Intervention and Sectarian Conflict: Fear and Loathing in the Levant

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to determine under what circumstances foreign intervention exacerbates sectarian conflict. Since the vast majority of academics do not pay heed to the argument that sectarian conflict is simply the result of ancient hatreds, economic, political, and social factors that result in sectarian conflict must be analyzed. To determine what these factors are and how they interplay with intervention and its associated outcomes, this paper will first review the appropriate literature on foreign intervention and sectarian conflict and then apply relevant theories to three case studies in the Levant covering 1990 to 2014. This paper will utilize the theory that sectarian conflict is produced when groups collectively fear for their future, which eventually provokes a security dilemma and a conflict spiral. It logically follows that any conditions that increase perceptions of fear or exacerbate the security dilemma or conflict spiral are the circumstances under which foreign intervention exacerbates sectarian conflict. Ultimately this paper concludes that high levels of poverty, preexisting civil conflict, the presence of a marginalized sectarian group, and the presence of manipulative leaders in the context of an intervention targeting a state's government are the circumstances under which intervention exacerbates sectarian conflict.

Introduction

In the two decades prior to 2011, there were two US-led military interventions and one UN-led sanctions regime targeting Iraq. However, since 2011, there have been at least 11 military and economic interventions in the region. The outcomes produced by the 2003 invasion include the genesis of militant groups that still exist in the region today, a bloody sectarian civil war, and ultimately a weak Iraqi state that today is unable and at times unwilling to police its borders or protect its population from extremist groups. It remains to be seen if the numerous interventions in the Levant in the last several years will produce similar outcomes. However, the regionalization of the civil war in Syria, the rise of new extremist groups, and the return of widespread sectarian violence to Iraq seems to indicate that similar outcomes are likely.

This paper will address the future of the Levant by analyzing how and why interventions result in, fail to result in, or exacerbate ethnic conflict. More specifically, this paper will determine the circumstances under which intervention in the Levant results in or increases sectarian conflict[1]. Several such circumstances are determined by reviewing the academic literature on intervention and sectarian conflict, and through an analysis of three Levantine case studies. From the literature on intervention, I conclude structural factors such as the target of the intervention and the effect of the intervention on state strength can make intervention more likely to result in conflict. From the literature on sectarian and ethnic conflict, a general explanation regarding the process that creates conflict between rival social groups is produced and several economic and social factors that exacerbate this process are identified. These conclusions, as

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[1] Sectarian identity is a subset of religious identity which is itself a subset of ethnicity (e.g. Arab Christians and Muslims are the same ethnicity, but hold different religious identities). Sunnis and Shias have largely the same religious identity, but different sectarian identities. The terms 'ethnic' and 'sectarian' are used interchangeably in this paper because both terms contextually distinguish between separate social groups.

well as the utility of the theory on the genesis of sectarian conflict, are tested by analyzing to what degree my chosen circumstances explain the outcomes produced in the case studies.

Ultimately I conclude that the theory on the creation of conflict between rival social groups that I glean from the literature can fully explain the outcomes seen in the case studies. This allows me to argue that interventions targeting state governments and interventions that substantially decrease the target[2] state's capacity to provide services and security are the main circumstances that cause intervention to result in sectarian conflict. Additionally, I argue that poverty, preexisting civil conflict, the presence of politically relevant sectarian grievances, and the presence of manipulative leaders who use sectarian identity and fear of the rival sect to maintain power are lesser conditions that if extant in the target state, increase the likelihood of sectarian conflict after an intervention by contributing to insecurity and marginalization.

Perspectives on Intervention

For the purposes of this paper, intervention is defined as the use of national armed forces, coercive economic sanctions, and the transfer of weapons, money, or fighters to influence the political, social or economic conditions in a target country. The inclusion of economic components takes this definition beyond purely military intervention, and the inclusion of transfers of weapons, money, or fighters as a form of intervention allows for atypical interventions into irregular wars to be considered (Pickering & Kisangani, 2006). In this section I will review the appropriate literature to illustrate the forms intervention can take, why interventions take place, and general outcomes of intervention.

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[2] 'Target state' refers to the state that the intervention is directed at. 'Sender state' refers to the state that is undertaking the intervention.

Main Methods of Intervention

Interventions can be coded as either hostile interventions, supportive interventions, or rival interventions. Hostile interventions oppose the target government while supportive interventions do the opposite. Rival interventions refer to a situation where at least two actors are intervening, with at least one supporting the target state's government and at least one opposing the target state's government. Supportive interventions are statistically more likely to hasten the end of a civil war, while hostile and rival interventions are more likely to prolong it (Pickering & Kisangani, 2006). Interventions that are military or transmissive in nature can be either hostile or supportive, whereas economic interventions are almost entirely hostile because it is generally not feasible to sanction or economically attack non-state actors.

In the literature I found three main forms that interventions can take. The first is military intervention, which is what the common usage of the term intervention describes. A hostile military intervention by definition means going to war with the target state which is seen as a very costly action. Supportive military intervention means involving national forces in a foreign civil war, also a costly action. The 1999 NATO bombing of Kosovo, which targeted the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, is an excellent example of a hostile military intervention. Despite high economic and political costs, military intervention is the most effective and direct of the three methods of intervention. In contrast to military intervention, economic sanctions are a less costly way of intervening in the affairs of a target state, and do not rely violence to be effective.

Economic sanctions are a form of coercive intervention where a sender state attempts to reduce the overall economic welfare of a target state in order to coerce the target state's regime to change its political behavior (Hufbauer, Schott, Elliott, 1990). The traditional rationale is that despite a lower probability of success, sanctions are a viable policy tool because they are lower

cost for the sender, they are less violent, and have lower human costs for the target than direct military intervention. In theory, sanctions work by reducing the available resources in the targeted state until the population is so deprived that they pressure their leaders to change their behavior (Allen & Lektzian, 2013). The current economic sanctions targeting Iran in an attempt to dissuade them from pursuing a nuclear program is a salient example of a hostile economic intervention. However, sanctions are criticized because the act of lowering the aggregate level of wealth and resources in a country disproportionately harms the poor and vulnerable, instead of the elites who are typically responsible for the behavior that incurred the sanctions in the first place. For example, the sanctions on Iran have harmed the average Iranian consumer and driven up prices for basic goods. In an attempt to mitigate this effect, 'smart sanctions' or 'targeted sanctions' are used to target only key industries and individuals. However, smart sanctions are often criticized as functioning more as a signaling mechanism rather than a coercive policy (Drezner, 2011).

The transfer of funds, weapons, and fighters is an atypical method of intervention which can be either supportive or hostile. If the transfer is hostile, weapons and fighters unaffiliated with the sender state's government aid the rebels. Rebel forces often need financial resources more than military support to initiate and persist in a conflict (Pickering & Kisangani, 2006). If the transfer is supportive it is generally intended to prop up a weak government that is unable to secure access to weapons, funding, and soldiers. It is important to note that transferring funds, weapons, or fighters can be direct or permissive. For example, a direct transfer would be a sender state's government transferring funds directly to the government to support the target state against rebels. In contrast, a permissive transfer in the same situation would be private actors, ethnic allies, or special interests inside the sender state being permitted to transfer funds to their

chosen side in the target state with the tacit consent of their host state. Permissive transfers are an indication that greater distance from the conflict is preferred by the sender state. An example this in practice is presented by the Second Congo War, where Rwanda armed and supplied several rebel groups who fought against Rwanda's enemy, the Democratic Republic of Congo. Rwanda's actions constitute a hostile transfer intervention.

Motivations for Intervention

Interventions are motivated primarily by three factors. First, there are instrumental factors that include economic gains, domestic political concerns, military interest, and balance of power. Second are affective factors which are identity-based and include communal grievances, and shared senses of identity and ideology. Finally, there can be a normative motivation to intervene. The international norm of responsibility to protect (R2P), which is upheld by liberal-internationalists, holds that intervention for humanitarian purposes is permissible in situations where a state is unwilling or unable to protect its citizens from imminent atrocities, genocide, or ethnic cleansing (Williams, 2013). Ultimately the motive to intervene can be purely instrumental in nature, or a mix of instrumental and affective. However, it is rarely purely affective because states do not undertake costly interventions in situations where there are no real benefits outside the realm of ideological solidarity (Carment, James, & Taydas, 2006; Friedman, Long, & Biddle, 2012). For example, while there were ideological and normative components to the 1999 Kosovo intervention, the realist explanation that preserving the stability of Eastern Europe was the principle motivation, carries more weight. However, states that are more secure, are able to absorb higher costs, and have higher military and economic capacity have the ability to intervene for more purely affective reasons (Walt, 1985). Ultimately, instrumental, affective, and

normative factors determine when and where intervention takes place by informing decision making processes that are made in a context largely dictated by realist logic.

