

**Internationalization of Intrastate Armed Conflicts in East and Southeast
Asia: Mechanisms, Channels and Factors**

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INTRODUCTION

International and – increasingly so – transnational dimensions of internal strife have become a prominent object of both international studies’ and conflict studies’ inquiry. The body of academic literature addressing various ‘external’ aspects of civil wars has grown exponentially since early 1990s mostly driven by a dramatic increase in the share of what is often categorized as internationalized internal conflicts that spread across post-Cold War Europe, the post-Soviet space, Africa and the Middle East.

Yet to fully comprehend the nature of this phenomenon it is not sufficient to limit the study of empirical pool of armed conflicts to just the post-bipolar timeframe since many patterns of internationalization had started taking shape between 1945 and 1991. The region of East and Southeast Asia¹, which is one of the most ethno-culturally diverse, was not immune from the projection of global confrontation affecting regional politics through the second half of the 20th century. Diffusion, spill-overs, interventions and externalizations of various forms of organized violence took place in East and Southeast Asia to no lesser extent than in other traditionally ‘conflict-prone’ regions of the world.

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

In this paper, the “consequential” mode is the one adopted as a starting point for deductive inquiry into the nature of armed conflict internationalization. What I strive to achieve is not so much to describe the multitude of transnational manifestations of internal conflict, but rather to reveal how this consequential escalation happens to penetrate established state boundaries and affect a larger international system. Or, to put it simply, how do we get from here to there, from a purely intrastate armed conflict to an evidently internationalized armed conflict.

¹ The region can be interpreted as both: 1) an additive construct covering the area of two specific regions – the region of East Asia and the region of Southeast Asia; 2) a standalone macro-region mostly including the same countries and territories but implying greater geostrategic significance though probably less political cohesion. For the purposes of this research, neither the conceptual differentiation between the two interpretations nor choosing between the two is critically important.

To this end, I elaborate a conceptual model of intrastate conflict internationalization that I loosely denominate “the integrated three-dimensional model”. The model integrates horizontal, vertical and systemic dimensions of armed conflict internationalization (hence the “3D” model) as well as a variety of interplays between the three.

The following sections of this paper are structured in such a way that I first outline the basics of the conceptual model explaining mechanisms, channels and factors behind each of the three dimensions. This organically includes a certain literature review component since some elements of the model have been thoroughly studied as standalone sociopolitical processes by many prominent scholars of the field. Then, I apply the model to the realm of cases of armed conflict internationalization that had taken place in East and Southeast Asia between 1945 and 2010 looking for any regional patterns and specifics. I finish the paper by reflecting on certain constraints on empirical use of the model and identifying research avenues for its further analytical application.

THE INTEGRATED THREE-DIMENSIONAL CONCEPTUAL MODEL

In the most general sense, I define conflict internationalization as expansion of its internal structure in such a way that it acquires a cross-border dimension that may include but is not limited to geographic spread of hostilities or even of its physical and social consequences, direct or indirect involvement of foreign actors (both state-based and non-state-based²), as well as any observable growth of the relevance of a given conflict for outside third parties. These and other aspects of such consequential escalation may or may not affect the original intrastate dynamics of the conflict in question, but they nevertheless make it bigger and under some scenarios may even contribute to the onset of other conflicts beyond national borders.

Across a variety of ways by which intrastate armed conflicts become internationalized, I analytically distinguish between three dimensions – a horizontal one, a vertical one and a systemic one. I also tend to employ the “escalation” term to denote directed processes that lead to internationalization, at the same time being fully aware that nominally *escalation* is a much broader concept that encompasses multiple aspects of growth in conflict scale and intensity. In this sense,

² The latter may include not just independent non-state-based actors, but also ones that can be categorized as state-enabled, state-controlled and state-tolerated non-state-actors.

