UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

# The Process of Internal Conflict Diffusion:
# Neighbours at War, Transnational Alliances, & Mercenary Mobilisation in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1980 to 2016

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by Vanessa Margarete Gottwick

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# The Process of Internal Conflict Diffusion: Neighbours at War, Transnational Alliances, & Mercenary Mobilisation in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1980 to 2016

By Vanessa Gottwick
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## ABSTRACT

Despite the knowledge that armed conflicts diffuse, we know little about the actors triggering this process. This thesis offers a transnational perspective to conflict onset, exploring to what extent mercenaries act as triggers of diffusion. By extending and refining the diffusion framework of Opportunity and Willingness, I develop an original theory that combines the variables neighbours at war, transnational alliance, and mercenary mobilisation to assess how conflict spreads. An integrative study of the spread of conflict, taking an actor-centric approach to diffusion, will be provided. This investigation presents and draws on original data gathered for the Commercial Military Actors in Armed Conflict Dataset (CMAD), a database which provides data on mercenary and private military and security companies activities from 1980 to 2016. A mixed methods approach is used combining both statistical data and case study analysis. I use a logistic regression to determine whether there is a correlation between the key variables and the variable of interest conflict onset. In a second step I establish causal inference through the method of process tracing. I analyse three distinct cases of conflict onset on the African continent: Sierra Leone 1991; Zaire 1996, and Sudan 1983. I find that conflict onset is the outcome of an intricate network of state and non-state actors. In addition I argue that mercenaries play a vital role with regard to the diffusion process, but not as independent actors. These case studies reveal that mercenaries are not actors that pursue and spread conflict on their own accord, instead mercenaries should rather be perceived as foreign policy tools of regional elites. These findings are crucial for the field of conflict research in order to pre-empt triggers of conflict onset.

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Table of Contents

## List of Tables

## List of Figures

## List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ADF | Allied Democratic Forces |
| AFL | Armed Forces of Liberia |
| APC | All People's Congress |
| AFDL | Alliance des forces Démocratiques pour la Libération |
| BBTG | Broad Based Transitional Government |
| CMA | Commercial Military Actor |
| CMAD | Commercial Military Actors Dataset |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| EO | Executive Outcome |
| ELF | Eritrean Liberation Front |
| EPLF | Eritrean People's Liberation Front |
| ECOMOG | Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| FN | Forces Nouvelles de Côte d'Ivoire |
| FAR | Forces Armées Rwandaises |
| FAZ | Zairean Armed Forces |
| FDLR | Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda |
| FLEC | Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| LRA | Lord Resistance Army |
| MPR | Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution |
| MRU | Mano River Union |
| MPRI | Military Professional Resources Inc. |
| MRND | Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement |
| MRND(D) | Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement et la D**é**mocratie |
| NAG | Non-State Armed Group |
| NPP | National Patriotic Party |
| NRA | National Resistance Army |
| NFSL | National Front for the Salvation of Libya |

| | |
|---|---|
| NPFL | National Patriotic Front of Liberia |
| NRPC | National Provisional Ruling Council |
| OAU | Organization of African Unity |
| PMSC | Private Military and Security Company |
| RCD | Rally for Congolese Democracy |
| RPA | Rwandan Patriotic Army |
| RPF | Rwandan Patriotic Front |
| RUF | Revolutionary United Front |
| RSLAF | Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces |
| RSMLF | Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force |
| SI | Sandline International |
| SLA | Sierra Leone Army |
| SPLM/A | Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army |
| UN | United Nations |
| UP | Unity Party |
| UCDP | Uppsala Conflict Data Program |
| UNAR | Union Nationale Rwandaise |
| UNITA | União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola |
| UNWOWAS | United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel |
| WAP | Warring Alliances Partners |
| WBN | Warring Border Nations |
| WNBF | West Nile Bank Front |
| ZDI | Zimbabwe Defence Industries |
| ZANU-PF | Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front |

## 1. Introduction

The puzzle of conflict diffusion encompasses several distinct research areas ranging from geographical aspects such as borders, the emergence of militant groups, the creation of alliances, and violent non-state actors to name a few. This thesis will analyse the role of mercenaries in relation to the spread of armed conflict.

Mercenarism is a phenomenon that impacts security and foreign policy decisions around the globe. State and non-state actors use mercenaries to pursue their interests on foreign soil, most commonly in conflict settings. The advantage lies in being able to impact dynamics on the ground whilst also being able to plausibly deny any connection to the combatants. The debate around the use of mercenaries in conflict settings recently picked up speed when several newspaper outlets reported the presence of Syrian mercenaries fighting for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This event is not the only mercenary incident that made headlines in 2020. The activities of Sudanese mercenaries in Libya were a cause of concern for the stability of the Libyan state. More specifically, Janjaweed mercenaries are fighting on behalf of Khalifa Haftar who contests the Libyan government. The latest annual report of the United Nations Working Group on the use of Mercenaries concluded that mercenaries are considered "a source of insecurity and destabilization in Africa" (United Nations General Assembly, 2020, p. 3).

These examples illustrate that mercenaries are active in interstate as well as intrastate conflict. They are hired by legitimate governments as well as warlords. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the civil war in Libya are not irregularities. Mercenaries are present in conflicts around the globe. However, my findings show that they are predominantly involved in African internal conflicts. Other examples of their active presence range from internal conflict in Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Chad. Yet, mercenaries are not a ubiquitous phenomenon in conflict generally. Mercenaries are predominantly used to provide combat-related tasks in internal conflict. The assumption that mercenaries are actors that have the ability to impact conflict dynamics is nothing new. Chojnacki et al. (2009) examines the determinants of mercenary presence in civil wars from 1950 to 2000. According to their findings mercenaries have been hired by at least one warring party in one-third of the internal conflicts during the second half of the 20th century. Petersohn (2014) assesses the impact of mercenaries on conflict severity,

whereas Fitzsimmons (2012) explores the repercussions of mercenaries' involvement in asymmetric warfare. However, the impact of mercenaries on a new conflict onset has not been evaluated to date.

This thesis delineates a causal pathway that assesses the impact of mercenaries on conflict onset. The event of conflict onset will be analysed by employing a transnational perspective. Research on the event of conflict onset tends to focus on explanations that examine country-inherent structural factors. This thesis puts forward an explanation to conflict onset beyond the common variables such as regime type, population size, GDP or ethnic fractionalisation. The phenomenon of conflict onset will be assessed through the framework of conflict diffusion. The process of diffusion is defined as "a process whereby internal conflict in one location alters the probability of another internal conflict erupting in another location at a later point in time" (Forsberg, 2014a, p. 189). This means a shift away from country-inherent factors towards the incorporation of transnational dynamics of internal conflict. This framework aims to improve the understanding of how conflicts diffuse. The overarching research questions this thesis addresses are: How does conflict diffuse? And to what extent are mercenaries triggers of internal conflict diffusion?

This is crucial for the study area of conflict onset, as well as conflict prevention in order to pre-empt potential triggers to conflict onset. A conflict onset, according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) is reported when "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths" (Gleditsch *et al.*, 2002, p. 1). However, incompatibilities between a government and a domestic opposition group exists before one of the groups resorts to violence to pursue their political goals. The most common explanations as to why an opposition group would choose violence as a political tool to pursue their aims is the debate around greed vs. grievance (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). The debate is centred around two key arguments about the causes of civil war. Rebel groups are either predominantly motivated by opportunistic reasons, or by grievances that are based on identity issues such as repression, exclusion, or inequality.

This thesis does not evaluate the motivations of rebel groups per se, but develops an integrative approach to study the spread of conflict, taking an actor-centric approach to diffusion. By extending and refining the diffusion research framework of Opportunity and Willingness (Siverson and Starr, 1990) with the added element of

Mobilisation, this thesis goes beyond the analysis of rebel motivation and takes on a transnational approach to conflict onset. My theoretical framework focuses on shared borders, as opportunities; transnational alliances, as the element of willingness; and mercenary activities as the factor of mobilisation.

### 1.1 Addressing the Gap: Actors of Conflict Diffusion

Prevailing diffusion research tends to focus on factors such as transnational linkages, for instance religious-ties between neighbouring countries (Fox, 2004), or ethnic-groups (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008) which extend across borders. Gleditsch, for example, asserts that "more transboundary ethnic groups increase a country's risk of conflict" (2007, p. 303). This emphasises the notion that the participation of one (ethnic-) group in a conflict in one particular country will increase the likelihood of a conflict break out in a second country nearby, if the second country is host to members of the same ethnicity or group. Another stream within the literature of civil war diffusion focuses on refugees (Salehyan and Gleditsch, 2006; Forsberg, 2009). A high number of refugees in a host state could increase the likelihood of a civil war onset within that state. In other words, "refugee flows may cause civil conflict to spread from one state to another" (Forsberg, 2009, p. 28). Studies point out that the significance of diffusion effects in civil war cannot be ignored, but their empirical results cannot explain "why or how civil war spreads across neighbouring countries" (Hegre and Sambanis, 2006, p. 532).

The puzzle of conflict diffusion intertwines several distinct areas of armed conflict research. Diffusion can be described as multicausal process. A range of distinct factors need to be taken into consideration to observe the spread of armed conflict across borders or even throughout a region. Unpacking the underlying mechanisms of diffusion has become more prominent within the analysis of civil war onset research. Thus, causal mechanisms like coercion, learning, and emulation have been put forward as potential driving forces for the transnational spread of conflict, but have collectively suffered from being "under-theorized" (Checkel, 2013, p. 13). Other variables related to conflict such as the availability of weapons and mercenaries are deemed to be factors impacting the spread of conflict (Buhaug, 2005), but are not systematically assessed. Bara (2017, p. 4) stresses that scholars who investigate the diffusion process have not been oblivious to transnational arms flows and cross-border

mercenary movements as a mechanism regarding the spread of conflict. However, none of the studies indicated by Bara have had either arms or mercenaries as the focus of analysis (Salehyan and Gleditsch, 2006, p. 352; Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008, p. 222; Braithwaite, 2010, p. 313; Forsberg, 2014a). A theory-based mechanism linking the mobilisation of mercenaries, as specific class of combatants within an internal conflict scenario, to the spread of armed conflict has not been tested.

The meaning and conceptualisation of the term 'mercenary' is and has been subject to an extensive scholarly debate. Debates frequently differentiate between the "historical, legal, and philosophical use of the term" (Ettinger, 2014, p. 175). At a basic level a mercenary can be described as a specific type of combatant that is "different from regular soldiers" (Percy, 2007, p. 56). The questions that follow are: What makes a mercenary different? And more specifically: What makes a mercenary?

The Organisation for African Unity's (OAU) Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa has published one of the central documents regarding the definition of the actor mercenary[1]. The particular definition was established following the developments from the African national liberation wars in the 1960s and 1970s. Article 1 of the Convention adopted in July 1977 defines a mercenary according to the following six aggregated characteristics:

> A mercenary is a person who:
>
> a) is specifically recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict;
> b) does in fact take a direct part in the hostilities
> c) is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and in fact is promised by or on behalf of the party to the conflict material compensation;
> d) is neither a national of a party to a conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party to the conflict;
> e) is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict; and
> f) is not sent by a state other than a party to the conflict on official mission as a member of the armed forces of the said state.
>
> Organisation for African Unity, 1997, p. 2

[1] Other relevant legal international conventions regarding mercenarism are the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions (1977), the UN Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries (1989/2011). The definition used by the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions is identical to the one used by the OAU.

A “mercenaries’ desire for money” (Lynch and Walsh, 2000, p. 142), or as expressed in characteristic c) a ‘desire for private gain’ and financial compensation is perceived as a key indicator for the concept mercenary. This characteristic obtains strong overall agreement within in the literature for being an integral aspect for a mercenary definition (Singer, 2003, p. 4; Pattison, 2008, pp. 144–145; Carmola, 2011, pp. 12–16; Krahmann, 2012, p. 344). Nevertheless, Lynch and Walsh argue that both soldiers and mercenaries are being paid. The difference, however, lies in the circumstance that soldiers are permanently employed by a state; whereas mercenaries are employed by a party of conflict as “contractors who only make a living when they are involved in warfare” (Lynch and Walsh, 2000, p. 142). This notion is reflected in characteristic a) and e) of the OAU definition. Whereas a soldier has a long-term employment/ commitment, the mercenary is recruited and hired on a contractual basis for the specific purpose of providing military services, predominantly fighting/combat operations. The notion that mercenaries are recruited and hired on a contractual basis is in line with one of Singer’s characteristics of his account of what constitutes a mercenary. Singer uses the label “independence” (2003, p. 43). Independence indicates that a mercenary is not part or not integrated into any national forces. Not being integrated into armed forces means that a mercenary is not part of a chain of command and does not wear a uniform. However, Singer’s, definition of a mercenary is rather state-focussed and does not acknowledge the possibility that non-state actors, such as rebel groups, also benefit from mercenary services. Thus, it is relevant to broaden the aspect of independence beyond a notion of integration that is solely linked to a state’s armed forces as client or consumer of mercenary services. A further characteristic that receives broad agreement is the aspect of foreignness. Being foreign is a frequently used attribute to differentiate between a soldier and a mercenary (Singer, 2003, p. 43; Ettinger, 2014, p. 176) and refers to point d) of the OAU Convention. One has to bear in mind that this aspect goes hand in hand with the creation of the modern state system. Thus, the aspect of foreignness is frequently linked to the idea of states and citizenship.

The key aspects of financial gain and foreignness are arguably a mercenary’s essential features (Ettinger, 2014, p. 178). However, these two aspects are not deemed sufficient to provide a complete definition of a mercenary. By taking the OAUs criteria and Singer’s definition into consideration, I will employ the following definition of a mercenary for the purposes of this thesis: a mercenary, (1) is either an individual or part of a group organised in an ad-hoc manner; (2) who provides services directly

related to armed conflict; (3) whose primarily intention is financial gain, the prospect of earning a living or looting; (4) who is neither a national of a party to the conflict nor a resident of the territory controlled by a party of the conflict; (5) not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict. Taken together these five criteria are necessary in order to distinguish mercenaries from other violent non-state actors.

Due to several reasons I have chosen a regional focus of analysis on Sub-Sharan Africa: (1) The African[2] continent experienced a vast number of armed conflicts. Only eight out of forty-two Sub-Saharan states (excluding island states) did not experience an armed conflict between 1980 and 2016. (2) The aspect of transnationality of African armed conflicts is still neglected, thus especially African armed conflicts need to take on a regional dimension of analysis (Duursma *et al.*, 2019). (3) Internal conflicts in Africa display devastating long-term repercussions for whole regions, where one of the consequences of armed conflict in one location is an armed conflict in a different location nearby.

### 1.2 Contributions

This thesis offers a number of contributions to different sections within the field of conflict research. I argue that transnational factors of conflict onset need to be taken into consideration when exploring the causes of intrastate conflict. A focus on a state's country-inherent conditions to assess causes of civil wars is not sufficient. In applying a transnational perceptive, more specifically in refining the framework of conflict diffusion, I present a theoretical contribution to the study of internal conflict research. By adding the crucial aspect of mobilisation of mercenaries, I offer a distinct perspective on conflict research.

By applying a mixed-methods approach I firstly demonstrate that there is indeed a correlation between a state's likelihood of experiencing a civil war and the variables of a neighbour at war, external support, and the mobilisation of mercenary forces. In addition, I provide important insights to the literature on mercenaries. A major obstacle regarding the assessment of mercenary activities was the issue around data availability. With the creation of the "Commercial Military Actors in Armed Conflict Dataset" (CMAD) (Petersohn *et al.*, 2017) this issue has been improved. The

[2] The term Africa throughout this paper only refers to Sub-Sharan Africa, North African countries will be excluded within this research setting.

CMAD is an original dataset that provides comprehensive material on mercenary and Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) activities in armed conflict from 1980 until 2016, across five world regions: Africa, East Asia and Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean, the Middle East, and South Asia. As part of the CMAD project team and as primary researcher for Sub-Saharan Africa I was able to make use of CMAD-data prior to its official publication. I constructed the variable of mercenary presence and absence in Sub-Saharan African conflicts between 1980 and 2016. In addition, I have created my own dataset to assess the implications of mercenaries, neighbours at war and transnational alliances on conflict dynamics in Africa. I add to the mercenary-armed conflict nexus by delineating a systematic analysis of the involvement of mercenaries in armed conflict on a transnational level. I illustrate that mercenaries are not untrustworthy and rogue actors per se that seek conflict due to their 'greedy' (Percy, 2007, p. 66) 'bloodthirsty'(Lynch and Walsh, 2000, p. 143), or 'cruel and evil nature' (Lynch and Walsh, 2000, p. 135). Through the analysis of the Sub-Saharan Africa market for force, I demonstrate that the recruitment of mercenaries as additional fighters follows a demand-driven structure. Mercenaries are hired by external regional elites to support rebel groups in neighbouring states. In other words, their immediate area of influence. This thesis leads to an enhanced understanding of the transnational dimension of civil war in general.

### 1.3 Synopsis

This thesis assesses the process of conflict diffusion, by analysing the impact of shared borders, transnational alliances, and mercenary mobilisation on the spread of armed conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Chapter 2 explores the process of diffusion by systematically identifying cross-cutting themes present in the literature. Various concepts, mechanisms, and conditions that facilitate diffusion are discussed and evaluated. The concept of conflict diffusion originates in the area of interstate conflict literature. A key finding from this research body is that borders and alliances are crucial conditions that facilitate exchange relationships between states. Subsequently, it is argued that borders and alliances increase the likelihood for a state joining an ongoing conflict (Siverson and Starr, 1989, 1990). Moving beyond the interstate diffusion literature to the spread of civil war, the distinction between indirect and direct mechanisms of diffusion is at the heart

of the evaluation. This systematic literature review sets the stage and links my own argument to the research body of conflict diffusion.

Chapter 3 develops the original theoretical framework of this thesis. More specifically, the theoretical framework of *Opportunity*, *Willingness*, & *Mobilisation* is introduced. The key focus rests upon three explanatory variables that form a coherent causal pathway. The variables of a neighbour at war, transnational alliances, and mercenary mobilisation will be addressed in detail. These three conditions are sufficient to bring about the outcome of a civil war onset.

Chapter 4 lays out the research design and the methods of analysis to ascertain to what extent mercenaries can be considered actors of conflict diffusion. I employ a mixed method design. On the one hand, I delineate the benefits of a systematic statistical analysis by relying on a logistic regression to establish correlation between the explanatory variables and the outcome of interest, conflict onset. On the other hand, the method of process tracing is used to evaluate the causal mechanism across three case studies. The aim of the three selected case studies is to further explore findings from the statistical analysis in support of the theoretical argument. I have selected three pathway cases to assess the validity of the theoretical framework. Cases of conflict diffusion are Liberia and Sierra Leone; Rwanda and Zaire; and Ethiopia and Sudan.

Chapter 5 provides a statistical assessment of the relationship between the key explanatory variables of the diffusion framework - *neighbour at war*, *transnational alliance*, and *mercenary mobilisation* - and the dependent variable *conflict onset*. I begin this chapter with the presentation of findings drawn from descriptive statistics. I use original data from the CMAD (Petersohn *et al.*, 2017). As part of the research team creating the CMAD, and as primary investigator for the African continent I gathered and coded novel data on mercenaries for the time period between 1980 and 2016. Crucial findings are: (1) the majority of mercenaries are of African origin not, as frequently presumed, from Western nations; (2) the key clientele of mercenary services are national governments, foreign governments and rebel groups; (3) 85 percent of services provided by mercenaries are combat-related. In addition, I performed a logistic regression to demonstrate a correlation between the theorised explanatory variables of conflict diffusion and a new civil war onset. Different models show a robust relationship between the three proposed explanatory variables and an increased likelihood of a conflict onset. This chapter reiterates and corroborates previous findings, such as the increased risk of conflict onset when a neighbour

experiences war. In addition, this chapter presents new insights to the relevance of an external sponsor for the formation of a rebel group, and a consequent conflict onset, by influencing their resource availability and military capabilities. Lastly, the finding that mercenaries have an impact on a new conflict onset adds to the understanding of how violent non-state actors influence conflict dynamics and conflict onset.

Chapter 6 examines three distinct cases of conflict diffusion. Three pathway cases were selected to corroborate the statistical analysis in support of the theoretical argument. The first pathway case analyses the spread of conflict from the Liberian civil war to the new civil war onset in Sierra Leone in 1991. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) insurgency and the consequent civil war onset was formed and fostered though Liberia's external support. Charles Taylor's, the rebel leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), extensive network of skilled fighters and ex-combatants, i.e. mercenaries, made RUF a decade long viable threat to Sierra Leonean stability. The second case study traces the process of diffusion from the Rwandan civil war (1990 to 1994) to the civil war onset in Zaire in 1996. This case of post-conflict diffusion corroborates the finding that the government of the host conflict is also the key sponsor of a new rebellion in the target state. In addition, this case highlights the notion of how ethnic linkages facilitate the formation of a transnational alliance between the Tutsi government in Rwanda, and the Tutsi minority present in Zaire. Mercenaries were highly involved in the Zairean Kivu rebellion, and predominantly tasked with combat operations. However, the rebel group Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) never directly hired additional mercenary forces. The Ugandan-trained force of the Tutsi legion (mercenaries who portrayed ethnic linkages from Burundi, Eritrea, and Uganda) had a surge in numbers during the advance to the west. Eritrean and Ethiopian mercenaries were hired for three monthly periods in the Kivus[3], during the early phase of the conflict. The third case examines a conflict onset during the Cold War, in which the process of diffusion between the Ethiopian civil war and the onset of the second Sudanese civil war will be analysed. This case study explores another legion of mercenaries, the Libyan sponsored Islamic legion who fought against the Sudanese government and who also supported the south Sudanese rebellion.

[3] Kivu was the name for a region in Zaire under the rule of Mobutu Sese Seko that bordered Lake Kivu. The Kivus incorporate today's North Kivu and South Kivu provinces.

Chapter 7 provides a discussion and a summary of the key findings, addresses strengths and limitations of this thesis, and will answer the overarching research questions regarding the impact of mercenaries on the process of civil war diffusion.

Finally, Chapter 8 offers concluding remarks, as well as an outlook concerning future research and work on the internal conflict diffusion-mercenary-nexus.

## 2. The Spread of Conflict: Concepts, Mechanisms, & Conditions

The literature on the topic of conflict diffusion can be separated into two distinct sub-categories. There is the process of diffusion conceptualised by scholars analysing the diffusion of interstate conflicts. Alternatively one finds the concept of diffusion applied to the area of civil war. This division seems to be straightforward but even within each individual realm, researchers make use of different conceptualisations of the phenomenon. Not only are there diverse definitions of conflict diffusion; scholars use a great number of terms and apply them interchangeably to refer to the same process. In the literature terms that indicate diffusion-related concepts are: contagion, inspiration, societal fission, infection, imitation, escalation, horizontal-escalation, adoption, selective-adoption, domino effect, demonstration effects, and emulation to name a few. Hence, researchers that investigate the spread of conflict are confronted with a plethora of terms and a lack of consensus. Consequently, the purpose of this literature review is threefold. Firstly, I aim to clarify commonalities and differences concerning these various terms used to analyse the process of the spread of conflict. Secondly cross-cutting themes regarding mechanisms and conditions of diffusion will be addressed. And finally, I will set the stage for my own diffusion argument.

The outline of this chapter is as follows: the first part of the review will be an introduction to the conceptual origin of conflict diffusion; secondly, I will evaluate the application of the diffusion concept in the research area of internal conflict by focusing on the transnational dimension of armed conflict and neighbourhood effects on a regional level; thirdly, the concept of diffusion that is applied in the civil war literature will be discussed by employing the distinction of indirect and direct diffusion mechanisms.

### 2.1 The Process of Diffusion in Interstate Conflict Literature

The process of diffusion lies at the heart of interstate war literature. Leading innovators within the area of interstate diffusion scholarship are Most and Starr (1980). Most and Starr's concept of conflict diffusion is linked to the process of states joining an ongoing interstate conflict. In other words, diffusion perceived as increasing war participation of states. The emphasis lies upon processes of positive spatial diffusion. Positive spatial diffusion is a process "in which the occurrence of a war participation by one

nation *increases* the probability that other nations will experience new war participations" (Most and Starr, 1980, p. 933). The process described entails the idea that a nation's war behaviour has an impact on other nations' behaviour. In other words, their conceptualisation of diffusion is focused on the notion that "wars expand through a certain dynamic by which more and more states join an ongoing conflict" (Siverson and Starr, 1989, p. 23). Nevertheless, the transfer of one nation's war conduct cannot be perceived as boundless. Most and Starr's investigations stress the assumption that diffusion processes operate most likely among nations that are in geographic proximity, "as measured either by "short" distance or shared borders" (1980, p. 935).

Geographic proximity and its impact on the processes of interstate diffusion studied through the so-called Warring Border Nation Model measures proximity in terms of border continuity. Thus, borders are perceived as the "primary mechanism for a state's web of (interaction) opportunities for cooperation and conflict" (Starr and Most, 1985, p. 209). Types of borders can be broken down into three sub-categories: contiguous land borders, 200-mile limit water borders, and proximity zone borders (Starr and Most, 1985, p. 210). Even though it has been assumed that different types of borders have varying impact on the diffusion of war, the overall conclusion is that the influence of a specific type of border, with regard to the sub-categories, can be overlooked. Rather the effect of a border in general is relevant (Starr and Most, 1985). Nevertheless, it is important to stress that this framework does not imply that borders cause conflict, but that they are a condition that increases the level of interaction between states. In this view, even war can be perceived as one form of an exchange relationship. In short, borders are one way to create possibilities for states to engage with each other. Thus, interaction is an essential condition for conflicts to diffuse. Since not every state in the international system displays a similar degree of engagement, the likelihood of spatial diffusion to operate at a global level is low. For that reason, it becomes relevant to specify a subset of states that interact with each other when it comes to the analysis of interstate diffusion processes.

In summary, the conceptualisation of diffusion, describes a situation when an event somewhere impacts or changes a state's behaviour elsewhere. Due to the impact on a state's behaviour the likelihood for states to join an ongoing war increases. Hence, Most and Starr's concept of diffusion is located in the research area of "linkage politics" (1990, p. 392). Linkage politics is a concept that deals with the "the influence

of interdependence" on transnational issues (Most and Starr, 1990, p. 392). Based upon these finding Siverson and Starr (1990) applied the framework of the so called "linkage-penetration view" (Siverson and Starr, 1990, p. 64). The application of a linkage-penetration view regarding the interstate diffusion process enables the researcher to account for the notion that "events elsewhere change a state's disposition to behave similarly" (Siverson and Starr, 1990, p. 64). When applying this perspective to a civil war setting, one could argue that a civil war in state A changes state B's behaviour. State B is likely to evaluate its own situation regarding possible threats from an ongoing civil war nearby. A domestic opposition group in state B might reconsider their assumptions regarding a possible successful rebellion.

Siverson and Starr (1989, 1990) and Starr and Siverson (1998)[4] refined the original research design by applying an *Infection-Contagion Approach* for the analysis of diffusion processes. They also elucidated a second mechanism for interaction opportunities besides borders: alliances. Whereas shared borders are a geographical factor, a given attribute; forming alliances on the contrary can be perceived as the outcome of a careful consideration of policy choices. Henceforth, borders display opportunities for states to interact and alliances illustrates a state's willingness to collaborate within a set context.

The framework of *Opportunity* and *Willingness* combines two indicators that are relevant for the occurrence of conflict diffusion. Subsequently, the diffusion processes are investigated by combining geographic as well as political elements. One additional argument is that interaction effects of these two factors may be at play. In order to assess the likelihood of borders and alliances to produce the effect of diffusion, Siverson and Starr's research design drew upon Most and Starr's Warring Border Nation Model and added the treatment of *alliances*. More specifically, the treatments are Warring Border Nations (WBN) and Warring Alliances Partners (WAP). Alliances "act as conduits for the expansion of conflict" (Siverson and Starr, 1989, p. 26). Similarly, to Most and Starr's approach, diffusion is defined with reference to the notion of *growth,* and not vis-à-vis the idea of the spatial spread of conflict[5]. For their

[4] Siverson and Starr's analysis, on the diffusion of international war, makes use of the same unit of analysis, which is nation-years and covers a similar time period. Their study from 1989 covers the post-World War II era from 1946-1965 and the studies from 1990 and 1991 both cover the period from 1816-1965.

[5] "The spread of instability from one geographic area to another" (Rodt, 2020, p. 1).

analysis Siverson and Starr (1989, 1990; 1998) applied the same categories of border types used by Starr and Most (1976) and distinguished the treatment alliances into three separate categories, which are (1) Defence pacts, (2) Neutrality/non-aggression pacts, and (3) Ententes. They found that states are at a minimum three times more likely to be involved in a conflict when both treatment conditions WBN and WAP are present (Siverson and Starr, 1989). Moreover, their results indicate that combinations of certain WBNs and WAPs provide stronger diffusion effects than others. The combination with the strongest effect of diffusion seems to be "contiguous WBNs and defensive WAPs" (Siverson and Starr, 1990, p. 57). Thus, it is crucial to stress that the type of alliances seems to matter. Whereas Starr and Most's (1985) findings indicate that the type of border does not make a significant difference to diffusion, Siverson and Starr argue that contiguous borders display stronger diffusion effects than other kinds of borders.

A distinct approach to analyse the spread of interstate conflict is the notion of ConflictSpace. ConflictSpace is a concept that "explore[s] the interaction of geographic and network spaces to understand how war spreads" (Flint *et al.*, 2009, p. 827). The focus of the analysis goes beyond a dyadic set-up and the idea of formal alliances. The study examines state-relations by looking at their networks. The new element in this research is the assumption that ConflictSpace is not only spatial or physical, but "nearness" between two states can also be analysed through networks and ties between individual politically relevant actors. In this regard the concept of ConflictSpace tries to evaluate the "possibilities and constraints a state faces in its decision to enter or avoid war" (Flint *et al.*, 2009, p. 829). The concept of ConflictSpace is illustrated by using the example of the spread of the First World War.

The idea of ConflictSpace in a sense updates the ideas put forward above. The role of a state's location and its neighbours is still prevalent when it comes to the analysis of how conflict spreads. However, the second element - network spaces - expands the analysis of alliances to identify patterns of behaviour. The presence or absence of interaction within a social network of states becomes of relevance (Flint *et al.*, 2009; Vasquez *et al.*, 2011). Nonetheless, the concept of ConflictSpace, as well as the framework of Opportunity and Willingness, analyse the spread of conflict as new warring parties joining an existing conflict. Overall it is the political decision-makers' prerogative to decide whether to join a war.

Before briefly summarising the first part of the literature review it is noteworthy to mention one additional finding. Starr and Most (1985, p. 217) investigate whether there are differences between certain types of conflict. They concluded that the process of diffusion is not linked to one specific type of war (Starr and Most, 1985, p. 217). Therefore, not only the examined cases of interstate war, but also intrastate wars are likely to diffuse.

As examined in this section, the concept of diffusion within the interstate conflict literature primarily focusses on the notion of states joining an ongoing conflict. Thus, the diffusion process displays two different dynamics: The first dynamic is characterised by the idea that a nation's war behaviour has an impact on other nations' behaviour. A second line of thinking entails the notion that wars grow like an "infection". However, to label the processes described above as diffusion can be misleading. The process described rather falls in the category of conflict escalation. Conflict escalation "occurs when new actors become involved in an already existing conflicts within its confined geographic boundaries" (Rodt, 2020, p. 1).

The second section of this literature review will emphasise the transnational dimension of intrastate conflicts as well as neighbourhood and regional effects. The studies examined, in the following, are predominantly situated within the area of large-n, or the quantitative research body.

### 2.2 Neighbourhood Effects and a Transnational Dimension of Conflict

Making use of a transnational or regional approach to explain the phenomenon of a civil war onset is a relatively recent development. The vast majority of the intrastate conflict literature tends to focus on factors related to country-inherent aspects to examine the causes of a civil war onset. Factors such as regime type, population, a countries' gross domestic product (GDP), or the peacetime until a conflict outbreak are prevalent (Sambanis, 2002). In addition and most prominent in recent years has been the debate around 'greed versus grievance' in explaining the outbreak of an internal conflict. The grievance-based explanation argues that identity issues such as "ethnic or religious hatred, political repression, political exclusion, and economic inequality" are crucial factors as to why people take up arms and rebel (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, p. 570). The greed-based explanation, by contrast, is centred on the

idea of an opportunity to form a rebel group. In other words, "the opportunity for rebellion is the availability of finance" (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, p. 588). Overall, Collier and Hoeffler's results were in support of a greed-based explanation of conflict onset.

In contrast to the line of civil war onset research discussed above, several studies were performed to investigate the notion of neighbourhood effects on the likelihood of a civil war outbreak (Hegre and Sambanis, 2006; Gleditsch, 2007; Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008; Dixon, 2009; Reid *et al.*, 2020). Key findings with regard to neighbourhoods at war and the transnational dimension of internal conflict will be discussed in the following section.

The first aspect of interest is the notion that countries that are *located in war prone areas* are more likely to experience a civil war than countries located in areas deemed conflict-free. The assumption relates to the concept of 'bad neighbourhoods' coined by Weiner (1996). Consequently, this assumption indicates two distinct types of explanations for a transnational conflict onset. On the one hand, diffusion effects could be at play, where a country that is involved in an armed conflict increases the likelihood for their neighbouring countries to experience a civil war outbreak. Thus, diffusion can be defined as process whereby "a civil conflict in one country may bring about the onset of civil conflict in a nearby country within a short time period" (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008, p. 217). On the other hand, however, the finding could indicate that civil wars cluster geographically (Hegre & Sambanis, 2006, p. 553). A clustering of conflicts could be the result of a high similarity of shared characteristics of neighbouring states. Reid et al.'s (2020) study attempts to tackle the issue of contagion vs. clustering by applying the idea of Conflict Environments. Conflict Environments "is a concept that taps into spatial and temporal dimensions of violence in a state's neighbourhood" (Reid *et al.*, 2020, p. 1). Their finding supports the assumption that political violence in nearby states increases the likelihood of a civil war onset at home. Distinct to other studies, that analysed the spread of conflict, Reid et al. (2020) do not take a mechanism-based approach, but an ecological approach to diffusion. The study combines aspects of "historical violence in state's neighbourhood […] with a state's domestic history of conflict" (Reid *et al.*, 2020, p. 2). This set-up enables them to account for lingering effects. The overall finding is similar to Weiner's notion of bad

neighbourhoods, in the sense that a "dangerous conflict environment consistently elevates the risk of civil war" (Reid *et al.*, 2020, p. 1).

A second notion that can be delineated by examining the literature on the transnational dimension of conflict is the idea that the risk of conflict diffusion varies according to a *state's interaction opportunities* (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008). Thus, similar to the assumptions discussed in the interstate diffusion literature, the more opportunity for interaction between states and rebel groups, the likelier a conflict onset. Consequently, one could assume that the likelihood of a conflict outbreak is relative to a "country's interaction opportunities and exposure to neighbouring conflicts" (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008, p. 216). The definition of diffusion applied by Buhaug and Gleditsch (2008) offers a first indication of how to operationalise the process of the spread of conflict. Thus, key elements are a state's possibility for interaction and a state's exposure to a conflict in term of geographical proximity. This set-up is similar to the operationalisation of diffusion within the interstate literature. In particular, the idea of interaction opportunities is familiar. Hence, interstate and intrastate literature theorises that the risk of conflict diffusion varies according to interaction opportunities. The greater the number of interaction opportunities or transnational linkages, the higher the likelihood that a new civil conflict erupts.

A third line concerning the explanation of diffusion is with regard to the *nature* of interaction opportunities. For internal conflict diffusion, transnational ethnic ties can be perceived as the most relevant factor when observing the spread of conflict (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008). The concept of ethnic ties refers to ethnic groups that are found in more than one country within a region. The assumption is that the likelihood of a civil war onset increases the more ethnic groups are present across national boundaries. One potential explanation for this finding is that transnational communities tend to support each other through resources (Gleditsch, 2007). Consequently, external support for insurgencies can be expected. In addition, it becomes more difficult for a "government in the conflict county to limit [these] sources of support and bases/safe havens in other countries than it would be the case on its own territory" (Gleditsch, 2007, p. 298). This finding raises the question of how transnational group linkages and the notion of identity-based ties of groups transcending borders may be of importance within the study of conflict diffusion. Hence, "intergroup linkages, rather than geography per se" (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008, p. 231) seem to be relevant. Nonetheless, distance plays an important role

concerning the idea of transnational linkages. Distance can be seen as a "powerful modifier of opportunities for interaction" (Gleditsch, 2007, p. 300). Following from this line of argument it can be assumed that neighbouring states that share trans-border ethnic communities are particularly prone to a conflict onset. This particular argument is similar to that presented by the interstate diffusion literature, claiming that a state's network of alliances could make diffusion processes more likely. Within the setting of interstate conflict diffusion only alliances between states seem to play a role, but other transnational linkages through which exchange relationships are formed, such as alliances between states and non-state actors are not considered. However, the concept of forming alliances can equally be applied to examine transnational linkages between states and rebel groups, or among rebel groups. Consequently, a rebel group's external relations need to be deliberated when examining civil war outbreaks. One example for a cross-border ethnic group that was involved in several insurgencies/ rebellions are the Tuareg in the Sahel region, an ethnic group that was "portioned across borders" between Mali and Niger (Onah, 2015, p. 87).

A final factor that is theorised to have an impact with regard to the process of diffusion is the *type of conflict* or the *incompatibility.* Thus, it is assumed that the odds of a civil war to diffuse vary between governmental and secessionist conflicts (Buhaug and Gates, 2002). It is argued that conflicts over territory tend to have a greater influence on the process of diffusion than conflicts over governmental control.

Before exploring the notion of indirect and direct diffusion-mechanisms in a more detailed manner in the following sub-section, it is necessary to address three further assumptions. Firstly, although empirical results from the intrastate literature seem to be comparable to the findings of interstate diffusion scholars, both scholars display distinct concepts of diffusion. Whilst the interstate scholars mainly work with a diffusion process based on the growth of conflict, the intrastate scholars focus on the notion of the spread of conflict in spatial terms. Secondly, for intrastate diffusion researchers the notion of ethnic groups displaying transnational networks or ethnic linkages that transcend borders of nation-states is the most analysed explanation within the context of diffusion processes. Thirdly, further testing and a greater specification of "conflict actors and the risks of conflict among neighbor states" (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008, p. 15) needs to be addressed. The notion that distinct actors might influence the risk of conflict among neighbouring states will be addressed in the third

and final section of this literature review. Different diffusion mechanisms which can be separated into two categories - direct or indirect diffusion - will be examined.

### 2.3 Mechanism-Based Explanations of Civil War Diffusion

This section will address the spread of intrastate conflict according to indirect and direct mechanisms of diffusion. The concept of indirect diffusion refers to a process whereby actors experience a process of learning, adaption and/or inspirational developments, which are described as intangible aspects. Direct diffusion, on the other hand, discusses observable or more tangible factors like the influx of refugees or the trade of arms. These factors relate to a "direct spillover of conflict externalities across borders" (Forsberg, 2014a, p. 193). The focus, in most of these studies, lies on direct diffusion between neighbouring states.

An overall concept that is frequently addressed and perceived as an established factor in the study of diffusion are shared borders. Diffusion effects are assumed to be more likely between countries that share a land border (Forsberg, 2008; Maves and Braithwaite, 2013). By taking a closer look at the nature of land borders, Forsberg (2008, p. 295) argues that the length of a shared border impacts the likelihood of diffusion. She maintains that the longer the border between two states, the more opportunities for interactions and spillover-effects are given. Besides the characteristic of a long continuous border, rough terrain and poorly developed infrastructure are also two factors which are deemed to increase the likelihood of diffusion (Linebarger and Braithwaite, 2020). Most of the conflict diffusion studies assume that the process of diffusion is linked to spatial dependence and is related to the concepts of proximity. Hence, it is argued that the spread of conflict is "inherently self-limiting" (Lake and Rothchild, 1998, p. 24), which indicates that diffusion processes are limited to a regional context. Thus, it is unlikely for a conflict to spread or expand on a global level.

Below, key mechanisms of indirect and direct diffusion will be addressed, followed by conditions that are considered to increase the likelihood of the spread of conflict.

Indirect Conflict Diffusion

Studies that examine the process of indirect conflict diffusion use a range of distinct terminology, such as inspiration and demonstration effects (Lake and Rothchild, 1998; Fox, 2004; Forsberg, 2008; Weidmann, 2015), emulation (Maves and Braithwaite, 2013), imitation (Gurr, 1993), learning/ adaption (Ayres and Saideman, 2000), to describe the phenomenon of the spread of conflict. These terms have at least one commonality. All these expressions refer to the idea that groups update or change their demands based on the experiences, practices or norms of another group. Consequently, a crucial factor is the notion of group-identity. Two key characteristics of group-identity that enable the exchange of information of transnational groups are *ethnicity* and *religion*. Crucial to the process of indirect diffusion between transnational groups is the *exchange of information*.

Conflict diffusion is commonly conceptualised as the process whereby "given an ethnic conflict in one location, a proximate state is more likely to also experience ethnic conflict if it shares ethnic ties with a conflict actor" (Forsberg, 2014b, p. 148). Pioneers concerning the analysis of the spread of ethnic conflict are Lake and Rothchild (1998). They assume that for one conflict to alter the probability of a second conflict to erupt elsewhere, the initial conflict must "generate or worsen information failures, problems of commitment, or security dilemmas" (Lake and Rothchild, 1998, p. 25). The assumption is that information traveling through existing channels of communication, between members of an ethnic-group in state A, who are involved in an armed conflict, and members of the same ethnic group located in state B, could impact the beliefs and ideas of ethnic-group B. Consequently, a group's "ethnic affinity will serve as a conduit for exchange of information and as potential motivation for action" (Davis and Moore, 1997, p. 173). A potential explanation for the heightened exchange of information among members of ethnic-groups is based on the notion that group members care about the welfare of other group members and that this loyalty does not stop at the border (Davis and Moore, 1997). Hence, transnational groups are able to learn, and anticipate action within a neighbouring country, through a flow of information and communication. Moreover, groups are able to draw lessons by observing the occurrence of armed conflict in a country nearby (Ayres and Saideman, 2000, p. 14). In other words, groups outside an ongoing ethnic conflict witness the situation in a neighbouring country and start to reconsider or revaluate their own situation. Lessons learnt which could potentially lead to a new conflict onset are:

"new tactics or strategies; new ideas and delegimitation of previous approaches; revised expectations about the likely behaviour of key outside actors; revised expectations about the chances of success" (Saideman, 2012, p. 715). Thus, especially groups in countries with unhindered access to media could be more likely to experience similar interaction[6] (Saideman, 2012; Maves and Braithwaite, 2013). This line of argument is similar to Weidmann's (2015) approach of arguing that a high number of informational linkages via communication networks increases the likelihood of transnational diffusion.

A second characteristic linked to group-identity is religion. Fox (2004, p. 99) proposes that the mechanism of "violent ethno-religious conflict" is at play, and that in cases of contagion across borders, the likelihood of the spread of conflict seems to be intensified along religious lines. Nonetheless, Fox's (2004) study of ethno-religious conflict did not find evidence of diffusion.

A further explanation for diffusion along ethnic lines, which is distinct to the studies examined above, is based on a government's reaction and threat perception to an ethnic conflict in its neighbourhood. The line of argument is that a government anticipates the rebellion of an ethnic group in a neighbouring state that is also represented at home. Consequently, the government sees itself at risk and reacts with "increasingly repressive state policies combined with political opportunity that allows the transnational ethnic group to mobilise in response" (Konaev and Brathwaite, 2019, p. 464). Different to prior analysis where rebel groups where suspected to update their behaviour due to new information, here, it is the state's reaction that triggers the diffusion process. Thus, transnational ethnic ties are "one of the most robust and thoroughly explored mechanisms associated with diffusion" and has the ability to bridge the "categories of direct and indirect diffusion" (Reid *et al.*, 2020, p. 4).

The next sub-section will address mechanisms concerning direct conflict diffusion. Mechanisms relating to the process of direct conflict diffusion predominantly focus on the impact of conflict externalities. Thus, the following sections will be more centred on agents of diffusion.

[6] Some autocratic regimes severely limit or censor their societies' access to the internet and social media, amongst others are Eritrea, China, North Korea, Iran, or Saudi Arabia. Thus, indirect diffusion process could be less likely in regimes with strong social media restrictions.

Direct Conflict Diffusion

Direct conflict diffusion is defined through tangible aspects of conflict, such as the movement of weapons, refugees and rebel leaders, (Weiner, 1996; Salehyan and Gleditsch, 2006; Forsberg, 2009, 2014b; Bara, 2017) as well as the forced movement of combatants (Black, 2012a, 2013). Mechanisms of direct conflict diffusion are characterised through various population movements. Thus, a variety of actors are either moving from a host conflict to a potential target state, or in the case of arms are being moved from host to target.

The movement of refugees across borders is one of the most commonly addressed mechanism regarding direct conflict diffusion, and is also associated with direct spill-over-effects of negative conflict externalities (Weiner, 1996; Salehyan and Gleditsch, 2006; Salehyan, 2008; Saideman, 2012; Bartusevičius and Gleditsch, 2019). A frequent line of argument is that an incoming refugee population threatens to "destabilize the countries that take them in" (Bollfrass, Shaver and Zhou, 2015, p. 1). These countries are therefore at a higher risk of conflict onset. The theoretical assumption is that a refugee population based in potential target country B enables a rebel group from the host country A to expand their network. Or put differently, refugee populations "may import conflict-specific capital such as arms and combatants, as well as ideologies favouring violence" (Bartusevičius and Gleditsch, 2019, p. 240). Saideman, on the other hand, argues that refugee camps are often used as "a target for hot pursuit as refugee camps are often bases for insurgents fighting in the homeland" (2012, p. 715). However, other scholars find that "there is no positive association between refugee population and subsequent outbreaks of civil violence" (Bollfrass, Shaver and Zhou, 2015, p. 1). By contrast, it rather seems to be the case that specific conditions in a target country, such as already prevalent incompatibilities, between an opposition group and the government, define whether a refugee population is deemed a security risk (Bartusevičius and Gleditsch, 2019, p. 244).

