

4-2017

Things Fall Apart: The Role of Small Arms Acquisition in Insurgent Fragmentation

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Things Fall Apart: The Role of Small Arms Acquisition in Insurgent Fragmentation

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in
International Relations from The College of William and Mary

by

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Accepted for _____

(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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19 April, 2017

Abstract:

Insurgent is a label applied to a large variety of armed political actors, but all these actors have one need in common: the need to arm their fighters. This paper examines how the manner in which insurgent groups acquire arms affects the likelihood that the group will fragment or cohere over time. Specifically, if an insurgent group has a highly centralized process of arms acquisition, such as direct transfers to insurgent commanders by a third party, the cost of defection for insurgent field commanders will be high. If the cost of defection is high, then a splinter group is less likely to form. To test this hypothesis, this paper deploys a mixed method approach, combining quantitative analyses of the Uppsala Conflict Data and the Minorities at Risk: Organizational Behavior Data with two case studies in the Central African Republic and the Solomon Islands.

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“The death toll from small arms dwarfs that of all other weapons systems – and in most years greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In terms of the carnage they cause, small arms, indeed, could well be described as ‘weapons of mass destruction.’” –Kofi Annan¹

Introduction

Festooning the front pages of newspapers and the covers of books, the image of the rebel holding an AK47 is integral to how civil conflicts are commonly perceived. But despite the omnipresence of small arms in depictions of civil conflict, little attention is ever paid to these arms. Sometimes observers document the weapons’ origin, but the weapons’ effects on the dynamics of civil conflict are rarely documented. Using a mixed-methods approach, this paper argues that the arms themselves are actually crucial to the conduct of civil wars.

More specifically, this paper argues that the way that insurgent organizations acquire small arms influences the likelihood that they will fragment. The crucial distinction is between centralized and decentralized processes of arms acquisition: shipments of weapons from an external state to an insurgent organization are centralized, but reliance on grass-roots arms markets is not. If an insurgent group acquires arms through a centralized process, then the insurgent field commanders will face a higher cost of defection if they splinter from the parent organization; similarly, if the arms acquisition process is decentralized, then costs of defection for insurgent field commanders will be lower. The end result is a negative relationship between the centralization of arms acquisition, and the incidence of defection by insurgent field commanders.

This paper proceeds in six sections. Section one briefly overviews the literature on insurgent fragmentation, and section two then outlines a new theory of insurgent fragmentation based on arms acquisition. After a brief third section discussing this paper’s methodology, a

¹ United Nations Department of Public Information, “Backgrounder,” *Small Arms Review Conference 2006*, published June 2006, accessed 16 April 2017, available online: <http://www.un.org/events/smallarms2006/pdf/backgrounder.pdf>

quantitative section uses multiple datasets to test the relationship between insurgent fragmentation and arms acquisition. Following the quantitative section, a pair of case studies analyzes this relationship in greater depth. Section five is a case study of two insurgent groups in the Solomon Islands: the Malaitan Eagle Front and the Isatabu Freedom Movement. The next case study, section six, follows the narrative of the Séléka coalition and the anti-Balaka militias in the Central African Republic. Section seven concludes the paper.

The State of the Literature

There has been a growing consensus in the literature of insurgency that insurgent fragmentation matters for the study of civil conflict. Variations in the cohesion and fragmentation of insurgent groups have many implications for civil conflicts, “including the escalation from nonviolence to violence, the likelihood of attaining peace settlements, the scope of concessions within settlements and whether they forestall a return to war, internecine violence, collaboration with the state, and the political and military effectiveness of these movements.”² After a conflict, fragmentation may complicate Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) programs because of the greater number of armed groups that require attention. These effects mean that explaining why insurgent groups do or do not fragment is a crucial task. Though little consensus has been formed, one can distill three broad schools of thought from the disparate literature on insurgent organization.

The first school of thought argues that social networks are the primary determinant of whether insurgent groups fragment or cohere. Staniland makes the claim that insurgent groups require significant social resources, and as such, “[t]he structure of the social ties on which an organization was originally built shapes the new institutions that emerge. Social divisions and cleavages that existed at the time of organizational founding create enduring internal fissures and

² Lee JM Seymour, Kristin M. Bakke, and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, “E pluribus unum, ex uno plures: Competition, violence, and fragmentation in ethnopolitical movements,” *Journal of Peace Research* 53(2016): 3-18.

indiscipline, whereas overlapping social networks make it possible to create new institutions able to control violence.”³ Weinstein notes that insurgent groups can organize themselves either using resource endowments or social capital. An insurgent group which organizes itself using its resource endowment will be composed of opportunistic individuals with short time horizons with more loyalty to themselves than to the insurgent group. An insurgent group which organizes itself using social capital, on the other hand is “better equipped to institutionalize the long-term commitments of their members by building a cooperative environment.”⁴ These different factor endowments mean that insurgent organizations built on social foundations are more likely to cohere than ones built on material resources.

The second camp argues that factors internal to the state in which the insurgency occurs shape the insurgency. For instance, Johnston argues that insurgencies which occupy more rugged or distant territories are less able to maintain a tight hierarchy, decreasing their military effectiveness.⁵ While exogenous factors such as geography may play a role, the actions of the state in which the insurgency occur may also matter. The insurgent group and the state are locked in a strategic interaction, so the actions of the state may or may not induce fragmentation. In Myanmar, for instance, the state used valuable logging concessions in order to entice elements of the Karen National Union (KNU) to defect with the main body.⁶ Seymour et al. expand on this notion: concessions will create splits, but so will repression, which will “increase the costs of mobilization and foster internal disagreements about how to deal with these costs.”⁷ These arguments illustrate that the state has an important role to play in the fragmentation of insurgencies.

³ Paul Staniland, “Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia,” *International Security* 37(2014): 148.

⁴ Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 139.

⁵ Patrick Johnston, “The Geography of Insurgent Organization and its Consequences for Civil Wars: Evidence from Liberia and Sierra Leone,” *Security Studies* 17(2008): 107-131.

⁶ Paul D. Kenny, “Structural Integrity and Cohesion in Insurgent Organizations: Evidence from Protracted Conflicts in Ireland and Burma,” *International Studies Review* 12(2010): 533-555.

⁷ Seymour et al., “E pluribus unum, ex uno plures,” 5.

A third camp argues that external state (a state other than the one in which the insurgency operates) support influences the fragmentation or cohesion of insurgent groups. Many insurgent groups receive material support from external states, but the effect of external state support depends on where precisely that support goes. External state support may flow directly to the commander of an insurgency. Or, on occasion, a state may be incentivized to provide external resources to individuals who are not the head of an insurgency, effectively “exploiting local rivalries to fragment the opposition.”⁸ This dichotomy means that the effect of external state support for insurgency is varied. For instance, the emergence of divisions amongst the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) emerged after external state support in Ethiopia shifted towards a different faction within the SPLA/M, causing the armed group to fragment.⁹ Tamm reconciles these contrary effects by arguing that “the more [external] state sponsors help reinforce an imbalance of power that favors an existing rebel leader, the more they strengthen organizational cohesion;” and the more the state sponsors support internal rivals, the more they increase insurgent fragmentation.¹⁰

However, all of these arguments treat insurgencies as though they were any other social organization. In addition to the usual collective action problems, insurgencies face unusual challenges in order to keep themselves viable. Chief among these is the need to fight: an insurgency which cannot fight will lose legitimacy among its followers. In order to fight, an insurgency requires a supply of small arms and ammunition.¹¹ While certain scholars address the material needs of insurgencies, they generally do so in broad terms by discussing “resources,” rather than any resource in particular. I argue that insurgent groups’ requirement for small arms requires an analysis of its own because an insurgency cannot be continued without them. Other

⁸ Lee JM Seymour, “Why Factions Switch Sides in Civil War: Rivalry, Patronage, and Realignment in Sudan,” *International Security* 39(2014): 104.

⁹ Henning Tamm, “Rebel Leaders, Internal Rivals, and External Resources: How State Sponsors Affect Insurgent Cohesion,” *International Studies Quarterly* advance access (2016): 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 1.

¹¹ While an insurgency could use larger weapons, the cases where an insurgency possesses more than SALWs are relatively rare.

resources which insurgent groups need, such as food, clothing, and fuel, can generally be manufactured locally. Small arms cannot be acquired as easily as food, but are even more important to the continuing of an insurgency.

There is a paucity of literature regarding causal connections between small arms and insurgency, but scholars do seem to agree that arms matter. Some scholars have mentioned the role of small arms as “conflict-specific capital.”¹² Byman et al. likewise make the observation that “[s]mall arms are an insurgency’s defining technology.”¹³ Hazen predicated her book on the idea that, in addition to other resources, rebel groups require “arms and ammunition, communications equipment, training, and manpower.”¹⁴ The most directly relevant study is one authored by Marsh,¹⁵ who makes the crucial distinction that small arms do not have substitute goods for an insurgency. This lack of substitutes means it is inaccurate to aggregate small arms supplies into broader supplies of resources available to insurgents as Fearon and Laitin do.¹⁶

Marsh goes on to argue that “control [over arms acquisition] is a key factor influencing the form of insurgency.”¹⁷ He enumerates three correspondences between small arms acquisition and types of insurgency. If “[a] single armed group’s leadership” controls the [arms acquisition] process, then the result is “a single opposition group.” If the process is controlled by regional commanders, then the result is “warlordism.” And if the arms are acquired by individual combatants, then the civil conflict will be “[f]ractured with numerous armed bands.”¹⁸ However, Marsh fails to elucidate a causal mechanism linking these conditions of insurgency to small arms

¹² Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, World Bank Paper, accessed 31 March 2017, available online: <http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01241/WEB/IMAGES/28126.PDF> .

¹³ Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau, and David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001): 93.

¹⁴ Jennifer Hazen, *What Rebels Want: Resources and Supply Networks in Wartime* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013): 49.

¹⁵ Nicholas Marsh, “Conflict Specific Capital: The Role of Weapons Acquisition in Civil War,” *International Studies Perspectives* 8(2007): 54-72.

¹⁶ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *The American Political Science Review* 97(2003): 75-90.

¹⁷ Marsh, “Conflict Specific Capital,” 63.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 63.

availability; he merely posits their correlation. My theory builds on Marsh's, though Marsh uses the simple availability of arms as his independent variable. He then argues that "[t]here is clearly a need for more research to highlight the role of weapons acquisition (as distinct from other factors) and the casual relationship between weapons and an insurgency."¹⁹ To my knowledge, Marsh's paper remains the only attempt to link small arms and the organization or fragmentation of insurgent groups.

