducted negotiations with the Turkish officials on various issues. The Turkish President Abdullah Gül paid a visit to Iraq in March 2009, and he became the first Turkish president to visit Iraq in 33 years. During this visit, President Gül used the term of "Kurdistan Regional Government" to describe the entity in northern Iraq. President Gül's use of the "Kurdistan" word became an indicator of the intensity of relations between Türkiye and the KRG (Duman, 2021).

The PKK continued to use various areas in northern Iraq as safe havens following the 2003 Gulf War. In response, Türkiye persisted in conducting border operations into northern Iraq, specifically targeting the PKK members (Erkmen, 2015). More recently, Türkiye's military operations in this region have intensified, and rather than working through the Iraqi central authority, Türkiye and the Joe Biden administration have increased their coordination for these operations. Presently, Türkiye and the Biden administration are closely collaborating on military actions in northern Iraq. Türkiye initiated significant cross-border operations against the PKK targets in this region starting in April 2021. Despite objections from Iraq's central government, the Biden administration has upheld Türkiye's authority to target the PKK elements in northern Iraq (Akal, 2021).

## **Conclusion**

The relationship between Türkiye and the US has been pivotal for Türkiye since the end of World War II. During the Cold War, the US served as the linchpin in safeguarding Turkish security against the Soviet threat. Although the relations between the two countries started in a positive framework during the Cold War period, the developments

that took place during the period allowed the relations between the two countries to be strained from time to time and even to the point of rupture. However, the developments in the international conjuncture during these periods when the relations loosened or even reached the breaking point enabled the re-establishment and development of relations between the two countries.

However, the end of this era brought about uncertainties in their future ties due to evolving global threats. Despite this shift, both countries still share common interests in various areas during the post-Cold War era. However, changing priorities have led to more frequent disagreements between the US and Türkiye. While both acknowledge that finding common ground in this volatile era might be challenging, these disagreements have not hindered cooperation on many other important matters (Duman, 2011).

The relationship between the US and Türkiye has indeed been a complex tapestry of cooperation and discord, particularly centered around Iraq over the past three decades. Their policies regarding Iraq have led to numerous agreements and disagreements between the two nations. While some disputes escalated into crises, the mutual interests in maintaining a strong relationship ultimately prevailed, enabling them to navigate through these differences.

The aftermath of the rejected resolution in March 2003 had a lasting impact, causing a setback in the relations between the US and Türkiye. Even though Türkiye permitted the use of its airspace during the 2003 Gulf War, the dynamics between the two nations seemed to shift more towards a necessity rather than a steadfast alliance.

The ISIS terrorist organization problem, which emerged as a result of the US policies in Iraq, has also affected both the territorial integrity of Iraq and the course of relations between Türkiye and the US. The main reason for this is that the US trained the YPG, the Syrian branch of the PKK terrorist organization, to fight against ISIS and did not consider Türkiye's sensitivities. As mentioned before, the foundations of the ISIS problem were laid during the Obama era, allowing the terrorist organization to operate effectively inside Syria. The active support of the YPG terrorist organization operating in Syria has naturally led to strained relations between Türkiye and the US.

When evaluated in the historical context, it is clear that the relations between the two countries will not continue in the usual flow and will have an up-and-down graph. The main point to be mentioned here is that the US does not consider Türkiye's sensitivities and therefore the relations between the two countries have been worn out. Türkiye took into account the sensitivities of the US during the September 11 attacks and showed a stance against terrorism and supported it in this context, but the fact that the same sensitivity was not shown by the US and the activities of terrorist organizations in the region in the process that started with the Iraq war will also affect the relations between the two countries in the future.

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# India: Third-Party Funding in Practice of International Arbitration

Vikas H. GANDHI

**Abstract:** High expenses are associated with international investment arbitration. To save the additional expenditure of the adjudication, parties typically prefer sponsored third-party arbitration proceedings. On the other hand, the third-party funder is interested in funding the arbitration to benefit significantly from the dispute's resolution. Interestingly, the arbitrators should be able to overlook the Third-Party Funding [TPF] issue to gain the necessary competency. Their competence is limited to disputes between the foreign investor and the host state only. This article discusses the concept and legal status of the third-party funder in arbitration.

**Keywords:** *Arbitration, third-party funding, expenses, adjudication, disputes, dispute resolution.*

## Introduction

Third-party funding [TPF] was initially perceived as a mechanism meant to enable individuals who may not be able to afford the exorbitant costs involved in dispute resolution, and it has been increasingly used by various companies in capital-intensive industries that have found TPF to be a convenient alternative to financing disputes themselves (Pinheiro & Chitalia, 2021). It is essential to understand what the term 'third-party funding' includes. While widespread dispute exists about the nuances and technicalities of a formal definition for the concept, it can be lightly defined as an arrangement. An unrelated third party, who has no prior interest in the dispute, provides financial support to one of the parties engaged in a dispute resolution in return for a share of the eventual monetary proceeds that come out of the award, if any (Friedland, 2018).

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The rising trend of TPF has been witnessed globally, with a similar impetus developing in litigation in India. Regrettably, there is a lack of a similar practice within Indian arbitration, despite the same scope for returns on investments and party's interests as there exists in litigation. More importantly, the often-high costs associated with arbitration provide a substantial barrier to legal recourse for those in need, either individuals or enterprises.

The terms that are used in this paper are necessary to explain, define, and make it to conceptualize the context. They are as follows:

**a. International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID)**

ICSID is the world's leading institution devoted to international investment dispute settlement. States have agreed on ICSID as a forum for investor-state dispute settlement in most international investment treaties and numerous investment laws and contracts. ICSID was established in 1966 by the Convention on the Settlement of Investment Disputes between States and Nationals of Other States (the ICSID Convention) (ICSID, n.d). It is also available for state-state disputes under investment treaties and free trade agreements and as an administrative registry.

The ICSID process is designed to take account of the unique characteristics of international investment disputes and the parties involved, maintaining a careful balance between the interests of investors and host States.

**b. International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)**

The ICC is to make business work for everyone, every day, everywhere, by promoting open international trade and investment systems that foster peace, prosperity, and opportunity altogether. Levels of excellence in arbitration and ADR services facilitate the prevention and resolution of disputes for companies, states, and individuals (ICC, n.d). It offers a wide choice of administered procedures, including arbitration, as an alternative to litigation for resolving domestic and international disputes. Moreover, it is globally accessible and provides neutral services to anyone, from private sector enterprises to individuals, states, and state-owned entities.

**c. Stockholm Chamber of Commerce (SCC)**

The Stockholm Chamber of Commerce Arbitration Institute was established in 1917 to administer arbitration proceedings. Though the SCC is shown as a part of the Chamber of Commerce, it is independent of the Chamber of Commerce in its function. The SCC has a Board and a Secretariat to handle arbitration proceedings efficiently. The SCC handles commercial arbitration (dispute between private parties) and investment arbitration (dispute between a foreign investor and a State) (Swarupa & Affef, 2023).

**d. United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL)**

United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) refers to a subsidiary body of the United Nations General Assembly. Established in 1966, UNCITRAL is the core legal body of the UN's system in international trade law. Its membership was expanded in 1973 to 36 States, in 2004 to 60 States, and again in 2022 to 70 members by its mandate "takes into account in its work "the interests of all peoples, and particularly those of the developing countries, in the extensive development of international trade" (UNCITRAL, n.d.). Members of the Commission represent different geographic areas. They are elected by the General Assembly "having due regard to the adequate representation of the principal economic and legal systems of the world, and of developed and developing countries".

**e. North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), enacted in 1994 and created a free trade zone for Mexico, Canada, and the United States, is the most essential feature in the U.S.-Mexico bilateral commercial relationship. As of January 1, 2008, all tariffs and quotas were eliminated on U.S. exports to Mexico and Canada under NAFTA (NAFTA, n.d.).

NAFTA covers services except for aviation transport, maritime, and basic telecommunications. The agreement also protects intellectual property rights in various areas, including patents, trademarks, and copyrighted material. The government procurement provisions of the NAFTA apply not only to goods but also to contracts for services and construction at the federal level. Additionally, U.S. investors are guaranteed equal treatment to domestic investors in Mexico and Canada (NAFTA, n.d.).

NAFTA allows your company to ship qualifying goods duty-free to customers in Canada and Mexico. Goods can qualify in several ways under NAFTA's rules of origin. This might be due to the products being wholly obtained or produced in a NAFTA party or because, according to the product's rule of origin, a sufficient amount of work and materials is required in a NAFTA party to make the product become what it is when exported (NAFTA, n.d.).

**f. Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs)**

Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) are reciprocal agreements between two countries to promote and protect foreign private investments in each other's territories. BITs establish minimum guarantees between the two countries regarding the treatment of foreign investments, such as national treatment (treating foreign investors at par with domestic companies), fair and equitable treatment (by international law), and protection from expropriation (limiting each country's ability to take over foreign investments in its territory) (PRS Legislative Research, n.d.).

BITs generally provide a mechanism for settling disputes between investors and the investment country. The most preferred mode of resolving such disputes is arbitration, where parties agree to have their dispute decided by a neutral person (the arbitrator) instead of going to court.

Based on rules and procedure, arbitration may be institutional (administered by an arbitral institution as per its rules) or ad hoc (mutually arranged by the parties).

### **The Fundamental Benefits of Third-Party Funding (TPF) in Arbitration**

Third-Party Funding<sup>1</sup> (TPF) is the investment of the disputed party's legal expenses. In return, the funder anticipates receiving a percentage of the winning award (International Council for Commercial Arbitration (ICCA), 2018). While the arbitral process is continued, the funder will bear the costs of the "investment in dispute. The third-party funder pays the legal counsel charge, tribunal fee, cost of expert witnesses, pre-deposit, adverse costs order, and other dispute-related charges based on the settlement between the funder and the disputed party to the arbitration (ICCA, 2018). It has been observed that the three main factors driving the parties' interest in third-party fundraising which are as follows: *First*, more funds are needed to begin an arbitration against the State. *Second*, international investors are hesitant to participate in the arbitration process owing to lengthy and expensive arbitration hearings. They understand that it [same amount] can be used for various commercial prospects. *Third*, the extent of control that the funder can exercise. For the parties to an agreement, financial risk can be transferred by paying a percentage of the winning award to the funder. The primary disputing parties [claimants and defendants] who receive such funds have such conditional financial award. An emerging trend is consenting to transfer other risks to the final awards (ICCA, 2018). It's also true that there is an inherent risk of the third-party funder gaining control over the arbitral proceedings from the foreign investor due to its sizable financial interests (De Brabandere & Lepeltak, 2012). Additionally, it addresses the problem of cost distribution to lessen the expense associated with the arbitration procedure. By exercising discretion, the tribunal will usually consider the cost as a deciding factor. For instance, the ICSID<sup>2</sup> The committee has the right under

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1 TPF is referred to as litigation or Arbitration financing and relates to funding from an independent third party to cover litigation costs upon agreement that, in the event of success, the third party will receive a share of the monetary amount awarded in the form of damages. It is widely regarded as an essential tool to promote access to justice by levelling the playing field, at least regarding financial capacities (Mandal *et al.*, 2023).

2 ICSID is the world's leading institution devoted to international investment dispute settlement. It has extensive experience in this field, having administered most international investment cases. States have agreed on ICSID as a forum for investor-state dispute settlement in most international investment treaties and numerous investment laws and contracts. "ICSID was established in 1966

its curial law to choose the amount to charge for the use of the Centre's facilities, the fees and expenses of its members, and the costs incurred by the parties throughout the proceedings. However, the question is whether arbitrators have the authority or are compelled to resolve the third-party funding issue when determining the cost (Van Boom, 2011).<sup>3</sup> The question is whether arbitrators have the power to inquire about and discuss the control of a third-party funder, particularly when deciding on the allocation of expenses. Specifically, the effective influence of funders on arbitral proceedings may significantly increase the cost (De Brabandere & Lepeltak, 2012). A well-established method of funding in arbitration is third-party funding. For instance, "Vannin funded a class action lawsuit against online retailer Surf Stitch for violating its continuous disclosure obligations and acting in deceptive manners for Australian Dollar (AUD) 100 million" (ICCA, 2018). IMF Bentham, Johnson Winter, and Slattery Lawyers have jointly sponsored a class action resulting from the Facebook privacy breach, in which the personal information of about 50 million users was collected by "This is My Digital Life" and provided to Cambridge Analytica without the users' knowledge (ICCA, 2018). Through a clever online application, IMF Bentham enables users to assess whether they have been impacted and should participate as plaintiffs in the class action lawsuit (2018 USA)" (ICCA, 2018). "The Indian start-up *Advok* helps plaintiffs raise money for their claims through technology-enabled crowd-funding to build a market for third-party funding. According to readily available information, funding has been finished in eight situations (2016 India)" (ICCA, 2018). The existence of a funding agreement is also brought up as a potential factor in the tribunal's cost determination (De Brabandere & Lepeltak, 2012).

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by the Convention on the Settlement of Investment Disputes between States and Nationals of Other States (the ICSID Convention). The ICSID Convention is a multilateral treaty formulated by the Executive Directors of the World Bank to further the Bank's objective of promoting international investment. ICSID is an independent, depoliticized, and effective dispute settlement institution. Its availability to investors and states helps promote international investment by providing confidence in the dispute resolution process. It is also available for state-state disputes under investment treaties and free trade agreements and as an administrative registry (About ICSID).

- 3 As to the costs of the present annulment proceedings, under Article 61(2) of the ICSID Convention and ICSID Arbitration Rule 47(1)(j), read in conjunction with Article 52(4) of the ICSID Convention and ICSID Arbitration Rule 53, the Committee has the discretion to determine how and by whom shall be paid the expenses incurred by the parties in connection with the proceedings, the fees and expenses of the members of the Committee and the charges for the use of the facilities of the Centre.

## The Following Laws Permit Third-Party Fundraising

Arbitral tribunals can permit other parties to submit their opinions regarding fundraising. Institutions like the International Chamber of Commerce<sup>4</sup> (ICC) and the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce<sup>5</sup> (SCC) have rules alike. It allows tribunals to appoint experts after having consulted with parties (Van Boom, 2011). United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) rules also leave the matter to be decided at the discretion of the tribunal. The new International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes<sup>6</sup> (ICSID) rules have been engrossed on third-party funding disclosures (approved on March 21, 2022). Third-party submissions in arbitration proceedings are admissible if the ICSID panel deems them appropriate, according to the “Aguas Argentinas ruling [earlier in 2005]” (Aguas Argentinas v. The Argentine Republic, ICSID Case No. ARB/03/19, May 19, 2005).<sup>7</sup> ICSID arbitration rule 37 empowers non-disputing parties to submit arguments after disclosing potential conflicts of interest. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) also has a disclosure policy. Permission must be obtained by submitting the information of third-party funding. In addition, tribunals may request for *amicus* brief on third-party funding to decide whether funding would result in a conflict of interest with any arbitrators.<sup>8</sup>

## Deciding on Funding

In broad terms, funders decide to fund based on information received by various platforms. In other words, they decide to fund on evidence. Generally, the information they gather is from experts, like claim assessors, technical experts, forensic detectives, regional legal firms, etc. The views provided by these experts can be beneficial in estimating the probability that a dispute will be resolved successfully, comprehending the risk that

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4 It facilitates the prevention and resolution of disputes for companies, states, and individuals, making business work for everyone every day. When commercial disputes arise, you can rely on us for affordable, predictable, and efficient dispute prevention and resolution services. We offer a wide choice of administered procedures—including arbitration—as an alternative to litigation for resolving domestic and international disputes. Moreover, our globally accessible and neutral services are available to anyone: from private sector enterprises to individuals, states, and state-owned entities.