I tend to divert from the way *vertical escalation* and *horizontal escalation* are traditionally delineated.³

Within the integrated three-dimensional model that is being introduced in this paper, the horizontal dimension (horizontal escalation) represents varied processes through which the spatial spread of organized violence (often originated on the sub-state level) affects the territory of other (usually neighboring) countries leading to consequences (usually destabilizing) for both the source state and the recipient state. The vertical dimension (vertical escalation) covers the processes by which either the structure of the conflict gets expanded to involve outside (foreign) actors, normally as secondary (supporting) parties, or (often as a result of the former) the nominal level of conflict gets upgraded from intrastate to interstate. Vertical escalation is enabled either through an attack by a source state on the territory or subjects of one or more of its neighbors (*outward-directed vertical escalation*), or alternatively through intervention by a state-based external actor into the original internal conflict (*inward-directed vertical escalation*). Finally, the systemic dimension (systemic escalation) denotes the expansion of international systemic limits of original conflict by increased political stake, interest and/or attention of various international actors vis-à-vis the conflict in question. Multiple interplays between the three dimensions are also important because they can affect (stimulate or block) various dimension-specific factors through both reinforcing and counterbalancing systemic loops.

The Horizontal Dimension: Spreading Across Established Borders but Retaining the Intrastate Status and Original Structure

Under the horizontal dimension, organized violence provoked by an internal armed conflict (which often may amount to civil war⁴) or its physical and social consequences spill over recognized national boundaries producing destabilizing effects on other (mostly neighboring) countries. At the same time, firstly, the status of the original conflict remains intrastate since no conscious state-based action takes place that would violate other state's sovereignty thus transforming the conflict into a nominally interstate one; and secondly, the conflict structure remains the same meaning that no external actors get involved into the original dispute as either primary or secondary parties.

³ *Vertical escalation* has traditionally referred to an increase in the intensity of violence, whereas *horizontal escalation* has been used to imply an increase in the number of actors involved, usually accompanied by inevitable geographic spread of violence.

⁴ In case it is accompanied by at least 1000 battle-related deaths over a calendar year as stipulated by the widely accepted UCDP operationalization (see: <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/>).

The most directly observable manifestation of horizontal escalation are spontaneous cross-border spillovers of hostilities in regions where state boundaries are porous, poorly guarded or just formed by natural barriers (such as mountains, waterways, etc.). However, more common in real conflict internationalization cases are direct and indirect *physical consequences (spillovers)* of domestic armed struggle that spread over national borders and affect neighboring countries. Such physical spillovers include flows of refugees (e.g., Choi and Salehyan 2013; Weiner 1992; Whitaker 2003), as well as of arms and mercenaries that can undermine stability and put additional social and economic pressure on local communities straining their limited resources. In a civil war zone, rebels can also establish sanctuaries over the border in a neighboring country either with the help, through neglect or merely due to incompetence of latter's authorities (e.g., Salehyan 2007). A violent intrastate conflict can also contribute to the destruction of physical infrastructure that stretches across territories of at least two countries resulting in negative economic and trade implications for neighboring nations (e.g., Bayer and Rupert 2004; Murdoch and Sandler 2002). Finally, it can provoke degradation of regional ecosystems endangering the livelihoods of communities that live over the borders but are greatly affected by transnational environmental shocks.

That said, physical spillovers are not merely standalone manifestations of horizontal escalation. They can also be conceptualized as being constituent elements within the mechanism behind a larger phenomenon that is normally described as *conflict diffusion*, or *conflict contagion*. The nature of diffusion of organized violence is akin to a more general process of spatial diffusion of sociopolitical phenomena beyond national borders (Elkins and Simmons 2005; Solingen 2012). With respect to transborder spread of civil wars, *diffusion* (or *contagion*) denotes a process by which an intrastate armed conflict in one country increases the probability of a similar conflict onset in another (usually neighboring) country (e.g., Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008; Carmignani and Kler 2016; Cederman et al. 2009; Hegre and Sambanis 2006: 529). The metaphoric conceptualization of diffusion draws similarities between armed conflict contagion involving sovereign states and contraction of infectious diseases by humans through the epidemiologic source-target mechanism described by the widely renowned Kermack-McKendrick model (Ayres and Saideman 2000; Braithwaite 2010: 313; Golubev 2016).

Through the so called “domino effect”, diffusion can lead to destabilization of entire regions that become engulfed with conflict ranging from political instability to outright civil war. Such conceptualization was widely applied to describe the dynamics of the communist regimes' collapse in Eastern Europe in late 1980s – early 1990s, as well as to explain the clustering of civil wars in

Great African Lakes region through 1990s-2000s. More recently, the concept has been adapted to address the wave of revolutionary events and violent civil conflicts that have spread across the Middle East and North Africa region since late 2010 (Saideman 2012).