Another issue is the gap in the literature on small arms when it comes to comparisons across conflict zones. The vast majority of literature on small arms in conflict zones comes from research organizations like the Small Arms Survey or the Groupe de Recherche et D'Information sur la Paix et la Sécurité (GRIP). The work of these organizations focuses largely on individual conflicts. For instance, the Small Arms survey has several baseline assessment security projects, including Sudan, South Sudan, India, Liberia, and Nepal. However, these projects have different scopes and use different methodologies. Such specificity makes it difficult to generalize about the role of small arms across conflicts, rather than the role of small arms in a specific conflict.

A New Theory of Insurgent Fragmentation

My explanation for insurgent fragmentation is predicated on the need for armaments in war. As mentioned above, small arms and their ammunition are crucial for an insurgency. Local artisans occasionally hand-craft armaments in different conflict zones, but these handmade small arms are always an inferior good and are produced in small numbers.²⁰ As such, they are a weapon of last resort, which means that insurgent groups rely on sources for their arms and ammunition which are outside the insurgency's control.

¹⁹ Ibid, 70.

²⁰ In the Solomon Islands, insurgents used locally produced pipe-guns to fire leftover WWII-era .50 caliber bullets. Similarly, in the CAR, these small-production armaments are often called 'don't last' in the local dialect, signaling their inferior quality. See: Eric G. Berman with Louisa N. Lombard, *The Central African Republic and Small Arms: A Regional Tinderbox* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2008): 65.

While insurgent groups may start small, they often grow larger, more than can be managed by any individual. There is no hard and fast rule on the necessary size of an insurgency, but in order to effectively compete with the resources and labor at the disposal of the state, an insurgent group will almost certainly have to grow larger than can be feasibly managed by a single individual. It may be organizationally efficient for an insurgent group to remain small, but the group must grow in order to compete with the armed forces of a state. To maximize the potential gains in effectiveness from an increased supply of insurgent labor, the groups practically always take a hierarchical form.²¹

This growth of size means that insurgent leaders must delegate some authority to the field, which produces a principal-agent dynamic. In principal-agent theory, “[d]elegation is a conditional grant of authority from a *principal* to an *agent* empowering the latter to act on the former’s behalf.”²² In an insurgency, the insurgent leader is the principal, and insurgent field commanders are the agent. This paper defines a field command as an internal unit with its own command structure, allowing it to independently conduct military operations. Importantly, both principal and agent are independent actors who have their own goals.

Information asymmetries complicate the relationship between principal and agent: the principal cannot observe directly what the agent does. These information asymmetries give the insurgent the ability to shirk, or defect from the contract. An insurgent group leader’s goal may be to implement the rebel group’s manifesto, or assume control of a country’s territory. The insurgent field commander, on the other hand, will act to maximize its goals, which may be different. Because of information asymmetries the leader will not always know whether the insurgent is pursuing his field command’s interests, or the interests of the wider group. These differences create incentives for the field commander to act against the principal’s interest, which

²¹ Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*, 129.

²² Darren G. Hawkins, David A. Lake, Daniel L. Nielson, and Michael J. Tierney, “Delegation under anarchy: states, international organizations, and principal-agent theory,” in *id.*, *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 7.

are “magnified by the level and immediacy of the risks combatants face.”²³ In extreme cases of differences, the insurgent field commander may defect from the wider group, creating a splinter organization. In such an instance, the insurgent group can be said to *fragment*; in the absence of such an instance, the group can be said to *cohere*.

Insurgent organizations thus face a problem: how to make sure that local field commanders are fulfilling the tasks assigned to them by the leadership. For instance, when ordered to take a strategic objective, field commanders may choose instead to loot the area’s natural resources. When the insurgent leader’s interests and the interests of field commanders differ sufficiently, insurgent leaders must prevent splinter groups from forming. To prevent defections, the insurgent leader may increase the costs of defection by making the field commanders rely on the central insurgent organization for resources. While most resources necessary for an insurgency can be procured in the field, one crucial resource cannot: small arms.²⁴ As such, a centralized distribution of small arms is an effective way of keeping insurgent field commanders dependent on the insurgent leader: if an insurgent field command is cut off from its supply of weapons, then the field command cannot continue to fight.

The insurgent leader’s ability to foster small arms dependence is determined by the group’s acquisition process. If the process is very centralized, insurgent leaders should be better able to monopolize arms distribution; if the process is decentralized, field commanders will be better able to arm themselves. If an insurgent leader receives shipments of weapons directly from an external state, then it is fairly easy for that leader to centralize the distribution of small arms. For instance, the Ethiopian government supported the SPLA/M by providing centralized arms transfers until 1991; when the arms transfers ceased, so did the centralized distribution of armaments. On the other hand, an insurgent group may arm itself by recourse to the

²³ Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*, 129.

²⁴ Or at least small arms cannot be procured in sufficient quality or quantity.

international black market in arms, though centralization in that case depends on the structure of the market. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), for instance, engineered a highly sophisticated international arms smuggling network, shuttling arms via a centrally controlled network of smugglers.²⁵ On the other hand, the Karen National Union (KNU) accessed the South East Asian arms market by nature of its position on the Myanmar-Thailand border. This access by geographic proximity meant the insurgent leadership could access the arms market, but so could the various field commanders. Arms procurement may be entirely decentralized. Al Shabaab, for instance, is able to arm itself largely through arms markets on the streets of Mogadishu, allowing field commands to arm themselves without influence from the group's leaders.²⁶

The centralization of arms acquisition enforces hard limits of an insurgent groups' ability to use arms distribution to prevent defection. Because insurgent leaders have an incentive to increase the costs of defection for insurgent field commanders, I assume that insurgent groups will centralize their arms distribution process to the full extent possible. Because centralization is constrained by the spectrum of arms acquisition processes, there exist differing costs of defection among insurgent groups. If an insurgent group uses a centralized arms acquisition/distribution process, its field commanders will have a higher cost of defection; if an insurgent group uses a decentralized arms acquisition process, then its field commanders will have a lower cost of defection. For field commanders making the cost benefit analysis, this logic means that they are less likely to defect if they are dependent on leaders for arms. If an insurgent field commander could acquire the necessary materials to continue the insurgency through decentralized means, defection is easier. Thus, insurgent groups with a decentralized arms

²⁵ Byman et al., *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Organizations*, 117-122.

²⁶ United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2111 (2013): Somalia*, S/2014/726 (13 October, 2014): 221

acquisition process are more likely to suffer from defection—in other words, they are more likely to fragment.

To summarize, because insurgencies require small arms, and because insurgencies are generally too large to be individually led, the centralization of an insurgent group's arms acquisition process and its likelihood of defections are negatively correlated. Of course, small arms acquisition is not the only relevant factor for insurgent fragmentation. Defections, splits, and other incidents of fragmentation often occur along pre-existing fractures within insurgent organizations. However, this theory allows us to explain changes in rates of defection by looking at changes in arms acquisition. The following section elaborates the methodology for testing this hypothesis.

Methodology

This paper deploys a mixed methods approach to test whether small arms acquisition influences insurgent fragmentation. First, I use several datasets, which include measures of insurgent fragmentation, to perform two quantitative analyses. I then use two case studies to trace the process I describe at work in the Solomon Islands and the Central African Republic.

My independent variable is the method in which insurgent groups acquire small arms, and my dependent variable is to what extent the insurgent group fragments. However, I also argue for a specific mechanism: the centralization or decentralization of an insurgent group (defined as the relative ability of an insurgent headquarters to control its field commanders). Thus, any data source needs information on all three components of my theory, though the specific operationalization of the variables varies slightly across data sources.

Because of the paucity of quantitative data on small arms, this paper conducts two separate analyses. The first uses the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP),²⁷ as well as

²⁷ Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, UCDP Actor Database v2.2-2015, accessed 1 December, 2016, available online: <http://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/>

Cunningham et al.'s expansion of these data.²⁸ While the number of observations is high in this dataset (577), the way it is structured means that my outcome variable is static. Because the data are static, they do not capture the potential for change in the way that insurgent groups acquire arms and cannot fully capture the paper's mechanism. They can demonstrate that insurgent groups that have a centralized arms acquisition process are less likely to fragment, but not the temporal relationship between those two variables.

The second analysis uses a combination of the Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior (MAROB)²⁹ data and data from the Small Arms Survey on the global prices of Kalashnikov rifles.³⁰ The MAROB data tracks information on 118 ethnopolitical groups in the Middle East and North Africa from 1980 to 2005. The unit of observation in the MAROB data is the insurgent-year dyad, which means the data are well suited to capturing change over time. I use the Kalashnikov price as a proxy for small arms availability, because the Kalashnikov is the most common assault rifle in the world, and because the price of the weapons should reflect the supply. The resulting analysis relates the price of a Kalashnikov in a country in one year with whether an insurgent group in that country fragments in the following three years. However, the Kalashnikov price data are only available in 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005, and MAROB only covers the Middle East and North Africa, so the number of observations is much smaller (135, of which 7 observations include a yes value for fragmentation). As such, both the analysis using the UCDP data and the analysis using the MAROB data add utility: the first has a large number of observations, but the second has a more informative unit of observation.

²⁸ David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, "It Takes Two: A Dyadic Analysis of Civil War Duration and Outcome," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53(2009): 570-597

²⁹ Victor Asal, Amy Pate, and Johnathan Wilkenfeld, *Minorities at Risk: Organizational Data and Codebook*, Version 9/2008, accessed 16 February 2017, available online: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=hdl:1902.1/15973>

³⁰ Philip Killicoat, "What Price the Kalashnikov? The Economics of Small Arms," in *Small Arms Survey Yearbook 2007* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2007): 256-287.

Following the quantitative analyses, I use a pair of process-tracing case studies to more closely observe the hypothesized mechanism in action. The first step in any such study is selecting the cases. My goal in selecting specific cases was to maximize the variation in the independent variable, so I choose countries with multiple insurgencies which fragmented at different points in time. I also chose my case study countries based on geographic variation, to decrease the likelihood that my data are the result of geographic specifics. Finally, as a point of scholarly interest, I chose two cases studies which do not feature particularly prominently in the civil war literature. The resulting case studies—two countries and four insurgencies—are the Isatabu Freedom Movement and the Malaitan Eagle Front in the Solomon Islands, and the Séléka and anti-Balaka militias in the Central African Republic. Both these countries and the different insurgencies within them provide a wide range of arms acquisition processes, allowing for sufficient variation on the independent variable.

I then engage in process tracing within these insurgencies, examining them over a period of time during which their methods of small arms acquisition may or may not change. I also examine the competing factors to explain insurgent fragmentation: social networks, internal factors, and external state support. Within each case study I demonstrate how these factors fail to explain insurgent fragmentation, while illustrating how small arms acquisitions processes do explain fragmentation.