Another theoretical assumption as to why one conflict alters the probability of a conflict onset in a state nearby, is related to conflict externalities such as weapons, combatants, and rebel leaders (Bara, 2017). Moreover, Bara's large n-study explored the temporal dimension of diffusion in more detail, by arguing that the "contagiousness of a source conflict temporarily increase right after it [the conflict] has ended" (2017, p. 8). The theoretical explanation is based on the notion that conflict specific capital becomes available after a conflict was terminated. This means that weapons,

combatants, and leaders are no longer in demand in the pacified host state. Conflict-specific capital becomes available for actors in the neighbourhood, who then receive the means to facilitate a new conflict onset (Bara, 2017). The study's shortcoming, however, is that due to the lack of data of cross-border movement only observable implications of the process could be accounted for. An in-depth analysis of the theoretical mechanisms presented was not performed.

Studies investigating the impact of negative conflict externalities on the likelihood of a civil war onset lack testing the actual mechanisms. Theoretical assumptions were made but only general connections were detected. These studies rather show that there is a correlation between the numbers of refugees entering a country from neighbouring states and the increased likelihood of a civil war onset. Overall, studies examining direct conflict diffusion are large-n studies that focus on general patterns rather than investigating causal mechanisms.

Another stream of direct diffusion research focuses on the impact of victorious rebel groups on the spread of conflict. The argument is as follows: a rebel group wins the conflict; forms a new government; and subsequently provides support to other rebel groups in the region. Through this outside support to a rebel group abroad a new civil war onset becomes more likely. Thus, Black (2012a, 2013) proposes that a rebel victory leads to a higher likelihood of a new conflict nearby. He argues that in the instance that a rebel group defeats the government and takes over power, the former rebels decide to spread the word of their revolutionary victory. Consequently, the new government would assist other rebel groups in their proximity to initiate conflict, which would fall in the category of direct diffusion mechanisms. Forsberg (2009, 2014a) also argues that this mechanism, works under the condition that the rebel group has won the civil conflict against the government. However, she proposes that a "successful" secessionist movement inspires other rebel groups to pursue similar territorial demands. Thus, two distinct mechanisms were proposed regarding the condition that a rebel victory leads to an increased risk of a conflict onset in a potential target state.

A further mechanism proposed takes a government's actions into consideration and is based on the notion that "the government of the sending state […] forces combatants in their country outside their borders" (Black, 2012b, p. 16). This mechanism is labelled expulsion. The focus is on the element of forced movement. Ex-combatants are coerced to leave the country. This mechanism does not include the

movement of combatants who leave the host country on a voluntary basis. The process of diffusion, in this case, can be perceived as "an unintended consequence of the sending state's government" (Black, 2012b, p. 19). A final mechanism of direct conflict diffusion is based on the action of outside interference (Beardsley, 2011; Black, 2012b). Black argues that the interference of a potential target state in an ongoing host conflict could result in triggering a boomerang effect. This boomerang effect makes a consequent conflict onset in the target state, who interfered, more likely.

Besides mechanisms of indirect and direct diffusion there are several other conditions addressed in the literature that are deemed to increase the spread of conflict. Mostly linked to either conditions in a potential target state such as domestic circumstance, or conditions related to the host conflict, such as conflict type or conflict intensity. The following will address circumstances present in a target state that are related to an increased risk of diffusion.

*Circumstances related to a higher risk of diffusion in a target state*

The domestic context of a potential target state is of relevance. The likelihood of an ethnic conflict to spread is higher when the target state is already at risk of a conflict onset. Consequently, as long as the domestic circumstance for a conflict onset are not given, the process of diffusion is unlikely to take place (Lake and Rothchild, 1998). This assumption proposes that some countries are more at risk of conflict onset than others.

In other words, some countries are better equipped to resist a rebellion due to factors such as strong "domestic institutions, strategies of coup-proofing, [or] channels of external support" (Saideman, 2012, p. 717). Hence, a variable that impacts the likelihood of how susceptible a state is to diffusion is the aspect of *state capacity.* Arguably the likelihood of conflict diffusion, given that a neighbouring state is experiencing conflict, varies according to a government's state capacity (Braithwaite, 2012). Low state capacity indicates a higher likelihood of a conflict onset, whereas high state capacity acts as a conflict-inhibitor.

Another hypothesis, related to state capacity, is that regime types can determine how susceptible a target state is. A regime type that is associated with a higher likelihood of a civil war onset through diffusion are autocracies and more specifically "autocracies with legislature" (Maves and Braithwaite, 2013, p. 478). Autocracies with

legislature are conceptualised in the following manner: autocracies are "countries in which governments have attempted to appease and accommodate opposition but in which those governments have no room remaining to satisfy increased opposition demands" (Maves and Braithwaite, 2013, p. 479). Thus, the overarching line of argument is based on the notion that institutions facilitate the process of diffusion.

A final condition which is deemed to make a state more conflict prone is *ethnic polarisation* (Forsberg, 2008). Forsberg's findings indicate that ethnically polarised societies are more at risk of experiencing a conflict onset. In other words, "divided ethnic groups are particularly effective conflict transmitters" (Brown, 1996, p. 595). In addition to notions of learning and inspiration processes through kinship-ties, Forsberg's explanation for a diffusion process to be triggered is also centred on the idea that transnational ethnic groups across borders are confronted by similar structural conditions (Forsberg, 2008, 2014b).

Lastly, Forsberg (2008, p. 295) stresses the finding that states with a "history of ethnic conflicts" may be more prone to diffusion effects. Hence, the spread of conflict could also play a role with regard to the reoccurrence of conflict. Thus, the variable of *peace years*, which is the count of consecutive conflict-free years, a potential target country experienced is relevant regarding the susceptibility of a target state.

*Circumstances related to a higher risk of diffusion in a host state*

Besides conditions of a potential target state that foster a conflict onset, specific circumstances displayed by the conflict host are also relevant when it comes to the facilitation of conflict diffusion. Distinct conditions with regard to the host conflict will be explored: conflict intensity (Forsberg, 2014a; Bara, 2017), type of conflict (Ayres and Saideman, 2000), the conflict outcome (Black, 2012b, 2013).

*Conflict intensity* in the source/host state may have an impact with regard to a higher likelihood of a conflict spreading. The assumption is that high intensity conflicts, referring to a higher number of casualties, most commonly defined by minimum of a 1000 battle related deaths, are considered to produce more conflict externalities. Thus, one can argue that high intensity conflicts are more likely to produce so-called conflict externalities, such as a higher number of refugees leaving the source of conflict.

The *type of conflict* seems to be of relevance too. Separatist movements in one state could increase the likelihood of similar demands in a distinct state (Ayres and Saideman, 2000; Byman and Pollack, 2007; Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008). Rather conflicts over territory than over government seem to increase the likelihood of a conflict onset. Arguably the accommodation of territorial demands of rebel groups could initiate a domino effects whereby rebel groups nearby are encouraged to pursue similar demands.

When it comes to the concept of domino effects within the context of civil war the following definition to describe the phenomenon is used: A "process whereby the successful secession of one ethnic group is suggested to lead other, and yet other, ethnic groups to pursuer separatist aims" (Forsberg, 2013, p. 330). This definition is also used to describe indirect diffusion processes in general. The idea is that groups update their beliefs and demands based on being witness to a victory or success of a rebel group nearby. However, Forsberg (2013, p. 336) assessed this claim and concluded that "there are no indications that a series of successful separatism is followed by an upsurge in the number of territorial conflicts". A finding that runs contrary to initial claims discussed above. Furthermore, she argues that inspiration effects from one group to the other does not seem to be the explanatory factor when it comes to the spread of conflict. It is rather based on the notion that the involvement of one particular ethnic group in a conflict makes neighbouring states more conflict prone when transnational kinship patterns are present. Table 1 provides an overview of variables associated with a higher likelihood of diffusion.

*Table 1: Variables Associated with an increased likelihood of Internal Conflict Diffusion*

| **Host** | **Host-Target Links** | **Target** |
|---|---|---|
| Type of conflict: Territory<br>Conflict Intensity: High<br>Conflict Outcome: Rebel Victory | Ethnic Ties<br>Religious Ties<br>Refugee Flows<br>Weapons Flows<br>Rebel Victory & Foreign Support<br>Forcible Movement of Combatants<br>Boomerang Effect | State Capacity: Low<br>Regime Type: Autocratic with legislature<br>Society: Ethnic Polarised<br>Peace Years: Low |

Diffusion-related studies that do not fit either category examined above, but are still relevant with regard to diffusion dynamics are the aspects of rebel mobilisation (Linebarger, 2015) and third-party intervention (Kathman, 2010, 2011). Linebarger proposes that the body of diffusion analysis would benefit from using the dependent variable 'emergence of militant groups' instead of civil war onset. He argues that the diffusion process takes place well before an official civil war onset is recorded. Finally, Kathman argues that regional powers might be more motivated to intervene in ongoing civil war in order to prevent the conflict from spreading across the region. This notion applies in particular when risks to trade are involved.

### 2.4 Summary

This literature review provides an overview of cross-cutting themes and variables addressed by scholars of conflict diffusion. Moreover, it provides the reader with an indication of how diffusion is perceived differently in interstate and intrastate research. Whereas the former focuses on the notion of growths of conflict in terms of warring participants the latter is centred on the idea of spatial expansion. In addition, it can be stressed that diffusion is not a random process that spreads like a disease, where cases increase exponentially. On the contrary, several so-called pre-conditions have to be met for a new conflict onset in a potential target state. As Lake and Rothchild (1989), amongst others, argue a target state needs to be susceptible for conflict for a diffusion process to be triggered. Thus, on the one hand, diffusion processes are triggered in states when "incompatibilities already exist" (Bartusevičius and Gleditsch, 2019, p. 242). On the other hand, the spread of conflict is limited within spaces. Findings demonstrate that the risk of being a target of diffusion effects increase in cases when a country is located in a conflict-prone or conflict-ridden region.

Having explored the literature on direct and indirect mechanisms of conflict diffusion, this thesis proposes a distinct mechanism, incorporating two further variables that should be taken into consideration when it comes to the analysis of internal conflict diffusion.

The following chapter presents an original framework of internal conflict diffusion based on the condition of shared borders and the two key variables: willingness through transnational alliance and the mobilisation of mercenary forces. The variables

of transnational alliances and the mobilisation of mercenary forces have only been addressed to a limited extent by the diffusion scholars. Although alliances have been analysed as a key factor of diffusion in the interstate conflict literature, intrastate conflict scholars were primarily focused on group linkages created though ethnic or religious networks. Black (2012b) proposed that foreign support to a rebel group could lead to a so-called boomerang effect of conflict diffusion. However, transnational alliances as cooperation between two actors in the realm of security and foreign policy has not been evaluated. It will therefore be relevant how, when, and why these alliances were created and what kind of support was provided. The phenomenon of mercenaries, as conflict externality, that move from conflict to conflict within a region has been acknowledged but was not part of a study so far. In addition, neither variable has been explored in relation to, or in connection with, each other.

One of the biggest constraints when it comes to exploring mechanisms of internal conflict diffusion is the limited availability of data concerning supposedly key actors of diffusion, such as mercenaries. Data on patterns of mercenary activity is hardly available. However, this obstacle will be addressed by introducing the dataset of Commercial Military Actors in Armed Conflict, 1980-2016 - a dataset which comprehensively covers mercenary activities armed conflicts. Besides the statistical assessment of overall patterns of the proposed mechanisms, this thesis will begin to fill the gap of qualitative research studies in the area of conflict diffusion. So far diffusion studies have been mainly focused on quantitative patterns, supported by anecdotal evidence. The original theoretical framework of Opportunity, Willingness and Mobilisation will be outlined to analyse the process of the spread of civil war in Sub-Saharan-Africa.

# 3. A Theory of Conflict Diffusion: Opportunity, Willingness, & Mobilisation

This chapter introduces and illustrates the original theory of Opportunity, Willingness, and Mobilisation to assess the phenomenon of internal conflict diffusion. To grasp the relationship between the presence and activities of mercenaries, and conflict diffusion an enhanced version of Siverson's and Starr's (1990) "Opportunity and Willingness" framework will be applied.

Diffusion within the realm of interstate research has been defined as a process in which "events of a given type in a given polity are conditioned by the occurrence of similar events in other polities at prior points in time" (Most and Starr, 1990, p. 402). The spread of conflict has commonly been analysed by examining the relationship between borders and alliances, and the spread of war. In this scenario Siverson and Starr see borders as opportunities for interaction; whereas alliances are defined as a "result from a deliberate process of policy choices" (1990, p. 50). Therefore, a willingness to build alliances "with specific partners - may be seen as an indicator of shared policy preferences" (Siverson and Starr, 1990, p. 50). Their findings "indicate that the probability of war diffusion substantially increases as opportunities and willingness increase" (Siverson and Starr, 1990, p. 47). Forsberg (2014a) applied Most and Starr's diffusion-conceptualisation to the area of civil war studies. She put the following definition forward: "diffusion is […] a process whereby internal conflict in one location alters the probability of another internal conflict erupting in another location at a later point in time." (Forsberg, 2014a, p. 189). Thus, the process of diffusion cannot be considered as an independent or dependent variable, but as a specific category of mechanism (Starr, Darmofal and Iqbal, 2008).

The novel element of the theoretical framework is to link the transnational dimension of conflict onset to the supply and demand structure of soldiers for hire, i.e. mercenaries. Mercenary services are traded on the so-called market for force. The market for force is a supply and demand driven market where ex-soldiers or former combatants offer their services. Mercenary service provision tends to be primarily combat orientated. A mechanism-based theory of direct conflict diffusion, where mercenary activities and transnational alliance are at the centre of the analysis, will be presented. The causal mechanism of diffusion is initiated by an armed conflict. This

theoretical framework does not differentiate between the notions of ongoing-conflict and post-conflict diffusion. The whole conflict period plus an additional five years will be considered as the potential initiation phase of the diffusion process. This five year allowance is common within the research area of diffusion and is employed to capture lagged effects (Black, 2012b, 2013). Thus, it is assumed that the repercussions of a civil war experience are present, beyond a peace deal, lingering within a country and across the regions. Conflict-specific capital such as arms, or combatants are available for old and new conflict actors. While discussing the mechanism, diffusion-dyads are comprised of a host and target state. The host state is considered to be the part of the dyad that experiences or experienced an armed conflict. The potential target state is a state which experiences a subsequent armed conflict onset, "partially as a result of the sending states' conflict" (Black, 2012b, p. 14). Which indicates a 'quadrangular' relationship of transnational conflict between actors involved in the process of diffusion. This relationship consists of a rebel and government dyad in the host and a rebel and government dyad in the target state.

*Table 2: Civil War Diffusion Dyad*

| **Civil War Diffusion Dyad** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Internal Conflict | → | Potential for a new conflict onset |
| Host State (A) | → | Target State (B) |

The remainder of this theory chapter explores the individual components of the theoretical framework and is laid out in the following manner. The first aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is the conceptualisation of borders and boundaries as opportunities. Secondly, the notion of willingness is conceptualised as transnational alliances. In other words, transnational alliances are characterised through the outside interference of state or non-state actors supporting an armed group within a potential target country. And finally, this chapter will examine the aspect of mobilisation. The supply and demand side of mercenaries within a regional context will be evaluated. These factors are deemed to increase the likelihood of a new conflict onset resulting from an existing conflict nearby. The idea is to combine a state-centric and a non-state actor-centric perspective.

### 3.1 Opportunity: Shared Borders

Shared borders are one of the most relevant preconditions for the creation of opportunities for a conflict to diffuse. Thus, a country's location, which is a given factor, provides interaction opportunities between states, as well as between distinct non-state actors within and beyond state boundaries. Borders[7] are an important factor due to their role of facilitating exchange opportunities (Kratochwill, 1986, p. 32).

Researchers within the area of diffusion so far have seen borders or the confined boundaries of states as something that can be considered as self-evident, almost as a given that needs no further explanation. This line of thinking might be applicable or reasonable within a Eurocentric context of analysis, where states are considered to be sovereign entities and able to exercise "authority within its own geographic boundaries" (Krasner, 2001, p. 17). Thus, states and the link to political-authority based on territory is the key feature of analysis within the modern international system since the Peace of Westphalia, in 1648. The Peace of Westphalia, an event which is generally understood as the crucial moment regarding the emergence of the modern state (Krasner, 2001). Krasner concludes that the ideal type of the modern notion of state sovereignty has not been fully accurate throughout history. Buzan and Waver (2003, p. 219) point out that "Africa has retained some of the superficial appearance of the Westphalian-style states". However, several African states can be considered weak as states and powers. And the "disintegrative dynamics of weak states" have fostered the process of more permeable borders (Khadiagala, 2010, p. 267). Within the context of African boundaries, the notion and creation of borders, and states have to be addressed in a more detailed manner. In order to fully grasp, and to be able to analyse, the idea of direct conflict diffusion including aspects such as the unhindered flow of conflict externalities across borders, this section takes a brief look at the attributes and history of African boundaries. This is also of relevance since the concept of mercenaries is linked to the notion of being foreign[8] or external to an internal conflict within the boundaries of a particular state (Percy, 2007, p. 52). The

[7] The term borders and boundary will be used interchangeably, defined as "a line that marks the confines or divides two contiguous territories" (Okumu, 2011, p. 2).

[8] The aspect of foreignness is not linked to the concept of citizenship. The concept of mercenaries will be addressed in the third sub-section 'Mobilisation' of this chapter.

suggestion that the nature of African boundaries plays a significant role in spreading or perpetuating conflict rather than facilitating peace is linked to two distinct features. African boundaries are described as being contestable and permeable (Silberfein and Conteh, 2006, p. 344).

The aspect of *contestability* and the creation of African boundaries cannot be addressed without being linked to the continent's colonial history. Not only due to the fact that the vast majority of borders were established by colonialists, but also by considering that most of the newly independent African states recognised these borders, although they were put in place prior to their independence (Herbst, 1989, p. 675). The borders created during the colonial area were officially accepted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) as the basis of the newly independent states. This decision was encapsulated in the OAU's founding Charter, referring to the key principle of *uti possidetis* ('you possess, you shall possess henceforth'). A principle that would ensure that emerging states, across Africa, would inherit borders set up by the colonial powers (Zoppi, 2013). It is argued that by accepting these boundaries at the time of independence the inherent limitations and to some extend the colonial baggage were carried on (Nuget and Aiswaju, 1996; Silberfein and Conteh, 2006).

Africa's postcolonial borders can be considered relatively stable. An observation that is linked to the second guiding principle of Article III, of the OAU Charter, which stresses the aspect of 'non-interference in the internal affairs of States'. Thus, the aim to maintain the territorial status quo of the newly independent states was at the heart of the African agenda at the time (Zoppi, 2013). This observation is also captured in the theory of border fixity. Borders are considered to be fixed rather than being subjected to change (Atzili, 2011, p. 15). Consequently, the idea of territorial integrity is in opposition to territorial self-determination. Hence, most of the early secessionist movements beginning in the 1960s in Sub-Saharan Africa were subject to failure rather than success: the Katangese attempt of secession from former Zaire and today's Democratic Republic of the Congo; the state of Biafra claiming secession from Nigeria; or the case of Somaliland in Somalia. Successful movements that sought territorial autonomy, starting in the 1960s, such as Eritrea and South Sudan struggled for over three decades before they gained independence. Eritrea became independent from Ethiopia in 1991 and South Sudan became independent from Sudan in 2011. In sum, boundaries have been subject of incompatibilities over self-determination, yet

most of these movements were unsuccessful, and borders were not adjusted. Since it is argued that a successful rebellion over territory leads to a higher likelihood of a diffusion process to be triggered, at least on the African continent, the universe of cases to observe this mechanism is limited. A further argument which is also linked to the spread of conflict is the division of ethnic groups across borders (Forsberg, 2008). Transnational ethnic groups, "are those groups whose fractions are indigenous to more than one state" (Onah, 2015, p. 86) and are deemed to be conflict transmitters, through an increased flow of information and mutual support.

The feature of *permeability* is linked to the concept of direct conflict diffusion and indicates that "there is no hindrance to cross-border movement" (Griffiths, 1996, p. 68). Inter-state boundaries are considered to be porous. Efficient and sufficient border management to control cross-border activities can be considered a challenging task for many of the Sub-Saharan states. In this regard corruption by border control agents is a connected issue (United Nations, 2015). If border control officers collude with, for instance, smugglers or other entities that cross borders for illegal purposes the likelihood of conflict specific capital to be distributed throughout a region is increased (Nuget and Aiswaju, 1996). Thus, the sudden availability of arms and (ex-)combatants influences the opportunity for a rebellion to ignite. Border security can be perceived as an ongoing issue. As Nugent and Aiswaju phrase it "given that the boundaries of Africa have not changed significantly, supervision of lengthy frontiers (some 50.000 miles in all) remains problematic" (1996, p. 7). A further aspect is the high number of collapsed or failed state on the African continent, especially since the 1990s. Many African states that experienced an armed conflict and can be categorised as weak states. In most cases, weak governments are not able to monitor border zones, or to demonstrate power in remote areas, or even outside major cities (Médard, 2009, p. 276; Hazen, 2013, p. 8). The task of exercising power "over huge distances of [sometimes] scarcely populated land and difficult terrain" (Atzili, 2006, p. 20) has always been challenging. Thus, one can establish a connection between lengthy borders, large countries in terms of territory and more opportunities for conflict to diffuse (Beardsley and Gleditsch, 2015). In sum, shared borders are deemed to facilitate the spread of conflict to neighbouring countries, and in some cases even back to the original host (Silberfein and Conteh, 2006). Thus, porous borders facilitate the unhindered movement of conflict externalities from country to country. It has been

argued that a state involved in an armed conflict loses control over arms (Kreutz et al, 2011), combatants and the flow of goods, not only within its territorial boundaries but also beyond. Additionally, one has to take into consideration that diffusion mechanisms "are likely to be mediated by distance" (Buhaug, 2005, p. 88). Thus, it is possible that conflict repercussions, such as the movement of conflict externalities are more pronounced factors for states that are in close proximity to the location of the conflict. Moreover, if the conflict itself is located in a border region, which might be more likely for secessionist rebel movements spillover effects are expected to be more pronounced (Buhaug, 2005). Which leads me to delineate the first hypothesis:

> Hypotheses One: *A neighbour at war increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in a potential target state.*

Nonetheless, one has to acknowledge that this line of argument, thus, this hypothesis has been subject to testing before (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008; Forsberg, 2014a; Bara, 2017). However, the notion of shared borders, more specifically, a neighbour at war is inherent to the process of conflict diffusion.

The next part of this thesis will explore a variable that remained thus far under conceptualised in the area of internal conflict diffusion. The creation of transnational alliances is a factor that can be linked to an increased risk of conflict onset, and thus makes diffusion more likely. However, it is relevant to bear in mind that internal conflicts do not just spill over from one state to another (Hazen, 2013). Connections between certain armed conflicts are not a coincidence. On the contrary, "connections are specific to particular actors who made conscious decisions to engage in the war of a neighbouring state" (Hazen, 2013, p. 70). These connections and links are deliberate decisions and will be conceptualised in detail within the following section.

### 3.2 Willingness: Transnational Alliance

Willingness is the second organising concept of the theoretical framework. Willingness, just as the concept of opportunity is, theorised as a condition that is of relevance "for the occurrence of events" (Siverson and Starr, 1991, p. 25). The event in question: civil war onset. The condition of willingness reflects the decision maker's

foreign policy choices. More specifically, the actor's "decision to enter an alliance" (Siverson and Starr, 1991, p. 26). Alliances, in general, can be described as a double-edged sword with regard to their impact on the likelihood of peace and conflict. Thus, the question that comes to mind is, do alliances aggravate or avert internal conflict? Like the overall concept of diffusion, alliances have initially been subject to analysis within the realm of inter-state research. The Correlates of War project (Small and Singer, 1966, 1969; Gibler, 2009), which is considered a reference point when it comes to the study of alliances, defines alliances "as formal, written, mostly voluntary, agreements, treaties, or conventions among states pledging to coordinate their behaviour and policies in the contingency of military conflict" (Sprecher and Krause, 2006, p. 363). For the purpose of this thesis, however, it is necessary to work with a concept that incorporates non-state actors as agents that are able to enter, and to be part of, a security arrangement. Hence, the definition of alliances needs to be expanded to encompass security or military cooperation between states and rebel groups, as well as between two rebel groups based in distinct states. Moreover, it is worth broadening the scope of alliances from their strictly formal notion of arrangements to include ad-hoc cooperation or support. Tamm (2016) distinguishes between interstate alliances and transnational alliances. The distinction made is helpful, but to some extent a limited categorisation, since non-state to non-state actor cooperation is not included by this definition of transnational alliances. Although external sponsorship or external support from a government to a rebel group seems to be more commonly addressed, one cannot ignore the possibility of transnational alliances between two armed groups. Thus, a relatively capable rebel group in one state could be able to sponsor or support a rebel group in a distinct state. Akcinaroglu (2012) addresses the phenomenon of rebel interdependencies, with a focus on the presence of multiple rebel groups within the setting of one armed conflict, where the government of a state is confronted by several rebel groups. However, it seems also to be common for rebel groups to assist other rebel groups in a transnational setting. Examples among others are: (1) the Burundian rebel group Palipehutu-FNL who had been fighting the Burundian-Tutsi government, supplied training to the Rwandan Hutu-dominated rebel group Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and (2) resource and information sharing between Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels and Liberia's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) during the Liberian civil war.

For the purposes of this theoretical framework and to grasp alliances mentioned above, the concept of transnational alliances will be broadened to encompass transnational rebel interdependencies. Hence, a transnational alliance is formed when a government or a rebel group in the region decides to provide support to a rebel group in state B in the area of security and military. The impact of external support on civil war dynamics has been examined extensively, ranging from their impact on duration, severity, conflict outcomes and conflict recurrence (Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski, 2005; Jones, 2017; Karlén, 2017). For my theoretical framework it is relevant to distinguish between the provision of indirect and direct external support, since my research focus is on the notion of pre-war support (Balcells, 2011) in favour of a rebel group in a potential target state. Indirect support encompasses support short of the deployment of foreign troops. Thus, the provision of external support through transnational alliances includes support in terms of financial assistance, the supply of weapons or military equipment, the provision of access to territory/sanctuaries, or the delivery of logistical support. Put differently, the concept of indirect support excludes the notion of third-party interventions into an armed conflict by the armed forces of a foreign government (Roberts, 2019). Karlén's (2017) work on conflict recurrence is a first attempt to analyse the impact of external support on the notion of conflict onset. In general little research has been done concerning the impact of external support on the event of conflict onset. This is surprising since findings indicate that the provision of external support for rebel groups is especially relevant in the early stages of a civil war (Jones, 2017). Rebel groups begin wars from a disadvantage point in comparison to most state actors. Thus, rebel movements are in need to develop a support system, which is most likely not to be fund internally (Hazen, 2013, pp. 3–4). Thus, external state and non-state actors "are critical to the organization's viability and structure" (Salehyan, 2010a, p. 501). In short, transnational alliances make rebellions viable.

Transnational alliances and linkages have to be considered as an important factor with regard to a rebel's group formation, survival, and capabilities. It can be argued that external sponsorship through foreign governments is a relatively reliable resource of military support. This practice, however, could in turn lead to a rebel group "losing some degree of autonomy" (Salehyan, Gleditsch and Cunningham, 2011, p. 716). External support from foreign but predominantly regional actors is perceived as deliberate and conscious outside interference from a state or non-state actor in the affairs of another state. In other words, the provision of external support "reflects a

willingness to accept the potential costs of [a transnational] alliance balanced against potential gains" (Siverson and Starr, 1991, p. 26). The decision maker, whether this be a head of state or a resourceful rebel leader, makes the conscious choice to support a domestic opposition group nearby, being aware of the likely consequence of alienating the government of the target state. However, the decision maker is only willing to enter a transnational alliance because he or she anticipates that the risks taken are "offset by the military or security benefits" (Siverson and Starr, 1991, p. 41). Table 3 provides an overview of the concept of transnational alliances.

*Table 3: Conceptualisation Transnational Alliance*

| | **Transnational Alliance** |
|---|---|
| **Decision Maker** | Regional elites<br>- government OR rebel group (predominantly in host state) |
| **Indirect Support** | Area of security and military<br>- financial assistance, the supply of weapons or military equipment, the provision of access to territory/sanctuaries, or the delivery of logistical support |
| **Beneficiary of Indirect Support** | Domestic opposition group/ rebel group in target state |

The target state, however, is most likely prone to the onset of an internal conflict since an organised group, that is open to receive military support, is already present. In other words, transnational alliances entail external support for a future warring party. Thus, foreign support, "can be a key source of optimism that convinces uncertain rebel leaders to start conflicts against superior government adversaries" (Black, 2012b, p. 15). In sum, external support through transnational alliances is able to impact conflict dynamics by influencing resource availability and capabilities of warring parties.

The idea behind employing the concept of transnational alliances builds upon Harbom's and Wallensteen's finding that "state support to rebel groups is […] most often provided by neighbors" (2005, p. 629). Their explanation concerning a neighbouring state's willingness to support a rebel group is linked to the notion of

retaliation.[9] Thus, *Government A* might support *Rebel Group B* nearby because *Government B* supported *Rebel Group A*. The intention behind this kind of foreign policy behaviour is to weaken and destabilise the government dealing with a rebellious armed group within their state (Harbom and Wallensteen, 2005). Besides, it is argued that only the prospect of foreign support through an alliance can lead to a similar effect (Kuperman, 2002). The idea is that through the rebel groups' increased capabilities and the likely rise of optimism within the armed group, the success rate of a rebellion can be amplified. Thus, enhanced rebel capacities through external support could impact the likelihood of a civil war to break out.

On a different note, research results on recent trends in outside support for insurgent movements, contrary to the common perception, indicates that transnational alliances are "primarily motivated by geopolitical rather than ideology, ethnic affinity, or religious sentiment" (Byman *et al.*, 2001, p. 23). This might be of importance since research on diffusion processes tends to put a strong focus on the notion of transnational ethnic ties facilitating the spread of conflict (view, Austvoll 2005; Forsberg, 2014b). Furthermore, this trend can be linked to the notion of transnational alliances being established because of foreign policy decisions to weaken a neighbouring country. In addition, a transnational alliance allows the decision maker to enhance the projection of his or her capabilities (Siverson and Starr, 1991). A government or a rebel group that is capable of providing external support to a rebel group in a neighbouring state has to be perceived as geopolitical threat. The provision of indirect support to a rebel group in a neighbouring state, in order to foster your own geopolitical goals, replaces the necessity of a direct intervention. A direct intervention, which could be costlier in terms of human and financial costs. Moreover, some transnational alliances can be established without public knowledge. Thus, the principal of non-interference can be maintained, while exerting influence through indirect means of support.

By bringing together the elements of borders and transnational alliances in a strategic framework, the analysis of the spread of armed conflict is concerned with the relationship that places state and/or non-state actors as "decision makers within their

[9] Further reasons or explanations as to why transnational alliances are formed will not be addressed within the framework of this work. Alliance-formation is a theory in itself and can be actor and conflict specific due to situational circumstances. There have been incidences where loyalties can be described as fluid, since support and sponsorship might vary during a conflict episode (Debos, 2008).

surrounding environments" (Siverson and Starr, 1990, p. 48). The following second hypotheses can be delineated as follows:

> Hypotheses Two: *A transnational alliance between a regional state or non-state actor and a rebel group in a potential target country increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in the rebel group's home state.*

Nevertheless, as Siverson and Starr (1991) acknowledge, the organising concepts of opportunity (borders) and willingness (alliances) are relevant for the occurrence of diffusion events, but I argue that a further condition has to be met to increase the likelihood of the diffusion process to take place. Especially within African armed conflicts mercenaries have been a common feature, starting with the post-independence conflicts in the 1960s and 1970s through to the 21st century. However, most studies have analysed the impact of mercenaries on conflict dynamics during an ongoing conflict. Thus, on the variables of duration, termination, efficiency, and severity.

The following sub-section will explore the mobilisation of mercenaries, in connection to a civil war onset, through supply and demand dynamics on the lucrative transnational market for force.

### 3.3 Mobilisation: Supply and Demand Structure of Mercenaries

The African continent, and especially Sub-Saharan Africa, not only display a high number of armed conflicts, but also a vast record of foreign involvement of violent state and non-state actors within these conflicts. The presence of mercenaries, within the scholarly literature, is associated with a particular kind of perception. First of all, mercenaries are different from soldiers. Whereas soldiers are considered regular fighters, mercenaries are at least perceived as irregular conflict actors (Percy, 2007). Moreover, mercenaries are not only deemed to be untrustworthy, but also not able to be effective in warfare (Lynch and Walsh, 2000).

Thus, on the one hand, it is argued that mercenary presence is associated with combat inefficiency, as well as with their participation in looting and pillage of civilian property and the actors' resulting economic benefits (Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 3). On the other hand, the presence of mercenaries can be linked with alterations to

warring parties' military capabilities, mostly to the client's advantage. Thus, the cross-border movement of former soldiers that offer their experience and knowledge in combat to a third party is associated with the spread of armed conflict and the facilitation of diffusion. In this scenario mercenaries are predominantly perceived as conflict externalities. Unfortunately, the term mercenary is often used in a derogatory way, to describe someone as foreign and unwelcome. Thus, a detailed characterisation of what a mercenary is, is crucial and will be the focus of this section.

Musah and Fayemi (2000) provide an valuable overview of the African encounter with mercenarism. According to Musah and Fayemi mercenary activities is "the practice of foreign professional soldiers freelancing their labour and skills to a party in conflict for fees higher and above those of soldiers of the state in conflict" (2000, p. 5). Although this conceptualisation is useful throughout this section I will delineate further elements that are of relevance to conceptualise the term mercenary. Musah and Fayemi address a particular kind of mercenary present on the African continent in the 1960-70s. Mercenaries from the 1960-70s, in comparison to mercenaries in the 1990s, 2000-2010s display distinct characteristics with regard to their predominant place of origin. Mercenaries in the 1960s and 70s have been labelled as "vagabond mercenaries" (Nossal, 1998, p. 31; Percy, 2007, p. 60). Vagabond mercenaries are "characterized by ill-disciplined individuals or small groups loosely organised in bands" (A.-F. Musah and Fayemi, 2000, p. 6). Mercenaries in the later decades, and according to findings from the Commercial Military Actors in Armed Conflict Dataset (CMAD), seem to have a more regional origin and focus. According to Musah and Fayemi the extensive presence of vagabond mercenaries in the 1960s was linked to the independence and self-determination movement of several African states. Nearly all former colonies became independent entities and entered the states system with weak institutions and severely underdeveloped economic and military capabilities (Gibler, 2016, p. 6). Thus, these so-called vagabond mercenaries could exploit existing and expanding security vacuums in weak African states. However, these mercenaries were predominately linked to ex-colonial powers; and the ex-colonial powers' interests to covertly exert influence and to operate in "clandestinity" (Harding, 1997, p. 87). Most prominent examples for these particular groups of vagabond mercenaries who were present during the time of African states' path to independence are: British mercenary 'Mad Mike' Hoare who is known for his frequent involvement in African coups and

conflicts (Fawthrop, 1982); Bob Denard, a French mercenary regularly engaged in former French colonies on the African continent, as well as the (Dossou-Yovo, 1999), Belgian Jean Schramme and his involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

More recent conflicts show the engagement of regional mercenaries. Mercenaries from Liberia and Sierra Leone have been accused of fighting alongside Guinea's rebel leader Alpha Conde in the armed conflict from 2000 (*Agence France Presse*, 2000). In 2020 reports emerged that Sudanese mercenaries are involved in the Libyan internal conflict (Pouls and Profazio, 2020). More specifically, that Sudanese mercenaries are tasked with "coordinating and engaging in joint military operation with their Libyan patrons" (United Nations General Assembly, 2020, p. 10). In sum, the mercenary operator origin shifted from being proxies of ex-colonial powers to regional recruits.

Political and military elites, as well as rebel groups, seek mercenary services due to the notion that mercenaries operate in the area of plausible deniability[10], and display a lack of accountability. This thesis argues that mercenary activities are embedded in a demand and supply structure: mercenaries fight if someone pays (Chojnacki, Metternich and Münster, 2009). Therefore, in order for a rebel group or a government to hire mercenaries two things must take place: former soldiers must be willing to offer their combat services - the supply side; and a rebel group or government must be willing to pay for their services - the demand side. Consequently, the phenomenon of mercenaries can only be perceived if combatants are available and willing to fight another person's war. This line of thinking fits into a greed-based model of armed conflict mobilisation which suggest that rebels wagging an armed insurgency draw mercenaries through the opportunity of loot or financial compensation (Malet, 2013, p. 4). It is not only warring parties involved in an internal conflict, such as rebel groups and national governments, who make use of mercenary services. In addition, foreign governments are inclined to hire mercenaries in an attempt to change conflict dynamics abroad and according to their own geopolitical interests. External actors who provide support through the mobilisation of mercenary forces are most commonly neighbouring states or influential regional players. Mercenaries are hired to provide an advantage to one specific warring party. Moreover,

[10] The goal of plausible deniability "is to ensure that arms, equipment, and other forms of support cannot be traced to the government providing them" (Poznansky, 2020, p. 3).

mercenaries are perceived as "an intermediary [that] creates distance between the intervening State and the supported party" (United Nations General Assembly, 2020, p. 10). The supported warring party, put differently the consumer of mercenary services, can be a rebel group or a government. This foreign policy behaviour adds another layer in terms of the clientele base of mercenary services. At this point it is important to distinguish between the client[11] and consumer[12] base of mercenaries. The presence of additional combat forces, could lead to an increased risk of conflict onset, especially if a rebel group's combat abilities are bolstered. According to the CMAD, on the African market for forces rebel groups are the key consumer base for mercenary services. Through a rebel group's successful mobilisation of mercenaries, the pursuit of an armed conflict becomes more likely.

In sum, two aspects of *demand* can be delineated, when it comes to the mobilisation of additional mercenary forces, on the transnational market for force. One can differentiate between pull- and push effects: national/foreign governments and rebel groups can actively pursue the recruitment of mercenary forces and thereby attract or pull ex-combatants to fight on behalf a given consumer - known as the pull effect. Ex-combatants can also move or are drawn to conflict areas to offer their services and create demand through an increased availability locally. In the pursuit for financial gain and the prospect of earning a living ex-combatants "travel across border[s] to offer their "military skills to state and non-state actors in the neighbourhood" (Bara, 2017, p. 6) - known as the push effect.

The supply-side is linked to an available pool of combatants. A pool of ex-combatants is predominantly created through conflict. Ex-combatants become mercenaries if they offer their combat services abroad. Thus, one could argue that the more conflicts a region experiences the more likely is a high availability of skilled ex-fighters on the market for force, as experienced in West Africa and the Great Lakes Region.

The primary focus relies upon the conflict actor mercenary, who is neither a national of the party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party of the conflict (Organisation of African Unity, 1977). A mercenary's conflict

[11] The party which recruits mercenaries and pays for their services.
[12] The party which consumes and benefits from the services purchased.

involvement is related to its active participation in fighting, or the provision of training for rebel groups or government forces to improve their military skills in combat. Therefore, other services, such as military consultancy, logistics, and non-combat-related tasks provided by mercenaries are expected to be not as relevant in terms of service provision (Chojnacki, Metternich and Münster, 2009). Hence, the idea that mercenaries can act as force-multipliers is taken into consideration. Governments and rebel groups may recruit mercenary services "to complement limited personnel and lack of specialist skill sets" (United Nations General Assembly, 2020, p. 12). Therefore, and as indicated above, mercenaries are deemed to alter a warring party's military capabilities. The availability of experienced and skilled fighters might be able to elevate the military capacity of rebel groups in a potential target country (Bara, 2017, p. 6). In other words, due to their military and regional know-how, mercenaries display the capacity to alter a warring party's/consumer's capabilities. Moreover, rebel groups who are able to hire mercenaries could not only be at a military advantage, but the ability to recruit mercenaries could indicate that the given rebel group has either the financial ability to afford these services, or they are supported by external actors who recruit the additional mercenary forces for them. Similar to the concept of transnational alliances, the mobilisation of mercenaries is one way for a rebel group to increase military resources and to maximise their chance of pursuing victory (Malet, 2013, p. 5).

To paint a coherent picture of the African market for force, the essential differences between the two Commercial Military Actors (CMAs): mercenaries and Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs), need to be established. A brief overview with regard to the crucial conceptual differences will be provided. Although, mercenaries and PMSCs both provide commercial military services and display overlapping characteristics, these two actors have to be distinguished to be analytically precise. Table 4 provides an overview regarding conceptual differences of mercenaries and PMSCs. PMSCs came to establish themselves on a global scale, i.e. on the regional and international market for force from the 1990s onwards. A more corporate market for force was developed through the increased availability of military personnel available for contracting after the end of the Cold War (Avant, 2007, pp. 182–183). And on the African continent more specifically, the end of the South African Apartheid regime in the 1990s (Cock, 2004). These two events led to a process of large-scale

state demilitarisation, which created a vast pool of unemployed ex-military men. Thus, demilitarisation in the 1990s paved the way for the commoditisation of security and the vast expansion of a privatised security and military sector. Under the label of PMSCs a lot of the same actors from earlier years evolved into commercial entities that now display a corporate identity.

*Table 4: Conceptualisation CMAs: Mercenaries vs. PMSCs*

| | **Commercial Military Actors (CMAs)** | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Mercenaries** | **PMSCs** |
| **Organisational Structure** | Individual or group organised in ad-hoc or temporary units | Corporate structure |
| **Economic Motivation** | Intent for private/financial gain OR Prospect of earning a living OR Prospect of loot | Contractual relationship with client; financial compensation |
| **External to Conflict** | Neither national of the party to the conflict, nor a resident of territory controlled by a party of the conflict | Can be local or international due to corporate structure |
| **Non-Integration Armed Forces** | Not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict | Not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict |
| **Military Service Provision** | Tasks directly related to armed conflict | Wide range of military services |

The African conflict market displays vast opportunities for CMAs. Consequently, Africa as a region displays a comparatively high number of mercenary activities. In addition, Africa experiences "the greatest number of PMSCs because many states in Africa are weak and prone to power contestation" (Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski, 2012, p. 805).

With regard to the aspect of economic or financial motivation of commercial military actors PMSCs and mercenaries portray differences. PMSCs are part of a competitive corporate environment and bound to contractual obligations. Arguably PMSCs are more restricted in the way they act. In contrast to loosely-organised and ad-hoc mercenary groups that are most likely already present in the region. Thus, when it comes to the aspect of economic of financial motivation, I argue that there is a difference between PMSCs and mercenaries. Whereas PMSCs as corporate actors seek

to establish a contractual relationship with a client, due to their business and profit driven nature. The relationship between a mercenary and their potential client base is not as clear cut. Although, the intent for financial gain has to be present, I argue that regional mercenaries are rather motivated by the prospect to earn a living or the opportunity to loot.

Accordingly, one can delineate differences with regard to the *clientele* of PMSCs and mercenaries. A frequent assumption is that PMSCs, due to their reputational boundaries, are more likely to offer and sell their services to "legitimate" governments. Whereas mercenaries are more commonly perceived to fight on the side of rebel groups. Nonetheless, several reports and studies show that "mercenaries can be engaged by both types of belligerents, which increases their prospective client base" (United Nations General Assembly, 2020, p. 9). This assumption is backed by reports, for instance, from the first Ivorian internal conflict beginning in 2002. Both warring parties, the government headed by Laurent Gbagbo and the northern rebel group Force Nouvelle (FN), hired regional mercenaries, predominantly from Liberia, to fight alongside their forces (Sengupta, 2003). Mercenaries are present within recent internal conflicts, such as Liberia, Guinea, and Democratic Republic of Congo or in Ivory Coast, to only name a few. Which indicates that PMSCs have not replaced mercenaries as commercial military service providers on the African continent. In contrast, one can rather observe a parallel development, an evolutionary or transformatory process that does not eradicate the prior actor mercenaries (Singer, 2003, p. 45; Percy, 2007, p. 7). Singer (2003, p. 44) even argues that "the present pattern of mercenary involvement in conflict is as high as any other time in the last century". Moreover, it is also possible that PMSCs and mercenary groups are present and take part within the same conflict theatre. Each actor hired by an opposing warring party, as experienced, for instance, during the civil war in Sierra Leone. The government under Valentin Strasser contracted the South African PMSCs Executive Outcomes in May 1995 to "provide technical services, combat forces and limited training" (Howe, 1998, p. 314). At the same time the rebel group Revolutionary United Front (RUF) received training provided by Burkinabe mercenaries, also in May 1995.

In conclusion, a meaningful conceptualisation concerning the phenomenon of mercenaries is of relevance to differentiate mercenaries to other foreign fighters such as PMSCs, or intervening state militaries. Thus, by taking the five elements as established in Table 4 together: A mercenary is either an individual or part of a group

organised in an ad-hoc manner; whose primarily intention is financial gain, the prospect of earning a living or looting; who is neither a national of the party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party of the conflict; not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict; and provides services directly related to armed conflict.

However, these elements are not individually sufficient to conceptualise the term mercenary; only by adding up these five elements a definition becomes meaningful and applicable. To consider whether mercenaries have an impact on the onset of an armed conflict, time and location are of relevance. The recruitment of mercenary forces during an ongoing civil war will not be considered as part of a diffusion process. Thus, it is crucial to determine at what point in time mercenaries were recruited and mobilised to either provide training or to engage in combat alongside rebel groups. Only if mercenaries were present prior to the onset of conflict the process of diffusion is at play. The line of argument, in a nutshell, is that the availability of mercenary and mercenary-related services creates the ability, for those rebel groups who can afford it, to supplement lacking military capacity and to pursue policies and interests through aggressive means, which increases the likelihood of a conflict breakout.

A third testable hypotheses can be delineated and the following impact of mercenaries on armed conflict diffusion can be expected:

> Hypothesis Three: *The mobilisation of mercenaries on behalf of a rebel group in a potential target state increases the odds of an armed conflict onset.*

The following sub-section will provide a summary of the main theoretical assumptions.

### 3.4 Summary

This chapter introduced an original theory of internal conflict diffusion. To observe the event of diffusion several factors and actions need to be taken into consideration. The specific diffusion mechanism presented focuses on the elements of shared borders, transnational alliances, and mercenary mobilisation. This mechanism of diffusion can be best described as an interplay between state, non-state as well as structural factors.