5 Since 1917, the SCC Arbitration Institute has provided a neutral, independent, and impartial venue for dispute resolution in commercial business around the world. We keep at the forefront of change to meet the developing needs of the business community.

6 The United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) is the core legal body of the United Nations system in the field of international trade law, with a mandate to further the progressive harmonization and unification of the law of international trade.

7 Order in response to a petition for transparency and participation as *amicus curiae*.

8 Likewise, the OECD Investment Committee set forth several relevant considerations when deciding on third-party admission.

needs to be valued, and evaluating the expenses involved. Investment potential exists in class action lawsuits and related issues that produce unprecedented settlements (number of claims). Funders frequently serve as valuable coordination tools in such circumstances (Van Boom, 2011).

### **Transparency and Confidentiality in Arbitration Practice**

TPF has evolved into a practical choice for organizations with strong resources. In-house cash flow management is more straightforward when money is received for arbitration (Favro, 2022). Maintaining adequate cash flow to continue operations, as usual, is one of the four reasons, argue professors *Lisa Bench Nieuwveld* and *Victoria Shannon Sahan* (Nieuwveld & Sahani, 2017). However, the parties to an arbitration appreciate the agreement's confidentiality. The party is reluctant to disclose the existence of the funding, the name of the funder, the claim's historical events, its present procedural status, its planned strategies and tactics, its expected recovery, its billing arrangements, its potential for litigation, etc. However, as required by law or a regulator, the established mechanism for disclosures is an exception to this agreement (ICCA, 2018).

The success of confidentiality is demonstrated through the business arbitration procedure. However, it can bring up a delicate diplomatic and political issue (Van Boom, 2011). One example is the growing criticism of investment arbitration's perceived lack of transparency. The parties' agreement governs an ICSID arbitration's confidentiality and transparency. Without it, the arbitration process will automatically follow the ICSID transparency norms of 2022. Additionally, with the consent of the disputing parties, the UNCITRAL Rules on Transparency 2014 in Treaty-based Investor-State Arbitration may apply in ICSID matters (Van Boom, 2011). These regulations exist because they improve transparency, leading to better judgment, more accountability, legitimacy, and systemic coherence, upholding democratic ideals, greater public involvement, and the realization of human rights. However, transparency comes at a higher price, with a longer time commitment and lessened assurances that information will be kept private (Van Boom, 2011). TPF agreements are considered by international investment tribunals when allocating costs. When read in conjunction with Article 20 of the ICSID Arbitration Rules, Article 61 of the ICSID Convention establishes the basis for the arbitral tribunal's ability to include the third-party funder in the allocation of costs in addition to having an active approach in general (De Brabandere & Lepeltak, 2012).

The question of cost allocation in the event of a third-party funding arrangement was brought up in one of the ICSID cases. The issue was brought up in the case of *Ioannis Kardassopoulos and Ron Fuchs v. Republic of Georgia* (Ioannis v. Republic of Georgia ICSID Case No. ARB/05/18 & ARF/07/15, 2010). In this case, the Claimants requested that her costs be awarded because they prevailed on jurisdiction and liability (Ioannis v. Republic of Georgia ICSID Case No. ARB/05/18 & ARF/07/15, 2010). Georgia responded

by claiming that the loser pays principle should be avoided in international investment arbitration cases and count on their argument as the delay caused by the Claimant and the issue complicated (Ioannis v. Republic of Georgia ICSID Case No. ARB/05/18 & ARF/07/15, 2010). Georgia argued that it needed to be clarified whether costs should be recovered since a third party had funded the claimant's expenses (Ioannis v. Republic of Georgia ICSID Case No. ARB/05/18 & ARF/07/15, 2010). The tribunal, however, considered that it. The tribunal also cited the bilateral investment treaties (BITs) between Georgia, Greece, and Israel, which, while not relevant to this case, contain a clause stating that a Contracting Party may not object at any time if the other party receives "compensation or an indemnity under an insurance contract in respect of all or part of the damages incurred" (Ioannis v. Republic of Georgia ICSID Case No. ARB/05/18 & ARF/07/15, 2010). As a result, the tribunal did not see any reason for third-party funding to be regarded as different from one of these arrangements. As a result, the tribunal determined that the Respondent was responsible for funding the Claimant's expenses (Ioannis v. Republic of Georgia ICSID Case No. ARB/05/18 & ARF/07/15, 2010).

Investment arbitration is increasingly becoming more transparent (Ioannis v. Republic of Georgia ICSID Case No. ARB/05/18 & ARF/07/15, 2010).<sup>9</sup> Additionally, international investment arbitration involves evaluating a sovereign State's actions taken in its capacity as a sovereign, which may entail obligations to its people and government, particularly regarding access to and transparency of the proceedings. The funded party may voluntarily disclose a funding agreement in the case of *Oxus Gold PLC v. Republic of Uzbekistan* (Oxus Case UNCITRAL, 2011), conducted under the UNCITRAL Arbitration Rules. The tribunal had to decide whether or not to inform the other party about the existence of a third-party financing agreement. Usually, it is regulated according to the funding agreement but most funding agreements contain a confidentiality clause. This disclosure regulation, however, only addresses the funded party's obligation to the funder; it does not address whether the sponsored party would be required to inform the tribunal or the other party of a funding agreement during the arbitral proceedings (Oxus Case UNCITRAL 2011).

### **India and Third-Party Funding**

Third-party funding, or TPF, is simply an updated version of the 'maintenance and champerty' (Srivastava, 2022). In Indian litigation, a common practice known as 'champerty' is used, in which a third party, who is not otherwise a beneficiary of the dispute, makes a calculated investment in the legal proceedings in exchange for a share of the funded party's future proceeds from the dispute resolution. International

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9 As evidenced for example by the modification in 2006 of the ICSID Arbitration Rules to accommodate the submission of amicus curiae briefs (De Brabandere & Lepeltak, 2012).

arbitrations are included in this (Srivastava, 2022). The involvement of a third-party funder is required to secure costs and to guarantee that no member of the arbitral tribunal has any previous association with any other party to the arbitration or has an interest that would conflict with that party (Srivastava, 2022). Under Section 12 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, the arbitrator must provide a written disclosure of any fact calling his independence or impartiality into question. The fifth schedule of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act 1996 considers an arbitrator's indirect interest (Srivastava, 2022). Hence, it is necessary to disclose the funder (third party) and the relevant part of the agreement (Srivastava, 2022). This revelation would guarantee the arbitrator's impartiality and independence. Conflicts of interest may result in a court order to set aside the award, which would be contrary to the purpose of the arbitration. The parties involved can determine how much of the TPF agreement should be released while maintaining confidentiality and using legal means to prevent disclosure to the other party (Srivastava, 2022).

In the recent *Tomorrow Sales Agency Ltd v SBS Holdings Inc.* (TSA v. SBS 2023/DHC/003830, MANU/DE/3643/2023), the Delhi High Court division bench refused to hold a third-party funder liable for an adverse award. According to the Court, a third-party funder could not be "mulcted with liability, which they have neither undertaken nor are aware of" if they were not a party to the arbitration agreement, the arbitration process, or the arbitral award that was reached.

No express/specific provision confers the power to direct discovery to the arbitrator in India. However, the emphasis is derived from §19, the Act, which permits the arbitrator to have absolute power and flexibility to control the proceedings, which may include the third-party funder in the present context (The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, §19). In the case of *Delta Distilleries Limited v. United Spirits Limited* (Delta Distilleries, AIR 2014 SCC 13) the Hon'ble Supreme Court clarified that the term 'any person' under §27(2)(C) of the Arbitration Act is not just limited to the witnesses but also covers the parties, i.e., third party funder (Delta Distilleries, AIR 2014 SCC 13).

India has adopted a progressive stance on discovery, which would act conducive to promoting arbitration as a form of convenient dispute resolution. This stance will be helpful in the enforcement of the awards for costs in cases where one of the parties has turned to TPF (Pinheiro & Chitalia, 2021).

## **Conclusion**

TPF has expanded its development in the law and practice of international arbitration due to significant legal and regulatory advancements that liberalize the industry. But, one of the most apparent issues with third-party money is that it is essentially unregulated in international arbitration. Financing agreements often avoid jurisdictions severely restricting financing arrangements when choosing applicable legislation and

enforcement forums. Smaller companies and other organizations/individuals facing financial difficulties can take confidence from the Judiciary's support of TPF since it has become evident that unregularized TPF can only go so far.

However, it will be challenging for the parties to the dispute, the third-party funder, the arbitral tribunals, and the courts to predict the outcomes of their choices and actions unless clarification is provided regarding the various potential challenges and scenarios from TPF. This is because rulings like the one discussed in *Tomorrow Sales Agency Private Limited v. SBS Holdings, Inc. and Ors.* are viewed as the TPF mechanism's guiding lights, regularising and standardizing it. These court rulings clarify critical grounds of contention and highlight the necessity for TPF legislation, rules, and regulations in the government. Until then, all concerned parties should make every effort to ensure that the arbitral panel and Courts are informed of all pertinent disclosures; if necessary, they should keep the opposing party informed.

Principles of third-party funding must be adapted through legislation and associations to enable India to develop as an arbitration hub that would involve the parties preferring arbitration as the preferable mode of settling the dispute rather than ending up in litigation. The funders should also make the process easier by synergizing with the party seeking financing, which would be a pertinent feature for the success of TPF.

Furthermore, it is essential to carefully write agreements for third-party finance to ensure that all potential scenarios are addressed and that future responsibilities are not relocated or diminished.

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# Kenya: Establishing the Nature and Rate of Resilience (Recovery) Among the Displaced Population in Nakuru County

Eric ISRAEL-OKERE

**Abstract:** Although internal displacement of persons has been witnessed in Kenya over the years, the 2007/08 episode was the most severe. This study was conducted to examine the socio-economic characteristics of the internally displaced population (IDPs) and to assess the nature of the initial resettlement among the displaced population at the Nakuru Pipeline Complex, Nakuru County, Kenya. The study used a survey design and sampled 260 households from the resettlement register. Questionnaires which included the household displacement deprivation scale and key informant guide were used. Indicators that were rated worst (i.e., severely or rarely available or accessible) at the time of the initial settlement in 2008 included loss of self-esteem (82%), loss of income (82%), loss of employment (78%), lack of shelter (81%) and loss of property (71%). By 2018, there were considerable improvements (recovery) that included housing (72.0%), food access (63.0%), water (57.0%), and clothing (54.0%) compared to the initial crisis periods. Given the occurrence of processes that induce disasters and displacement, social development efforts should be directed to the reduction of vulnerabilities, including socio-ecological vulnerabilities. Such measures will ensure that when disasters and displacements occur, it will be possible for the people, and citizens, to recover, adapt to new environments, and continue with their livelihoods. Reduction of severity in magnitude and duration will need to be an integral part of the social development planning.

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## Background

Forced displacement refers to occurrences (or incidences) of households (persons) obliged to leave or flee their habitual

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residence as a result of natural disasters, conflicts, development initiatives, and/or violation of human rights (UN, 1951). Although forced displacement has been witnessed at various times in history, it became one of the major challenges from the 2nd half of the 1900s particularly in developing countries; characterized by the two inter-related components; namely refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—UNHCR, 2009, UN 1951). Refugees were defined in 1951 as persons displaced across an international border, and IDPs were defined in 1998 as persons displaced but remained within the county/state of their original habitual residence. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) (2012) emphasized that displacement in itself was a driver of future disaster risks, and it placed people at a higher risk of impoverishment.

By 2018, 70.8 million people were displaced globally; of which 29.5 million were refugees, and 41.3 million were IDPs (UNHCR 2015, 2016, 2018). By 2018, 23.8 million people were displaced in Sub Sahara Africa (SSA), reflecting a dramatic increase from 14.1 million in 2016 to 18.4 million in 2017 (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—OCHA, 2017). Out of the entire displaced people in SSA in 2018, 7.3 million were refugees and 16.5 million were internally displaced (UNHCR, 2015, 2016, 2018; Getanda *et al.*, 2015). By 2016, SSA had overtaken the Middle East in both the conflicts and displacements with nearly one million new displacements as a result of resource-based conflicts.

The displaced population in East and Horn of Africa (EHOA) stood at 13.02 million at the end of 2018, of which 4.02 million were refugees and asylum-seekers and 9.0 million were IDPs largely by environmental conditions, conflicts, and socio-economic deprivation (UNHCR-IOM-UNOPS-MoDM-KRG, 2007; UNHCR 2018, OCHA 2017, Samuel Hall, 2016). Although internal displacement has been witnessed in Kenya since the early 1960s, the 2007/08 Post-Election Violence (PEV) was the most severe with estimated 660,000 IDPs, out of which 53% (360,000) went to displaced camps and 300,000 (47%) were designated as integrated IDPs, i.e., displaced persons living outside the camps, staying primarily with host families, relatives, friends, etc. (Getanda *et al.*, 2015, Kamungi 2013).

While the causes of displacement have continued to increase globally and in various regions, an even greater challenge has been the issue of protracted displacement. UNHCR (2009) defined Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS) as circumstances where 25,000 refugees or more have been in exile ‘for about 5 years or more after their initial displacement, without immediate prospects for durable solutions’. Similarly, an expert seminar on Protracted Internal Displacement (2007) organized by UNHCR and the Brookings-Bern Project agreed that protracted internal displacement situations (PIDS) will be those situations in which ‘the process for discovering long-term solutions has been delayed and stalled for about 5 years or more after their initial displacement,

remained marginalized or lacked the protection of human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights.

In this case, resilience has been adopted and used in conflict-induced displacement as a concept and also as a theory to reverse the effects of the underlying processes, address related vulnerabilities, and develop /reinstate self-reliance and capacity to participate in durable solutions. Displacement by definition limits people from owning or accessing their previous livelihoods and forces them to adapt to new circumstances. Resilience therefore is referred to as the capacity of human units (individuals, homes, societies, nations, and structures) to mitigate, adapt to, and recuperate from hazard shocks in ways that reduce the severity of the impact (loss of lives, damages, destructions or disruptions); including depletion of socio-economic capacity, sliding to chronic poverty, poverty vulnerability; and re-activating rapid self-reliance and ability to participate in durable solutions (Wisner & Fordham, Department for International Development—DFID, 2011).

Recovery is measured by how long it takes to return to the prior state after a disruption (Folke, 2006). Majidi and Hennion (2014) examined the resilience of displaced women in Afghanistan, gender dimensions, and vulnerabilities of internal displacement. These authors observed that women were “the vulnerable within the vulnerable” and struggled to re-establish sustainable livelihoods with their families or on their own. Families and households tended to delay the decision of whether or not to go back to their places of habitual residence or start a new life elsewhere. However, limited attention has been given to resilience towards recovery and self-reliance, measures to enhance livelihoods, adaptation to urban livelihoods, labor market, and integration to socio-economic production therefore this study was determined to establish the nature and rate of resilience (recovery) among displaced population in Nakuru county Kenya.

## **Methodology**

### ***Study site***

This study was carried out at the Nakuru Pipeline Displaced Complex (NPDC) which hosted the 2007/08 segment of the IDPs. The study site was appropriate to examine displacement vulnerability, resilience, recovery after more than 10 years in the temporary-transit displacement camp, and re-settlement in the urban environment since 810 households were settled in the NPDC. The initial pipeline Camp was located 15 km from the Nakuru Municipality of Nakuru County and 155 km from Nairobi.

### ***Target population***

The target population of the study therefore was the entire displaced households at the Nakuru Pipeline Displaced Complex (NPDC) and resulting resettlements at Subukia and Njoro, most of whom had remained in the same complex since the 2007/08 displacement episode.