Quantitative Analyses

The first step in establishing the role of arms acquisition in insurgent fragmentation is to compare as many groups as possible. The number of such groups necessitates a quantitative approach, which allows us to look for broad patterns across insurgent organizations in how arms acquisition affects group cohesion. While such an approach sacrifices detail and nuance at the group level, it may be valuable if it displays arms acquisition having a consistent and quantifiable effect.

This model uses Cunningham et al.'s expanded version of the Uppsala Armed Conflict Data,³¹ as well as the UCDP conflict actor database.³² By examining a variable in the UCDP actor database which notes if a group formed by splintering off from a parent organization, I created a list of parent organizations that splintered at some point during their existence. The dependent variable for this regression is a binary variable which measures whether or not an insurgent organization appears on that list.

The independent variable for this model is a variable which measures how capable an insurgent organization is of acquiring arms, relative to the state.³³ If a group struggles to acquire arms, then this variable will take on a low value; if the group can easily acquire arms, then the value is high. Because this variable measures the entire group's ability to acquire arms as a whole, this variable can be read as a measure of centralization in the arms acquisition process (if individual insurgents, or a segment of the overall insurgency could acquire arms more easily, this would not translate to the group as a whole).

I also include a range of other variables to control for other possible sources of insurgent fragmentation. Firstly, I include an indicator for whether the insurgent group was previously active in a different period of time.³⁴ This variable is important because insurgent groups which have previously fought the government are likely to already have a strong social network, so we would expect to see a negative relationship between the previously active variable and fragmentation. Alternatively, a group which has existed for longer has had more chances to fragment, so this variable's effect on fragmentation is ambiguous. I also include an estimate of

³¹ Cunningham et al., "It Takes Two," 570-597.

³² Uppsala Conflict Data Programme

³³ David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, *Codebook for the Non-state Actor Data*, version 3.3 (24 January 2012), accessed 24 March 2017, available online: http://privatwww.essex.ac.uk/~ksg/data/NSAEX_codebook.pdf

³⁴ The NSA data codes insurgent organizations that do not continuously exist as separate organizations for each time period. For instance, if an insurgency fought against a state at time = 1, signed a peace treat at time = 2, and then resumed fighting at time = 3, there would be two entries for that insurgent organization: one at time = 1 and one at time = 2. So the previously active variable measures whether this organization has fought the government at previous times.

the rebel group's size, as a larger insurgent group could contain a weaker social network or greater internal divisions.³⁵ If a larger group has a weaker social network, then one would expect a positive correlation between an estimate of the group's size and the splinter variable. Whether the insurgency controls territory is also included as a control, because controlling a large amount of territory can thin the group out, leaving greater distances between units and making social networks harder to maintain. Because of territorial control's negative influence on social networks, I expect it to correlate positively with the splinter variable.

The next control variable is whether or not the insurgent group receives support from the government of a foreign state: because such support creates the potential for internal division, one would expect this variable to have a positive correlation with the splinter variable. Similarly, I include whether a group is supported militarily by transnational non-state actors. Because such support increases the potential for internal division, we would expect it to correlate positively with the splinter variable. I also include whether the insurgent group's political wing is legal; if the wing is illegal, this indicates state oppression, and so could foster division.³⁶ As a result, one would expect a positive correlation between the legality of the group's political wing and the incidence of fragmentation. Finally, I also include a variable for how long the insurgent organization has existed. The longer the group has existed, the more it has had the chance to fragment, though such duration may also mean an organization has had time to increase its resiliency. As such, the effect of the duration variable is ambiguous, but it nevertheless important to include.

Because the fragmentation outcome variable is binary, I estimate these relationships using logit regressions. Estimated coefficients and standard errors from two specifications are displayed in Table 1. The first model is a general model with all of the variables listed above. I

³⁵ This variable is divided by 1,000 to keep the orders of magnitude similar.

³⁶ The Cunningham et al. data also included a variable for whether the insurgent group has a political wing, but these variables are collinear so I only use one here.

then used a series of F-tests to determine which variables were unimportant; the resulting parsimonious model is the second model.

Table 1: Insurgent Group Fragmentation, 1946 - 2010

		1	2
Arms Procurement	0.1520 (0.2730)	0.1099 (0.2688)	
Duration	0.0363* (0.0212)	0.0384* (0.0208)	
Previously Active	0.8012** (0.2826)	0.8064** (0.2779)	
External Government Support	0.8968** (0.2958)	0.9104** (0.2927)	
Group Size (in thousands)	-0.0026 (0.0042)		
Transnational Actor Support	0.2326 (0.1821)		
Legal Political Wing	-0.9496** (0.3173)	-0.9667** (0.3144)	
Controls Territory	0.0276 (0.2880)		
Intercept	-3.0568*** (0.4055)	-2.7717*** (0.3044)	
N	578	578	
Log Likelihood	-186.24	-187.33	
Akaike Information Criterion	390.47	386.65	

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.5$; *** $p < 0.01$

According to Table 1, the manner in which insurgent organizations procure arms is not significant in either regression. However, several other variables are significant determinants of insurgent fragmentation. Duration increases the likelihood of an insurgent group having fragmented—which makes sense, because the longer a group has existed, the more chances it will have had to fragment. A group being active in a previous period time also increases the likelihood that the group will have fragmented. This effect is the opposite of what one might think, as a previously active insurgency ought to have allowed strong social groups to emerge.³⁷

³⁷ While the previously active variable may be addressing the same process as duration, since an insurgency which has existed previously has existed longer. However, removing duration from the equation as a minimal effect on the magnitude of the previously active variable, and vice versa. This suggests that the two variables are not part of the same phenomenon.

External government support also has a strong effect on insurgent fragmentation, which is an interesting finding, because Tamm and Seymour argue that the effect of external state support should depend on the exact circumstances of the support.³⁸ Finally, if a group's political wing is legal, this appears to have a strong negative effect on fragmentation. This correlation makes sense because it indicates a group is not subject to government oppression, which could strain the group's internal tensions.

To summarize, duration and the legality of a group's political wing move in the way I predicted, whether a group existed previously moved the opposite way I expected, and the effect of external state support is ambiguous. More significantly, the ability of the group to procure arms had no significant effect on insurgent fragmentation. There are a couple of reasons for which this might be the case. First, these variables are time-invariant: they simply measure whether an insurgent group has fragmented at any point, and they do not capture changes in the group's ability to acquire arms. Second, because the data are static, they cannot capture the temporal mechanism which I am studying. They cannot show how a difference in arms acquisition between time $t=1$ and $t=2$ effects fragmentation in time $=2$ or 3 . Moreover, these data would show the same correlation if fragmentation predated a change in arms acquisition as they would if a change in arms acquisition predated fragmentation. In short, while these data are not supportive of my hypothesis, they are also not a particularly effective test of it. Given the paucity of data, however, they are nevertheless a worthwhile exercise.

An answer to the specific problems of the UCDP data lays in the MAROB data, though the MAROB data have problems of their own.³⁹ While the MAROB data vary over time, they are limited to the Middle East and North Africa, which reduces the overall number of observations. More significantly, the MAROB data do not contain information on how the insurgent groups

³⁸ Tamm, "Rebel Leaders, Internal Rivals, and Internal Resources;" Seymour, "Why Factions Switch Sides in Civil Wars."

³⁹ Asal et al., *Minorities at Risk*.

acquire their arms, which necessitates relying on other sources.⁴⁰ In short, while the MAROB data have the advantage of varying over time, their smaller sample creates substantial problems—particularly when other factors constrain the total number of observations, as is the case in this paper. In addition, the MAROB data records many groups which are not militarily active; these regressions only include the armed groups in the data.

The units of observation in these regressions are insurgent group-year dyads. The dependent variable in these regressions is whether a group splinters in the three years following an observation of the independent variable. So if the independent variable is measured at year = 0, the splinter variable would measure if the group fragmented in years 1, 2, or 3. Noticeably, these dynamic data provide the potential for a superior demonstration of the paper's hypothesis, relative to the static data of the previous test.

The independent variable for these analyses is constructed via a collection of prices for Kalashnikov assault rifles.⁴¹ The Kalashnikov series—including both the AK47 and AK74 variants—is one of the most common assault rifles in the world, with anywhere from 50-100 million produced.⁴² As such a representative rifle, the price of an AK47 should correspond highly with the overall price of small arms in a given market. These price data are then divided by GDP per capita, to yield an adjusted Kalashnikov price.⁴³ I expect this constructed variable to have a negative effect on fragmentation, because the lower the price, the lower the demand of small arms in a given country, and so the more centralized the arms acquisition process. However, because these data are only available in 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005, they significantly reduce my regression's total number of observations.

⁴⁰ While the MAROB data do contain an ARMS variable, this only measures whether an insurgent group makes money by smuggling arms, which is not what this paper addresses. Moreover, when placed in the following regressions, it is insignificant.

⁴¹ Killocoat, "What Price the Kalashnikov?"

⁴² Ibid, 258.

⁴³ "Per capita GDP at current prices – US dollars," *UNData*, accessed 28 March 2017, available online: <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=GDP+per+capita&d=SNAAMA&f=grID%3a101%3bcurrID%3aUSD%3bpcFlag%3a1>

I also include a range of variables to control for other explanations for insurgent fragmentation. The data already implicitly controls for social network theories: because the MAROB data include only ethnically motivated organizations, all groups share at least a moderate social network. Beyond that, variables for social networks are largely absent in the MAROB data. Two variables control for factors internal to the state. First, I control for whether a state uses violence against the organization. State use of violence to repress an organization is likely to stress the group's internal fractures, and so I expect it to have a positive effect on fragmentation. I also include whether an organization is legal. This binary variable ought to correlate negatively with fragmentation, because a legal organization is likely subject to less repression. I also include two variables to control for whether an insurgent group is supported by a transnational actor or an external state. Both of these variables should correlate positively with the splinter variable, because this assistance may not go straight to the insurgent leader, and so increases the potential for internal division.⁴⁴ I also include the time since the insurgent group last fragmented, because a longer period gives the insurgent group more chances to fragment, although it may also be the case that groups which have lasted longer have acquired more resiliency to fragmentation. To allow the time relationship to take any form, I also include the square and cube of the time since last splinter variable.⁴⁵

Because the outcome variable is binary, and relatively rare, I use a penalized likelihood logistic regression.⁴⁶ The results are displayed in Table 2. Because of the much smaller number of observations, I do not compute both a general and a parsimonious model (as the latter would be practically empty). I use a Breusch-Pagan Test to check for the presence of heteroscedasticity. Finding significant heteroscedasticity (which is logical, because I am using a panel model), I use Huber-White standard errors.

⁴⁴ Tamm, "Rebel Leaders, Internal Rivals, and External Resources."

⁴⁵ David B. Carter and Curtis S. Signorino, "Back to the Future: Modeling Time Dependence in Binary Data," *Political Analysis* 18(2010): 271-292.