It is important to note that the United States is able to partially largely transcend the realist logic that dictates intervention decisions because of its hegemonic status. The United States is considered a hegemon due to its geographic location, unparalleled military and economic strength, and position of global leadership in international relations. As a hegemon, the US has fewer barriers or disincentives to stop it from intervening abroad than any other country. As a result, the US has undertaken military, economic, and transfer based interventions many times since its rise to hegemonic status. Overthrowing leaders in South America, bombing Kosovo and Somalia, and destroying centrifuges in Iran are all examples of this, to say nothing of the three case studies discussed below where the US plays a considerable role.

The US's propensity to intervene or invade sovereign states when it suits US interests is considered by some to be a weakness in hegemonic stability theory. Hegemonic stability theory holds that a unipolar system under a hegemon is stable configuration because the hegemon will underwrite and uphold global security. However, since no other states can come close to challenging the US, the hegemon does not need to be concerned with the balance of power. As a result, there are fewer realist checks on the US to stop it from undertaking foolish wars or interventions which can ultimately destabilize the international system, and cause or exacerbate sectarian conflict (Buzan, 2013). Essentially, a hegemon can afford to intervene for affective and normative reasons, and does not need to have vital interests informing the motivation to intervene. Arguably, this leads to ill thought out foreign adventurism, such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which has produced and exacerbated sectarian conflict in the Levant (Pape, 2009).

Instrumental factors are best understood through realist theory, which is based on the principal that international relations are inherently anarchical, and that the main goal of any state is survival. Further, realism holds that states are unitary, rational actors. As a result of this, states will decide to intervene when, after a careful consideration of instrumental factors, intervention is considered the best strategy to achieve their interests. This is because instrumental factors, such as how the decision to intervene, or not intervene, will affect the balance of power, are exactly the variables that inform the realist calculus behind what is considered the best strategy to achieve state interests. Supportive intervention can then be seen as a form of balancing through alliance formation. Balancing through alliance formation refers to two states allying in order to maintain a favorable balance of power relative to the allies' adversaries. Realists believe that balancing, and therefore supportive intervention, is a tactic that is used to protect values and assets already possessed (Walt, 1985). States therefore have incentives to undertake a supportive intervention if the fall of the target state would produce an unfavorable shift in the balance of power for the sender state, *or* if the intervention would produce a favorable shift in the balance of power for the sender state. For example, one of the reasons Iran is intervening in support of the Syrian regime is because the fall of the regime would reduce Iran's power relative to its regional adversaries (Heydemann, 2013b).

Similarly, a hostile intervention is undertaken if the expected outcome produces a more favorable balance of power for the sender state. However, hostile interventions cannot be seen as realist alliance formation because they are essentially attacks on the target state. Instead, hostile interventions occur either when there is the sender state believes there is a high potential for gain at minimal cost[3], or when the sender state perceives that the target state is a threat that cannot go

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[3] For example, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait can be explained by this logic. Saddam perceived a high potential for economic, and therefore balance of power gain at minimal cost by seizing Kuwait's oil fields.

unaddressed. Hostile interventions are therefore often informed by the realist balance of threat theory, which holds that states will identify their greatest threats based on four instrumental factors: 1) the aggregate power of the target, 2) the geographic proximity of the target, 3) the offensive capacity of the target, 4) the perceived intentions of the target (Schweller, 1994). It is unsurprising to realists then that neighboring states are often considered threatening, especially if they are powerful, have offensive weapons, or an adversarial history. Historically, this describes almost any pairing of Middle Eastern states outside of the Gulf Coast Monarchies. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that many of the states in question are resource rich, creating incentives to intervene for greed purposes. It is interesting to note that in contrast to supportive interventions which are done to protect what is already possessed, hostile interventions can be undertaken to gain new assets and values.

Affective factors that are rooted in identity are very salient in situations of sectarian conflicts or civil wars. Ethnic kin in neighboring states are natural allies for both rebel and regime forces, and are often the source of funds and fighters in the transfer method of intervention. Additionally, ethnic allies in a neighboring state can pressure their government to intervene more directly. Ideological solidarity can also motivate governments to intervene because of the perception that protecting and affirming an ideology abroad protects and affirms it at home (Walt, 1985) As a result, ethnic and sectarian linkages between a potential intervener and rebels has been shown to result in a higher likelihood of intervention, but this does not hold for ethnic linkages between a potential intervener and the target's government (Carment, James, & Taydas, 2006; Friedman, Long, & Biddle, 2012).

Normative motivation does not fit cleanly into either instrumental or affective factors. It functions more as a combination of the two. On the instrumental side, invoking R2P is based

partially on domestic political concerns of the sender state, and on the cooperation and collective action of the international community who will be influenced by realist factors (Williams, 2013). On the affective side, R2P is based on a global ideology of human rights and a global sense of morality, grievance, and responsibility. In practice, R2P has been applied selectively and rarely, an indication that R2P functions more as an affective factor than an instrumental one.

Outcomes of Intervention

The outcome produced by an intervention will be unique and a consequence of the circumstances of the intervention. However, there are some generalized conclusions that can be drawn about what types of outcomes are the most likely. The outcomes produced by military intervention depend largely on whether the intervention is supportive or hostile. A supportive intervention is more likely to end an extant civil war in the target state. In contrast a hostile military intervention is more likely to prolong the conflict in question, and to increase the intensity of the conflict (Pickering & Kisangani, 2006). In addition to this, state failure is a possible result of a successful hostile intervention, and can lead to long lasting violence, insurgencies, sectarian conflict, and humanitarian crisis (Flibbert, 2013). It is because of this that I identify hostile interventions, and interventions that result in state weakness or failure as the key circumstances under which intervention causes or exacerbates sectarian conflict.

There is considerable academic debate on the utility of sanctions as a coercive tool. Ultimately the number of cases where sanctions alone can be shown to bring about a change in behavior in the target state is disputed (Hufbauer, Schott, Elliott, 1990; Pape, 1997). However sanctions generally succeed in their goal of reducing the aggregate welfare of the target state. This often translates into increased poverty leading to food and health insecurity for the middle

and lower class in the target state. Sanctions also often increase the civilian population's dependency on the target state's government due to state run rationing programs, and can create a 'rally around the flag' effect that increases nationalism (Allen & Lektzian, 2013). Finally, it is common for military intervention to follow the imposition of sanctions. This often combines the worst outcomes of both methods of intervention. Public health in the target state is drastically reduced, state failure is more likely, and the economic damage from the sanctions is compounded by the economic damage caused by violence.

Perspectives on Sectarianism and Conflict

To address the literature on sectarianism and conflict as it relates to the Levant it is necessary to first understand the schism between Sunni and Shia Islam. Sunnis make up approximately 85% of the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, Shias make up the remaining 15%, and a very small minority identify as members of subsects such as Alawites. Shias are a majority in Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Bahrain and have a plurality in Lebanon while Sunnis are the majority in more than 40 states (Council on Foreign Relations, 2014). The root of the schism between the two sects is over the rightful leadership of Islam. Shias believe that the cousin of Mohammed, Ali ibn Abi Talib and his descendants are part of a divine genealogy and should lead the Islamic community while Sunnis reject succession based on Mohammed's bloodline and instead favor electing a caliph.

There has been a long history of Sunnis persecuting the Shia minority, which has resulted in the reductionist and orientalist view that contemporary sectarian conflict is a result of 'ancient hatreds.' The view that sectarian and ethnic conflicts are primordial in nature is supported by the essentialist school of thought, which holds that loyalty to a communal identity is based on, and reproduced by psychological needs and emotional factors. As a result, communities remember

past grievances and conflicts, and ultimately attack traditional enemies due to old hatreds and resentments (Kaufmann, 2005). However, most scholars view the ancient hatred argument as too simplistic, and instead focus on political and economic factors to explain sectarian violence. For example, in Sunni dominated states the Shia minority often lack access to economic opportunities. Additionally, when a single sect controls the state that sect generally has almost exclusive access to the state's resource rents, further economically marginalizing the rival sect. Both of these situations are exemplified by Iraq under Saddam's rule. However, it is important to not fully discount a history of conflict between the two sects as a factor that informs conflict today. Negative sectarian sentiments are not created on the spot, instead they exist dormantly and are informed by the histories, stories, and conflicting ideologies of the two sects, until sectarian identity becomes politically relevant (Haddad, 2013; Lake & Rothchild, 1996). Despite these factors, the fact remains that during the 1000 years prior to the turn of the millennium there were only three instances of substantive sectarian conflict in the Levant (Haddad, 2013). This is strong evidence that political, economic, and social factors must be analyzed to understand the causes of sectarianism and conflict.