These parts together form a coherent picture as well as a causal mechanism that can be tested. The mechanism of armed conflict diffusion is presented in Table 5.

*Table 5: Direct Conflict Diffusion - Causal Mechanism*

| **Cause** (Host - A) Civil War | **Opportunity** Shared borders | **Mobilisation** Mercenaries | **Outcome** (Target - B) Civil War Onset |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Willingness** Transnational Alliance | | |

The trigger for every diffusion process is an armed conflict that alters/increases the likelihood of an armed conflict to erupt in the neighbourhood.[13] Thus, the condition of shared borders and therefore proximity to the host conflict, which creates the opportunity for conflict to spread, is of relevance. I argue that two further variables need to be taken into consideration to explain the transnational dynamic of conflict onset. The variable of transnational alliances can be described as conflict transmitter. Through the act of interference of neighbouring state B in the ongoing conflict of a state A, the host conflict, state B becomes a target of civil war onset through retaliation of state A, who in turn provides external support to the insurgency in state B. The support through the alliances leads to an increase in rebellion specific capital in state B. To evaluate the support through a transnational alliance factors such as how, when, and why these alliances were created have to be evaluated.

*Table 6: Theory of Direct Conflict Diffusion - Hypotheses*

| | **Theory of Conflict Diffusion** |
|---|---|
| **Hypothesis ONE** | A neighbour at war increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in a potential target state. |
| **Hypothesis TWO** | A transnational alliance, between a regional state or non-state actors and a rebel group in a potential target country increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in the rebel group's home state. |
| **Hypothesis THREE** | The mobilisation of mercenaries on behalf of a rebel group in a potential target state increases the odds of an armed conflict onset. |

[13] The concept of equifinality comes into play. The proposed mechanism for conflict diffusion is one path among others that leads to a conflict onset.

Using the idea of diffusion as a foundation for explaining civil war onset, in the following chapter I set forth the research design. The research design will be a mixed method approach which combines qualitative and quantitative practices.

## 4. Research Design and Methods of Analysis

Using the concept of diffusion as a foundation for explaining a transnational dimension to armed conflict onset, in this chapter I set forth the research design, as well as the employed methods of analysis. This thesis is designed to evaluate one possible explanation concerning the puzzle of conflict diffusion. Henceforth, to assess the proposed hypotheses and underlying mechanisms a mixed-method framework will be applied. Mixed-method research encompasses qualitative and quantitative strategies, as well as distinct analysing techniques and links these into an overall research design. The overall aim is to "[enhance] the quality of causal inference" (Seawright, 2016, p. 42), based on the assumption that each method can compensate for another method's weakness to some extent. However, the aims and combinations of methods and methodological traditions varies greatly. Two commonly applied frameworks that can be differentiated are: a framework of triangulation and an integrative approach to multi method research. The difference between these two frameworks is the way theory is measured. A triangulation approach measures the same theory by using two or more different methods, to be able to compare and check results and conclusions produced by either method (Seawright, 2016). Thus, triangulation approaches of mixed methods can be considered as parallel tests. At the core of an integrative approach, however, lies the idea of combining methods to support a "single, unified causal inference" that produces more rigorous, as well as more credible casual inference (Seawright, 2016, p. 47).

For the purpose of this work, Gary Goertz's multi method framework of the *research triad* will be employed. The research triad is particularly valuable for this study since it does not only combine quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis, but also incorporates a third dimension; the dimension of causal mechanisms. The research triad is considered an integrative approach that consists of three distinct elements and as such combines cross-case analysis, case studies, and causal mechanisms (Goertz, 2016). Consequently, inference will be drawn in distinct ways. Thus, case studies within the framework of the research triad add to a "quantitatively based causal inference by tracing causal pathways" (Seawright, 2016, p. 47). As Goertz phrases it, "demonstrating a causal effect is only half the job, the second half involves specifying the casual mechanism and empirically examining it, usually through case studies" (Goertz, 2016, p. 1). Combining statistical analysis with process

tracing is one option to bring together quantitative and qualitative methods. Thus, this thesis will provide a statistical assessment of the relationship between the key variables of this study and the likelihood of an armed conflict to erupt. By employing logistic regression, the overall pattern of conflict diffusion will be analysed. In other words, the validity of more general claims concerning internal conflict diffusion can be assessed. Although this method, has its advantages, it is not particularly well suited to evaluate the theorised causal mechanism. Therefore, in a next step, within-case inference will be established through the method of process tracing and the elucidation of the causal mechanism (Gerring, 2007, p. 122). A small number of cases – three cases - for a detailed analysis will be selected, through the case-selection technique of identifying pathway cases.

The aim of applying process tracing will be to gain a more in-depth understanding of the diffusion mechanism. The intention is to achieve a sense of the more interactive elements of foreign support through transnational alliances, as well as, of combatants offering their services on a transnational market for force. Through the process of analysing case studies interactions and decision-making procedures, between state and non-state actors, can be uncovered. Through the application of process tracing in that specific way, unpacking the casual mechanism "can greatly increase the confidence in the causal significant of the correlations identified" (Bennett and Checkel, 2014, p. 20) through the statistical analysis.

Although statistical methods and case studies portray a similar epistemological logic, one has to bear in mind that these methods "use very different kinds of reasoning regarding fundamental issues such as case selection, operationalisation of variables, and the use of inductive and deductive logic" (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 6). Nevertheless, the differences of both methods will lead to comparative advantages. As illustrated by George and Bennett (2005) by using more than one method, in an integrative research design the employment of alternative methods will produce compensating effects regarding the limitation of each individual method. Cross-case and within-case analysis are, therefore, perceived as complementary to each other. Hence, an additional aim will be to emphasise the strength of each method. Within the subsequent sections the individual parts of the research triad will be discussed in more detail, beginning with the statistical analysis followed by the presentation of process tracing and the causal mechanisms.

### 4.1 Statistical Analysis: Logistic Regression

This section offers the reasoning and rationale behind the testing of the theory's main hypothesis using armed conflict data with a research focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. A statistical analysis is provided to establish the relationship between the independent and dependent variables of interest that requires explanation (Checkel, 2013). In other words, to test covariance. The statistical analysis is used to test the individual hypothesis delineated from theory. The focus will be first on the more general question of whether the likelihood of a new armed conflict is increased by an existing armed conflict within the neighbourhood. This evaluation is followed by an assessment of the variables: transnational alliances and mercenary mobilisation.

The next sub-sections specify the rationale behind the outcome and operationalises the key dependent and independent, as well as the control variables.

Time Frame and Coverage

The time frame for this investigation is defined according to three key datasets employed. Firstly, the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset version 20.1, a conflict-year dataset containing information regarding armed conflicts in the time period between 1946 and 2019 (Gleditsch *et al.*, 2002) will be used. Secondly, the Commercial Military Actor Dataset (CMAD), the primary dataset concerning the involvement of mercenaries in intrastate conflict is employed. The CMAD covers mercenary activity exchange events in Africa, East Asia and Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean, the Middle East, and South Asia with a focus on states that experienced an armed conflict between 1980 to 2016. The temporal overlap of these two datasets manifests the time period under investigation, which is from 1980 until 2016. Despite, these two key datasets that form the basis of the investigation one crucial variable cannot be assessed over this period of time. Thus, there is a limited timeframe of information concerning the UCDP dataset on the provision of external support (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011b). Data is only available from 1975 until 2009. Consequently, the overall number of observations for the variable transnational alliances will be lower. Thus, the time frame for statistical models that include the variable transnational is limited to the years 1980 until 2009.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis (a case) is a potential target country, where an armed conflict onset could take place. An observation is constituted as a potential target country year. Thus, the dataset investigated portrays a yearly set-up. All variables will be measured in the potential target state.[14]

Dependent Variable: Conflict Onset

The dependent variable for the binary logistic regression is the onset of an armed conflict in a potential target state in any year from 1980 until 2016, employing the UCDP/PRIO Onset Dataset (Gleditsch *et al.*, 2002). The coding criteria for an armed conflict onset are taken from this dataset. A threshold of battle related deaths - a minimum of 25 - per calendar year is employed. The dependent variable is dichotomous and takes on the values of zero and one; zero indicates no onset and one specifying conflict onset.

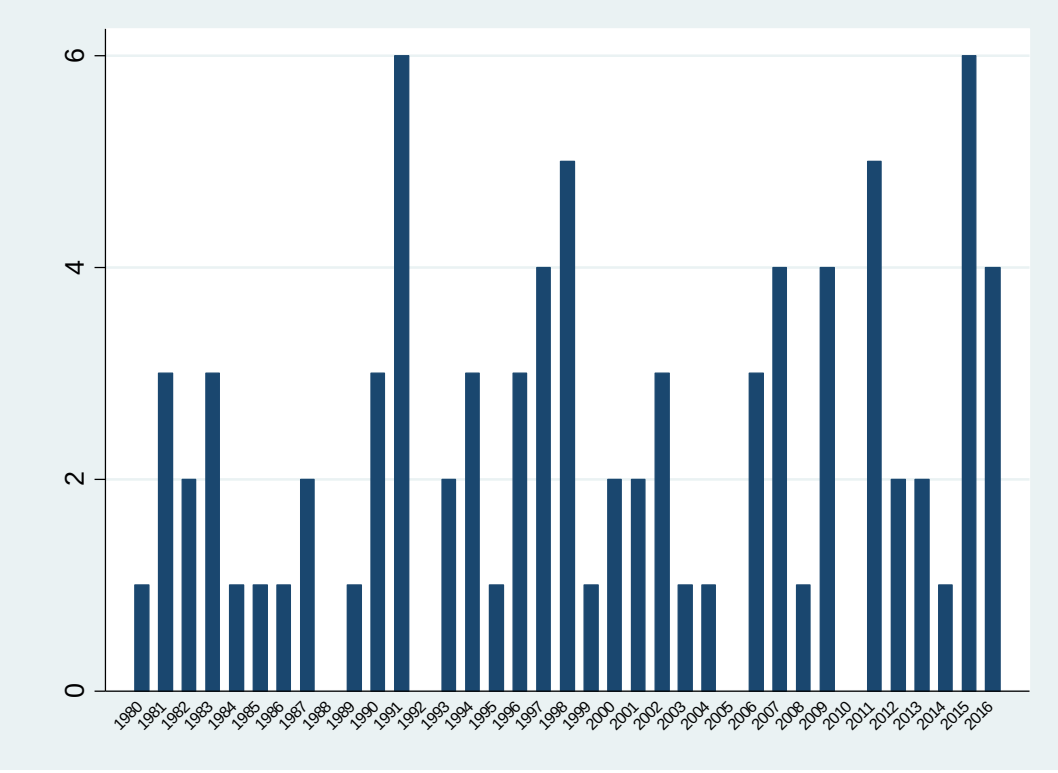


*Figure 1: Onset of Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa between 1980 and 2016*

[14] Diffusion-dyads are comprised of a host and target state. The potential target state is a state which experiences a subsequent armed conflict onset, "partially as a result of the sending states' conflict" (Black, 2012a, p. 14). The host state is considered to be the part of the dyad that experiences or experienced an armed conflict.

Conflict episodes with less than two calendar years of inactivity between them are collapsed into one single conflict. This means that a new conflict onset is only coded if there is "more than two years since the last observation to the conflict" (Pettersson, 2020, p. 2), or in case of a new warring party. Moreover, only the year of the conflict onset is coded as one, thus, years of ongoing conflict will be coded as zeros (Dixon, 2009, p. 724). The dependent variable conflict onset displays a frequency of 84. Figure 1 presents the sum of armed conflict onsets in Sub-Saharan Africa per given year from 1980 to 2016. Thus, out of 1.140 observations only 84 conflict onsets are recorded for 32 Sub-Saharan African countries between 1980 and 2016. In other words, only 7.37 percent of the observations for conflict onset are coded as ones.

Independent Variables: Neighbour at war, Transnational Alliance, Mercenary Mobilisation

*Neighbour at war (Hypothesis ONE):* The first independent variable with regard to the spread of armed conflict within this research setting is an armed conflict itself. The main explanatory variable is the event of an internal conflict in a neighbouring state. Thus, the claim that the condition of shared borders increases the likelihood of a conflict spreading will be tested. The variable *neighbour at war* is coded as a binary variable where zero indicates no ongoing conflict in a neighbouring state and a one specifying an ongoing conflict.

*Table 7: Chi-Square Statistic Conflict Onset and Neighbour at War*

| | ***Neighbour at War*** | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Conflict Onset*** | 0 | 1 | |
| 0 | **360** | **696** | 1056 |
| 1 | **17** | **67** | 84 |
| Total | 377 | 763 | 1140 |
| Pearson chi2 (1) = 6.7462 | | Pr = 0.009 | |

The variable *neighbour at war* displays 763 ones and 377 zeros. This means that for 66.93 percent of the observations a neighbouring country of a target state was involved in an internal conflict. Table 7 provides an overview of how the dependent variable conflict onset and the first independent variable neighbour at war are distributed. In addition, a chi-square test was performed, which shows a significant p-value.

*Transnational Alliance (Hypothesis TWO):* The formation of a transnational alliance and therefore the provision of support to a rebel group needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the diffusion of conflict, as elicited in more detail in the theory section of this thesis. The formation of a transnational alliance between a foreign government or rebel group in host state A and a rebel group in potential target state B is assumed to increase the likelihood of an armed conflict onset. Due to the increased rebellion-specific capital through external support, it becomes more likely that an opposition group turns to violent means in the pursuit of their political goals. It is necessary to differentiate between two forms of external support. The UCDP dataset on External Support in Armed Conflict[15] distinguishes between secondary warring support and secondary non-warring support to a conflict party (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011a); which is in line with the distinction between direct and indirect forms of support. The former, direct support, will be excluded, since this thesis does not evaluate the effect of an external supporter sending their armed forces to assist one warring party in an ongoing conflict. Thus, the focus will be on secondary non-warring support to a warring party through indirect means of support "such as the provision of sanctuary, financial assistance, logistics, and military support" (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011b, p. 5). The variable *transnational alliance* is constructed as a binary variable, indicating whether external support was provided to the warring party in a given year or not, 1 (external support) and 0 (no external support).

*Table 8: Chi-Square Statistic Conflict Onset and Transnational Alliance*

| | ***Transnational Alliance*** | | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Conflict Onset*** | 0 | 1 | |
| **0** | **720** | **159** | 879 |
| **1** | **32** | **33** | 65 |
| **Total** | 752 | 192 | 944 |
| Pearson chi2(1) = 39.8963 | | Pr = 0.000 | |

This is an aggregated variable which means, if multiple external actors support a warring party, it will still be coded in a binary manner. Table 8 provides a first indication of how the variables of *transnational alliance* and *conflict onset* are

[15] Data for the variable of external support is only available between 1975 and 2009. This restriction leads to a limited timeframe (1980 and 2009) to test hypothesis two.

distributed. For these two variables the result of the chi-square test also attests a correlation between a transnational alliance and the event of a conflict onset.

*Mercenary Mobilisation (Hypothesis THREE):* When analysing the spread of conflict, the influence of mercenaries being mobilised to support various warring parties in internal conflict is widely acknowledged. Thus, the claim that mercenaries can be perceived as actors that impact the dynamics of internal conflict diffusion is widespread. However, a statistical account of whether this claim holds true has not been performed. The variable mobilisation of mercenaries indicates whether mercenaries were present or not present in a potential target country in a given year. The line of argument is that the mobilisation of mercenaries in support of a conflict actor in a target state leads to an increased risk of a conflict onset. Key services provided by mercenaries, as shown in the descriptive statistics chapter, are combat related. Thus, hypothesis three evaluates the availability of mercenary services to supplement a rebel group's military capability and therefore an increased likelihood of an armed conflict to erupt. For the purpose of this study, the variable of mercenary mobilisation was dummy coded and takes the value of one (present) and zero (not present). The following table, Table 9, shows the distribution of cases setting the variable *conflict onset* and *mercenary mobilisation*. For the third variable of interest the p-value is statistically significant.

*Table 9: Chi-Square Statistic Conflict Onset and Mercenary Mobilisation*

| | ***Mercenary Mobilisation*** | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Conflict Onset*** | 0 | 1 | |
| 0 | **898** | **158** | 1056 |
| 1 | **52** | **32** | 84 |
| Total | 950 | 190 | 1140 |
| Pearson chi2(1) = 29.9805 | | Pr = 0.000 | |

Control Variables: Characteristics of Conflict Onset & Conflict Diffusion

The determining factors of conflict diffusion, and thus the onset of armed conflict, are complex. Control variables included in the statistical models assessed are carefully selected on the basis of Achen's and Ray's guidance (Achen, 2005; Ray, 2005). Both authors advocate against the employment of a so-called garbage can list of control

variables, whereas "any variable with some claim to relevance can be tossed in" (Achen, 2005, p. 329). They stress that models that include more than three control variables will be difficult to assess. Thus, it will be problematic for results to be interpreted in a "confident, consistent fashion" (Ray, 2005, p. 291). In contrast, researchers should consider the inclusion of control variables based on strong theoretical assumptions and supporting arguments (Oneal and Russett, 2005). By taking these considerations into account, I have selected four key control variables, drawn from a variety of sources. The control variables included are: Regime Type, Peace Years[16], a state's GDP per capita, and a dummy for Cold War dynamics. The control variables discussed are measured within the potential target country and will be operationalised in more detail as follows:

*Regime Type/ Regime instability*

Regime type is one of the common variables concerning the analysis of armed conflict onset. Different regimes display varying level of predisposition of a conflict to erupt. The range of different regimes varies greatly, ranging from democratic to autocratic regimes on a scale from +10 (strongly democratic) to -10 (strongly autocratic); according to Marshall et al. (2019), indicating that there are several different forms. Nevertheless, one particular kind of regime type seems to be more commonly associated with civil war onset than others. According to Hegre et al. (2001) intermediate regimes are most conflict-prone. Thus, research on the relationship between the onset of civil wars and regime types points out that anocracies/anocratic regimes are more susceptible to a conflict to erupt than other regime type (Regan and Bell, 2010). Maves and Braithwaite (2013) specifically examined the relationship between the spread of conflict and the question of why different autocracies are more or less receptive to conflict externalities and diffusion processes. Their findings suggest that a specific type of autocratic regime is especially prone to the diffusion process. Among authoritarian regimes, those with elected legislatures have to be considered as increasingly susceptible to the spread of conflict. This is due to the assumption that these regimes are more likely to breed latent opposition groups (Maves and Braithwaite, 2013; Forsberg, 2014a). In line with Regan and Bell's (Regan and Bell, 2010, p. 751) measurement, the polity indicator will be recoded into an ordinal

[16] The control variable Peace Years will also be included in Peace Years Squared and Peace Years Cubed.

variable consisting of three distinct categories: (1) a polity score between -10 and -6 is considered autocratic; (2) a score between -5 and 5 is classed as an anocracy; (3) and a state with a value from 6 to 10 can be perceived as a democratic state.

*Peace Years*

The control variable *peace years* is considered a remedy for temporal dependence using logistic regression. It is constructed as a count of consecutive years a potential target state did not experience conflict, and therefore aims at correcting "for duration dependence of observations" (Pettit, 2019, p. 1276). The variable *Peace years* in the dataset that was constructed for the regression analysis ranges from 0 to 34, and has a mean of 6.32 years.

*GDP per Capita*

The control variable GDP per capita can be perceived as a proxy for a state's political instability or weakness which is reflected by a "variation in wealth and income" (Gleditsch and Ruggeri, 2010, p. 340). The inclusion of this control is based on the theoretical assumptions that a low GDP per capita score can be linked to fewer economic opportunities for a state's population. This structural factor could make a state more prone to the onset of an armed conflict. This is in line with the argument that "poverty aids rebel recruitment" for armed violence (Bartusevičius and Gleditsch, 2019, p. 244). In sum, and in line with the overall theoretical assumptions of this thesis, it can be argued that a country with a low GDP per capita is more susceptible to the process of diffusion. Thus, the potential target country displays a higher likelihood of a conflict onset. The variable GDP per capita is taken from the World Bank Data which is available from 1960 until 2019 and is measured in US$.

*Cold War*

A dummy variable to account for varying conflict dynamics during and after the Cold War will be employed. The dummy takes a value of one for every observation from 1989 until 2016. Years during the Cold-War period will be assigned a zero. This dummy was included to gauge whether Cold-War dynamics bear an influence on conflict onset.

The following section will provide an overview of how the case studies and the causal mechanism are set-up and how both will be examined.

### 4.2 Case Study: Process Tracing - Examining the Causal Mechanism

In line with the underlying assumptions of the research design, the purpose of the selected case studies is to unpack and assess a specific causal mechanism. Thus, examining the underlying causal mechanism linking X to Y, in a systematic manner, through the method of process tracing completes the research triad. This section of the analysis will combine within-case analysis of individual cases and the comparative assessments of a small number of cases, more precisely three cases will be examined. This strategy has been chosen due to the notion that inference can best be drawn from case studies that make "use of a combination of within-case analysis and cross-case comparison within a single study or research program" (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 18). In addition to applying this combinatory design to case study research, one of George and Bennett's six distinct objectives to theory-building research can be identified. For the purpose of this thesis, case studies will be utilised to test the mechanism proposed, through process tracing.

Process tracing as a research method originates from the study area of cognitive psychology, where its essential meaning refers to "the examination of intermediate steps in a process to make inference about hypotheses on how that process took place and whether and how it generated the outcome of interest" (Bennett and Checkel, 2014, p. 6). In contrast, process tracing in the realm of political science displays a more evidence-based focus, where the main objective can be described as twofold: hypotheses about causal claims are either developed, or they are tested (Bennett and Checkel, 2014, p. 7). As established above the mechanism within this context will be tested and traced through process tracing. The case studies are designed with the objective to test the three hypotheses which are relatively untested. The claim that an armed conflict in one location alters the likelihood of an armed conflict erupting in a location nearby has been tested statistically. However, the specific causal mechanism that should be investigated to establish causation between two armed conflicts has not been assessed. Thus, one the one hand cross-case co-variational patterns have already been delineated. On the other hand, however, the assessment and the clarification of the mechanism linking X to Y has not taken place. The impact of external support as well as the presence of mercenaries as contributing factors to the spread of armed

conflict have not been analysed, or assessed within one coherent theoretical framework.

This thesis follows a three-part standard when it comes to a beneficial application of process tracing: meta-theoretical, contextual, and methodological (Bennett and Checkel, 2014, p. 7). The main objectives relating to this study will be theory elaboration and refinement as well as the assessment of casual effects.

In sum, the qualitative method of process tracing bears several advantages concerning the generation of within-case inference through the assessment of causal mechanisms. Meaningful case study research and substantial process tracing efforts are closely linked with regard to an evidence based documentation of complex interactions (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 22). In that sense, complex interactions can be formulated through causal mechanisms, where each part of the mechanism is described through an intervening variable. The following section discusses the concept of causal mechanisms in more detail. In addition, the specific causal mechanism for the process of armed conflict diffusion put forward in the theory chapter will also be discussed.

*Causal Mechanism*

Causal mechanisms are an integral part of qualitative and case study research, and is "about cultivating sensitivity to a local context" (Gerring, 2007, p. 48). The baseline definition applied for causal mechanisms is that a casual mechanism can be described as a "pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished" (Gerring, 2008, p. 178). This definition suggests that causal mechanisms can be perceived as sufficient, in some contexts, to bring about a certain outcome (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 136). In other words, researchers investigating causal mechanisms have to be aware of the possibility that there are most certainly other mechanisms at play which produce the same outcome. Moreover, the onset of armed conflict does not always display a transnational dimension. With regard to the spread of conflict, other pathways leading to the onset of an armed conflict, within an adjunct country or in the neighbourhood, cannot be ignored. Hence, the possibility or phenomenon of equifinality, in other words, the argument of "causal substitutability" (Gerring, 2007, p. 123) has to be taken into consideration. Multiple paths that lead to the same outcome have to be considered as a common phenomenon. However, equifinality "could threaten inferences based on comparisons of small numbers of

cases" (Bennett and Checkel, 2014, p. 19). At this point another advantage of process tracing reveals itself. Through the employment of process tracing viable explanations, such as particular causal mechanisms, within specific cases can be assessed and confirmed (Bennett and Checkel, 2014). By confirming the proposed mechanism for individual cases, one accounts for equifinality but simultaneously validates the theorised explanation for the outcome under investigation. An additional benefit of working with causal mechanisms in single case studies is the ability to investigate a fairly large number of (intervening) variables. Therefore, the overall aim of a causal mechanisms is to establish or construct a chain of evidence to assess how the specific cause X has come to produce a particular outcome Y.

*Table 10: Causal Mechanism: Opportunity, Willingness, & Mobilisation*

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Cause<br>(Host - A)<br><br>Civil War</td><td>Opportunity<br><br>Shared land border</td><td rowspan="2">Mobilisation<br><br>Fighters from host conflict or the wider region hired by political elites to support insurgency in target state<br><br>OR<br><br>Fighters from host conflict or the wider region driven to target state by prospect of loot</td><td rowspan="2">Outcome<br>(Target - B)<br><br>Civil War Onset</td></tr>
<tr><td>Willingness<br><br>Transnational Alliance: Regional Governments/ regional elites support rebellion in target state</td></tr>
</table>

Each point of the chain is treated as condition that helps to conceptualise or establish the relationship between the independent and dependent variable. The causal pathway delineated for the analysis of conflict diffusion is presented in Table 10. A n*eighbour at war*, a *transnational alliance*, and the *mobilisation of mercenaries* are considered sufficient for the outcome - *conflict onset* - to become more likely. However, it is of importance to consider and address the structural context of a potential target state. States within a neighbourhood differ with regard to the susceptibility to diffusion processes. Hence, some states can be considered more receptive to an armed conflict eruption than others. The features/parts presented in Table 10 lie spatially and/or

temporally between the independent and the dependent variable. One has to bear in mind that these features also portray an independent effect in the nature, timing, or magnitude of the dependent variable.

The empirical manifestation of the variables constituting the causal mechanisms, such as shared borders, the provision of external support, and the mobilisation of mercenaries, have already be addressed in the statistical part of this research methods chapter. The measurement of these variables will portray a similar set-up. The advantage of using a mixed methods framework is that for case study research one can employ a "great variety of techniques - both quantitative and qualitative - for gathering and analysis of evidence" (Gerring, 2007, p. 32). Thus, correlations between independent and dependent variables found through the statistical analysis can be used to manifest empirical findings in the procedure of process tracing. However, to produce in-depth case studies, it is of relevance to consult, primary and secondary accounts that describe the play of events in this period. For example, especially for analysing the presence or absence of mercenaries, primary sources such as newspapers are analysed.

The next sub-section will present the case selection technique in more detail, and introduces the cases selected.

*Case selection*

"One of the most important functions of case study research is the elucidation of causal mechanisms" (Gerring, 2007, p. 122). For the purpose of this study the techniques for choosing cases is the pathway. The aim is to identify, trace and probe the causal mechanism that links conflict A in a host state to conflict B in a potential target state. Pathway cases are cases that "uniquely penetrate(s) insight into causal mechanisms" (Gerring, 2007, p. 122). Thus, pathway cases are cases where "the casual factor of interest, X1, correctly predicts Y's positive value" (Gerring, 2007, p. 125). The causal mechanism is assessed in a scenario were causes can be perceived as present. Cases were selected in order to assess whether the mechanism is viable across time and sub-regions.

By taking a closer look at the dataset built for the statistical analysis the data shows that on the Sub-Saharan continent between 1980 and 2016 a total number of

84[17] conflict-onsets can be detected. From these 84 conflict-onsets I could identify 12 potential cases of conflict diffusion where all three variables were present: a neighbouring country at war, a transnational alliance[18] and mercenaries. This assessment provided a first indication of the universe of cases. However, it is of relevance to mention that the indicator of neighbour at war does not evaluate whether the conflict is linked to the new conflict onset. Neither does this first indication of cases capture the aspect of post-conflict diffusion. By further examining the 12 potential cases of conflict diffusion as theorised in the Opportunity, Willingness, and Mobilisation framework, I selected two cases. One conflict onset post-cold-war and one onset during the Cold War: Zaire in 1996 and the Second Sudanese civil war erupting in 1983, covering the regions of Central and East Africa. The third case was selected by analysing four remaining cases that indicated that a transnational alliance and mercenaries were present, but the conflict in a neighbouring state fell under the threshold of 25 battle-death and was therefore categorised as terminated. The final case study selected will examine the conflict onset in Sierra Leone in 1991, West Africa.

*Table 11: Selection of Case Studies*

| | **Armed Conflict** (Host) | **Shared Border** | **Transnational Alliance** | **Mobilisation of Mercenaries** | **Conflict Onset** (Target) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Case A** | 1st Liberian 1989-1996 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Sierra Leone RUF 1991 |
| **Case B** | Rwanda 1990-1994 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Zaire AFDL 1996 |
| **Case C** | Ethiopia 1973-1991 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2nd Sudanese SPLM/ SPLA 1983 |

Table 11 provides an overview of the three selected cases. The case studies are all structured similarly. After the analysis of the internal conflict in the host country, the linkages between the host country's warring parties with the potential target country's armed groups will be delineated. In the following steps the presence of the explanatory

[17] 1140 observations in total, 1056 observations with no conflict onset.
[18] Data on transnational alliances is restricted and only available from 1980 until 2009.

variables will be established and assessed. Lastly, the conflict onset in the target country will be analysed. The case studies aim to trace the pathway that link two internal conflicts.

### 4.3 Summary

This chapter discussed this thesis' research design which is divided into three related aspects: the statistical analysis, the qualitative method of process tracing, and the presentation of the causal mechanism. The measurement of key explanatory and control variables was evaluated; the causal mechanism was introduced and the case selection procedure was delineated. The next chapter forms the first analytical chapter. A statistical assessment will be performed. The following chapter begins with an introduction to the overall patterns of mercenaries in Sub-Saharan Africa by providing an analysis of descriptive statistics. This is followed by the presentation of results from the logistic regression.

## 5. The Spread of Armed Conflict: A Statistical Assessment

The proposed framework of conflict diffusion based on the factors Opportunity, Willingness, and Mobilisation, assumes that besides the condition of shared borders and the feature of transnational alliances, the mobilisation of mercenaries is a central variable to explain cases of internal conflict diffusion in Sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, the novel element of this diffusion framework is the possibility to statistically assess the impact of mercenaries on the likelihood of a new civil war onset.[19] Therefore, this chapter has two key intentions. Firstly, patterns of the involvement of mercenaries in Sub-Saharan African internal conflicts, thus their activities, will be evaluated. The objective is to map out the African market for force to provide a deeper understanding of the non-state conflict actor, the mercenary. Secondly, a logistic regression including the framework's key explanatory variables will be performed. As part of the mixed method research design, the statistical assessment will provide a first indication of whether a correlation between the proposed independent variables and my dependent variable *conflict onset*, can be established.

### 5.1 Patterns of the Sub-Saharan African Market for Force

Data on the market for force is generally centred on the presence and activities of PMSCs. This is most likely due to the dominance of corporate actors on the market for force, but could also be due to the greater availability of data on local and international companies. Between 1980 and 2016, 1222 (77%) commercial exchange events were recorded for corporate entities. In contrast, 374 (23%) exchange events fall into the category of mercenary activities, as illustrated in Figure 2. However, 561 out of 1222 of the recorded events for corporate actors are related to the provision of security tasks, such as the protection of embassies or government buildings. Therefore, it is very likely that these kinds of events are irrelevant when it comes to the assessment of how PMSCs affect conflict dynamics. Whereas 255 out of the 374 events documented for mercenaries indicate the provision of combat operations. In comparison only 27 records specify the provision of combat operations for corporate actors. This pattern

[19] Data on the other two explanatory variables assessed in this framework, such as neighbour at war and external support were generated from two already existing datasets, as described in more detail in the research design chapter of this thesis.

indicated that mercenaries are more involved in ongoing armed conflicts than corporate actors are.

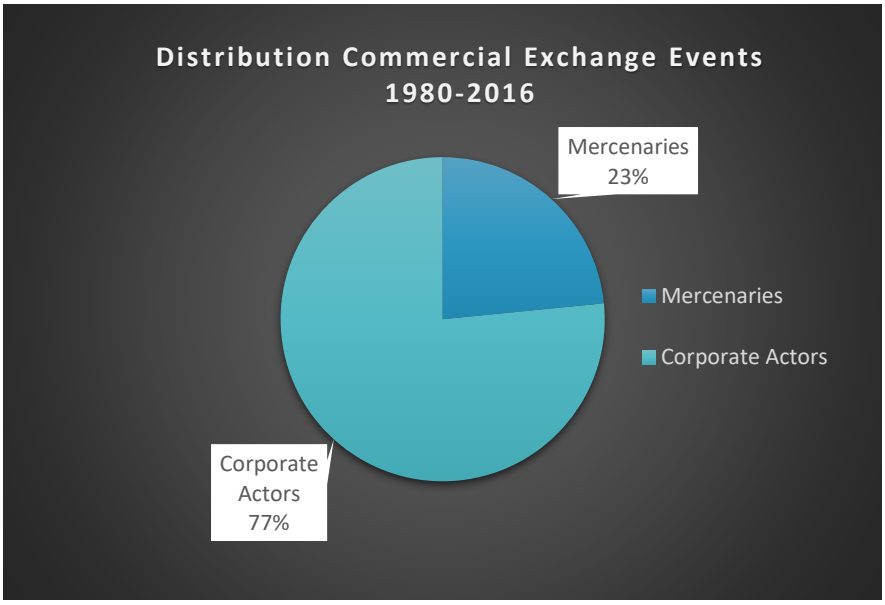


*Figure 2: Distribution Commercial Exchange Events*[20]

In addition, the scholarly world still has only limited access and availability of datasets focusing on PMSCs and mercenaries. As of now three datasets have been constructed. Baranovic and Chojnacki (2011) gathered and provided data on PMSCs in failing and weak states from 1990-2007. Musah and Fayemi (2000) recorded instances of PMSCs and mercenary involvement in Africa from the 1950s until the 1990s. Avant and Neu (2019) collected data on PMSCs activities across Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia using a time frame from 1990 until 2012. One can conclude that each of these datasets has its own timely and regional limitations, but more precisely data on mercenaries' activities past the time period of the 1990s is not available at all. Thus, there is the issue of a lack of data on how mercenaries affect internal conflicts. Mercenaries' activities in armed conflict have predominantly been analysed through in-depth case studies, such as Mobutu's White Legion in former Zaire (Fitzsimmons, 2012).

This data gap was addressed by the Commercial Military Actors Dataset (CMAD)[21]. The CMAD comprehensively collects data on CMAs, i.e. mercenary and PMSCs activities in internal conflicts between 1980 and 2016, covering civil wars and

[20] n = 1569
[21] The CMAD is a Gerda-Henkel-Foundation funded project at the University of Liverpool.

armed conflicts across five different world regions. More specifically data is provided for the following regions: Africa; Latin America and the Caribbean; East Asia and the Pacific; the Middle East; and South Asia. Thus, the CMAD is a crucial leap forward regarding the availability of data on mercenaries, as well as PMSCs.

*Table 12: Commercial Military Actors*

| **Commercial Military Actors** | |
|---|---|
| Mercenaries | Private Military and Security Companies |

Before presenting key patterns, a brief introduction of the data collection process and the conceptualisation of a commercial exchange event will be discussed. The data collection process began with performing a key word searches on the newspaper repository LexisNexis. Search terms such as 'military contractors', 'security contractors', 'military firm', 'security firm', 'military company, 'security company', 'military outsourcing', 'mercenary', 'mercenaries', 'dogs of war' plus the respective country, were used (Petersohn *et al.*, 2017, p. 19). The searches performed for the individual countries yielded a vast amount of results, ranging from 55 results for Lesotho to more than 3000 articles for Guinea-Bissau. Yet, a lot of these articles could be discarded since they were unrelated, off topic or too unspecific. The first crucial task was to identify relevant sources which contained the information of interest. Once all relevant news sources were identified, the information of potentially several sources, were merged into an exchange event. In a final step, information on specific exchange events were coded[22].

The CMAD focuses on exchange events based on a client-agent relationship. More precisely, a commercial exchange event is composed of the *year*, the information on the *client*, and the information on the *agent*, the CMA. Beyond providing the information on the presence or absence of the agent, additional information regarding the CMA's organisational structure; the services provided; or the consumer, were gathered. As a final point, one has to acknowledge that basing our data on newspaper reports makes the database subject to media bias. This could be problematic since either locally noteworthy events could be left aside or because it might be difficult for

[22] For more detailed information of this process please consult the Commercial Military Actors in Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook.

reporters to assess the presence of mercenaries and PMSCs during an ongoing conflict. Thus, researchers should be aware of the issue/limitation of under-reporting.

The next subsection will present patterns of mercenary activities in African conflicts. Yet, to acquire a better understanding of how the African market for force is composed I will also include and present data concerning the presence and activities of PMSCs.

Data gathered on mercenary and PMSCs activities in Sub-Saharan Africa, as part of the CMAD, reveals patterns concerning this particular regional market for force. The findings corroborate general trends presented in the literature, such as the increase of CMAs activities over time. New patterns at the heart of the African market for force, such as regional differences on the continent or the key consumer base, will also be revealed.

The findings presented below are based on an originally compiled dataset that makes use of the documents and information gathered for the creation of the CMAD. However, to ensure consistency across the 32 African states included in this database no additional events found in secondary literature were added. The dataset is focused on mercenary and PMSC activities in Sub-Saharan Africa. This regional dataset is the first of its kind presenting a comprehensive account of mercenary and PMCS activities on the African continent between 1980 and 2016. The reason for not making use of the CMAD is based on one key difference: the way mercenaries are conceptualised. For the CMAD to create an exchange event, a client and a contractual relationship have to be established. However, the data on mercenaries in armed conflict can be scant. Thus, the threshold to create an event for my dataset is lower. An exchange event was established if a predominant intent for financial or economic gain was reported (Pattison, 2014). This lower threshold makes it possible to include instances where mercenary activities are reported, but a specific contract delineating the terms and conditions of the services provided was not identified in the manner a corporate actor would be expected to do.

A first pattern that corroborates the general trend within the debate around CMAs, is the increasing number of services provided by these particular kind of non-state actors. Hence, Figure 3 presents the aggregated number of commercial exchange events over time and shows a continuous rise. This finding is not surprising, since the end of the Cold War is perceived as being at the centre of the emergence of the

privatised military industry (Singer, 2003, p. 49). The commonly cited security gap at the end of the superpower rivalry created opportunities to privatise national security sectors. The security gap was addressed with the formation of PMSCs seeking to generate profit offering the provision of military services.

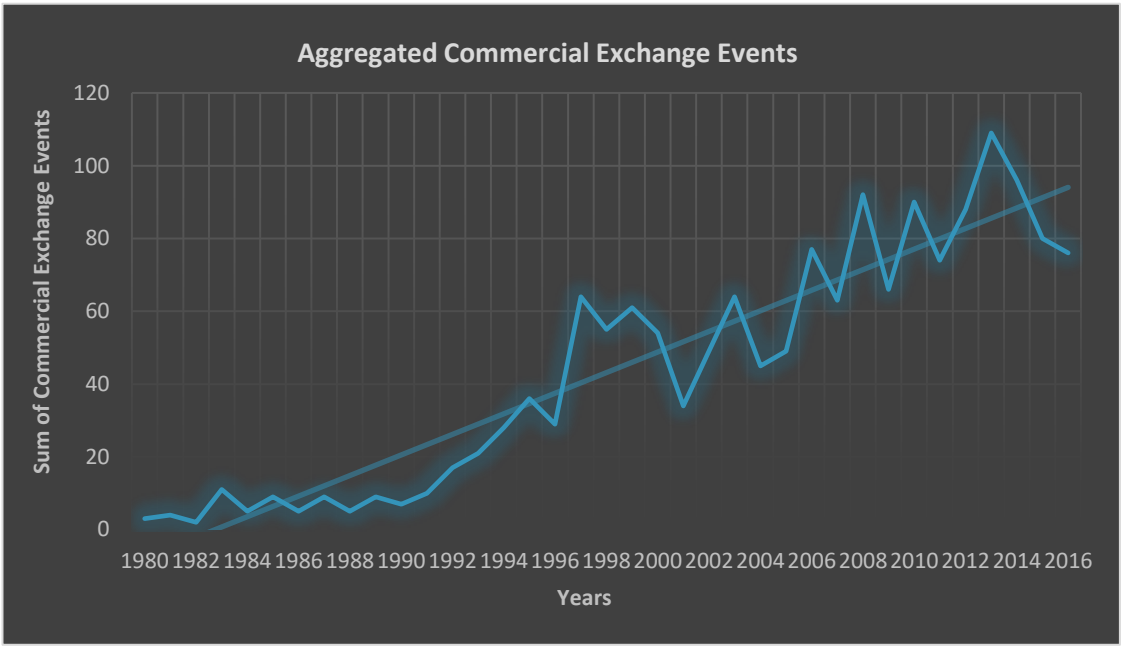


*Figure 3: Aggregated Commercial Exchange Events*[23]

The most prominent and frequently cited example of PMSCs activities in Africa during the 1990s is the South African company Executive Outcomes (EO). EO was hired by the Angolan government in 1992 in their struggle against UNITA and by the Sierra Leonean government in 1995 combating RUF. PMSCs are generally considered as highly professional corporate actors. Nonetheless, PMSCs have also frequently been associated with a number of human right abuses (Avant and Neu, 2019), which taints the corporate and highly professional picture so often painted. Yet there was CMA activity prior to the 1990s, beginning as early as the 1950s, and thus, with the start of the decolonisation period. Mercenaries were present and involved in African conflicts, as shown by Musah and Fayemi's (2000) data in 'Mercenaries: Africa's Experience 1950s-1990'. The original data presented records mercenary activities as early as 1980, whereas the first event recorded concerning corporate actors was detected in 1984.

Activities of corporate actors, which is a category that combines local and international companies, have continuously been on the rise (Figure 4). However,

[23] n = 1596

events recorded of mercenary activities seem to be rather stable over time, with a prominent peak of exchange events in the late 1990s. This peak was mainly driven by the involvement of mercenaries in three large scale civil wars, namely Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone. The second noticeable take up of mercenary activity around 2011 is primarily explained by the presence of Liberian mercenaries during the second armed conflict in Cote d'Ivoire.

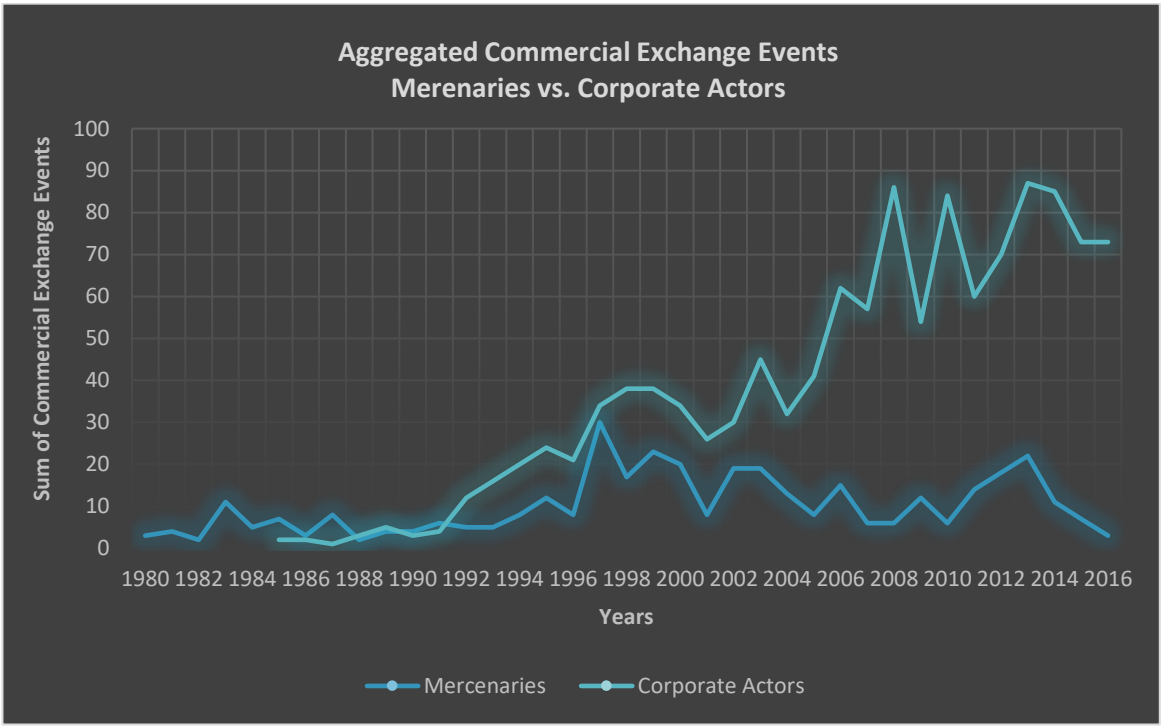


*Figure 4: Aggregated Commercial Exchange Events: Mercenaries vs. Corporate Actors*[24]

The data on how mercenaries are distributed across the African continent indicates that the sub-region of West Africa experienced the highest amount of mercenary activities, with around 45 percent of events taking place in West Africa (see Figure 5). This finding is supported by a Human Rights Watch Report from 2005 that highlighted the sub-regional dynamic of regional warriors/ mercenaries in West African conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Burkina Faso. At the centre of the investigation has been the "flow of arms and combatants across the fluid borders of West Africa" (Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 1). However, the number of West African states that experienced armed conflict, 13 in total, makes up nearly half of all the Sub-Saharan states that went through an internal conflict between 1980 and 2016, a total of 33 states.

[24] Mercenaries n = 374; Corporate Actors n = 1222

Regions such as the South and the East experienced a lower number of conflicts during the same time period. Thus, the presence of mercenaries is linked to the variable of conflict. This first indication will be further examined by taking a closer look at the type of service provided by mercenaries.