⁴⁶ Specifically I use the "brglm" package in R.

Table 2: Insurgent Fragmentation and Kalashnikov Prices in the Middle East / North Africa, 1980-2004

Adjusted Price	-8.353* (5.005)
External State Support	-0.005 (0.008)
Transnational Support	2.244** (0.821)
Organization is Legal	1.340 (0.843)
State Uses Violence	-0.003 (0.007)
Time	-2.598** (0.988)
Time²	0.517 (0.362)
Time³	-0.028 (0.038)
N	135
Log Likelihood	50
Akaike Information Criterion	-17
Note: *p<0.1 ; **p<0.5; ***p<0.01	

According to Table 2, price of Kalashnikovs has a negative impact on the likelihood of fragmentation. If we accept price as a negative proxy for demand, then a high price of small arms should correspond to a high demand for small arms, which implies that insurgents are relying on arms markets for their arms and so are not using a centralized arms acquisitions process.

Alternatively, higher arms prices could make small arms unaffordable to individual insurgents, making them reliant on a top-down supply. Either way, the independent variable affects the dependent variable in the way that I predicted. It is, however, only weakly significant, with a p-value of 0.095. More importantly still, the significance of this variable is heavily dependent on the estimator: without using Huber-White standard errors, the variable is not significant whatsoever. As such, while weakly supportive of my hypothesis, this result is not particularly robust and is not a conclusive test of the hypothesis.

The only two control variables which are statistically significant are transnational support and the linear time variable. Transnational support moves in the predicted direction, increasing the likelihood of fragmentation. Interestingly, time since the last incidence of fragmentation is statistically significant and negative. One would expect it to be positive, because the longer it has been since a group has fragmented, the more opportunities the group has had to fragment. However, the negative effect of time suggests that groups acquire more resilience to fragmentation over time. Alternatively, this result may suggest a selection bias, whereby weaker groups tend to fragment more quickly.

However, the small number of observations is a limit to these data. In the 135 observations, there are only seven instances in which the group fragments within the three years following a price observation. The modest number of observations reduces my ability to detect effects. So while these data alleviate the problem of time-invariance with the previous analysis, they introduce a problem of their own. Moreover, because the constructed price variable is not a direct measure of small arms availability, it too is likely introducing an element of error.

Both of these analyses have problems. While the first analysis lacks the change in time necessary to demonstrate the hypothesized mechanism, it has a sufficient number of observations. The second analysis can show the mechanism over time, but has an untenably small number of observations. So neither regression is particularly effective in testing this paper's hypothesis. An ideal data source would be structured in insurgent-year dyads so that variables could change over time, would have a sufficient number of observations to provide a meaningful test, and would have a variable which measures how each insurgent group acquires arms. To the best of my knowledge, no such dataset exists. While it is possible that such a dataset could be constructed from available sources, the effort that would be required puts it beyond the scope of this paper.

In short, data-related problems make my quantitative analyses inconclusive. While the first test does not support my hypothesis, and the second test supports it very weakly, neither regression offers sufficient analytic power. So, in the absence of a superior dataset, I move on to a series of case studies in order to demonstrate the proposed mechanism at work. While these case studies would be important regardless for process-tracing purposes, the inconclusiveness of the quantitative analyses render them even more vital.

Case Study: the Solomon Islands

Before the Solomon Islands gained independence in 1978, it had already endured some of the fiercest fighting of World War II during the Battle of Guadalcanal. But independence did not prove a remedy to violence: conflict broke out again from 1998 until an external intervention in 2003. This case study focuses on the later conflict between the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM)⁴⁷ and the Malaitan Eagle Front (MEF), and the fragmentation that occurred during it. This case study first gives a brief overview of the 1998-2003 ‘tensions’ which affected the Solomons, and then outlines several vectors for small arms acquisition by the two insurgent groups. Detailed studies of both groups follow, after which the case study concludes.

Conflict in the Solomon Islands: An Outline

The Solomon Islands is a diverse country, with roughly 80 languages occupying over 1,000 far-flung islands.⁴⁸ The majority of the violence in the 1998-2003 ‘tensions’ took place around the capital Honiara, on the island of Guadalcanal. Honiara became the capital of the Solomons after the end of World War II, to capitalize on the significant amount of infrastructure left behind by the American forces at nearby Henderson Airbase.

⁴⁷ The Isatabu Freedom Movement is synonymous with the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA), but this paper refers to the group as the IFM to avoid confusion with the Guadalcanal Liberation Front, a later splinter faction. For more information, see: Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report: Confronting the Truth for a Better Solomon Islands* (Honiara, 2012): 216-7.

⁴⁸ Sinclair Dinnen, “Winners and Losers: Politics and Disorder in the Solomon Islands, 2000-2002,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 37(2002): 285.

The islands vary greatly in terms of economic development. Guadalcanal has a number of large businesses, but the island of Malaita is resource poor and population heavy.⁴⁹ During WWII, many Malaitan laborers travelled to Guadalcanal to find work, and this migration continued during the post-war period during which of the country's investment continued to flow to Guadalcanal. This unequal pattern of development saw resentment grow both in the outer islands, where locals "saw themselves as victims of 'distance decay,'" and on Guadalcanal where immigration was felt to put pressure on traditional land ownership.⁵⁰

Two social factors intensify the effects of this pattern of migration and development. First, the relatively recent independence of the Solomons and the endurance of traditional institutions meant that the state "had to compete for legitimacy with powerful and well-entrenched premodern traditional institutions."⁵¹ One crucial institution is the traditional network of relationships of reciprocity, which are often nestled within wider kinship affiliations, and mean that "[e]thnic labels such as 'Guale' or 'Malaitan' may create a narrative of group identity that is used as a means to demand compensation and ultimately seek resources and power."⁵² The second relevant social factor is the importance of land. More than an economic bonus, land ownership in the Solomon Islands "is an essential part of a person's identity and forms the core of their narrative of belonging because it enshrines membership within large and established social and familial networks."⁵³

When combined these social factors were a significant driver of conflict in the Solomons. A Guale identity coalesced around kinship groups and social networks, driven by a shared sense

⁴⁹ *Final Report: Confronting the Truth for a Better Solomon Islands*. (Honiara: Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012): 31.

⁵⁰ Judith Bennet, *Roots of Conflict in the Solomon Islands: Though Much is Taken, Much Abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism*. State, Society, and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper no. 2002/5 (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2002): 8.

⁵¹ Shahar Hameiri, "The Trouble with RAMSI: Reexamining the Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands," *The Contemporary Pacific* 19(2007): 412.

⁵² Julian Droogan and Lise Waldek, "Continuing drivers of violence in Honiara: making friends and influencing people," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 69(2015): 290.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 296.

of dispossession of land by Malaitan immigrants to the island and a demand for compensation. These underlying resentments are clearly visible in the comments of former IFM commander Francis Kennedy, who said “[m]ost of our resources were utilized by the Malaitans. With this in mind the boys formed a militia group. We came together and discussed and we finally came to a conclusion to move these people out from our land.”⁵⁴ Another individual reported that “[the Guales] were frustrated over the manner in which the Government failed to address their concerns in relation to Malaitan settlers on Guadalcanal showing no respect for the indigenous people and killing Guales.”⁵⁵

Such frustrations metastasized into violent conflict beginning in October 1998.⁵⁶ In this period, the IFM began evicting Malaitan settlers from their homes on Guadalcanal. The violence escalated during the following period, as Guale militants continued to demand the creation of a state government for Guadalcanal that would better represent their interests. The Solomon Islands government and the Guadalcanal Provincial Government agreed to negotiate these demands in June 1999, resulting in the Honiara Peace Accord of June 28th. After this accord failed to prevent further violence, the MEF made its first public appearance on January 17th, 2000, with a raid on the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) armory at Rove.⁵⁷ Shortly thereafter, the MEF also forced the resignation of Prime Minister Ulufa’alu, placing him under house arrest and declaring an “all-out war” on the IFM.

As the conflict continued, the MEF’s superior armament and its collaboration with the RSIPF allowed it to gain the upper hand. On October 15th, the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) was signed and both groups formally dissolved. However, MEF militants continued to conduct “Joint Operations” with the RSIPF against IFM splinter groups which arose during the

⁵⁴ Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, p. 219.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 223.

⁵⁶ For a complete timeline, see *Ibid*, 51-3.

⁵⁷ The Solomon Islands does not have a standing police force, so the RSIPF is solely responsible for maintaining law and order—as well as maintaining the Solomons’ stockpile of firearms.

same period, meaning that most of the militants continued to fight after the TPA. This state of affairs continued with only minor alterations until the arrival of the Australia and New Zealand-led Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) on July 24th, 2003. RAMSI's first order of business was to disarm the militants, which it accomplished through a series of amnesties which resulted in the surrender of 3,558 weapons by August 2003⁵⁸. After tentatively rearming elements of the RSIPF, RAMSI departed the country in 2017.

Vectors for Small Arms Proliferation in the Solomon Islands.

Insurgents in the Solomon Islands used three primary vectors to acquire small arms: unexploded ordinance, smuggling, and armory raids. Unexploded ordinance (UXO) from WWII is common in the Solomon Island. Many deposits remain from the Battle of Guadalcanal, which was one of the largest battles in the Pacific Campaign. These caches are a poor source of small arms: most of the weapons have disintegrated over the intervening period or are otherwise unusable. However, these caches contain large amounts of ammunition. Both .30 caliber and .50 caliber bullets remain, though militants preferred .50 caliber bullets during the tensions as they better survived the passage of time.⁵⁹ The bullets were then fired from homemade pipe guns. Acquiring arms via unexploded ordinance is a very decentralized process of arms procurement, as it can be done by anyone, and is by necessity spread over a large area.

The second vector for arms acquisition was smuggling. The Bougainville Province of Papua New Guinea and the Western Province of the Solomon Islands share a loosely policed maritime border, and arms were in abundance in the area during the Bougainville Conflict, from 1988 to 1998. Several sources note the presence of gun-running across the border, with the guns chiefly ending up in IFM hands.⁶⁰ These trades were mediated through the black market, not

⁵⁸ Robert Muggah, *Diagnosing Demand: Assessing the Motivations and Means for Firearms Acquisition in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea*, State, Society, and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper no. 2004/7 (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2004): 5-7.

⁵⁹ David Capie, *Under the Gun: The Small Arms Challenge in the Pacific* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2003): 110-111.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 82-3.

coordinated directly with insurgent leaders.⁶¹ Because smuggling took place via an intermediary black market, rather than by way of direct arms transfers, they represent a middle ground in terms of the centralization of arms acquisitions.