In analyzing these factors I found a common theme permeating theories of sectarian conflict. There is a pathway to sectarian conflict, one that perhaps takes place in the context of historic animosities, but is largely based on systematic factors that cause sectarian identity to become an incredibly important part of everyday life (Kfir, 2014). This pathway can be broken down into four distinct segments: fear, identification and mobilization, the security dilemma, and the conflict spiral. It is important to note that this pathway can be nonlinear and self-reinforcing;

multiple stages can occur at the same time and the stages from mobilization onwards can form a positive feedback loop[4] which fuels perceptions of fear (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007).

Perception of Fear for the Future

The pathway to sectarian conflict begins with the introduction of factors that cause individuals and groups to fear for the future (Hshim, 2007; Lake & Rothchild, 1996). Fear for the future can be generated in many different ways. The most direct way is a situation where individuals come to fear for their physical safety and livelihoods. This is often the case in a situation of "emerging anarchy" which describes a scenario where individuals and groups are newly responsible for their own security (Carment, James, Taydas, 2009, 78). In a situation of emerging anarchy, the state is unable or unwilling to provide for the security of certain individuals and groups. Emerging anarchy is common in cases of failed, weak, or disrupted states (Flibbert, 2013; Lake & Rothchild, 1996; Saikal, 2000).

Another factor that can increase perceptions of fear is the loss of public services. This is also generally related to state weakness. Loss of services can increase perceptions of fear because of the perception that the state is weakening, the perception that one is being marginalized or discriminated against, or more benignly, the perception that the loss of the service will decrease economic security (Koubi & Bohmelt, 2013; Prasch, 2012). Services whose loss will increase perceptions of fear include security, property rights, contract enforcement, social services, utilities such as electricity and water, and infrastructure maintenance (Di John, 2010).

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[4] A positive feedback loop is a feedback loop where a change to a system causes the change/the cause of the change to be increased

Fear for the future can also be generated by marginalization, which can be both political and economic in nature. Political marginalization can mean disenfranchisement, loss of political rights, lack of access to state institutions, no protection of minority rights, and the capture of the state by a rival ethnic group (Ayub, 2013; Carment, James, & Taydas, 2009). This can lead individuals and groups to foresee a future of greater marginalization with less security and opportunity, thus increasing perceptions of fear.

Economic marginalization is the most salient under conditions of corruption and crony capitalism (Prasch, 2012). Under these conditions, one sect or ethnic group exists in a privileged position that is able to obtain the majority of a state's economic gains, or when one group has privileged access to the best jobs and opportunities in an economy. Similar to political marginalization, this leads individuals and groups to predict a future of greater marginalization with less security and opportunity. It is important to realize that in a situation where one sect holds a privileged position, be it political, economic, or both, the potential or actual loss of that privileged position will increase the privileged sect's perception of fear as well. (Koubi & Bohmelt, 2013; Murshed, 2010). This is because the loss of a privileged position entails not only a reduction in opportunity, but also the potential for retribution.

The ultimate effect of increased perceptions of fear is increased incentives to construct a sectarian identity, or to identify with a sectarian identity more strongly in order to obtain utility and tangible benefits. This is supported by rational choice theory, which holds that individuals make efforts to maximize their preferences in a rational way (Kaufman, 2005). The result is that the self-interest of rational individuals leads to group identification so that the individuals can access services and goods controlled by the group. It is important to note that the factors that increase perceptions of fear for the future do not need to be sectarian in nature, or take place in a

context of sectarian hostility because the end result of increasing sectarian identification is the same. However, fears that are sectarian in nature or take place in the context of sectarian hostility will be more acute, and will increase the speed and the scope of identification and mobilization. This is supported by the essentialist framework, which holds that emotional responses drive group formation, and that negative emotions regarding the ethnic or sectarian 'other' solidifies in-groups, and incentivizes mobilization (Kaufman, 2005).

Identification and Mobilization

A common theme in the factors that increase perceptions of fear is the loss, or potential future loss, of services and commodities. What is lost can be intangible in nature, political enfranchisement or security for example, or a tangible service such as provision of a utility. Once perception of fear grows enough, which is to say once enough is lost or endangered in aggregate, individuals seek a way to recoup past losses and protect against future losses. This is accomplished through increased affiliation and identification with a sectarian group and identity. Group membership is achieved by displaying certain behaviors and social traits which actively identify an individual as part of the group via social comparison (Fkir, 2014). Through sectarian identification individuals gain real-world utility from their sectarian affiliation. Sectarian groups provide services that increase the economic and physical security of their members. In essence, social identification yields tangible benefits that mitigate perceptions of fear (Kfir, 2014; Murshed, 2010).

The process by which services and benefits are actually provided to group members is called mobilization. Sectarian groups are able to mobilize faster and more efficiently than most other groups for several reasons. Sectarian groups can easily recruit from within their community,

can easily overcome the collective action problem, and have established leaders and meeting places. Additionally, sectarian groups can easily utilize built in symbols and ideals, have a shared history and set of myths to invoke, and often have members from diverse social strata which allows for a division of labor between financing and labor (Koubi & Bohmelt, 2013).

Constructivism is a useful theoretical lens for understanding this process. Constructivism holds that group identity is constructed through iterated social discourse. Because of this, myths involving past atrocities committed against the in-group are particularly important to group formation and mobilization because they create a sense of communal identity while also increasing perceptions of fear (Kaufman, 2005).

Provision of security is the clearest example of a communal group providing a good or service, and is the most pertinent in a discussion on sectarian conflict. In a situation of emerging anarchy, individuals who are newly responsible for their physical security will have rapidly increasing perceptions of fear. The newly insecure then find their sectarian identity more salient than ever before. This is doubly true if insecurity is caused by sectarian conflict because then one's sectarian identity makes them a target *as well* as providing them access to a protective group (Kalyvas, & Kocher, 2007). To obtain security and services that the state can no longer (or is unwilling to) provide, individuals turn to the most relevant social group they have access to, which for the reasons given above will be groups mobilizing based on sectarian affiliation (Koubi & Bohmelt, 2013). This same process can take place outside the context of a security risk or emerging anarchy. Salient sectarian affiliation can be used to mitigate the loss of services, utilities, or to balance against marginalization.

Increased perceptions of fear, identification, and mobilization can occur outside the context of sectarian conflict and as a result of nonsectarian causes. Despite this, mobilization

undertaken in these stages to increase security has the inherent ability to provoke a negative

sectarian response. As discussed earlier, this is partially due to a shared history that includes

marginalization and violence between the two sects which becomes relevant in lockstep with

identity becoming relevant in daily life (Haddad, 2013). However, a more important factor in

creating a negative sectarian response is the logic of the security dilemma which takes hold in

this situation.

The Security Dilemma

The security dilemma describes a situation where one state increases its military

capability in order to increase its security. This diminishes the security of other states if the

original state is unable to credibly signal that it does not have aggressive intentions, and all the

states exist in an anarchical environment with imperfect information and unresolvable

uncertainty. An arms race and a conflict spiral is the likely result. The security dilemma can be

applied to sectarian groups because the realist logic behind the security dilemma remains

constant. Just like states, sectarian groups can be seen as unitary, rational actors whose primary

goal and motivation is survival (Kaufman, 2005). As a result, the realist logic of the security

dilemma can be applied to sectarian groups in conditions of emerging anarchy. In essence when

one sectarian group seeks to increase its security by mobilizing and arming itself, other sectarian

groups perceive their security as reduced and will mobilize and arm themselves in turn (Flibbert,

2013).

Additionally, realism's offense/defense theory informs this part of the pathway.