Some aspects of conflict diffusion have been very well researched. These include various groups of factors (or conditions) that determine the estimated probability of contagion (Forsberg 2014a), the primacy of state-based actors as agents of the process (Black 2012), the role of transborder ethnic kin groups in mediating contagion (e.g., Cederman et al. 2009; Forsberg 2014b), and the target state's capacity to resist "infection" (Braithwaite 2010; Danneman and Ritter 2014). Still, extensive scholarly interest in the subject so far has not translated into formulation of a comprehensive or universally applicable model of conflict contagion mechanism. This paper does not aspire to fill this void with a given solution, but rather to identify specific elements of this mechanism that would also factor into a wider framework of conflict internationalization consistent with the introduced three-dimensional model.

Relying on structural analysis, four main elements can be discerned within a generic contagion mechanism: source state, target state, agents of transmission and channels of transmission.

Features of a *source state* are important to the extent that they are related to the type of conflict in question. For example, it was established that conflicts over territory (including separatist conflicts) are more contagious than disputes over government control (Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008: 228-229), violent elite-driven coups are less contagious than non-violent mass protest movements (Miller et al. 2016), while conflicts caused by political exclusion of ethnic groups are more likely to spread across borders than are conflicts rooted in other causes (Metternich et al. 2015: 13). Capacities of a source state (or lack thereof) to retain control over its own territory and its borders despite internal strife also have a great impact on whether organized violence (as well as its consequences) spills over to neighboring countries or not.

Target state (object of contagion) is another primary element of the mechanism, therefore its qualitative characteristics determine to a large extent whether it is receptive to "infection" or not. Specifically, more prone to conflict onset when exposed to similar conflict nearby are fragile states with low indices of state capacity (Braithwaite 2010: 317); states with a dominant repressive system (Forsberg 2014b: 159); anocracies representing transitory regimes characterized by political instability, institutional immaturity and fluid combination of democratic and autocratic

practices⁵ (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Hegre et al. 2001; Hegre and Sambanis 2006); and ethnically polarized societies characterized by delicate balance between a dominant group and a small number of relatively large and internally cohesive minorities (Forsberg 2008).

Agents of transmission are conscious actors that are capable of either facilitating or, on contrary, blocking the contagion effect. These include governments of both a source state and a target state, various kinds of opposition groups that are mobilized in a source state and potentially capable and willing to get mobilized in a target state, transnational ethnic, religious and ideological groups that are settled across territories of both countries, as well as multiple types of external actors that may have a vested interest in the conflict and are capable of constructive or destructive interference.

Channels of transmission are no less important than other elements because they serve as a medium of influence through which a target state is affected. Such channels can be broadly categorized as falling under one of the three types.

The first category is represented by the same physical spillover effects that were already mentioned above. Flows of refugees, arms and mercenaries, cross-border activity by rebels, degradation of transboundary infrastructure and other destabilizing consequences of violent internal strife function not only as standalone manifestations of horizontal internationalization, but also as a transmission channel that facilitates regional diffusion of intrastate armed conflicts.

The second category encompasses various information-based channels of transmission, particularly linked to the so-called *demonstration and learning effects* (DLEs) that allow agents in one state to learn from and replicate the behavior of agents in another state even if these are not located in the immediate vicinity of each other. Thus, conflict in a source state can contribute to the awareness by minority groups in a target state of their deprivation and encourage them to start a struggle of their own (Kuran 1998). It can also foster the opposition groups' beliefs in high chances for success and therefore make them increase their demands vis-à-vis the ruling regime (Lake and Rothchild 1998). A distinguishing feature of the DLE channels is that they are based on communication networks that are not bound by geographic neighborhoods which allows the contagion effect to take place even between non-adjacent countries (Weidmann 2015).

⁵ Especially those authoritarian systems that have introduced some elements of the democratic process such as elected legislatures (Maves and Braithwaite 2013).