Finally, armory raids were common in the Solomon Islands, though some raids were far more successful than others. The IFM raided the RSIPF armory at Yandina and the armory of the guards at Gold Ridge mine. The MEF raided the main RSIPF armory at Rove, in Honiara. However, because armory raids are a one-time event, they can only result in a brief period of centralization: after the guns are distributed through the ranks, there is no more centralizing influence. This means that armory raids decrease the likelihood of fragmentation during the immediate aftermath, but do not provide a long term centralizing influence.

The Isatabu Freedom Movement

The Isatabu Freedom Movement was the first insurgent group that formed in the Solomons, and its goal was to evict the Malaitan settlers from Guadalcanal. The group formed over the course of several meetings, beginning in March 1998. While the exact sequence of events and attendance of meetings is unclear, what is clear is that a core of leaders emerged during the remainder of the year: Harole Keke, Joseph Sangu, George Gray, Andrew Te'e, and Ezekiel Alebua. These core members were also family relations: "Keke and Sangu were brothers, George Gray was their nephew, Andrew Te'e was a distant cousin, and Ezekiel Alebua was their uncle."⁶² Below them was a series of lieutenants who were appointed at the village level.

Potential splits existed from the group's initial formation. The factions of the IFM in the east, which were largely controlled by Andrew Te'e, were greatly influenced by the Moro Movement, a religious movement which attempted to impose traditional Guadalcanalese customs on the villages under its command.⁶³ On the other hand, IFM militants in the west were

⁶¹ Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, p. 235.

⁶² Ibid, p. 233.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 224-5.

more likely to be Christians, and were commanded by Joseph Sangu. Sangu went as far as to say that the Moro movement was a “cult” and that “[t]here were always conflicts between the Moro movement and the non-Moro movement.”⁶⁴

According to George Gray, “[m]any of the men simply carried spears, bush knives, hatchets, slings and bows and arrows. There were no machine guns or other sophisticated military weapons.”⁶⁵ In absence of high-powered weapons, the group armed itself with WWII-era ammunition used in homemade rifles. A focus group with former militants recounted how

[W]e were also trained in how to make homemade guns. We collected pieces of pipes, about the size of what they used to pipe water and then we were taught how to cut them to fit .50 caliber and their frames. We started to make homemade guns but then we had to look for cartridges. We were shown the various sizes of bullets to fit the type of guns according to their sizes, and we knew how to go about finding them. We had to look for crashed planes from the Second World War, got the cartridges, cleaned them up and inserted them into the homemade guns and trained ourselves how to use them.⁶⁶

This narrative reveals the decentralized process of arms acquisitions practiced by the group in the initial period of fighting. Individual militants went out, collected their own ammunition, and built their own guns. Some arms came from Bougainville smugglers, but estimates of the total quantity are as low as “50 to 100 [of which] maybe 10 were modern weapons.”⁶⁷ Such a small number of weapons did not prove a major influence on the group.

On 11 December, 1998, not long after the group was formed, the IFM raided the RSIPF armory at Yandina. Harold Keke personally led the raid, with planning assistance from Ezekiel Alebua and a RSIPF officer.⁶⁸ While the raiding party only made off with a number of older .303 and .22 rifles,⁶⁹ the involvement of senior commanders of the insurgent group gave the raid a far

⁶⁴ Ibid, 225; see also: Jon Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004): 70.

⁶⁵ Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, p. 234; also see Capie, p. 111.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 234.

⁶⁷ Qtd. in Capie, p. 83.

⁶⁸ Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, p. 221.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 961.

more centralized character than either digging up WWII-era shells or smuggling weapons from Bougainville. These arms were then distributed down through the ranks.

Once distributed to the IFM's militants, there is no evidence that the central group of commanders retained any control over how those weapons were used. The single high-powered weapon to which the group had access was strictly controlled, to the point where "[e]ven to touch the weapon was strictly forbidden and one could be severely punished for holding the rifle without the commander's authorization."⁷⁰ However, this was only one gun: the absence of any mention of such restrictions regarding less powerful weapons in the recollections of former militants implies that they were not as centrally controlled. In May 1999, several months after the raid (a pause necessitated by the brief imprisonment of rebel leader Harold Keke), IFM attacks continued to increase, mostly concentrated in the northern plains of Guadalcanal.⁷¹ These raids specifically targeted Malaitans, and displaced roughly 24,000 inhabitants from rural Guadalcanal by November.⁷²

A Commonwealth envoy, visiting in June 1999, reported being shocked that the IFM battalion he visited had a clear chain of command, suggesting the group was much better organized than was thought at the time.⁷³ However, as time passed from the Yandina armory raid, the group's central organization grew less and less influential. The arms were passed to the insurgents in the field, and because the armory raids yielded only a one-time input of arms, the insurgent leaders gradually lost their control over field commanders. On 28 June, the Honiara Peace Accords were signed, but their political settlement was not realized, and were not accompanied by a noticeable decline in violence. The lack of fragmentation during this period attests to the centralizing influence of the armory raids.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 235.

⁷¹ Fraenkel, 55.

⁷² Ibid, 61.

⁷³ Ibid, 68-9.

The group's influence peaked between June 1999 and June 2000, after which the Rove armory raid allowed the MEF to gain the upper hand. The MEF's better equipment and support from the Malaitan-dominated RSIPF led the IFM to engage in peace talks which resulted in the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) in October 2000. Both the IFM and the MEF were to dissolve after the TPA was signed, but in reality, there is little evidence that either group ceased or reduced operations. Rather, the concentrated and consistent insurgency following the Yandina raid implies a centralized organization, with the IFM maintaining a more-or-less unitary front.

As more time passed from the armory raids, however, fragmentation of the IFM intensified through a series of high-profile defections between 2001 and 2002. These defections occurred almost entirely along the pre-existing fault lines in the IFM. Harold Keke's faction, which controlled much of the territory along the Weather Coast, broke away to form the Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF). He imposed a personalized form of religious governance on the area, rapidly losing legitimacy with local populations. GLF militia members later handed over 48 guns, 28 of them high-powered, demonstrating that Keke had managed to hold on to a number of guns independent of the IFM's central command structure.⁷⁴ Andrew Te'e defected to the government (and unofficially MEF)-led Joint Operation in March 2001, which was a series of attacks on the Weather Coast meant to dislodge Keke.⁷⁵ And in the center of Guadalcanal, around the Gold Ridge mine, Stanley Kaoni's group held sway and prevented Keke from leaving the Weather Coast, though it appears that Kaoni's group quickly degenerated into banditry.⁷⁶ That these defections occurred along the preexisting fault-lines implies that these divisions were latent throughout the entire period of the IFM's militancy. However, in the period following the Yandina raid, the small arms acquisition process of the IFM had exercised a centralizing force on the operation. As these weapons were distributed, their centralizing influence gradually declined,

⁷⁴ Ibid, 169.

⁷⁵ Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Report, 100-142.

⁷⁶ Ibid 92-4.

making the group more vulnerable to the pre-existing fault lines. Once the weapons and the ammunition were gone, the IFM was forced to rely on unexploded ordinance for supplies of ammunition; these digs required little supervision, and thus would be carried out by any insurgent field commander. Since the field commands could independently provide their own arms and ammunition, the costs of defection lowered. What had previously been latent tensions blossomed into outright defections.

This timeline of fragmentation is inconsistent with alternative explanations of insurgent fragmentation. First, family connections created a very strong pre-existing social network which connected the various insurgent field commanders. According, therefore, to the social network theories of fragmentation the IFM should never have fragmented. Factors internal to the insurgency also do not explain this pattern of fragmentation. The group's geographical control was constant throughout the insurgency, so insurgents did not become more spread out over time. While the state did eventually become an armed interlocutor in the conflict, it did so after the fragmentation had already taken place. Finally, the absence of external state support during the conflict did not vary over time, but the incidence of fragmentation did, removing external state support as an explanatory factor.

The trajectory of defections within the IFM reveals that changes in small arms acquisition processes were the most likely factor in determining the incidence of fragmentation. While guns were flowing from the central committee of the insurgency, the IFM presented a unified front. When the guns stopped flowing, the insurgency fragmented into a number of splinter groups.

The Malaita Eagle Front

The Malaita Eagle Front was the other main insurgent group in the Solomon Islands tensions. Emerging only in late 2000, it was a relative latecomer to the conflict. One reason for this late emergence of a Malaitan defense was the hope that the Malaitan-dominated RSIPF

would adequately protect communities. The group emerged out of a series of vigilante groups around Honiara, which formed to prevent IFM militants from taking over the capital. The MEF grew by piecemeal, though one former MEF member recounted that “[w]e did not have proper weapons at that time. As far as I can remember we had in our possession four .22 rifles and one pigeon gun.”⁷⁷ Attempts to uncover unexploded ordinance from the area surrounding Honiara were unsuccessful, compounding the supply problems of MEF-precursor groups.

One of the larger vigilante groups was that camped around future MEF leader Jimmy Lusibaea’s property at Shorncliffe. Following the example of the IFM’s raid on the Yandina armory, the MEF-precursors raided the RSIPF armory at Auki, the provincial capital of Malaita. They launched the attack on the armory on 17 January 2000, and captured between 34-100 guns.⁷⁸ After the raid, the MEF became a rallying point for Malaitans who had been harassed by the IFM, and the group expanded. Key amongst these new converts were future high-level commanders, including Alex Bartlett, Jeremy Rua, Andrew Nori, and Leslie Kwaiga. The name itself was decided at Andrew Nori’s office, and was so-called after the successful Malaita Eagles soccer team.⁷⁹

The MEF’s initial posture was defensive, with one former commander noting that “[t]he environment at that time left us Malaitans with no choice but to take up guns and fight to defend innocent Malaitans.”⁸⁰ The organization of the group was based on the Melanesian *bigman* tradition, based on personal authority. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Report, “[a]fter the Auki armory raid, MEF activities were coordinated from various camps established around the city boundaries of Honiara. Each camp received weapons from the break-in, was manned 24 hours a day and led by a field commander.”⁸¹ However, these field commands were

⁷⁷ Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Report, 243.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 244; also Frankel, 82.

⁷⁹ Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Report, 246.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 247.

⁸¹ Ibid, 249.

differentiated according to their cultural and language groups: each group had their own camp. Malaita is an ethnically heterogeneous island, and these linguistic differences provided a pre-existing set of cleavages around which the MEF could disintegrate, similar to the religious fractures within the IFM.