Offense/Defense theory holds that states, or in this case sectarian groups, have a preference

between offensive and defensive military tactics because of the advantages that either strategy

confers. In this context, an offensive strategy is seen as preferential because the first group to

martially mobilize and begin committing offensive violent acts has a first mover advantage and is almost impossible to defend against. As a result, not only does the security dilemma increase perceptions of fear, it also incentivizes preemptive attacks. While the stages before the security dilemma do not necessarily involve sectarian polarization and animosity to function, in the security dilemma they are inevitable.

For example, in a situation of emerging anarchy or state disruption the presence of a Shia militia in a nearby neighborhood incentivizes Sunnis to mobilize and militarize to ensure their security. However, doing so increases perceptions of fear among nearby Shias who see their own security as lessened. Even if the Shia militia was formed for nonsectarian reasons, it still inflames sectarian tensions and provokes a sectarian response. If the Shia militia *was* formed for sectarian reasons, the same process occurs but with greater intensity due to higher perceptions of fear among Sunnis. The end result is less security for everyone and an increasing likelihood of falling into a conflict spiral where actual violence reinforces and exacerbates the security dilemma (Carment, James, Taydas, 2009). Ultimately, a feedback loop is formed to the first stage on the pathway to sectarian conflict, perception of fear. Many scholars argue that sectarian war is fundamentally built on the logic of the security dilemma which dictates balancing in terms of mobilization in any situation where credibility cannot be established (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007; Kaufman, 2005; Lake & Rothchild, 1996).

Conflict Spiral

Once sectarian mobilization has resulted in a security dilemma the scene is fully prepped for sectarian conflict to begin. A conflict spiral describes the situation where once a violent act is committed by one sect against another, the security dilemma becomes so exacerbated and

grievances become so inflamed that a cycle of revenge attacks becomes inevitable (Hashim, 2007). In the conflict spiral, attacks by one sect against another fuel perceptions of fear and ultimately come to drive the entire process by which fear is translated into actual violence. In essence, extant sectarian violence is itself the cause of sectarian polarization and mobilization as well as its consequence (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007).

In addition to increasing perceptions of fear, the conflict spiral also increases the scope and speed of identification and mobilization. This is because religious and political violence increases religiosity (Zussman, 2014). Because sectarian identity now turns individuals into targets, those individuals now have a strong incentive to leverage that identity for protection by their sect. This then leads to quicker and more martial mobilization for mutual protection which in turn fuels the security dilemma. It is by this process that the pathway to sectarian conflict becomes a positive feedback loop. This helps explain the growth of sectarian conflict ex post and why sectarian conflicts are so difficult to end.

The initiation of conflict can turn a nonviolent sectarian cleavage into a dominant feature of daily life. The result of this is that violence can cause further sectarian conflict that is unrelated to the factors that precipitated the violence in the first place. Over time sectarian or ethnic groups can find themselves involved in an ongoing conflict that is based far more off of the animosity between the two groups than any original concrete objectives. (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007). This phenomenon actually lends some weight to the essentialist 'ancient hatreds' argument because it seems possible for a sectarian or ethnic conflict that was originally political in nature to morph into a primordial conflict based on hatred for the rival group (Kaufman, 2005). Essentially, while sectarian conflicts are born from economic and political issues rather than

identity politics, they are sustained and intensified by fear, identification, and conflict spirals rooted in identity (Carment, James, & Taydas, 2009).

Exacerbating Factors

There are six main structural factors that influence the entire pathway from perceptions of fear to the conflict spiral. These are poverty, state weakness, the presence of manipulative leaders, the resource curse, neoliberal economic policies, and corruption. These factors increase the general likelihood that the final stages of the pathway will be reached. While poverty is no longer seen as the main determinant behind terrorism, it is still widely considered to increase the likelihood of civil war and sectarian conflict. (Azam & Thelen, 2010; Carment, James, & Taydas, 2009; Koubi & Bohmelt, 2013; Murshed, 2010).

State weakness can, as discussed above, create conditions of emerging anarchy which greatly increases the utility of sectarian identity and perceptions of fear. A weak state has a lower capacity to suppress rebellions which increases the likelihood that a conflict will arise and fuel perceptions of fear. Additionally, a poorly organized rebellion against a weak state is more likely to leverage the cheapest mobilization network possible: ethnicity and sectarianism. Finally, while a strong state has the ability to end a sectarian conflict inside its borders, or to win a sectarian civil war, it also has the ability to forcefully limit the expression of sectarian identity and negative sectarian sentiment (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007; Kaufman, 2005). The result is that sectarian conflict almost inevitably takes place in a context of state weakness. The more disrupted the state, the greater the risk of conflict, and the presence of a sectarian conflict generally only makes the state weaker.

Manipulative leaders, who are referred to in the literature as 'ethnic entrepreneurs,' can exacerbate, or even cause sectarian conflict. Ethnic entrepreneurs are individuals who obtain, or wish to obtain, public office or social power by appealing to a specific ethnic constituency, and by playing on people's fears of an ethic 'other' (Lake & Rothechild, 1996). The manipulative power of ethnic entrepreneurs is supported by the constructivist perspective which argues that since collective identities are constantly made and remade through social discourse, identities can be easily coopted by manipulative leaders who control the discourse (Kaufman, 2005). The result is that ethnic entrepreneurs legitimize ethnic violence, advocate for mobilization, and exaggerate the risk and hostility of the other in order to build a constituency. In practice this increases sectarian polarization, fuels the pathway to conflict by increasing perceptions of fear, and can greatly exacerbate extant conflicts. Ethnic entrepreneurs are especially common in contexts of state weakness where they are able to use ethnic mobilization, or violence, to cement their power and delineate an in-group (Beswick, 2009). Iraq's former Prime Minister, al-Maliki, is an excellent example of an ethnic entrepreneur. By stoking fears of Sunni extremism he appealed to Iraq's Shia majority, and once in power he oversaw numerous policies that disenfranchised, and legitimized violence against Sunnis. However, it is important to note that ethnic entrepreneurs do not need to be state leaders or politicians, they can also operate on a neighborhood level.

The resource curse and corruption are two exacerbating factors that create grievances in society which are often experienced on sectarian lines (Brannigan, 2014; Prasch, 2012). The resource curse describes a situation where revenue from natural resources is accompanied by poverty and corruption, two factors which exacerbate sectarian polarization. Resource rents allow political elites to enrich themselves through corruption. Income inequality is often further

increased by crony capitalism, which reserves economic opportunities and privileges for state elites. Under these conditions, it is common for economic gains to go primarily to one ethnic group, especially if that group has captured the state to obtain resource rents (Lake & Rothchild, 1996; Prash, 2012). This all ultimately increases negative sectarian sentiment and creates a fertile environment for the pathway to sectarian conflict by creating a feeling of communal injury (Koubi & Bohmelt, 2013; Prash, 2012).

This entire situation can be further aggravated by neoliberal economic policies. Many states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) pursued neoliberal policies in a bid to capture greater foreign investment, and jumpstart their nascent private sectors which were generally underdeveloped due to oil rents (Achcar, 2013). The failure of these neoliberal polices can be partially blamed for the region's poverty in recent years. [5] Neoliberal policies, which prescribed lower rates of public investment, were supposed to lead to higher rates of private investment by getting the state out of the market, and increased foreign investment by lowering trade barriers. However, the private sector's contributions did not offset the loss of public investment funded by oil rents. Instead, gross capital formation stagnated between 1982 and 2007, the ratio of private investment to GDP remained one of the lowest in the world, foreign direct investment never materialized, and unemployment boomed (Achcar, 2013, 44). A large population of poor, unemployed young people is destabilizing because they are a pool of potential recruits for terrorist or sectarian groups. Additionally, neoliberal polices exacerbate corruption in weak states, and states without strong institutions by incentivizing and facilitating patrimonialism and rent seeking behavior. Essentially, neoliberal economic polices both exacerbated and caused poverty, while also facilitating corruption and bad governance (Achcar,

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[5] The poverty I am referring too, and the following statistics, exclude the Gulf Coast Countries which have arguably benefited considerably from globalization and neoliberal policies.

2013). Ultimately, since poverty and corruption are factors which can lead to and exacerbate sectarian conflict, neoliberalism helps lead to and exacerbates sectarian conflict as well.