Finally, the third category of transmission channels refers to social-psychological connections established by various transnational identity-based ties such as ethnic, religious and ideological ones. Through such kin-based channels, certain psychic and emotional states (e.g., the perception of threat) are transmitted between peoples residing across national borders but sharing common ethnic, religious or ideological background. The effectiveness of identity-based transmitters in facilitating contagion has been widely acknowledged and reported (e.g., Ayres and Saideman 2000; Cederman et al. 2009; Forsberg 2014b; Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). When a transnational group becomes involved in internal armed conflict on one side of the border, the salience of identity markers and ties greatly increases for the whole group including kin communities residing in neighboring countries (Forsberg 2014b: 144). Consequently, the group becomes entrenched in its “identity fortress” leading to social-psychological polarization and segregation. It is noticeable that this type of transmission channels is closely related to transnational identity-based groups as agents of transmission meaning that these two normally go hand-in-hand as pieces of the contagion mechanism.

When all these elements come together, the contagion mechanism functions as follows. Motivated by certain dynamics of internal conflict in a source state, agents of transmission acting through one or several channels of transmission exert influence on opportunities and motivations of opposition groups (and – to a lesser extent – of the government) in a target state thereby changing their calculations. If successful, this triggers rebel mobilization which in effect greatly increases the probability of civil conflict onset in the target state (Linebarger 2015). The entire process is conditioned by physical and institutional factors related to the type(s) of channels being used. Whereas physical spillovers and transnational ethnic ties normally limit the contagion effect to just neighboring countries thus resulting in spatial clustering of armed conflicts, transnational religious and ideological ties and – even more so – demonstration and learning effects can transmit contagion to target states located far away from the source state’s immediate surrounding thus levelling the significance of geographic proximity.

The Vertical Dimension: Expanding the Conflict Structure, Moving from Intrastate to Interstate

Under the vertical dimension, external actors get involved either voluntarily or not (usually as secondary, or supporting, parties) expanding the original conflict structure. At the highest level of vertical escalation, the conflict status gets upgraded from intrastate to interstate. At the same time, localization of hostilities may or may not expand geographically.

Voluntary involvement of outside actors in support of one of the primary parties of the internal conflict can be categorized as *intervention (inward-directed vertical escalation)*. In the case of non-voluntary involvement, another (often neighboring) country becomes a victim of the attack by a state where the original internal armed conflict takes place – the process categorized as *externalization (outward-directed vertical escalation)*. According to Davies, domestic violent strife increases the probability of both conflict initiation abroad⁶ and becoming a target of attack by other states (Davies 2002). Both directions are interrelated and constitute integral parts of the overall conceptual framework presented in this paper.

Inward-directed vertical escalation: Intervention

Although the possibility of intrastate armed conflicts becoming a significant driver of militarized disputes between states has received due scholarly attention relatively recently (e.g., Atzili 2006-2007; Gleditsch and Salehyan 2007; Gleditsch et al. 2008), various aspects of external interventions into civil wars have been thoroughly studied and reported. Depending on intervenor's motivations, such actions are taken to provide support either to the central government (a group that currently controls the central government) or to the opposition group(-s). Depending on intervention dynamics, it can result either in encouraging or suppressing the spread of original violent conflict. Finally, the range of forms (modes) of intervention varies from high level (high-cost, hard) involvement, such as direct military intervention, to relatively low level (low-cost, soft) involvement limited to just providing arms, logistical, financial, political, diplomatic or other kind of support to one of the primary parties, either overtly or covertly.

Due to externalities and spillovers induced by the civil war, a vested interest in conflict-related issues or some kin-based affinity, outside actors may have different preferences with regards to the outcome of a conflict. When external states see interest in a rebel victory, they may have incentives to intervene in support of an opposition group. If such support takes a form of direct military intervention, an intrastate conflict gets effectively transformed into an interstate one.

One of the most important aspects of the intervention mechanism is motivation behind external involvement. Every generic decision-making process about whether to intervene or not revolves around a combination of motivation and opportunity. Whereas opportunity is provided by an

⁶ At the same time, Davies argues that nonviolent conflict reduces such probability (Davies 2002).

intrastate conflict itself (since the latter usually debilitates a rival state and renders it incapacitated), motivation can be based on a variety of considerations. Traditionally, specific motivations have been categorized as either *instrumental* (geopolitical interests, territorial ambitions, economic gains, domestic political agenda, etc.), *affective* (shared historic grievances, ethnic or religious identity, racial-cultural affinity, common ideological principals, etc.) or some combination of the two (Carment and James 2000; Cooper and Berdal 1993; Heraclides 1990; Saideman 2001; Suhrke and Noble 1977).