On 5th June 2000, with the assistance of Malaitan members of the RSIPF, the MEF raided the main police armory at Rove, which contained most of the Solomon Islands' military weapons. This raid captured "approximately 300 modern SR88A assault rifles and 50 Ultimax-100 light machine guns purchased several years earlier from Singapore. There were also several hundred older SLR and .303 rifles, Sterling sub-machine guns, as well as a miscellany of sidearms, shotguns, and ammunition."⁸² Later that day, the MEF affected a coup against sitting Prime Minister Ulufa'alu, replacing him with a "Supreme Council," consisting of Jeremy Rua, Leslie Kwaiga, Alex Bartlett, Andrew Nori, and senior members of the police. The police and the MEF began the "Joint Operation," a collaboration which was "responsible for planning the daily operations of the police and MEF militants... Its members held daily meetings at the Lelei Resort, after which they instructed the leaders of the MEF camps about upcoming missions."⁸³

This description of the MEF hierarchy reveals a strictly centralized organizational structure, with the Supreme Council at the top. While some of this centralization is no doubt due to the influence of the RSIPF, membership of the MEF grew to about 3,000 in the aftermath of the raid. This remarkable growth (the total population of Honiara in 1999 was under 50,000⁸⁴) means that the organizational infrastructure of the police could not accommodate the influx of militants. The MEF operated independently, while drawing on police resources and manpower when necessary, meaning that the influence of the police cannot explain the centralization of the MEF. Rather, the centralized distribution of small arms from the Rove armory allowed the MEF

⁸² Capie, 98. See also Fraenkel, 87.

⁸³ Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Report, 256-7.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 48.

to retain its hierarchy: the power of the Supreme Council came from its ability to distribute weapons to its followers.

The centralizing effect is visible in the MEF Supreme Council's ability to coordinate operations in the field. Within a few days of the Rove raid, the MEF dispatched battalions to destroy the IFM camp at Tenaru, to kill IFM members at a hospital in Honiara, and to capture IFM strongholds around Honiara.⁸⁵ Even at the height of its influence, the IFM was never able to sustain such an operational tempo. These operations were not confined merely to the aftermath of the Rove raid; the Joint Operation conducted sustained attacks on the Weather Coast from April 2001 to October 2002.⁸⁶ These operations were often conducted at distance via captured RSIPF patrol boats, meaning that the MEF Supreme Council exercised a remarkable amount of control over its far-flung commands.

However, as was the case with the IFM after the Yandina Raid, the MEF gradually lost control over its militants as time passed after the Rove raid and the arms were distributed. The MEF gradually lost its appearance as a cohesive organization, and “[e]ven the Supreme Council, which held a considerable amount of power at the time, could not avoid the explosion of criminal activities and chaos as a result of hundreds of high-powered weapons in circulation after the armory raid.”⁸⁷ The greater scale of the Rove raid, when compared to the Malaita raid, meant that the subsequent flow of arms to militants was of a greater scale as well. Guns became cheap, and the Supreme Council was powerless to stop the criminal activities of its nominal subordinates. The weapons taken at Rove were never returned to the MEF, leading higher crime rates and decreased public safety.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid, 257-258.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 106.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 261.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 152.

During this breakdown, order was retained in the MEF faction which worked closely with the RSIPF in the Joint Operation, but other groups skirmished against each other. In Northern Malaita, the militants under Jimmy Lusibaea clashed with the “Mafia” faction of the MEF (so-called for its penchant for violent criminal activities) because of an ongoing land dispute. Militants from Auki clashed with a faction from To’obaita after a drunken brawl escalated sharply.⁸⁹ In short, after the arms were distributed, the Supreme Council lost control.

As with the IFM, alternative explanations for the MEF’s particular fragmentation are ineffective. As with the MEF, there were strong preexisting social networks which, according to Staniland, ought to have prevented the group’s snowballing fragmentation.⁹⁰ The geographic extent of the insurgent’s control was relatively stable. The MEF received large amounts of support from the state apparatus; though Seymour argues that this kind of support can have deleterious effects on the coherency of the insurgency, the timeline is all wrong.⁹¹ Finally, the absence of external support was constant throughout the insurgency. In short, alternative explanations for insurgent fragmentation do not explain the timeline of fragmentation in the Solomon Islands.

The fragmentation of the MEF mirrors the pattern set by the IFM: the movement was initially vigorously centralized, in the direct aftermath of the armory raid on Rove. However, as these arms disseminated to the average militant, their centralizing effect was lost. As the militants were no longer dependent on the Supreme Council for the weapons, the cost of defecting from the Supreme Council diminished. As a result, insurgent fragmentation at the individual and group level increased. As with the IFM, the change in small arms acquisition remains the most persuasive factor to explain the trajectory of fragmentation.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 152; see also Fraenkel, 128-9.

⁹⁰ Staniland, “Organizing Insurgency.”

⁹¹ Seymour, “Why Factions Change Sides in Civil War.”

The Solomon Islands: Conclusion

By the time that RAMSI arrived in the Solomon Islands, the arms with which the various insurgent commanders' groups had once exerted control over their forces were evenly disseminated amongst the population. RAMSI made disarmament their first priority, and in the end it collected 3,558 surrendered weapons, including 119 SR88A rifles, 131 SLR L1A1 rifles, 14 Ultimex 100 light machine guns, and 5 Browning .50 caliber machine guns.⁹²

The case of the Solomon Islands supports the hypothesis that small arms acquisitions influence the fragmentation of insurgent groups. In both cases, armory raids allowed the central command structures of armed groups to briefly exercise control over their militants and field commanders. However, as time went on, the dissemination of weapons to individuals reduced the militants' dependence on their commanders. By lowering the cost of defection, the distribution of small arms amongst the ranks increased the fragmentation of both insurgent groups. The impact of how the groups acquired their weapons on whether the group fragments or coheres is clear.

Case Study: the Central African Republic

The Central African Republic (CAR) is a country the size Texas with a population of roughly five and a half million people.⁹³ After independence in 1960, the CAR was wracked by a series of coups, at one point becoming the short-lived Central African Empire under the dictatorial Jean-Bédél Bokassa. This case study focuses on the CAR's most recent period of conflict, beginning in November 2012. It studies the violence between the Séléka and anti-Balaka groups, and their respective trajectories of fragmentation and cohesion; while other insurgent groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army operate in the CAR, this case study limits its scope.

⁹² Fraenkel, 170; also Muggah, 5.

⁹³ "The Central African Republic," *The CIA World Factbook*, accessed 8 March 8, 2017, available online: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ct.html>

Conflict in the CAR: A Brief Outcome

The territory now known as the CAR was violent before it was first constructed by European imperialists. Before the arrival of Europeans the country was a loose constellation of tribes in the south and sultanates in the north. The sultanates in the north used raids into the south of the area to provide slaves for the trans-Saharan and Nilotic slave trade. In the 18th century, several vassal sultanates put a greater focus on proselytizing, converting swathes of the northern CAR to Islam.⁹⁴ In the intervening period, the Islamic population spread through the CAR, leading to an intermingling in many places. However, there is still a significant ethno-religious tension between the Christian and Muslim populations. For instance, the lingua-franca of the CAR is Sango, a language that the Muslim population is less likely to speak.⁹⁵ “A Muslim, even a Central African one, often faces difficulties obtaining documents from the national government,” because many non-Muslim Central Africans feel that a Muslim is by definition a foreigner.⁹⁶ In short, there remains significant animus between Christian and Muslim populations in the CAR from pre-colonial times.

The area of the CAR was annexed to the French empire largely for the purpose of territorial continuity: France wanted its empire to stretch from French West Africa to its colony on the horn of Africa (now Djibouti). But after the Fashoda incident, the area which is now the CAR became an accidental “cul-de-sac” of French Empire.⁹⁷ Such accidental imperialism led to a certain amount of administrative neglect exercised by the French. Eager to colonize on the cheap, the French outsourced their imperial responsibilities to concessionary companies. These private companies covered a little over half of the newly formed Colony of Oubangi-Chari, and paid the French government for the privilege of extracting the resources in their given concessions. These companies were disastrously underfunded, constructing little to no

⁹⁴ Stephen W. Smith, “CAR’s History: The Past of a Tense Present,” in Louisa Lombard and Tatiana Carayannis (eds.) *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2015): 19.

⁹⁵ Smith, “CAR’s History,” 40.

⁹⁶ Faouizi Kilembe, “Local Dynamics in the PK5 District of Bangui,” in Louisa Lombard and Tatiana Carayannis (eds.) *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2015): 87.

⁹⁷ Smith, “CAR’s History,” 21.

institutions or infrastructure, creating a less profitable versions of the extractive regime of the Congo Free State.⁹⁸ The result of this style of ruling was that the CAR was even less institutionalized than other French colonies; what institutions did exist were largely confined to the environs of the capital. Even in colonial times it was commonly said that “the state stops at PK12’—i.e. 12 kilometres from the capital, Bangui.”⁹⁹ In short, the pre-independence colony that would become the CAR suffered from two main problems: large autonomous areas and poorly developed institutions.

These problems persisted into the post-independence period. The country became independent in 1960, but the spiritual leader of the independence movement was deposed shortly after. The incumbent regime was replaced by the authoritarian regime of David Dacko, who in turn was replaced by the dictator Jean-Bédél Bokassa, the former army colonel who later declared the hereditary Central African Empire. When Bokassa started leaning more towards Muammar Qaddafi, French paratroopers descended on Bangui while Bokassa was in Libya in 1979. The French returned Dacko to power, who passed power to André Kolingba who ruled with the help of the French secret security service (DGSE).¹⁰⁰ In 1993 Central Africans went to the polls for their first democratic election, electing Ange-Félix Patassé. After a series of attempted coups, the French mounted another intervention, turning into a collection of United Nations-authorized interventions, including the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) which left in 2010, and the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) which was present during the anti-Balaka/Séléka conflicts, but was largely ineffective in keeping the peace.

Despite UN peacekeepers in the country, Francois Bozizé came to power in 2001 by using borrowed Chadian troops to attack and loot Bangui. In the largely autonomous north, a

⁹⁸ Ibid, 20.

⁹⁹ Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, “Local Powers and a Distant State in Rural Central African Republic,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 35/3 (1997): 441.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, “CAR’s History,” 30.

series of rebellions rose against Bozizé's rule. One of these, after it was rebranded as the Séléka, eventually managed to surround the capital. After internationally mediated negotiations fell through, Bozizé fled into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, leaving the Séléka alliance under Michael Djotodia in loose control of Bangui. Because the rebel alliance was largely from the north of the CAR, the largely Christian Southerners perceived the coup to be the action of Muslims. This caused popular disgruntlement with Djotodia's rule, leading to the formation of the anti-Balaka movement, which emerged from a coalition of local self-defense groups and later removed the Séléka from Bangui.

On 5th December, 2013 the UN Security Council authorized MISCA, an "African-Led International Support Mission."¹⁰¹ The increase in international attention eventually forced Djotodia to negotiate, stepping down after a summit in N'Djamena. A Transitional National Council (TNC) elected the former mayor of Bangui, Catherine Samba-Panza. She led the country until the December 2015 elections, during which the current president, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, came to power. However, the problems faced by the CAR at independence—weak institutions and autonomous areas—still plague the CAR today.