### ***Sample and sample size determination***

We used the formula for small and finite populations, 95% probability of confidence, and the corresponding 5% probability of error were used to obtain a sample of 260. The same sample size was also verified with the use of the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970) which indicates required sample sizes for different levels of population sizes at a 95% level of confidence (or inversely 05% probability of error).

### ***Data collection***

Data collection was carried out using three principal approaches, namely key informants, focus group discussion (FGD), and the survey questionnaire. The key informant approach involved interviews of persons knowledgeable on the 2007/08 post-election violence in Kenya, Nakuru, displacement, and resettlement. In total, we had 15 key informants that included an assistant sub-county commissioner, the head of the catholic relief secretariat, a representative of the Norwegian Relief Council, the chief, assistant chief, a priest, and coordinators of the Nakuru pipeline Camp, Njoro and Subukia. Other key informants included the Nakuru County Education Coordinator and the principal of the Nakuru Pipeline Primary School. We adopted three (3) key dimensions of social resilience, namely: (a) displacement deprivation; i.e., key aspects that households experienced the greatest deprivation; (b) recovery or the ability for timely response to overcome adversity (or disruption); and (c) the ability to adjust to new environments, occupations and livelihoods. Key aspects (indicators) of resilience that were examined included the rate of response to key dimensions at the displaced Camp, the rate of recovery after 12 months in key areas, reduced vulnerability from displacement deprivations, reduced dependency particularly from humanitarian agencies and donations, recovery to adequate levels of sustainability and adjustment to new occupations, careers, and environment.

### ***Data analysis***

Data were tabulated, edited, recorded, and classified in quantifiable terms. Data were presented using frequencies, bar charts, pie charts, and percentages. Qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive content analysis. The typological analysis was used to classify patterns, themes, and recurrences. The logical analysis was used to outline generalized causation. The research findings came directly from the results of the analyzed data.

### ***Ethical considerations***

The study sought ethical approval from Kenyatta University and the National Commission of Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI/P/18/47050/25833). Before data collection, all participants were consented and informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that they would withdraw from the study without any indictment.

## Results

### *Household displacement deprivation scale*

For this study, a deprivation scale was adopted to assess the reduction in vulnerability, recovery to adequate levels of sustainability, and adjustment to new occupations, careers, and environment.

A scale that ranged from 1 to 5 representing progression from severe lack of availability/access to adequately available/accessible goods and services to support livelihood, notably: (1) severe lack of availability/access of goods and services; (2) rarely (minimal) availability/accessibility; (3) available through aid agencies and not sustainable; (4) regular availability/accessibility of goods and services; and (5) adequately available/ accessibility of goods, services (Ergin, 2017; EU 2017).

Indicators that were rated worst (i.e., severely or rarely available or accessible) at the time of the initial settlement included loss of self-esteem (82%), loss of income (82%), loss of employment (78%), lack of shelter (81%) and loss of property (71%) as summarized in Table 3.1 below:

**Table 3.1:** Percent deprivation one year at displacement camp 2008/2009

Key components	1	2	3	4	5	Total
1 Severe food shortage	55	30	6	5	4	100 (257)
2 Lack of shelter/housing	81	7	6	3	3	100 (258)
3 Loss of employment	78	9	6	4	3	100 (258)
4 Shortage of water	52	21	15	9	4	100 (258)
5 Loss of property	71	13	4	7	4	100 (260)
6 Limited access to clothing	16	56	13	11	4	100 (260)
7 Loss of income	82	8	4	3	3	100 (260)
8 Congestion	70	12	9	6	3	100 (260)
9 Insecurity	47	31	7	8	7	100 (257)
10 Loss of dignity/self-esteem	82	8	4	3	3	100 (257)
11 Family cohesion and integrity	55	21	11	9	4	100 (257)
12 Lack of sanitation	53	21	13	9	4	100 (260)
13 Sickness/lack of medical services	42	31	17	5	5	100 (257)
14 Accessibility of education facilities	57	23	9	7	4	100 (260)

Key 1= severe lack of availability/access, 2=rarely/minimally, 3=made available through aid agencies, 4= regularly available/accessible, and 5=adequately available/accessible.

Key challenges to the households during the initial six months of settlement at Nakuru Pipeline Displaced Camp were listed in the order of the deprivation as access to food

(33%), access to shelter (30%), need for clothing (20%), and the need for employment (17%) as shown in Table 3.2 below:

**Table 3. 2:** Order of Key deprivations; One year of displacement

Key Deprivations	Frequency	Percent
Limited Access to Food	84	33
Limited Availability of Shelter	78	30
Limited Access to Clothing	53	20
Limited opportunities for employment	45	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Fieldwork, 2018

**Recovery (Resilience); 3 years of displacement**

Household heads indicated their experience of recovery three (3) years after displacement (adversity, disruptions, or discontinuity); on a scale of 1 to 5 for faster (or timely) recovery on key aspects that included employment, self-employment, trade (business), average income, education for children, continued education for household head and spiritual growth. Areas that reflected a reasonable rate of recovery included spiritual growth (53.6%), self-employment (42%), trade (41.6%), and education for children (38.6%). This is summarized in Table 3.3 below.

**Table 3.3:** Rate of recovery: Three years of displacement

Specific Aspects	Rate of Recovery in Some Dimensions					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Employment	73.2	11.5	7.2	6.2	1.9	100 (257)
Self-employment	20.4	22.6	42.0	15.0	0	100 (242)
Trade (business)	23.5	18.7	41.6	7.6	8.6	100 (197)
Average Income	71.9	11.9	11.8	4.4	0	100 (257)
Education for children	15.2	18.5	38.6	27.7	0	100 (257)
Continued Education for the household head	75.2	9.5	7.2	6.2	1.9	100 (255)
Spiritual growth	19.9	24.5	53.6	0	0	100 (258)

We also assessed recovery during the three (3) year period with access to basic needs. Out of the six (6) indicators, access to religious services, and access to basic needs (43.5%) reflected reasonable recovery during the three (3) years of displacement. The result is presented in Table 3.4 below:

**Table 3.4:** Rate of recovery; Three years of displacement

	Specific Aspects	1	2	3	4	5	Total
1	Access to basic needs (Shelter, food, water, sanitation)	13.4	15.3	27.8	43.5	0	100 (253)
2	Access to livelihoods (Farm produce, trade, employment, and/or income)	31.1	26.2	24.6	18.0	0	100 (257)
3	Access to welfare support	52.7	18.1	14.7	14.5	0	100 (257)
4	Access to religious services	22.3	9.4	8.5	8.1	51.7	100 (257)
5	Access to opportunities to improve household wellbeing	58.0	27.0	15.0	0	0	100 (255)
6	Adjusting to living at the Camp	57.9	18.3	10.2	9.4	4.2	100 (255)

### ***Vulnerability reduction and recovery (resilience)***

Given the challenges at the initial settlement, household heads were requested to respond to the same deprivation rating scale (where one was equal to severe lack of availability/access, to 5 for adequate availability/accessibility of key components (food, shelter, sanitation, etc.) from their present (2018) experience at the Nakuru Pipeline Displaced Complex.

In principle, most of the indicators reflected a scale of 4; i.e., regular availability/accessibility of goods and services; which reflected a considerable reduction of vulnerability and therefore recovery. Responses are summarized in table 3.5 below:

**Table 3.5:** Percent deprivation 10 years at displacement complex 2018

	Key components	1	2	3	4	5	Total
1	Severe food shortages	5	15	5	63	12	100 (257)
2	Lack of shelter/housing	4	7	9	72	8	100 (258)
3	Loss/recovery of employment	14	30	11	38	07	100 (258)
4	Lack/shortage of water	7	12	11	57	14	100 (258)
5	Loss/recovery of property	9	28	11	38	14	100 (260)
6	Limited access to clothing	4	17	11	54	14	100 (260)
7	Loss/recovery of income	8	20	7	52	13	100 (260)
8	Congestion	9	21	5	61	04	100 (260)
9	Insecurity	23	23	7	42	05	100 (257)
10	Loss of dignity/self-esteem	12	18	5	51	14	100 (257)
11	Family cohesion and integrity	10	17	6	53	17	100 (257)
12	Lack/poor sanitation	16	19	6	51	9	100 (260)
13	Sickness/lack of medical services	27	30	6	37	06	100 (257)
14	Accessibility of education facilities	11	19	6	47	18	100 (60)

**Household occupation and resilience**

We examined recovery on the occupation of the households; using the type of occupation held by 2018. The key change was the transformation from casual labor (45%) in 2008–09 to farming (32%) which became the main occupation supporting 32% of the households. The resulting transformation enhanced the participation of the displaced population in both subsistent and commercial farming from 16% in 2008–2009 to 32% (which represented an increase of 16%). The results are presented in Table 3.6 below:

**Table 3.6:** Post-displacement (present) occupations of the household heads

Occupation by 2018	Frequency	Percent
1 Farming	83	32
2 SME trading	72	28
3 Technical occupations	63	24
4 Casual laborers	42	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Household income and resilience**

We examined recovery on household income using monthly income by 2018. It was noted that although they still were not able to meet their needs, there had been some recovery in the household income. A household that accessed less than 5,000 KES per month had reduced from 61% to 25%, an improvement of 36%. Similarly, a household that accessed less than 10,000 KES per month had increased from 19% to 48%; again, an improvement of 29% as shown in Table 3.7:

**Table 3.7:** Post displacement monthly household income, 2018

Household Income (KES)	Frequency	Percent
500–5,000	65	25
5,000–10,000	124	48
10,001–20,000	38	15
20,001–35,000	20	08
Over 35,000	13	05
<b>Total</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>100</b>

Post-displacement household expenditure was examined to determine the way they met their needs and it was found that household expenditure ranged from KES 2,000 (USD 20) to 35,000 (USD 350) per month. By 2018, most of the displaced households (47%) reported having spent over KES 5,000 (USD 1.7) as shown in Table 3.8 below:

**Table 3.8:** Post displacement monthly household expenditure

Household Income (KES)	Frequency	Percent
2,000–5,000	87	33.46
5,001–10,000	121	46.54
10,001–20,000	33	12.69
20,001–35,000	12	4.61
Over 35,000	7	2.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>100</b>

### *Sources of immediate assistance*

We identified key agencies that provided emergency responses and attended to some of the needs. In response, agencies were ranked as follows: aid agencies (40%), government agencies (27%), local religious agencies (11%), relatives and friends (12%), and local networks including credit and begging (08%) as shown in Table 3.9 below:

**Table 3.9:** Sources of immediate assistance at the camp.

Key Challenges	Frequency	Percent
Aid Agencies	105	40
Government Agencies	70	27
Local Religious Agencies	33	11
Relatives and friends	30	12
Local Networks	22	08
<b>Total</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Discussion**

This study was determined to establish the nature and rate of resilience (recovery) among the displaced population in Nakuru County Kenya as a result of the post-election violence of 2007/2008 in Kenya. Widespread disenchantment, illusions, losses, and deprivations during the 1st one year of displacements were reported. Every household had lost property, money, work or trade, and self-esteem. Also, households experienced diseases and an increase in mortality rates. A key informant reported that within a few days of displacement, they realized that they were incapacitated and unable to support themselves. The participants at the FGD informed us further that their houses were reduced to tents.

In Afghanistan, it was reported that the proportion of households that owned their home fell drastically, from 70% before displacement to 25.6 percent (regardless of the period of displacement) (IDMC *et al.*, 2012). Other documentation indicates that internally displaced persons arrive at refugee camps with minimal resources, generally

without the financial and social networks to live anywhere other than in tents and small insubstantial mud homes (IDMC *et al.*, 2012). Besides tents and sub-standard shelters, added vulnerabilities include lack of privacy, limited water, sanitation, ventilation, etc. We were informed also that food insecurity continued for over three (3) years because displaced households had no access to fields to cultivate.

Although there were relief foods from Aid Agencies, most of the households did not receive adequate rations to support their families. Poor nutrition and severely limited access to medication led to an increase in diseases at the Camp particularly those of the children under five (5) years. These ratings were substantially similar to the reports in the previous studies including monitoring of the displaced persons in Kenya (Getanda *et al.*, 2015; Irish Aid, 2017; Kamungi, 2013).

Other categories of aspects that were rated also as not available (accessible) included the shortage of water (52%), lack of sanitation (51%), and security (47%). Some participants from the FGD reported that from the Nakuru Agricultural Show Grounds to the Nakuru Pipeline Displaced Camp, water, sanitation, and security were part of the key challenges. Water was supplied by the Government for two (2) years, from 2008 to 2011 after that, the Camp had to make alternative provisions to purchase a driven supply of water. Although some common toilets were established, based on a given number of houses (tents), sanitation remained a challenge. A key informant informed us that *“When we arrived at the Nakuru Displaced Pipeline Camp most of us were tired, sick and traumatized, and struggled to access food every day”*. He added, *“fear and helplessness were common among us”*. Another key informant added, *“we all had feelings of pain because we had lost everything—small pieces of land, savings, jobs, and families scattered in all directions everything was therefore new for us, the Camp, the people, order, and the security”*.

The rating of insecurity as a key challenge stood at 78%. It is instructive to note that at the establishment of the camp, a police station was also established. However, the participants of FGD emphasized that insecurity was a pervasive challenge to most households, particularly women, children, and girls. They reported that at the initial stages of the camp, ladies were exposed to sexual manipulation and abuse at the hands of the native population who fostered transactional relationships in exchange for food or temporary employment. Another informant added that *“people were targets of all kinds of intimidations and harassments”*. Previous monitoring reports had made similar observations. Irish Aid (2017) summarized that at the start of the conflict and, displacement and initial settlement, the female gender is marked for sexual and gender-based violence.

Family cohesion and integrity were also rated as severe challenges because of the challenges related to violence against women (VAM), prostitution, forced or early marriages, and drugs. A key informant reported that every household had one issue or another related to VAM, prostitution, forced or early marriages, and drugs. The participants

from the FGD agreed that every household had a challenge related to VAM, prostitution, forced or early marriages, and drugs. It was estimated that over 35% of girls between 15 and 17 years were forced to early marriage and/or had children, accompanied by the problem of the upkeep. Reports from Afghanistan indicated that over 37% of the households had at least a girl who was under the age of 16 getting married during displacement. An additional 27% of female children were forced to marry against their will (IDMC *et al.*, 2012).

These results were consistent with the previous studies (Samuel Hall, 2016, Getanda *et al.*, 2015; Majidi & Hennion, 2014; Boano *et al.*, 2008). The rating of these aspects reflected the contention that displacement dramatically disrupts the livelihoods of the households (or displaced persons), and severe reduction in availability (or accessibility) to essentials such as food, clean water, shelter, proper clothing, health care, and sanitation.

The experience of recovery three (3) years after displacement (adversity, disruptions, or discontinuity) on key aspects showed interesting results. Areas in which they reflected a reasonable rate of recovery included spiritual growth (53.6%), self-employment (42%), trade (41.6%), and education for children (38.6%). access to religious services, and access to basic needs (43.5%) reflected reasonable recovery during the three (3) years of displacement. Access to religious services was generally 52.7% because of services that were provided by religious agencies within and outside the camp. Access to basic needs stood at 43.5% because of improved housing at the Nakuru Pipeline Displacement Camp and the production of food at adjacent parcels of land. It also included improved water and sanitation at the Nakuru Pipeline Displacement Camp.

Conversely, the other four (4) indicators namely access to livelihoods, access to welfare support, access to opportunities to improve well-being, and adjustment to living at the camp reflected low or negligible recovery. More specifically, access to livelihood resources (i.e., farm produce, trade, employment, and/or income) reflected a slow response rate (31.1%) and therefore appeared to have been complex. According to the FGD sessions, many of the households were not and have not been able to secure adequate access to livelihood to the present.