<u>Conclusions on Sectarianism and Conflict</u>

To address the question of under which circumstances intervention increase the likelihood of sectarian conflict I will apply the results of intervention to the model of sectarian conflict described above. Interventions that result in increased state weakness and higher perceptions of fear, or more generally increase the utility of sectarian identity are the most likely to exacerbate a sectarian security dilemma and create a conflict spiral. The circumstances that allow for this that are identifiable from my literature review of sectarianism and conflict are conditions of emerging anarchy, poverty, corruption, and sectarian grievances based on economic and political marginalization. Ultimately, hostile interventions and the resulting state weakness or failure, as well as sectarian grievances and marginalization, and the active presence of ethnic entrepreneurs are identified as the circumstances under which intervention will cause or exacerbate sectarian conflict.

Iraq in 1990: Hostile Economic and Military Interventions

While the case studies I present can be viewed as three discrete events, it is also beneficial to view them as a single Levantine case study evolving over time with three periods in that evolution being observed. The three periods correspond to three different sets of interventions into the region and encompass hostile, supportive, and ultimately rival interventions. This allows an analysis of how and why interventions in practice result in, fail to result in, or exacerbate sectarian conflict. The first analyzed period is Iraq in the 1990s, when the

state was targeted with hostile economic and military intervention. These interventions can be seen as purely instrumental in nature. Western states viewed Iraq as an unfriendly regime, and saw the invasion of Kuwait as a revisionist action that would reduce regional stability and energy security. Arab states saw the invasion of Kuwait as an attempt to revise the regional balance of power, and resisted the action by supporting the western led and UN sanctioned coalition.

During the 1970s, Iraq saw a huge increase in oil revenue. There was less than 1 billion US dollars of oil revenue in 1970, but by 1980 this had increased to 26 billion dollars. This money allowed for substantial development of the government bureaucracy, the development of a strong social security net, the expansion of the military, financed infrastructure improvements and paid for imports (Alnasrawi, 2001, 206). As a result of this, prior to the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq was considered to be one of the most developed states in the Middle East (Ismael, 2007; Talmadge, 2000).

However, economic stagnation accompanied expansive growth of Iraq's military during the 1980s. The percentage of the labor force in the military increased from 3% to 21% from 1975 to 1988 and the percentage of GDP spent on the military increased from 19% to almost two thirds in the same period (Alnasrawi, 2001, 206). The increased military spending came at the cost of improving living conditions, which coupled with an inability to substantially increase oil rents incentivized Saddam's regime to invade Kuwait on August 2nd, 1990. Saddam's decision to seize Kuwait's oil fields conforms nicely to the realist theory that hostile intervention are undertaken to gain new assets. The bid to seize Kuwait's oil fields as a solution to Iraq's economic stagnation and to finance populist policies resulted in a comprehensive sanctions regime being implemented by the UNSC on August 6th (Alnasrawi, 2001, 206).

The sanctions regime cut Iraq off from the global economy, essentially ended Iraq's oil trade, froze financial assets, and involved a naval and air blockade. The result was a drastic decrease in food security; Iraq had previously imported 70%-80% of its total food consumption. The Iraqi government quickly instituted a rationing program, which as the intervention literature suggests, resulted in greater state control over the population (Alnasrawi, 2001, 209; Talmadge, 2000). Additionally, the inability to obtain spare parts and repair supplies quickly began to inhibit Iraq's critical industries which were import reliant (Talmadge, 2000).

Economic intervention alone did not coerce Saddam to pull out of Kuwait, nor did it result in increased sectarian conflict. The reason for this is despite the economic and human costs of the sanction regime, Iraq still had a strong state. The Iraqi state kept negative sectarians sentiments in check and mitigated perceptions of fear. Despite discriminatory policies which favored Sunnis and Ba'ath party members, as well as cuts to social services, perceptions of fear for the future were kept low by government rationing programs and the continued provision of security and public goods (Alnasrawi, 2001).

Hostile military intervention against Iraq started on January 16th 1991 with a US led bombing campaign that eviscerated Iraq's military and quickly led to a full scale Iraqi retreat from Kuwait. This event can also be seen as a supportive military intervention aiding Kuwait. When framed as a supportive intervention, the decision to sanction and bomb Saddam's forces conforms nicely to the realist explanation that supportive interventions are undertaken to preserve what is already possessed, in this case access to Kuwaiti oil and a favorable balance of power in the region. However, coalition bombing inside Iraq was not limited to military targets, which suggests that it is simplistic to view the military intervention as purely supportive of Kuwait. Civilian targets including water treatment plants, power stations, telecom networks,

industrial sites, oil facilities, and civilian buildings were also bombed (Alnasrawi, 2001). Viewing the bombing as a hostile intervention with the goal of attacking Saddam's regime also conforms to the realist theory that hostile interventions are undertaken to gain something, in this case the removal of Saddam.

As the literature suggests, economic intervention combined with military intervention created a humanitarian crisis. Over 1.5 million Iraqi, including roughly six hundred thousand children died from diseases related to unsafe water and inadequate nourishment which could not be treated without imported medicines. Incidence of stunting and wasting also increased dramatically in the following years (Ismael, 2007, 343). Unemployment increased dramatically, hyperinflation was accompanied by rapidly increasing prices, and salaries fell dramatically. Electricity output in Iraq fell to only 4% of the pre-bombing levels and oil production was substantially reduced (Alnasrawi, 2001, 210; Ismael, 2007).

Despite a humanitarian crisis, a decimated economy and infrastructure, and continued sanctions that precluded rebuilding, no substantial sectarian conflict emerged after the interventions. It is reasonable to assume that perceptions of fear for the future increased due to these outcomes but increased perceptions of fear did not translate into sectarian conflict. This is because in addition to maintaining the ability to actively surprises ethnic violence, the Iraqi state remained strong enough to continue providing services and guaranteeing security. The pathway to sectarian conflict was interrupted between 'increased perceptions of fear' and 'identification and mobilization' because there was little utility gained from increased sectarianism that the state could not also provide. The result of this was that a sectarian security dilemma and subsequent conflict spiral were never created.

Evidence for this can be found in several places. First and foremost, Saddam's regime remained in power. This is a strong indication that while the Iraqi state was disrupted, and saw its capacity reduced, it did not experience state failure. The food rationing program instituted soon after the sanction regime, and later the UN's Oil For Food program (OFFP) increased state control over the population and provided channels for the state to deliver social services (Alnasrawi, 2001; Talmadge, 2000). The continuance of Saddam's regime ensured that a situation of emerging anarchy was not created. Government food rationing ensured that the population would not turn to sectarian mobilization to ensure their food security. The OFFP provided revenue which the Iraqi government used to provide reduced but extant social services and utilities to the population. This disincentivized sectarian identification and mobilization to obtain the same services and utilities. While the first two interventions into Iraq did not result in sectarian conflict, they created conditions which proved fertile for sectarian conflict after the 2003 military intervention thoroughly destroyed the Iraqi state.

Iraq in 2003: Hostile Military Intervention and Sectarian Civil War

The next period of intervention in the Levant is the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq. In contrast to the 1990 interventions, the 2003 intervention was purely military in nature and caused sectarian civil war. Ultimately, the factors that can be identified as contributing to this are forced state failure and grievances due to marginalization experienced by both Shias and Sunnis which together allowed the pathway to sectarian conflict to produce a security dilemma and conflict spiral.

Viewed through a realist lens, this intervention was motivated by a high perception of threat. Dick Chaney's one-percent doctrine held that intervention was warranted in any situation

where there was even a one-percent chance of terrorists gaining access to a WMD. The US had a high perception of threat because the suspected presence of WMDs represented a high offensive capacity, coupled with a perception of malignant intentions. That the likelihood of the threat occurring could be so low and still warrant an invasion is evidence that a hegemon has fewer barriers to stop them from intervening. Other realist justifications for the invasion of include the desire to create a deeper military and political presence in the region, and the desire to influence and protect the development and extraction of oil resources (Balaam & Dillman, 2011). It is important to note that as realism predicts of hostile interventions, these conceptions of the intervention end with the US gaining new assets.

State Failure in Iraq

Iraq experienced forced state failure for several reasons after the 2003 military intervention. The invasion of Iraq destroyed what little public infrastructure survived the first Gulf War and a decade of deprivation from sanctions. For instance, after the 2003 invasion, 80% of Iraq's higher education institutions were destroyed, only 15% of the population had at least 12 hours of electricity per day, and a third of the population lacked access to safe drinking water (Ismael, 2000, 346). In addition to the physical damage, the 2003 military intervention resulted in the destruction of two of the Iraqi institutions which could have potentially preserved law and order.