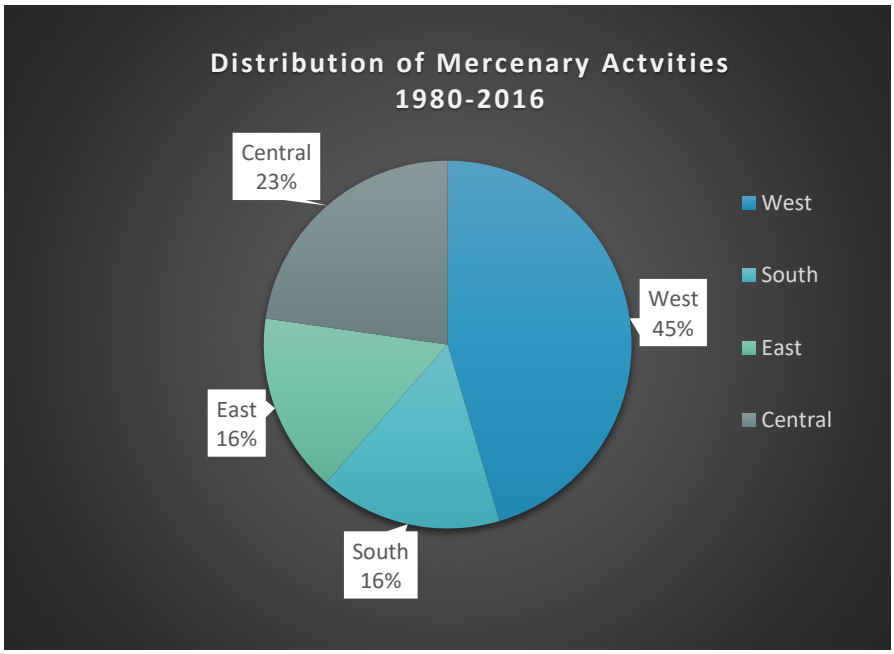


*Figure 5: Distribution of Mercenary Activities across Sub-Saharan African sub-Regions*[25]

The type or range of services provided by CMAs is a category by which these actors can be distinguished. The finding that mercenaries are frequently involved in conflict scenarios is further supported by Figure 6. In other words, mercenaries are predominantly hired to fight on behalf of their consumer. The range of services that CMAs provide is commonly characterised according to the "Tip of the Spear" typology, whereby services are categorised according to how close they are to the actual fighting. Thus, combat operations are at the tip of the spear indicating that they are at the forefront of the battlespace (Singer, 2003, p. 93). Consequently, services such as military logistics - the provision of transport for goods and equipment - or security tasks, are further away from the actual conflict theatre and are deemed to be closer to the rear of the spear. The CMAD categorises the provision of services across eleven different sets of tasks. The data indicates that 85 percent of tasks provided by mercenaries can be considered as at the tip of the spear (combat operations, military

[25] n = 374

consultancy, and military training). Therefore, mercenaries can be categorised as a violent non-state actor that can predominantly be placed in one specific area of service provision, the provision of military tasks. Mercenaries can be perceived as force multipliers for their respective consumers, either directly through combat engagement or indirectly through the provision of military training. Consequently, a finding is that the type of service provided by mercenaries in Africa varies very little.

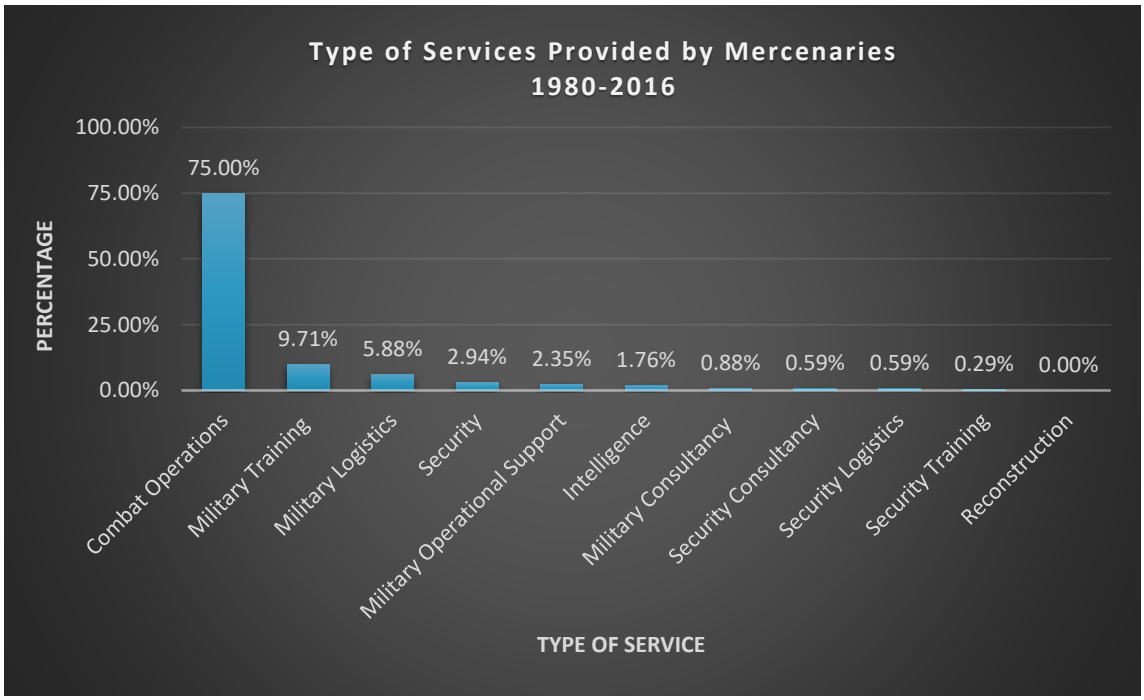


*Figure 6: Types of Services Provided by Mercenaries*[26]

Moreover, the original data presented aims to provide a better understanding of the types of consumers that are associated with mercenaries. By taking a closer look at the distribution of consumers of mercenary services in Africa the data shows that the category of *opposition* is the most common consumer of mercenary services, closely followed by the category of *national government*.

The consumer category *opposition* captures only those opposition parties who have been identified as a party of conflict by UCDP/PRIO (Gleditsch *et al.*, 2002). In other words, rebel groups and national governments have a demand to use mercenaries to fight alongside them. This pattern is a first indication that supports the theoretical assumptions delineated in this thesis: mercenaries are used to improve military

[26] n = 374

capabilities in combat settings. With regard to the variable of interest, thus, conflict onset, one can argue that the mobilisation of additional/ external fighters could increase the likelihood of a civil war onset.

By taking the figures for the most common consumers for PMSC services into consideration, the data paints a different picture. The findings corroborate assumptions from the scholarly body of PMSC research. The most common consumer of PMSCs services are national governments. National governments in Africa consume twice as many PMSCs services (321 exchange events) in comparison to services provided by mercenaries (124 exchange events). Rebel groups, on the other hand, have consumed 5 times the amount of mercenary services (127 exchange events) in contrast to service provision of PMSCs (25 exchange events).

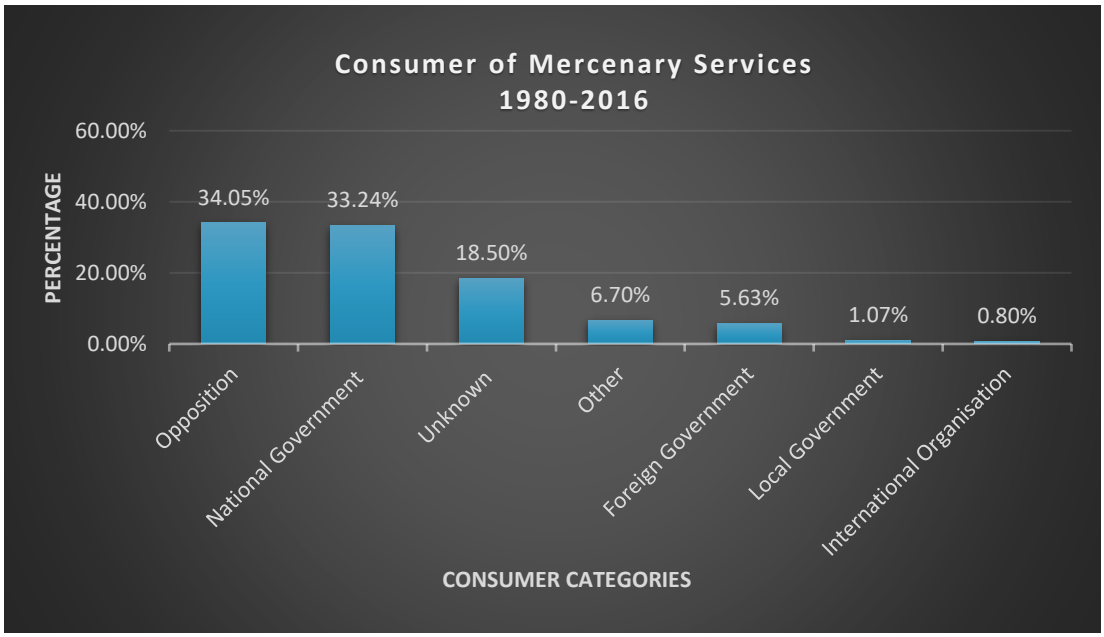


*Figure 7: Consumers of Mercenary Services*[27]

However, for both categories' mercenaries and PMSCs national governments and rebel groups are the key consumers. In third place, when it comes to the consumers of mercenary services, are foreign governments. These are documented exchanges where mercenary services were consumed by a foreign government active in an internal conflict. Two examples of such cases would be the government of South Africa contracting mercenaries to fight for them in the Angolan civil war, or the government of Libya hiring mercenaries to participate in the Chadian internal conflict. The

[27] n = 374

exchange events recorded for the consumer category of international organisations are three events where the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) is indicated as the consumer. ECOMOG was a group of multilateral armed forces that was active in the Sierra Leonean civil war, a group that was established in 1990 by the regional organisation: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Lastly, one has to acknowledged that for nearly 20 percent of the exchange events recorded a consumer could not be identified.

A similar situation is detectable when examining the clientele data of mercenary services. For this category the number of unidentifiable cases of clients is even higher and lies, as shown in Figure 8, at 35 percent of all clients detected. The client side is distinct to the consumer base, due to the aspect that clients can pay for services but they are not necessarily consuming themselves.

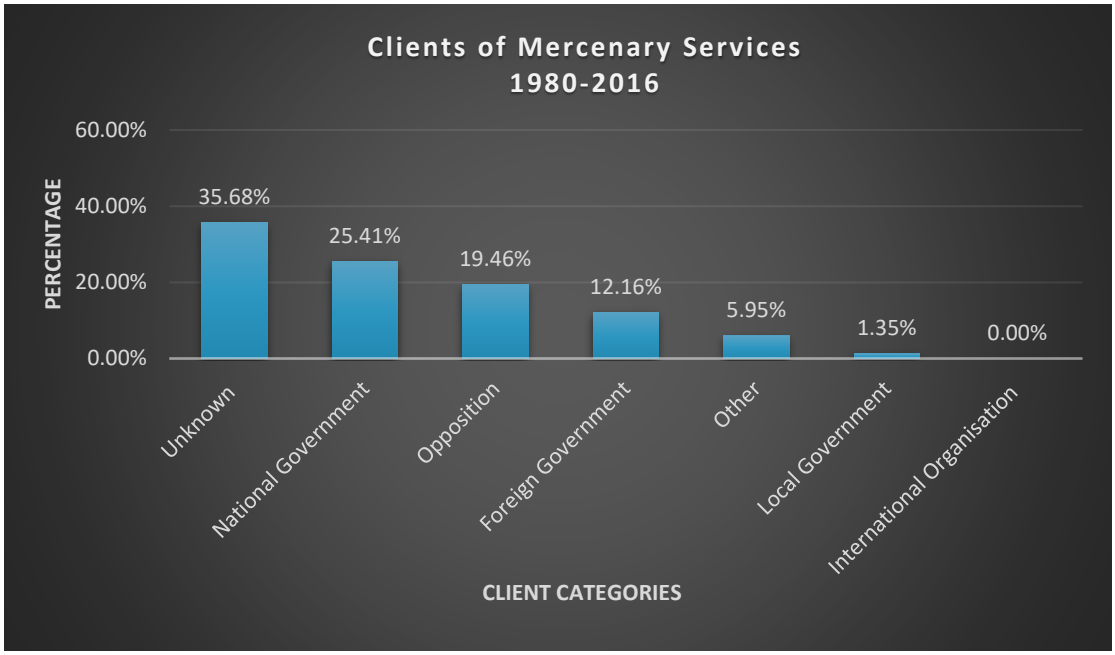


*Figure 8: Clients of Mercenary Services*[28]

When comparing data on the consumer base (Figure 7) and the client base (Figure 8) one detects a difference in the category of foreign government. By looking at the data one could argue that foreign governments pay and hire mercenary services for the consumption of a national government or an opposition, which is most likely involved in an armed conflict. Furthermore, one can detect that data on the consumer category provides a more complete picture than the client category. The limited data on the

[28] n = 371

client category might be due to the notion that clients who hire mercenaries, either for their own benefit or for a third party, prefer to be able to plausibly deny having hired them.

A final variable of interest is the origin of the operator/mercenary. In other words, where do mercenaries that are external to a civil war come from? First of all, one can detect an evolution of the conflict-actor mercenary over time. Mercenaries in the 1960s and early 1980s, compared to mercenaries in the 1980s and beyond, vary greatly in their origin. Thus, mercenaries active in former Zaire, for instance, hired by the Congolese Prime Minister Moïse Tshombe in 1964 were led by 'Mad Mike' Hoare an "Irish born, former British Army commando officer" (Dodenhoff, 1969, p. 49). Further recruits were mostly European from countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Greece, and Italy. However, there were also African recruits from South Africa and the Rhodesian regime; regimes that were known for conducting a "policy of white supremacy and racial segregation" (Dodenhoff, 1969, p. 50). Thus, white mercenary forces formed the backbone of Tshombe's recruits. In less than three weeks over 1000 men were ready to fight in the Congo (Dodenhoff, 1969, p. 52). A similar line of recruitment was performed by the Rhodesian Government from 1956 until 1980, whereas mostly former UK soldiers were recruited to support the "white minority rule against Mugabe's ZANU and Nkomo's ZIPRA" (A. F. Musah and Fayemi, 2000, p. 266).

From the 1990s onwards however, there seems to have been a shift regarding the origin of mercenaries active in Sub-Saharan-Africa. Although European mercenaries are still present, the majority of 'soldiers for fortune' are from African states. Thus, more than 60 percent of the mercenary services provided to rebel groups and national governments are provided by mercenaries from Africa (Figure 9). By comparing this data to Musah and Fayemi's account of mercenary activities in the 1960s and 1970s, there seems to have been a shift in the operator origin. From predominantly European mercenaries in the 1960s and 1970s, who have also been labelled vagabond mercenaries, to a more localised market for force and potentially the phenomenon described as regional warriors (Human Rights Watch, 2005). Consequently, mercenaries from other regions beyond Europe and Africa do not seem to play a role on the African market for force. Thus, I argue that the market for force has become more local or regional.

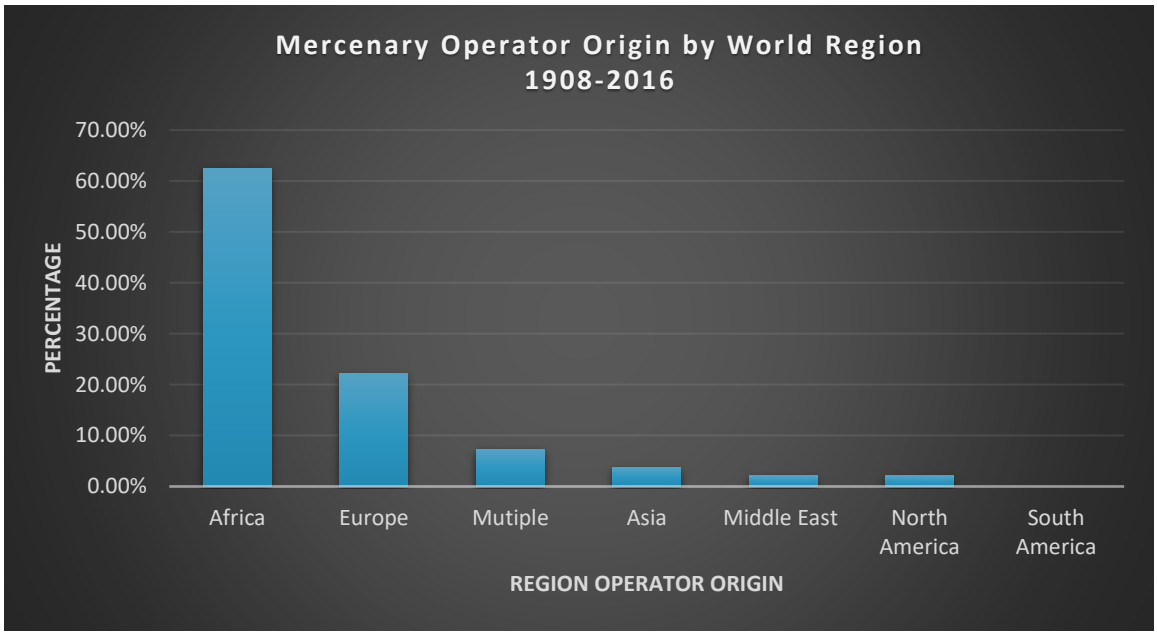


*Figure 9: Mercenary Operator Origin by World Region*[29]

This trend can also be corroborated by taking a closer look at the origin of corporate actors/PMSCs between 1980 and 2016. The number of local private security and military providers based in Sub-Saharan Africa has risen over time. The total number of commercial exchange events provided by corporate actors between 1980 and 2016 is 1222 events, as shown in Figure 2. From these 1222 exchange events, 613 instances are in the category of firms based in Africa. This means that 50.16 percent of the commercial exchange events recorded and categorised as a corporate actor have their company origin in Africa. The next most common with 324 exchanges (26.51 percent) were companies based in Europe and 139 exchanges (11.37 percent) of companies from North America, mainly the US.[30] Thus, a total of 793 events (613 local companies plus 180 African mercenaries) which are 50 percent of all commercial exchange events recorded for Sub-Saharan Africa, are categorised as being provided by local actors. Accordingly, the regional market for force seems to be predominantly operated by African private security service providers.

This section provided an overview of key findings of original data concerning the presences and undertakings of mercenaries in Sub-Saharan-Africa between 1980 and 2016. Key findings are summarised in the following section.

[29] n=288; for 86 exchange events the origin of mercenaries is coded unknown.
[30] For 92 commercial exchange events the origin of the company could not be determined.

Summary of Key Findings

This descriptive statistic section provides a first overview regarding the actor *mercenary*. In total six key findings can be delineated: (1) The number of mercenary related exchange events seems to have been stable over time, in contrast to a rise of exchange events recorded for corporate actors; (2) The sub-region of West Africa accounts for the most mercenary exchange events recorded; (3) Types of services provided by mercenaries vary very little. 85 percent of services provided are considered at the tip of the spear; (4) Mercenary services are almost as frequently consumed by national governments as by rebel groups; (5) The clientele base is more diversified than the consumer base, with foreign governments being more involved in the hiring process, rather than the consumption of services; (6) The majority - 60 percent - of CMAs that are hired have African origin. Overall, one has to acknowledge that the data concerning the client and consumer category is scant to some extent. For most exchange events recorded it is an either-or situation: either information on the client or on the consumer seems to be available. Exchange events portraying the whole range of information are rather rare.

The following section will provide a statistical analysis of the Opportunity, Willingness, and Mobilisation framework, investigating the three hypotheses delineated theoretically.

### 5.2 Analysis of Conflict Diffusion

To examine the three hypotheses of conflict diffusion, I made use of a logistic regression, since the dependent variable of conflict onset is binary (onset/no onset). The independent variables included in these analyses are as follows: neighbour at war (ongoing conflict in neighbouring state); transnational alliance (indirect external support to rebel group); mercenaries (mobilisation of mercenary forces). The total number of observations ranges between 881 and 1064. This is due to the restriction of data available for the variable transnational alliance - data is only available until 2009. The aim of this section is to assess the relationship between the key explanatory variables of diffusion and the likelihood of a conflict onset. Through the statistical assessment a first indication of an overall pattern of conflict diffusion can be delineated. Thus, the crucial purpose of the statistical assessment is to establish correlation and not per-se causation. Four distinct models were calculated, as shown

in table 13. Across the four models presented, the theorised explanatory variables remain statistically significant. In the following the four models presented will be analysed in more detail, beginning with Model 1.

*Table 13: Armed Conflict Onset, 1980 to 2016*

| | **Model (1)** | **Model (2)** | **Model (3)** | **Model (4)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Neighbours at War** | .9118689 ** | .788442* | 1.008347** | .881541* |
| | (0.005) | (0.029) | (0.002) | (0.013) |
| **Transnational Alliance** | | 2.743668*** | | 2.462652*** |
| | | (0.000) | | (0.000) |
| **Mercenaries** | | | 1.50153*** | 1.115252** |
| | | | (0.000) | (0.001) |
| **Regime Type** | .180143 | .4544394 | .2420315 | .489748* |
| | (0.405) | (0.064) | (0.282) | (0.049) |
| **GDP/Capita (ln)** | -.1530718 | 3.53e-07 | -.1948701 | -.0113834 |
| | (0.348) | (1.000) | (0.231) | (0.955) |
| **Cold War** | .3733777 | -.0170529 | .1029452 | -.2072247 |
| | (0.324) | (0.962) | (0.792) | (0.582) |
| **Peace Years** | .1742728 | .538853*** | .2836169** | .5699479*** |
| | (0.059) | (0.000) | (0.003) | (0.000) |
| **Peace Years Squared** | -.0175027 | -.0392132*** | -.0253988** | -.0414964*** |
| | (0.056) | (0.001) | (0.005) | (0.000) |
| **Peace Years Cube** | .0004093 | .000761*** | .0005616** | .0007949*** |
| | (0.059) | (0.002) | (0.008) | (0.001) |
| **Constant** | -3.076559** | -5.964512*** | -3.382022*** | -6.09903*** |
| | (0.002) | (0.000) | (0.001) | (0.000) |
| ***N*** | 1,064 | 881 | 1,064 | 881 |

Note: Logistic regression estimates with absolute z scores in parentheses.
Legend: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Model 1 investigates the general assumption of conflict diffusion, which is whether a neighbour at war impacts the likelihood of a consequent conflict onset at home; in other words, in a potential target state. At the heart of the argument is the notion that shared borders are a relevant precondition concerning interaction opportunities between distinct states and non-state actors. The spread of conflict is facilitated across state borders, and therefore shared borders are inherent to the process of diffusion. Indeed, the findings suggest that a *neighbour at war* impacts the likelihood of a conflict to erupt, at a statistical significance level of p<.01 (Table 13). By examining the odds ratios in more detail for the variables studied in Model 1, as shown in Figure 10, one can conclude that a neighbour experiencing a conflict can be associated with higher odds of the outcome - conflict onset. The odds ratio is at 2.49, which indicates a

positive relationship which means that as neighbour at war increases the odds for a target state of experiencing a conflict increases. This can be interpreted as having a neighbour at war puts a target state at 2.5 times greater odds of experiencing a conflict onset. The 95% confidence interval depicts a low level of precision since its range is quite large. However, this particular finding in itself is not novel. The variable *neighbour at war* was assessed by several authors (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008; Forsberg, 2014a; Bara, 2017). Nevertheless this finding portrays the first building block for a further detailed assessment of the proposed diffusion mechanism.

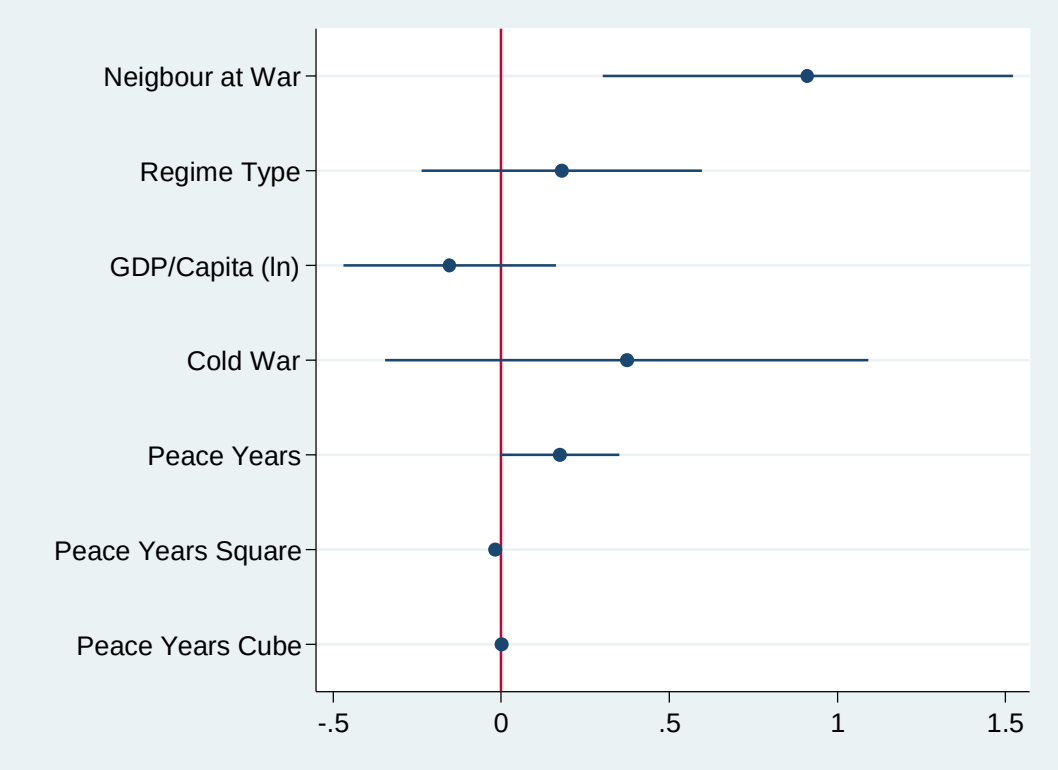


*Figure 10: Odds Ratio Model 1*

None of the control variables were significant in Model 1, which is contrary to prior findings that suggest that a state's regime type impacts its susceptibility of a conflict onset through the process of diffusion (Maves and Braithwaite, 2013). In sum, the statistical results presented confirm Hypothesis 1. Thus, a correlation between a neighbouring state experiencing a conflict and increased odds of a subsequent conflict onset in a target state can be established.

Model 2 assess the assumption delineated in Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 claims that the formation of transnational alliances to facilitate the provision of indirect support

from regional elites to rebel groups in a potential target state increases the likelihood of a conflict onset. Indirect support refers to a range of external backing, but is short of sending in a state's armed forces. The provision of armed forces from an external actor in support of a rebel group falls under the category of direct support and conflict intervention. Indirect support to rebel movements entails support such as financial assistance, the supply of weapons or military equipment, the provision of access to territory/sanctuaries, or the delivery of logistical support. The formation of a transnational alliance, in contrast to the condition of shared borders, is a deliberate foreign policy choice by a state and the rebel movement which receives the outside backing. Thus, it incorporates the second element of the diffusion framework: Willingness.

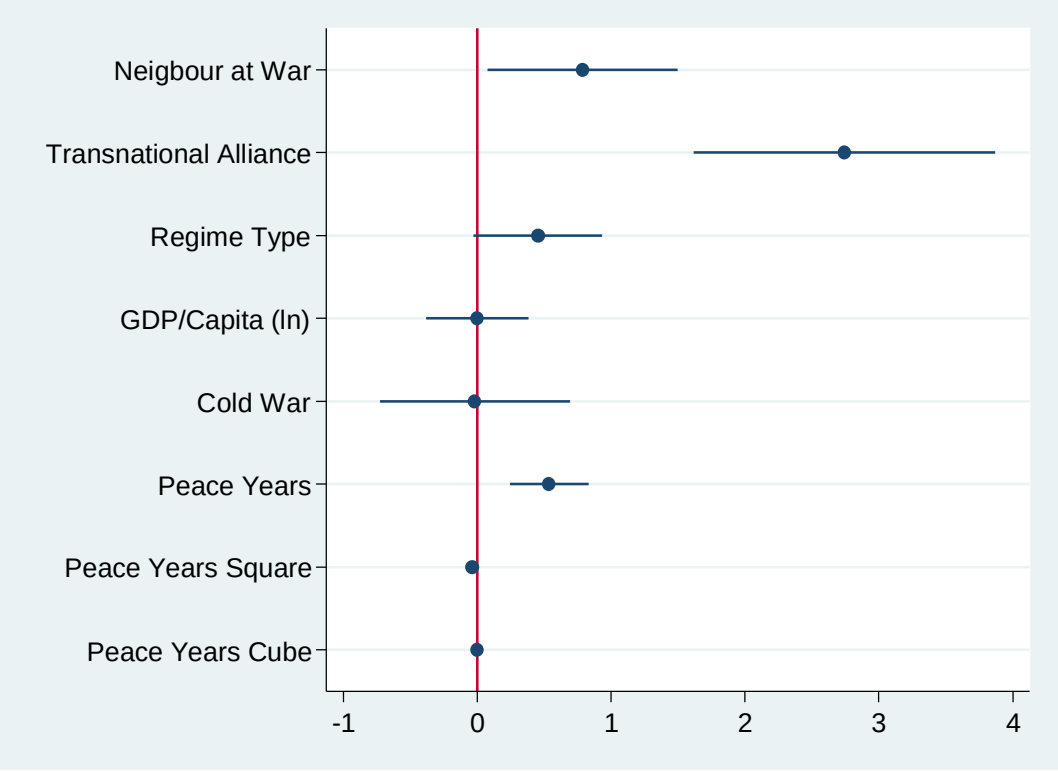


*Figure 11: Odds Ratio Model 2*

The result of statistical analysis indicates a correlation between the existence of a transnational alliance and an increased likelihood of a conflict onset (Table 13). Hence, according to the regression results hypothesis two can be confirmed. For Model 2, the variables of *neighbour at war* and the set of *peace years* controls are statistically significant. However, similarly to the results from Model 1, none of the other control variables are of statistical significance.

By examining the odds ratios for Model 2, as shown above in Figure 11, the statistically significant variable *neighbour at war* can be perceived as a risk factor for conflict onset, since the variable portrays a positive values greater than one, to be more precise an odds ratio of 2.19 (see appendix). The odds ratio for the independent variable *transnational alliance* is at 15.54, which indicates a substantial increase in the odds for a conflict erupting if a transnational alliance was formed.

Model 3 examines claims posited in Hypothesis 3: The mobilisation of mercenaries in a potential target state increases the likelihood of an armed conflict to break out. The line of argument assumes that mercenary forces are able to act as force multipliers. Thus, one can reason that a rebel group's military capabilities are increased through the recruitment of mercenaries as additional forces, who provide combat and combat related services. Subsequently, through the availability of mercenaries, the likelihood for a rebel group to pursue its political aims through the use of violence is increased.

The mobilisation of mercenary forces displays a transnational character. This assumption is based on the statistical finding presented above (see descriptive statistics: operator origin) that indicates that mercenaries act predominantly on a regional level. It could be argued that conflicts generate future ex-combatants that sell their services on a regional market for force. According to the results from the logistic regression performed to assess hypothesis 3, one can detect a correlation between the mobilisation of mercenaries and a civil war onset in a target state. Moreover, the explanatory variable *mercenaries* yields an odds ratio of 4.49, which indicates that the presence of mercenaries puts a target state at nearly 5 times greater odds of experiencing a conflict onset, in comparison to states where no mercenaries are present. In addition, the variable *neighbour at war* is of statistical significance as well, similar to findings from Model 1 and Model 2.


*Figure 12: Odds Ratio Model 3*

The final logistic regression model, Model 4 includes all of the theorised explanatory variables. The findings remain stable. The variables *neighbour at war*; *transnational alliance*; and *mercenaries* are of statistical significance.

The odds ratios for Model 4 are presented in Figure 13. As in previous models the key explanatory variables have a positive impact on the dependent variable *conflict onset*. Each of the variables can be perceived as a risk factor. The odds ratio for the individual variables change when assessing them in a holistic model. The odds ratio for the variable *transnational alliances* decreased in value, from 15.54 in Model 2, to 11.74 in Model 4. Similarly, the odds ratio for *mercenaries* dropped from 4.49 in Model 3 to 3.05 in Model 4. In model 4 the variable regime type becomes significant. Other than that none of the control variables expect for *peace years* have statistical significance.

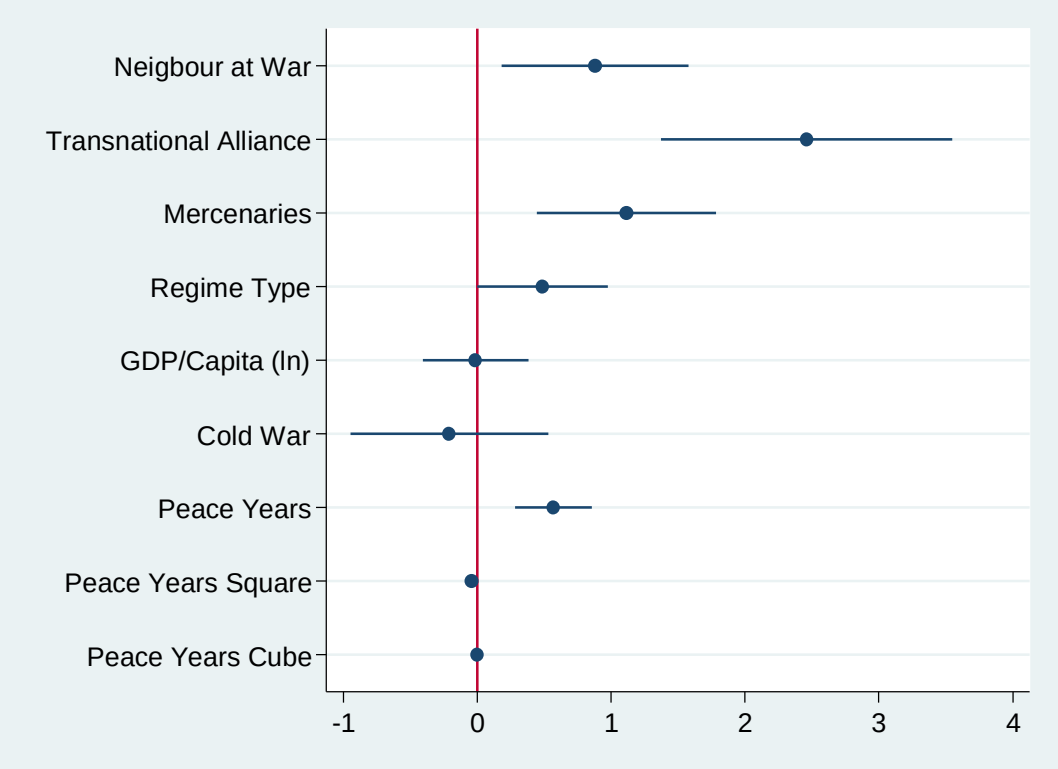


*Figure 13: Odds Ratio Model 4*

### 5.3 Summary

The results presented so far are evidence for a correlation between the theorised explanatory variables of conflict diffusion and a new civil war onset. Explanatory variables remained significant and stable across distinct models (see appendix for robustness checks and odds ratios). Table 14 provides an overview of the initial findings.

*Table 14: Hypotheses of Conflict Diffusion - Statistical Assessment*

| | Theory of Conflict Diffusion | Result |
|---|---|---|
| **Hypothesis ONE** | A neighbour at war increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in a potential target state. | Significant |
| **Hypothesis TWO** | A transnational alliance, between a regional state or non-state actor and a rebel group in a potential target state increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in the rebel group's home state. | Significant |
| **Hypothesis THREE** | The mobilisation of mercenaries on behalf of a rebel group in a potential target state increases the odds of an armed conflict onset. | Significant |

The three hypotheses can be confirmed. However, from the statistical assessment one cannot establish causation, or more specifically a time sequence. It could be the case that external support through the establishment of an alliance exists and a conflict onset is subsequently reported. Similarly, it could be that mercenaries are mobilised in the same year but are only present shortly after the initial onset. To further explore the validity of the hypothesised claims and to establish causation, I have conducted three in-depth case studies. The three case studies will analyse the causal mechanism and the according hypotheses of conflict diffusion. As delineated in my research methods chapter I will trace the mechanism of conflict diffusion for the conflict onsets in the following target states: Sierra Leone in 1991; Zaire in 1996;  and Sudan in 1983.

## 6. Testing the Mechanism of Armed Conflict Diffusion

The onset of a conflict can be considered a rare event; an event that is unlikely to occur by chance. Consequently, this thesis sets out to investigate one specific pathway to conflict onset: the process of diffusion. This chapter will provide three distinct case studies that trace the proposed mechanism. The three studies follow the same design, trying to establish causation through the method of process tracing. The first case that will be investigated looks at the transnational linkages between the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. This is followed by an analysis of the diffusion process between Rwanda and Zaire, today's Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Finally, the connection between the Ethiopian civil war and the second Sudanese conflict onset will be explored.[31]

### 6.1 The Spread of Conflict from Liberia to Sierra Leone: The RUF Insurgency

In 2001, after a decade of civil war, Sierra Leone was declared the least developed country in the world, being ranked last on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Program, 2003, p. 144). Nearly a decade later in 2019, and according to the latest figures from the UNDP the picture painted for Sierra Leone still looks bleak, being among the ten countries displaying the lowest human development; Sierra Leone was ranked 181 out of 189 (United Nations Development Program, 2019, p. 302). These figures give an initial indication concerning the devastating long-term repercussions of the extreme violence during the 1990's. An internal conflict that was sponsored and nurtured by Liberia's president, Charles Taylor. This case study employs the theoretical framework *Opportunity*, *Willingness*, and *Mobilisation* as outlined in Chapter Three of this thesis, to provide an explanation for the civil war onset in Sierra Leone, in 1991. Consequently, this study examines the causal link between two internal conflicts. The process of diffusion, whereby the 1989-1996 Liberian civil war altered the probability of an internal conflict erupting in its neighbouring country Sierra Leone, will be analysed. This particular case of diffusion is labelled as a case of *ongoing-conflict diffusion*. This is due to the characteristic that the Liberian civil war was not terminated at the point in time where conflict erupted in Sierra Leone. The case study will analyse the diffusion process by applying the

[31]How cases were selected is discussed in chapter 3.2 of this thesis.

theorised causal mechanism, as presented in table 15 below. Each of the three parts of this mechanism have been converted into testable hypotheses, which will be probed.

*Table 15: Causal Mechanism of Conflict Diffusion*

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Cause<br>(Host - A)<br><br>Civil War</td><td>Opportunity<br><br>Shared borders</td><td rowspan="2">Mobilisation<br><br>Mercenaries</td><td rowspan="2">Outcome<br>(Target - B)<br><br>Civil War Onset</td></tr>
<tr><td>Willingness<br><br>Transnational Alliance</td></tr>
</table>

This case study will begin by providing an overview of the conflict background and the most relevant conflict actors of the host conflict the first Liberian civil war. This will be followed by an analysis of the three individual parts of the mechanism: shared borders, transnational alliances, and mercenary mobilisation. Finally, an analysis of the conflict background and the consequential onset in Sierra Leone will be provided linking the cause to the outcome. This chapter will be concluded with a summary of the overall findings of this case study.

### 6.1.1 Cause: The First Liberian Civil War from 1989 until 1996

The first Liberian civil war is a host conflict: a potential trigger for a process of diffusion. The underlying causes behind the onset of an internal conflict in the host state, in this case, Liberia's civil war from 1989-1996, are relevant to fully comprehend the causal link between the two conflicts under investigation. Thus, this section will provide a brief account of why and how Charles Taylor and his rebel movement the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) sought to overthrow Samuel Doe's regime in December 1989. The origins of the first Liberian civil war will be discussed.

Samuel Doe came into power through a military coup in April 1980. Doe's military junta's "major interest was in regime change and not in transformation" (Kieh, 2008, p. 54). Hence, the deconstruction of the neo-colonial state apparatus was not a priority on his post-coup agenda, as so many Liberians had hoped. On the contrary, his rise to power was ruthless and can be best characterised by the brutal assassination of the overthrown President William Tolbert and thirteen of Tolbert's senior officials within the first week of Doe's military junta being in charge (Adebajo, 2002, p. 20).

During Doe's rule of Liberia, from 1980 until 1990, the state's "repressive capacities" (Kieh, 2008, p. 55) were constantly amplified. Doe's potential rivals and/or political opponents became the object of frequent harassment. They were forced into exile, disappeared inexplicably or were eliminated, thus, political murder became the norm (Adebajo, 2002; Kieh, 2008). Doe was militarily challenged in several instances. He came into power through a coup d'état and was always aware of and constantly alerted to possible threats to his own power. As a consequence, Doe made the decision to fill important military and security ranks, as well as other top positions in the bureaucracy and public service, with members if his own ethnic group the Krahn (Sesay, 1996, p. 11; Ellis, 2006, p. 56; Call, 2010, p. 349). The preferential treatment of ethnic Krahn into higher ranks of the government, can be considered as a starting point of the instrumentalisation and exploitation of ethnic rivalries in order to divide the Liberian population (Adebajo, 2002).

One of the most relevant foiled coups attempts which eventually culminated in Taylor's successful invasion in December 1989, was Thomas Quiwonkpa's endeavour in November 1985. Thomas Quiwonkpa, the former commanding general of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was one of the leading figures in the 1980 military coup bringing Doe into power (Kieh, 2008, p. 145). Yet, Quiwonkpa and Doe fell out, rather quickly when Quiwonkpa was demoted to the merely ceremonial position as Secretary-General of the Council (Ellis, 2006, p. 57; Kieh, 2008, p. 160). Quiwonkpa left the country, disgruntled, in 1983 and subsequently established, formed, and organised the NPFL in 1984. Quiwonkpa's coup was launched a year later from, and favoured by, neighbouring country Sierra Leone. The possibility of a coup in Liberia was highly favoured by army Chief General Joseph Momoh who would become Sierra Leone's president by the end of 1985. Momoh indicated strong interest in the possibility of a regime change in Liberia, and even promoted the idea with then president Siaka Stevens[32] (Waugh, 2011, p. 107). However, the coup was quickly "squashed by the [Liberian] government's well-equipped Krahn-led army units and Israeli-trained Executive Mansion guards" (Waugh, 2011, p. 108). Two main issues or mistakes made by the coup plotters, which subsequently led to the failure of the mission, were the error of not cutting the communication lines between Doe and his army, as well as a loss of focus on the elimination of Doe himself (Waugh, 2011).

[32] President of Sierra Leone form 1971 until 1985.

During the coup attempt Samuel Doe was safe in his Executive Mansion, while Quiwonkpa and his followers prematurely paraded the streets of Monrovia, celebrating the end of Doe governing Liberia, in a false sense of victory. Doe's reaction to the failed coup-d'état was brutal. In an act of retaliation and to portray his strength Doe's government launched a raid against the Gio and Mano ethnic groups, with a strong focus on Quiwonkpa's home region, the Nimba County (Harris, 1999, p. 433). Doe's killings of an estimated 3000 civilians further exemplified already existing ethnic tensions and rivalries. Quiwonkpa was executed and only a few remnants of the NPFL were able to save their lives (Agbu, 2006, p. 21). They fled alongside hundreds of Gio soldiers who left Liberia for neighbouring countries Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast. It is very likely that the motivation behind the timely and subsequent regrouping was revenge. One refugee camp in Ivory Coast, near Danané, became the focus point of a pending rebellion. Liberian dissidents "began organising to return home and overthrow Doe's regime" (Lidow, 2016, p. 115) almost immediately. The recruitment of the NPFL was straightforward, to begin with. The NPFL grew rapidly, due to Doe's killings and the persecution of ethnic Gio and Mano. The movement's rapid growth can be attributed to two motives: "protection and retribution" (Lidow, 2016, p. 122).

The initial armed invasion, on Christmas Eve 1989, was a force of only around 100 men from various backgrounds. The group was mainly composed of exiled dissidents from across the West African region. Charles Taylor, as the key architect behind the invasion, managed to bring together a group of "mercenaries and Liberians who shared similar resentments towards Doe's government" (Kukis, 2003, p. 1708).

Charles Taylor's road to trigger a six year long civil war in Liberia started with his escape from a USA prison in 1985, where he was waiting to be extradited, facing charges in Liberia of embezzling funds (Kieh, 2008, p. 145). Taylor was part of Doe's regime until 1983, when he fled the country due to allegations of corruption linked to his position in the Liberian General Services Agency.[33] Taylor's declared aim was to oust Doe (Ellis, 2006, p. 74). To achieve his aim Taylor made use of his most important assets: the ability to form and maintain international contacts with governments and influential business. This trait would come in handy when assisting the RUF insurgency. Taylor's ability to secure external backing for the reformation of the NPFL was one of his ultimate selling points to convince Liberians to follow his lead. Several

[33] A position which put him "in charge of the allotment of all government property to the ministers" (Huband, 1998, p. 16) and gave him access to government funds.

years prior to the invasion, he created a "network of West African dissidents and interventionist politicians prepared to assist an armed conflict effort in Liberia" (Hoffmann, 2011, p. 30). Taylor was able to secure support and funding, in varying degrees, from several African governments, such as Libya, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso (Sesay, 1996). The opportunity to receive backing from Libya finally secured him a leadership role among the remnants of the NPFL based in Ivory Coast. Additionally, the aspect of family bonds with some of the more influential soldiers at the camp further secured support at the base (Lidow, 2016, p. 115).

Taylor's first success in utilising his network was acquiring external support from Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi.[34] He organised the provision of military training for some of the members of the NPFL on Libyan territory. Gaddafi's ulterior motive concerning the provision of intensive military training to Liberians was to counter-balance the strong US influence in West Africa. In October 1987, Taylor's group of 168 men arrived in Tripoli, they graduated from the Libyan training course in May 1988. The Liberian graduates stayed in Libya until the following year in July (Huband, 1998, pp. 53–58).