Assessments of motivations for real-world external interventions normally fall under one of the following scenarios (broad reasons):

- *Opportunistic intervention* aimed at exploiting internal turmoil in a rival state and weakening it either by launching a direct military campaign or by providing support to opposition factions and using them as proxies⁷ (e.g., Brown 1996; Cooper and Berdal 1993; Lake and Rothchild 1998; Maoz and San-Akca 2012).
- *Defensive intervention* intended to prevent cross-border incursions by armed groups (including terrorist ones) from the target state, as well as cross-border refugee flows (Cooper and Berdal 1993), or to halt cross-border violations by target state's security forces pursuing rebels in frontier areas (Brown 1996).
- *Protective intervention* aimed at rescuing an ethnic kin group that is threatened by internal violent conflict in the target state (e.g., Brown 1996; Carment and James 2000; Moore and Davis 1998). Such kin solidarity is especially acute in the situation of *ethnic alliance* when the majority group in the intervenor's state is a minority group in the target state and the latter is perceived to be engaged in a struggle for survival.
- *Irredentist intervention* takes place when a civil conflict in the target state involves separatist goals while leaders of a separatist group appeal to the majority kin group in a neighboring state to take military action (or are encouraged by the latter to do so) in order to incorporate the disputed territory (populated by the ethnic brethren) into a larger ethnic state (Van Evera 1997).

Carment et al. also established that the decision to intervene largely depends on such intervenor-specific variables as its institutional configuration and ethnic composition, with ethnic diversity and high constraint on state action exercising a restraining effect on political decision to intervene (Carment et al. 2009). At the same time, if intervention happens (be it at high or low level of

⁷ The objective can be rooted either in weakening a strategically or circumstantially rival state, or alternatively, in removing a regime that is regarded as odious or hostile to one's interests.

involvement), it tends to prolong the duration of civil conflict (Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski 2005; Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000; Cunningham 2010) and to increase its intensity (Lacina 2006).

Outward-directed vertical escalation: Externalization

I define *externalization* as deliberate actions taken by a state facing domestic rebellion that constitute effective violation of another (neighboring) state's sovereignty, normally in the form of limited or full-fledged military campaign. According to Trumbore, at least with ethno-political rebellions, externalization is more common than intervention, and states dealing with internal strife are more likely to use force first rather than to become victims of external aggression (Trumbore 2003).

Externalization falls under one of the following three broad scenarios (of a combination thereof), comprising different sets of motivations. The first scenario is represented by *diversionary wars* that are initiated either by politically embattled leaders to draw public's attention away from domestic problems or under conditions of internal civil unrest (violent or not) with the aim of inducing a "rally round the flag" effect and thus bringing society back together (e.g., Gelpi 1997; Goemans 2008; Jung 2014; Miller 1995). Analytically, diversion seems a viable scenario only for a situation of low-intensity internal strife since the debilitating effect of a violent civil war (high-intensity strife) must significantly limit state's opportunities for foreign adventurism. Moreover, empirical support for diversionary scenario is inconclusive with many findings contradicting this hypothesis (e.g., Gleditsch and Ward 2000; Gleditsch et al. 2008; Thompson and Tucker 1997). Some authors argue that the probability for initiation of a diversionary interstate dispute is conditioned by regime type and – even more so – by interstate rivalry settings (Daxecker 2011; Mitchell and Prins 2004).

The second scenario of conflict externalization is *cross-border counterinsurgency*. When rebels maintain safe havens on neighboring state's territory and use them to retreat, to launch raids and to maintain arms supply lines, the government side of the original conflict may undertake military actions across the border in order to destroy rebel infrastructure (Lake and Rothchild 1998; Salehyan 2007). Sometimes, such violations of neighbor's sovereignty become a result of "hot pursuit" that inadvertently spills over the border, though, under these circumstances, the degree of willfulness or awareness is always hard to determine. Opportunities for rebels to maintain external sanctuaries may exist due to host state's mere inability to control its own borders, however, in

many cases, such foreign rebel presence may be welcomed and supported by the host government. The latter situation constitutes an example of low-level intervention (providing support for one side of an internal conflict in a neighboring state), in which case externalization effectively becomes a response to external intervention.