Although they still had access to humanitarian support, 52.7% reported limited access to welfare. Focused group discussions indicated that humanitarian support was not adequate and was not consistent; i.e. three to four months would pass before the next round of support. Similarly, even a higher percentage (58%) reported limited opportunities for improving their well-being. Further, a similar percentage (58%) reported limited adjustment to living at the camp. Except for the loss of property, loss of employment, insecurity, and medical services, all the other indicators were over 50% of the availability (accessibility) and therefore reflected considerable recovery over the initial period of one year (12 months) of displacement. More specifically, indicators with

considerable recovery included housing (72%), access to food (63%), access to water (57%), clothing (54%), sanitation, congestion, and self-esteem (51%).

Although there were still some desperate segments, by 2018 availability and access to food had improved by 75%. Indeed, the proportion of displaced that had severe difficulties accessing food reduced from 85% at the beginning of displacement (2008/2009) to 73% after 12 months and finally to 37%. During the first three (3) years of displacement, they relied largely on food aid and begging to access food.

Various reports emphasized the continued challenge of food among the displaced; particularly desperate efforts to find regular and adequate employment to support food requirements. By 2018, as an advantage to this segment of the displaced population, over 58% of the households generated their food and livelihoods from one of the three fields: (1) the Nakuru Pipeline Displaced Complex; (2) Njoro Re-settlement Farm; and (3) Subukia Re-settlement Farm where they cultivate maize, beans, and other horticultural produce. However, by 2018, the time of the study, 25% still relied on food aid and begging to access food; an additional 41% of the displaced households survived on less than three meals a day, and seemingly adapted to chronic food deficiency. About 43% cited cost and lack of a consistent supply of food as a major hindrance to them getting food.

By 2018, housing had been transformed from tents to earth-based floors of semi-permanent structures. Rooms in these structures ranged from two to three rooms; and still, some households cooked outside. These structures were spread from the Nakuru Displaced Pipeline to Njoro and Subukia. The participants from the FGD reported that they have advised the household to carry out stepwise improvement of the houses as a way to mitigate the financial burden. Further, there was a water improvement (57%) but which was relied on purchases from the neighboring estates. The provision of water for the households in Nakuru Displaced Pipeline, Njoro, and Subukia was understood as ad-hoc, awaiting a durable solution, and, therefore, households with limited income will continue with the challenges of water.

There was also a modest improvement in family cohesion and integrity (53%). Households continued to witness challenges related to violence against women (VAM), prostitution, forced or early marriages, and drugs. Challenges have shifted to relatively poor households that were not able to meet a wide range of requirements.

By 2018 congestion had improved with a rating of 65%. Allocations of additional parcels of land in Njoro and Subukia were instrumental in the reduction of the congestion. Each of the new parcels took at least 1/3 of the 810 households; thereby reducing the congestion at the Nakuru Displaced Pipeline. Similarly, dignity/self-esteem improved with a rating of 65% again driven largely by the two additional parcels of lands in Njoro and Subukia.

Aspects that have not been promising include employment (45%), insecurity (47%), and medical services (43%). Of these aspects, employment was the most surprising. From the onset, the government and the Aid agencies should have focused on competencies necessary for employment and integration. Members of the focused group discussion had reported that security was still a challenge particularly for women and girls.

Accordingly, the change in the order of the occupation and emergence of farming as the principal occupation was attributed to three fundamental developments: (a) purchase of the land and cultivation at the Nakuru Displaced Pipeline Complex; (b) allocation of farm and subsequent cultivation at Njoro area; and (c) allocation of farm and subsequent cultivation at the Subukia area. The three farms are held in the form of shares that enable each of the displaced households to have a portion for cultivation. It is instructive to note that the two farms, one in Njoro and the one in Subukia are partly owned by the displaced households because there are still disputes with the previous farmworkers who are also claiming some stakes in the two farms. Notwithstanding the dispute, most of the displaced households were planting maize in the three (3) parcels of land and some of them had even established enterprises that included shops for various hardware and other items.

Also, some of the women around the Nakuru Pipeline Displaced Complex engaged in income-generating activities that included trade in second-hand clothing (mitumba), factory work, selling vegetables, making illicit liquors, tailoring, and prostitution are all options. Some were even allowed to visit their fields while working from rented space. In comparison, whereas 67% were employed before displacement in Afghanistan, 57% were reported to be engaged in part-time skilled, underpaid, and seasonal-bound jobs (Samuel Hall, 2013). Others were engaged in self-employed activities that ranged from shopkeeping to street vending.

Recovery on household income using monthly income by 2018 showed that most of the households had shifted to the category of earning between 5,000 and 10,000 KES per month (which was in the range of more than USD 1.6 per day). With an average household size of between 3 and 5 members, most of the internally displaced still lived below the poverty line of less than 5,000 KES per month (or 1.80 EUR, 2.00 USD per day). As in the previous reports, displaced households spent their income on meeting immediate needs, with 61% on food, 14% on energy, 9% on clothing, and medical treatment. Expenditure on these goods was their primary priority, accounting for nearly 93% of their total resources. 67% of the households used credits (loans) with an average monthly loan of KES 3,700 which was 74% over and above their average income.

57% of household heads belonged to some self-help groups for purposes of supporting livelihood and participated regularly to support cultivation, commercial, and saving ventures. The key aspect of the Nakuru Displaced pipeline Complex is their Njoro-Subukia rural-based farming, where the operations required joint efforts and collaboration.

Key agencies that provided emergency responses and attended to some of the needs of the displaced households did not provide measures to ensure sustainability such as re-training members of the households to adapt to new careers. Other examples existed where Greater economic and employment opportunities from the Africa Trust Fund (ATF) have supported displaced households in the Horn of Africa region to adapt to sustainable careers and various SME options. There were few chances for capacity-building or vocational training openings to enable displaced households to build new occupations. This could have been particularly important for rural IDPs who had to find work in an urban setting where many displaced families could not earn enough to cover their daily expenses for food, water, transportation, gasoline, and essential non-food goods like toilet paper, sanitary napkins, soap, detergent, and toothpaste.

Assessment of any commercial support services towards the establishment of a vocational or business venture was done and about 68% indicated NO; and 32% reported that they were aware but had not accessed the services. From the FGD, we established that they were aware of the NCKK micro-finance and credit program (SMEP) which targeted Christians in NCKK. Besides, Females in Pain conducted training workshops for displaced women to enable them to develop ideas and strategies for starting and sustaining income-generating activities. However, the repayment terms were based on the economic sustainability rate which was relatively expensive for most of the households particularly those headed by extremely low-income persons

## **Conclusions**

Although we identified key dimensions of recovery and by extension resilience, it will be important to refine the scope of those dimensions to form part of the pre- and post-displacement interventions. Given the occurrence of processes that induce disasters and displacement, social development efforts should be directed to the reduction of vulnerabilities, including socio-ecological vulnerabilities. Such measures will ensure that when disasters and displacements occur, it will be possible for the people, and citizens, to recover, adapt to new environments, and continue with their livelihoods. Reduction of severity in magnitude and duration will need to be an integral part of the social development planning.

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# Philippines: Diaspora and Homeland Conflict. Locating the Moro Diaspora in the Mindanao Insurgency

Jose Mikhail PEREZ

**Abstract:** An ever-expanding body of literature suggests the possible link between diasporas and the exacerbation of civil wars in their home countries. One of the most notable findings on the link between diaspora and armed conflict is derived from a set of arguments known as the Greed and Grievances Thesis. According to the said framework, a higher diasporic support to a homeland conflict is positively correlated with a higher incidence of civil war intractability. Applying this framework to the data on external support to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) insurgency from 1990–2008, the study notes that there is a lack of support from the Moro diaspora which forced the MILF to secure peace with the Philippine government. On the contrary, the increase in conflict activities during the insurgency can be qualitatively attributed to the economic and political support from hostile states and international terrorist networks that support the Moro insurgents against the Philippine government. The study concludes that there is an absence of substantial evidence on the role of the Moro diaspora in funding the insurgents due to other factors such as internal financing for the rebellion and the role of international actors in prolonging the Moro conflict.

**Keywords:** *Moro Muslims, diaspora, civil war, homeland conflict, the Philippines.*

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## Introduction

At the end of the Cold War, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue that conflicts in the twenty-first century are often intrastate in nature. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2002), 15 out of the major conflicts in 2001 alone were all internal conflicts. Internal

conflicts, also known as civil wars or ‘*small-scale*’ insurgencies, are defined as armed combats taking place within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties that are subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities (Kalyvas, 2009). Quantitatively speaking, a civil war is empirically defined as an internal conflict with at least 1,000 combatant deaths per year (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006).

One of the most notable findings in the literature on civil wars is that diaspora support is positively correlated with a higher incidence of civil war casualties in war-torn insurgencies. This assumption is based on the various empirical studies that were conducted on the possible relationship between diasporas and internal conflict (Angoustures & Pascal, 1996; Mariani *et al.*, 2018; Féron & Lefort, 2019). Most of them argue that diaspora support, often financial, causes the exacerbation of civil war due to a variety of reasons. Among the various reasons cited are: (1) the need to buy more weapons and equipment for the war; (2) the recruitment of more insurgents who will fight in the name of the insurgency; and (3) incentives for local elites to prolong the conflict due to economic benefits gained in the duration of war (Collier, 2000; Berdal, 2005, Kaldor, 2012). Some notable examples of this phenomenon are the Tamil diaspora in the Sri Lankan civil war (Angoustures & Pascal, 1996) and the Irish diaspora during the Troubles in Northern Ireland (Cochrane, 2007). Despite the rich literature on the topic, the lack of comprehensive studies detailing the theory’s testability is still evident since it has yet to be empirically tested in various insurgencies taking place around the world.

Consequently, this correlation is yet to be theoretically tested in the decades-old Moro conflict between the Christian-dominated Philippine government and the Muslim Moros in the southern Philippines. Despite the fact that the Moro conflict falls into the empirical definition of a civil war, it remains to be validated whether the link between Moro diasporic support and the intractability of the Mindanao insurgency is positively correlated or not.

### **Research Problem and Variables**

As mentioned earlier, the primary research problem that this study attempts to address is to explain whether or not the presence of Moro diaspora support is exacerbating the conflict in Mindanao. Using the Moro diasporic support as the independent variable, this research proposes to establish a link on whether such a variable can be related to the exacerbation of the Mindanao conflict which will then be its dependent variable.

Hence, the study hypothesizes that support by the Moro diaspora is causing the Mindanao insurgency to be intractable. This assumption is based on the various studies that argue for the potency of conflict-driven diasporas to be mobilized in supporting insurgents in their homelands (Angoustures & Pascal, 1996; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Ross, 2004).

The study is structured as follows. First, the study provides an overview of the nexus between diaspora and civil war. This will then be scrutinized in the context of the Moro insurgency that has plagued the southern Philippines for decades where the study will review the existing literature on the existence of the Moro diaspora as a potent force in the Mindanao insurgency. The absence or presence of such a diaspora can provide more theoretical evidence in establishing the possibility that the explanatory independent variable is related to the dependent variable which is the Mindanao conflict.

Second, by utilizing the salient arguments of the Greed and Grievances Thesis, the study employs the application of these arguments in creating a theoretical framework that will attempt to establish a link between the study's two explanatory variables.

Third, the data and method that was used are explained in the results and discussion section of this article. After building an argument on the literature between diaspora and conflict, the study then highlighted certain empirical and theoretical findings that are crucial in establishing a link between the two variables. Using the Uppsala Conflict Program Dataset on External Support (2020), the study attempted to establish observations generated from the dataset. Drawing explanations from various studies on conflict resolution and management, the discussion part will highlight alternative interpretations of why different explanatory variables have emerged upon analyzing the dataset. A conclusion will then summarize the findings and recommendations of the study.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Background on the Diaspora-Conflict Nexus***

Less developed countries often bear the brunt of endless civil wars where development is felt least. Moreover, these conflicts often cause sizable migration flows that often lead to the creation of conflict-created diasporas to escape repression and violence from the home country (Koinova, 2018). Since the home country cannot provide security to its citizens, these eventually create diasporic migrants who are forced to live in countries where economic opportunities are abundant. Even though these diasporas live in various countries away from their homeland, there is adequate evidence that they can play a major role in the evolution and duration of the conflict in their home country such as political lobbying, financial support to the insurgency, or direct involvement in the fighting (Mariani *et al.*, 2018).

The role of diasporas in conflict has gained attraction from scholars in various disciplines such as political science, international relations, sociology, and history, to name a few. In addition, these studies have triggered numerous debates on the relationship between diasporic support and civil wars. However, most of them remain inconclusive. For this reason, one of the most notable ontological issues that emerged from these debates is whether to consider diasporas as unitary or multiple actors which resulted in the epistemological divide in the study of diasporic studies and conflict.

Collier and Hoeffler (2004) primarily consider diasporas as unitary actors in terms of their ability to provide financial remittances to insurgents in their homeland which can be measured in terms of quantifiable parameters. On the other hand, Keen (2012) and Abramson (2017) attempted to explain diasporas as a product of constructivist processes caused by long-term grievances or identity formation. Therefore, it is necessary to harness these debates in order to provide better explanations for predicting how diasporas mobilize in homeland civil wars.

The relationship between diaspora and their role in an internal conflict is divided into two fundamental arguments. Smith and Stares (2007) have pondered on the question of whether diasporas could either be *peace-wreckers* or *peace-makers*. They found out that they could act as both, depending on the social and political context of their homeland countries. This was supported by Féron and Lefort (2019) by citing the case of the Irish Americans as a diaspora that was actively involved in the peace negotiations in the Northern Ireland conflict during the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. On the other hand, Angoustures and Pascal (1996) argued that the mobilization of the Tamil diaspora in providing financial remittances to support the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) paved the way for it to become one of the most feared guerilla forces in the world until its defeat by the Sri Lankan armed forces in 2009. Such contradiction between the two examples is a testament to how a diaspora can be mobilized violently or peacefully depending on the domestic and international factors at hand.

### ***Is there a Moro Diaspora?***

As mentioned earlier, among the most important causal variables commonly attributed to civil war onset is the strength of a diaspora to mobilize resources and garner international support. Koinova (2018) argues that the ability of a diaspora to become engaged in the civil wars of their homelands is a necessary factor if such conflict can worsen or not. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the concept of diaspora has never been conceptualized in ethno-nationalist terms at its initial stages in academia.

The etymology of the term '*diaspora*' is commonly attributed to the Greeks. Initially, the term was first documented in the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. In contrast to popular knowledge, the term diaspora initially referred to the Jewish people in a religious sense where the Hebrew God had dispersed the Jews since they did not follow God's commandments. According to Liberatore and Fesenmyer (2018), the diaspora eventually became an ethno-nationalist concept upon the rise of the modern nation-state. In the 1990s, postcolonial and postmodern approaches have problematized the relationship between a diaspora and their homeland origins where the line between religion, ethnicity, and diaspora are distinguished. These homeland connections for diasporas around the world yielded an alternative explanation that the civil wars occurring in various parts of the world can be attributed to

the rise of political and financial participation of diasporas as ‘*transnational actors*’ in a globalized world.

In this study, an important theoretical point of departure is to establish a possible link between diaspora and conflict using the Moro diaspora as a case study. Theoretically speaking, the presence of a Moro diaspora has been debated by various scholars throughout the existence of the Moro conflict. An initial issue that most scholars debated on the Moro diaspora is whether or not it exists. According to Wilson (2009), the existence of a Moro diaspora is evident in their notable presence in the Middle East, Australia, and Europe, where they have provided financial support to the Moro insurgency. An example of such support was documented in the transfer of financial remittances to the MILF insurgency through bank transfers in the United Arab Emirates in 2001 (Wilson, 2009). Even so, this form of support from the diaspora is seen as an outlier from the typical financing that the MILF receives from other sources.