Meanwhile, in Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré - who would be president of Burkina Faso until 2014 - led a coup d'état, killed his friend, President Captain Thomas Sankara, and seized power. The coup in October 1987 was "supported by a squad of Liberian exiles" (Ellis, 2006, p. 68). Compaoré was one of Taylor's main supporters; he provided Taylor with accommodation and protection, while Taylor was looking "for a convenient springboard from [which] to launch his invasion" (Huband, 1998, p. 57). Moreover, Compaoré supported Taylor with men and training facilities during the civil war (Sesay, 1996, p. 15). Taylor's initial plan was to launch his armed invasion from Sierra Leone. This plan failed, due to president Momoh's unwillingness to support Taylor's undertaking. Momoh's decision would later become one of the main reasons as to why Taylor would allow "the Sierra Leone dissidents who joined him to invade their country" (Huband, 1998, p. 59) from Liberian territory. Taylor sought reprisal.

Not only Burkina Faso but also neighbouring country Ivory Coast, and its president Félix Houphouët-Boigny assisted Taylor during his initial attack. Ivory

[34] Taylor's first contact with Libya had been established through the ambassador to Burkina Faso in Ghana (Huband, 1998, p. 51). However, it was "through Compaoré that Charles Taylor was able to secure a line of communication with Libya's Colonel Gadaffi" (Ellis, 2006, p. 69).

Coast harboured a lot of Liberian dissidents, and supplied weapons. In addition, Ivory Coast was the starting point for the NPFL invasion when the rebels crossed the border into Liberia's Nimba County. Shortly after the launch of the invasion Taylor and his NPFL were in control of about 90 percent of the Liberian territory, but struggled to get to Monrovia, due to the presence of ECOMOG[35] forces (Byman *et al.*, 2001; Adebajo, 2002). Nonetheless, at the high point of his rebellion, in 1992 Taylor was able to control significant areas beyond Liberia's borders. Thus, he did not only claim most of Liberia, but also "parts of Guinea and about a quarter of Sierra Leone as 'Greater Liberia' from his base at the provincial centre of Gbarnga" (Reno, 1995, p. 112). After more than six years of conflict, "in August 1996, the fourteenth peace accord led to presidential and parliamentary elections" (Harris, 1999, p. 431) to be held in July 1997. The National Patriotic Party (NPP) led by Charles Taylor, comprising individuals of the original invasion force, won the elections with triumphant 75 percent of the vote (Call, 2010), ahead of the Unity Party (UP) headed by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

By examining the events that led to the civil war onset in Liberia, the host country, I find that personal relationships and the formation of transnational alliances between rebel leaders and governments in West Africa are inextricably intertwined. These alliances were formed as acts of retaliations and are frequently defined on a personal level. How the transnational alliance between then rebel leader and later president of Liberia - Charles Taylor - and the founder of the rebel group RUF in Sierra Leone - Foday Sankoh - was formed, will be examined in due course.

The next section, however, will take a closer look at the first condition of conflict diffusion: shared borders. Shared borders, within the theoretical framework applied for this case study, are perceived as opportunities for interactions of state and non-state actors. This condition of conflict diffusion is considered pre-defined. A common border increases interaction between states, may they be of peaceful/favourable nature or hostile.

[35] ECOMOG, an African peacekeeping intervention set up by the regional organisation ECOWAS. ECOMOG forces intervened during the ongoing Liberian civil war, and without the agreement of the key warring parties. Nigeria was the main troop contributor and financier (Gberie, 2003).

### 6.1.2 Opportunity: Shared Borders

The condition of shared borders is the first element of the theoretical framework *Opportunity*, *Willingness*, and *Mobilisation*. Borders create a variety of exchange opportunities between distinct actors. The conflict in Liberia as the host conflict, from 1989 until 1996 impacted the likelihood of a civil war onset for its neighbours. Liberia's neighbouring states Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Ivory Coast can all be perceived as potential target states. Hence, for seven years these three states had at least one neighbour at war. In the analysis of diffusion between Liberia and Sierra Leone, the condition of shared borders is present.

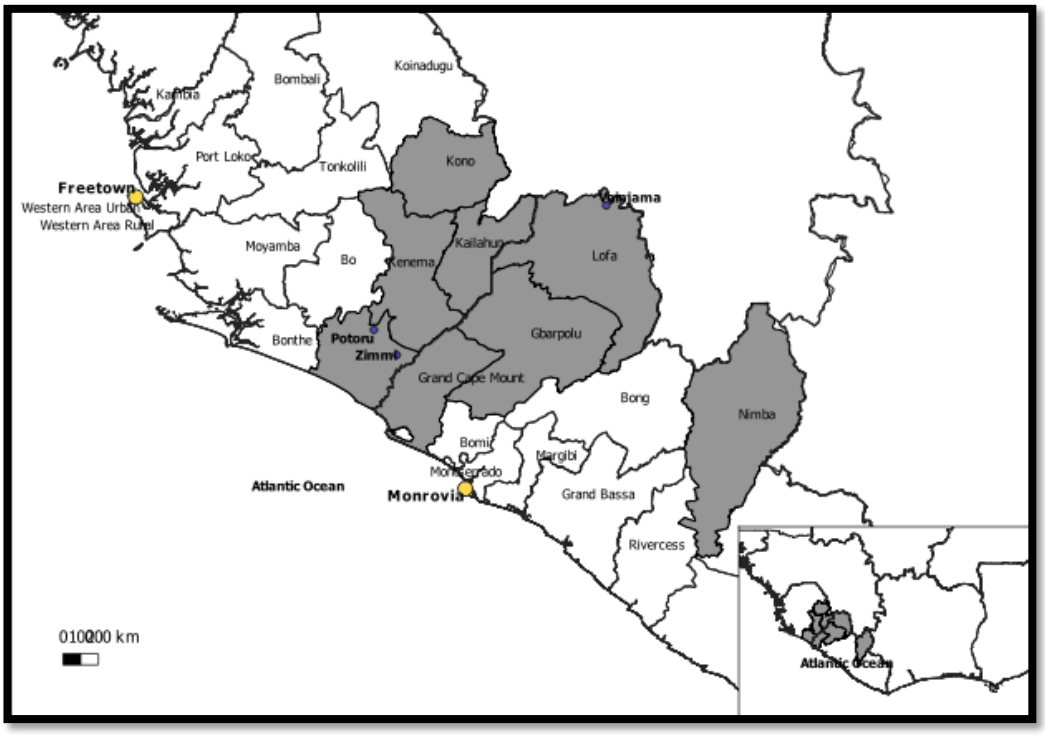


*Figure 14: Map Liberia and Sierra Leone*

The border between Liberia and Sierra Leone, is 299km in length and runs from the tripoint with Guinea in the north-east, along the Mano river, to the Atlantic Ocean in the south-west (The World Factbook, 2020). Most of the border can be categorised as "unsupervised through much of its length" (Richards, 1996, p. 205). The border between the two countries be can best analysed in the context of the so-called Mano River Region. The term was coined after the establishment of the international association of the Mano River Union (MRU). The MRU was established in October 1973 between Liberia and Sierra Leone and was focused on intensifying economic

relations and the elimination of trade barriers. Thus, the main aim was the creation of a customs union (Robson, 1982, pp. 613–617). These days the MRU "is seen as a device for potentially solving mutual problems including transborder issues" (Silberfein and Conteh, 2006, p. 346). The Mano River region does not only consist of neighbouring countries Liberia and Sierra Leone, but also incorporates Guinea and Ivory Coast, in the sub region of West Africa.

Since 1990, the region has sustained several conflicts which have spread across borders. Internal conflicts have led to more than 500,000 deaths. Border permeability is perceived as one of the reasons why the whole area was troubled by conflict over several decades. It still remains difficult to stabilise the region due to the "porous nature of its borders, which facilitates the unhindered movement of armed and criminal groups" (United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, 2021, p. 1). The cross-border movements of armed groups became a valid threat, and is perceived to perpetuate conflict (Silberfein and Conteh, 2006). Permeable borders "represent the prime facilitator of perennial conflict in the region" (Waldman, 2005, p. 9). The diffusion of conflict has been "fundamentally facilitated by the porosity of borders between neighbouring countries" (Waldman, 2005, p. 9).

Consequently, if states are not able to monitor and secure their borders, unregulated flows of contraband, weapons, and mercenaries will continue. Porous borders give ex-combatants within the region the opportunity to easily cross into a neighbouring country in the search for employment as a mercenary. In addition, the lack of border security enables recruiters who actively seek to hire mercenaries, as service providers, on the market for force. Porous borders guarantee unhindered passage from country to country. This lends credence to this hypothesis that the condition of shared borders with a neighbour at war increase the likelihood of diffusion.

Among others it has been these factors that allowed RUF rebel leader Sankoh to use Liberia as a launchpad for his armed rebellion, crossing into Sierra Leone from Liberian territory. The RUF rebels did not encounter huge obstacles moving into Sierra Leone. On the contrary, RUF could rapidly overrun the "unprotected border-zone communities" (Richards, 1996, p. 208). The issue of border permeability enabled the RUF, as well as the NPFL to seize the opportunity to invade from a safe haven in a neighbouring country.

The next section will explore the relevance of transnational alliances. Transnational alliances are interaction opportunities that are willingly and considerately formed between state and non-state actor. Thus, other than borders, transnational alliances involve a decision-making process, which is open to change and is therefore not a given factor.

### 6.1.3 Willingness: Transnational Alliances

Transnational alliances expressed through the sponsorship of armed groups by foreign governments or external non-state actors are a key aspect when it comes to the analysis of the diffusion processes. Through the concept of transnational alliances, a plethora of links between the first Liberian civil war and the civil war onset in Sierra Leone can be uncovered. This section's main focus will, firstly, be the analysis of two RUF key sponsors: Charles Taylor's NPFL based in neighbouring country Liberia, as well as the government of Libya under Muammar Gaddafi. Thus, there is an initial variation amongst the two main supporters, since the former is a non-state supporter and the latter is a state supporter. However, whereas NPFL, which would form the elected government of Liberia in 1997, has provided constant support over the period of the Sierra Leonean conflict, Libya's support can be described as more limited, in comparison. Additionally, this section will provide an analysis of two further governments that also backed RUF and provided support for the rebel movement: the governments of Burkina Faso and the government of Ivory Coast. The support of the governments of Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast did not take place during the initial phase of the creation of RUF, nor during the first couple of years of the ongoing conflict. Therefore, these alliances are deemed less relevant in the context of this analysis.

<u>Sponsoring RUF: Charles Taylor from NPFL Warlord to elected President of Liberia</u>

Taylor was undoubtedly the major sponsor of the RUF. Before taking a closer look at how Taylor supported Sankoh and the RUF, the question of why Taylor was inclined to sponsor the insurgency movement will be addressed. Taylor's involvement in the Sierra Leonean armed rebellion can be best explained vis-à-vis three distinct dynamics: *retaliation*, *geopolitical advantages*, and *revenue*.

The aspect of *retaliation* is linked to Taylor's personal resentment against the government of Sierra Leone under Joseph Momoh. In 1989, President Momoh denied Taylor access to Sierra Leone's territory as a safe haven for his rebellion. Consequently, Taylor needed to adjust his plans. He launched his armed invasion from Ivory Coast. Thus, Taylor seized the opportunity to strike a deal with Sierra Leonean dissident Foday Sankoh in mid-1989. Taylor's and Sankoh's first encounter remains refuted to some extent. The most common description is that Sankoh and Taylor met in Libya in the early 1980s (Byman *et al.*, 2001; Keen, 2005). This indicates that the alliance between NPFL leader Charles Taylor and the future-RUF leader Foday Sankoh could have been forged by the Libyan head of state Muammar Gaddafi. Counter to this, Abdullah (1998, p. 220), argues that Taylor had already left Libya, before Sankoh arrived in Tripoli. Abdullah supports this claim by arguing that "if Sankoh had met Taylor in Libya, he would definitely have turned up at Po, Burkina Faso, where the majority of NPFL fighters were trained". The explanation Abdullah puts forward is that Sankoh, who left Libya in 1988, was travelling back and forth between Sierra Leone and Liberia in order to advance their agenda; and "it was during one of these excursions that they allegedly came into contact with NPFL officials" (1998, p. 220). The deal between the two rebel leaders was straightforward: "Sankoh and his group would help Taylor 'liberate' Liberia, after which he would provide them with a base to launch their armed struggle" (Abdullah, 1998, pp. 219–220). Thus, the participation of Sankoh and other Sierra Leoneans in Taylor's rebellion "was premised on the promise of Taylor's assistance with the rebellion in Sierra Leone" (Keen, 2005, p. 37). Taylor was not the only one who was fuelled by resentment; Sankoh "had a bitter grudge against the Sierra Leonean government for dismissing him from the army" (Conteh, 2001, p. 60). A transnational alliance was created.

President Momoh became aware and increasingly concerned by the activities of Sierra Leonean dissidents in NPFL ranks. In consideration of valid national security interests being threatened, Momoh decided to be part of the intervention mission labelled Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group (ECOMOG). ECOMOG was established by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The mission was spearheaded by the Nigerian government; a decision which most likely fostered Taylor's willingness to sponsor an armed insurgency against the government of neighbour Sierra Leone.

The second reason for Taylor's involvement in RUF is the importance of Taylor's *geopolitical strategy*. The ECOMOG mission was deployed in August of 1990, at a point in time where Taylor and his NPFL already "controlled 90 percent of the country and derived resources from the lucrative export trade in areas under his control" (Adebajo, 2002, p. 73). Consequently, the activities of ECOMOG did not sit well with Taylor. He was at risk of losing territory that he needed to continue to finance his rebellion. The driving force behind the ECOMOG mission, a "West African force for Liberia", was Nigeria's President Ibrahim Babangida (Howe, 1996, p. 151). According to Babangida one of his main objectives was to set a precedent against "rebel wars in Africa that were being fought for material and political conquest" (Byman *et al.*, 2001). Besides, military rulers in West Africa, especially Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Guinea, believed that Taylor's incursion was "an act of thuggery that should have been repelled quite easily" (Adibe, 1997, p. 472). Consequently, ECOWAS did not expect that its intervention mission ECOMOG would be a long-lasting initiative. ECOMOG would stay engaged in the Liberian armed struggle until 1996, "losing about seven hundred men in combat while trying to establish cease-fire" (Howe, 1996, p. 146). In October 1990, only two month after the multinational ECOMOG forces have entered Liberia from Sierra Leone, Taylor made contact with president Momoh threating him with the possibility of an invasion in case Momoh would not withdrew his support from ECOMOG (Keen, 2005, p. 37). Momoh did not renounce his support for ECOMOG. Consequently, Taylor, in an attempt to destabilise Sierra Leone, prompted the formation of the RUF "led by former corporal in the Sierra Leone Army, Foday Sankoh to invade Sierra Leone" (Fyle, 1994, p. 133). Additionally, by supporting RUF, Taylor was able to install a buffer-zone between him and the ECOMOG forces based in Sierra Leone.

Thirdly, Taylor anticipated an economic gain. He was keen to back a rebel movement in Sierra Leone to secure unhindered access to the diamond rich areas in the south east of the country, such as the Kono District. Taylor seized the opportunity of a constant stream of *revenue* from diamonds through fostering an insurgency that would act in his favour. Thus, "Sierra Leone diamonds have financed the rebel movements of both Foday Sankoh and Charles Taylor" (Hirsch, 2001, p. 25). Furthermore, revenue made from the diamond trade and control over the cross-border conflict were closely intertwined issues. The diamonds sourced in Sierra Leone's hinterland were illegally

exported across the porous borders with Liberia and Ivory Coast. Estimates assume that in the 1990s only "10 percent of diamonds sourced passed through the government's official channel" (Hirsch, 2001, p. 26). Consequently, the government's tax revenues from diamond trade in the 1990s were insignificant (Hirsch, 2001, p. 26; Keen, 2003, p. 68). In other words, Taylor became dependent on the revenue generated through the illegal diamond trade. The access to diamonds provided Taylor with "significant financial resourced to keep him solvent and in power" (Berman, 2001, p. 7). The RUF on the other hand were able to use Taylor's support and "military muscle" (Reno, 2003, p. 62).

Taylor's support to the RUF was continuous from the onset at the very beginning of the armed rebellion in 1991 until at least 2000. Taylor "has been actively supporting the RUF at all levels, in providing training, weapons and related materiel, logistical support, a staging ground for attacks and a safe haven for retreat and recuperation" (United Nations Security Council, 2000, p. 33). There is unambiguous evidence for the existence of a constant supply flow from Liberia to RUF controlled areas in Sierra Leone. The support over nearly a decade means that Taylor aided the RUF also during his time as elected president of Liberia from 1997 onward. Although, Liberia's civil war has come to an end, Taylor still nurtured conflict in the border region of Liberia. More importantly, however, the group that had invaded Sierra Leone in 1991 was mainly made of "NPFL troops 'on loan'" (Richards, 1996, p. 208). Furthermore, according to Ellis "Taylor reportedly contributed some of his toughest troops to the RUF incursion" (2006, p. 93). Whether these Liberian troops on loan can be categorised as mercenaries will be addressed in the section below. Yet by the time Taylor was part of the Liberian government it is believed that he had provided the RUF "with 200 fully armed Liberian soldiers, as well as with artillery" (Berman, 2001, p. 7). In July 2000 RUF troops under the command of Sam Bockarie "were being trained and encamped in Liberia" (Berman, 2001, p. 8). Regular training was provided in Gbatala near Gbanga, but the RUF soldiers were also "trained alongside Liberia's Anti-Terrorist-Unit" (United Nations Security Council, 2000, p. 33). Although Taylor had backed the activities of the RUF in Sierra Leone for nearly a decade, it is of relevance to acknowledge that the RUF's overall supply network remained rather limited over the course of the conflict. In other words, the "group remained heavily dependent on Charles Taylor for access to needed resources" (Hazen, 2013, p. 75).

Not only Liberia's Taylor but also players in his extended network supported the rebellion in Sierra Leone at an early stage of the insurgency. The government of oil-rich North African state Libya has had its own interests at stake. Hence, what follows is an account of the extent of Libya's support and the nature of the alliance with the RUF.

Libya's Gaddafi: Providing Military Training for West African Dissidents

Libya's foreign policy towards Sub-Sahara and especially West Africa has been described as "the jewel in its foreign policy crown" (Ronen, 2002, p. 60). Consequently, the alliance between the government of Libya and the RUF rebel leader Sankoh must be analysed in light of Gaddafi's foreign policy interests. Therefore, Libya's regional power aspirations will be taken into consideration. Libya's military involvement in West African conflicts has become undeniable, although the existence of a "ten-year plan to destabilize Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire" (Solomon and Swart, 2005, p. 471) is still contested. What is clear, however, is that Libya's support to the RUF was a rational extension of its existing support for Taylor and the NPFL. In the beginning of the insurgency the RUF were provided with arms from Libya by making use of the existing supply networks to Liberia (Keen, 2005, p. 38). Most relevant, however, is the fact that Libya provided intensive military training for future RUF fighters, as well as leaders, like Sankoh, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These trainees eventually returned to Sierra Leone with advanced military capabilities to take part in a conflict. Gaddafi's training camp was set up with the specific purpose of training and educating "African revolutionaries" (Byman *et al.*, 2001), in how to conduct military warfare; a decision which is in line with Gaddafi's alleged aim to create instability in the region. Gaddafi also supported the RUF through financial means (Berman, 2001; Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011b). In 1998 Gaddafi supported the RUF with one million US Dollars to form a political party; an endeavour which did not bear fruits since the RUF boycotted the elections (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). Moreover, it is assumed that Libya had been involved in sponsoring training of RUF fighters in Liberia during the critical stage of the ongoing civil conflict in 1999 (Ellis, 2006, p. 71).

The following part of this section moves on to describe the involvement of the government of Burkina Faso in greater detail.

The Government of Burkina Faso: Key Supporter in Delivering Weapons to the RUF

The government of Burkina Faso, led by President Blaise Compaoré, played an integral part concerning the supply system of weapons to RUF fighters in Sierra Leone. The vast majority of weapons that arrived in Sierra Leone were imported through Burkina Faso, which is not surprising since Compaoré had also been a close and long-term ally of Taylor. Thus, the government of Burkina Faso backed the rebel incursion through the provision of safe passage for weaponry. Burkina Faso actively took part in the delivery process by providing helicopter flights to undertake airdrops to the RUF (Berman, 2001). Lastly, Compaoré also made purchases of weapons, such as the acquisition of 68 tons of weapons and ammunition, which included "anti-tank weapons, surface-to-air-missiles, and rocket propelled grenades" (United Nations Security Council, 2000, p. 35), for the RUF on his own account. The United Nations Report of the Panel of Experts from 2000 provides a detailed account of how weapon shipments were conducted through Burkina Faso. Their description of a delivery of Ukrainian weapons reveals the extent and reach of the supply network, including the governments of Burkina Faso and Ukraine operating in disguise through the employment of private companies (United Nations Security Council, 2000, pp. 35–36). According to Mutwol "the RUF maintained direct communication with senior government officials in Ouagadougou" (2009, p. 222), which indicates that the RUF were able to coordinate with external backers, independent from Taylor. The government of Burkina Faso did not support the RUF due to their altruistic motivation. Compaoré benefited financially from helping the RUF sell diamonds they have sourced in Sierra Leone. It is highly likely that Burkina Faso benefited economically from being a backer of the RUF. Reports also indicate that the RUF frequently bartered illicit diamonds for weapons (Mutwol, 2009, p. 222).

Another West African government that has been friendly towards RUF has been Félix Houphouët-Boigny's Ivory Coast. In the following section I will provide an analysis of Ivory Coast's involvement concerning the civil war onset in Sierra Leone.

The Government of Ivory Coast: Félix Houphouët-Boigny's Personal Resentments

The government of Ivory Coast was only indirectly in support of the RUF, through assistance to Taylor. Similar to Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast secured safe passage for material meant for the RUF. President Houphouët-Boigny's decision to support Taylor, and thus indirectly the RUF, reveals personal motives. President Houphouët-Boigny and "many senior Ivoirians were personal friends of Tolbert and his colleagues killed on April 22, 1980 by the Doe regime" (Tarr, 1989, p. 79). Houphouët-Boigny's resentment towards Doe only deepened when the AFL "dragged his foster son-in-law, Dolphius B. Tolbert, from the French Embassy in Monrovia and killed him in 1980" (Tarr, 1989, p. 79). Thus, the support for a rebellion in a neighbouring country has again been fuelled by personal antagonism. As Ellis phrases it the murder of Tolbert's son was a "slight which Houphouët-Boigny never forgave" (2006, p. 54). In addition, and according to the UN Expert Panel Report Ivory Coast also provided training for RUF rebels on its territory in the early 1990s (United Nations Security Council, 2000, p. 34).

Thus far, this case study analysed two relevant factors which impact and increase the likelihood to observe the spread of internal conflict across borders. These two factors are: opportunity and willingness, expressed through a shared land border and transnational alliances. The following part of this chapter moves on to describe a third factor that must be taken into consideration, when analysing diffusion, in greater detail. The next section will take a close look at the supply and demand structures on a transnational market for force. Thus, the relevance and presence of mercenaries in connection with the onset of an armed conflict will be analysed.

### 6.1.4 Mobilisation: Supply and Demand Structure of Mercenaries

The involvement of mercenaries in the Sierra Leonean civil war is commonly known. Yet, while existing research highlights a general causal connection between mercenaries and the process of diffusion, we know little about the degree of how mercenary activities impact the onset of an armed conflict. In this section, I will demonstrate the effect of mercenary forces amongst the RUF on the civil war onset.

Mercenary forces were part of the initial insurgent force - RUF - that invaded Sierra Leone and entered the Kailahun District on the 23rd of March 1991. For a non-

state actor to be categorised as a mercenary all of the following five criteria, as introduced in the theoretical framework of this thesis, have to be met: (1) an individual or part of a group organised in an ad-hoc manner; (2) who provides services directly related to armed conflict; (3) whose primarily intention is financial gain, the prospect of earning a living or looting; (4) who is neither a national of the party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party of the conflict; (5) not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict.

Before providing an analysis I will briefly discuss why other commercially driven non-state actors will not be part of this analysis. Throughout the internal conflict in Sierra Leone, a variety of non-state actors were involved from peacekeepers to private military and security companies (PMSCs). Although PMSCs and mercenaries are both commercially motivated actors, PMSCs are not agents of diffusion. This is based on two findings. First, one can assume that "the majority of private military contractors are not engaged in combat operation" (Pattison, 2008, p. 45). This finding is corroborated by the CMAD. According to my findings only 27 out of 1222 events recorded for PMSCs, being active in Sub-Saharan Africa between 1980 and 2016, are coded as PMSCs who were engaged in combat operations. I find that the key task that PMSCs perform, on the African continent, is the provision of security services. Secondly, findings from a preliminary study investigating the impact of PMSCs on the process of diffusion indicate that PMSCs "could rather be perceived as a potential protective factor with regard to the spread of internal conflict by providing boots on the ground for weak states" (Gottwick, 2019, p. 1). In other words, PMSCs could be a non-state actor that is potentially capable of inhibiting the process of diffusion. In contrast to these findings, are results from a recently published study by Petersohn (2021)[36]. Petersohn proposes that PMSCs increase the likelihood of conflict onset; however "the actual substantial effect is exceptionally small" (2021, p. 2).

The PMSCs involved in the Sierra Leone conflict, Executive Outcome (EO) and Sandline International (SI), were both hired after the conflict onset. EO was hired to contain RUF advances on behalf of the government in March 1995, four years into the conflict. And SI was contracted by the Sierra Leone government in 1998. Thus, one can conclude that neither PMSC outlet was in Sierra Leone prior to the civil war

[36] Petersohn's investigation focuses on PMSCs and the "government-affiliated segments" (2021, p. 6) of the market for force. In contrast to this thesis focus on rebel groups being the key clientele for mercenary service.

onset in March 1991, nor were they employed by the rebel group RUF. Mercenaries on the other hand supported the RUF during their initial invasion and beyond.

The RUF force that invaded Sierra Leone, and thus, entered Kailahun District on the 23rd of March 1991, was compromised of three key groups, yet, the force composed of only around a hundred men (Abdullah, 1998; Wai, 2012; Hazen, 2013). The three key groups were: Sierra Leonean dissidents, "some of whom had fought with the NPFL in Liberia, some NPFL troops 'on loan', and a group of perhaps 50 Burkinabe mercenaries" (Richards, 1996, p. 208). These figures indicate that a minimum of 50 percent of the initial armed insurgency have been ex-combatants from Burkina Faso, fighting for a paycheque. The Burkinabe mercenary contingent was experienced, skilled and battle-hardened fighters, with skills and experience gained "from fighting alongside Taylor in Liberia" (Mutwol, 2009, p. 222). The mercenary force would fight alongside the RUF for about a year, until they were gradually replaced, starting in the beginning of 1992, by "unemployed diamond miner and local Sierra Leonean teenagers" (Mutwol, 2009, p. 222). Combatants from Burkina Faso fall under the conceptualisation of mercenaries presented above. These individuals were contracted by Charles Taylor and Blaise Compare to fight on behalf of the RUF. In addition, they were not nationals of the parties to conflict and not part of the Burkinabe regular troops (Kamara, 2000).

My investigation and analysis of international newspaper articles - on the newspaper respiratory NEXIS, published between 1980 and 2016 - revealed that the key-words of interest *mercenaries* and *Sierra Leone* have only been mentioned once in the year of the rebellion; more specifically in October 1991, by The Independent (London). At the time the article stated that already "up to 500,000 people in the eastern and southern part of the country [Sierra Leone] have been displaced since March by a mercenary invasion from Liberia" (Richards, 1991, p. 1).

The NPFL soldiers, meet all of the five criteria specified above. These combatants provided military services, were neither a national of the party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party of the conflict, and not a member of any armed forces. Finally, and by keeping in mind that Taylor must have anticipated the opportunity to capture diamond rich areas in the borderlands of Liberia and Sierra Leone, the aspect of earning a living through the opportunity of looting is fulfilled. NPFL fighters were promised opportunities to loot conquered areas, which

can also be seen as financial gain (Reno, 1995, p. 116). By pursuing this line of argument, the Liberian combatants are considered mercenaries. Similarly to the Burkinabe mercenaries the Liberian fighters had to be replaced. The RUF reconstituted its forces in 1993, "along military lines with the establishment of battle-group and battlefront commanders" (Abdullah, 1998, p. 225). The replacement of the Liberian mercenary forces was influenced by the claim that the RUF rebellion was only relying on outside forces. In addition, a lot of the worst and most violent attacks across the eastern part of Sierra Leone were regularly attributed to Liberian mercenaries (Hoffmann, 2011, p. 34). Thus, the large number of Liberians became an issue for the RUF and its leadership. Existing literature agrees that the combatants from Liberia were mercenary forces. Hazen (2013, p. 75) as well as Abdullah (1998), argue that the Liberian NPFL fighters can indeed be characterised as "Liberian mercenaries". Hazen's statement is based upon several sources, amongst them interviews she conducted with former Sierra Leone Army (SLA) soldiers in 2002.

The initial armed invasion from Liberia into Sierra Leone, which is considered the date of the onset of the armed conflict in the eastern parts of the country, was mainly composed of mercenary forces, i.e. combatants from Burkina Faso and Liberia. These findings underpin the assumption that the RUF armed rebellion could not have occurred or been sustained without the presence of battle experienced mercenaries. The presence of mercenaries impacted the likelihood of the conflict to erupt in Sierra Leone.

The impact of mercenaries on the Sierra Leonean conflict dynamic did not vanish with the Liberian and Burkinabe mercenary forces leaving the conflict theatre in 1992 and 1993. Other actors got involved by training and fighting alongside the RUF. Thus, in 1999 a "significant improvement of tactics and use of weapons by the RUF rebels was noted" (United Nations Security Council, 2000, p. 33). This progress was attributed to training provided by a retired South African army officer who was in charge of military training sessions. Fred Rindel, who was contracted as a "security consultant by Charles Taylor in September 1998" started training combatants from Burkina Faso, Niger and the Gambia in November 1998 (United Nations Security Council, 2000, p. 33). The report states that Rindel trained around 1200 fighters; Rindel cancelled his contract in August 2000 due rising negative media attention (United Nations Security Council, 2000, p. 33). These pieces of information reveal two distinct layers of mercenary activities: (1) A South African national was contracted

by Taylor for the provision of military training; (2) nationals from distinct African states were trained in Liberia on behalf of Charles Taylor to be deployed on RUF-territory in Sierra Leone. In May 2000 the Vancouver Sun reported that the conflict onset in March 1991 destroyed Sierra Leone development aspirations and brought "near-total dependence on paid mercenary forces and foreign troops" (Muir, 2000, p. 1).

This section provided an analysis of how the RUF invasion force was drawn together. Throughout it is argued that without the presence of mercenaries the invasion would not have been successful and the rebellion not as long lasting. The following section will provide a brief account of the civil war onset, including background information regarding the situation of the Sierra Leonean government prior to and during the time of the conflict as well as their reaction to the invasion.

### 6.1.5 Outcome: The Border War - Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002

The internal conflict began in March 1991 with the RUF insurgency invading Sierra Leone's diamond rich hinterlands. The decade long internal conflict would only be formally concluded in 2002, more specifically on the "18th of January 2002 with a Joint Declaration of End of War" (Reno, 2003, p. 44); a decade long conflict that claimed more than 120,000 lives (Conteh, 2001, p. 60). The invasion from Liberia into Sierra Leone prompted a row of successive events, such as the military coup in April 1992 led by Valentin Strasser. The successful coup marked the end to the twenty-five yearlong rule by the leaders of the All People's Congress Party (APC)[37] and simultaneously constituted the beginning of a new era, a military government headed by Strasser (Fyle, 1994, p. 127). As a result, President Joseph Momoh, who had been in charge of the Sierra Leonean government since November 1985, and who was Siaka Steven's designated successor, was ousted. Long before the invasion and the coup took place, the Sierra Leonean population was highly dissatisfied with the situation in their country. As Conteh (2001, p. 59) argues, the Sierra Leoneans "were praying and hoping for a radical political change", and thus, the strong longing for a regime change

[37] APC leader, Siaka Stevens, had been appointed Prime Minister on 21st of March 1967 (Fisher, 1969, p. 625). However, "Stevens was prevented from taking office by a military coup until a counter-coup enforced the election's results in 1968" (Reno, 2003, p. 51).

propelled great parts of the population to support the RUF's revolutionary ambitions. Hope was cultivated by the RUF's claim to fight for "a just, democratic, and egalitarian society" (Wai, 2012, p. 95). This message was continuously spread through the 'liberated areas' of Kailahun and Pujehun, and attracted support "especially among marginalized rural youth in these districts" (Wai, 2012, p. 95). These young men would quickly become RUF's local allies and some of them would also be recruited to become part of the rebel force.

However, the initial support for the insurgency declined quite drastically, when the RUF's interest in spreading fear and violence, as well as and being in charge "of the nation's only significant source of wealth –the diamond mines" (Conteh, 2001, p. 59) became more prevailing than considering Sierra Leonean needs and political change.

How did the Sierra Leonean government react to the insurgency in 1991?

Invading on the 23rd of March, the RUF launched their attack from Voinjama in Liberia, entered the Kailahun District of Sierra Leone, and were able to rapidly overrun the border communes. Wai (2012, p. 93) describes that the opening "attack left 2 officers (a major and lieutenant) of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF) and 11 civilians dead." President Momoh and his government were quick to "dismiss the attacks as a banal incident that was caused by a failed commercial transaction" (Wai, 2012). Thus, they did not perceive this act as an important threat to national security, yet, or even anticipated that "a protracted and senseless war was in the making" (Abdullah, 1998, p. 203). Consequently, the RUF could make swift "advances in the eastern province in the first three months" (Fyle, 1994, p. 133) of the invasion. It was frequently reported that Taylor "has declared Foday Sanko as Governor of Sierra Leone at Pendembu, in the eastern Sierra Leone border area, by April" (Fyle, 1994, p. 133). Thus, within the first couple of months Taylor further fostered his plan of creating a Greater Liberia by acknowledging Sankoh's claim to the eastern territories of Sierra Leone. In addition Taylor was able to incorporate "conquered territories into his alternative state's commercial network", which meant that the in 1991 and 1992 the "most economically viable parts of Sierra Leone - the diamond fields and export agricultural lands – briefly became part of the NPFL associated commercial empire" (Reno, 1995, pp. 114–115).

Therefore, one can convincingly argue that the swift advances of the RUF revealed the government's inability to appropriately react to the attack with an effective counter-insurgency plan (Wai, 2012). Momoh's problems in dealing effectively with the invasion can be deemed homemade to some extent, due to the constitution of the Sierra Leonean army. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), in 1991, were small and ill-equipped to say the least. Gberie estimates that the armed forces of Sierra Leone, at the onset of the armed conflict compromised of 3000 personnel and describes the soldiers as "fat cats who were recruited into the forces by a patronage system designed by ex-President Siaka Stevens to ensure that the army remained loyal to the regime" (1997, p. 155). However, most of the RSLAF personnel that would have been ready for combat had already been deployed as part of the ECOMOG intervention force in Liberia. Other available forces besides the RSLAF were paramilitary forces, such as the Special Security Division of the Sierra Leone Police compromising of an estimate of 800 staff and around 100 coast guards (Koroma, 1996). The closest military compound of the RSLAF to the location of the insurgency was Moa Barrack near Daru in Kailahun District, laying around 130 kilometres south of Kailahun, the capital city of the Kailahun District. Troops from the Moa Barracks would be rushed to repel the rebels (Wai, 2012, pp. 93–94). The situation became even more challenging for the RSLAF when the RUF "simultaneously opened a second front in the south of the country with attacks in the Mano River Bridge […] and Zimmi in Pujehun District" (Wai, 2012, p. 94). Considering the quick development of events in the east and the south of Sierra Leone, the government was left with limited options, and was forced to expand the size of the army to 6,000 men (Reno, 2003, p. 153). Thus, to meet the threat Momoh had to double the number of armed forces personnel. The issue with the hasty decision to increase the number of soldiers, was however, that recruits were not screened properly. Subsequently, the new recruits were "little more than uniformed rabble which easily found more profit colluding with the RUF" (Gberie, 1997, p. 155). Even Sierra Leone's foreign minister Abdul Koroma disclosed that most of the recruits can be described as rural unemployed, hooligans, thieves, and drug addicts (Koroma, 1996). Although some of the new recruits were in cahoots with the RUF fighters, other junior officers soon became conscious of the scheming of senior staff "stealing supplies meant for frontline soldiers" (Reno, 2003, p. 56). This meant that the solider at the war front did not receive material support, let alone their salaries (Fyle, 1994, p. 135).

According to Reno that might have been one of the main reasons as to why some of them took the chance to march to Freetown staging a coup against Momoh, forcing him to flee (2003, p. 56). Amongst these junior officers was Valentin Strasser, who took power in April 1992 and set up the National Provisional Ruling Council (NRPC). During the regime transition, the RUF was able to advance significantly. By November 1992 they were able to capture the Kono diamond mine and the surrounding area, but "were recaptured by NPRC soldiers in January 1993 with help from Nigerian troops" (Reno, 2003, p. 58). Thus, "Sierra Leone also managed to obtain support from friendly countries, particularly Nigeria and neighbouring Guinea" (Fyle, 1994, p. 133). However, the conflict soon came to a stalemate, where the RSLAF with outside support was able to stop the RUF advance in some areas, especially on the eastern battlefront where they manage to take back cities, such as Potoru, Pujehun, and Zimmi, which are located on the Liberian/Sierra Leonean border (Wai, 2012, p. 98). The stalemate lasted for a while, until Valentine Strasser decide to hire the private military outlet Executive Outcomes, headed by Eben Barlow in 1995. A further seven years down the line the conflict found its official end in 2002, representatives of nearly 70,000 combatants from the RUF, the RSLAF, and the quasi-official Civil Defense Force, agreed to disarm (Reno, 2003, p. 44).

The following section will draw the findings from the sections above together to provide a clear overview of the findings.

### 6.1.6 Summary

This chapter has examined the three key aspects of the causal mechanism of internal conflict diffusion, by providing an in-depth analysis of the spread of conflict between Liberia and Sierra Leone in the early 1990s. Common factors to examine transnational aspects of armed conflict are borders and alliances or networks that transcend borders. The factor of mercenaries concerning the mechanism of diffusion has been deliberated, but not analysed. This case study showed that the civil war onset in March of 1991 in Sierra Leone is intrinsically linked to the Liberian conflict for several distinct reasons.

Firstly, the rebel group RUF had strong support from Taylor's NPFL and relied on external forces in an attempt to overthrow the Joseph Momoh government in Freetown. Similar to Taylor's "assault on Liberia, the RUF entered Sierra Leone with

a small group of fighters" (Hoffmann, 2011, p. 32), being well aware that the border guards on either side would not be able to stop their advances. This supports the claim that the governments in the Mano River region "have never been able to exercise effective control of their borders" (Hirsch, 2001, p. 24). In addition, Taylor must have anticipated that the ill-equipped and already deployed Sierra Leonean army would not be capable of pursuing a counter-insurgency operation in time.

Secondly, not only the NPFL combatants who were part of the insurgency were trained in Libya, RUF forces were trained in Libya as well. Thus, Sierra Leone dissidents who later became involved with the RUF rebellion, experienced intense military training before they returned to Sierra Leone to launch the armed struggle (Abdullah, 1998, p. 221). Thirdly, mercenaries were involved from the beginning of the Sierra Leonean conflict and throughout. Experienced and battle-hardened Burkinabe mercenaries, who were active in the first Liberian civil war, were part of the initial group that crossed into Sierra Leone from Liberia. Liberian fighters could also be categorised as mercenaries because they fought for loot.

The incursion can be labelled as spillover from the Liberian civil war, since nearly all the actors involved were also warring parties in the Liberian conflict, be it the Sierra Leonean dissidents who struck a deal with Taylor, the NPFL fighters who were promised the opportunity of looting, or the combat-experienced Burkinabe who had already fought alongside Taylor. An aspect of relevance regarding this particular kind of group constellation, which resulted in the civil war onset, is displayed in the feature of personal antagonisms and personal gain. The civil war onset seems to display a circle of retaliation between disgruntled leaders, by choosing to back opposition movements and insurgencies in neighbouring countries, which can be linked back to the *willingness* factor of this theoretical framework. The RUF insurgency massively benefited from Taylor's already existing transnational network which encompassed heads of states, influential business owners, and combat ready fighters from across West Africa. Concerning the aspect of personal gain, it became obvious quite early on that Taylor and Sankoh's main motivation was their hunger for power. In other words, they "were both power hungry to rule their respective countries" (Conteh, 2001, p. 60). Neither of the rebel leaders had the greater good in mind when they started their respective rebellions. The motivation of leaders, such as Taylor and Sankoh, asserts that "neither political philosophy nor long-running historical tribal clashes were at the

roots of the war" (Davis et al., 1997, p. 2, cited in Kieh, 2008, p. 144). The aim has been to overthrow the respective governments, and again regime change was the driving factor and not state transformation.

The individual parts of the causal mechanism have been converted into testable claims. Thus, the final aspect of this summary, will be to cross-check the theoretically hypothesised assumptions. The table below provides an overview of hypotheses at hand. With regard to the analysis of each part of the causal mechanism, all three hypotheses can be deemed accurate.

*Table 16: Hypothesis of Conflict Diffusion - Findings Case Study Three*

| | **Theory of Conflict Diffusion** | Result |
|---|---|---|
| Hypothesis ONE | A neighbour at war increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in a potential target state. | Verified |
| Hypothesis TWO | A transnational alliance, between a regional state or non-state actor and a rebel group in a potential target state increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in the rebel group's home state. | Verified |
| Hypothesis THREE | The mobilisation of mercenaries on behalf of a rebel group in a potential target state increases the odds of an armed conflict onset. | Verified |

Thus, the elements of *Opportunity*, *Willingness* and *Mobilisation*, can be considered sufficient for the spread of armed conflict, as shown by the analysis from the host conflict Liberia to target conflict in Sierra Leone. Consequently, the three factors form a coherent causal mechanism, and provide an explanation of how conflicts in one area can be linked. Thus, the one conflict can lead to the possibility for conflict to erupt in another country nearby. Without the presence of *Opportunity*, *Willingness* and *Mobilisation,* the onset of an armed conflict in Sierra Leone in 1991 would have been considerably less likely.

This case study is presenting the first pathway case addressed in this thesis. The following chapter will provide another case that outlines the casual mechanism of diffusion, as addressed above. Consequently, the second case study will investigate the process of diffusion in the complex conflict theatre of the First Congo War, also known

as Africa's First World War. The spread of conflict from the host state Rwanda (1990-1994) to the target state of Zaire in 1996 will be the object of analysis.

## 6.2 The Spread of Conflict from Rwanda to Zaire: The Formation of the AFDL

Several states in the African Great Lakes region have experienced internal conflict either subsequently or in some cases simultaneously. Conflict dynamics of specific internal wars need to be examined at a transnational level, rather than in isolation. This case study analyses the causal link between the conflict in Rwanda from 1990 until 1994, and the successive conflict onset in Zaire in 1996. The aim of this pathway case is to demonstrate that the proposed causal mechanism of diffusion is applicable beyond the region of West Africa. This in-depth study will reveal how the conflict dynamics in Rwanda altered the likelihood of a conflict onset in Zaire. This chapter examines each part of the causal mechanism, from the cause, which is the host conflict in Rwanda, to the outcome, which is the conflict onset in a neighbouring country, Zaire. The first section will address the root causes of the Rwandan civil war. This information and background knowledge are essential to be able to portray a comprehensive picture as to why and how this conflict is linked to the civil war onset in Zaire. This section will be followed by an analysis of the three key parts of the causal chain, which are: *Opportunity* (shared borders); *Willingness* (transnational alliance); and *Mobilisation* (mercenary forces). The examination of the causal mechanism will be concluded by an account of the conflict onset in Zaire, followed by a summary which will present key findings.

### 6.2.1 Cause: The Rwandan Civil War from 1990 to 1994

When analysing conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, especially in reference to Rwanda, most scholars' line of argument is rooted in the notion of ethnic divisions as the fundamental driver for conflict (Cunningham, 2011, p. 137), which indeed played a vital role. However, the one-dimensional explanation of conflict between two ethnic groups, Hutu and Tutsi, does not fully account for the underlying structural challenges that existed within the country. Beyond the explanation that conflict occurred between two distinct ethnicities, conflict was fought "between those who wanted to hoard power and those willing to share it" (Fujii, 2009, p. 46). Put differently, "problematic vertical and horizontal social relations within Rwanda" (Coletta and Cullen, 2000, p. 14) created an environment for a civil war to erupt. The military invasion of Rwanda

on the 1st of October 1990 by the Rwandan Patriotic Army[38] (RPA) from neighbouring country Uganda marks the onset of the four yearlong civil war. The conflict ended in 1994 when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) seized power in Kigali and put an end to the devastating genocide. The RPF as a political movement was "created in 1987 by Rwandese exiles in Uganda" (Prunier, 2004, p. 362), who were part of Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) from 1981 until 1996 during the fight against Milton Obote. The causes of the conflict onset, its trajectory and the genocide in the 1990s cannot be comprehensively examined without taking pre-colonial and colonial events into consideration.

Towards Rwandan Independence

Rwanda always displayed a Hutu majority of around 85 percent, nevertheless, it had been ruled by a Tutsi minority for a long period of time, essentially since the establishment of the kingdom in the 16th century (Dzubow, 1994). The distinction between Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa in a precolonial context was not based on different ethnic backgrounds, but rather on the grounds of how the Rwandan society was organised around different classes. A caste system was in place and group affiliations were fluid to some degree. Tutsi and Hutu categories were not "hard unchanging identities which many commentators have purported them to be" (Prunier, 1995, p. 21). The relationship between Hutu and Tutsi began to deteriorate during the era of Belgian colonial oppression[39]. By the end of the First World War in 1916, Rwanda was "ceded to Belgium under a mandate from the League of Nations" (Dzubow, 1994, p. 514). It was the period of colonisation that fostered "socioeconomic disparities and solidified the divide between the groups along 'ethnic' (rather than class) lines" (Coletta and Cullen, 2000, p. 16). The Belgian colonial powers installed and endorsed a ruling system, which identified the Tutsi as the superior group in power. More precisely a ruling system which forced both groups into static ethnic identities was installed. The introduction of this fixed 'ethnic' division between Hutu and Tutsi would later became a frequently used "tool for manipulation of the masses by an elite ruling group" (Coletta and Cullen, 2000, p. 16). Bearing in mind that the Hutu were in

[38] RPA was the name for the military wing of the opposition movement that invaded Rwanda (Hitchcott, 2017, p. 152). However, in practice actors and scholars refer to both the military and political components of the group as RPF (Prunier, 1995, p. 93). This thesis will adopt this practice.

