How internal armed conflicts become internationalized: introducing an integrated three-dimensional analytical framework

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ABSTRACT: This article presents a new integrative analytical framework for studying and understanding the multitude of processes that make intrastate armed conflicts become internationalized in a broad conceptual sense. The authors attempt to shift the debate beyond the dichotomy of international vs. transnational dimensions of civil wars and argue that numerous aspects of this process can essentially be interpreted as part of a complex phenomenon which is to be studied through the lens of a comprehensive analytical system. To this end, the authors conceptually distinguish between the three dimensions of conflict internationalization with the horizontal escalation leading to spatial spread, the vertical escalation expanding the conflict structure and the systemic escalation transforming its relevance within a larger international system. More importantly, the paper elaborates on how various processes that occur along different dimensions – and that have been grasped by a plethora of both theoretical and empirical contributions in the fields of IR and conflict studies – connect to one another creating both reinforcing and counterbalancing systemic loops that determine the international, transnational and cross-border scope of an internal conflict. The resulting three-dimensional analytical framework can be applied at both region-specific and conflict-specific levels. To demonstrate the former, the authors provide a sample application of the framework to the realm of armed conflict internationalization in Southeast Asia illustrating how varied instances of diffusion, intervention, externalization and proxy-structuring have driven one another creating patterns specific for this region.

Keywords: armed conflict, conflict internationalization, conflict contagion, conflict spillovers, intervention, conflict proxyfication.

INTRODUCTION

International and – increasingly so – transnational dimensions of internal strife have become a prominent object of both international studies' and conflict studies' inquiry. The body of academic literature addressing various 'external' aspects of civil wars has grown exponentially since early 1990s mostly driven by a dramatic increase in the share of what is often categorized as internationalized internal conflicts that spread across post-Cold War Europe, the post-Soviet space, Africa and the Middle East. Yet, to fully comprehend the nature of this phenomenon, it is not sufficient to limit the study of empirical pool of armed conflicts to just the post-bipolar timeframe since many patterns of internationalization had started taking shape since the end of World War II. It is conceptually important to distinguish

between the *causational mode* and the *consequential mode* of internationalization. The former refers to external causation of internal armed conflict (forces from the outside of a state that contribute to civil war onset) whereas the latter denotes various dynamics and manifestations of conflict that spread across national borders and – in one of the most prominent consequential scenarios – can even transform a conflict from nominally intrastate to varying degrees of interstate.

In this paper, the consequential mode is the one adopted as a starting point for deductive inquiry into the nature of the phenomenon. In the most general sense, the authors of the present paper define conflict internationalization as expansion of its structure and dynamics in such a way that it acquires cross-border dimensions that may include but are not limited to the geographic spread of hostilities or of its physical and social consequences, direct or indirect involvement of foreign actors (both state-based and non-state-based[1]), as well as any observable growth of the relevance of a given conflict for outside third parties. These and other aspects of consequential escalation may or may not affect the original intrastate dynamics of the conflict in question, but they nevertheless make it bigger and under some scenarios can even contribute to the onset of other conflicts beyond national borders. Given this broad interpretation of the conflict internationalization phenomenon, what the authors attempt to achieve in this paper is to integrate the multitude of discernable international, transnational, and cross-border manifestations of internal conflicts into an explanatory system that would reveal how this multi-faceted consequential escalation happens to penetrate the established state boundaries and affect a larger international system. Or, to put it simply, how do we get from here to there, from a purely intrastate armed conflict to an evidently internationalized armed conflict.

To this end, the authors elaborate an analytical matrix and loosely denominate it as an *integrated three-dimensional framework*. It conceptually captures the horizontal, vertical and systemic dimensions of armed conflict internationalization (hence the "3D" framework) as well as a variety of interplays between the three. Forsberg's delineation between clustering, contagion and connectedness (2016) is probably the most recent attempt at such integrated conceptualization. However, the integrated three-dimensional framework presents a broader perspective on the problem and aims to overcome the traditional contrasting between transnational and international manifestations of armed conflict by reconciling the two within a single analytical system. The following sections of this paper are structured in such a way that the authors first outline the elements of the analytical framework explaining mechanisms, channels and factors behind each of the three dimensions. This naturally includes a comprehensive literature review component since some elements of the framework have been thoroughly studied as standalone sociopolitical processes by many prominent scholars. To provide an example of framework application at the region-specific level, the authors then apply the framework to the realm of cases of armed conflict internationalization, that had taken place in Southeast Asia during the Cold War and the immediate post-Cold War period, looking for any regional patterns and specifics. The paper ends with reflecting on certain constraints of empirical use of the framework and identifying research avenues for its further scholarly application.

[1] The latter may include not just independent non-state actors, but also ones that can be categorized as state-enabled, state-controlled and state-tolerated non-state-actors.

Integrated three-dimensional analytical framework

Across a variety of ways by which intrastate armed conflicts become internationalized, three dimensions can be singled out analytically: a horizontal one, a vertical one and a systemic one. The "escalation" term can be employed to denote directed processes that lead to internationalization. At the same time, nominally, *escalation* is a much broader concept that encompasses multiple aspects of growth in conflict scale and intensity. In this sense, the authors tend to divert from the way *vertical escalation* and *horizontal escalation* are traditionally delineated.[2] Within the integrated three-dimensional framework that is being introduced in this paper, the horizontal dimension (horizontal escalation) represents varied processes through which the spatial spread of organized violence (often originated on the sub-state level) affects the territory of other (usually neighboring) countries leading to consequences (usually destabilizing) for both the source state and the recipient state. The vertical dimension (vertical escalation) covers the processes by which either the structure of a conflict gets expanded to involve outside (foreign) actors, normally as secondary (supporting) parties, or (often as a result of the former) the nominal level of conflict gets upgraded from intrastate to interstate. Vertical escalation is enabled either through an attack by a source state on the territory or subjects of one or more of its neighbors (*outward-directed vertical escalation*), or alternatively through intervention by a state-based external actor into the original internal conflict (*inward-directed vertical escalation*). Finally, the systemic dimension (systemic escalation) denotes the expansion of international systemic limits of original conflict by increased political stake, interest and/or attention of various international actors vis-à-vis the conflict in question. The proposed dimensions are conceptual constructs aimed at facilitating the analysis of conflict dynamics and are not intended to be interpreted literally. Multiple interplays between the three dimensions are also important because they can affect (stimulate or block) various dimension-specific factors through both reinforcing and counterbalancing systemic loops.