However, other scholars argue that the role of the Moro diaspora in the Mindanao conflict is a weak one compared to other diasporic-driven insurgencies around the world. According to Huang *et al.* (2012), the lack of continuous support by the Moro diaspora can be attributed to why the MILF was forced to eventually sign a peace agreement after international support was withdrawn by Malaysia due to political pressure from the Philippine government to cripple the MILF leadership into surrendering its armed struggle in favor of autonomy. This is further supported by the Uppsala Data Conflict Program (2020) which claims the lack of a Moro diaspora to financially support the Moro insurgency since the conflict itself is primarily funded by hostile states like Malaysia and international terrorist networks such as Jemaah Islamiyah from its establishment in the 1990s until today.

Another issue that is being debated by several scholars is whether or not the international Moro diaspora is a force to be reckoned with since most Moros were only dispersed locally during the Moro civil war. According to Ringuet (2002), the Moros were displaced from their homeland in Mindanao during the conflict in the 1970s under martial law by the Ferdinand Marcos administration. The conflict has forced the Moros to migrate to various parts of the Philippines resulting in the creation of Moro communities in Christian-dominated cities such as Manila, Cebu, and Davao, with the *Maranao*-dominated Muslim Town in Quiapo, Manila as one of the most notable. Thus, the lack of a strong international Moro diaspora is often invoked by some scholars when discussing its role in the Mindanao conflict (Ringuet, 2002).

In sum, the lack of compelling evidence except for Wilson’s (2009) claim on the existence of a Moro diaspora provides a perfect springboard for discussion on whether or not the Moro diaspora can financially or politically support an insurgency despite the existence of various domestic and international factors that hinder it. This point of departure will be thoroughly discussed in the latter part of this study.

### ***Greed and Grievances as a theoretical framework***

This study attempted to replicate the methods employed in the greed and grievances thesis employed by Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and Keen (2012). According to Keen (2000), conflicts are often exacerbated when there is support for it in financial and political aspects. On the other hand, Collier & Hoeffler (2004) emphasize the economic capability of insurgents to blackmail diasporas in mobilizing support to provide financial remittances at the expense of their families who are caught in the middle of the insurgency.

Applying the greed and grievances debate on the Moro insurgency, the study attempts to provide an empirical and theoretical explanation of why civil wars are often caused by the interaction of horizontal and vertical inequalities in the onset and duration of the conflict. Using diaspora support as an independent variable, the study employs the premise that economic oppression fostered in civil wars often creates 'vertical inequalities' which are defined in terms of economic inequalities between individuals in a society (Collier, 2000). These inequalities are often mobilized by ethnic entrepreneurs to recruit more fighters to wage an insurgency that will challenge the dominant nation-state. Hence, the presence of financial support from a diaspora to a civil war therefore causes the elites in ethnic armed groups to act based on their self-interests since the benefits of conflict tend to outweigh the costs of the conflict in general.

Throughout the study of intrastate conflicts in the post-Cold War world, the debate on whether civil wars are caused by either "greed" or "grievance" has engaged conflict scholars across several disciplines in explaining the factors of how insurgents are mobilized to challenge the nation-state. Kaldor (2012) argues that these civil wars can be classified in an umbrella term known as '*new wars*' where the causes of warfare have shifted from an ideological struggle into a case of ethnic grievances from an insurgent group. Previously, civil wars were only explained as a consequence of irrationality and inexplicably primordial qualities of human beings (Berdal, 2005). Thus, the blur between state and non-state forces is more evident in less developed countries where state failure is almost inevitable.

At the onset of the twenty-first century, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) have presented statistical findings that argue that the economic incentives to challenge the authority of the nation-state are the primary reason why insurgents often pursue violence in civil wars. This debate whether economic reasons precede ethnic or socio-political reasons in civil wars gave rise to the '*greed*' argument in the debate of civil war onset and duration. On the other hand, Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Keen (2012) have provided criticisms that it is virtually impossible to create generalizations on the causes of civil wars since they have to be studied on a case-to-case basis. This led to the rise of the '*grievance*' argument where civil wars are caused by complex ethnic and social processes that heavily depend on the historical and political context of the countries

involved. Thus, the case of the Moro conflict provides an excellent opportunity to test these arguments on a civil war that has plagued a country for decades.

## **Methodology**

### ***Data and Method***

The study has utilized the data from the Uppsala Conflict Program (2020) dataset on External Support. In particular, the study used the data on MILF support against the government of the Philippines from 1990-2008. According to the dataset, there were 19 observations ( $N = 19$ ) on MILF support from external actors in its campaign against the Philippine government. Due to the fact that the total number of observations in the dataset did not reach the minimum number of observations for regression analysis ( $N < 30$ ), the study only employed descriptive statistics in explaining the observations from the dataset.

In analyzing the data, the study generated a separate dataset that lists the observations documented in the large- $N$  dataset on external support for the MILF. Since the study's independent variable is Moro diasporic support, the generated observations were initially classified as *diasporic* (D) and *non-diasporic* (ND) to distinguish the observations regarding diasporic support.

Moreover, the study wanted to replicate the methods used by Collier and Hoeffler (2004) in proving the greed and grievance framework as a primary explanation of the relationship between diaspora and conflict. According to the framework, diasporic support increases the risk of conflict by providing political and financial support to rebels in their respective homelands.

Consequently, this assumption was empirically tested by Mariani *et al.* (2018) by providing a simple model of conflict by simulating how a diaspora can support a rebellion using model building in regression analysis using the cases of the Sri Lankan, Irish, Somalian, Croatian, and Cuban diasporas' involvement in their respective homeland conflicts. On the other hand, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) have proposed a caveat in this assumption that although there is substantial evidence that diasporas can cause a conflict to endure, it does not represent a truism that all conflicts are caused primarily by diasporic support since there are other factors that might cause the conduct to endure for a longer period.

### ***Results and Discussion***

Upon the initial coding of the observations generated from the dataset, the study found a notable finding. It can be observed that most of the funding and support come from non-diasporic sources such as hostile states and international terrorist networks.

By using frequency analysis to illustrate this, most of the funding that the MILF received in its insurgency came from other international sources. These sources can be categorized into three: (1) states supporting the insurgency; (2) international terrorist networks; and (3) international non-governmental organizations. Initially, the study attempted to distinguish the financial sources of the MILF rebellion on the presence and absence of diasporic support. This can be summarized in the table below:

**Table 1.** Category of Funding to the MILF

(N=19)

Category of Funding	Observations (total)	Percentage
Diasporic (D)	0	0
Non-diasporic (ND)	18	94.74
Others	1	5.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100</b>

It can be observed from the table that an absence of diasporic support is present in the dataset. Most observations can be derived from the fact that the sources of financial support to the Moro insurgency emanate from international sources that are not diasporic. For example, Abuza (2005) cites the case of Malaysian and Libyan support for the MILF in the 1990s as a part of a wider campaign of Islamic states to support Islamic-led secessionist movements. Nonetheless, Malaysian support for the MILF waned in the early 2000s due to the latter’s relationship with terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah as its primary benefactors in its campaign against the Philippine government (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, it can be inferred that the rise of radical Islamist groups has increased their support for the MILF after the 9/11 attacks. The launching of counterinsurgency programs by the Philippine government can be credited to the rise of extremist groups in Mindanao such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the Maute group (Perez, 2020). Such a trend is well documented in the dataset where military and financial support was present in the MILF insurgency from 1990 until 2008 when the Philippine government and the MILF were about to sign the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). This was eventually declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court due to its ‘secessionist tone’ in creating a separate ancestral domain for the Moros (Candelaria, 2018).

Prior to the signing of the MOA-AD, most financial support to the MILF came from radical Islamist groups like Jemaah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda with strongholds in Malaysia and Indonesia. Based on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2020), the MILF received mostly financial and logistical support from these Islamist groups ranging from financial/economic support, access to military and intelligence infrastructure, to the training of combatants on guerilla warfare. This can be summarized in the table below.

**Table 2.** Distribution of External Support to the MILF

(N=19)

External Supporter	Observations (total)	Percentage
Jemaah Islamiyah	7	36.84
Al-Qaida	6	31.58
IIRO	5	26.32
CPP	1	5.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100</b>

From the total observations in the dataset, more than half of the funding to the MILF insurgency is from international terrorist networks such as the Al Qaeda group and Jemaah Islamiyah. The former is alleged to have links with Osama bin Laden after the 9/11 attacks in the United States. According to Banlaoi (2006), the Al Qaeda group in the Middle East was able to establish links in Southeast Asia by providing funding schemes to separatist movements in the MILF and terrorist activities in the ASG, with the latter forming a terrorist group out of their disgruntlement on the developments of the MILF peace process. In contrast, the Jemaah Islamiyah is notorious for providing support to Islamic terrorists in the establishment of an Islamic state in Southeast Asia (Ressa, 2011).

Another notable finding in the dataset is the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in funding the Moro insurgency. According to the dataset, most funding in the MILF came from a Saudi Arabia-based NGO known as International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO). According to Abuza (2003), Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, one of Osama bin Laden’s brothers-in-law, established several Islamic organizations and charities in the Philippines for charity work but channeled money to separatist and terrorist groups. Thus, this explains how the MILF was able to create a web of funding sources from both legitimate and illegitimate sources to sustain its rebellion against the Philippine government.

Unfortunately, it can be observed that the dataset does not even highlight the role of the Moro diaspora in the conflict. Despite various claims that the Moro diaspora made some attempt to provide support to the ongoing Bangsamoro conflict, it has not played a prominent role in ultimately determining the outcome of the Moro conflict that led to the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) last 2011. In sum, a brief summarization of the variables analyzed in this study is explained in the table below:

Deducing from the table, MILF support is not primarily ascribed to the Moro diaspora abroad. This can be attributed to two possible explanatory variables: (1) the presence of hostile states and radical groups who are motivated to support the insurgents to pursue their self-interests; and (2) internal funding from illicit activities and shadow economies.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics (Category of Funding & External Support)

(N=19)

Variable	Observations (total)	Percentage
<b>Category of Funding</b>	19	100
<i>Diasporic</i>	0	0
<i>Non-diasporic</i>	18	94.74
<i>Others</i>	1	5.26
<b>External Supporter</b>	19	100
<i>Jemaah</i>	7	36.84
<i>Al-Qaida</i>	6	31.58
<i>IIRO</i>	5	26.32
<i>CPP</i>	1	5.26

According to Franco (2016), due to the lack of Moro support abroad, the MILF had no choice but to engage itself in illicit activities such as shadow economies and by introducing the concept of *zakat*- a revenue-generating scheme levied on MILF-supporting peasants which make up almost two percent of the total MILF revenue stream.

Moreover, Lara (2016) provides a compelling explanation on how the Moro clans in Muslim Mindanao generate their income from shadow economies where local clans have created an underground economy ranging from the smuggling of illegal goods coming from Sabah, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Taiwan to the illegal trade of drugs and narcotics where Mindanao served as a transit route for the drug trade in Southeast Asia. These shadow economies have given the Moro clans more power in generating funds for their electoral campaigns on various election periods in Muslim Mindanao. Moreover, these clans who are usually affiliated with the MILF, also provide security to MILF insurgents in Mindanao as manifested in the 2015 Mamasapano attacks that resulted in the deaths of 44 policemen from the Special Action Force (SAF) of the Philippine National Police (PNP).

To put it briefly, we can infer that there are three possible reasons why the MILF has been successful in prolonging the conflict until the signing of a peace agreement in 2014 under the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). One is the increased role of international organizations and hostile states against the Philippine government that provided the MILF with weapons, financial assistance, and training of combatants. Second, the ability of the MILF to generate income from illicit economic activities such as shadow economies and illegitimate tax schemes for its supporters. Finally, the MILF’s ability to gather funds from legitimate sources and use it for its insurgency is also notable in the case of the IIRO.

Although there were instances when the Moro diaspora was mobilized to provide support to the insurgency (Wilson, 2009), there is no adequate evidence proving its decisive role in contributing to the MILF's success in prolonging its insurgency against the Philippine government. Drawing from Keen's (2012) premise that civil wars are not primarily motivated by economic incentives alone, the following arguments can be inferred based on the results generated in the dataset. These interpretations can provide alternative justifications for the research problem raised in this study.

First, based on the dataset, neighboring countries such as Malaysia and other Islamic countries such as Libya have interests in supporting the MILF due to the international campaign of supporting their fellow Muslims against a Christian-dominated government in Manila. Furthermore, it can be theorized that if the Bangsamoro is successful in seceding itself from the Philippines, then it can be the latest addition to the *ummah* of Muslim-dominated states in Southeast Asia. This phenomenon is best captured in the *bad neighbor's theory* proposed by Weiner (1996) where an ethnic group aiming for secession can produce more refugees and create more instability in the region. These refugee flows eventually provide opportunities for other states to intervene in the conflict. Citing the case of the Moros in Mindanao, Weiner (1996) explains that territorial ethnic conflicts give neighboring states more reason to interfere in the internal affairs of the dominant state since the mobilized ethnic group can retaliate against the dominant state's repressive policy of preventing the rebellion. In response, this can force a neighboring state to participate in the conflict for the conflict not to spill within its borders (Elbadawi & Sambanis, 2002). This phenomenon can be observed from Malaysian support to the MILF in the 1990s which sought to prevent the expansion of the MILF's conflict activities in Malaysia as a consequence of the Moro civil war (Franco, 2016).

Second, rebel groups can generate illegitimate funds despite the state's ability to prevent it from acquiring financial assistance from legal sources. Lara (2016) argues that shadow economies are often established in conflict regions as a response to the state's inability to provide economic security to discriminated ethnic groups. Eventually, local clans and insurgent groups like the MILF fill in the power vacuum by creating income-generating collection schemes for their armed struggle in exchange for security for the civilians living in these disputed territories. Consequently, a weak state such as the Philippines ultimately evolves into a 'warlord state' where elite control becomes a key component of state control (Sidel, 1989; Lara, 2016).

Finally, the ability to channel legal sources of funding into terrorist activities is also an emerging causal variable on how ethnic conflicts can endure over time. Citing the case of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) in the Colombian civil war, Saab and Taylor (2009) explain how the insurgent group was able to launder money obtained from the illegal drug trafficking of narcotics in Colombia by transferring it to offshore accounts. Additionally, the FARC can recruit members who provided contributions to its

armed struggle against the Colombian government in return for higher salaries. Thus, the similar abilities of both the FARC and MILF are a manifestation that insurgents can mobilize legitimate funds into illegal activities to reap the benefits of waging long-term civil wars for their benefit.

Despite the study's initial hypothesis on the role of the Moro diaspora in the Mindanao conflict, the results eventually gave rise to other possible explanations. These explanations can be useful in providing policy solutions in determining possible causal variables that motivate insurgents in waging long-term wars. Moreover, the study affirms the caveat proposed by Collier and Hoeffler (2004) that some civil wars may not be diasporic in nature, thus, it is prudent for scholars of conflict studies not to generalize that the onset and duration of civil wars are more likely caused by the mobilization of a diaspora.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, there are two notable contributions generated from the study. Despite the initial assumption that a Moro diaspora is exacerbating the Mindanao conflict, other notable variables have emerged upon analyzing the Uppsala Conflict Dataset (2020) such as terrorist networks, hostile states, and NGOs. Moreover, the presence of internal financing within a rebellion is also highlighted as an alternative form of financial support to prolong an insurgency.

First, a major contribution that this study has provided is the viability of the greed and grievances argument to explain why civil wars continue to plague less developed countries such as the Philippines. Utilizing the presence or absence of a diaspora as an explanatory variable, the study has provided an empirical and theoretical explanation that affirms an important finding in the greed and grievances framework that some civil wars are not only motivated by economic incentives alone but also by historical and social realities that continue to shape an insurgency's existence over time.