This intervention-externalization nexus is even more relevant with the third externalization scenario which can be described as *retaliatory interventionist counteraction*. Unlike in the previous scenario, here, neighbor's own forces and objects, not rebel infrastructure, become targets of one's military actions while the main objective is to coerce the neighbor to withdraw support from one's rebel groups (Schultz 2010).⁸

The Systemic Dimension: Political Expansion and Penetration Through International System

The systemic dimension of conflict internationalization refers to the expansion of its external systemic limits, or the scope that it occupies within a larger international system. When systemic escalation of an intrastate armed conflict takes place, its relevance grows penetrating through the system and affecting international relations, power balances and relationship structures at regional and even global level. Firstly, the number of stakeholders (external players that have at least some vested interest in the conflict) increases which may include powerful international actors (mostly states) that are central to the system structure. Secondly, stakes associated with the conflict and its outcome may get higher for (some of) these external players leading to escalation of their commitment to relevant issues. Thirdly, it often (though not always) translates into bigger involvement of respective actors in the conflict transforming them into third parties or secondary (supporting) parties within the conflict structure. As a result, the conflict – though it may nominally remain intrastate – gains more international attention and becomes progressively more salient on the international agenda.

Precursory ideas about a linkage between communal violence (in this case – ethnic conflict) on the one hand and international systems-level conflict on the other hand were first developed by Midlarsky in his model of systemic war (e.g., Midlarsky 1992). According to this model, applied to the spread of ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia, resource inequality under conditions of multipolarity triggers alliance formation while memories of past conflicts produce overlap in

⁸ Therefore, the primary difference between the second scenario and the third one is the difference between attacking rebels on neighbor's territory and attacking the neighbor itself in retaliation for supporting the rebels.

conflict structures. The resulting change in the balance of power leads to systemic war although such developments do not occur frequently.⁹ Another notable early contribution to this conceptual domain was made by Marshall's macrosociological theory of social conflict that seeks to explain internal communal strife and international systemic conflict as driven by the same processes thus rendering traditional intrastate/interstate dichotomy analytically inaccurate (Marshall 1997). Later on, Marshall explored the close interplay between localized political violence and systems-level global conflict processes specifically during the Cold War period (Marshall 1999).

Expansion of conflict's external systemic limits lies at the heart of the systemic dimension of internationalization. The more political, economic and security interests of external actors are affected, the more conflict is generated among a larger circle of parties. The greater systemic escalation is, the more it destabilizes system as a whole because of the multiplier effect (Marshall 1997).

Potential for systemic escalation is particularly considerable when the conflict structure is linked to broader patterns of competition in international relations such as preexisting international rivalry dyads. Power dynamics within these dyads can become embedded into an intrastate conflict structure transforming it into a proxy war and, likely, exacerbating the rivalry itself. Another factor associated with systemic escalation is when the object of incompatibility includes "broader" issues that are relevant on a systemic level.¹⁰

Higher stakes of external actors that develop over the course of systemic escalation can be associated not only with certain outcomes being more favorable for some parties and less favorable for others, but also with continuation of the conflict per se. Especially in regions with lucrative resources, transnational economic factors of civil wars contribute to the development of war economies that on both the supply and the demand side bring together internal and external players with a vested interest in continued armed struggle.

Cross-border illicit trade in natural resources serves as one of the major sources of financing a rebellion. Although the primary financial gain is for those on the supply side, external actors that buy illegally channeled natural resources (such as war diamonds, timber and drugs) on both regional and global scale also gain significantly from these kinds of networks since the latter offer

⁹ Midlarsky identified only eight systemic wars that had happened between 500 b.c. and early 1990s.

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

deals at dumped price levels. Similarly, arms flows that go the opposite direction (into a conflict zone) create vested interests for those external players that are involved with arms smuggling networks by directly benefiting regional criminal syndicates and indirectly – global arms manufacturers. All these stakeholders flourish and proliferate on the fertile ground of complex emergencies produced by systemically escalated armed conflicts.