The Horizontal Dimension: Spreading Across Established Border

Under the horizontal dimension, organized violence provoked by an internal armed conflict (which often may amount to civil war[3]) or its physical and social consequences spill over the recognized national boundaries spreading spatially and producing destabilizing effects on other (mostly neighboring) countries.[4] The most directly observable manifestations of horizontal escalation are spontaneous *cross-border spillovers of hostilities* in regions where state boundaries are porous, poorly guarded or just formed by natural barriers (such as mountains, waterways, etc.). However, more common in real conflict internationalization cases are direct and indirect *physical consequences* (*spillovers*) of domestic armed struggle that spread over national borders and affect the neighboring

[2]*Vertical escalation* has traditionally referred to an increase in the intensity of violence, whereas *horizontal escalation* has been used to imply an increase in the number of actors involved, usually accompanied by inevitable geographic spread of violence.

[3]In case it is accompanied by at least 1000 battle-related deaths over a calendar year as stipulated by the widely accepted UCDP operationalization (see: http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/).

[4]At the same time, firstly, the status of the original conflict remains intrastate since no conscious state-based action takes place that would violate other state's sovereignty thus transforming the conflict into a nominally interstate one. Secondly, the conflict structure remains the same meaning that no external actors get involved into the original dispute as either primary or secondary parties.

countries. Such physical spillovers include flows of arms and mercenaries as well as of refugees that can not only undermine stability and put additional social and economic pressure on the local communities straining their limited resources (see, e.g., Choi and Salehyan 2013; Weiner 1992-1993; Whitaker 2003), but also be subjected to militarization and radicalization (see, e.g. Muggah 2006; Stedman and Tanner 2004). In a civil war zone, rebels also strive to establish sanctuaries over the border in a neighboring country, either with the help (in case of rivalry), through neglect or merely due to incompetence (in case of state weakness) of the latter's authorities which, among other things, has a significant effect on the prolongation of conflict (see, e.g., Salehyan 2007, 239-241). A violent intrastate conflict can also contribute to the destruction of physical infrastructure that stretches across territories of at least two countries and lead to negative economic implications for the neighboring nations including a decline of investment, emigration of skilled labor force, and even collapse of trade and entire sectors of economy (see, e.g., Bayer and Rupert 2004; Murdoch and Sandler 2002). Finally, it can provoke degradation of the regional ecosystems endangering the livelihoods of communities that live over the borders but are greatly affected by transnational environmental shocks. That said, physical spillovers are not merely standalone manifestations of horizontal escalation. They can also be conceptualized as being constituent elements within the mechanism behind a larger phenomenon that is normally described as *conflict diffusion*, or *conflict contagion*. With respect to transborder spread of civil wars, *diffusion* (or *contagion*) denotes a process by which an intrastate armed conflict in one country increases the likelihood of a similar conflict onset in another (usually neighboring) country (see, e.g. Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008; Carmignani and Kler 2016; Cederman, Girardin, and Gleditsch 2009; Hegre and Sambanis 2006, 529).

Some aspects of conflict diffusion have been well studied. These include various groups of factors (or conditions) that determine the estimated probability of contagion (see Forsberg 2014a), the primacy of state-based actors as agents of the process (see Black 2012), the role of cross-border ethnic kin groups in mediating contagion (see, e.g., Cederman, Girardin, and Gleditsch 2009; Forsberg 2014b), and the target state's capacity to resist "infection" (see Braithwaite 2010; Danneman and Ritter 2014). Channels of transmission that serve as a medium of influence through which a target state is affected can be broadly categorized as falling under one of the three types. The first category is represented by the same physical spillover effects that were already described above. Flows of refugees (see Krcmaric 2014; Lischer 2015), arms and mercenaries, cross-border activity of the rebels, degradation of transboundary infrastructure and other destabilizing consequences of violent internal strife function not only as standalone manifestations of horizontal internationalization, but also as a transmission channel that facilitates regional diffusion of violent internal strife. The second category encompasses various information-based channels of transmission, particularly linked to the so-called *demonstration and learning effects* (DLEs) that allow agents in one state to learn from and replicate the behavior of agents in another state even if these are not located in the immediate vicinity of each other (see Kuran 1998; Lake and Rothchild 1998). Such mechanism primarily functions through learning by proto-rebels from ongoing civil wars as well as from victorious revolutionary governments (see Linebarger 2016). Finally, the third category of transmission channels covers social-psychological connections established by various transnational identity-based ties such as ethnic, religious and ideological ones. Through such kin-based channels, certain psychic and emotional states (e.g., the perception of threat) are transmitted between peoples residing across national borders but sharing common ethnic, religious or ideological

background (see, e.g., Ayres and Saideman 2000; Cederman, Girardin, and Gleditsch 2009; Forsberg 2014b; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). Through the so called "domino effect", diffusion can lead to destabilization of entire regions that become engulfed with conflict ranging from political instability to outright civil war. Such conceptualization was widely applied to describe the dynamics of the communist regimes' collapse in Eastern Europe in late 1980s – early 1990s, as well as to explain the clustering of civil wars in Great African Lakes region through 1990s-2000s. More recently, the concept has been adapted to address the wave of revolutionary events and violent civil conflicts that have spread through the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region since late 2010 (see Saideman 2012).

The Vertical Dimension: Expanding the Conflict Involvement of Other Actors Expanding the Conflict Structure

Under the vertical dimension, external actors get involved, either voluntarily or not (usually as secondary, or supporting, parties), expanding the original conflict structure. At the highest level of vertical escalation, the conflict status gets upgraded from intrastate to interstate. At the same time, localization of hostilities may or may not expand geographically. Voluntary involvement of outside actors in support of one of the primary parties of an internal conflict can be categorized as *intervention* (*inward-directed vertical escalation*). In case of non-voluntary involvement, another (often neighboring) country becomes a victim of an attack by the state where the original internal armed conflict takes place – the process categorized as *externalization* (*outward-directed vertical escalation*)[5]. According to Davies (2002), domestic violent unrest increases the probability of both initiating conflicts abroad[6] and becoming a target of attack by another state. Trumbore (2003) argues that, at least with ethno-political rebellions, externalization is more common than intervention, and states dealing with internal strife are more likely to initiate the use of force rather than to become victims of external aggression. However, in absolute terms, intervention (or interference) by external forces into ongoing intrastate conflict is a much more common phenomenon, which is illustrated by the Libyan case as well as other cases from the region.