Finally, the onset and duration of a civil war as an explanatory dependent variable can be caused by a multitude of variables that can serve as a starting point for future studies. The emergence of alternative variables that might have caused the MILF insurgency provides practical policy directions in finally addressing the root causes of the conflict.

Thus, there are two major issues that the study has raised for future studies. One is a possible explanation for why the Moro diaspora was not able to fully mobilize in supporting its homeland insurgents, unlike other diasporic-driven insurgencies around the world. Lastly, the existence of a coherent Moro diaspora should also be scrutinized in the context of why the other explanatory variables can provide more compelling reasons why the Moro insurgency has endured over time. Nonetheless, diasporic mobilization, illegitimate sources of funding, and international actors are valuable explanatory tools in understanding why ethnic conflicts have motivated key conflict actors to pursue intractable insurgencies.

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# Syria: Proxy Wars in the Middle East

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**Abstract:** The conflict in Syria quickly escalated into a complex and prolonged civil war where states outside the conflict fueled rebel groups to fight. The onset of multiple proxy wars befell Syria. Proxy war happens when a ruler of a state devises and facilitates the provision of support to a rebel group that is engaged in carrying out violent activities in another state. Thus, an external state can influence the outcome of a civil war without having to bear the heavy costs of sending its army forces. States that wage proxy wars risk a potential conflict escalation, and gamble with provoking retaliation by either the offending state or its allies. Furthermore, inadvertent consequences of backing rebel forces are also possible such as international condemnation. So, why does a state choose to form a relationship with a proxy group, instead of intervening directly? Why invest money and military power in a third party that could lead to a prolonged conflict? The analysis highlights that the political survival of regimes in the Middle East caused leaders to support rebel groups in Syria. I present a causal mechanism that is based on transnational threats to explain the phenomenon of proxy war in the Syrian civil war.

**Keywords:** *Syria, proxy war, Middle East, qualitative analysis, foreign policy.*

## Introduction

Empirical research shows that external support to rebels fuels the groups to pose an “effective military challenge to their rivals” (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010, p. 421) and “fight ferociously” (Cunningham *et al.*, 2009, p. 710). Scholars of conflict highlighted the risk that the type of warfare, either guerilla or irregular, can also change when a rebel group receives extensive and continuous external support that can result in a change in the balance of military capabilities between

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the two warring parties<sup>1</sup> (Lockyer, 2010) and demonstrates empirically, the instrumental role of the balance of capabilities in shaping the form of warfare that develops in civil wars. It contends that the current common practice of labelling civil wars as either guerrilla or conventional (which is usually meant to accurately characterise the type of warfare throughout an entire civil war. Indeed, states that support violent non-state actors (VNSAs) in conflicts may accelerate their military involvement in a conflict, and possibly provoke the retaliation of the offending state and its allies (Bapat, 2012). So, if research has shown that the presence of external actors in civil wars means that a conflict can last longer, be bloodier and negotiations for a settlement can be harder, why do states choose to provide external support to VNSAs instead of intervening directly?

Almost all scholars working on proxy war and external intervention agree on one aspect—that states calculate the costs and risks to decide which type of intervention they will choose. Still, when asking why states choose to carry out proxy war rather than sending their troops to a conflict zone to support their preferred warring side, this rational-choice explanation leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Notably, which cases are worthy of military intervention and which ones are not? Do these cases connect to geopolitical or economic interests? Theoretical contributions from the external interventions' scholarship have unearthed multiple linkages between actors to such an extent that it seems that numerous factors can lead to the same outcome (Hannigan, 2019). Indeed, studies on external intervention have created an abundance of potential motivations to send troops in a civil war. Their primary focus has deliberately been the linkages between the intervener and the target state.

In addition, proxy war is always presented as the state's dubious moral response to the international community's forceful norms of non-intervention in the internal affairs of third countries. The low popularity among domestic audiences of such a foreign policy as norms breaking is seen as another reason why states prefer a limited intervention. In other words, proxy war is understood based on facilitating low-cost foreign policy in an environment where intervention is constrained. Still, states do not choose proxy war only because they cannot choose a direct intervention. As recent events in Ukraine and Azerbaijan have shown, states are capable and willing to use their armed forces if necessary. Consequently, a proxy war is regarded as a foreign policy to respond to a threat in a regional setting.

The question this paper provides an answer to is: why did Saudi Arabia wage a proxy war to bring military and operational equality with Assad forces instead of intervening directly to challenge Iran's influence? And why did Turkey wage a proxy war instead of intervening directly to ensure that the Kurdish threat would not compromise its

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1 Specifically, the change could be among three types of warfare: (i) guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare; (ii) irregular warfare; and (iii) conventional warfare.

borders? Why did Iran wage a proxy war with Assad, thus risking a direct confrontation with other regional powers and losing the ideological superiority against the US instead of not intervening in the war?

Drawing my argument from existing research I connect research on the transnational threat (Tamm, 2016) and research on revisionist states (Cooley *et al.*, 2019) to argue for a causal mechanism that leads states to proxy war in conflicts even if they have the military power to interfere in a conflict. In the causal mechanism that I propose, I make a case that states that have to deal with transnational threats and tend to support the order of the system tend to orchestrate a proxy war through rebel groups. If they must deal with a transnational threat, and they are against the international order then they tend to wage proxy wars through the state's paramilitaries. I propose a causal mechanism that works at the domestic level as well as the international and regional levels. There are four steps in the mechanism, with two steps focusing on the domestic and another two on the regional or international level.

This article contributes to the field of proxy war studies as it provides a qualitative-driven analysis of the civil war in Syria. The presentation of a causal mechanism on transnational threat is a contribution to explaining the phenomenon of the internationalization of civil wars. Furthermore, the focus on the Middle East serves the purpose of contrasting the foreign policy of states located in a single region.

The paper develops into five parts. First, I present the existing literature on proxy wars and the connection to the modern proxy war along with the concept. Secondly, I present the causal mechanism of proxy war and in doing so, I indicate how a proxy war is present and the causal connection between the steps of the proxy war mechanism. The last section of the paper focuses on presenting the way the mechanism was observed in the cases of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey and discussing the findings and the validity of the hypothesized mechanism.

### **Modern Proxy Wars**

The prevalence of proxy war should be linked to two major shifts in conflict studies. The first one points to the emergence of violent non-state actors and their essential involvement in challenging the state and its sovereignty through insurgencies (Cunningham *et al.*, 2009; Davies *et al.*, 2022). In addition, the second shift addresses the international aspect that internal affairs have come to have, especially in conflicts where third parties' interventions seem to have risen dramatically in the last decade (Byman *et al.*, 2001; Regan, 1996, 2000). Those two shifts have sparked the growth of examining and evaluating, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the role of the violent non-state actors in conflicts, either in the form of insurgent groups or terrorist groups and their motivations to receive support from external parties. Surprisingly though, much less attention has been paid to the motivation of states for enabling proxies in conflicts.

Proxy war is often regarded as a phenomenon of the Cold War. Bar-Siman-Tov (1984) argued that the motivations that drove the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to proxy wars during the Cold War instead of intervening militarily and triggering a possible conflict escalation that would have led to a nuclear clash between them, can be summarized in five reasons: (a) they were no vital interests in a conflict that could justify a direct intervention; (b) even if there were vital interests in a conflict, the risk of direct intervention was too high; (c) the crisis could have been solved without intervention; (d) neither domestic nor international legitimacy for intervening; (e) military actions were lacking in options. Duner (1981) and Towle (2022) also pointed to these reasons that distinguished proxy war as a preferable policy to direct intervention. Indeed, these studies depicted the Cold War motivations where proxy wars fulfilled the needs of the Great Powers, and consequently, they cannot explain the motivations of states that do not have the status of a Great Power but still wage proxy wars, for instance, Congo, Uganda, and Sudan (Prunier, 2004).

I contend that proxy wars are still waged today, and the Syrian conflict is a case in point. The Syrian civil war is an internationalized intrastate but also a proxy war since interveners often aim to defeat each other's proxy and not necessarily to end the conflict. The onset of multiple proxy wars befell Syria (Fearon, 2013). Yet, even if the case of Syria is regarded as a complicated proxy war that plays on regional and international tensions, it does not belong to the Cold War period. As scholars studying conflicts in Africa highlighted as well, proxy wars are not outdated, and explanations for the onset of proxy wars need to be part of the research agenda. Indeed, the existing explanations for the onset of proxy wars do not seem to fully explain why states decided to wage them in the heart of the Middle East. Simply put, proxy wars are not limited to the Cold War.

Contemporary studies have debated the appeal of proxy wars and the reasons that states have to enable proxies in conflicts, even if the Cold War is over. Pattison (2015) and Salehyan (2010) argue that arming rebels is a less costly strategy for the sponsoring state, and it is achieved without the knowledge of the international community. In addition, Dombrowski & Reich (2015), who examined sponsorship strategies, underlined that the reduced financial costs for the states, the low number of casualties, and the possibility of easier disengagement attributed to the appeal of these strategies. Moreover, Salehyan (2010) added to these motivations arguing that the states that decide to support an insurgency can benefit from the rebels' knowledge of the intricacies of the specific conflict, such as the population and the terrain, while also presenting a "local" face that would prove to their advantage. While Mumford (2013) argued that the ideological motives and the obsolescence of major war are the two key factors that motivated states to proxy wars and not the realist approach based on interest, Loveman (2002), explained that proxy wars are closely linked to the technological progress and the institutional change that accounts for engaging civil societies and vibrant liberal

democracies that are strongly constrained to intervene directly to conflicts. Yet, despite these prevailing trends, Regan (2010), notes that despite all the research on interventions in civil wars “we know next to nothing about the goals of the interveners”.

So, despite prior scholarship on proxy war motivations, it remains unclear why some states decide to wage proxy wars instead of intervening directly.

Existing research on the Congo Wars identifies that political survival is the prime cause to explain external support for rebel groups. This study examines the presence of a hypothesized mechanism that focuses on the transnational threat (Tamm, 2016). Indeed, this mechanism can explain why there is a tendency for rulers of autocratic regimes to use third parties that will create a threat to the survival of the other ruler and, in the best case, overthrow them, instead of waiting for an opportunity to strengthen their army forces to attack their rivals. In the case of Syria, we can see that all states that decided to take an active part in supporting various warring groups face, in one way or another, a threat to their political survival, especially if we consider the timing of the conflict and the tensions present in the region.

### **Conceptualization of Proxy War**

Although proxy war is identified by some as a Cold War phenomenon, it remains relevant and, as I argue, increasingly recurrent in today’s world affairs. Examples are abundant during the Cold War when proxy wars were waged in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Angola, and El Salvador (Mearsheimer, 2003). Current examples are more frequent: during the 2005–2010 Chadian civil war France supported the Chadian government against insurgent groups, shared logistics, and reconnaissance intelligence. Libya trained members of the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, and Liberia gave material support during the 1991–2002 Sierra Leone Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of proxy war was scarcely developed during the Cold War (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1984; Duner, 1981). However, recent scholarship has provided a more nuanced analysis of how proxy war is connected with external support in conflicts. Rauta (2021), as one of the leading scholars on proxy war, claims that indirect and direct intervention belong to the same concept using Sartori’s work on the concept to argue for the “inclusion of a sub-type” to military intervention, that is, proxy war. One attribute that all proxy war scholars agree on is delegation. A sponsoring state that supports a proxy is not officially at war with another state, but it employs a strategy to defeat its enemies indirectly. In

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2 Third-party external support in civil wars is an empirical phenomenon closely related to a proxy war. External support describes a state’s decision to directly influence a civil war, putting the specific civil strife as the focal point of the analysis where the agent—the intervening state—interferes in a conflict, whereas proxy war describes the foreign policy of a state to indirectly engage in a conflict through a proxy.

other words, these states have delegated their monopoly of violence to the proxy in the conflict to achieve their goals. In addition, the sponsor in a proxy war can retreat from the conflict by solely stopping the provision of assistance to the proxy without having to bear the costs of defeat or negotiate for a conflict resolution. I propose that proxy war happens when a ruler of a state devises and facilitates the provision of support to a rebel group that is engaged in carrying out violent activities in another state.

## Research design

My method is process tracing aiming to test a hypothesized causal mechanism using a case study. Given that the assessment of a mechanism requires a result that will confirm or deny the presence of a cause to an outcome, then the assessment of different theories of mechanisms against each other (difference-making evidence) cannot be done in the process tracing of a theory. Essentially, process tracing is answering the question “if a mechanism is present in a case to produce an outcome”, and not “if that mechanism is the only one producing the outcome” (Beach & Pedersen, 2016, p. 167).

Bennett (2013), advocating for the development of causal mechanisms in the study of transnational civil war, suggests that by pushing the border between observable and unobservable worlds we can infer our mechanisms. Checkel (2013) also agrees that causal mechanisms are “ultimately unobservable ontological entities”. However, “as scientific realists maintain, our theories about mechanisms often generate observable implications on what should be true if the posited mechanisms operate in the manner that we theorize. We can test these implications to assess the accuracy of our theories, even if we cannot observe mechanisms of causation directly or unproblematically assess how well our theories fit the observable evidence” (Checkel, 2013, p. 208). In the following section, I present the causal mechanism of proxy war based on transnational threats (Tamm, 2016).

## Core assumptions and scope conditions of the causal mechanism

The unit of analysis is the leader of a state, specifically the leaders of autocratic regimes. The analytical focus is on the micro-level since the theory examines the strategic interactions of neighboring leaders, domestic coalitions, and opposition groups in a regime.

The first assumption is a leader’s willingness to hold on to office.<sup>3</sup> After all, political survival is an existential aim for all leaders. The second assumption is uncertainty due to incomplete information about the preferences of other actors, as the beliefs of the

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3 Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* *The Logic of Political Survival*, p. 21. Tamm (2016) mentions also a second assumption about the maximization of revenue, however, he argues that political survival is the cause that can explain most, if not all, the cases of transnational alliances in sub-Saharan Africa after the Cold War.

leader guide the choice of a policy. In this case, fear, and mistrust among leaders and between supporting coalitions inside the regime are always a given. A third assumption derives from the concept of proxy war specifically, namely the duration of the conflict. The duration of the relationship between the sponsor and the proxy is present for a significant period so that it is valid to infer that a state provides support for the achievement of a specific policy goal.

There is a limitation to the theory since it focuses on leaders who have an increased probability of facing a threat of removal from office through coups or rebellions. This limited scope of the theory affects the cases that may be applied to and evaluated. Nevertheless, the theory can apply in the cases of the leaders in the Middle East since most of them face challenges to their survival. Indeed, leaders of the Middle East saw a total of twenty-seven coup attempts, between 1980 and 2013, fifteen of which triggered the replacement of incumbents (Albrecht, 2015).

### **Causal Mechanism of Proxy War**

There are four (4) steps in the mechanism (Figure 1). Here, I provide further explanation for each step:

In unconsolidated democracies, rulers want to ensure their grip on power by any means. Coup-proofing is one of the most common policies to avoid the capture of the regime by a small group within the regime's apparatus (Quinlivan, 1999). Indeed, it is common for the states in the Middle East to engage in coup-proofing where "pervasive division and personal rivalry" are part of the system (Bill & Springborg, 2000). Especially for the Gulf States "national security" often conflates with "regime security" (Ulrichsen, 2009). The funding of parallel militias and security forces in conflicts instead of army forces is a strategy of coup-proofing. After all, for rentier states such as Saudi Arabia where oil revenues allow the provision of ammunition and financial aid to rebel groups, it also ensures the proxy that the sponsor is a stable partner and in this case, it is easier for rebel groups to become amenable and loyal to the regime (Regan *et al.*, 2009).