[39] Colonial rule began when Rwanda became part of German East Africa in 1897-1916 (Punier, 1995, p. 25).

an overwhelming majority, "by the end of the Belgian presence in Rwanda in 1959, forty-three chiefs out of forty-five were Tutsi as well as 549 sub-chiefs out of 559" (Prunier, 1995, p. 27).

In 1959 the strained relationship between two competing groups, an emerging Hutu elite and the existing Tutsi elite, escalated. The "older neo-traditionalist Tutsi elite which the colonial authorities had promoted since the 1920s" (Prunier, 1995, p. 50) was now confronted with the newly evolving Hutu elite; around Grégoire Kayibanda and his political party PARMEHUTU. After an attack on a PARMEHUTU activists in November 1959, violent-clashes and chaos broke out. Many Tutsi houses were attacked and burnt. The Hutu social revolution started and brought the century long political dominance of the Tutsi to an end. By 1960 elections were held, and the monarchy was abolished through a referendum. PARMEHUTU won a majority and in 1961 its leader George Kayibanda became the first elected president of a republican government. Rwanda became officially independent from Belgium on the 1st of July 1962. During these events "tens of thousands of Tutsis […] were forced to flee the country" (Dzubow, 1994, p. 514). Due to continuing sporadic violence that took place between 1959 and 1963, Tutsis increasingly took refuge in neighbouring countries', such as Belgian Congo, Burundi, Uganda, and Tanganyika. It is estimated that "some 130,000 Rwandese Tutsi" were forced to go abroad (Prunier, 1995, p. 51). Other sources claim that by 1963 "as many as 500,000 Tutsi refugees living outside the country" (Dzubow, 1994, p. 514).

From Kayibanda to Habyarimana

During his time in office, Kayibanda[40] and his government were responsible for enormous waves of repression against the Rwandan Tutsi population. It is estimated that between December 1963 and January 1964, 10,000 Tutsi were slaughtered (Prunier, 1995, p. 56), in revenge for a surprise attack organised by Tutsi exiles launched from neighbour Burundi. Tutsi repression did not decline. On the contrary strong ethnic quotas were put in place for the public as well as the private sector making sure that no more than nine percent in any sector of employment are Tutsi (Prunier, 1995, p. 60). The government's aim was to limit Tutsi participation in the workforce. This course of action led to several waves of Tutsi emigration with one of

[40] Kayibanda was the president of Rwanda from 1961 until 1973.

the biggest waves taking place close to the end of Kayabinda's presidency from October 1972 to February 1973.

1973 marked the start of a new era for Rwanda. Juvénal Habyarimana came into power through a coup d'état, which was welcomed by the majority of the population. However, Tutsis were still marginalised, the quotas were still in place, and the country remained poor. On the upside, the new leader appeared to be more benevolent in comparison to Kayibanda's regime. Ethnic quotas were only loosely enforced. Under Habyarimana, Rwanda's economy improved and ethnic relations became more peaceful, many Tutsi businessmen were able to flourish (Fujii, 2009, p. 46). Some even described Rwanda in the 1970s and 1980s as a role model for African development (Ansoms, 2005). Rwanda was referred to as "orderly, safe, and relatively free of corruption" until the late 1980s when things stated to fall apart (Fujii, 2009, p. 46). Calls for Rwanda's democratisation became louder, and opposition parties began to form and organise. The one-party system that had been in place since 1978 started to be scrutinised. So far, the system had made sure that Habyarimana's ruling party, the Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND) and his claim to power would not be questioned. However, with the collapse of world coffee prices a severe economic crisis was fuelled. The economic predicament impacted and accelerated the demand for participation and democracy. A further issue that became increasingly delicate to deal with was overpopulation, which was reaching critical levels. By fall 1990 the situation deteriorated and the "Rwandese political scene was one of deep and pervasive crisis" (Prunier, 1995, p. 90). President Habyarimana's rather shallow announcement, from July 1990, declaring that he supported a multi-party system did not ameliorate the situation.

Meanwhile, the RPF based in neighbouring Uganda, was preparing for war. The exiled Tutsi in Uganda were aware of the ongoing political crisis in Rwanda and seized the opportunity. Thus, when Habyarimana announced that he was open to change and a multi-party system, the decision by the RPF leadership to attack Rwanda had already been made, and "Fred Rwigyema set out on a fund-raising mission among Tutsi émigré communities" (Prunier, 1995, p. 92). Consequently, on October 1st 1990 the RPF launched its military invasion, which marked the onset of the Rwandan civil war. The RPF was composed of Tutsi exiles who had fled Rwanda, most during the 1959 social revolution or during the pogroms that took place in 1963/1964 (Fujii, 2009; Hitchcott, 2017). Things started to go wrong for the RPF quite quickly, when on day

two of the invasion their leader Rwigyema was killed (Prunier, 1995, p. 94). The RPF had to retreat and re-valuated their strategy and tactics. Paul Kagame who became Rwigyema's successor, quickly realised that the RPF would not succeed by engaging in conventional warfare. Thus, Kagame "called the beginning of a protracted popular war" (Prunier, 1995, p. 96) employing guerrilla warfare style. The Rwandan civil war would continue for four years until the RPF seized control of the Rwandese capital city of Kigali in July 1994, which marks the end of the internal conflict (Cunningham, 2011, p. 142). The Rwandan government at the beginning of the civil war was quick to label the invasion an "ethnic war" (Bertrand, 2000, p. 99). Thus, ethnicity became the only "lens through which people viewed the country's problems" (Fujii, 2009, p. 50). This decision was taken by the government in a successful attempt to manipulate group feelings, exploiting the notion of ethnic divisions "in their struggle for controlling scarce and even shrinking financial, cultural and political resources" (Prunier, 1995, p. 141). More specifically, in the Rwandan government's struggle for political survival.

Low-intensity Conflict and Peace Talks that end in a Genocide

The years between 1990 and 1994 were characterised by several interlinked issues and events: the task of paving a way towards democracy, sporadic organised civil violence, the RPF's ongoing low-intensity armed struggle, as well as the Arusha peace negotiations process. In the midst of an armed conflict, Habyarimana and his government were confronted with a large-scale opposition movement made up of several new political parties that had the support of a big part of the general population. It was rather difficult for the opposition parties to act in an environment where "every single new step on the road to democracy was going to have to be fought for against a stubbornly conservative power structure bent on keeping its money and privileges" (Prunier, 1995, p. 132). In other words, the opposition was faced with a ruling elite that constantly placed obstacles on the road to further democratisation. The use of violence, thus the perpetration of massacres, was one way for the ruling elite to put a genuine democratisation process to a stop. The process of creating a multi-party system was overshadowed by ongoing massacres, especially in the North of the country, where sporadic organised violence against the population took place. Meanwhile, peace talks with the RPF initiated by Rwanda's opposition in 1992 led to the signing of a ceasefire in July 1992. The peace process was tiresome, challenging,

and fragile. Some opposition parties, such as the CDR, drifted towards extremism by 1993, and hardliners of the Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement et la Démocratie (MRND(D)) accused President Habyarimana of selling out, by accepting a deal with the RPF (Prunier, 1995). After overcoming the last big stumbling block on the agenda, the question of how to set up the post-conflict Rwandan Armed Forces, a peace agreement was signed on the 4th of August in 1993 (Lischer, 2003, p. 80). The Arusha peace agreement outlined, amongst other things, a detailed way on how to install a so called Broad Based Transitional Government (BBTG), as well as the new structure of the united armed forces (Prunier, 1995, p. 191).

The peace deal would not last long. Only ten months after signing the agreement, from "April to June 1994 hundreds of thousands of Rwandan Tutsi and [moderate] Hutu opposed to the Habyarimana regime were brutally massacred by the army and extremist militia of Rwanda" (Manahl, 2000, p. 18). The build up to the devastating large-scale massacres in 1994 was characterised by continuous sporadic violence. A further issue was that the creation of the agreed transitional government was postponed several times. In other words, the aftermath of the peace agreement was characterised by a lack of willingness to implement changes that were previously agreed upon. The fall back to a full-blown civil war in Rwanda was also influenced and fuelled by events outside Rwanda. The assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, the first elected Burundian president, as well as the first Burundian Hutu president (Prunier, 1995, p. 199). Ndadaye was kidnapped and murdered by Tutsi extremist army members in October 1993. Levels of anger, fury, and strong resentment were high among the Hutu community. Acts of retaliations took place, until the "Tutsi-controlled army moved in to restore order in a very heavy-handed way" (Prunier, 1995, p. 199)[41]. Extremist factions in the Rwandan political sphere exploited Ndadaye's death to further justify anti-Tutsi resentments, specifically, that Tutsi are a threat to the Hutu community, and that they cannot be trusted. Thus, for the Hutu to feel secure, Tutsi needed to be eliminated. Extreme racist voices became louder, extremist networks gained more support, and racism became generally more accepted. The final event that needs to be taken into consideration was President Habyrimana's death. On the way back from a high-level meeting in Tanzania, Habyarimana's Falcon 50 was shot down

[41] About 50,000 deaths, 60% Tutsi and 40% Hutu in Burundi (Prunier, 1995, 199)

taking a direct hit from two missiles at Kigali airport. Also on board was the president of Burundi Cyprien Ntaryamira, and the French air crew (Barnett, 2002, p. 97). With Habyarimana out of the picture the Hutu hardliners and extremists were able to seize control of the government. The president's assassination would be the final straw, and "Hutu hardliners declared all Tutsis to be their enemy" (Straus, 2006, p. 7).

The genocide that would follow was seen as a strategy and an attempt to keep the elite in power. The estimated figure of genocide deaths put forward by the UN in November 1994 was 500,000. It is of relevance to add that a "pre-colonial Rwanda did not display a history of systematic violence between Tutsi and Hutu" (Prunier, 1995, p. 39). The notion of ethnic differences between Tutsi and Hutu was fostered by the colonial powers, especially under Belgium's colonial reign, and was further exploited by Rwandan elites to acquire wealth and to stay in power. These ideas and myths about the Hutu and Tutsi population that were spread, implemented, and abused over several decades and "gave birth to its modern society - and its almost intractable problems" (Prunier, 1995, p. 21).

The genocide was stopped when the RPF was able to topple the Hutu regime in Kigali in July 1994. A new government under RPF leader Kagame was formed and the former rebel group swiftly transitioned to become the new ruling party of Rwanda (Salehyan, 2010b). President Paul Kagame had to face "the difficult task of rebuilding Rwanda's economy establishing effective state institutions, and pursuing justice for the horrible massacre of Tutsis as well as Hutus who did not go along with the killings" (Salehyan, 2010b, pp. 20–21). In the aftermath of the genocide, "more than one million Hutus among them the main perpetrators of the genocide, the Interahamwe militia, fled across the border into eastern Zaire, where they congregated in enormous refugee camps" (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2020a). Armed elements based in Zairean refugee camps started cross-border attacks into Rwanda, as well as attacking the Banyamulenge, a Tutsi tribe based in Zaire, which marked the beginning of the Rwandan crisis affecting the situation in neighbouring state Zaire.

The next section will address the condition of *Opportunity*, in terms of shared borders and border permeability within the African Great Lakes region. It will examine how

porous borders between Zaire/DRC[42] and Rwanda provided armed groups with the opportunity to stage cross-border attacks.

### 6.2.2 Opportunity: Shared Borders

Shared borders are one of the key conditions vis-à-vis the creation of interaction opportunities. A country's location provides a unique set of opportunities for state and non-state actors to facilitate exchange. The condition of a shared land border, or in other words, the condition of having a neighbouring state is present in the case of Rwanda. Rwanda is a landlocked country, surrounded by its four neighbours: Uganda to the north, Tanzania in the east, its so called-twin country Burundi in the south, and the big neighbour DRC to the west. Rwanda has a land area of 24,670 km2, whereas the DRC in comparison, which is also the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa, has a total land area of 2,267,050 km2 (*DR Congo*, 2020). Rwanda's civil war from 1990 until 1994 is categorised as the host conflict of diffusion. This makes Rwanda's neighbours potential target states with an increased risk of conflict onset.

Rwanda and the DRC are part of the Great Lake Region which can be described as a "complex network of political and economic interactions with significant implications for peace, security and governance" (Kanyangara, 2016, p. 1). Hence, conflicts in the regions are likely to be intertwined. The border between Rwanda and the DRC is relatively short, with a total length of 217 km. 89 km of the 217km go through the Lake Kivu, and 60km are characterised by mountainous terrain. Thus, the border provides a number of natural barriers (Bedford, 2019).

An important aspect for the study of borders between Rwanda and DRC, and their impact on conflict diffusion, are the two trans-frontier conurbations: Rubavu and Goma located in the north of Lake Kivu and Rusizi and Bukavu in the South Kivu (see Figure 15). These conurbations were key conflict theatres to the internal conflict onset in Zaire in 1996. To the North of the Lake Kivu are Goma (DRC) and Rubavu (Rwanda). The border is 60km long and separates the Virunga National park in the DRC from the Rwandan Volcanoes National Park (Bedford, 2019, p. 4). This region can be described as an area for smugglers, ranging from illegally trafficking small arms, to minerals and wildlife. The Bukavu/Rusizi border area to the South of Lake

[42] The country names Zaire and DRC are used interchangeably.

Kivu historically portrays a high degree of cross-border trade. Both provinces experienced a huge influx of Hutus in 1994, who fled Rwanda after the Tutsi genocide.

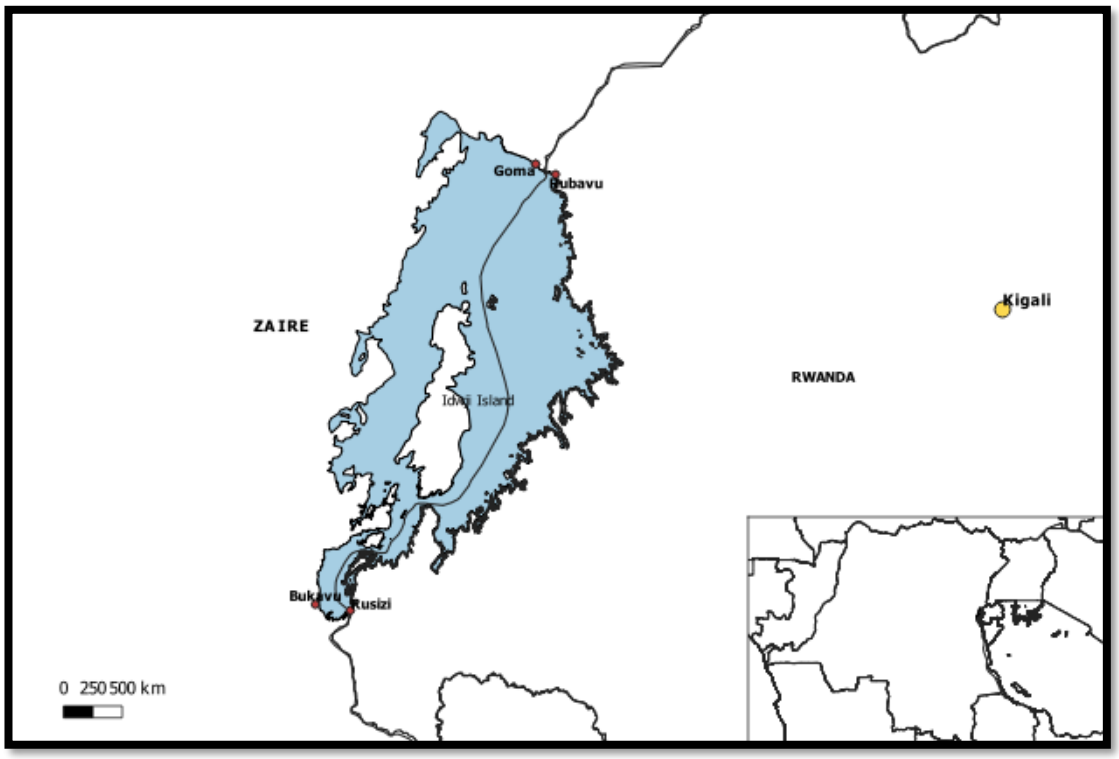


*Figure 15: Map Zaire and Rwanda*

Thus, violence that had initially been internal to Rwanda has "spilled over, and ignored and contested international borders" (Médard, 2009, p. 279). The strong "cross-border dimensions and transnational ethnic identities" (Kanyangara, 2016, p. 1) impacted an already tense situation in Zaire, when armed groups and militias crossed borders to fight. Consequently, the first factor of the causal mechanism is present. The opportunity to launch an insurgency was presented by a shared and porous border that was characterised by limited to no border control. Borders meant very little when refugees and preparators of the genocide fled the Rwandan conflict. Neither were they an obstacle for Congolese Tutsi to move back and forth between the two states to receive training in Rwanda. The historical presence and high degree of interaction opportunities between the communities on either side facilitate the unhindered flow of refugees, as well as combatants.

The second factor of *Willingness* will be explored in the following section. The deliberate choice of several distinct governments to support an emerging rebellion in Zaire will be central to the analysis.

### 6.2.3 Willingness: Transnational Alliances

The formation of a transnational alliance is based on the notion of willingness. Thus, a transnational alliance is the deliberate choice of outside interference in another state's affairs in the areas of security and military. A transnational alliance can be deemed present if we detect the provision of external support from a regional actor to a rebel group in a neighbouring country, more specifically a target state. For the case of conflict diffusion from Rwanda to Zaire the variable of a transnational alliance is present. This finding will be examined in the following.

To be able to fully grasp the regional dimension of conflicts in the African Great Lakes, and more specifically the connection between the Rwandan civil war, and the conflict onset in Zaire in 1996 one must bear in mind the complex picture of transnational alliances. The formation of transnational alliances based on ethnic ties, must be examined in the context of events following the Rwandan civil war and genocide. This section will analyse the external support system of the Alliance des forces Démocratiques pour la Libération (AFDL), "the umbrella rebel organization" (Prunier, 2004, p. 361) that was formed in eastern Zaire in 1996. The AFDL is a rebel group, which was created by and nurtured through the support of several African governments such as Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. Their common goal was to get rid of strongmen Joseph-Désiré Mobutu. Mobutu was in power from 1965 until 1997, when he was overthrown by AFDL rebel leader Laurent Kabila. This section will examine how these distinct but linked transnational alliances were built, how different actors brokered them, what these transnational alliances achieved, and how long alliances lasted. The aim is to detangle the vast web of state-sponsored subversion of the Zairean government.

The next sub-sections will address the linkages between the Rwandan government and an emerging AFDL, and the impact the repercussions of the Rwandan genocide had on the Kivu provinces in Zaire and on the early stage of the conflict. This will be

followed by an examination of the provision of external support from Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

The government of Rwanda acts against Mobutu's inactivity in the Kivu region

President Kagame's reasoning behind the pursuit of Rwanda's interest in neighbouring country Zaire can be best characterised by the notions of national security and foreign policy interests. The transnational alliance that the Rwandese government struck with the Banyamulenge in Zaire and subsequently the AFDL, displays three key dynamics: (1) *protection* (2) *threat elimination*, and (3) the possibility of *regime change*.

Before I provide an analysis of the support that Rwanda provided for the emerging rebel force, it is of relevance to examine the events between the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the 1996 civil war onset in Zaire. After the RPF under Kagame took control in Kigali, hundreds of thousands Rwandan fled into neighbouring countries, especially into Zaire and Tanzania, "mostly Hutu who feared the revenge of the FPR" (Manahl, 2000, p. 18). Amongst the refugees fleeing to Zaire were soldiers of the ex-Rwandan armed forces, the Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR), as well as individuals of the notorious Interahamwe, who formed the youth wing of Habyamina's MRND, and can be labelled an organised militia group. Both groups were involved in the execution of, and are responsible for, the mass murder against the Tutsi, moderate Hutu and Twa, in 1994 (Salehyan, 2010b, p. 21). The key figures and the main perpetrators of the genocide were hiding amongst refugees in Zaire. The refugee camps in South and North Kivu would provide the factions the opportunity to regroup. Thus, ex-FAR and Interahamwe "almost immediately melded together to form one insurgent force" (Thom, 1999, p. 2). The insurgent force did not only use the refugee camps in the Kivu Province as a hideout. They also managed to take over control of the area, through being in charge of the distribution of relief supplies, and the collection of taxes (Thom, 1999, p. 9). In addition, the camps provided an ideal situated base from which they were able to launch cross border guerrilla-style attacks into Rwanda (Thom, 1999, p. 2; Manahl, 2000, p. 18). The militarisation of the militia group, and thus, their ability to organise attacks from Zaire was enabled by President Mobutu's inactivity. In comparison to other states such as Tanzania, Zaire did not limit militant actives within the camps. Additionally, Mobutu actively encouraged the organisation of a militant fighting force that could retake Kigali (Salehyan, 2010b, p. 21). This argument is supported by the circumstance that the Zairean government allowed the ex-FAR

members to “keep small arms and light infantry weapons, (i.e., automatic rifles, machine guns, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades [RPGs], hand grenades, etc.)” (Thom, 1999, p. 2). Only heavy weaponry such as vehicles and artillery were seized.

One could also argue that the Mobutu regime simply did not have a lot of control over the situation in the eastern part of Zaire. The Kivu provinces are located around 1400 to 1500km east from the capital city Kinshasa and Mobutu’s ability to exercise control was very limited. Although “Zairean troops were sent to the east to provide security in and around the refugee camps” many soldiers of the Zairian Armed Forces (FAZ) decide to collaborate with the Rwandan militias (Manahl, 2000, pp. 18–19). This was partially because Mobutu failed to pay their salary, which translated into low morale. Moreover, it would have been generally challenging for the ill-equipped FAZ to deal with the sizeable number of around 40,000 ex-FAR and Interahamwe (Salehyan, 2010b, p. 22). The outcome was that Zaire acquiesced the situation, a behaviour which led to the re-establishment of the “old genocidal government […] in exile” (Vlassenroot, 2002, p. 508). When the international community did not act to demilitarise the Zairean refugee camps and the militias began to attack the Tutsis in Zaire, the Rwandan government decided to act. The presence of Hutu militias that harassed and attacked the already marginalised Tutsi population in the Kivus throughout 1995-1996, as well as the growing number of “small-scale incursions into Rwanda without being prevented by the host regime” (Vlassenroot, 2002, p. 508) led the Rwandan government to intervene in Zaire.

The first dynamic that aims to explain the reasoning behind the Rwandan government’s decision to form an alliance with and assist the AFDL, is the notion of *protection*. More specifically, the protection and the defence of Tutsi communities in eastern Zaire. Thus, the Rwandan government decided to train and arm the Banyamulenge who would become the key group of the future AFDL insurgency. The attacks on ethnic Congolese Tutsi by the exiled Rwandan Hutu fighters highly impacted the Rwandan government’s course of action. Moreover, the Hutu fighters who attacked the Banyamulenge communities were supported by FAZ soldiers. FAZ soldiers frequently arrested, killed and looted their villages. Longstanding tensions and disputes over land, resources, and the question of citizenship, between the Banyamulenge, who are Kinyarwanda speakers and the Autochtones, who see themselves as the indigenous Congolese were exacerbated by the Rwandan genocide

(Nest, Grignon and Kisangani, 2006, p. 20). Especially, the issue of citizenship became more acute and threating for the Banyamulenge community in April of 1995. On the 28th of April the Zairean "transitional parliament adopted a resolution that stripped the Banyarwanda[43] and Banyamulenge of their Congolese nationality" (Ndikumana and Emizet, 2005, p. 76). The situation escalated when the deputy governor of the South Kivu province, Lwabanji Ngabo, called upon all Banyamulenge to leave Zaire. The Banyamulenge refused to leave and instead turned to the government of Rwanda for help (Ndikumana and Emizet, 2005). The vice-governor's announcement and the intensification of harassment against the Banyamulenge were an important step in a chain of events that ultimately led to the civil war onset and the end of Mobutu's decade long dictatorship in Zaire. The call for help from the Banyamulenge, and their insecure position in general presented a great opportunity for the Rwandan government to act. The ties between the marginalised Tutsi communities, predominantly of the Banyamulenge, who live in "the highlands to the east of the Rusizi river and Lake Tanganyika" (Manahl, 2000, p. 19), and the RPF go back to the initial stages of the Rwandan armed conflict. As early as 1991 "a group of Banyamulenge youth had left the Haut Plateau to be enrolled into the RPF forces" (Vlassenroot, 2002, p. 508) to receive military training. By 1995 the Banyamulenge youth recruits from 1991 facilitated further recruitment among the community, several hundred new recruits would be militarily trained in and by Rwanda (Willame, 1997; Vlassenroot, 2002). In July 1996, the Banyamulenge welcomed a first delegation from Kigali in the Haut Plateau. The delegation informed the leaders, as well as the general population that a military operation is in preparation (Vlassenroot, 2002, p. 509). More intense preparation for the imminent military intervention into Zaire began in August and September 1996, when the first Banyamulenge fighters who received training in Rwanda came back to the Kivu provinces (Thom, 1999, p. 2). The strategy of the Rwandan government was straightforward. The aim was to arm and support Zairean rebels. The Banyamulenge played a key role to materialise this plan. By November 1996, the Rwandan trained Banyamulenge, "aided by the Rwandan Army, was able to capture the town of Goma" (Salehyan, 2010b, p. 22). The protection of fellow Tutsi was not the only reason for the Rwandan government to become involved in Zaire. Rwanda also saw its own national security at stake.

[43] Kinyarwanda speakers that migrated to Rwanda in the 1950s (Nest, 2006, p. 20).

The second dynamic, the notion of *threat elimination*, was already touched upon. The protection of the Banyamulenge community can also be perceived as a welcomed pretext for the subsequent Rwandan military intervention in Zaire in 1997. The presence of a militant armed group who is openly hostile to Kigali was a concern that needed to be addressed. Hence, the decision to intervene in Zaire tackled not only the issue of protecting ethnic Tutsi, but also created the opportunity to address a far more pressing issue. For Rwanda's national security the presence of an antagonistic militia at their border, that can be best described as a "state-in-exile" (Lischer, 2003, p. 93), was no longer tolerable. Mobutu being unwilling or incapable of addressing being host to an "extraterritorial rebel base" further sparked hostilities between the two states (Salehyan, 2008, p. 55).

Moreover, the intricate net of transnational alliances only heightened existing tensions. The Zairean-based Hutu militia were supported by the Sudanese military, a revelation which further increased Kagame's threat perception (Prunier, 2007, p. 372). The transnational alliance of the RPF and the Banyamulenge was set up in 1991 through the provision of training for the Zairean Tutsi. In 1996 the Rwandan government was able to use this alliance to their benefit. The local connection was a relevant strategic advantage for the Rwandan government. Reyntjens (2009, p. 55) goes even further and argues that the Rwandan government instrumentalised the Banyamulenge, and thus, the Banyamulenge rebellion which was initiated in South Kivu was an extension of the Rwandan civil war. The RPA dealt with the security issue along its borders "in the most radical fashion" (Prunier, 2004, p. 375). By addressing the issue of a Hutu militia in the Kivu provinces, the military operation of the Rwandan government caused another massacre. This time thousands of innocent refugees lost their lives (Ndikumana and Emizet, 2005, p. 76). By September 1996, Rwanda's issue with the militias hiding in refugee camps was dealt with, and a buffer-security zone along its border was established (Lischer, 2003, p. 98). Thus, Kigali moved to the next phase of its plan: topple Mobutu.

The third dynamic of *regime change* was on the cards. The aim to overthrow Mobutu let Kigali further sponsor and create the Zairean rebel group AFDL. With the well-timed emergence of the AFDL umbrella rebel movement, the initial Banyamulenge rebellion could be extended (Thom, 1999, p. 4). The rebellion, spearheaded by its proclaimed leader Laurent Kabila, now also attracted other disgruntled Congolese,

beyond the Tutsi communities in Zaire, who were anti-Mobutu. There is strong evidence to suggest that Rwanda actively chose and wanted Kabila to lead the "popular insurgent army" (Salehyan, 2010b, p. 22). Under the leadership of Kabila the AFDL staged "a rebellion in eastern Congo in October 1996" (Ndikumana and Emizet, 2005, p. 76), which marks the civil war onset in Zaire. Thus, a rebellion which began in the Kivu provinces soon expanded throughout the whole country. Noteworthy at this point is that Kabila already attempted to challenge the Mobutu regime in the 1960s, but only "with Rwandan help was he able to lead the AFDL to several early victories against" the FAZ (Salehyan, 2010, p. 22). Rwanda's further pursuit of challenging the Mobutu regime, after the initial aim of eliminating the threat coming from the Hutu militias in the refugee camps, can be perceived as an act of retaliation; an act of reprisal concerning Mobutu's support to the Habyarimana regime during the early stages of the Rwandan civil war. In 1990, Mobutu was swift to send over FAZ troops in support of the FAR, in a successful attempt to push the RPF rebels back into Uganda. On the other hand, Rwanda was of the impression that the Mobutu regime was "an easy target for change" (Lischer, 2003, p. 98).

The axes of competing alliances and support networks in 1996 was reasonably straightforward: AFDL and Kagame with his main supporter Museveni versus Mobutu and the ex-FAR/ Habyarimana supported by the Sudanese government. The following sub-section will address Uganda's involvement in supporting the Banyamulenge and the AFDL.

The Government of Uganda and its Diplomatic backing of Rwanda in Zaire

The government of Uganda decided to support the creation of the AFDL in line with Rwanda's foreign policy interests. Thus, the notion of my friend's enemy is my enemy comes into focus when analysing Uganda's reasoning behind the provision of external support to the AFDL in 1996 and 1997. Both governments the Ugandan and the Rwandese were linked through a long-standing transnational alliance, based on the personal relationship and close friendship between President Museveni and President Kagame. Uganda decided to support the Banyamulenge rebellion indirectly and later the AFDL directly. From the beginning of the rebellion, on the 24th of October 1996, Uganda played a vital role.

Rwandan troops were able to use Ugandan territory to intervene in Zaire. Thus, the RPA was "crossing the border with Uganda at Cyanika [Rwanda] and transiting through the Kisoro region" (Reyntjens, 2009, p. 58) having the Kibumba camp as their target. Moreover, during the rebellion Uganda also provided substantial indirect assistance for the AFDL. The Ugandan government provided support in form of training, supplies and encouragement (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). Although never openly admitted by the Ugandan administration evidence suggests that Uganda also sent troops into combat in support of the AFDL. Moreover, there is profound evidence from several eye witnesses that "Ugandan soldiers entered Zaire though Rutshuru" (Reyntjens, 2009, p. 60) heading north by the end of January 1997. Unfortunately, Uganda's involvement and its implications in Zaire and their relationship is "less well documented than that of Rwanda" (Reytjens, 2009, p. 58). A further line of reasoning as to why the government was involved in Zaire could be the fact that Mobutu provided Ugandan rebel forces access to Zairean territory. In other words, he provided a safe haven for the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) who were able to operate from Zairian territory.

However, in comparison to Museveni, the Angolan government was more open concerning their support of the AFDL. The next subsection will address the Zimbabwean and Zambian interference in the Zairean internal conflicts.

Zimbabwe's & Zambia's clandestine support for the AFDL

The involvement of the governments in Zimbabwe and Zambia is frequently less addressed when it comes to the examination of regional outside support of the AFDL. However, the government of Zimbabwe, more specifically the ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF), were in favour of the new rebel movement, providing them with substantial assistance during the ongoing conflict. The ZANU-PF supplied the AFDL with relevant and important hardware such as weapons and aircraft produced and transported to Zaire by the Zimbabwe Defence Industries (ZDI), the Harare-based and state-owned arms manufacturer and procurement company. In addition, the Zimbabwean government also sent over direct troop support such as "pilots, paratroopers and special forces" and "two Zimbabwean air force Casa transport planes were used to ship arms and food to the rebel forces and

to airlift troops to advanced positions" (Reyntjens, 2009, pp. 65–66). The total value of ZDI's supplies was estimated to be around US$39 million (Reyntjens, 2009, p. 65).

Zambia's backing of the AFDL was less clear. There are limited accounts. However, according to the findings of the UCDP External Support Dataset, Zambia indeed provided backing for the AFDL (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). Their accounts indicate that Zambia provided the AFDL with access to their land. Thus, the government of Zambia allowed the AFDL to cross its territory to have easier access to areas around Lubumbashi and the South of Zaire. Zambia in an effort to support the AFDL also cooperated with the government of Angola and "in early April 1997, Lusaka allowed the Katangese Gendarmes to land in Ndola" (Reytjens, 2009, p. 65), a city along the Zairean-Zambian border. The advance of the Tigres[44] was successful. The Tigres moved further north and were able to take "Lubumbashi from the west, after entering Zaire through Kipushi" (Reytjens, 2009, p. 65). Moreover, the government of Zambia did not grant Belgian troops access to their territory when Belgium requested to station troops in Ndola in preparation to evacuate Lumbumbashi (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). Distinct reports and newspapers provide different accounts on the extent of Zambia's involvement. However, if you perceive these accounts as complementary, Zambia's support went beyond indirect support of the Zairean rebel movement. Thus, according "to the South African weekly, The Sunday Independent newspaper, Zambia also contributed 1000 troops" (Reytjens, 2009, p. 65). Other sources report that in early 1996 alone hundred and fifty tons of "weapons and communication equipment were distributed from Zambia into Zaire" (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011a, p. 1).

Angola's reasoning to back the AFDL: Mobutu's support for UNITA

The relationship between the Angolan government and Mobutu can be described as severely constrained. The reason for their adversarial relationship was the Zairean support for the Angolan rebel group União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA). The rebel movement UNITA, active in Angola over several decades, was one of the key parties in the Angolan civil war from 1975 to 2002. Over the years Mobutu supported UNITA by providing the opportunity to purchase "hundreds of tons of weapons and ammunition" (Reytjens, 2009, p. 62). Moreover,

[44] Tigres were an integrative part of the Angolan armed forces.

Mobutu provided UNITA with access to Zairean territory from where the rebel group was able to launch its attacks into Angola. The Zairean support of UNITA was one of the key reasons why the Angolan government joined Rwanda and Uganda, in a coalition of states with the aim to topple Mobutu. However, Angola's support to Kabila and the AFDL was "more narrowly focussed on undermining its rival UNITA" (Thom, 1999, p. 10). Thus, Angola's decision to enter the conflict was not predominantly based on the assumption that Mobutu needed to be overthrown, but it was considered a welcomed side-effect (Thom, 1999, p. 10). When Angola sent troops into Zaire their security concerns regarding the presence of UNITA was heightened, and Luanda decided to support the ambitions of the AFDL to expand the focus of the rebellion from the north to the whole of Zaire (Reytjens, 2009, p. 63). The involvement of Angola supporting the AFDL in Zaire was not evident at the end of 1996. During mid-February 1997 "several battalions (2000-3000 'Tigres') were airlifted to Kigali, and taken from there by road to Goma and Bukavu (Reytjens, 2009, p. 63). At this point it becomes more apparent that the government of Angola entered the Zairean conflict, since the Tigres were an integrative part of the Angolan armed forces. With the logistical support of the Angolan government and the RPA, the Tigres made their rather late, but nevertheless, successful entry. The deployment of the Tigres, thus, the Katangese Gendarmes provided the relevant and critical push for the AFDL to be able to further advance towards seizing Kinshasa. With the support of the Tigres the AFDL was able to capture most parts of Zaire within in three months of their arrival, from mid-February to mid-May 1997 (Reyntjens, 2009). Angola being openly involved in the Zairean civil war supporting Kabila, Luanda became the centre of "meetings between the rebellion and its regional supporters" (Reyntjens, 2009, p. 64).

The Angolan government extended their support to the AFDL from indirect support, i.e. providing weapons, logistics, and training to becoming a secondary warring party through their provision of troops. Not only the Angolan government went from indirect support to the provision of troops. The governments of Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia also went from indirectly supporting the AFDL to intervening with their armed forces.

This section provided an analysis of the intertwined network of regional transnational alliances in support of the AFDL aiming at overthrowing Mobutu. From this account Rwanda can be perceived as the main and key sponsor of the AFDL, whereas other

heads of states provided support to varying degrees. Thus, the Kivu rebellion displays a closely-knit network of state actors with differing interests but ultimately the same aim: the installation of a friendlier and potentially controllable regime in Zaire.

The following sub-section will address the presence and involvement of mercenary forces in the Zairean civil war on behalf of the rebel group and their impact on the civil war onset. Although most accounts of mercenary activities analysed in Zaire are focused on Mobutu's White Legion, this will not be the centre of analysis in the following. This is due to the fact that Mobutu only hired European mercenaries one month into the internal conflict. Thus, the White Legion did not influence the civil war onset, but rather ongoing conflict dynamics. On the contrary, the focus will exclusively be on the AFDL's relationship with distinct actors on the market for force that impacted the process of diffusion.

### 6.2.4 Mobilisation: Supply and Demand Structure of Mercenaries

The market for force in the Great Lakes Region, and especially the involvement of mercenaries in the in the First Congo rebellion, is particularly diverse and covers a range of services provided by distinct actors to the AFDL. Services range from training prior to the conflict onset to engagement in combat.

The independent variable of mercenary mobilisation is present if we can establish the activities of violent non-state actors that falls under the following concept: A mercenary is either an individual or part of a group organised in an ad-hoc manner; whose primarily intention is financial gain, the prospect of earning a living, and/or looting; who is neither a national of the party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party of the conflict; not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict; and provides services directly related to armed conflict.

In November 1996 during the ongoing conflict, only the New York Times published a report that indicated that the AFDL were trained by mercenaries on Rwandan soil prior to the conflict onset. This article was in line with the assumption of many diplomats that predicted that "there is little doubt that Rwanda's Tutsi led Government played a major role in supporting the rebellion in eastern Zaire" (French, 1996, p. 1). Further accounts on the activities of mercenaries indicate that the AFDL lead by Kabila was not only supported by neighbouring countries' governments

Uganda and Rwanda, as outlined above, but also from "foreign mercenary forces" (Pech, 2000, p. 120). Unfortunately, Pech's (2000) account provides no further information with regard to the tasks these mercenaries provided, nor their origin.

However, two distinct mercenary activities, beyond the training provision in Rwanda, can be identified: firstly, the Tutsi Legion; and secondly, the presence of Eritrean and Ethiopian mercenaries. Both of these actors were present in Zaire before the civil war onset.

The presence of a Tutsi Legion in support of Kabila was discovered by French and Belgian intelligence services, and seems to complement the vast presence of mercenaries involved in the 1996/97 Zairean civil conflict. Isnard (1997) reports on the presence and operations of a 'legion tutsie' in Zaire. The Tutsi Legion was present since the beginning of the conflict, numbering around two thousand men (Isnard, 1997). However, to take Kisangani in March 1997 the Tutsi Legion were able to mobilise 15,000 men. Other newspaper outlets picked up on this story and provided further accounts of the Tutsi mercenaries' involvement during the conflict. The Toronto Star reports that a "Ugandan-trained Tutsi Legion of as many as 15,000 men has been the main force" backing rebel leader Kabila (*The Toronto Star*, 1997). Further information is provided regarding the country of origin: the fighters were allegedly recruited in Uganda, Eritrea and Burundi. Several newspaper articles state that a multinational mercenary force trained and logistically supported by Uganda "backed Mr. Kabila's conquest of eastern and central Zaire" (Pfaff, 1997, p. 2). The Sunday Mail indicates that the Tutsi fighters were at the head of the AFDL's rebellion and also responsible for mass killings of Hutu refugees (*Sunday Mail (Queensland, Australia)*, 1997). This is information is corroborated by the Tages-Anzeiger reporting that since the advance of the Tutsi Legion started between 150,000 and 180,000 people have 'gone missing', most of the victims being Hutu refugees from Rwanda (*Tages-Anzeiger*, 1998). According to Isnard (1997) the fighters recruited for the Tutsi Legion were financed through private means/private investors, meaning the Colombian, Lebanese, and Israeli members of the diamond and gold mafia, totalling an amount of 208 million US Dollars. These accounts indicate that the client financing the Tutsi mercenaries is a private actor. The service of combat provision was consumed by the AFDL rebel movement, but the logistical aspects of the Tutsi Legion was organised by the Ugandan government. The notion of hiring mercenaries along ethnic lines becomes more prominent at this point. The Tutsi Legion might be comparable to

Gadhafi's strategy of recruitment of fighters from the Tuareg ethnic group based in Mali and Niger in the 1970s when he created the 'Isalmic Legion' and in 2011 when about 2000 to 3000 Tuareg from Mali left to fight in Libya (Vogl, 2011).

The Tutsi Legion was not the only group of mercenaries fighting on behalf the AFDL. A second group, of Eritrean and Ethiopian mercenaries, was also involved in the Zairean conflict (Reyntjens, 2009). Eritrean and Ethiopian mercenaries were hired on "three-month contracts and solely for operations in the Goma-Bukavu area" (Reyntjens, 2009, p. 62). Taking into consideration that the Eritrean and Ethiopian mercenaries were predominantly hired for operations in the Kivu provinces it seems like the AFDL's demand for mercenaries, as combat support, increased as the rebellion geographically expanded. In other words, the geographical expansion demanded an increased number of mercenaries.

A third commercial military actor that was active in Zaire on behalf of the AFDL and thus impacted conflict dynamics on the ground in favour of the AFDL was the private military company MPRI. However, it becomes of relevance to state that MPRI was hired during the ongoing conflict, and thus cannot be said to have impacted the conflict onset in 1996. In addition, MPRI, as an international company, not only has a different organisational structure, in comparison to the regional mercenary forces from Uganda, Eritrea, Burundi, and Ethiopia, it also provided a different set of services. Consequently, the impact of MPRI on the Zairean conflict must be evaluated in a slightly distinct manner. Moreover, it can be argued that the US-based company, MPRI, had close links with the US government. The private company played a relevant role in Kabila's successful campaign to take control of Kisangani and Kinshasa through the provision of technical and logistical support (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). Moreover, MPRI provided the AFDL with artillery advisors. In combination these three distinct tasks were important for a successful offensive. The question remains: Who financed MPRI's involvement? In other words, who was the client and financier? Similar to the financing of the Tutsi Legion, the funds were provided by the private sector, more specifically by Barrick Gold Corp. Barrick Gold Corp is an international company that has been publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange since 1987, which was US based until 2005 when it was taken over by a Canadian rival. It can be argued that the corporation had a vested interest in a stable Zaire. Potentially it even aimed at installing a friendlier regime through supporting

Kabila's rise to power in 1997. The Barrick Gold Corp started mining in the Haut Uele province, Isiro in 1998, but had to withdrew the same year due to rising local unrest and the most likely the civil war onset (Quick *et al.*, 2018). The Haute Uele province is located in north-eastern part of Zaire, on the border to South Sudan. MPRI's involvement in the Zairean conflict could also be labelled as a covert operation of the US, being able to pursue US interests without direct involvement of US boots on the ground. Thus, the privatisation of military operations offers the possibility of plausible deniability for every state government (Reyntjens, 2009, p. 76).

In summary, in support of the AFDL were two distinct types of Commercial Military Actor, on the one hand regional mercenaries, and on the other hand a globally active private military company. The high amount of outside interference regarding the recruiting process of CMAs is relevant. Most of the CMAs that fought on behalf or alongside the AFDL were hired and paid by a third party. A third party which was either a government, in the case of Rwanda and Uganda, or a private actor, such as the 'mafia' or a big corporation. It appears that none of the CMAs present in Zaire have had a direct client-agent relationship with Kabila or the AFDL leadership. The Kabila rebellion was merely the consumer who crucially benefitted from the outside support. In other words, it seems like Kabila did not broker any connections to mercenaries or private military companies himself.

Although this section is focused on the AFDL, I would like to briefly acknowledge Mobutu's extensive use of mercenaries in the early stages of the conflict. One month after conflict erupted in the Kivu provinces, in November 1996, Zaire's military leaders came together to discuss a counter-offensive strategy (Pech, 2000). During this meeting Eluki Monga Aundu, the army chief of staff stressed that the FAZ "could not stage an effective counter-offensive against the Ugandan and Rwandan-backed rebels […] without the assistance of foreign mercenaries" (Pech, 2000, p. 127). The decision to recruit mercenaries was swiftly taken and negotiations with military experts took place. However, "Kinshasa failed to implement an immediate plan" (Pech, 2000, p. 127). Such a plan could perhaps have buttressed Mobutu's forces enough to quell the AFDL rebellion. It seems like the last-minute decision to recruit the so-called White Legion had not had the impact the Mobutu regime intended (see Fitzsimmons, 2012).

The following section will go into more detail on how the AFDL was formed. Moreover, it will address the distinct phases the civil war went through, and how the Kabila rebellion transitioned from a local rebellion in the Kivu provinces to a country wide civil war that would not only threaten the Mobutu regime but would eventually overthrow his thirty-two yearlong dictatorship.

### 6.2.5 Outcome: The Escalation of the Kivu Conflict

From the moment the fighting broke out in eastern Zaire involving more than a million refugees based in North and South Kivu provinces, one question was most prevalent: "Where could the potent rebel force that ignited this conflagration have suddenly sprung from?" (New York Times, Nov. 23 1996). One month after the civil war onset in October 1996 the western world struggled to unravel or grasp the intricate network of multiple state and non-state actors involved in Zaire. The conflict was relatively brief, lasting for around seven months until it was terminated on the 17th of May when Laurent Kabila seized power of Kinshasa, and consequently renamed Zaire the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Saleyhan, 2010, p. 23). The potent rebel group the New York Times referred to in November 1996, was the AFDL, an alliance, a coalition of distinct "movements opposed to the Mobutu regime" (Manahl, 2000, p. 20). The rebellion and the subsequent conflict onset in the Kivu provinces broke out when Mobutu's Zaire was already struck by "economic crisis and political chaos" (Ndikumana and Emizet, 2005, pp. 75-76). Mobutu was not only confronted with a severe economic crisis, but also with a rising opposition movement that longed for reforms to his one-party-system under the leadership of his Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution (MPR). The way Mobutu dealt with challengers to his decade long dictatorship was ruthless. As his decision to slaughter 294 protesting students in Lumbumbashi, in May 1990, portrays (Emizet, 1997, p. 44; Nest, 2005, p. 19). With the large influx of Rwandan refugees in 1994 the political, as well as the security situation in Zaire, especially on a local level in the eastern part, deteriorated (Emizet, 2000). However, to begin with Mobutu did not show a lot of interest concerning the situation in the Kivu provinces; "local and regional dynamics far exceeded the capacity of a collapsed state and an impotent political class" (Reytjens, 2009, p. 13) to appropriately handle the large influx of refugees and fighters in a remote area of Zaire.