Various aspects of external interventions into civil wars have already been thoroughly studied and reported.[7] Depending on intervention dynamics, it can result either in encouraging or suppressing the spread of original violent conflict. Forms (modes) of intervention vary from high level (high-cost, hard) involvement, such as direct military intervention, to relatively low level (low-cost, soft) involvement limited to just providing arms, logistical, financial, political, diplomatic or other kind of support to one of the primary parties, either overtly or covertly. Depending on intervenor's motivations, support is provided either to the central government (a group that currently controls the central government) or – when outside stakeholders see interest in a rebel victory – to the opposition group(-s). If support to the opposition takes the form of direct military intervention, an intrastate conflict gets effectively transformed into an interstate one. One of the most important aspects of the intervention mechanism is motivation behind external

[5]We define *externalization* as deliberate actions taken by a state facing domestic rebellion that constitute effective violation of another (neighboring) state's sovereignty, normally in the form of limited or full-fledged military campaign.

[6]At the same time, Davies' results (2002, 685-686) indicate that nonviolent conflict reduces such probability while increasing the likelihood of domestic repression.

[7]For one of previous comprehensive state–o- the-art overviews, see Regan (2010).

involvement. Every generic decision-making process about whether to intervene or not revolves around a combination of motivation and opportunity. Whereas opportunity is provided by an intrastate conflict itself (by debilitating a rival state and rendering it incapacitated), motivation can be based on a variety of considerations. Traditionally, motivations to intervene have been categorized as either *instrumental* (geopolitical interests, territorial ambitions, economic gains, domestic political agenda, etc.), *affective* (shared historic grievances, ethnic or religious identity, racial-cultural affinity, common ideological principals, etc.) or some combination of the two (see, e.g., Carment and James 2000; Cooper and Berdal 1993; Heraclides 1990; Saideman 2001; Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham 2011; Suhrke and Noble 1977).

Recent research also suggests that traditional delineation between neutral mediation as a third-party conflict management strategy, on the one hand, and biased intervention by joining one side of a conflict, on the other hand, needs to be corrected towards a more integral understanding of third-party strategies. Corbetta and Melin (2017) maintain that third-party states that have vested interests in a civil conflict and possess appropriate resources are likely to adopt dual methods employing a mix of biased coercive and non-biased non-coercive strategies. If intervention happens, it is likely to prolong the duration of a civil war (see Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski 2005; Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000; Cunningham 2010; Regan 2002)[8], and to increase its intensity (see Butt 2017; Lacina 2006) as well as the likelihood of recurrence (see Karlen 2017). Finally, according to Jones (2017), the choice of strategy and timing of military intervention into a civil war has a fundamental effect on its eventual outcome with regards to whether the war becomes protracted or not and whether it ends with a government victory, a rebel victory or a negotiated settlement.

The Systemic Dimension: Political Expansion and Penetration Through International System

The systemic dimension of conflict internationalization refers to expansion of its external systemic limits, or the scope that it occupies within a larger international system. When systemic escalation of an intrastate armed conflict takes place, its relevance grows penetrating through the system and affecting international relations, power balances and relationship structures on the regional and even global level. Firstly, the number of stakeholders (external players that have at least some vested interest in the conflict) increases which may include powerful international actors that are central to the system structure. Secondly, stakes associated with the conflict and its outcome may get higher for these external players leading to escalation of their commitment to relevant issues. Thirdly, it often (though not always) translates into bigger involvement of respective actors in the conflict transforming them into third parties or secondary (supporting) parties within the conflict structure. Forth, even when systemic escalation does not bring increased involvement of concerned outside actors within the conflict structure, it can still become a factor in international political dynamics and affect interstate relations at systemic level by causing mistrust and tension or, on the contrary, by stimulating security cooperation. Respectively, it can lead, among other things, to either dysfunction or development of regional security arrangements. As a result of all these developments, the conflict gains more

[8] For a somewhat contradicting argument, see Testerman's (2015) claim that civil conflicts in which there is a break in external support to rebels are even more likely to last longer than the ones with continued external support.

international attention and becomes progressively more salient on the international agenda, though it may nominally remain intrastate.

Precursory ideas about a linkage between communal violence (in this case – ethnic conflict), on the one hand, and international systems-level conflict; on the other hand, were first developed by Midlarsky (1992) in his model of systemic war. According to this model, applied to the spread of ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia, resource inequality under the conditions of multipolarity triggers alliance formation, while memories of past conflicts produce an overlap in conflict structures. The resulting change in the balance of power leads to systemic war although such developments do not occur frequently.[9] Another notable early contribution to this conceptual domain was made by Marshall's macro-sociological theory of social conflict that seeks to explain internal communal strife and international systemic conflict as driven by the same processes thus rendering traditional intrastate/interstate dichotomy analytically inaccurate (see Marshall 1997). Later, Marshall (1999) explored the close interplay between localized political violence and systems-level global conflict processes specifically during the Cold War period. Expansion of the conflict's external systemic limits lies at the heart of the systemic dimension of internationalization. The more political, economic and security interests of external actors are affected, the more conflict is generated among a larger circle of parties by regional diffusion of insecurity (Marshall 1997, 93-98). The greater the systemic escalation is, the more it destabilizes the system as a whole because of the multiplier effect.