In the first step, the ruler perceives a threat to the survival of the regime. This threat may be presented in two different forms: (i) as the belief of the ruler that a rival is about to provide arms to domestic opposition; and (ii) a neighboring ruler is providing arms to a rebel group inside the regime. Central for the mechanism to work is the ruler's perception of threats from neighboring states. The logic of political survival, based on rational choice and political economy theories, assumes that a ruler seeks to survive, and this is an instinctive political goal. Along with the assumption that the position of the ruler is envied, we can explain the constant worry of the ruler of external and internal threats (Bueno De Mesquita *et al.*, 2003). *Step 1: When a leader of an autocratic regime perceives a threat to their survival, either in the form of a coup or a rebellion, then they will seek a way to protect the regime from falling.*

As a second step, the ruler wants to respond to the transnational threat. A regional power has a specific stance towards the order, which might change when there are imbalances in the system, but more often than not it has a specific worldview and a strategy in the region. If the state is pro-order and the system is not unipolar then it follows that the regional power will not want to disturb the order by initiating a military intervention against another state, especially without the support of the international community. In this case, it will orchestrate a proxy war with a proxy providing mostly financial support as well as training. If the state is anti-order and the system is not unipolar then it follows that the regional power will want to disturb the system and decide to wage a proxy war with a proxy providing financial, technical, and military support and readiness to intervene with its army in a conflict. *Step 2: a leader evaluates the position of the state towards the regional system.*

As a third step, the ruler has clear intentions to respond to the threat but there are two possible caveats that concern the military effectiveness of the armed forces. Firstly, the repercussions of coup-proofing often render a military's effectiveness in undertaking a large-scale intervention operationally difficult. If the ruler decides to undertake a direct intervention to respond to the transnational threat, meaning that the army will be reinforced, then he compromises the survival of the regime. Indeed, rulers often have to counteract threats deriving from the anarchic international system as well as the domestic level that is coupled with external influence. In these competitive environments, the ruler seeks a safer reaction to a major threat without having to jeopardize his political survival. Secondly, even if the military is capable of conducting interventions then two incentives push rulers to support rebel groups. First, the value added to gain competitive advantages in a conflict through the use of militant groups that have expertise about the terrain, the targets, and the local populations. Second, due to the popular/widely acknowledged international norms of non-aggression, the possibility of international sanctions in the case of direct intervention rises exponentially, so rulers may find proxy war, especially covert actions, a more appealing policy. *Step 3: When a ruler decides to respond to the threat it weighs on two possible issues that rise against direct intervention: (a) the army becoming a threat to the regime; and (b) the danger of the international community to impose sanctions.*

The final step is that the ruler initiates a proxy war. The provision of support to a rebel group is consistent and continuous. The rebel group fights the common rival on its territory. The causes that prompt states to wage proxy wars inside a civil war are often presented as long abstract lists of potential causes that may lead to the onset of proxy wars.<sup>4</sup> However, little attention has been paid to the development of theories

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4 For example: (i) ideological solidarity with a particular group promoting a common cause; (ii) national/religious ties with a proxy that fights a common enemy; (iii) assisting a military

	Cause (Transnational threat)	Foreign Policy assessment	Domestic considerations	Outcome (Proxy war)
Entity and Activity	A leader of an autocratic regime perceives a threat to their survival	The leader and their elite group evaluate the position of the state towards the regional system	The leader intends to respond to the threat a. There is no military army effectiveness of the to violate the non-aggression norms	The leader decides to establish a relationship with a proxy
Theoretical explanation/ motivation	Regime Survival (Bueno De Mesquita et al., 2003; Tamm, 2016)	Regional powers (Cooley et al., 2019)	Repercussions of coup proofing (Quinlivan, 1999)	Proxy war (Karlén et al., 2021; Rauta, 2021)

**Figure 1.** The causal mechanism of proxy war

and mechanisms that explain the decision to wage proxy wars. This mechanism works at the domestic level as well as the international and regional levels. Two out of four steps in the mechanism focus on the domestic and the other two focus on the regional or international level. Their steps have entities that act leaving behind “traces” that we can evaluate through empirical research. This way, we can integrate their actions into a framework that either sets a mechanism in motion or not. In any case, the mechanism proves that there were actions that were specifically aimed at the desired outcome that the states decided to pursue. *Step 4: When a ruler decides to respond to the threat and a proxy is available to be used against the state that posed the threat, the ruler prefers the added value of using that proxy rather than intervening directly.*

### **Case selection**

The conflict in Syria is not just another civil war. Therefore, many of our understandings and analyses of the issue need to be tested or challenged to grasp the specific qualities of this conflict. For this reason, I contest that qualitative research is indeed fitting to examine the reasons that proxy wars erupted in the region. Second, using a theory that was applied in the cases of the Congo wars to test the case of the Syrian civil war is a good starting point since they might have underlying commonalities. I follow George and Bennett (2005) in defining a case study as a well-defined aspect of a historical episode that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historical event itself.

### **Syria’s proxy war**

#### *Situating the case*

The Iraq War changed the regional balance of the Middle East: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey rose to powerful regional players (Al Tamamy, 2012) its true consequence for the Kingdom was the changed regional and international strategic environment (It is important to note that the views stated in this paper do not intentionally represent any official stance.. These states have the power to shape outcomes in the regional system; however, for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the projection of this power is more negative than for other regions (Fawcett, 2005). Regionalization of security describes how regional states and other actors have engaged with local security dilemmas by becoming providers of security replacing or complementing the role of great powers or the UN (Fawcett, 2005). However, the demarcation of the region also creates the illusion of a common interest in cooperation which is not present in the case of the MENA. Insecurity and interdependences, however high, do not provide enough incentives for the states to cooperate more broadly and especially more effectively. Rather,

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campaign to achieve shared objectives; (iv) greed that is linked to financial gain; and (v) revenge based on an enduring rivalry.

this push for cooperation that stems from external involvement in the region creates more tensions and incompatibilities among the states that lead to fragmentation and ephemeral results. States of the Middle East have a record of being “poor balancers and weak hegemons” (Fawcett, 2005).

**Table 1.** Middle East states in Syria’s proxy war, their foreign policy, sponsorship relationship, proxy and type of support.

	Foreign Policy	Sponsorship Relationship	Type of Support	Proxy
Saudi Arabia	Protect national interest in the “near abroad”	Orchestration	High	Free Syrian Army
Iran	Protect national interest	Orchestration	High	Syrian government
Turkey	Protect against the Kurdish threat and national interest in the aftermath of the civil war	Delegation	Low	Free Syrian Army

The protests in Dera’a and the transfusion of the Arab Spring to Syria took everyone by surprise and political calculations started from day one. However, at the beginning of the conflict, Syria seemed to have old and new allies, Russia and Iran, Turkey, and Qatar. None of them wanted Assad to lose power in the country. The stance of the allies and in general Middle Eastern rulers was to condemn the violence publicly and ask the protesters for a compromise. However, and this shows that in the Middle East mistrust is a given even among allies, the patience for Assad evaporated in just two months. In July- August 2011 Qatar and Turkey retracted their support.

The Syrian civil war became a “multi-layered, highly localized, and rapidly changing strategic conflict” (Sayigh, 2013). International rivalries, the rise of sectarianism, and the growing prominence of radical jihadist groups have created a chaotic situation on the ground. In Syria’s case, one of the features of the conflict that shaped its onset and evolution is that there are two unequal groups. These two groups are divided over secular and religious cleavages, ideological Baathist versus non-Baathist, and core versus periphery issues (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, 2011) post-Cold War international system. We also find that after controlling for per capita income, more ethnically or religiously diverse countries have been no more likely to experience significant civil violence in this period. We argue for understanding civil war in this period in terms of insurgency or rural guerrilla warfare, a particular form of military practice that can be harnessed to diverse political agendas. The factors that explain which countries have been at risk for civil war are not their ethnic or religious characteristics but rather the conditions that favor insurgency. These include poverty—which marks financially and bureaucratically weak states and also favors rebel recruitment—political instability, rough terrain, and large populations. We wish to thank the many people who provided comments on earlier versions of this paper in a series of seminar presentations. The

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### *Saudi Arabia*

From its establishment onwards, Saudi Arabia has been an autocratic regime, and this remains so until today. The Arab Spring challenged the foundations of that regime and the social contract with both the Sunni and the Shi'a citizens legitimized its power. What is puzzling, though, in the case of Saudi Arabia was how King Abdullah dealt with uprisings in other states. For example, one of the crucial questions that this paper examines is why Saudi Arabia had a different reaction to the Arab Spring protests. In specific terms, why did the Kingdom support the regime in the case of Bahrain, by directly intervening through the Gulf Cooperation Council, but intervened indirectly in the case of Syria?

Iran was the main rival in both cases and Saudi Arabia was getting increasingly frustrated with the way the regional status quo was shifting towards Iran. What happened with Bahrain on 14 March 2011 when Saudi Arabia sent 1,000 troops was not repeated with Syria even though there was an engagement of Saudi Arabia in the Syrian civil war. In both cases, analyses have emphasized that the rivalry between the two states is key to understanding the policies that Iran and Saudi Arabia, have implemented in response to the protests. However, in the case of Saudi Arabia, we see that there is a different outcome. I hold that interstate rivalry explains why Saudi Arabia responded to the challenges, but it does not allow us to understand why it will go for an indirect instead of a direct intervention against a rival, since in both cases Iran and Shi'a groups were participating in the uprisings. Another question that we should consider is: why did Saudi Arabia prefer not to intervene, while it had the chance to challenge Iran in Syria?

The Arab Spring uprisings did reach Saudi Arabia, specifically in the Eastern Province where the residents of the province are mostly Saudi Arabian "Twelver" Shi'a citizens along with a Sunni minority (Wehrey, 2013). From 1979 until 2011 the whole population of the province was targeted by the regime, suffering from "economic neglect and political marginalization" (Wehrey, 2013). One of the salient/predominant issues was the minimal engagement of this group with the general administration. The Shi'a population of the Eastern Province continued to have grievances in 2011, even if these had changed over the years. When the Iranian Republic was established in 1979, the Shi'a people in Saudi Arabia endorsed the revolution and there were many protests in the province. Iran seized the opportunity to gain influence in Saudi Arabia by establishing an Office of Liberation Movements in Iran that aimed to spread the revolution to other Shi'a communities in the MENA region. Throughout the 1980's the "Movements" was responsible for two attacks in Mecca in 1986 and 1987 in Mecca (O'Hern, 2012, p. 71). However, Iran was not able to gain the influence it desired through the local support in Saudi Arabia and preferred to have an alternative approach. In 1996 it created a militant

group in Saudi Arabia named Hezbollah al-Hejaz that was responsible for the Khobar Towers bombings (Kirkpatrick, 2015). In the following years, the relations between the two states started to change and with the National Dialogue in 2003, the demonstrations in the province stopped. However, the rhetoric that the region has close relations with Iran did not disappear and was always raised in moments of crisis, especially by prominent clerical figures (Wehrey, 2013).

The catalyst to this threat was the “Day of Rage” on March 11, 2011 after a failed attempt of an elite group in the province to come to the negation table with the King and communicate the grievances of both Sunni and Shi’a communities failed. The “Hunayn Revolution” instigated by the Free Youth Coalition was backed by both Sunnis and Shi’as, but it failed to motivate many citizens to take to the streets (or mobilize many citizens). The situation changed when the intervention in Bahrain unraveled and the Shi’a community inside Saudi Arabia was framed by national TV as threatening to the national security. Even though the protests started as a local issue that both religious communities raised, from October 2011 onwards the Shi’a Saudi Arabian citizens protested and continued to escalate into what was called “the largest and longest protest movement in Saudi Arabia’s modern history” (Matthiesen, 2012; Amnesty International, 2011). Is the movement funded or found? a leader, the Shi’a cleric Nimr al-Nimr, who in his sermons and public speeches called for equality for the Saudi Arabian Shi’a community as well as the end of the monarchy while protesters shouted “Death to Al Saud” (Townsend, 2016; Staff, 2011)<sup>5</sup> condemning the Saudi family (Al Jazeera, 2011).

Saudi Arabia, through the Minister of Interior Naif bin ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz, accused Iran of backing the protests in the eastern city of Qatif (Peel, 2011). The minister was reported to have said: “Evil surrounds Saudi Arabia from every direction. We have the problems of Iraq to the north, Yemen to the south, the problems of Iran, which is threatening Saudi Arabia, [to the east], and the problems of Africa to the west. But, praise God, despite all this, we are experiencing stability and progress”(Yehoshua, 2011) and also here “a group of troublemakers... assembled... some on motorbikes and carrying petrol bombs as they began their actions to disrupt security at the behest of a foreign country which tried to undermine the security of the homeland in a blatant act of interference” (Reuters, 2011).

In this case, the mechanism worked as follows. An entity, namely the protests in the Eastern province created a tense environment for the Kingdom. The Kingdom believed that this specific uprising was exclusively related to the Shi’a population, and it failed to dress the Sunni population that was also present in the region. The perception of

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5 He was further accused in October 2014 that he is responsible for “foreign meddling” “in the Kingdom along with disobeying its rulers and taking up arms against the security forces”. (Reuters, 2011).

the threat was also evident in the way that Saudi Arabia's state press was framing the protestations as exclusively Shi'a. The connection to Iran was in this case quite easy to make since the region used to receive support from Iran.

In a similar tone, in October 2011 an alleged plot to kill the Saudi Ambassador in the US was also linked to Iran because Arbabsiar, the person responsible for the attempt according to Saudi Arabia, was recruited by his cousin who holds a senior post at the Quds Force of Iran (Finn, 2013).

The question if Saudi Arabia is a status-quo state or not has sparked a debate among analysts who take opposite stances on this matter (Kamrava, 2012; Reiger, 2013). But if one adopts the perspective of Riyadh, it was becoming more obvious by the day that Iran was gaining ideological ground and cashing in influence in states that were allies of Saudi Arabia, such as Egypt, where it could not do so previously. In this way, Iran was creating instability in the region with Bahrain and Yemen (Gulcan, 2016). Still, that does not prove that Saudi Arabia is a status quo state, rather it seems that in this specific instance, it regarded Syria as a pivotal case to prevent Iran from getting the upper hand in the region. It was opposing the status Iran was gaining, and in this way, Saudi Arabia was opposed to the possible balance of power in case Iran secured influence in Syria. In the meantime, though, Saudi Arabia was not explicitly against the order. Rather, it was pro-order concerning the international system and the regional system. That is why a confrontation with Iran would have meant that Saudi Arabia was challenging the order aiming to control the region and secure its place as the regional hegemon. Saudi Arabia wanted to stay in power but not in a way that could create friction with its allies and not in a way that could force the Kingdom to withdraw without securing a clear victory.

The ruling Saud family, which managed to unite the Arab peninsula during the period of state formation, understood that some concessions needed to be in place for the Al Saud family to be able to secure its reign over other tribes. In this case, rentier policies have been in place to ensure that political representation will be minimalized for the families that gain the privileges of running no-taxation businesses, a social contract that politically stabilizes the royal family (Mabon, 2012).

As Mabon mentions, Saudi Arabia has put different mechanisms of coup-proofing in place that perceived threats that stem not only from the military but also from oppositional groups inside the state (Mabon, 2013). First, he points to the fact that Saudi Arabia and the royal family focused on establishing itself as the legitimate ruling elite. The Al Saud was not just an elite that gained power over other elites but rather the elite that connected closely to Saudi Arabian identity, the link to the religious aspect of the regime that ensures the safety of the two holy Muslim places. Of course, one cannot overlook the parallel military, the National Guard, which as Quinlivan points out has to "ensure the security of the regime", under the Ministry of Interior that ensures that external threats will not affect the regime (Hertog, 2011; Quinlivan, 1999). So, we see

that Saudi Arabia has gone through coup-proofing strategies that could not take on such an extended engagement in Syria against the Assad regime by itself.