The US-mandated process of de-Ba'athification purged the Iraqi government of many former members of the Ba'ath party. This process was not limited to party elites: many mid and low level bureaucrats were also removed. The result of the purges was massive Sunni disenfranchisement, and the destruction of Iraq's bureaucracy (Ayub, 2013; Kalyvas & Kocher,

2007). The destruction of the bureaucracy undermined administrative capacity and created a political vacuum which no actors were immediately able to fill. This contributed to the situation of emerging anarchy because there was no legitimate authority to provide public goods (Flibbert, 2013). In addition to dismantling Iraq's bureaucracy, the US administrative authority disbanded Iraq's military and other security apparatuses. Not only did this create a security vacuum, it created a huge population of unemployed young men with military training, a grudge against the United States, and potential sectarian grievances. The result was an additional contribution to emerging anarchy (Bensahel, 2006; Flibbert, 2013).

This political and security vacuum was created in the context of the ongoing humanitarian disaster created by the military and economic interventions of the first Gulf War. In the 1990s, a strong Iraqi state kept the country from falling into chaos and sectarian conflict, but that state strength no longer existed after 2003. The result was state failure. As the literature on sectarianism and conflict would suggest, with the state no longer able to guarantee security or other goods and services, a situation of emerging anarchy was created and the pathway to sectarian conflict was put into motion. Immediate effects of state failure could be seen in the rampant looting and violence that took place shortly after the fall of Baghdad. Ultimately it would take several years for the situation in Iraq to descend into full scale civil war as perceptions of fear, negative sectarian sentiment, and the security dilemma all became more acute.

Sectarian Grievances in Iraq

In addition to the immediate personal and group security concerns created by the situation of emerging anarchy, old and new grievances helped create negative sectarian

sentiments which increased perceptions of fear and the utility of sectarian identity. Iraq's Sunni minority had enjoyed decades of privileged status under Saddam's regime, and in the process accumulated substantial ill will from the country's Shias and Kurds. The process of de-Ba'athification created an inversion of the power relationship between the two sects; Shias now controlled Iraq allowing for the marginalization of Sunnis. Nouri al-Malaki, Iraq's president from 2006 till 2014, exacerbated this situation by integrating Shia militias into the political body, and by legitimizing the marginalization and violence committed against Sunnis (Hashim, 2007; Khoury, 2013).

This situation of marginalization experienced on sectarian lines fits into the theory where perceptions of fear are increased when a rival ethnic group captures the state (Ayub, 2013; Carment, James, & Taydas, 2009). Additionally, the situation of mutual grievances experienced on sectarian lines fits into the theory that group grievances lead to increased sectarian identification and conflict (Koubi & Bohmelt, 2013). As the literature suggests to be a likely outcome in this situation, Sunnis began mobilizing quickly after the 2003 military intervention in attempts to regain lost power and privilege, and to protect themselves from Shia retribution (Flibbert, 2013).

Application of Intervention and Sectarian Theory to Iraq

State failure, humanitarian crisis, and marginalization all resulted in increased perceptions of fear, and increased utility from sectarian identification and mobilization. Both Sunnis and Shias began mobilizing soon after the fall of Baghdad to provide for their own security. One example of this is urban migration inside Baghdad. Roughly 80% of Baghdad's residents relocated from formerly multiethnic neighborhoods to the perceived safety of

homogenous neighborhoods (Carpenter, 2012, 184). Ultimately, mobilization translated into security dilemmas and conflict spirals as sectarian violence became more common in Iraq.

This process can be seen in the normalized presence of sectarian militias that operated out of homogenous neighborhoods and regions. Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the Ja'ish Mahdi Army (JAM) were, respectively, the main Sunni and Shia militias.[6] However, smaller sectarian militias were often organized at the neighborhood level and were seen (and often acted) as the last line of defense for their local community (Carpenter, 2012; Hashim, 2007). While these militias were the natural product of mobilized sectarian groups providing services for their constituents, their very presence provoked a security dilemma. Essentially, the formation of any sectarian militia decreased the perceived security and increased perceptions of fear for anyone in the rival sect who the militia could potentially attack. This then incentivized the rival sect to create their own militia, which of course resulted in increased perceptions of fear and lowered perceptions of security for the original sect.

The movement along the pathway to sectarian conflict from the security dilemma to the conflict spiral took place as sectarian violence became more prevalent. Both AQI and JAM directly targeted the rival sect with tactics that included assassinating tribal leaders, government officials, religious leaders, mass killings, and bombing civilian and religious targets (Carpenter, 2012; Hashim, 2007). This created an environment where sectarian identity played the dual role of making individuals into targets as well as providing them with security and services through sectarian identification. As theorized in the literature, this created a situation where sectarian

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[6] AQI and JAM are also considered terrorist groups. Terrorist groups carry out the same functions in the pathway to sectarian conflict (e.g. increasing perceptions of fear and aggravating the security dilemma), but are considered by some scholars as a separate category of actor from purely sectarian groups and militias because they replace providing club goods and services to a broad sectarian constituency a broader political agenda. However, other scholars argue that terrorist groups exist not to pursue a political agenda, but to provide club goods and services to the in-group, and to create an environment of social solidarity (Abrahms, 2008)

violence itself surmounted all the other factors that had previously increased perceptions of fear. Sectarian violence came to be the cause and consequence of identification and mobilization (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007). As a result the security dilemma was exacerbated past the breaking point, and a cycle of revenge attacks on civilian populations as well as rival militias was started.

By February 2006, Iraq was in a state of sectarian civil war. In the following month nearly 4000 Iraqis were killed in sectarian violence (Hashim, 2007, 3). There are two main factors identified in the literature on intervention and sectarianism that can be identified in this case study as contributing to sectarian civil war after the military intervention: state failure and marginalization. State failure is recognized as increasing the likelihood of sectarian conflict, and hostile interventions are understood as being the most likely to result in state failure (Pickering & Kisangani, 2006; Saikal, 2000). As the literature suggests to be the likely outcome, the US led hostile intervention resulted in state failure due in part to the subsequent dissolution of Iraq's army and bureaucracy, as well as the near total destruction of Iraq's infrastructure.

The resource curse is also identified in the literature as a condition that increases the likelihood of sectarian conflict by creating and inflaming grievances over economic and political marginalization. Sectarian grievances themselves are also identified in the literature as a factor that increases the likelihood of sectarian conflict (Koubi & Bohmelt, 2013). Prior to 2003, Iraq's Shia majority resented being ruled by a Sunni minority who disproportionately benefited from oil rents, and who had access to political and economic opportunities that Shias did not. After the 2003 intervention, the relationship of privilege and grievance between Shias and Sunnis was inverted and further exacerbated by de-Ba'athification and state legitimized marginalization and violence under Maliki who can fairly be construed as a political entrepreneur. As predicted in the literature, state failure resulted in a condition of emerging anarchy (Carment, James, & Taydas,

2009). This was coupled with mutual and acute sectarian grievances which the literature suggests served to keep historical animosities alive and kept sectarian identity politically relevant and utilitarian (Haddad, 2013). Ultimately, both Iraqi case studies supports my argument that state failure, sectarian grievances and marginalization, poverty, and the active presence of ethnic entrepreneurs causes and exacerbates sectarian conflict.

Syria in 2011: Rival Interventions and Civil War

The final period of intervention in the Levant concerns the Syrian civil war between 2011 and early 2014. This period does not include recent developments such as US airstrikes in Syria and Iraq which would rightly deserve their own section. Numerous state and non-state actors have intervened in Syria on behalf of both the Assad regime and the rebels. As the literature suggests, rival interventions resulted in a bloodier, protracted conflict (Pickering & Kisangani, 2006). To identify the conditions that caused interventions in Syria to result in sectarian conflict this section will analyze the genesis of the Syrian civil war, the motivations and methods for both the supportive and hostile interventions, and the outcomes these interventions produced.

Social, Political and Economic Causes of the Syrian Civil War

The progression from peaceful protests in Syria to a full blown sectarian civil war that is spilling over Syria's boarders requires an analysis of the social, political, and economic conditions inside Syria prior to the initiation of the conflict. Analysis of these factors allows some of the conditions under which intervention results in increased sectarian conflict to be identified. High levels of poverty, marginalization and grievances, neoliberalism, oil rents and

one sectarian group capturing the state were all extant conditions in Syria prior to 2011, and are all identified in the literature as factors that make sectarian conflict more likely.