The influx of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire, however, did not create the civil war onset. It was rather the large number of ex-Rwandan armed forces and Interahamwe who fled into neighbouring Zaire. Both groups rather quickly combined forces and created an insurgency movement with the aim to retake Kigali. They were able to launch cross-border attacks into Rwanda. And the newly formed militia used the refugee camp as basis for attacks within Zaire, against the local Tutsi population, more specifically the Banyamulenge. As addressed in greater detail above, the presence of such a group was a valid security concern for the Rwandan government and the attacks against Tutsi a welcomed justification for their intervention in Zaire. Thom (1999, p. 12) illustrates that the seven month long civil war underwent distinct phases pursuing different objectives: (1) October to November 1996 - control of "border towns and major refugee camps"; (2) December 1996 until March 1997 - "rebel breakout from the eastern frontier into Haut Zaire Province"; (3) March until May 1997 - "rapid advance to control the remaining strategic regions" and the fall of Mobutu. However, before the civil war onset in October, and about two months earlier between August and September 1996, 1200 soldiers from Rwanda began to infiltrate Zaire through the forests "along the north and south-west borders" accompanied by "200 Rwandan-trained Banyamasisi Tutsi fighters" who infiltrated North Kivu and "1000 Banyamulenge Tutsi fighters" who were tasked with infiltrating the province of South Kivu (Pech, 2000, p. 125). Thus, according to Pech (2000, p. 125) "the initial strength of the rebel forces was about 2500" fighters. At this point in time the force can be described as rather fragmented. However, one can argue that the ethnic Tutsi from the South Kivu province, the Banyamulenge, were the core of the group, and would become the backbone of the future rebel alliance (Thom, 1999, p. 12; Pech, 2000, p. 125).

Their first operation was launched on the 4th of October 1996 attacking the village of Lemera in the North Kivu province. Several days after the infiltration force was able to record their first victory at Lemera, more precisely on the 18th of October, which marks the date when the Rwandan led rebel movement would call themselves the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaire (Pech 2000). The 18th of October is also the date which officially marks the civil war onset in Zaire. At this point the assumption or explanation that the armed rebellion in eastern Zaire was solely based and initiated by young and marginalised Banyamulenge

fighting for their right to citizenship and against prosecution, needed to be revised (Vlassenroot, 2002, p. 509).

The first phase of the conflict was marked by the AFDL military advances in the eastern provinces, but was also characterised by "massacres and [violent] persecution of refugees" (Manhal, 2000, p. 20). By early November, once the AFDL was in control of the major border towns from the South Kivu in Uvira, over Bukavu, to North Kivu in Goma, the Rwandan aim to create a security buffer zone along the border was accomplished. This also meant that the Banyamulenge gained significant control in the military and political sphere. A new administration was set-up and several "influential position within the provincial administration" in the South Kivu province were given to Banyamulenge (Vlassenroot, 2002, p. 509). Therefore, not only the Rwandan government was successful in achieving their aim. The Banyamulenge were too. The fact that the AFDL only occupied around five percent of Zaire four months into the conflict (Reyntjens, 2009), was an indicator that the Banyamulenge and the Rwandan government, perceived the rebellions' aim to be fulfilled once the border areas were secured.

One did not fail to notice that there was indeed hesitation amongst the regional supporters of the AFDL; apparently Uganda was unwilling to further sponsor a rebellion in Zaire "beyond its immediate security interests" (Reytjens, 2009, p. 62).While the outside supporters were discussing further strategies, the AFDL gained momentum at the local level, when 'native' Congolese joined the AFDL with the aim to overthrow Mobutu's oppressive regime. Thus, the creation of an official and tangible rebel group, the AFDL, in October, can be perceived as the first turning point. A second critical moment for the alliance was Kabila's introduction as a "leader of the revolution" (Thom, 1999, p. 14), in November. Kabila's emergence as the key figure of the AFDL gave the alliance momentum and credibility. The Kivu conflict which up until this point could have rather been described as "proxy war" (Thom, 1999, p. 14) led by Rwandan troops supporting ethnic Tutsi, was now spearheaded by a Congolese who had experience leading revolutionary movements (Pech, 2000, p. 125). However, Kabila was never successful in his revolutionary struggle against Mobutu until he had extensive outside support of several regional governments, as addressed above. Thus, the second phase of the civil war began when the rebellion advanced beyond the Kivu provinces. The AFDL's aim was to take Kisangani, a city around 700 km west from Bunia. According to Manahl (2000, p. 27) the AFDL fought for five months before

taking Kisangani. But once Kisangani was conquered the alliance was able to advance towards Kinshasa, which marks the third phase of the civil war. When the AFDL started to push further westward the alliances gained even more strength and momentum when thousands of anti-Mobutu Congolese welcomed the rebel group (Saleyhan, 2010, p. 23). From there on, due to the overwhelming dissatisfaction with the Mobutu regime in the general population and the alliance's strong support from Rwandan and Angolan armed forces the AFDL was able to advance swiftly. According to Ndikumana and Emizet the rebel group was "met by cheering crowds as they captured towns en route to Kinshasa" (2005, p. 76). Precisely twelve days after the AFDL had taken over in control in Kinshasa, their leader Kabila became the first president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the 17th of May 1997 (Ndikumana and Emizet, p. 2005).

How did the Zairean Government react to the Kivu rebellion in 1996?

The Zairean government's reaction can be described as a mixture of indifference, and inability. It can be argued that Mobutu was indifferent to the fighting, since the conflict broke out in the most eastern part of the country, thousands of kilometres away from the capital. Inability was due to the aspect that Mobutu was not able to project power to the eastern part of the country along its border with Rwanda. Nonetheless, by taking a closer look at the numbers of armed forces available to the Zairean government, the Zairean army was considerably superior in numbers, in contrast, to the rebel force. In 1996 when conflict broke out the "combined Zairean security forces numbered officially more than 100,000" (Manahl, 2000, p. 20). In contrast, the number of combatants on the rebel side is difficult to estimate. Numbers vary from 2,500, over to 6,000, to a total of 10,000 combatants (Pech, 2000, p. 125; Fitzsimmons, 2012, p. 261). However, one can assume that the Zairean armed forces were not in great shape, which also explains the government's need for mercenary forces concerning the organisation of a counter-offensive. Moreover, a successful counter-offensive in the east was further complicated by badly deteriorated roads, which made it more challenging for the Zairean army to be deployed in the east (Pech, 2000, p. 127). Nevertheless, it was not the case that the government did not react at all. Reinforcements were sent to the Kivus. As Thom (1999, p. 13) describes "at least batteries of field artillery totalling about 12 guns, part of a DSP battalion, and additional SARM troops were deployed to the border region", a troop deployment which "had no appreciable effect on the

outcome". One line of argument is that the Zairean troops rather worsened the situation. Zairean troops who were not local to the Kivu provinces took advantage of the unclear situation and took to looting, rather than protecting the civilian and refugee population. This reinforcement was "one of the few major redeployments of FAZ forces to occur throughout the war" (Thom, 1999, p. 13). However, once the rebels were able to take control in Kisangani the situation for the Zairean government became more challenging. Mobutu decided to hire a European mercenary force, the so-called White Legion, in defence of Kinshasa, a decision which would not prevent Kabila and the AFDL from seizing control over Zaire. Strategic points in Zaire were conquered by the alliance held together by RPA command and combat support. Kinshasa, on the other hand, failed to act swiftly. The White Legion counter-offensive could not halt the AFDL advances. The external support the alliance received from Angola, Uganda, and Rwanda played a decisive role "in achieving Kabila's victory" (Fitzsimmons, 2012, p. 262).

Kabila's presidency of the newly renamed DRC was due to last only until 2001, but was characterised by the greatest conflict the African continent has ever witnessed. This devastating civil war was from 1998 until July 2003. The civil war onset only a year later appears like a déjà vu. Kabila quickly fell out with the external regional supporters that brought him into power, foremost the government of Rwanda. Another Banyamulenge-initiated rebellion erupted in Goma backed by the Rwandan government, and the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) was formed. This marked the start of the Second Congo Rebellion.

Today's DRC still struggles to come to terms with the devastating long-term repercussions from these internal conflicts. The situation in the Kivus is still highly volatile. The region very recently made new distressing headlines when the Italian ambassador to the DRC was killed on the 22nd of February 2021 near Goma (Assignon, 2021). The government of the DRC accused the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) for attacking the convoy and killing the ambassador, his bodyguard and the driver (Karuhanga, 2021). The FDLR is closely linked to the events described in this case study. The militia was "founded by Hutu extremists partly responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide" (Assignon, 2021, p. 1). However, the FDLR denies its involvement, and blames the armies of the DRC and Rwanda.

The following section will draw the conclusions from the sections above together to provide a clear overview of the findings.

### 6.2.6 Summary

The spread of civil war from the conflict-host-state Rwanda to the target state Zaire is a case of post-conflict diffusion. By contrast, the spread of conflict from Liberia to Sierra Leone was a case of ongoing-conflict diffusion. The conflict onset in Zaire 1996 can be characterised as a result of events that took place in neighbouring country Rwanda, i.e., conflict and genocide which triggered a mass exodus of refugees and ex-FAR. The assumption that the experience of conflict in the host state altered the likelihood of a conflict onset in a neighbouring state was verified.

*Table 17: Hypothesis of Conflict Diffusion - Findings Case Study One*

| | **Theory of Conflict Diffusion** | **RESULT** |
|---|---|---|
| **Hypothesis ONE** | A neighbour at war increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in a potential target state. | Verified |
| **Hypothesis TWO** | A transnational alliance, between a regional state or non-state actor and a rebel group in a potential target state increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in the rebel group's home state. | Verified |
| **Hypothesis THREE** | The mobilisation of mercenaries on behalf of a rebel group in a potential target state increases the odds of an armed conflict onset. | Verified |

The Zairean conflict was fought over control of the central government. The AFDL's main goal to take over Kinshasa and to put an end to Mobutu's thirty-two yearlong dictatorship over Zaire attracted a lot of support from the general population. However, it was the strong involvement of several regional governments, all of them not only supporting a rebellion in a neighbouring country, but also pursuing their own interests, that made Kabila's victory possible. The civil war onset was facilitated by the swift and easy infiltration of Rwandan-trained Kinyarwanda speakers, and RPA forces into Zaire. Thus, the notion of porous borders, and a lack of border control from the Zairean side, substantially increased a civil war onset. The presence of refugee camps, which were not patrolled or controlled by Zairean armed forces, along the border facilitated a swift infiltration from Rwanda into Zaire. Thus, the first hypothesis, as shown in

table 17, can be deemed verified. Without the permeability of borders, the backbone of the future AFDL alliance would not have been able to access and act freely in the eastern provinces of Zaire. In context of the overall theoretical framework of this thesis, it can be argued that the rebels seized the opportunity and invaded Zaire.

The second relevant theoretical aspect is the notion of *Willingness*, which is characterised by the active political decision of a government or a non-state actor to form a transnational alliance, in support of a local rebel group in a potential target state, as formulated in hypothesis two (see table 17). To understand the regional dimension of the conflict theatre that was formed in the Great Lakes one must take longstanding ethnic tensions, as well as a history of rebel sponsorships, into consideration. On the one hand, the transnational alliance between Rwanda and the AFDL was brokered around ethnic linkages, and Mobutu's historical support for ethnic Hutu. On the other hand, an alliance with the AFDL opened up the possibility for retaliation; retaliation for Mobutu's provision of safe havens for rebel groups, such as UNITA (Angola), or the ADF and LRA (Uganda). Thus, the regional network of anti-Mobutu governments was formed on the basis of national security concerns. Consequently, and indistinct of the motivation behind the alliances that were brokered with the AFDL, it can be assumed that without the strong outside support, in form of training and the provision of armed forces, the rebellion would not have been able to advance its cause beyond the Kivu provinces.

The third and final integral part of the causal mechanism of conflict diffusion, is the supply and demand structure of mercenaries, thus the aspect of mobilisation. Mercenaries where highly involved during every stage of the Kivu rebellion, and predominantly tasked with combat operations. Eritrean and Ethiopian mercenaries were hired for three-monthly periods in the Kivus, during the early phase of the conflict. The Ugandan-trained force of the Tutsi Legion, mercenaries who portrayed ethnic linkages from Burundi, Eritrea and Uganda had a surge in numbers during the advance to the west. By taking a closer look at the client-agent relationship it seems that the AFDL never directly hired mercenaries. On the contrary, based on several accounts and reports, the AFDL can merely be perceived as the consumer of mercenary services. But, CMAs were hired by a variety of actors such as commercial non-state actors, or state governments. It appears that commercial non-state actors, who were labelled as the 'gold mafia' from various countries and the corporate entity Barrick Gold Corp., hired the services of CMAs in support of the AFDL to ensure a quick and

decisive victory. Their key aim was to have unhindered access to the natural resources of Zaire. In other words, mercenaries were hired predominantly along ethnic lines and to guarantee access to natural resources. The fact that mercenaries were part of this complex conflict prior to the conflict onset confirms hypothesis three. Hence, the presence of mercenaries indeed impacts the likelihood of a new conflict onset. Furthermore, the revelation that a 15,000 strong Tutsi Legion was created confirms the impact of mercenary fighters on conflict dynamics in the Zairean conflict.

This pathway case study proved that the delineated casual mechanism is at play. Similar to the analysis of conflict spreading from Liberia to Sierra Leone, one key transnational alliance can be identified. In both cases the host state of the conflict is also the key sponsor of the conflict onset for a newly formed rebel group in a neighbouring state. However, one has to bear in mind that Charles Taylor in Liberia and Paul Kagame in Rwanda present distinct sets of motivation for the brokerage of a transnational alliance. Moreover, the conflict in Zaire is an example for the at times challenging conceptual distinction between intrastate and interstate conflict. In the case of the first Congo rebellion the lines are certainly blurred, due to the high involvement of conventional foreign armed forces.

As a final point I would like to address the notion that the influx of refugees from Rwanda to Zaire facilitated or triggered the conflict onset in Zaire. The refugee population must clearly be distinguished from the Interahamwe and the ex-FAR who had the explicit aim of taking back Kigali, and who conducted internal, as well as cross-border, attacks. This distinction becomes even more plausible by taking into consideration that the conflict was characterised by a huge humanitarian refugee crisis.

This case study forms the second pathway case and demonstrates the presence of the causal mechanism that combines the elements of *Opportunity*, *Willingness*, & *Mobilisation*.

The following third and also final pathway case will analyse the spread of internal conflict from Ethiopia to Sudan. More specifically, I will examine the onset of the second Sudanese Civil War in 1983.

## 6.3 The Spread of Conflict from Ethiopia to Sudan: Creation of the SPLM/A

This case study examines the process of conflict diffusion between the Ethiopian civil war, which led to the independence of Eritrea in 1991 and the conflict onset in Sudan in 1983. The theoretical framework of *Opportunity*, *Willingness*, and *Mobilisation* will be applied to trace the causal mechanism and to assess the validity of the three associated hypotheses. At the time of the conflict onset in 1983, Sudan and its president Jaafar Muhammad Nimeiri did not only face internal struggles, but were also confronted with two of its neighbouring states, more specifically Chad and Ethiopia, experiencing conflict.[45] The trajectory of the decade long Sudanese internal conflict was influenced by its neighbouring countries, but also considerably impacted the development of the overall region. In addition to taking into consideration external factors, the 1983 conflict onset must also be analysed in the context of Sudan's size and geographical position. Prior to the successful secessionist movement Sudan was "the biggest country on the African continent, […] it's leaders struggled to monopolize the legitimate use of force inside its borders" (Rolandsen and Daly, 2016, p. 117). The lack of power projection created favourable conditions for the formation of rebel movements. In 1983 the People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) was established. The Sudanese civil war had devastating repercussions for the Sudanese population; "it is estimated that two million people died as a result of violence, famine, and disease during the first 20 years of the war" (Uppsaala Conflict Data Program, 2020, p. 1). Moreover, around four million people experienced internal displacement and "another 420,000 became refugees" (Uppsaala Conflict Data Program, 2020, p. 1).

In the extensive history of the Sudanese internal conflict the years 2011 and 2019 mark significant milestones. On the 9th of July 2011, an independence referendum was held, in accordance with the 2005 Naivasha Agreement between the SPLM/A and the Government of Sudan. The south Sudanese population voted for independence, with a landslide win of 99%. A result which led to the creation of the Republic of South Sudan. The peace deal between the government of Sudan and the

[45] This chapter will focus on the causal linkages between the Eritrea War of independence and the Second Sudanese civil war. The reasoning behind this decision is based on the criteria that the conflict over the Aouzou Strip is classified as an interstate conflict between Chad and Libya, which is beyond this thesis' conceptual scope of potential causes or triggers of a civil war onset.

SPLM/A settled Africa's longest running civil war, but distinct rebel groups were nevertheless still active and kept on fighting the government. The year 2019 is of relevance since it marks the first year since 1983 where the government of Sudan was not actively challenged by a rebel group. As a result, there was no active conflict over government. The reasons for this civil war onset in 1983 are diverse. However, this case study explores the linkages between a host conflict and the variables of a *neighbour at war*, a *transnational alliance*, and the *mobilisation of mercenaries*. The transnational nature of the 1983 conflict onset in Sudan will be traced.

The next section provides an overview of the key events of the Ethiopian civil war, an ongoing conflict between 1961 and 1991. It will show that this case study is another example of ongoing conflict diffusion. The conflict in the potential target state, Sudan, erupted during the ongoing civil war in a host state, Ethiopia. The succinct assessment of key factors of the host conflict establishes the linkage between the two internal wars. This analysis will show that the Ethiopian conflict substantially increased the likelihood of conflict onset in Sudan.

### 6.3.1 Cause: The EPLF's War of Independence from 1973 until 1991

Over the course of the thirty yearlong Ethiopian internal conflict several distinct warring parties fought the Eritrean cause. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)[46] and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) are the two rebel groups that led and dominated the struggle against the Ethiopian government. The ELPF was formed in 1973 by three ELF break away groups (Tareke, 2009, p. 63). The division of ELF and EPLF was due their distinct aims and visions of the rebellion's trajectory. On the one hand, the ELF "could best be described as a leftist-nationalist organisation, dedicated to the pursuit of social justice for Eritrea" (Keller, 1992, p. 612). On the other hand, the EPLF's goal was clearly focused on the pursuit of Eritrean self-determination and eventual independence. The rebel groups' competing ideas of a solution for the Eritrean struggle led to their split. The EPLF's envisioned solution of independence was accomplished in April 1991. Eritrea's successful secession from Ethiopia must be

[46] The Ethiopian civil war, more specifically the Eritrean struggle of independence initially began with the establishment of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in July of 1960. A subsequent conflict onset was reported in September 1961 (Tareke, 2009, p. 59).

analysed in connection to the continuous backing by various Sudanese heads of government. Sudanese external support for Eritrean rebel groups can be dated back as early as 1963 (Yihun, 2013, p. 36). The provision of external support from Sudan to Eritrean rebel groups is one of the key reasons as to why the conflict in South Sudan, erupting in 1983, is intertwined with Ethiopia's internal struggle. Like the diffusion cases addressed above the pattern of retaliation can be detected. A tit-for-tat of supporting rebel groups in neighbouring countries, more specifically, Sudan's support to the EPLF led to Ethiopian support of the SPLM/A rebellion.

Similar to the spread of conflict from Liberia to Sierra Leone, as well as the conflict diffusion between Rwanda and Zaire, a brief account of the colonial history is needed to fully grasp the context in which the internal conflict took place. With the beginning of the decolonisation of Africa in the 1950s; Ethiopia was quick to claim Eritrea as integral part of their country due to their longstanding "historical connection" (Tareke, 2009, p. 56). The majority of Eritreans, by contrast, "denied such historical connection and wanted a state of their own" (Tareke, 2009, pp. 56–57). The Eritrean demand was ignored by the international community, which led to an internal struggle for Eritrean national liberation and self-determination. The conflict lasted for three decades. The cause of the conflict onset in the former Italian colony, was the erosion of an agreement set up by the United Nations (UN), between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The agreement entailed the UN General Assembly's decision to federate Eritrea to Ethiopia after the Second World War. In December 1950, the UN General Assembly decided that Eritrea "be constituted an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown" (United Nations General Assembly, 1950, p. 1). The ratification of this agreement was not until December 1952 (United Nations General Assembly, 1952, p. 1). The agreement specified that Eritrea, as an autonomous unit, would have "its own democratically elected government and parliament, its own flag, free press and free trade unions, and two official local languages" (Johnson and Johnson, 1981, p. 183). However, Ethiopia was quick to take several active measures to undermine the conditions agreed upon at the UN. The Ethiopian army was moved north into Eritrea. During the following years political parties and labour unions were banned, the use of the two official languages were replaced and by 1959 the Eritrean flag was repressed (Johnson and Johnson, 1981, p. 183). These actions by Ethiopia were taken with the aim of dissolving the federation step by step. The Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's real intention was to annex

Eritrea. By 1962 any aspect of Eritrean autonomy was erased. The 14th of November 1962 marks the day of the dissolution of the federation between Ethiopia and Eritrea (Tareke, 2009, p. 58). More than ten years later, and with the creation of the EPLF in 1973 the movement gained momentum, and "by the end of 1977, the Eritrean revolution controlled more than 90 per cent of the country" (Johnson and Johnson, 1981, p. 192). The outstanding 10 per cent remained under Ethiopian control, including the capital city of Asmara and the ports of Assab and Massawa (Tareke, 2002, p. 474, 2009, p. 64). Being able to successfully take over control of 90 per cent of cities and rural areas in Eritrea is rather impressive; especially when examining other rebel groups with the aim of self-determination and secession. Most of the secessionist movements on the African continent can be described as rather "short-lived, quite minor in scope, and unsuccessful" (Englebert and Hummel, 2005, p. 399).[47]

The 1980s were the most intense phase of the conflict, meaning that the internal conflict's scale and scope increased noticeably (Keller, 1992, p. 609). This phase is marked by Ethiopia's failed attempt to once and for all put an end to the Eritrean secessionist movement. The Ethiopian government launched operation 'Red Star' in late 1981 (Mitchell, 1982). Operation Red Star was launched to erase Eritrea's aspirations for self-determination through a decisive military victory. And consequently, to end the twenty yearlong ongoing conflict by setting a precedent that might serve as a disincentive for other secessionist movements on the African continent. However, the largest Ethiopian offensive in the history of the Eritrean struggle for self-determination was unsuccessful, even though on paper the odds were highly in favour of the Ethiopian regime, since "some 22,000 guerrilla fighters were facing over 84,000 troops" (Tareke, 2002, p. 478). The Ethiopian regime severely underestimated the EPLF. In addition, the Ethiopian government received external backing from Libya, South Yemen and the Soviet Union (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). The Eritrean rebels, on the other hand, received limited external support at this point in time. This was due to the issue that external backers on the side of the rebellion had to deal with their own crisis-management. During Ethiopia's offensive: "Neighbouring country Sudan was immersed in a civil war, and Iraq was at war with Iran" (Tareke, 2002, p. 477). Nonetheless, several Arab and north African

[47] Examples of unsuccessful movements are the Frente para a Libertação do Enclave de Cabinda (FLEC) fight for the independence of the Angolan province of Cabinda from 1992 to 1997, or the unsuccessful Katanga rebellion from 1960 to 1963 in Congo, today's DRC.

governments were generally in favour of the secessionist movement, such as Syria, Iraq, and Libya (who switched sides) and provided the EPLF with weapons and artillery, which was directed through neighbouring country Sudan (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). Operation Red Star did, however, manage to "temporarily neutralise" (Keller, 1992, p. 613) the EPLF. However, this 'achievement' came at a great cost in terms of casualties for the Ethiopian regime. From February to July 1982, 10,115 soldiers were killed and 23, 212 were wounded, which totals to more than 33,000 casualties for the Ethiopian army (Tareke, 2002, p. 488). The EPLF which had grown in numbers over the years from "some 300 to a force of fighters, mechanics, medics and agronomists numbering tens of thousands" (Johnson and Johnson, 1981, p. 190) recorded about 4,000 fighters dead and around 12,000 wounded (Connell, 1997, p. 218). Consequently, the EPLF had to adjust their tactics. The EPLF changed from conventional warfare strategies to the effective use of guerrilla methods. In sum, Mengistu Haile Mariam's overall aim of undermining the EPLF failed, and in fact reinforced the movement "by causing people to rally behind the insurgents" (Tareke, 2002, p. 473). By underestimating the EPLF's will power and effectiveness, the Ethiopian regime experienced a military defeat. On the humanitarian front the Ethiopian offensives led to around 100,000 persons being displaced. Most of them found refuge in neighbouring country Sudan in the Solomuna camp (Johnson and Johnson, 1981, p. 192). The Eritrean struggle continued until 1991. The Ethiopian regime, which succeeded the Ethiopian dictator Mengistu, "opted for Eritrean independence as a way to mute the nationalist claims that had underwritten Eritrean contest of imperial borders" (Khadiagala, 2010, p. 271). The Ethiopian regime's struggle to contain the Eritrean secessionist movement impacted the wider region, more specifically it severely and continuously strained the Ethiopian-Sudanese relationship. The Sudanese involvement in Ethiopian affairs, through the support of the EPLF, led the Ethiopian regime to take counter-measures in an attempt to weaken the Sudanese government. Diffusion effects such as the external backing of rebel groups and mercenaries from one country to the next inhibited any cooperation between the two governments.

The following sub-sections will address the mechanism of diffusion from Ethiopia to Sudan in greater detail by focussing on shared borders, transnational alliance, and the

mobilisation of mercenaries to fight on behalf of the south Sudanese rebels. The presence of the first part of the casual mechanism will be addressed below.

### 6.3.2 Opportunity: Shared Borders

Borders play an important role when it comes to the spread of conflict. They provide interaction opportunities for state and non-state actors. The nature and the degree of interaction opportunities may vary between neighbours. Nonetheless, a state's location always presents a unique set of opportunities to facilitate exchanges. Ethiopia in 1983 shared a land border with four neighbouring states: Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti, and Somalia (Hensel, 2017). This makes Ethiopia's neighbours potential target states with an increased risk of conflict onset.

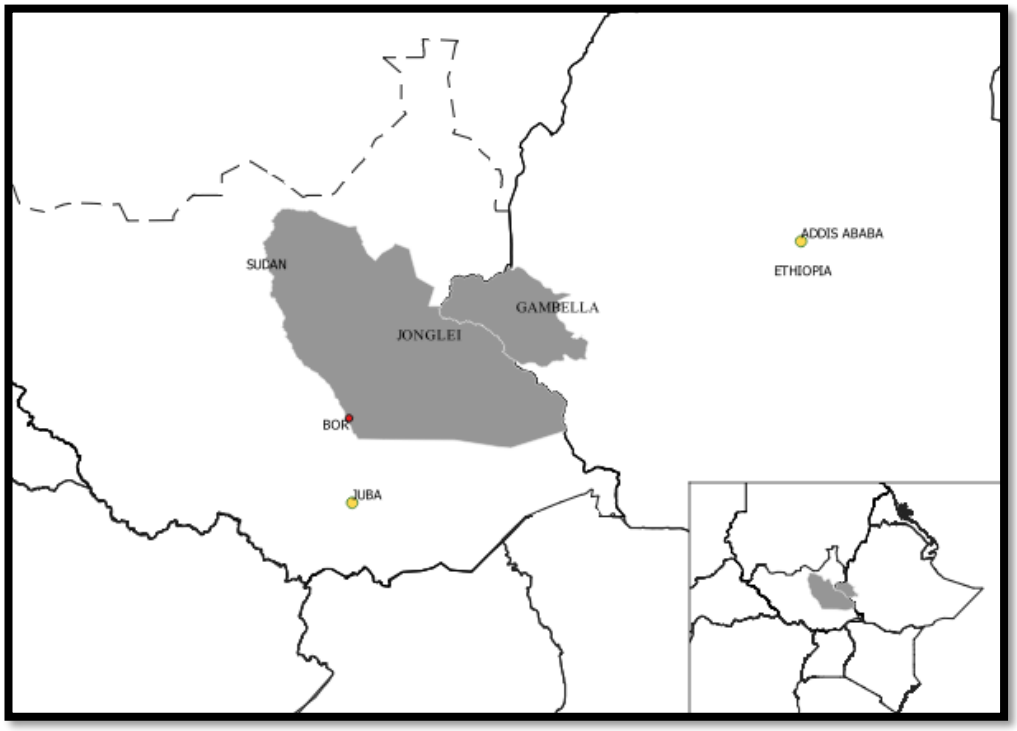


*Figure 16: Map Sudan and Ethiopia*

The condition of a shared land border and the condition of having a neighbour at war is present for the case of Sudan in 1983.[48] Ethiopia's shared border with Sudan (until

[48] When borders are, additionally, characterised by a high degree of permeability, a conflict onset in a neighbouring country becomes even more likely. A lack of border security is an indicator for the presence of porous borders. Opportunities for rebel groups to find safe havens in a neighbouring country are created and the possibility of cross-border attacks increases.

2011) had a total length of around 1600km. The border stretched from the Tekezze and the Royan Rivers in the north, near the Town of Humera to Lake Turkana in the south (Wubneh, 2015, p. 441). In particular, the area of the Gambella (Ethiopia) and the Jonglei (Ethiopia) depicted in map 16 was "intensely affected" (Bayissa, 2007, p. 20) by several internal Sudanese civil wars. Thus, the border region was and is characterised by a rather lax form of border control, a lack of clear demarcation lines, and cross-border attacks (Mwakideu, 2020). The issue of effective border control is still a concern for today's governments of Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. As recently as 2019 Sudanese farmers accused Ethiopian rebel groups of being involved in cross border crimes on Sudanese territory (*Agence France Presse*, 2019). In the same year both states decided to sign an agreement setting up a joint border protection force with the aim to "control smuggling, illegal immigration and cross-border crimes" (*Agence France Presse*, 2019, p. 1).

Issues along Ethiopia's border with today's South Sudan are no less challenging. The provinces of Jonglei (South Sudan) and Gambella (Ethiopia) are the centre of cross border disputes between groups on either side of the border. This borderland area played a significant role during the 1983 civil war onset. Gambella was a safe haven and a base for the SPLM/A rebels. The access to Ethiopian territory is a vital aspect concerning the conflict onset in 1983. Without the existence of a safe haven and training ground, for the SPLM/A, the establishment of a rebellion would have been more challenging.

The notion of porous borders has also been addressed by other scholars. Aalen (2014, p. 630) refers to the porosity of the Gambella frontier and the weak presence of the Ethiopians and Sudanese in their border regions which contributed to "cross-border flows of people and goods", which in turn can be linked to conflicts in both countries. Khadiagala (2010, p. 269) stresses the "disintegrative fissures of irredentism and separatism converging about the problem of contested boundaries" in the post-independence era of countries in Eastern Africa.

The following sub-section addresses the aspect of *Willingness*, the variable of transnational alliance. *Willingness* describes the deliberate choice of state or non-state actors to enter into an alliance with a rebel group in a neighbouring country or a country of the wider region in the area of security and military. Thus, the SPLM/A's external support network consisting of various regional governments will be analysed.

Key actors regarding the formation of transnational alliances of the South Sudanese rebel group are the governments of Ethiopia, Libya, and Israel.

### 6.3.3 Willingness: Transnational Alliances

A transnational alliance is characterised by the external sponsorship of rebel groups by a third party. In other words, a government or a non-state-actor is willing and deliberately decides to support and thereby advance the rebellion in a country of interest. This section focuses on two distinct neighbouring states that were in favour of a regime change in Sudan in the 1980s, but will also briefly address the influence of the state of Israel on the situation in the south of Sudan. Firstly, the governments of Sudanese neighbours Ethiopia and Libya were key sponsors of the SPLM/A rebellion. Ethiopia under Mengistu and Libya under Gaddafi externally supported the south Sudanese rebellion from the onset of the conflict in 1983. Their support came in various forms and to differing degrees. Mengistu and Gaddafi deliberately interfered in the affairs of Sudan, in an attempt to weaken Nimeiri. Second of all, the government of Israel's involvement in South Sudanese secessionist movement will be examined in connection to their relationship with the Ethiopian regime.

Thus, it can be established that the second element of the causal mechanism is present. The analysis of these transnational alliances will provide a nuanced account on how the alliances were created, the actors that brokered them, what these alliances achieved, and finally for how long they lasted. I will begin with exploring the Ethiopian government's support to the SPLM/A.

<u>The Government of Ethiopia's Support of a Southern Sudanese Insurgency</u>

The government of Ethiopia under Mengistu was an important sponsor of the second South Sudanese rebellion, even to the extent that the Ethiopian government was key to the formation and creation of the main rebel group SPLM/A. John Garang who emerged as the SPLM/A's leader was explicitly endorsed and supported by the Ethiopian government (Bayissa, 2007, p. 27). The SPLM/A was not the first movement that strived for South Sudanese secessionism. Attempts for the South to become self-determined were made before Mengistu (President of Ethiopia from 1977-199) and Nimeiri (President of Sudan from 1969-1985) came into power. The South Sudanese Anya-Nya movement started the fight for independence in the 1960s. However, with

"no external support" the guerrilla-army had to agree to talks with the Khartoum government (Malwal, 2014, p. 50). The negotiations ended with the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement. The Peace Agreement was the beginning of a ten year long conflict-free period in Sudan. This 'peaceful' episode ended in 1983, with Nimeiri's regime abolishing "the Southern Regional Government and Assembly" and his decision to divide "the [southern] region into three provinces" (Bayissa, 207, p. 20). Consequently, the demand for a South Sudanese right of self-determination gained new momentum and became increasingly threating to Sudanese unity and national integrity. The second attempt at secessionism, spearheaded by the SPLM/A, was especially threatening to Nimeiri's government since Ethiopia's Mengistu was in favour of a new leadership in Sudan. Mengistu "decided to use the southern Sudanese opposition to topple Nimeiri" (Bayissa, 2007, p. 24). In other words, Mengistu extensively supported the South Sudanese rebels. This sub-section analyses Mengistu's motivation behind his decision to support the SPLM/A from 1983 until his regime fell apart in 1991. The focus will be on the early years of the rebellion, enabling a civil war onset in Sudan in 1983. Ethiopia openly backed the SPLM/A in its "creation of the Movement in June 1983 and significantly contributed towards its crystallisation thereafter" (Yihun, 2013, p. 41).

Ethiopia's motivation in supporting the SPLM/A is analysed according to three distinct categories: regime change, retaliation, and the pursuit of regional influence. Mengistu's interest in a regime change in Sudan, put differently to oust Nimeiri, was more of desire than the possibility that the SPLM/A could seek territorial independence. The Ethiopian regime was keen to stress that they supported a future unity government in Sudan not a secession. This attitude is linked with the general finding that "African support for separatist movements was virtually non-existent, whereas there were some governments who were likely to be sympathetic to a 'national liberation' movement (Johnson, 2003, p. 62). SPLM/A rebel leader Garang was aware of the lack of outside support for separatist movements. Moreover, Garang was also conscious that "there could be no revolution without weapons" (Martell, 2019, p. 113). Thus, the SPLM/A's leader only choice was to let his external backers believe that the SPLM/A was fighting for regime change and a united Sudan by promoting the political agenda of a "New Sudan" (Malwal, 2014, p. 164). In other words, the SPLM/A had to proclaim what its external backers wanted to hear (Martell, 2019). Garang's strategy was successful. The Ethiopian regime chose to support the creation of the SPLM/A.

Moreover, the Ethiopian regime was keen to create, develop, and foster SPLM/A's policies to ensure that the clear aim was unity and not secession (Aalen, 2014, p. 673). The outright Ethiopian support went so far that the Minister of Foreign Affairs "officially acknowledged the legitimacy of the southern insurgents" (Aalen, 2014, p. 633).

A further reason why Ethiopia decided to sponsor the SPLM/A was retaliation, retaliation for the Sudanese support of the EPLF. In other words, "Ethiopia avenged Sudan's active role in the secession of Eritrea by progressively sponsoring South Sudan's bid for independence" (Yihun, 2013, p. 35). Various Ethiopian and Sudanese governments and leaders supported distinct rebel groups, across the border, beginning in the 1960s. Ethiopia and Sudan share a longstanding history of challenging bilateral relations characterised by backing each other's internal adversaries. A document from the Ethiopian Ministry of Defence from 1969 stresses "deteriorating relations with Sudan" (Aalen 2014, p. 627), and indicates that the relation to the neighbouring state is perceived as a significant issue for Ethiopian foreign policy decision making. The Sudanese/Nimeiri coup in 1969 marks a shift in the Ethiopian approach to supporting south Sudanese dissidents, away "from erratic and unsystematic to comprehensive and organised support" (Aalen, 2014, p. 631). Events that are illustrative of the strained relationship between Ethiopia and Sudan reveal common patterns of behaviour. In 1969/70 the Derg[49] started to facilitate military training missions for dissidents from the south of Sudan in Israel (Yihun, 2013, p. 39). South Sudanese dissidents were sent to Israel. South Sudanese were recruited from refugee camps in the Ethiopian Gambella province, where around twenty thousand south Sudanese sought shelter. Once the recruits completed their training they were sent back to Ethiopia to be deployed in refugee camps (Yihun, 2013). Beyond the provision of military training in Israel, the Derg also provided support to south Sudanese dissidents to politically organise as early as April 1975 (Yihun, 2013). In a nutshell, the historically challenging relationship between Ethiopia and Sudan did not improve under Mengistu, rather the contrary took place. Mengistu's foreign policy was characterised as violent and "based on the explosive principle of supporting enemies of his enemies" (Martell, 2019, p. 110). Thus, Mengistu perceived the arrival of the South Sudanese rebels in

[49] The Derg, the military government of Ethiopia from 1974 until 1987, that was under control of Mengistu Haile-Mariam. The military leadership formally civilianised the administration but stayed in power until 1991 (Bayissa, 2007; Johnson, 2003).

the Gambella area as great opportunity to weaken Khartoum. In addition, the Ethiopian government commonly adopted policy that sent the message that if Sudan does not refrain from "meddling in the Eritrean conflict" then Ethiopia had no choice than responding in a similar manner (Yihun, 2013, p. 35). In sum, part of the Ethiopian decision to assist the SPLM/A was based on a tit-for-tat in retaliation for Sudan's sponsorship of Eritrean rebels.

The third reason for Ethiopia to sponsor the South Sudanese rebels was Mengistu and Nimeiri's competition for regional hegemony and the pursuit of influence in the Horn of Africa (Aalen, 2014, p. 628). This line of argument can be linked to Cold War dynamics. Mengistu who was, at this time, backed by the Soviet Union, saw the opportunity to extend his sphere of influence by fostering a pro-communist regime in neighbouring country Sudan. Mengistu transformed Ethiopia into the "bastion of communism in Africa" (Malwal, 2014, p. 167). Thus, he was able to secure additional support from communist states such as East Germany, Cuba and Libya for the SPLM/A. Military trainers were flown in from East Germany, as well as advisors and doctors who were provided by the Cuban government under Fidel Castro (Martell, 2019, p. 111). How Libya supported the South Sudanese insurgent group will be addressed in more detail in the following section. However, I have already established that pro-Communist countries supported the Ethiopian mission to oust Nimeiri. Mengitu's overall aim was to expand the communist cause to the remaining states of East Africa and potentially to the whole of the continent (Malwal, 2014, p. 163).

When it comes to the details of how the Ethiopian regime supported the SPLM/A the most important aspect of the Ethiopian regime's support for the SPLM/A was their provision of access to their territory. The Gambella region/frontier was not only used as a safe haven, but also as a headquarters for training camps (Aalen, 2014, p. 630). But Mengistu's support went beyond merely providing access to territory. The SPLM/A received "substantial military and logistic support in its struggle against the Khartoum regime" (Bayissa, 2007, p. 20). The support to the SPLM/A was organised by the Ethiopian Ministry of Defence. Military training went alongside providing equipment and strategic advice on how to conduct military operations within Sudan (Yihun, 2013, p. 41). The Ethiopian regime provided the SPLM/A with the full range of military support, ranging from the supply of fuel to the provision of medicine (Bayissa, 2007, p. 29). The Ethiopian Ministry of Defence called this endeavour

"Project 07" and provided the South Sudanese rebels through the provision of "material, financial and moral assistance" (Yihun, 2013, p. 41). Moreover, Soviet-made sophisticated weapons were also made available to the SPLM/A. The SPLM/A was in need of, and dependent on the external support offered by Mengistu and his allies. Without the comprehensive backing by Ethiopia the rebel movement would have struggled to pursue their political agenda (Malwal, 2014, p. 167). Potentially they would have suffered a similar fate as the Anya-Nya movement. Thus, the external support was a crucial factor in the early stages of the SPLM/A formation. Although Ethiopia's support was especially crucial in the early stages of the rebellion, Ethiopia continued to support the SPLM/A until 1991. The end of Ethiopia backing the SPLM/A came with the end of the Cold War, and with the fall of the Soviet Union. The collapse of the rebel group's key sponsor was problematic and certainly impacted the SPLM/A's overall abilities to reach their political goals. The end of the USSR also accelerated Mengistu's downfall in 1991. Thus, Ethiopia's "role in the establishment of the SPLM/A and the dependence of the Movement on the Ethiopian material and military support" was a liability (Bayissa, 2007, p. 28). A strong dependence on the supply of weapons and access to territory was created and not easy to replace. The extensive support from Ethiopia to the SPLM/A resembles to the relationship between Charles Taylor/Liberia and the RUF rebellion.

The end of the Cold War also impacted the second key sponsor of the SPLM/A, Libya. Libya also showed keen interest in a regime change in Sudan. Libya's support of the SPLM/A was in line with general Cold War dynamics and divisions. Ethiopia and Libya were backed by the USSR, and Sudan by the USA.

The Government of Libya's Interest in a New Regime in Sudan

The government of Libya under Gaddafi was also part of the group of states that were keen to foster and support a regime change in Sudan. Libya's decision and motivation to support the South Sudanese rebel movement is linked to Gaddafi perceiving president Nimeiri as his and Mengistu's mutual enemy. The Libyan reasoning in forming a transnational alliance with the SPLM/A was characterised by the notion of my enemies' enemy is my friend, but also by Gaddafi's foreign policy strategy. There was a pro Communist group of North African states that tried to install a communist-friendly government in Sudan. From a foreign policy perspective Gaddafi "had

absolutely no desire for an independent Christian-dominated and free South Sudan" (Martell, 2019, p. 113). His key aim was regime change, since he perceived the Sudanese president as Washington's ally (Martell, 2019, p. 103). Regime change eventually happened, but without the SPLM/A's doing. Hence, Libya's support of the movement stopped when President Nimeiri was ousted from government through a bloodless coup in April 1985. Taking a closer look at how the Libyan government supported the SPLM/A, the UCDP External Support Dataset refers to substantial support in terms of military equipment (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). In terms of weapons, material and general logistics support, the pattern of support is similar to Ethiopia's. The key notion seemed to have been no revolution without weapons. The Libyan government supported the SPLM/A from the formation of the movement until the fall of Nimerei. The duration of Libyan sponsorship indicates that the SPLM/A was not more than a proxy for Gaddafi, a way of increasing the odds of regime change in Sudan.

Israeli support to the South Sudanese insurgency movements

Israeli support to the South Sudanese secessionist movement started prior to the creation of the SPLM/A. There is evidence that Israel trained Anya-Nya leaders and provided weapons to the liberation army in the 1970s, more specifically during the months leading up to the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement (Malwal, 2014, p. 50). The reasoning behind Israeli involvement in South Sudanese affairs is linked to Israel's foreign policy interests. By supporting the southern insurgents Israel tried to "contain Arab influence in the Horn" (Aalen, 2014, p. 633) of Africa. However, one has to acknowledge that the Israeli support to the South Sudanese insurgency movement was more extensive during the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, in 1969 the Ethiopian regime agreed to the establishment of an Israeli training camp for south Sudanese insurgents on their territory (Aalen, 2014, p. 634). Thus, the Israeli support to the south Sudanese cause was connected to/ based on the Israeli relationship with the Ethiopian regime. Once "Israel fell out with the Ethiopians […] no aid was provided from the Israelis to the Southern Sudanese" (Aalen, 2014, p. 635). However, the UCDP External Support Dataset reports two instances where Israel provided weapons to the SPLM/A rebels, in the years of 1987 and 1994 (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). The Israeli involvement when it comes to the civil war onset in Sudan is not as important as the contribution of the Ethiopian and Libyan government. However, the extensive military

training of South Sudanese dissidents in the 1960s and 70s meant the SPLM/A could incorporate well-trained and experienced fighters into their ranks.

This sub-section examined the SPLM/A's network of transnational alliance. The three key sponsors - Ethiopia, Libya, and Israel – display one key similarity. All three governments were interested in a regime change in Sudan. In particular the Ethiopian regime under Mengistu had a keen interest in removing the US ally Nimeiri from power. Ethiopia's influence during the early stages of the SPLM/A formation offers insight into the extent Mengistu used the movement as a foreign policy proxy. Resources and guidance provided by Ethiopia were crucial to a civil war onset in Sudan. The governments of Libya and Israel played subordinate roles, but shared Ethiopia's foreign policy direction to use the SPLM/A as a means to topple the Sudanese government. The SPLM/A under Garang's leadership had clear aims for a future (South) Sudan. However, it would be incorrect to argue that the SPLM/A was nothing beyond a tool for regional external governments to achieve their foreign policy aims. The SPLM/A had a clear mission on how to bring about change in Sudan. However, without the extensive external support the SPLM/A would probably have experienced the same fate as the Anya-Nya rebellion during the First Sudanese Civil War. The Anya-Nya entered into negotiations with the Sudanese government in 1972. In addition, the fall of Mengistu in Ethiopia in 1991, and thus the loss of external support severely weakened the SPLM/A.