Potential for systemic escalation is particularly considerable when the conflict structure is linked to broader patterns of competition in international relations such as pre-existing international rivalry dyads. Power dynamics within these dyads can become embedded into an intrastate conflict structure transforming it into a proxy war and, likely, exacerbating the rivalry itself. Another factor associated with systemic escalation is when the original dispute's object of incompatibility includes "broader" issues that are relevant at the systemic level.[10] The further systemic limits of an intrastate armed conflict expand, the more complex it becomes in terms of comprehending and managing its dynamics. Increased number of stakeholders always results in greater uncertainty due to fluid alliances. It also makes any settlement process less likely to succeed because of more individual interests involved that are to be reconciled with one another and due to higher probability of external spoilers. Unlike the horizontal dimension and the vertical dimension, the systemic dimension of conflict internationalization does not imply just one-off events, nor is it limited to directional processes, but rather involves interconnectedness that can become long-standing. Interplay between internal conflict dynamics and systems-level dynamics – together with diffusion, intervention and externalization processes[11] – can also create linkages between different conflicts within a single region. This interconnectedness has been conceptualized as *regional conflict complexes*, or *RCCs* (see Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1998) where distinct conflicts become mutually reinforcing to the point that it is impossible to completely disentangle them and to solve just one without addressing the entire regional dimension.[12] Connectedness in a RCC is maintained by links formed between actors and

[9] Midlarsky identified only eight systemic wars that had happened between 500 B.C. and early 1990s.

[10] A good example would be the Palestinian-Israeli issue of control over the Temple Mount (Haram al-Sharif) in East Jerusalem which is salient for Muslim and Jewish communities across the world.

[11] Heterogeneous distribution of country attributes that contributes to clustering of conflicts in time and space (see Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008) also favors such connectedness.

[12] For alternative conceptualizations see *regional conflict formations* (RCFs) defined by Rubin, Armstrong and Ntegeye (2001, 2) as " sets of violent conflicts – each originating in a particular state or sub-region – that form

between issues – from different conflicts – as well as by a kind of shared pool of resources which strengthens belligerents' fighting capacities and creates reinforcing loops perpetuating the complex's lifecycle.

Focusing on the economic aspects of connectedness, Pugh, Cooper, and Goodhand (2004, 17-44) single out the role of war economies in the formation of regional conflict complexes. Shadow economies are maintained by various types of transnational networks which include economic networks (illicit trade of natural resources and commodities, manipulated systems of taxation and illegal mechanisms to evade regulation), military networks (arms transfers and mercenary flows), political networks (transnational political ties) and social networks (transborder ethnic kin and diasporas). Especially in regions with abundant resources, war economies on both the supply and the demand side bring together internal and external players with vested interest in continued armed struggle. Cross-border illicit trade in natural resources serves as one of the major sources of financing a rebellion. Although the primary financial gain is for those on the supply side, external actors that buy illegally channeled natural resources (such as war diamonds, timber and drugs) also gain significantly from these kinds of networks since the latter offer deals at dumped price levels. Similarly, arms flows that go the opposite direction (into a conflict zone) create vested interest for those external players that are involved with arms smuggling networks such as regional criminal syndicates and, indirectly, global arms manufacturers. All these stakeholders flourish and proliferate on the fertile ground of complex emergencies produced by systemically escalated armed conflicts. Therefore, higher stakes for external actors that are a by-product of systemic escalation can be associated not only with certain favorable outcomes but also with continuation of the conflict per se. Interconnectedness adds more layers of complexity and offers at least one additional level of analysis which would be the one of RCC (or RCF) itself. Based on the logic of systemic dimension, a single internal conflict's structure can be studied as a subsystem within a respective regional conflict complex (or "formation"), while the RCC itself can be studied as a subsystem within a larger international system.

Interplay between the Three Dimensions

The distinction between different dimensions of internationalization is analytical and serves mostly conceptual purposes. Processes taking place within each of the three dimensions exhibit cross-dimensional links and correlations with each other. Many, though not all, of those correlations are mutually reinforcing meaning that escalation along one dimension is likely to trigger simultaneous or consecutive escalatory dynamics along another dimension or even both other dimensions. The horizontal-vertical and vertical-horizontal directed connections are among the most commonly observed interdimensional linkages. The risk of civil war contagion (the one of "contracting" organized violence "disease") also threatens interests of a neighboring state prompting the latter to consider intervening in order to reduce threat and protect own interests by curbing hostilities in the former (see, e.g., Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000; Kathman 2010; Lemke and Regan 2004; Thyne 2009). Kathman (2011) argues that state's motivation for intervention into a civil war

mutually reinforcing linkages with each other throughout a broader region, making for more protracted and obdurate conflicts"; and Ansorg's *regional conflict systems* defined as "geographically determined area of insecurity, characterised by interdependent violent conflicts with a plurality of different sub-state, national or transnational actors" (Ansorg 2011, 174-175).

lies not only with its narrow interests related to the conflict at risk of contagion, but especially so with its wider regional interests that might be affected by such diffusion. In theory, such military intervention, if successful, creates a counterbalancing loop containing diffusion of the initial conflict, i.e. halting horizontal escalation.

According to the same counterbalancing logic, if an external intervention aimed at suppressing internal violent strife in one country is largely expected but then fails to materialize, this may serve as a powerful learning lesson for opposition groups in another country that might be eager to launch a rebellion but are afraid of external involvement in support of the government that would undermine their chances. If a suppressive foreign intervention (vertical escalation) in the former state never happens, then it can produce a contagion effect (horizontal escalation) for the latter state by lowering estimated costs for its rebels and prompting them to opt for a fight. The same demonstration and learning logic can be equally applied to a government side of this equation with an oppressive and abusive regime choosing a violent approach to dealing with internal dissent if it witnesses a lack of will and commitment on behalf of international actors to launch protective interventions in other similar cases. In practice, however, this counterbalancing feedback (horizontal escalation/diffusion – vertical escalation/intervention – horizontal de-escalation) is anything but guaranteed. Multiple destabilizing effects of external military intervention into a civil war exacerbate rather than pacify its dynamics consequently leading to greater spatial spread of physical spillovers thus expanding transmission channels for further contagion (horizontal dimension) as well as increasing motivation for further intervention (vertical dimension) while potentially affecting the interests of actors at a higher level of a larger international system (systemic dimension). Consequently, a reinforcing loop is created which seems to be a much more likely product of these kinetic developments than a counterbalancing one.