One of the most important social factors is the country's diverse population. The majority of Syria's population is Sunni Muslim. However, the state is ruled by the minority Alawite sect (an offshoot of Shia Islam) under the Assad regime. There are also numerous ethnic minorities that include Shias, Kurds, Druze, Christians, Turkomen, and Ismailis. Syria borders Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and Iraq and as a result all of the larger religious groups have ethnic allies in bordering states (Noueihed & Warren, 2013). Another pertinent social factor is that the Assad regime historically and contemporarily portrays itself as a defender of the secular state and minority rights.

An economic factor that helped lead Syria into civil war were the neoliberal reforms undertaken by Bashar al-Assad after he replaced his father as the Syrian president in 2000. These reforms were supposed to liberalize trade, expand the banking sector, increase foreign investment, and reduce tariffs. However, they resulted in public investment falling from 13% of GDP in 2005 to 8% of GDP in 2008, while private investment stagnated and the overall rate of investment in the country fell from 25% of GDP to 20% of GDP (Achcar, 2013, 45). Despite this, these neoliberal reforms created some economic gains which were captured almost entirely by Assad's closer allies. Meanwhile, the majority of Syrians experienced these reforms in terms of rising unemployment and housing prices. Additionally, decreased tariffs left domestic manufacturing unable to compete with foreign imports, creating further poverty and unemployment (Hinnebusch, 2012; Noueihed & Warren, 2013).

Politically, Bashar al-Assad alienated many rural areas in the years leading up to the 2011 protests and civil war. Bashar's father had invested heavily in rural areas, surrounded himself

with allies from the countryside, and enacted many popular subsidies. Bashar al-Assad lacked his father's connection to the countryside, ended many of the subsidies, removed many of the rural old guard from power, and focused investment on urban centers. The result was a drop in agriculture as a percentage of GDP and higher levels of poverty in rural areas. For example, an average family in Damascus spent $773 per month in 2009 versus an average rural family which only spent $439. The percentage of income spent on food by the urban family was 35%, while the percentage spent but the rural family was 60% (Noueihed & Warren, 2013, 222).

The evolution from protests, to civil war, to regional sectarian conflict was rapid and took place in an international context created by Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Assad was advised on how best to respond to civil unrest by a committee put together to analyze the other Arab Spring revolutions. The committee found that the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes fell because they failed to crush the protests instantly, and recommended a policy of violent response to all protests (Heydemann, 2013a). Subsequently, in the rural town of Deraa several young boys were arrested for vandalism and tortured by security forces. The resulting protests were met with state sanctioned violence that killed several protestors. This in turn led to more protests, and more protestor deaths which sparked a viscous cycle that spread rapidly in rural areas and eventually reached urban centers. It is believed that protestors began arming themselves and organizing for protection very early on in this process. Armed protestors were soon complemented by defectors from the Syrian army who could not conscience killing their countrymen, and who had little incentive to follow orders to kill their ethnic kin that came from their minority leaders and officers. By early 2012, the situation in Syria had reached the point of civil war (Hinnebusch, 2012; Nepstad, 2013; Noueihed & Warren, 2013).

Motivations for Intervention in Syria

      The motivations for states to undertake both supportive and hostile interventions in Syria's civil war are a mix of instrumental and affective in nature. On the instrumental side, the outcome of Syria's civil war will have a large effect on the regional balance of power. A rebel victory would likely result in the emergence of a Sunni regime, while a victory by the Assad regime will maintain the Alawite regime. This has important implications for the region, which is currently divided into two competing camps. On one side are the Shia actors: Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. They form an alliance that is fairly hostile to the west. In the other camp, there are the Sunni states comprised of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states[7] who are largely western aligned (Heydemann, 2013b; Ryan, 2012). In addition to this roughly bipolar configuration, Russia is a longtime ally of the Assad regime and the United States is a longtime adversary.

      The Sunni block would benefit greatly from the fall of the Assad regime, and thus has incentive to intervene for instrumental reasons. This can be seen through the realist lens as the desire to gain new assets, namely a more favorable balance of power, through hostile intervention. This is the case because the emergence of a new Sunni state would weaken their regional rival, Iran, and create political space for Turkey and the GCC states to expand their influence. In addition to this, there was an affective component of the camp's motivation to support their sectarian allies who were targeted by the Assad regime throughout the conflict (Khoury, 2013). While the relative importance of instrumental versus affective motivations can only be speculated on, the literature indicates that instrumental reasons likely had greater influence on policy makers.

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[7] The GCC states are: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates

The Shia camp's instrumental and affective motivations to intervene directly mirror those of the Sunni camp. A regime victory in Syria would strength Iran's position relative to Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and maintain unbroken chain of bordering Shia states that links Iran to Hezbollah in Lebanon by way of Iraq and Syria (Heydemann, 2013a). Seen through a realist lens, this represents a supportive intervention as a form balancing against the Sunni block to preserve a favorable balance of power created by a continuum of Shia states. Additionally, the Shia block also experiences the same affective motivation to aid their sectarian allies.

Methods of Intervention in Syria

All three methods of intervention - military, economic, and passive and direct transfers - have been employed by the actors intervening in Syria. Russia directly transfers money and weapons to Syria (Saul, 2014). Iran also directly transfers money and weapons in support of the Assad regime. In addition to transfers, Iran also has undertaken supportive military intervention by sending members of the Basij militia, and military advisors to aid Assad (Saul & Hafezi, 2014). Hezbollah, as a non-state actor, does not cleanly fit into the literature on intervention. Hezbollah fighters are active as combatants in Syria, which can either be seen as a permissive transfer of fighters on behalf of Lebanon, or as a direct military intervention taken by a non-state actor (Kershner, 2014; Wimmen, 2013).

On the hostile intervention side, the US has continually escalated the degree of intervention it is willing to undertake in Syria. Initially, the US limited itself to economic intervention via sanctions, later adding non-lethal aid to rebels, and even later running covert programs to train rebel forces outside of Syria. Eventually, the US escalated its aid to transfers of weapons to moderate rebel groups, although this is thought to be done through a third party,

qualifying it as a permissive transfer (Bowman & Fordham, 2014). Turkey and the several GCC states, which includes Saudi Arabia, transfer weapons and money both passively and directly to rebel groups. In addition to this, they also allow fighters to migrate to Syria to fight the Assad regime, although this is a purely passive transfer (Chivers & Schmitt, 2013).

Outcomes of Rival Interventions in Syria

The literature suggests that hostile interventions tend to result in longer and bloodier conflicts, whereas supportive interventions result in shortened hostilities (Pickering & Kisangani, 2006). It logically follows that rival interventions that do not result in either the state or the rebels taking a clear advantage would also result in a longer, bloodier conflict. This is exactly what has happened in Syria. The numerous interventions prolonged the war by infusing money, fighters, and weapons into a situation where neither the rebels nor the regime could win outright, nor solidify an advantage that would force the other side to negotiate a conditional surrender. The situation on the ground today is strong evidence that the outcome produced by the rival interventions is intense and regionalized and sectarianized conflict. The literature of sectarianism and conflict suggests that the outcome of increased sectarian conflict is due to a positive feedback loop in the pathway to sectarian conflict. As discussed in the 2003 Iraq case study, extant sectarian violence in the conflict spiral stage causes sectarian identity to turn individuals into targets. This increases perceptions of fear, which causes sectarian conflict to become both the cause and consequence of every other stage of the pathway.

Evidence for this positive feedback loop can be seen in Syria's civil war which was initially characterized as a conflict between the Assad regime and the Sunni majority and other oppressed minority groups such as the Kurds (Totton, 2013). Over time, the conception that the

war was between the rebels and the regime shifted to a conception of the war being defined in sectarian terms, with the Assad regime representing only one of several sectarian enemies. Evidence for this conceptual shift can be found in the now constant infighting between extremist and more moderate rebel groups, as well as between rebel groups from different sects. Such infighting has claimed roughly 3300 lives between the start of 2014 and late February (Barnard & Saad, 2013; Holmes, 2014). This shift in conception is partially explained by the theory that in the conflict spiral stage, rival groups can easily lose track of their original goals, and instead find themselves enmeshed in a conflict based solely or mainly on animosity towards their rival (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007).