The following, and third part, of the causal mechanism will explore the mobilisation of mercenary forces during the civil war onset in Sudan in 1983.

### 6.3.4 Mobilisation: Supply and Demand Structure of Mercenaries

The analysis of how the mobilisation of mercenaries changed the dynamics of the conflict onset in Sudan in 1983 forms the centre of this sub-section. Mercenaries are violent-non-state actors that are able to alter a warring parties' military capabilities to their client's advantage and are therefore relevant in the analysis of internal conflict dynamics. There is a plethora of definitions when it comes to the term *mercenary.* Therefore, is worth reminding ourselves what criteria need to be met for an actor engaged in an armed conflict or civil war to be conceptualised or labelled as

mercenary. A mercenary is defined as follows: a mercenary, (1) is either an individual or part of a group organised in an ad-hoc manner; (2) who provides services directly related to armed conflict; (3) whose primarily intention is financial gain, the prospect of earning a living or looting; (4) who is neither a national of the party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party of the conflict; (5) not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict. These five factors have to be present in order to fulfil the conceptual needs of the term mercenary.

This section analyses the involvement of mercenaries in relation to the onset of the second Sudanese civil war. I explore who was recruited as mercenary and who hired the services available as a client. This part of the analysis is based on primary sources, of newspaper articles gathered on the newspaper respiratory Nexis. The news coverage of armed conflict and specifically regarding mercenary activities in the 1980s can be patchy/scanty. However, with the reports available an initial picture of the situation on the ground can be presented and logically delineated.

The sub-section on transnational alliances found that Ethiopia was the key external supporter of the creation and formation of the SPLM/A. However, this section offers more information regarding Libya's relation to the south Sudanese movement. It provides insight into Libya's second strategy of the employment and deployment of mercenary forces on Sudanese ground. Several newspaper articles report the presence of Libyan sponsored mercenaries on Sudanese territory prior to the civil war onset in 1983. Thus, in this particular conflict scenario, a key client for the provision of mercenary services is the Libyan regime under Gaddafi. The mobilisation and the deployment of mercenaries, with the aim of toppling President Nimeiri's government, was part of a wider foreign policy agenda envisioned by the Libyan regime. This section will focus on two distinct activities: firstly, the revelation of the presence of mercenaries in Sudan since May 1982 (*Defense & Foreign Affairs*, 1983); secondly, the role and activities of the Islamic Legion concerning the onset of the second Sudanese civil war.

The presence of mercenaries in Sudan tasked with staging a coup in February 1983 was reported by several news outlets. United Press International described in February 1983 that according to the then Egyptian foreign minister Boutros Ghali there was strong evidence that mercenaries were sent to Khartoum to overthrow the Sudanese government (Iacono, 1983). The Facts on File News Digest from February 1983, quoting Sudan's president Nimeiri, stated that Gaddafi's supporters are in the

country and their plans have been exposed prior to the execution of the task (*Facts on File World News Digest*, 1983). United Press International did a follow up report, stating that 25 conspirators who are inside Sudan will be charged with plotting against the Sudanese government; the conspirators "received military training in Libya and Syria" (*United Press International*, 1983, p. 1). Defense and Foreign Affairs stated that 56 plotters were arrested, stressing that "some of these [plotters] were involved with a shipload of arms which was seized at Port Sudan" (*Defense & Foreign Affairs*, 1983, p. 3). They, moreover, link the presence of mercenaries in Sudan to Libyan training camps and provide an extensive list of the locations and the specific training provided at each camp. In addition, and according to Mohammed Magariaf, the Secretary General of the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL) Libya was host to 40 camps to "train foreigners to carry out acts of terrorism and sabotage" in other countries (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 1983, p. 1). Moreover, Magariaf stressed that "Sudan ranked first in Colonel Qadhafi's [sic] programme of sabotage" (*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 1983, p. 1). These accounts are in line with Gaddafi's foreign policy agenda described above. The Associated Press quotes that "mercenaries are trained in Libya and their salaries are paid by Libya" (Campbell, 1983, p. 2). It is furthermore indicated that these mercenaries were recruited from neighbouring African countries. However, no specific information about the operator origin was provided by the newspapers examined. Hence, by taking the individual reports together one can establish that mercenaries on the Libyan payroll have been in Sudan prior to the civil war onset. The revelation that the mercenaries sponsored by Libya were already on Sudanese grounds prior to the civil war onset in May 1983 is further evidence of outside meddling impacting dynamics on the ground. The alleged coup attempt made Nimeiri even wearier of outside interference into Sudanese matters by neighbouring countries. In February 1983 the Sudanese newspaper Al Sahafa reported that "Sudan's autonomous southern region was the 'primary target' of the conspiracy, with Libya seeking to 'create a situation of instability" (*United Press International*, 1983, p. 1). It is unclear, however, whether the Libyan sponsored mercenaries were part of the Islamic Legion. No newspaper report indicated such a connection.

But, there are reports that indicate that the Islamic Legion can be perceived as a warring party of the second Sudanese civil war. According to this thesis' definition of a mercenary the members of the Islamic Legion fit the concept presented above.

The individual fighters are not national to the conflict they have been deployed to, they provided military service having passed-through prior military training at one of Gaddafi's training camps, they received a financial compensation (they were paid by Gaddafi), and they were not permanently integrated into the Libyan armed forces. The last characteristic mentioned, however, has been subject of discussion. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that the Islamic Legion were an ad-hoc force rather than a permanent part of the Libyan armed forces.

First of all, there is evidence that the Islamic Legion was created due to lack of personnel available to operate the military equipment by taking into consideration that the Libya Army had only around 300 fighters (Westenfelder, no date). One way for Libya to attract people to provide military service was to hire them in exchange for "regular pay and food" (Westenfelder, no date, p. 1). Gaddafi profited from the large amount of people that had to endure severe droughts in the Sahel region and in turn made their way north. Most of the fighters recruited into the Islamic Legion were ethnic Tuareg from Mali and Niger who joined by the prospective of cash salaries. Thus, the key motivation to join the Islamic Legion was to make a living. However, one cannot neglect the assumption that some members were forcefully recruited into the Islamic Legion. Furthermore, there are also accounts of fighters being recruited into the Islamic Legion from countries such as Pakistan who were deployed to fight in Lebanon (Thomson, 1994, p. 91) and who were allegedly only recruited for that one mission. This assumption supports the notion that individuals were not permanently integrated. As Percy (2007, p. 62) phrases it "the permanence of contracts means that these fighters essentially adopt their employers' goals as their own". However, this was not the case for the fighters that were recruited for the Islamic Legion. Second of all, if the Islamic Legion was integrated into the Libyan armed forces, they were certainly not integrated permanently since the Islamic Legion only existed between 1972 and 1987. In sum, two things: (1) Individual recruits were not a permanent part of the Legion, and (2) the legion was not a permanent feature of the Libyan armed forces. It is unclear to what extent the Islamic Legion was involved in the second Sudanese civil war. What was reported at the time, however, is that the Islamic Legion was made up of "some 2000 revolutionary mercenaries recruited from neighbouring African Countries" (Campbell, 1983, p. 1) and was active in Sudan. Nonetheless, it has been suggested that several African governments, amongst these Sudan were "worried about Libyan recruitment into the Islamic Legion" (St. John, 2008, p. 95).

The combination of a neighbour at war, outside support to the SPLM/A and the support of mercenary forces on the ground made it possible for the South Sudanese rebel movement to create a credible threat to the government of Sudan. A civil war onset might have been unlikely if these factors have not been in place. Unfortunately, it is difficult in this case study to assess how the mercenary forces hired by Gaddafi interacted with the rebels. However, it seems reasonable to assume that the mercenaries were tasked with supporting the rebels with manpower to make SPLM/A advances more effective and successful. It is similarly problematic to determine for how long the mercenaries were stationed in Sudan. Since Gaddafi stopped his external support of weaponry after Nimeiri was ousted in 1985, it might be reasonable to assume that his mercenary forces were pulled out of Sudan as well. However, these assumptions are speculative.

The next section will explore the situation in Sudan in 1983 and prior to the conflict onset in more context. The spread of conflict, which means the process of diffusion, where one conflict affects the conflict onset likelihood in a neighbouring state must be analysed in consideration of the domestic situation in a potential host state. In this case Sudan.

### 6.3.5 Outcome: Conflict Onset of the Second Sudanese Civil War in 1983

By perceiving the conflict onset in Sudan in 1983 as the outcome of a diffusion process, one acknowledges the transnational dimension of this particular conflict onset. However, country-inherent factors play a crucial part in creating an environment that makes a conflict onset more likely. Conflict susceptibility plays a vital role. Historically a key line of division in Sudan lies geographically between the North and the South of the country, which also represents a cleavage between the Arab and/or Muslim north and the Christian south. Although the UCDP codes the civil war in Sudan as a conflict over government, there is certainly a territorial dimension to this internal conflict. Malwal even argues that it "took South Sudan 64 years of struggle […] to break away" from the North (2014, p. 31). Generally, the south of the country was marginalised by the Khartoum government in the north. The marginalisation of the south was characterised "by little if any investment in the South" (Martell, 2019, p. 105) which eventually resulted in the first uprising of the South aiming for

independence in 1963. President Nimeiri came to power in 1969 and was able to strike a peace deal with the Anya Nya movement who fought for territorial independence of the south between 1963 and 1972. With the Addis Ababa Agreement South Sudan was able to "have a [its own] parliament, a president, a cabinet, and an administration of Southerners" (Rolandsen and Daly, 2016, p. 93). Moreover, the peace deal set out that the Anya Nya "guerrilla officers joined the national army" (Martell, 2019, p. 99), a decision that would prove to be problematic ten years later. Nonetheless, with these changes implemented the period between 1972 and 1983 was a relative period of peace or the calm before the storm before the next conflict onset. However, Southern Sudan's autonomy was highly dependent on President Nimeiri's willingness to execute the given rights to self-determination (Rolandsen and Daly, 2016, p. 93). When in May 1983 Nimeiri finally abrogated the ten-year-old peace agreement and therefore South Sudan's autonomy, the "consequence was the civil war that raged for 22 years" (Khadiagala, 2010, p. 217). The failure of peace combined with Nimeiri's drive for a further 'islamisation' of the whole country, by the introduction of the Sharia legislation in April 1983, are crucial factors for the formation of the SPLM/A movement and a renewed rebellion of the south. With the Sudanese economy in ruins, a growing number of violent attacks across the country, and Nimeiri surviving several unsuccessful coup attempts, not much was needed for the situation to escalate (Martell, 2019, p. 106).

The second civil war began with the attack at a military base in Bor on the 16th of May 1983 (Rolandsen and Daly, 2016, p. 105). The initial attack on the garrison in Bor was followed by "further mutinies and desertion from garrisons across the South", which meant that by "July 1983 about 2500 soldiers had defected to the new guerrilla base being established in Ethiopia" (Johnson, 2003, p. 62). However, the key rebel group fighting for regime change in Sudan was not established or created by this point in time. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/ SPLA) which would be the "the second military uprising following the August 1955 Torit uprising" (Malwal, 2014, p. 153) was not established until July 1983. Although the first instance of conflict was reported in May 1983, an organised movement did not exist at this point, and without the support and backing of the Ethiopian government a full-fledged civil war outbreak in Sudan would not have been possible or realistic. The new rebel leader Garang, who was also part of the Sudanese national army, was initially confronted with some "problems of seniority" linked to

disagreements on what the new movement wanted to achieve (Johnson, 2003, p. 62). Garang had to find a compromise to satisfy experienced fighters, such as the Anya-Nya veterans, who were strongly separatist and voices that were aware that it was nearly impossible for an outspoken separatist movement to receive external backing. However, "Southern independence remained an unspoken or even coded option" (Johnson, 2003, p. 65). John Garang, with Ethiopian assistance was able to establish "the-best organised liberation movement or army South Sudan ever managed to assemble", due to the extensive accumulation of fighting experience of the South Sudanese population (Malwal, 2014, p. 152). In addition, the SPLM/A was not only well organised, it was also able to present a well thought through political agenda, when it came to "rhetoric and policies" (Martell, 2019, p. 113). A manifesto was issued and presented in July 1983 providing "a historical overview of the pattern of underdevelopment in the Sudan" (Johnson, 2003, p. 3). It is estimated that the SPLM/A had a fighting force of around 3000 soldiers. In comparison, the estimated forces of the Sudanese government which were at 53000 soldiers. This indicates that the SPLM/A was outnumbered by one to nearly 18. However, the SPLM/A during the continued period of fighting between 1984 and 1988 SPLM/A used a three-stage strategy to expand areas under its control: (1) expeditionary force that enters the to be conquered areas (2) recruitment of the local population and sending them to be trained in Ethiopia, (3) trained recruits return to their respective region and establish a permanent presence (Rolandsen and Daly, 2016, p. 108). Thus, with this strategy and the predominant use of guerrilla tactics the SPLM/A was able to gain control over territory. However, during the period between 1983 and 1991 neither side was able to win an outright military victory (Rolandsen and Daly, 2016, p. 118). Consequently, the conflict went on for another 10 years and was arguably over by the end of 2002. However, three more years of negotiations were needed until the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed. The CPA also known as the Naivasha Agreement was signed on the 9$^{th}$ of January 2005 officially ending the Second Sudanese Civil War.

The following section will draw the findings from the sections above together to provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the findings.

### 6.3.6 Summary

This chapter analysed the three key aspects of the proposed causal mechanisms of conflict diffusion, which are shared borders, transnational alliances, and the mobilisation of mercenary forces. By analysing how the conflicts of Ethiopia and Sudan are linked, three individual hypotheses were examined (see table 18 below). Hypothesis one assumes that the condition of shared borders increases the likelihood of an armed conflict to diffuse. The matter of effective border control between Ethiopia/Eritrea and Sudan/South Sudan is an ongoing issue the region still grapples with. Thus, cross-border attacks are common. The SPLM/A was able to easily access Ethiopian territory, more specifically the Gambella area. The Ethiopian territory was used as a base, and as training grounds this evidence demonstrated the permeability of borders. Being able to use Ethiopian territory as sanctuary is considered an important factor for the formation of the SPLM/A rebellion and thus paved the way to a large-scale civil war onset in Sudan.

*Table 18: Hypothesis of Conflict Diffusion - Findings Case Study Two*

| | **Theory of Conflict Diffusion** | **RESULT** |
|---|---|---|
| **Hypothesis ONE** | A neighbour at war increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in a potential target state. | Verified |
| **Hypothesis TWO** | A transnational alliance, between a regional state or non-state actor and a rebel group in a potential target state increases the odds of an armed conflict onset in the rebel group's home state. | Verified |
| **Hypothesis THREE** | The mobilisation of mercenaries on behalf of a rebel group in a potential target state increases the odds of an armed conflict onset. | Verified |

These actions indicate that the variable of shared borders was given and necessary. The second hypothesis addressed the question whether the factor of external support to rebel groups impacts the likelihood of an armed conflict onset. In this case of ongoing-conflict diffusion, a transnational alliance was crucial for the SPLM/A's "rise to dominance" (Rolandsen and Daly, 2016, p. 110). The SPLM/A's ability to be a valid threat to the Khartoum government was heavily dependent on external backing from key external regional players such as Ethiopia and Libya. Consequently, the second hypothesis can be deemed verified. A final and third hypothesis addressed the

question whether the mobilisation and presence of mercenaries in a potential target country would increase the likelihood of a conflict onset. This third hypothesis can also be confirmed. Several newspaper outlets reported on the presence of mercenaries in Khartoum prior to the civil war onset in May/July 1983. The reports indicated that the mercenaries were tasked with toppling the regime while being on the Libyan government's payroll. In addition to these reports, activities of the, so called Islamic Legion, were analysed.

A recent observation speaks also to a longstanding conflictual history and "exchange" of fighters between Libya and Sudan. The UN Working Group on Mercenaries reports in 2020 that fighters from Sudanese armed groups are active in military operations with various Libyan patrons (United Nations General Assembly, 2020, p. 10)

This case study presents another case of conflict diffusion characterised by the factors of *Opportunity*, *Willingness*, and *Mobilisation*. The Eritrean struggle for independence impacted the Ethiopian government's regime and its decision to sponsor a rebel movement in Sudan. Consequently, the conflict in Ethiopia altered the likelihood of a conflict onset in neighbouring country Sudan. The key client concerning the mobilisation of mercenaries was not the main transnational ally. Moreover, the third case study is the only conflict onset that took place during Cold War. The Ethiopian/Sudanese case of conflict diffusion was therefore impacted by Cold War dynamics and power plays. These dynamics played an important part in the way transnational alliances were created. Nimeiri's Sudan was supported by the USA, whereas the Ethiopian regime was a key player in spreading the word of the Soviet Union. These two neighbours were pitted against each other by their respective proxy superpowers. Thus, Cold War dynamics exacerbated personal animosities between the governments of Sudan and Ethiopia, as well as Libya.

## 7. Discussion

This chapter addresses my overarching research question; synthesises the thesis' key findings; and discusses strengths and limitations.

To examine my research question I applied a mixed methods research approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. I find that mercenaries are agents of diffusion in internal conflicts where regional elites are engaged as external sponsors, providing indirect support to the key rebel group that challenges the government. I draw on of Siverson's and Starr's (1990) Opportunity and Willingness framework to explain the determinants relevant for the process of civil war diffusion. I applied their framework initially conceptualised for the phenomenon of interstate conflict diffusion to the process of armed conflict diffusion. In addition to the concepts of shared borders and (transnational) alliances I have added and conceptualised the third part of my causal mechanism - mobilisation. Mobilisation refers to additional combatants, specifically mercenaries, mobilised to fight on behalf of the rebel group that enters the confrontation with the government from a disadvantaged position. Thus, my theoretical framework proposes that the event of internal conflict diffusion is triggered by an armed conflict and is composed of the factors of shared borders, transnational alliances, and mercenary mobilisation.

In this thesis I approached the investigation of internal conflict diffusion from two angles. Through the application of a mixed methods framework, I was able to assess the relationship between the key elements in a quantitative and qualitative manner. Beyond demonstrating a relationship/correlation between the variables *neighbour at war*, *transnational alliance*, and *mercenary mobilisation* and a new conflict onset in the neighbourhood, the statistical assessment provides novel insight to the patterns of the Sub-Saharan African market for force. In that regard my research reveals several key patterns of the African market for force: the presence of mercenaries involved in internal conflict between 1980 and 2016 is constant; a steady presence of mercenary activities goes alongside the rise of the Private Military and Security Companies industry since the 1990s; the number of mercenary activities in West Africa is higher than in any other Sub-Saharan African region. This region is known to be afflicted by the continuous presence of mercenaries. However, this thesis finds that the phenomenon of so-called regional warriors is not specific to West Africa.

I demonstrate that influential regional elites, are the primary clientele of mercenaries. My findings indicate that mercenaries are more frequently hired by governments than rebel groups or opposition parties (view Figure 8). An explanation drawn from the case studies is that regional elites tend to hire mercenaries on behalf of a rebel group. In addition, data on the African market for force reveals that most of the commercial military actors are of African origin. Thus, I argue that there is a shift away from the employment of foreign military and security providers towards local/ African actors. By taking an even closer look at the CMAD data this trend can be explained with a substantial rise in local private security outlets. This explanation correlates with the finding that the bulk of PMSCs services provided are in the area of security provision. PMSCs engaged in combat operations is rather the exception than the norm. The norm over time from the 1980s until 2016 is the continuous presence of mercenaries during distinct stages of multiple conflicts. Establishing patterns regarding consumer and clientship, service provision, and operator origin strongly indicates that mercenaries are hired to be force multipliers. The service of combat provision by mercenaries was recorded for more than 80% of the events recorded.

Findings from the logistic regression yield strong evidence for a correlation between the theorised explanatory variables and a new conflict onset. When examining the bivariate relationship between the variables of a *neighbour at war*, the presence of a *transnational alliance*, and the *mobilisation of mercenaries* the odds of a conflict onset significantly increase (see Appendix). A neighbour at war increases the odds of conflict erupting in a target state by 2 (Odds Ratio: 2.03), a transnational alliance between a foreign government and a rebel group in the target state increases the odds of a conflict onset by nearly 5 (Odds Ratio: 4.67), and the mobilisation of mercenaries rise the odds for a conflict to erupt in a target state by 3.5 (Odds Ratio 3.49).

In the following I discuss and synthesise findings for each step of the causal mechanism, beginning with the trigger or cause of the diffusion mechanism which is an internal conflict and the first condition of the mechanism which is shared border. For the statistical assessment the variable *neighbours at war* was created.

*Cause & Opportunity: A Neighbour at War*

The assumption that a neighbour at war increases the likelihood of a new conflict onset is verified through the results from the logistic regression, as well as through findings from three case studies. My research corroborates the findings of previous research on

internal conflict diffusion (view Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008; Black, 2013; Forsberg, 2014; Bara, 2017). In addition to the corroboration of the statistical findings, three cases of conflict diffusion were identified and analysed through the method of process tracing. The onset of internal conflicts in Sierra Leone, Zaire, and Sudan are explained by taking a transnational perspective to conflict onset. These case studies show that there is a timely variation between a new conflict onset in the target states and the extent of the host conflict. Conflict onsets in Sierra Leone (1991) and Sudan (1986) are cases of ongoing conflict diffusion, whereas the conflict onset in Zaire (1996) is categorised as a case of post-conflict diffusion. Post-conflict diffusion is linked to the idea that conflict specific capital is made available after a conflict was terminated (Bara 2017). A key mechanism put forward is that conflict-externalities are spilling over from state A to state B. I argue that conflict does not just spill-over spatially. The more important factor according to my research are transnational alliances that are formed between regional elites and domestic opposition groups in need of support in the area of military and security.

In addition to the factor of time, geography also plays an important role concerning the process of diffusion. I find that the three rebel groups investigated had access to foreign territory across the border of their 'home state'. The RUF rebellion in Sierra Leone started from neighbouring country Liberia. The Kabila rebellion in Zaire began in the conurbations area of Lake Kivu, thus, Rwanda. The SPLM/A operated from their safe haven in Ethiopia, the Gambella region, to attack Sudanese position in the Jonglei. Another noteworthy finding is the aspect that all three rebel groups aimed to challenge the current regime. Consequently, all three conflicts can be categorised as conflicts over government. This finding goes contrary to the common assumption that conflicts over government are spatially closer to capital cities, whereas conflicts over territory are more commonly located in the periphery of a state. In all three diffusion cases the conflict did not start near the capitals of Freetown, Kinshasa, or Khartoum. It was rather the contrary; conflicts started along the border of each state. Thus, the location where a rebellion ignites seems to be impacted by the existence of a transnational alliances; foreign states that are willing to sponsor a rebel group in the region with the provision of a safe haven along shared border territory.

The following sub-section will present key findings concerning the aspect of transnational alliances that are formed between foreign governments and domestic opposition groups in the realm of security and military affairs.

*Willingness: The Creation of a Transnational Alliance*

I find that the provision of external support to a rebel group from foreign state or non-state actors in a potential target state substantially raises the odds of an armed conflict onset. My statistical findings indicate that the provision of external support increases the odds of a civil war erupting in a target state by 11 (Model 4).

A plethora of studies examine the impact of third party support on civil war dynamics (Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski, 2005; Cunningham, 2010; Regan, 2010; Karlén, 2017; Roberts, 2019). This research, however, primarily explores means of direct support. In other words, the phenomenon of third-party military state interventions. At the centre of these investigations are characteristics such as civil war duration, severity, and outcome. This suggests that external state and non-state actors become involved in an ongoing civil war (Salehyan, 2010a, p. 500). Little research has been done concerning the impact of external support on the event of conflict onset, since most research focusses on "support groups receive from extenal actors once the uprising are underway" (Jackson, San-Akca and Maoz, 2020, p. 635). The exception are Karlen's (2017) work on conflict recurrence; and Jackson, San-Akca and Maoz's (2020) study on the straegic anticpation of external support on the decision of a rebel group to initiate an uprising. This is surprising since the majority of rebel groups start conflicts from a disadvantaged point in comparison to most state actors. Moreover, findings indicate that the provision of external support for rebel groups is especially relevant in the early stages of a civil war (Jones, 2017).

I add to the literature body of external support in civil war research by assessing the notion of pre-conflict transnational alliances. The case studies reveal that the rebel groups under investigation RUF, AFDL and SPLM/A were founded and proclaimed after the group received external sponsorship from a foreign state or non-state actor. This finding indicates that a conflict onset is not only dependent on the mere presence of a domestic group that intends to challenge the government, but that these domestic groups were reliant on access to means necessary to pursue a violent strategy of regime change or territorial secession. This might sound trivial, but is a cornerstone of every rebellion, "violent resistance […] requires weapons, money, or sanctuaries (Jackson,

San-Akca and Maoz, 2020, p. 636). I do not want to suggest that domestic issues and grievances are less relevant regarding a conflict onset, but I argue that a conflict onset is made substantially more likely when a rebel group and a foreign state or non-state actor establish a transnational alliance.

The statistically significant correlation between the existence of a transnational alliance and a civil war onset is corroborated by findings from three independent case studies. By synthesising the case studies' results, three key patterns as to why transnational alliances were formed emerge: retaliation, regime change, and geopolitical aspects.

A common reason for a foreign government's willingness to support a domestic group in a neighbouring state is retaliation in connection with the destabilisation of a neighbouring government. This finding adds another layer to the debate about interstate rivals playing a vital role as intervening states in civil wars (Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski, 2005). Acts of retaliation can evolve into long lasting interstate rivalries, an outcome which can observed in the case of Ethiopia and Sudan. The finding that states are motivated to sponsor a domestic group in a neighbouring country to foster regime change corroborates the assumption that foreign governments are inclined to delegate conflict to rebel organisations (Salehyan, 2010a; San-Akca, 2016). Geopolitical aspects as motivation for external actors to intervene in neighbouring states affairs can be linked to the scholarly debate of natural resources and third party intervention (Ross, 2006; Findley and Marineau, 2015). In Sierra Leone and Zaire geopolitical factors were tangible in terms of access to diamond mines in the Sierra Leonean Kono district and the access to gold mines in the eastern part of Zaire. With regard to the conflict onset in Sudan the geopolitical advantages were rather linked to the notion of regional dominance at the Horn of Africa.

A question that remains open is whether the domestic group in the target state was already present and open to receiving external support in order to pursue their political goals using violence, and this domestic group then received support and triggered a conflict onset. Or perhaps a second scenario is at play where the causal chain begins with a foreign government pursuing a domestic group, thus offering them the possibility and the means to pursue a conflict, and the conflict onset takes place. The second scenario would refer to the notion of the instrumentalisation of domestic groups by foreign governments as external sponsors. This is linked to the debate of whether the provision of external support is just another option for a foreign

government to pursue their own foreign policy agenda without the need to deploy their armed forces (Salehyan, 2010a). The provision of external military and security support to domestic groups bears two key advantages for the external sponsor: plausible deniability and not needing to risk their own forces. However, the pursuit of proxy warfare through sponsorship also bears risk for foreign governments. Especially in cases when the government of the target state is willing to pursue a similar strategy. Put differently, the government's key risk is to experience a so-called boomerang effect.

Were these domestic groups instrumentalised by external sponsors? If you take a brief look at the intended outcomes for the rebel side one has to acknowledge that, with the exception of the RUF rebellion in Sierra Leone, the Kabila rebellion (Mobutu was toppled) and the South Sudanese secessionist movement (South Sudan became officially independent in 2011) were successful operations/undertakings. One finding that is rather striking is that for all three cases the leader of the rebellion was either favoured or actively installed by the key external sponsor. This was the case for RUF's leader Freddy Sankoh who had a very close relationship to Liberia's future president Charles Taylor. The Zairean rebel leader Laurent Kabila was pursued, favoured, and financed by the Rwandan government to advance the rebellion (Salehyan, 2010b, p. 22). And finally the SPLM/A's leader John Garang was explicitly endorsed, and supported by the Ethiopian government (Bayissa, 2007, p. 27). By taking a look at the foreign policy aims of the key sponsors the assessment of success is rather ambivalent. Taylor tremendously benefitted from the transnational alliance with RUF, especially since Taylor had continuous access to Sierra Leone's diamond mines to further finance his own rebellion and later his presidency. The government of Rwanda, through its support of the AFDL, succeeded in toppling Mobutu. However, Kabila and Kagame fell out shorty after Kabila became the new president of the DRC and the country experienced another devastating civil war. Mengistu's aim to overthrow Nimeiri was achieved, but this achievement was not connected to his (transnational) alliance with the SPLM/A. Nimeiri was ousted from government through a bloodless coup in April 1985.

In sum, as with every transnational alliance and foreign policy decision, state and non-state-actors have to evaluate their costs and benefits. However, one has to bear in mind that the allies' agendas and goals are likely to diverge either right from the start of the transnational alliance or over time.

The presence of mercenaries is a further condition that makes a civil war onset more likely. The following sub-section will discuss the supply and demand structure of mercenary forces.

*Mobilisation: The Supply and Demand Structure of Mercenary Forces*

The mobilisation of mercenaries is a crucial aspect of the diffusion process. One key finding is that mercenaries are hired in a regional context. The case studies revealed one key commonality: in all three instances an ally of the regional elites as part of the key transnational alliance was responsible for the recruitment of mercenaries, but to varying extents.

In the case of Sierra Leone mercenaries were hired from Burkina Faso whose head of state at the time, Blaise Compaoré, was a key ally of Liberia's Charles Taylor, the key external supporter to the RUF rebellion. Mercenaries fighting for the Tutsi Legion in Zaire were recruited and trained by Uganda and paid for by the private sector; a key ally of the Rwandan government was responsible for the mobilisation of mercenary forces. Lastly, in the Sudanese case the key mercenary sponsor and recruiting state was Libya. President Gaddafi pursued the same aim as the key sponsor of the SPLM/A, Ethiopia's leader Mengistu. In the Zairean and Sudanese cases the recruitment went beyond just regional circles.

*Table 19: Mobilisation & Recruitment of Mercenaries*

| **Interstate Alliance** | | **Transnational Alliance** |
|---|---|---|
| *Regional Government* | *State or non-state Actor in State A* | *Rebel Group in State B* |
| - Government of Burkina Faso | - Charles Taylor, leader of the NPFL in Liberia | - RUF (Sierra Leone) |
| - Government of Uganda | - Government of Rwanda | - AFDL (Zaire) |
| - Government of Libya | - Government of Ethiopia | - SPLM/A (Sudan) |

Thus, rebel groups did not initiate the recruitment and hiring process. Allies of the sponsoring party of the transnational alliance were responsible for the recruitment and financing of mercenaries. Additional mercenary forces were hired and deployed prior to the individual conflict onset in each state (see table 19).

Two related key assumptions regarding the aspect of rebel recruitment must be addressed: (1) military success is a rebel groups' key objective and requires a "force […] ranging from 500 to 5,000 troops […]" (Gates, 2002, p. 112); (2) rebel groups' methods of recruitment differ. Recruitment methods range from the forcible recruitment of fighters; the attraction of voluntary recruits; or a mixed strategy (Sawyer and Andrews, 2020, p. 877). Thus, the recruitment process at the beginning and throughout the rebellion can be challenging. The recruitment of fighters, however, is a key aspect of a successful rebellion. In other words, the "ability to succeed depends on its [rebel group] ability to recruit and motivate its soldiers to fight and kill" (Gates, 2002, p. 112).

The recruitment of mercenaries, i.e. fighters for hire is a further strategy to increase the number of the fighting force in order to pursue a successful rebellion. Put differently, through the recruitment of mercenaries the external backer increased the rebellions possibilities for a military success. In addition, the recruitment of mercenaries to fight on behalf the rebellion can be perceived as a further foreign policy strategy of external supporters.

*Contributions & Limitations*

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to contributions as well as limitations. Overall, my findings reiterate that conflict diffusion is not an arbitrary process. On the contrary, my diffusion research shows a new civil war onset can be the outcome of an intricate network of alliances and willing decision-making between state and non-state actors. It therefore advances Black's (2012, 2013) findings that the process of diffusion is shaped by deliberate actions rather than chance.

One of my key findings is that mercenaries are not drivers of diffusion on their own behalf. Their presence and their mobilisation prior to and during civil wars should rather be perceived as a military strategy or tool of regional elites (be they powerful rebel leaders or governments). Studies on the mercenary-diffusion nexus so far championed the assumption that mercenaries are conflict externalities with the 'ability' to spread conflict beyond states and through regions (Salehyan and Gleditsch,

2006, p. 352; Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008, p. 222; Braithwaite, 2010, p. 313; Forsberg, 2014a). However, I find it much more of relevance to examine the clients that hire mercenary forces and their intentions.

A key strength of this thesis is the fact that I was able to use original data. The data presented in this thesis is the first comprehensive data on the presence and activities of mercenaries available. Through the application of a mixed methods framework, I was able to not only use the coded data curated by the CMAD, but I was also in a position to use primary sources, such as international newspaper articles from a variety of sources, which were collected during the data gathering process.

In addition, I add to the theoretical debate of the mercenary-diffusion nexus by building upon and refining Siverson's and Starr's diffusion framework. By employing the concept of transnational alliances and mercenary mobilisation, I offer a distinct perspective on conflict onset research, which leads to an enhanced understanding of the transnational dimension of civil war.

Limitations I would like to address are the issue of data availability for the presence and activities of mercenaries. The reporting and coverage on mercenary events in global news can be deemed scanty. Data on mercenary activities might only show a fraction of the whole picture. Data on PMSCs is likely to be more accurate due to their corporate nature. Moreover, only data on the presence and absence of mercenaries in a potential target country was measured. For a number of the exchange events on mercenaries, neither a consumer or a client could be established, and therefore some additional information had to be discarded. In addition, spatial data on mercenary movements would be a great leap forward. Thus, providing event data on mercenary activities could be a further step to uncovering their role in conflict diffusion.

In relation to the provision of external support, it is important to address the misleading distinction between intra- and interstate conflict. The conflicts analysed portray interstate conflict dynamics, beyond the notion of internationalised civil wars. External state and non-state actors were heavily involved in so-called internal conflicts. The willingness of foreign governments to impact civil wars seems like a tit-for-tat strategy, if state A decides to support rebellion in state B, then state B is likely to support a domestic opposition group in state A. This foreign policy behaviour rather seems like an inter-governmental conflict through the means of supporting rebel groups that then triggers an internal conflict. Maoz and San-Akca (2012) find that

interstate rivalries create opportunities for rebel groups. More importantly they argue that the "the presence of rivalry increases the likelihood of state-NAG[50] cooperation" (Maoz and San-Akca, 2012, p. 720). This indicates that one might have to rethink the dichotomous conceptualisation of interstate and intrastate civil war. Another criterion that could be questioned is the differentiation between an armed conflict and an internationalised armed conflict. An internationalised armed conflict according to PRIO is present when "there is involvement of foreign governments with troops" (Gleditsch et al., 2002, p. 6). Consequently, the involvement of foreign governments in armed conflicts through other means than the deployment of their armed forces is not generally conceptualised as an internationalisation of an armed conflict. However, as shown foreign/regional governments have other ways to impact conflict dynamics on the ground to their advantage without the deployment of their armed forces. One could add a subcategory to the concept of internationalised civil war, that includes indirect support to conflict parties. Again, only direct support is included, whereas the impact of indirect support on conflict dynamics seems to be omitted.

The final chapter, the concluding remarks, will point towards further research and issues that emerged in my studies but were beyond the scope of this thesis. I will discuss research areas that logically build on the work I have done so far.

[50] Non-State Armed Groups (NAG).

## 8. Concluding Remarks

One overarching research question motivated this thesis: To what extent do mercenaries act as triggers of diffusion? To examine this question I have employed and refined Most's and Starr's (1990) Opportunity and Willingness framework of conflict diffusion. The variables *neighbour at war*, *transnational alliance*, and the *mobilisation of mercenary forces* are at the heart of this research framework.

I find that conflict onset is the outcome of an intricate network of state and non-state actors. This approach is distinct to the commonly used theories on causes of civil war, such as the grievance vs. greed debate or rational choice approaches that emphasis rebel recruitment. Rather than focussing on why and how rebels recruit new members based on the idea of a collective problem, my theory focuses on outside influence which impacts and also accelerate the creation of a rebel group. Thus, I provide new insights to the relevance of an external sponsor for the formation of a rebel group. I show that intergroup linkages are not predominantly centred around the notion of identity. The aspects of retaliation, gaining power, and regional influence seem to be of more relevance regarding the decision to back foreign rebel groups. Even when looking at the diffusion process from Rwanda to Zaire, ethnicity seems to have played a subordinate role. These findings have wide reaching implications in the realm of conflict prevention, especially since my findings indicate that the three rebellions under investigation were driven and sustained by foreign powers. Conflict prevention strategies could incorporate rebel groups' key foreign sponsors into diplomatic exchanges since these regional elites must be perceived as enablers to widespread violent conflict.

My findings show that mercenaries indeed play a vital role when it comes to a new civil war onset altering the likelihood of a conflict nearby. According to my results, however, mercenaries should not be perceived as independent drivers of conflict diffusion. In other words, mercenaries are not conflict triggers themselves. This finding is contrary to McFate's (2017) line of argument that unemployed commercial military actors simply initiate and wage conflict for the sake of it. On the contrary, my results speak to Avant's finding that "the market has enhanced the power of other states" (2006, p. 510). Thus, the employment of mercenaries is a flexible tool for regional elites to pursue their own foreign policy agendas. This thesis concurs with her argument that the market for force "presents states and non-state actors with

different choices" (Avant, 2006, p. 511). Consequently, I find that the aspect of the client/consumer relationship; who hires mercenaries and who consumes their services is the question that should be the focus of any mercenary investigation. Rather than the mere presence of commercial military actors as investigated by Petersohn (2021). This means a shift in the perception of mercenaries away from independent actors that spread and pursue conflict for the sake of it to perceiving mercenaries as foreign policy tools of regional elites. Although, I find that the market for force has increased the presence and availability of state and non-state actors' access to additional military forces, I do not argue that this finding per se increases the likelihood of armed conflict. Only if mercenaries are embedded in a complex structure of transnational networks does the likelihood of a conflict onset increase. Hence, the process of diffusion is reliant on regional configurations of state-and nonstate-actors. My comparative results show a link between a neighbour at war and the recruitment of mercenaries which is a novel and crucial finding. By analysing the civil war onsets in Sierra Leone (1991), Zaire (1996), and Sudan (1986) I find that mercenaries were recruited in all three instances by a regional government prior to the civil war onset. When taking a closer look at the odds of an armed conflict it is striking that on a bivariate as well as in the multivariate model a neighbour at war increases the odds of an armed conflict onset by two and the recruitment/mobilisation of mercenaries increases the odds of a new conflict to erupt by three. At first glance these findings seem to outperform traditional measures of conflict onset.

This thesis' investigation of the impact of mercenaries on conflict diffusion is the first of its kind (as far as I am currently aware of). With the creation of the Commercial Military Actors in Armed Conflicts Dataset it is possible to explore causes and dynamics of civil wars, beyond a structural approach, using actor-specific data. The CMAD is the largest and most comprehensive database containing detailed information about commercial military actors, i.e. mercenaries and PMSCs in civil wars between 1980 and 2016, covering five world regions: Africa; Latin America and the Caribbean; East Asia and the Pacific; the Middle East; and South Asia. The process of gathering, coding and using this data enabled me to enhance the theoretical as well as the empirical understanding of mercenaries as agents of armed conflict diffusion.

*Future Research*

By employing an actor-centric approach to conflict diffusion I demonstrate that the process is not random. Conflict does not just spill from location A to location B. The responses by, and the behaviour of, actors in a complex environment play a vital role to observe the process of diffusion. It is critical to comprehend how regional elites and emerging rebel groups interact with each other, since their behaviour shapes the trajectory of the (possible) conflict. Thus, one potential avenue for further research is an even more detailed analysis of the networks domestic opposition groups possess. As this thesis showed it is relevant to examine and measure indirect external support to domestic groups especially prior to a conflict onset. This also speaks to the research on how rebel groups are formed. My findings indicate that all three rebel groups were established after the concrete commitment of an external sponsor.

This thesis finds that mercenaries are actors of conflict diffusion by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. Building on these findings another potential avenue for future research is the employment of forecasting methods to include actor-specific behaviour into forecasting models. In addition one could estimate whether the variables neighbour at war, transnational alliance and mercenaries are not only statistically significant variables but also good conflict predictors. The CMAD is the first dataset of its kind that comprehensively gathers data on mercenary activities from 1980-2016. A further research avenue is the incorporation of geo-referenced data to incorporate a spatial component of mercenary activities.

My research also speaks to the literature body of (transnational) alliances and rivalries. The findings from the case studies indicate that the meddling of state-and non-state actors into the affairs of neighbouring country, as well as the employment of mercenaries on behalf of a rebel group, are common activities for leaders on the African continent. In a further research step one could expand this research focus from a regional to a global level.

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## Appendix

### Bivariate Analysis: Neighbour at War, Transnational Alliance, & Mercenaries

*Bivariate logit regression: Armed Conflict Onset, 1980 to 2016*

| | Coefficient | Odds Ratio |
|---|---|---|
| **Neighbour at War** | .7122333* | 2.038539* |
| | (0.011) | (0.011) |
| **Constant** | -3.05289*** | .0472222*** |
| | (0.000) | (0.000) |

legend: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

*Bivariate logit regression: Armed Conflict Onset, 1980 to 2009*

| | Coefficient | Odds Ratio |
|---|---|---|
| **Transnational Alliance** | 1.541119*** | 4.669811*** |
| | (0.000) | (0.000) |
| **Constant** | -3.113515*** | .0444444*** |
| | (0.000) | (0.000) |

legend: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

*Bivariate logit regression: Armed Conflict Onset, 1980 to 2016*

| | Coefficient | Odds Ratio |
|---|---|---|
| **Mercenaries** | 1.252067 | 3.497566 |
| | (0.000) | (0.000) |
| **Constant** | -2.848926 | .0579065 |
| | (0.000) | (0.000) |

legend: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

## Odds Ratios & Robustness Checks

*Armed Conflict Onset, 1980 to 2016, Odds Ratios for all four Models*

| | **Model (1)** | **Model (2)** | **Model (3)** | **Model (4)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Neighbour at War** | 2.48897** | 2.199966* | 2.741067** | 2.414618* |
| | (0.005) | (0.029) | (0.002) | (0.013) |
| **Transnational Alliance** | | 15.54389*** | | 11.73589*** |
| | | (0.000) | | (0.000) |
| **Mercenaries** | | | 4.48855*** | 3.050336** |
| | | | (0.000) | (0.001) |
| **Regime Type** | 1.197389 | 1.57529 | 1.273834 | 1.631905* |
| | (0.405) | (0.064) | (0.282) | (0.049) |
| **GDP/Capita (ln)** | .8580681 | 1 | .8229416 | .9886811 |
| | (0.348) | (1.000) | (0.231) | (0.955) |
| **Cold War** | 1.452633 | .9830917 | 1.108431 | .812837 |
| | (0.324) | (0.962) | (0.792) | (0.582) |
| **Peace Years** | 1.19038 | 1.71404 *** | 1.327924** | 1.768175*** |
| | (0.059) | (0.000) | (0.003) | (0.000) |
| **Peace Years Squared** | .9826496 | .9615457*** | .974921** | .9593528*** |
| | (0.056) | (0.001) | (0.005) | (0.000) |
| **Peace Years Cube** | 1.000409 | 1.000761** | 1.000562** | 1.000795*** |
| | (0.059) | (0.002) | (0.008) | (0.001) |
| **Constant** | .0461177** | .0032836*** | .0339787*** | .002245*** |
| | (0.002) | (0.000) | (0.001) | (0.000) |
| ***N*** | 1,064 | 881 | 1,064 | 881 |

legend: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

*Armed Conflict Onset, 1980 to 2016, Pooled Logit Regression with Cluster on Country*

| | **Model (4)** | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Coefficients** | **Odds Ratios** |
| **Neighbour at War** | .881541* | 2.414618* |
| | (0.020) | (0.020) |
| **Transnational Alliance** | 2.462652*** | 11.73589*** |
| | (0.000) | (0.000) |
| **Mercenaries** | 1.115252** | 3.050336** |
| | (0.008) | (0.008) |
| **Regime Type** | -.0113834 | .9886811 |
| | (0.965) | (0.965) |
| **GDP/Capita (ln)** | .489748 | 1.631905 |
| | (0.067) | (0.067) |
| **Cold War** | -.2072247 | .812837 |
| | (0.603) | (0.603) |
| **Peace Years** | .5699479*** | 1.768175*** |
| | (0.001) | (0.001) |
| **Peace Years Squared** | -.0414964*** | .9593528*** |
| | (0.001) | (0.001) |
| **Peace Years Cube** | .0007949*** | 1.000795*** |
| | (0.001) | (0.001) |
| **Constant** | -6.09903*** | .002245*** |
| | (0.000) | (0.001) |
| ***N*** | 881 | 881 |

legend: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

*Armed Conflict Onset, 1980 to 2016, Random Effects Model*

I have computed the Hausman, a test statistic that examines the difference between Random and Fixed Effects models. The test result was not significant, the null-hypothesis had to be rejected in favours of the Radom Effects model as shown below.

| | **Model (4)** | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Coefficients** | **dy/dx** |
| **Neighbour at War** | .8014248*<br>(0.045) | .0449069<br>(0.047) |
| **Transnational Alliance** | 2.691194 ***<br>(0.000) | .1507979<br>(0.000) |
| **Mercenaries** | 1.165901**<br>(0.001) | .0653299<br>(0.001) |
| **Regime Type** | .5789444*<br>(0.041) | .0324405<br>(0.045) |
| **GDP/Capita (ln)** | .0195071<br>(0.934) | .0010931<br>(0.934) |
| **Cold War** | -.3246366<br>(0.433) | -.0181906<br>(0.434) |
| **Peace Years** | .5703055<br>(0.000) | .0319564<br>(0.000) |
| **Peace Years Squared** | -.0404458<br>(0.001) | -.0022663<br>(0.002) |
| **Peace Years Cube** | .0007634<br>(0.012) | .0000428<br>(0.014) |
| **Constant** | -6.519864<br>(0.000) | |
| ***N*** | 881 | 881 |

legend: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001