Vectors for Small Arms Proliferation in the CAR

The three primary vectors for small arms acquisition in the CAR were looted stockpiles, pre-existing small scale holdings, and cross-border smuggling. The first source for small arms in the CAR was the small pre-existing holdings, and the markets they create. Gun ownership is common in the Central African Republic: in "Sangha-Mbaéré prefecture, more than 60 per cent of the population of the Kouapili district of Salo reportedly possessed at least one firearm in 1998."¹⁰² There is also a small cottage industry in homemade rifles, commonly referred to as *jaranga*, "meaning 'doesn't last' in the local dialect."¹⁰³ Because these markets exist without any

¹⁰¹ Resolution 2127, UN Document no. S/RES/2127, accessed 8 March 2017, available online: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2127\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2127(2013))

¹⁰² Berman and Lombard, *The Central African Republic and Small Arms*, 22.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 65.

imposed structure, they are incredibly decentralized; an insurgent group that relies on such acquisition procedures will have little to no centralizing influence from small arms.

As was the case in the Solomon Islands, looting stockpiles was a centralized process, but its effect was temporary. It takes organization and planning to identify arms stockpiles and to raid them, but after the arms from the raid are distributed, the centralizing influence wears off. In the CAR, insurgents looted the arsenals of the Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA), the stockpiles from previous disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs, and the personal stockpiles of former President Bozizé.¹⁰⁴ The Séléka in particular depended on armory raids, with much of their arms coming from Bozizé-era stockpiles.¹⁰⁵ Transfers from the FACA and Bozizé stockpiles are particularly noticeable because they are the only source for certain armaments manufactured in Europe and in China.

Finally, on the opposite end of the spectrum from the informal market, were organized arms smugglers who transfer weapons into the CAR. The CAR is surrounded by other conflict zones, including the Sudan, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and so the porosity of the CAR's borders creates the opportunity for arms smuggling en masse. This arms smuggling has the potential to be a very centralized process, with large-scale transfers being brokered by insurgent leaders. On the other hand, some weapons are brought across the borders in a decentralized process and quickly disappear on the open market, becoming indistinguishable from the pre-existing arms supply. In short, where insurgent groups receive direct cross-border arms transfers, this is a centralized process, but cross-border smuggling is not always so centralized.

¹⁰⁴ *Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2127 (2013)*, UN Document no. S/2014/452, accessed 14 March, 2017, available online: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/452

¹⁰⁵ *Non-State Armed Groups in the Central African Republic: Types and sources of documented arms and ammunition* (London: Conflict Armaments Research, 2015): 6.

The Séléka Coalition

The Séléka Coalition arose from the integration of several previously disparate insurgent groups in the peripheral north of the CAR, where the absence of the state “is so striking that the position in certain respects has almost reached the level of caricature.”¹⁰⁶ Most of the north consists of autonomous zones where the combination of geography and lack of government incentives mean that, even under the French colonial apparatus, the north was largely ignored.¹⁰⁷ This disconnection with the administration of the CAR led to anger over the lack of services provided by the government. The armed groups that would become the Séléka arose in the northern CAR under the Bozizé administration, both to provide public goods and to take advantage of the rents that the absence of a state allowed them to collect.

These predecessor groups controlled small, local sections of the CAR. But in March 2012, in Niamey, Niger, leaders of several of these groups met and formed an alliance (Séléka is the Sango word for alliance). The three initial groups were the *Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain* (FDPC) and two splinter factions of the *Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix* (CPJP).¹⁰⁸ Significant figures in the Séléka structure included Michel Djotodia, its leader and the former leader of the *Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement* (UFDR), Noureddine Adam and Mohammed M. Dhaffane of the CPJP splinter factions, Ali Drassa of the *Front populaire pour le redressement*, and Joseph Zoundeko, a former anti-poaching guard and the Séléka’s military chief of staff. As the Séléka gained territory, they absorbed a heterogeneous set of armed forces, including a significant number of former anti-poaching guards from the CAR’s northern national parks and game reserves.¹⁰⁹ They also recruited from areas they controlled, so while the Séléka numbered as little as 1,600 fighters in December 2012, the group numbered around 4,000

¹⁰⁶ Bierschenk and de Sardan, “Local Powers and a Distant State,” 441.

¹⁰⁷ Louisa Lombard, “The Autonomous Zone Conundrum: Armed Conservation and Rebellion in North-Eastern CAR,” in Louisa Lombard and Tatiana Carayannis (eds.) *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2015): 142-165.

¹⁰⁸ Yannick Weyns, Lotte Hoex, Filip Hilgert, and Steven Spittaels, *Mapping Conflict Motives: The Central African Republic* (Anwerp: International Peace Information Service, 2014): 15.

¹⁰⁹ Lombard, “The Autonomous Zone Conundrum,” 142.

when it captured Bangui.¹¹⁰ The structure of the Séléka alliance directly mirrored the principal-agent structure outlined in this essay's theory section: different regiments came into the structure, and were then commanded from a distance by the administration led by Michel Djotodia and Joseph Zoundeko.¹¹¹

The first Séléka attacks took place in September 2012, and they captured the military base at Bria, the capital of Haute-Kotto Prefecture (on the road to Bangui) by December 10th. This attack set the standard for the Séléka attacking military installations in order to procure arms. Even later, when looting civilian towns and villages, looting was “mainly limited to offices and bases, and to assets that contributed to the Séléka war effort, such as food, arms, vehicles and fuel.”¹¹² The control necessary for such constrained violence further implies an ordered, top-down hierarchy within the insurgent group. The Séléka were similarly well organized when they raided the FACA base at Ndélé, the major market town of Bamingui-Bangoran Prefecture. A non-exhaustive list of the armaments seized from the Séléka by MISCAs peacekeeper forces evidences the governmental sources of their armaments. They include: Chinese-built Type 56-2 assault rifles; Chinese-built Type 65-A HEAT 82mm recoilless rifle rounds; Iranian 12.7 x 108mm ammunition; Chinese-built PP93 60mm mortars; and many other imported weapons as well.¹¹³ Raiding FACA armories and the stocks of Bozizé's presidential guard is the only believable source for these weapons. These reoccurring armory raids took place during the Séléka's march southward to Bangui, during which the coalition had no evidence of splits despite the absorption of tremendously heterogeneous sub-groups. The fact that these raids continued to occur—as opposed to the limited number of armory raids in the Solomon Islands—meant that the short-term centralizing influence never wore off, and the Séléka did not fragment.

¹¹⁰ Yannick et al., *Mapping Conflict Motives*, 15.

¹¹¹ Gino Vlavonou, “Understanding the ‘failure’ of the Séléka rebellion,” *African Security Review* 23/3(2014): 318-326.

¹¹² Yannick et al., *Mapping Conflict Motives*, 29.

¹¹³ *Non-State Armed Groups in the Central African Republic*, 12-18.

After capturing Bangui on his march south, Djotodia began to receive shipments of arms and ammunition from the Sudan in early 2013. The Séléka received at least two deliveries of Khawad 12.7 x 108mm heavy machine guns (a Sudanese variant of the Soviet DShK), 12.7 x 108mm ammunition, and large amounts of 7.62 x 39mm ammunition (used in AK47's).¹¹⁴ Because these arms were delivered directly, by air, to the Séléka command in Bangui, they constitute an incredibly centralized form of arms acquisition. Towards the end of the Séléka's time in Bangui, field commanders in the east, far away from Bangui, grew increasingly distrustful of the leaders in Bangui. However, these tensions remained largely under the surface while regular shipments of small arms to field commanders continued. Though Djotodia formally disbanded the Séléka in September 2013 they “remained a rebel group, at least until August 2014 ... [t]here is no clear distinction between the behavior and motives of the Séléka and the ex-Séléka.”¹¹⁵ As such, during this time of centrally distributed armaments, not even formally dissolving the Séléka caused it to fragment.

These shipments did not endure beyond 2013. The lack of arms shipments to insurgent central commanders ended the centralized availability of arms—since the Séléka, and by now the anti-Balaka, had exhausted the supply of stockpiles to raid. By July 2014, in fighting broke out between Séléka factions, largely along ethnic lines. Though these ethnic divisions had been present during the entirety of the Séléka alliance, fragmentation did not occur until after small arms acquisition had been decentralized, consistent with a lowered cost of defection.¹¹⁶ By late 2014, forces under Joseph Zoundeko and Ali Drassa were fighting each other, and the latter declared his own splinter organization, the *Front républicain pour la changement*.

¹¹⁴ *Non-State Armed Groups in the Central African Republic*, 9-12.

¹¹⁵ Yannick et al., *Mapping Conflict Motives*, 23.

¹¹⁶ *Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2127 (2013)*, UN Document No. S/2014/762, accessed 15 March 2017, available online: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/762

This timeline is inconsistent with social network theories of fragmentation. The Séléka did not form along pre-existing social networks: it was artificially created by negotiation. However, at the time of formation, the Séléka was relatively stable and centralized. Over time, after which the strength of social networks within the Séléka should have increased, one can observe the coalition decentralizing, showing a trajectory opposite to that suggested by the social network theories of insurgent fragmentation. Another set of theories argues that factors internal to the insurgency matter, such as the extent of territory controlled by the group, and disagreement about potential goals. However, the Séléka remained coherent during its territorial expansion and for a significant amount of time afterward, unlike Johnston's prediction regarding insurgent structure.¹¹⁷ Moreover, though different segments of the Séléka had slightly different political grievances, they united around the idea of a separatist state in the north-east.¹¹⁸ State repression, nonexistent though it was, was also constant. It is true that external weapons shipments from the Sudan to Michel Djotodia may have provided a centralizing influence, but the limited duration of these shipments prevents them from explaining the Séléka's entire trajectory of cohesion and fragmentation. Moreover, the fact that these shipments consisted exclusively of small arms makes them less of a competing mechanism for cohesion and more of a subset of the arms acquisition processes described by this paper.

During the Séléka expansion process, the armory raids it used to arm itself provided a centralizing influence. While occupying Bangui, it received shipments of small arms direct from Khartoum, which likewise provided a centralizing influence. After centralized small arms acquisition processes became unavailable, the Séléka splintered. The alternative explanations for insurgent fragmentation do not adequately explain this timeline, and so the case of the Séléka supports this paper's hypothesis.

¹¹⁷ Johnston, "The Geography of Insurgent Organization and its consequences for Civil Wars," 107-131.

¹¹⁸ Yannick et al., *Mapping Conflict Motives*, 26.