Unlike the horizontal dimension and the vertical dimension, the systemic dimension of conflict internationalization does not imply just one-off events, nor is it limited to directional processes, but rather involves interconnectedness that can be essentially a long-standing state of affairs. Interplay between internal conflict dynamics and systems-level dynamics – together with diffusion, intervention and externalization processes¹¹ – can also create linkages between different conflicts within a single region. This interconnectedness has been conceptualized as *regional conflict complexes*, or *RCCs* (Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1998), where conflicts become mutually reinforcing to the point that it is impossible to completely disentangle them and to solve just one without addressing the entire regional dimension.

Connectedness in regional conflict complexes unfolds across a number of aspects. Firstly, actors from different conflict structures may realize they have similar goals with one another or fight common enemies. Often these links are reinforced by shared ethnic, religious or ideological identities, or by perception of similar grievances, motivating respective actors to cooperate with each other. Secondly, issues from different conflicts become interlinked making it difficult to disaggregate and separate various incompatibilities from each other. Thirdly, linkages between different conflicts create a sort of a larger pool of resources shared by different regional parties which strengthens belligerents' fighting capacities and creates reinforcing loops within a conflict complex thus perpetuating its existence.

Interconnected actors, issues and access points to resources add more layers of complexity and offer at least one additional level of analysis which would be the one of RCC itself. Based on the logic of the systemic dimension, a single internal conflict's structure can be presented as a subsystem within a respective regional conflict complex (RCC), while the RCC itself can be presented as a subsystem within a larger international system.

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

The further systemic limits of an intrastate armed conflict expand, the more complex it becomes in terms of comprehending and managing its dynamics. Increased number of stakeholders always results in greater uncertainty due to fluid alliances. It also makes any settlement process less likely to succeed because of more individual interests involved that are to be reconciled with one another and due to higher probability of external spoilers.

Interplay between the Three Dimensions

The distinction between different dimensions of internationalization is analytical and serves mostly conceptual purposes. Processes taking place within each of the three dimensions obviously exhibit cross-dimensional links and correlations with each other. Many, though not all, of those correlations are mutually reinforcing meaning that escalation along one dimension is likely to trigger simultaneous or consecutive escalatory dynamics along another dimension or even both other dimensions. Therefore, identifying specific links which exemplify the interplay between the three dimensions is of paramount importance for building a coherent conceptual framework of conflict internationalization.

Some of the elements from different dimensions substantially adjoin one another to the point that certain developments on the ground in a conflict zone can be associated with more than one dimension. One of the most obvious examples of this indivisibility are sporadic cross-border spillovers of hostilities which can represent both the horizontal escalation and the cross-border counterinsurgency (“hot pursuit”) scenario of externalization (vertical escalation). Analytically, this categorization is problematic and can only be based on whether the security forces attacking rebels across the border are fully aware or not that they are violating sovereignty of a neighboring state. In practice, however, this distinction can hardly be made.

Another common element for both the horizontal and the vertical dimension consists in the role of transnational identity-based groups as well as ties within and between them. Ethnic, religious, linguistic and ideological affinities that stretch across political borders do not only serve as transmission channels within a generic conflict contagion mechanism (horizontal dimension), they also determine affective motivations which, among other factors, drive external agents’ decision-making process behind their interventions into a civil conflict (vertical dimension). A reinforcing loop for this correlation is established by certain type of consequences of foreign interventions, namely, by the fact that such interventions tend to exacerbate perceptions of external threat and

hence to root all involved groups in their “identity capsules” further cementing respective transnational ties as transmission channels.

One of the strongest connections has been established between the risk of civil war diffusion as well as of actual physical spillovers (i.e. horizontal dimension) threatening interests of another (normally neighboring) state – on the one hand, and the latter’s decision to intervene (i.e. vertical dimension) in order to protect its interests by curbing the hostilities in the former – on the other hand (Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000; Lemke and Regan 2004; Thyne 2009). Kathman argues that state’s motivation for intervention into a civil war lies not only with its narrow interests related to the conflict at risk of contagion, but especially so with its wider regional interests that might be affected by such diffusion (Kathman 2011).