By the summer of 2011, many opposition groups in Syria wanted to receive external funding to secure their survival (Phillips, 2016). The Kingdom openly supported the rebel forces but was reluctant to be involved in the conflict since there were other pressuring situations in the region at the time (Zarras, 2018). In 2012, Saudi Arabia financed a large transfer of arms from Croatia to the Free Syrian Army in southern Syria. From then on the involvement of Saudi Arabia has continued to evolve (Chivers & Schmitt, 2013; Worth, 2013).

### *Iran*

In many cases, such as Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, the Iranian Republic effectively supports proxies that can promote Iranian interests on the ground. In similar ways, Iran used proxies in other conflicts from 1979 onwards that helped the state to facilitate relations with neighboring states while also having a revolutionary agenda against the international order (Ostovar, 2018; Tabatabai, 2018). Instrumental to that is the use of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) which was formed by militias that participated in the revolution and opposed the Shah. Of course, not all these groups unanimously supported Khomeini and once the regime was established, it had to undergo serious coup-proofing, especially after the Iraq-backed Nozheh coup plot in July 1980 to eliminate any threats of overturning the regime and also make sure that Artesh, the regular military force could stay, loyal to Khomeini (Axworthy, 2013, p. 185; Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019). The Artesh became more of a secondary force to IRGC, benefiting from privileges from access to resources and gaining influence over the regime, even if they gradually lost influence through the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. (Alfoneh, 2011). But IRGC, despite its initial difficulties, proved to be an effective force using guerrilla warfare that could ensure the security of Iran against Iraq (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019). The perception that the IRGC and its asymmetrical warfare could ensure the security of the revolutionary regime against a Western invasion was further entrenched with the idea that Iran was a David to the American Goliath. In this way, the Iranian Republic continued to facilitate relations with Shi'a and Sunni groups in the region, providing support through financial and military assistance but also providing social services and ideological influences (Wehrey *et al.*, 2009).

Iran responds to domestic but also to foreign groups that pose a threat to the regime. Access to sources on domestic politics in Iran is indeed very limited and they could also be misleading. , However, three main sources of externally funded sides act inside Iran: Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and some Sunni groups like Jaish ul-Adl, Jundallah, and Harakat Ansar Iran. ISIS began to be a threat to Iran before the beginning of the Syria civil war

and it was believed that Saudi Arabia was funding the group<sup>6</sup> (Williams, 2017). This sentiment was shared by Joe Biden, who said: “The Turks... the Saudis, the Emirates, etc, what were they doing? They were so determined to take down Syrian President Bashar al Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shi’a war, what did they do? They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tonnes of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad” (Usher, 2014).

However, the situation on the ground was evolving rapidly. In July 2011, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi sent close followers to set up a jihadist group in Syria, something that Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani succeeded in accomplishing by becoming the leader of JN (al-Nursa) in January 2012, and a few months later al-Nursa was one of the strongest forces fighting against Assad and was winning local support (Zelin, 2013). In the meantime, the FSA started to see al-Nursa as one of the best chances it had against Assad (Fletcher, 2012). The connection between AQI and al-Nursa is also supported by the American State Department sees al-Nursa as a front of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI): “Through these attacks, al-Nusra has sought to portray itself as part of the legitimate Syrian opposition while it is, in fact, an attempt by AQI to hijack the struggles of the Syrian people for its malign purposes” (Fletcher, 2012).

Meanwhile, a few months later the campaign “Breaking the Walls” started, which posed a serious threat not only to Syria but also to Iraq and Iran since the campaign was successful in freeing jihadists who participated in AQI attacks in 2006 and 2007 (Lewis, 2013; Wilson Center, 2019). The threat is real to the regimes of Syria and Iraq, both important states from the Iranian perspective.

The transnational threat was presented in Iran in the form of ISIS since Iran perceived that it was one of the top three targets of ISIS alongside the US and France (Tabatabai, 2018). It was also connected with the fact that the security of Iraq is very much connected to that of Iran (Malakoutikhah, 2018). So, the first part of the mechanism, that is an entity in the form of a transnational group, was ISIS in this case: it presented Iran with a threat to its regime. The threat of ISIS was evident to the world and especially the West in 2014 but Iran had a different perception of the crisis. In an interview the Iranian Foreign Minister mentioned “If Iraq dissolves, there will be chaos in the region. No one wants that” (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2015). That belief comes from the fact that Iran wants to oppose the scenario of Iraq splitting into three states based on their religious connection since such a scenario will pose a big threat to the borders of Iran (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2015).

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6 It is important to highlight that ISIS was not present in Iran. However, the belief of the Iranian government was that ISIS was active in its territory, something that can be seen also in the official statements that are discussed here.

Iran is a revisionist state, therefore it is not satisfied with the balance of power nor with the order in the regional system primarily (Ehteshami & Molavi, 2012; Russell, 2014). The official ideological stance against the system can be traced by Press TV as the English-language division of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) established in 2007. Radio and television broadcasting is controlled by the head of IRIB who is appointed by the Supreme Leader according to the constitution (Maysam, 2013). Of course, the ideology that is broadcasted is revisionist and adds proof to the fact that Iran is not content with the status quo and the order of the system (Firooz-Abadi, 2012; Wolf, 2018). However, the balance of power in the region does not allow Iran to directly challenge that order even if it is a revisionist state. It tries to challenge the order through indirect ways and influence key players of the regional system representing the “anti-Western axis” against Israel, the U.S., and Saudi Arabia. One can regard Iran as a “thin revisionist” (Behraves, 2018) “state revisionism” has been theoretically and empirically understudied. This article attempts to fill the lacuna by further conceptualizing revisionism and subsequently investigating its relationship with ontological (in. If we look at Iran through this lens as a “thin revisionist” that wants to influence the regional system it makes sense that they prefer to support Assad: they did want to change the regional status quo and the fall of Assad would probably mean that the order will be dictated by the international power, the U.S., and the regional power, Saudi Arabia.

In the ways to indirectly confront a regional player, Iran simply had a better chance to employ Hezbollah and the IRGC in the Syrian civil war. These actors both had strategic and battle knowledge that Assad was lacking (Fulton *et al.*, 2013). They could provide top-level support to Assad as well as intelligence support as part of the advisory mission, while they could also provide support to proxies in Syria and Hezbollah (Fulton *et al.*, 2013).

There is ample evidence that Iran stepped up its support as a response to the transnational threat of ISIS. Even if it was already engaged in the Syrian civil war by supporting Assad, the shift in material and strategic aspects is evident. Apart from that, we also see that what started as cautious support to an ally with some voices inside Iran calling to stop supporting Assad, changed in the following months (Abdo, 2011; Erlich, 2015).

According to U.S. officials, Iranian support for Syrian paramilitaries started in August 2012, when U.S. Secretary of Defense Panetta testified that there are “indications that [Iran is] trying to develop or trying to train a militia within Syria to be able to fight on behalf of the regime.” General Dempsey furthermore clarified that Iran called this militia Jaysh al-Sha’bi, or “the People’s Army,” and that it was “made up of Syrians, generally Shi’a and some Alawite” (BBC News, 2012).

The engagement of Iran in the conflict had been limited in the beginning, with only the provision of arms and ammunition through Iraq, while officers from IRGC’s Quds Force also had been transferred to the battlefields. In the months that followed the

involvement increased and Major-General Mohammed Ali Jafari publicly admitted that Iran was fighting alongside Assad (Hughes, 2014; Phillips, 2016).

Iran had intensified its involvement in Syria by late 2012 (Phillips, 2016, p. 161). One of the other pieces of evidence is that 48 Iranians were captured by a group of the Free Syrian Army in August 2012. Saudi Arabia broadcasted the event as a way to demonstrate the right decision they are making by supporting the rebels to their people (Cave & Saad, 2012). Iranians are stepping up their game from January 2012 onwards, when IRGC General Qassem Suleimani proposed a comprehensive strategy to Assad. General Ismail Gha'ani, deputy commander of the Quds Force said "If the Islamic Republic was not present in Syria, the massacre of people would have happened on a much larger scale" (Hokayem, 2014).

### *Turkey*

When the Syria uprisings started Turkey had domestic issues pending attention and resolution. There were two important trials—Ergenekon (after 2008) and Sledgehammer (2010)—Erdogan asked for the removal of hundreds of military figures and journalists on the accusation of conspiring to a coup d'état (Litsas & Tziampiris, 2015; Phillips, 2016). In November 2010 there was the accusation that Sledgehammer, a case of a military coup in 2003 against the AKP had just seen the light of justice (Basaran, 2016) with 300 army personnel being jailed. Coup-proofing was a high priority on Erdoğan's political agenda. The military in Turkey has always exerted a powerful influence on domestic politics as well as foreign policy decisions. Indeed, the threat of a coup from the army in Turkey is high since they have been successful in plotting and succeeding in four cases in the past 50 years (Unver, 2009). The "deep state" with the code name Ergenekon allowed Erdoğan to bring selected members of the military to trial and accuse them of undermining the rule of law (MacDonald, 2019)<sup>7</sup>. The argument was so powerful that it caused the European Commission to state in 2010 that these trials could give "an opportunity for Turkey to strengthen confidence in the proper functioning of its democratic institutions and the rule of law" (European Commission, 2010). In the end, Erdoğan accomplished the overturn of the dominance of the military in shaping outcomes in the country, through the implementation of AKP's constitutional changes and through the popular support it gained through the 2010 referendum. This time they were not just accusations or reshuffling of the staff but rather AKP gave the prosecutors the power to investigate the military forces based on alleged conspiracies by secularists against AKP (Tait, 2010).

In June 2011 the collapse of negotiations talks with PKK sparked a domestic threat (Ser, 2017). This is evident in the tenfold increase of terrorist attacks from 10 in 2011

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<sup>7</sup> These accusations were fabricated as was revealed during investigations.

to 54 in 2012 that were also more intense causing the deaths of 226 people (GTD). In the meantime, the secret talks with PKK failed (Kadioğlu, 2019). The situation has become more complicated for Turkey since the Syrian started and the Assad regime receives Iranian support to sustain itself. The Kurdish issue will become particularly important for Turkey in 2012 since all the terrorist attacks were instigated by PKK while Turkey knows that Iran has backed YPG. Even if a strong PKK is a security threat to both states, Iran is making sure that Turkey will not start to disrespect the northern borders of Syria (Crisis Group Middle East Briefing, 2016; Oktav *et al.*, 2018, p. 206). When Assad surrendered control of key towns in northern Syria to the PKK-aligned Democratic Union Party, one of Erdoğan's worst fears materialized since areas such as Afrin, Kobani, and Rasulayn became the territorial base of the organization (Phillips, 2016). The timing of the threat was very important since Turkey had to recompose itself in no time and show certainty against the threats. In a way the strategic place of Turkey allows it to participate in the conflict without having to do anything other than just allowing it. However, this stance changed with the coming of the transnational threat in the form of PKK and Turkey started supporting groups more openly. Turkey started to engage more openly in May 2012. Iran could create what some analysts have called the "Shi'a Axis" but more importantly, they were able to cut the energy route to central Asia as well as Turkey's with that region (Olson, 2000). Iran on the other side also supported opposition groups in Turkey in other instances, such as the Kurdish party and the Turkish Hezbollah ( Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2007).

For Turkey, after the elections of 2002 and Erdogan's rise to power, along with Davutoglu, the aim was to become a regional power in three different regions, including the MENA region (Parlar Dal, 2016). Concerning the MENA region and especially the balance of power it seems that Turkey accomplished this. The political changes in the region and the uncertainty especially at Turkish borders created a situation that impacted the vital interests of Turkey. However, if Turkey decided to intervene militarily without provocations in Syria, it would automatically oppose the order of the international system, something Turkey was not willing to do at the moment since it would mean a confrontation with the US (Bagdonas, 2015). In essence, Turkey was opposed to the ways the balance of power was shifting towards Iran but at the same time did not want to oppose the order of the region (Harrison, 2018).

Coup-proofing tactics might create a safer space for the regime to survive but they have repercussions for the military effectiveness of a state especially regarding the coordination of military units and the soldier's ability to autonomously manage a unit (Pilster & Bohmelt, 2011). In Turkey, there is a political elite that aimed for democratization to achieve a high level of coup-proofing, which was mainly aimed at military elites, and former army commanders, who support a secular Turkey and oppose Erdoğan's and AKP efforts to Islamize Turkey (Güler & Bölücek, 2016).

The option of supporting one of the opposition groups was very convenient for Turkey. Indeed, Turkey turned a blind eye to the Free Syrian Army meetings being held on its territory. The Turkish involvement in the Syrian civil war was treated with caution. Even if they allowed for the FSA to hold meetings on its territory it did not actively start to fund the rebels until July 2012, when they created a “nerve center” to allow for rebel forces to train and get weapons alongside Qatar and Saudi Arabia (O’Bagy, 2013; Regan & Amena, 2012). Turkey though had a paramilitary ally, the Muslim Brotherhood, and its affiliates such as the Liwa al-Tawheed and later Ahrar as-Sham that had knowledge of guerilla warfare and could cooperate with MIT, the Turkish intelligence agency (Phillips, 2017).

The proxy war that Turkey waged can be analysed as a different stage within the engagement leading to escalation and ultimately Turkey wanting to be more active in the war. It is important to mention that the decision to have a more meaningful engagement comes in the same month that the Syrian army decided to withdraw from the North of the country when the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the People’s Protection Units (YPG), the military wing of the party, are gaining ground in Syria (Federici, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I explained why interstate rivalry cannot explain why Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey decided to support paramilitary and rebel groups in the Syrian civil war. I proposed an alternative explanation based on the transnational threat. I provided a concept of the phenomenon of proxy war and presented the theoretical causal mechanism of proxy war. The empirical part of the paper explored whether the causal mechanism of proxy war was set in motion in the three case studies.

The findings indicate that there was a transnational threat that all the states had to respond to. The threat stemmed from opposition groups inside the states that received external support from third states and created a threat to the regime, either through protests or terrorist attacks. The states had to respond to the threat based on their position within the regional order and their intentions towards the international order. Lastly, the decision to go to proxy war was influenced by the coup-proofing activities of the states before the Syrian civil war, which had an impact on the military efficiency and coordination of the national armies.

The case of Saudi Arabia seems to fit the mechanism best since it followed the steps of the mechanism, and the empirical record explains the decision to change from supporting the Assad regime to orchestrating a proxy war and responding to the transnational threat of Iran. The case of Iran was also positive, but we had to take Iran’s responses to threats into consideration since the probability of having a confrontation with anyone who poses a threat to the regime is low. This case was also affected by the fact that the access to resources for the domestic debate regarding Iran’s position towards the Assad regime was ideal.

Finally, the case of Turkey was also positive and explained how the domestic calculation at the time of the initiation of the Syrian uprisings until the decision of Turkey to support rebel groups was gradually developed in conversation with the developments in the northern part of Syria. It is important to notice that Turkey was already more engaged in the Syrian civil war since the spillover of the civil war reached the borders of neighboring Turkey quite quickly. The sources for Turkey were very indicative of the calculations that Erdoğan had to consider before deciding to wage a proxy war.

We see that the mechanism of proxy war in the case of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey explains how the states decided to support rebel groups or paramilitaries to respond to transnational threats that were present in the MENA region during the Arab Spring. The mechanism of proxy war to explain why, despite the multiple interests that states may have had in the conflict, their initial decision to wage proxy wars instead of intervening directly, was guided by domestic as well as international calculations for surviving the crisis, remaining in office, and remaining regional powers in the MENA region.

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