One of the ways out of this counterbalancing vs. reinforcing feedback is through disaggregating between various types of intervention. Peksen and Lounsbery (2012) maintain that hostile interventions (in support of the opposition) increase the likelihood of conflict contagion to neighboring countries, whereas supportive interventions (in favor of the government) have a pacifying effect reducing the risk of contagion on the regional scale. At the same time, neutral interventions (aimed at ceasing violence and mitigating the strife without taking sides) are unlikely to have significant impact in terms of conflict diffusion potential. Thus, escalatory dynamics along the horizontal dimension become conditioned by variations of escalation along the vertical dimension. Along the same line as when the risk of diffusion triggers preventive external intervention by a neighboring state (horizontal-vertical connection), similar concern about potential target states (that are at risk but are not yet "infected") can affect political dynamics within a larger international system (horizontal-systemic connection). Flynn (2017, 14-15) argues that an increase in the level of neighborhood conflict that poses a risk of diffusion to a potential target state correlates with the increase in the amount of aid provided to such a recipient if the latter is of significant economic and political interest to the U.S. as the largest international donor. This kind of action (preventive aid) by a systemic hegemon is aimed at preventing a situation when potential contagion becomes a reality and starts to negatively affect its interests thus causing systemic escalation.[13]

[13] A similar logic underlies Woo's findings that oil exporting governments tend to receive increased external support from oil importing states that try to avoid the break of their oil trade ties (i.e. harm to their economic interests) caused by potential onset of a civil conflict in the oil exporting state (Woo 2017, 521-524). However,

Systemic factors such as regional rivalry and alliances can also determine the degree of the geographic spread of physical spillovers from an intrastate conflict (systemic-horizontal connection). Moorthy and Braithwaite (2016, 14) establish that states are more likely to accept refugees fleeing their rivals perceiving it as a proxy opportunity to economically and militarily weaken the latter and to "challenge their reputation as being unable to guarantee the security of their citizens". This finding not only underscores the importance of international dimension of refugee flows but also proves that state-based action based on systemic considerations can to some degree block certain aspects of horizontal escalation. There are other ways in which systemic factors determine (stimulate or block) the two other dimensions of escalation. It is important to bear in mind that regional conflict complexes (systemic dimension) maintain relatively long-standing connections between actors, issues and resource access points from different conflicts within a single region. By making this happen, RCCs contribute to strengthening of existent transmission channels for conflict diffusion (horizontal dimension) as well as to building motivations and opportunities of both regional and global external stakeholders for potential intervention (vertical dimension).

Identifying "joints" of different internationalization dimensions can also contribute to further conceptualization of the *proxy war* phenomenon. On the one hand, a generic proxy-conflict structure can be regarded as a result of intervention (inward-directed vertical escalation) by two external powers (that often happen to be engaged in strategic rivalry vis-à-vis each other) in support of the opposite sides of an intrastate conflict. On the other hand, such symmetric structure can also be an element (both the process and the outcome) of systemic escalation within a larger international system. Not surprisingly, as revealed by Findley and Teo (2006, 833-835), when one's strategic rival has already intervened in an ongoing civil conflict on the side of the government, the risk of one's own intervention on the side of the opposition increases by roughly eleven times. In the same way, when a rival intervenes on the side of the opposition, the probability of own intervention on the side of the government increases by nearly four times. A proxy struggle can unfold not only on the territory of a third country (the one engulfed by a proxy-type civil conflict), but also as a *mirrored cross-intervention* with both rivals providing direct or indirect support to each other's domestic opposition or rebel forces. In both situations, two rivals are engaged in an attempt to destabilize one another but avoid a riskier alternative of direct confrontation (see, e.g., Maoz and San-Akca 2012; Salehyan 2010). This way, a deeply internationalized intrastate conflict that has undergone both vertical and systemic escalation becomes a substitute for traditional international conflict (old-fashioned war between two nation-states).

Sample application of the framework: internationalization of intrastate armed conflicts in southeast Asia during the Cold War and beyond

The region of Southeast Asia, which is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse, was not immune from the projection of global confrontation affecting regional politics over most of the second half of the 20th century. Diffusion, spill-overs, interventions and externalizations of various forms of organized violence took place in Southeast Asia to no lesser extent than in other traditionally conflict-prone regions of the world.

these findings are not conditioned by conflict in neighborhood and thus represent systemic restraints on conflict onset proper rather than on its internationalization.

The Horizontal Dimension: Patterns and Channels of Conflict Diffusion in Southeast Asia

An intuitive relevance of Southeast Asia for exploring the phenomenon of conflict diffusion can be retrospectively highlighted by invoking the Domino Theory which was leveraged by the consecutive U.S. administrations of Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon to argue – not so much in conceptualized as in politicized way – for the ostensible threat of automatic Soviet takeover of reginal states one by one through the communist expansion. As it is now evident, the spread of ideologically-driven intrastate conflicts were not that inevitable as U.S. policymakers tended to believe. But still, Southeast Asia was a vivid example. Whereas the strategically important Indian and Middle Eastern "dominoes" never fell, in Southeast Asia, the rightist regimes were eliminated in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam. More generally, most of cases of regional conflict diffusion occurred mainly during the Cold War period underscoring the role of ideological factors. Of particular interest is to identify specific transmission channels (types of channels) and agents (both state and non-state) that were involved in the contagion mechanism associated with these cases. Probably, the most common channel of contagion during that time used to be *communist inspiration* transmitted between communist-affiliated political actors, the one which can be categorized as a combination of *transnational identity-based* (specifically – ideological) *ties,* on the one hand, and *demonstration and learning effects (DLE),* on the other hand. One of the first instances where this mechanism led to conflict diffusion was the civil war in Burma. In 1948, the Communist party of Burma (CPB) decided to adopt the Maoist strategy of guerilla warfare against the government (Lintner 1990, 14), though at the time there does not appear to have been actual material support from the Communist Party of China (CPC). However, Maoist inspiration went beyond just the CPB. In 1949, with the beginning of the conflict against the Karen movement, the latter was heavily influenced by Mao's ideas and recipes which led to nationalist movement's ideological drift to the left through the entire 1950s period (Smith 1999, 93).