The Anti-Balaka

The Anti-Balaka forces evolved from a series of small-scale, local self-defense movements which date back to the violent period of the mid-2000s, who originally fought road bandits and encroaching pastoral groups.¹¹⁹ The anti-Balaka expanded their efforts significantly—and became more consolidated as a political movement—when the Séléka began to spread their sphere of influence into the south and west of the CAR. Generally among southern inhabitants of the CAR, “[M]uslims are automatically considered foreigners.”¹²⁰ Because the Séléka came from the north of the country, were significantly more likely to have Muslim sounding names, and were accompanied by Chadian mercenaries, the spreading Séléka control was perceived as an act of foreign aggression. In many ways, these anti-Balaka are analogous to the emergence of Mai-Mai militias in Eastern Congo which fought against the perceived invasion of Rwandan ethnic groups.¹²¹

The multiple independent origins of local anti-Balaka groups meant that there was a lack of coordination across regions in efforts to combat the Séléka during the first anti-Balaka operations in August and September, 2013.¹²² However, the anti-Balaka militias were “rapidly joined by low-ranking officers and rank and file from Bozizé’s FACA, Presidential Guard, and Gendarmerie, who started to rally new recruits and to organize the groups to fight against the Séléka.¹²³” With this newfound organizational back bone, anti-Balaka factions acquired the capability to expand beyond their local areas of self-defense. The growing capabilities were made clear when the anti-Balaka groups coordinated to attack Séléka occupied Bangui on December 5th 2013. However, this attack lacked the organization and coherence of the initial Séléka march on Bangui. Lombard characterizes it instead as “a rampage in which Muslim neighborhoods were

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 44.

¹²⁰ Kilembe, “Local Dynamics in the PK5 District of Bangui,” 91.

¹²¹ Philip Roessler and Harry Verhoeven, *Why Comrades go to War: Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa’s Deadliest Conflict* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016): 324-324.

¹²² Enrica Picco, “From Being Forgotten to Being Ignored: International Humanitarian Interventions in the Central African Republic,” in Louisa Lombard and Tatiana Carayannis (eds.) *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2015): 235.

¹²³ Yannick et al., *Mapping Conflict Motives*, 44.

looted and destroyed and many people were killed.¹²⁴ After this period, a UN commission of inquiry “determined that the [anti-Balaka] had carried out an ethnic cleansing against the country’s Muslim minority.¹²⁵”

The anti-Balaka had an organic, grass-roots process for acquiring weapons. The local self-defense groups from which the anti-Balaka emerged were often armed with hunting rifles, although scarcities of ammunition often caused them to revert to traditional weapons like bows and arrows.¹²⁶ During these groups’ recent reemergence, they still largely relied on the large market for recirculated arms in the CAR; they “have armed themselves primarily with artisanal weapons, 12-gauge shotguns, and hunting rifles. Some anti-Balaka elements are also equipped with AK-pattern assault rifles, GPMGs, and RPG-pattern rocket launchers, which may have been obtained from FACA stockpiles or from local domestic markets.”¹²⁷ This lack of consistency in armaments suppliers denotes a disorganized acquisition process. Anti-Balaka forces also smuggled ammunition, mostly for hunting rifles, across the Cameroonian border.¹²⁸ However, this activity was largely under control of the anti-Balaka militia located in the village town of Cantonnier, rather than the anti-Balaka leaders in Bangui.¹²⁹ In short, these arms smuggling efforts bear little similarity to the coordinated methods of the Séléka. Importantly, the arms acquisition processes of the anti-Balaka groups did not change over time: at all points during the conflict, the anti-Balaka had a disorganized process for acquiring weapons.

This disorganized arms acquisition process is reflected in an overabundance of fragmentation. Even while in Bangui, the anti-Balaka was largely a conglomeration of individual groups; it lacked the central command structure of the Séléka. Though the FACA, presidential

¹²⁴ Louisa Lombard, *State of Rebellion: Violence and Intervention in the Central African Republic*

¹²⁵ Ty McCormick, “One Day We Will Start a Big War,” *Foreign Policy*, 28 October 2015, accessed 18 March, 2017, available online: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/28/one-day-we-will-start-a-big-war-central-african-republic-un-violence/>

¹²⁶ Berman and Lombard, *Small Arms and the Central African Republic*, 28. U33

¹²⁷ *Non-State Armed Groups in the Central African Republic*, 8.

¹²⁸ *Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic*, UN Document no. S/2014/762, 135-141.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 42.

guard, and Gendarmerie elements lent it some ability to organize, their effect did not last beyond the initial capture of Bangui. After the city's capture, a leadership structure in Bangui proclaimed its authority as the "central" anti-Balaka headquarters. New leaders included the former minister of youth and sports under Bozizé, Patrice Edouard Ngaïssona, the political newcomer Sébastien Wenezoui, and a bevy of Bozizé-era FACA officers. However, from the beginning the Bangui leadership was divided into two major factions. One group, largely coordinated by Ngaïssona, consisted of the former Bozizé associates in the anti-Balaka movement and headquartered itself in the north of Bangui. The other faction was led by Wenezoui, and controlled the important transport terminus of Mbaïki in the south of the city. In August 2014, Ngaïssona formally excluded Wenezoui from the movement, leading the later to create the splinter *Mouvance Patriotique pour l'avenir*.¹³⁰

This fragmentation is inconsistent with social network theories of insurgent fragmentation. The presence of a Bozizé-era "old-boys network" suggests a much stronger social network within the anti-Balaka than within the Séléka. However, the comparative timeline of fragmentation moves in the opposite way to which the social network theories would suggest. Similarly, while the anti-Balaka were geographically dispersed, they operated in the relatively infrastructure-rich south of the country. This means they would have had an easy time traveling to other anti-Balaka controlled areas—as opposed to the Séléka controlled areas of the north—and yet nevertheless were more prone to fragmentation than the Séléka. Another alternative explanation is state negotiation causing fragmentation, and it is true that Wenezoui was removed from the anti-Balaka after independently conducting negotiations in Brazzaville without Ngaïssona.¹³¹ However, the split between the two leaders pre-dated this separation, and the creation of Wenezoui's independent party merely formalized the situation on the ground. Finally, external state support for the anti-Balaka is not an adequate explanation for the groups' tendency

¹³⁰ Yannick et al., *Mapping Conflict Motives*, 48-49.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 49.

to fragment. The absence of third party support—such as the Séléka received from Sudan—cannot be ruled out as factor in promoting fragmentation. However, such support can also be interpreted within the context of this paper’s theory as the absence of a centralized source of small arms, and so at the least is not counter to the theory.

The case of the anti-Balaka is admittedly less convincing than other cases within this paper. Unlike the other cases, the anti-Balaka did not exhibit change over time in their fragmentation: they were a remarkably incoherent organization throughout their time in the CAR. While the lack of variation over time makes the anti-Balaka a slightly weaker test of this paper’s hypothesis than the other cases, it nevertheless supports this paper’s claim about the influence of small arms acquisition in insurgent fragmentation.

The Central African Republic: Conclusion

During the years directly following the conflict described above, the CAR played host to a confusing variety of peacekeeping missions, each of which recovered a staggering amount of arms and ammunition. Though exact numbers are difficult to come by, the disarmament of the various armed group is a monumental, and ongoing, task.

Armory raids followed by arms shipments from the Sudan allowed the Séléka to cohere. When this centralized supply stopped, the Séléka fragmented. The narrative of the anti-Balaka is even simpler: they did not have a centralized arms acquisition process at any point during the conflict, and were never able to cohere into a centrally organized insurgency. In short, the example of the CAR demonstrates that when insurgent groups have a centrally organized arms acquisition process, they will be able to avoid fragmentation.

Conclusion

An increased number of insurgent groups greatly complicates peacemaking processes, because the greater the number of insurgent groups, the greater the divergence of preferred war outcomes. Moreover, insurgent fragmentation can lead to increases in violence, as insurgent

groups work to out-compete each other and exert control over contested territories. Finally, fragmentation can increase the number of post conflict actors, and so complicate the DDR programs which intend to prevent the country's return to war. In short, insurgent fragmentation has important consequences for civil conflicts and their aftermaths.

The above case studies, as well as the previous quantitative analyses, show that arms acquisitions play a crucial role in determining whether or not insurgent organizations fragment. The process of arms acquisition can either be centralized or decentralized. Third-party transfers to insurgent leaders, for instance, are a centralized process of arms acquisition; relying on access to grass-roots arms markets and informal smuggling is a decentralized process. Via principal-agent dynamics, a centralized arms acquisition process increases the costs for insurgent field commanders to defect and form a splinter organization, but a decentralized process lowers these costs. The result of this mechanism is that the fragmentation of insurgent groups will be more common when insurgent groups have a decentralized arms acquisition process.

However, this study does have limitations. The biggest limitation is the absence of data that are directly focused on the issue of arms acquisition. For its quantitative analyses, this paper uses data cobbled together from various sources that are focused on facets of insurgency other than small arms. As a result, this paper would benefit from a data source that contained more focused data on insurgent organizations and how they acquire arms. As with the quantitative section, these case studies use a variety of sources, few of which actually deal directly with small arms. Where they do mention small arms, they often draw their data from the stocks of weapons collected after a conflict. As such, these data contain useful information on what small arms were used, but less information on where these arms come from. To collect better information would require interviews with ex-combatants focused both on the internal structure of the insurgent organization and where the insurgent acquired his or her weapon.

However, regardless of its limitations, this paper still presents useful conclusions: the way that an insurgent group acquires weapons is a crucial determinant of whether or not that group fragments or coheres. Not only does it outline a new theory of insurgent fragmentation, it provides strong qualitative support for that theory in action. Above all, it reiterates the idea that small arms are an important object of study for the civil wars literature. This paper suggests that there is a need not only for more data, but for more research on the material determinants of insurgent fragmentation. One possible avenue for future research would be to undertake similar analyses with other forms of material support for insurgency, to understand how unique the effects of small arms are. For instance, some insurgent groups manage to acquire larger weapons, like artillery or armored vehicles; it would be interesting to examine the effects of these sorts of weapons on insurgent fragmentation.

Finally, this paper provides a warning for states which arm third party insurgent groups, such as how the United States has armed rebels to fight in the ongoing Syrian conflict.¹³² While such a strategy is effective as long as the insurgent group controls the arms, if the group loses control of the arms, then fragmentation can increase throughout the region. This fragmentation increases the number of armed groups, so supplying arms to rebel groups may actually increase the longevity of the conflict and complicate any attempt at making peace. Such an example illustrates the importance of this paper's finding: as small arms proliferate, fragmentation increases and peace becomes more difficult.

¹³² Mark Mazzetti and Ali Younes, "C.I.A. Arms for Syrian Rebels Supplied Black Market, Officials Say," *The New York Times*, 26 June 2016, accessed 16 April 16, 2017, available online: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/27/world/middleeast/cia-arms-for-syrian-rebels-supplied-black-market-officials-say.html?_r=0

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