Under Which Circumstances Does Intervention Cause Sectarian Conflict

By applying the literature review to the case studies on intervention in Levant from 1990 to 2014, it is possible to determine several circumstances under which intervention will be more likely to exacerbate (existing) sectarian conflict. First, as a precondition there must be multiple sects or ethnicities inside the target state which explains why Afghanistan, a far more homogenous state than Iraq or Syria, was largely spared sectarian conflict in the decade after it experienced military intervention. With this precondition met, there are several circumstances which I conclude make sectarian conflict more likely after an intervention. First, hostile interventions and rival interventions result in or exacerbate sectarian conflict because they reduce the state's capacity to provide security and other services. Poverty is also a circumstance that increases the likelihood of sectarian conflict, mainly by worsening perceptions of fear and increasing the utility gained from sectarian affiliation. Inequality and marginalization that are experienced along sectarian lines are other conditions that result in an increased likelihood of

sectarian conflict because salient sectarian grievances and negative sectarian sentiments are created. Finally, the presence of ethnic entrepreneurs is a circumstance under which intervention makes sectarian conflict more likely because the entrepreneurs will have an ideal environment to stoke perceptions of fear to garner political support.

The literature argues and the case studies support the claim that hostile interventions, such as the ones targeting Iraq, are more likely to result in sectarian conflict. Rival interventions where neither the hostile nor the supportive camp can produce a significant advantage in the target state, such as the rival interventions in the Syrian case study, are likely to result in sectarian conflict by the same logic. This is essentially because hostile interventions result in a greater degree of state disruption. The more disrupted a state is, the more likely a situation of emerging anarchy will occur. As discussed above, emerging anarchy is a primary factor that increases perceptions of fear which fuels the pathway to sectarian conflict as a whole (Saikal, 2000). The case study of Iraq post 2003 shows that hostile interventions that cause a great enough degree of state disruption create situations of emerging anarchy; the creation of political and security vacuums in Iraq are examples of this. Based on the ability of hostile interventions to drastically increase perceptions of fear, I conclude that hostile interventions (undertaken by the intervening state) are a primary exacerbating factor of sectarian conflict.

Poverty is strongly associated in the literature with a higher likelihood of conflict (Carment, James & Taydas, 2009; Carpenter, 2012; Koubi & Bohmelt, 2013; Murshed, 2010; Prasch, 2012). It is fairly intuitive that higher levels of poverty increases the likelihood of sectarian conflict; perceptions of fear for the future will be stronger among impoverished populations who will feel any economic shocks caused by an intervention more acutely. An impoverished state is weaker, which facilitates the emergence of anarchy. Finally, impoverished

individuals also gain more utility from sectarian identification because the poor have fewer alternatives other than sectarian mobilization to obtain services. Based on this, I believe poverty in the target state to be a circumstance under which intervention is more likely to produce sectarian conflict.

Another fairly intuitive circumstance that increases the likelihood of sectarian conflict is the presence of an extant violent conflict in a state that is the target of a hostile or rival intervention. Not only would the conflict result in degree of state disruption, in this circumstance the pathway to sectarian conflict would already be in motion because of increased perceptions of fear due to the conflict. This describes the situation in Syria prior to the rival interventions. Additionally, if the civil war in question is sectarian in nature it is already possible for a conflict spiral and positive feedback loop to have been created. Alternatively, even if the conflict in question is nonsectarian in nature, increased perceptions of fear would still incentivize sectarian identification and mobilization, thus keeping the potential for future sectarian conflict alive. Based on the inflammatory effect a preexisting conflict would have on the pathway to sectarian conflict, I believe that an extant civil conflict in the target state is a circumstance under which intervention is more likely to produce sectarian conflict.

A situation where one sect is politically or economically marginalized by a rival sect in the target state is another circumstance under which intervention will be more likely to cause or exacerbate sectarian conflict. Sectarian conflict is more likely under this condition because marginalization increases perceptions of fear for the future in the marginalized group and creates politically salient sectarian grievances. Marginalization leads to increased perceptions of fear when the marginalized group foresees a future of even greater marginalization and decreased opportunity and security. This was experienced by Shias under Saddam's rule, and by Sunnis

under Maliki's. Salient grievances exacerbate the pathway to sectarian conflict by producing

negative sentiments regarding the rival sect and a strengthened sense of affinity for one's own

sect. These two outcomes fuel the pathway to sectarian conflict by increasing the speed and

scope of the identification and mobilization stage, add increased aggravation to the security

dilemma stage, and ultimately can cause more intense conflict in the conflict spiral stage. To

expand the Iraqi example, 2014 has seen numerous retributive attacks against both sects for

grievances built up under both Saddam's and Maliki's rule. Based on the effects of both

increased perceptions of fear and grievances, I conclude that the presence of a marginalized

sectarian group in the target state is a circumstance under which intervention makes sectarian

conflict more likely.

The final circumstance that I identify as increasing the likelihood of sectarian conflict

after intervention is the presence of ethnic entrepreneurs. These are individuals who purposely

exacerbate perceptions of fear, of sectarian rivals in particular, in order to build a political or

social constituency. Ethnic entrepreneurs often legitimize and direct sectarian violence,

contributing to the conflict spiral stage and helping create positive feedback loops inside the

pathway. Ethnic entrepreneurs are particularly dangerous and influential after an intervention

because they can prey on naturally heightened perceptions of fear and make use of the increased

relevance of sectarian identity. Bashar al-Assad for example, has acted as an ethnic entrepreneur

since 2011 by maintaining the loyalty of many of Syria's minority groups with rhetoric

predicting their marginalization and slaughter under a non-secular Sunni regime. Assad has used

this rhetoric to convince minority groups to fight against rebel forces thus legitimizing and

directing sectarian violence by controlling perceptions of fear (Noueihed & Warren, 2013).

However, ethnic entrepreneurs do not need to be state leaders; they can exacerbate sectarian

relations at any level of society. Based on the ability of ethnic entrepreneurs to increase perceptions of fear and stoke violence I conclude that their presence in the target state is a circumstance under which intervention makes sectarian conflict more likely.

Conclusion

Interventions that result in state failure or to a lesser degree state weakness are the most likely to result in sectarian conflict. The most important factor that contributes to this is the type of intervention: hostile interventions and balanced rival interventions are the most likely to cause substantial state disruption according to the literature and as evidenced in the case studies. The other factors identified in the literature and seen in the Levant that influence the degree of state disruption are the presence of: poverty, preexisting conflict, a marginalized sectarian group, and ethnic entrepreneurs in the target state. Ultimately, all of these circumstances function in the same way. They increase the speed and scope of the pathway to sectarian conflict by increasing perceptions of fear, incentivizing sectarian identification and mobilization, exacerbating the security dilemma, or fueling the conflict spiral and creating positive feedback loops to other stages in the pathway.

The three Levantine case studies provide strong evidence for this argument. The two interventions into Iraq in the 90s did not result in sectarian conflict, despite increasing perceptions of fear by causing a humanitarian crisis and destroying most of Iraq's infrastructure. The reason for this is that the Iraqi state under Saddam's regime was not weakened enough for the pathway to sectarian conflict to reach the identification and mobilization stage because there was little utility to be derived from sectarian affiliation that the state did not also provide. The third intervention targeting Iraq caused state failure and put the pathway into motion,

culminating in a sectarian civil war. The lesser circumstances of poverty, grievances caused by marginalization, and the operation of ethnic entrepreneurs can all also be seen as contributing to Iraq's sectarian conflict.

The Syrian case study also provides evidence that rival interventions resulting in state weakness and the lesser circumstances of manipulative leaders, powerful sectarian grievances, poverty, and a preexisting conflict all provide fuel for the pathway to sectarian conflict. However, the civil war in Syria has lasted longer and has claimed more lives than the civil war in Iraq. Determining why this is the case would be a valuable topic of further study.

Another topic for further study is the emergence of the insurgent group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). It is worth noting that an analysis of ISIL and their activities since 2011 provides ample evidence that intervention that weakens states and creates grievances will result in increased sectarian conflict. Applying the pathway to sectarian conflict theory to the atrocities that ISIL has committed yields concerning results. Mass killings and ethnic cleansing committed by a Sunni group with high military capacity will result in massively increased perceptions of fear among Shi'ites and other minorities in the region. Ultimately, it is unsurprising that Shia and Kurdish militias are mobilizing in response, or that they have carried out revenge attacks against Sunni civilians (Hubbard, 2014). The only silver lining regarding ISIL and the situation in the region today is that the current US led military intervention is, for the first time, a supportive intervention in the Levant.

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