Another example of the communist inspiration channel in action was the early stage of the civil conflict in South Vietnam (1955) where Vietnam Workers' Party leaders were supportive of Mao's idea and practice of "people's war". The onset of internal armed conflict in Malaysia in 1963 between the government and the Clandestine Communist Organization (CCO) was preceded by the CCO leaders' trip to China and the resulting exposure to the CPC's doctrine (Porritt 2004, 83). Finally, Mao's brutal struggle was also inspirational for Khmer Rouge's Pol Pot who called for building of a new atheistic civilization (Deac 1997, 42) effectively facilitating contagion to Cambodia in 1967.[14] The role of transnational ideological (communist) ties had not always been limited to just inspiration. In a number of cases, a *direct support* from China's and other regional communist parties to their foreign peers contributed significantly to armed conflict onset. In late 1950s, contagion effects took place between regional communist actors and Laos when Chinese, South Vietnamese, and

[14] The Khmer Rouge case may also be categorized as an example of negative learning (a subtype of demonstration and learning effects, DLEs). Norodom Sihanouk, a longtime leader of Cambodia, despite his sympathy for communist movements abroad, was so much concerned by the war exploding in neighboring South Vietnam in 1960s that he moved decisively against the left at home forcing many communist leaders, including some top members of Khmer Rouge's central committee, to flee the capital for a Vietnamese communist base along the border (Becker 1998, 10-11).

especially North Vietnamese communists provided training and overt military support to the Pathet Lao movement which would later (in 1975) assume political power in Vientiane. In a different but related development in mid-1970s, the communist insurgency, already underway in Thailand, reflected similar communist vs. anti-communist dynamics in Laos, Cambodia, South Vietnam and Malaysia, while the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) received direct and indirect support from ideological allies in respective countries as well as from China and North Vietnam.

Direct cross-border spillover of hostilities is another transmission channel relevant for conflict diffusion in Southeast Asia. Probably the most illustrative case was Burma in late 1950s – early 1960s when Chinese war with the Koumintang (KMT) sporadically spilled over to the Burmese territory. Firstly, when the KMT fled to the Burmese border following their defeat in the Chinese civil war it triggered the constant Burmese troop presence in the frontier Shan state. Although the 1960-1961 Sino-Burmese military operations finally succeeded at completely expelling the KMT to Laos and Thailand, still the influx of ethnic Burman troops and officials to Sham had considerably disturbed and sparked grievances among local Shan communities (Smith 1999, 190). It would later result in the Sham State Army becoming one of the largest anti-government insurgent groups in Myanmar. Secondly, when the anti-KMT hostilities spilled over to the northernmost Kachin State, China started to project claims on some of parts of the Burmese territory which led to the 1960 Burma-China bilateral treaty transferring the possession of three Kachin villages over to Beijing. The decision destabilized local Kachin communities so much that in February 1961 a popular uprising began accompanied by the formation of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) (Smith 1999, 157-158).

Transborder arms flow can be identified as another transmission channel for regional conflict diffusion. In Indonesia, the second phase of the separatist insurrection by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) was at least partly facilitated in 1990 by weapons transfers (financed by profits from marijuana production) from Thailand and Cambodia, the latter at the time having been engaged in internal armed conflict of its own (Schulze 2004, 28). Later, in Thailand, another separatist insurgency, the one in southern Patani region, was preceded in 2003 by transnational arms trade that involved groups in Cambodia, Mindanao (the Philippines) and Sri Lanka (Croissant 2007). The same Patani case also exemplifies the role of *foreign fighters*, coupled with their *cross-border training and military experience*, as yet another physical spillover turned to be a channel for conflict contagion. Specifically, some Patani insurgents had received training in Aceh, Indonesia, which in 2003 was still in a state of internal armed conflict. Besides, many Patani natives had fought alongside the mujahedeen in Afghanistan but returned to Thailand in 2003 and comprised a significant segment of Patani insurgent leadership in 2004 (Utitsarn 2007, 2). Recruits of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) from Indonesia, as well as of Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from the Philippines had, too, fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan where they not only accumulated military experience but were also exposed to indoctrination about global jihad (Oak 2010).

However, unlike Communist inspiration and support, transnational Islamist ideology as another type of identity-based ties surprisingly did not stand out as a channel of conflict diffusion in Southeast Asia. Although Al-Qaeda tried to establish ties with JI, ASG, MILF and some other minor groups it did not result in trans-jihadization of numerous Islamist insurgencies in the region. The rebel groups that associated themselves with Islamist cause remained focused on local grievances and stuck to their own agenda rather than to

transnational Islamist ideologies (see Finnbogason and Svensson 2018, 104). Therefore, most religious rebellions have been largely isolated from each other and from the global jihadist networks. A notable exception is the recently intensified effort by ASG and the Maute group to set a foothold in the Philippines in the capacity of an Islamic State regional affiliate which resulted in the 2017 Marawi crisis. But it remains to be seen whether this conflagration will have a region-wide contagious effect.

The Vertical – Horizontal Connection: Low Level Interventions Leading to Contagion

Few patterns of internationalization in Southeast Asia exhibited elements of outward-directed vertical escalation (externalization). For example, Myanmar (Burmese military) "has on many occasions pursued rebels from the Karen National Liberation Army across the border into Thailand, in some cases clashing with Thai troops" (Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz 2008, 486). Specifically, in 1990 hundreds of Myanmar troops appeared to have crossed the border river into Thailand while trying to take over the facility operated by Karen militants. The subsequent clash with Thai military forces resulted in a number of Myanmar soldiers killed or captured with the rest withdrawing back across the border. However, for the most part, externalization in the region has not been as common as intervention (inward-directed vertical escalation). Many of those interventions, especially during the Cold War era, unfolded along the same ideological communist vs. anti-communist lines as did conflict diffusion. What is notable, however, is a strong connection between contagion and intervention processes that reinforced and facilitated each other in many cases, including those already discussed above.

When the Royal Lao Government (RLG) meddled in the South Vietnamese civil war in late 1950s providing diplomatic support to the government side, it constituted clear violation of the 1957 neutrality agreement between the RLG and the communist Pathet Lao. It also alarmed North Vietnam which was the chief sponsor of South Vietnamese communist rebels. As a result, Hanoi decided to step up its support for the Pathet Lao which represented a kind of retaliatory low-level intervention and came to be one of the decisive factors in the onset of a civil war in Laos itself. Despite obvious ideological affinity between China and Cambodia's Khmer Rouge, Prince Norodom Sihanouk who opposed the KR eventually aligned his policy towards the Vietnam War with the one of Beijing by beginning to covertly assist the Chinese military aid to the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF, or Viet Cong) in 1964.[15] This low-level interference with the South Vietnamese conflict would later play against Sihanouk since his support to the NLF substantially enhanced the latter's capacity to harbor the brotherly KR allowing it to regroup and to start an insurgency against Sihanouk in 1967.

Another dramatic example of retaliatory intervention provoking conflict contagion was the support provided to the communist insurgency in Thailand by external actors in mid-1970s. Prior to that, the Thai government had overtly meddled in Laos from 1961 onward (by facilitating U.S. military operations and sending approx. 20,000 Thai "volunteers" against the Pathet Lao) as well as in South Vietnam (by providing territory for an American airbase used for military campaign in South Vietnam). When the PL assumed power in 1975 it retaliated for prior Thai interference by supporting the Communist Party of Thailand, as did North Vietnam (furious over Thai cooperation with the U.S.) by providing large amounts of weaponry and training to the CPT fighters along with logistical support to

[15] Chinese aid to Viet Cong was allowed to pass through Sihanoukville in Cambodia.

CPT's primary Chinese suppliers (Randolph and Thompson 1981). Thus, Thai support for the U.S. policies of containing the communist threat in Indochina backfired spectacularly and contributed to the escalation of a minor Thai communist insurgency into a major civil war.

A notable exception to the pattern presented above is the fate of North Vietnam that directly intervened in four nearby intrastate conflicts: 1) backing the insurgent NLF in South Vietnam from 1959 to 1975, 2) patronizing the communist Pathet Lao in Laos, 3) invading Cambodia and successfully toppling the Khmer Rouge (through the Kampuchea United Front for National Salvation, KNUFNS) in 1978, and finally 4) supporting – on a smaller scale – the Communist Party of Malaysia. Despite these multiple interventions, at the time, conflict never spread to North Vietnam which was a "puzzling non-recipient of contagion" – a deviation specifically addressed and explained by Black (2012, Chapter 5). Another striking evidence in support of the vertical-horizontal correlation is the link between non-interference and non-escalation in religiously defined conflicts. Unlike Communist-infused rebellions, Islamist insurgencies in Southeast Asia witnessed no high-level military interventions (troop support to at least one of the belligerents) by external powers. Finnbogason and Svensson (2018, 103-105) cite this "lack of internationalization" as a key factor that between 1975 and 2015 prevented minor regional armed conflicts from escalating into full-fledged jihadist civil wars. Consequently, as argued in the previous section, it has helped to keep religiously defined rebellions relatively isolated from each other by suppressing transnational Islamist ideological ties as channels of contagion. This pattern singles out Southeast Asia among other world regions, such as Africa, Asia (excluding SEA) and the Middle East, where roughly a third of religious armed conflicts have witnessed external interference (vertical dimension) that facilitated transnational linkages and the diffusion of violence (horizontal dimension).

The Vertical – Systemic Connection: Intervention and connectedness within Broader Regional Settings

Probably the most distinctive illustration for a complex interplay between the vertical and the systemic dimension during the Cold War era is the renowned Vietnam war case (1955 – 1975). After the partitioned Vietnam had gained independence from France, the conflict started as a civil war in the Republic of (South) Vietnam with the official government confronted by the communist-oriented NLF (Viet Cong). However, almost from the very beginning, the conflict was subjected to vertical escalation which eventually led to dramatic systemic escalation. NLF was initially supported by the communist-controlled Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam (low level intervention) leading to "Domino Theory"–inspired geopolitical fears on behalf of the United States. As a result, the same projection of global East-West confrontation occurred in Southeast Asia as in many other regional Cold War-driven hotspots. Gradually escalated U.S. involvement, starting with military advisors in early 1960s and followed by the buildup of American troops on the South Vietnamese territory up to early 1965, culminated in the Camp Holloway incident on February 7, 1965 which effectively transformed the conflict into an interstate one. Eventually, the process of internationalization of the Vietnam War – unfolding along all three dimensions – had drawn into its structure an impressive number of regional and global state-based and non-state actors, including Australia, Cambodia's Khmer Republic, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, and the Royal Lao Government – on the one side, and PRC China, DPR Korea,

Cambodia's Khmer communists and the Pathet Lao – on the other side (to name just those taking a direct part).[16]

The Vietnam War exhibited a substantial systemic dimension, not just by shaping international agenda and drawing the resources of major regional and global actors thus affecting the balance of power on a larger scale, but also by having long-term implications for the structure of the international system. The first steps towards rapprochement between the United States and China took place in early 1970s exerting some positive influence over multiple conflict developments in Indochina. But it really was only after the end of the Vietnam War that favorable conditions were created and capitalized upon to move Washington and Beijing towards full-fledged bilateral normalization which had a substantial impact on the Cold War dynamics and the nature of relationship within the U.S.-China-Soviet Union triangle. A number of conflicts in Southeast Asia validly prove (by contradiction) the relative significance of issues at stake and of state's own capacities for attracting external actors and triggering systemic escalation. Thus, in some cases, the potential for systemic internationalization remained suppressed because the issues within the object of incompatibility were of low systemic salience (e.g., Thailand's support to ethnic insurgency in Burma/Myanmar), while in other cases the state managed to contain the conflict making the situation seem less precarious at the systemic level and therefore resulting in less international attention (e.g., Islamic separatist movements in the Philippines up to early 2000s).

The Horizontal – Systemic Connection: Risk of Diffusion and Regional Security Cooperation

According to the prevailing assessments of post-Cold War dynamics, Southeast Asia, which used to be categorized as a regional conflict complex on par with South Africa and Central America, has since lost this status. Nevertheless, connectedness has not faded away because the factor of interdependent war economies lived through the end of the Cold War and even exacerbated in 1990s. Links between various stakeholders in the production and trade of war timber contributed to the interconnectedness between the conflicts in Burma/Myanmar, the Philippines, and Cambodia (see, e.g., Thomson and Kanaan 2004) in the same way as conflict over diamonds entangled the war economies of multiple civil conflicts in Africa. As in other regions of the world, after the bipolar paradigm had ceased to exist, ethnic strife replaced communist insurgency as the primary source of internal conflict (see, e.g., Landé 1999). At the same time, unlike in other regions, transborder settlement of many ethnic groups and their resulting transnational nature have not resulted in any significant affinity-motivated external interventions (vertical dimension) since the formation of ASEAN. The factor of transnational ethnic groups in most Southeast Asian countries creates a sort of common vulnerability, which in turn produces mutual interest in developing low-level interstate cooperation. That is why most national elites have refrained from offering material support to ethnic-based insurgencies in neighboring states, and instead have maintained loyalty to the principle of non-interference as one of the core ASEAN norms (see, e.g., Jones 2010; Narine 2012).

However, as Zha (2017, 307-309) argues, transnational ethnic ties is a structural factor that breeds the sense of insecurity among state elites and foments interstate mistrust.

[16] Those were joined respectively by the Republic of China (Taiwan) – on the one side, and the Soviet Union and Cuba – on the other side – as secondary (supporting) parties.

The case of Malays that constitute, on the one hand, the majority in Malaysia and on the other hand, a politically and economically disadvantaged minority in Thailand, falls into the category of "ethnic alliance" dyad. Although the Malaysian government, minding its own ethnic divide, has not provided any direct assistance to the ethnic-based rebellion in southern Thailand (Funston 2008, 22-23), Thai leaders are still suspicious of Malaysia's policy. This suspicion comes from intensive people-to-people contacts between Malays across the border (including silent hosting of refugees) as well as from the political platform of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), which is one of the largest opposition parties of Islamist orientation in Malaysia and is committed to protecting the rights of Muslim Malays in Southern Thailand and therefore prevents Kuala Lumpur from providing full security support to Bangkok. This generates mistrust between the two governments and strains their bilateral relations (Zha 2017, 315-318). Given that, transnational dynamics between Malaysia and Thailand is not unique and can be traced in other dyads (e.g., Malaysia-Philippines, Malaysia-Indonesia, Myanmar-Thailand), this is not just a bilateral issue. Ethnic politics limit Southeast Asian states' capacity to respond to each other's security needs and create uncertainties to regional cooperation that deprives the ASEAN security community of much needed substance. Thus, although external intervention in civil war is not practiced by ASEAN nations, risks associated with transnational ethnic ties as channels of contagion (horizontal dimension) still exert a negative influence on the regional security cooperation standing in the way of a strong institutional structure that could more effectively contain the spread of regional conflicts (systemic dimension).

CONCLUSION

A region-level application of the framework, like the one presented in this paper, mostly helps identify patterns of conflict internationalization specific to a certain regional space over a certain period of time. This may help outline the most important regional drivers that contribute to international, transnational and cross-border escalation of violence that originates at substate level. In case of Southeast Asia, various conflict processes that took place in the region during and after the Cold War fall under one or more of the three dimensions of the internationalization framework. During the Cold War period, transnational ideological ties (based on transnational communist movements) constituted the main driving factor behind the way regional intrastate conflicts acquired international and transnational dimensions. The most common transmission channel that facilitated conflict diffusion (contagion) across the region (i.e. horizontal escalation) used to be communist inspiration (a combination of transnational identity-based ties and demonstration-and-learning effects), in some cases coupled with direct support provided to each other by communist-oriented regional political actors. Other transmission channels included direct spillover of hostilities, and cross-border flows of arms and foreign fighters.

During the Cold War era, among the two directed processes of vertical escalation, intervention (inward-directed) was much more common than externalization (outward-directed). Interference with an internal conflict in a neighboring state often led to contagion (vertical-horizontal connection) or to a proxy-type structure of mirrored cross-intervention. On the other hand, some low-level and high-level interventions amounted to constitutive elements within larger processes of systemic escalation as exemplified by the Vietnam War case (vertical-systemic connection). After the Cold War end, connectedness among regional conflicts remained, although it has been no longer based on transnational ideology but rather

on war economies interlinked by illegal timber trade. The development of ASEAN as a security community with its norm of non-interference prevented ethnic kinship-motivated external intervention in civil conflict (vertical dimension) from being as common as in some other regions of the world. However, transnational ethnic ties as potential channels of contagion contributed to interstate mistrust and inhibited full-fledged security cooperation in the institutionalized regional format (horizontal-systemic connection).

The authors of the present study see a vast potential in the application of the framework to other regional realms of conflict internationalization including but not limited to South and East Europe, Central Asia and South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the ultimate sense, it can help identify country-specific, region-specific and system-specific factors that are to be addressed in order to block and prevent violent escalation processes that lead to intractable complex emergencies. Another way of applying the framework would be at the conflict-specific level, essentially as a tool of conflict analysis. Many of both terminated and ongoing conflicts start as internal strife but experience outgrowth of distinct transnational and/or international aspects. For some, this escalation is of minor scale and falls under just one of the three dimensions, while others may go through multi-faceted metamorphosis that put them to the forefront of regional or even global political concern and systemic relevance. The latter (such as the ones in Syria, Yemen, Ukraine and Myanmar's Rakhine among others) seem to be the most suitable cases for applying the framework. The attempted sample application has also exposed some constraints on the framework's analytical potential. Firstly, the framework by itself does not offer any case selection algorithms and thus, in this regard, relies on third-party methodological approaches. Secondly, some of the observable conflict internationalization processes are so complex and entangled with one another that it is often difficult to unequivocally categorize every one of them as representing specific elements of one of the three dimensions and not some others. Finally, the introduced framework is more or less a first approximation of integrated understanding of the phenomenon. Further conceptual integration is required, not just by identifying other analytical prisms of interplay between the three dimensions but also by bringing together state-based and non-state actors, their affective and instrumental motivations, opportunities and mobilization strategies, transmission channels, institutional and systemic constraints as well as other elements into a coherent internationalization mechanism in order to describe how it functions under different structural conditions.

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