Not surprisingly, the oppositely directed correlation (intervention-to-diffusion) has been proved as well, though it is conditioned by type of intervention. Peksen and Lounsbury maintain that hostile interventions (in support of the opposition) increase the probability of civil conflict contagion to neighboring countries, whereas supportive interventions (in favor of the government) have a pacifying effect reducing the risk of contagion on the regional scale (Peksen and Lounsbury 2012).¹²

Related to the latter is another correlation implying that diffusion, intervention and externalization, when put into effect, often lead to more physical spillovers thus expanding transmission channels for further contagion (horizontal dimension) as well as increasing motivation for further intervention (vertical dimension) while potentially affecting regional interests of actors at a higher level of a larger international system (systemic dimension).

Interestingly, under some circumstances, not only escalation along one dimension itself but a lack of it too can trigger escalatory dynamics along another dimension. More specifically, if an external intervention aimed at suppressing internal violent strife in one country is largely expected but then fails to materialize, this may serve as a powerful learning lesson for opposition groups in another country that might be eager to launch a rebellion but are afraid of external involvement in support of the government that would drastically undermine their chances. If a suppressive foreign intervention (vertical escalation) in the former state never happens, then it may produce in a contagion effect (horizontal escalation) for the latter state by lowering estimated costs for its rebels

¹² At the same time, neutral interventions (aimed at ceasing violence and mitigating the strife without taking sides) are unlikely to have significant impact in terms of conflict diffusion potential (Peksen and Lounsbury 2012).

and prompting them to opt for a fight. The same demonstration and learning logic may be equally applied to a reverse situation when an oppressive and abusive government may decide to choose a violent approach to dealing with internal dissent if it witnesses a lack of will and commitment on behalf of international actors to launch protective interventions in other similar cases.

Identifying “joints” of different internationalization dimensions can also contribute to conceptualization of the *proxy war* phenomenon. A generic proxy-conflict structure can be regarded both as a result of low-level intervention (inward-directed vertical escalation) by two external powers (that often happen to be engaged in strategic rivalry vis-à-vis each other) in support of the opposite sides of an intrastate conflict – on the one hand, and as an element (both the process and the outcome) of systemic escalation affecting a larger international system – on the other hand. In some cases, systems-level rivalry dyad is preexistent and can “absorb” an emergent intrastate conflict over a relatively short period of time. In other cases, a systems-level rivalry takes shape and starts projecting itself onto an already existent internal conflict thus changing its dynamics and resulting in both vertical and systemic escalation.

Such proxy struggle can unfold either on the territory of a third country (the one engulfed by a proxy-type civil conflict), or alternatively as a “mirrored cross-intervention” with both rivals providing direct or indirect support to each other’s domestic opposition or rebel forces. In both these situations, two rivals are engaged in an attempt to destabilize one another, but avoid a riskier alternative of direct confrontation (Salehyan 2010). In this way, a deeply internationalized intrastate conflict that has undergone both vertical and systemic escalation becomes a substitute for traditional international conflict (old-fashioned war between two nation-states).

Finally, regional conflict complexes, or RCCs (systemic dimension) – by maintaining relatively long-standing connections between actors, issues and resource access points from different conflicts within a single region – obviously contribute to strengthening of existing transmission channels for conflict diffusion (horizontal dimension) and to motivations and opportunities of both regional and global external stakeholders to interfere with the conflict (vertical dimension).

APPLYING THE MODEL TO CONFLICT INTERNATIONALIZATION IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Horizontal Dimension: Conflict Diffusion in Southeast Asia during the Cold War and Beyond

When dealing with the problem of case selection for studying horizontal escalation, and particularly conflict contagion (diffusion) within the region over the chosen period of time, I tend to rely on the approach and the selection results offered by Black (Black 2013).

An intuitive relevance of Southeast Asia for exploring the phenomenon of conflict diffusion can be retrospectively highlighted by invoking the Domino Theory which was leveraged by the consecutive U.S. administrations of Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon to argue – not so much in conceptualized as in politicized way – for the ostensible threat of automatic Soviet takeover of regional states one by one through the communist expansion. As it is now evident, the spread of ideologically-driven intrastate conflicts was not that easy and common as U.S. policymakers tended to believe. But still, Southeast Asia was a vivid example. Whereas the strategically important Indian and Middle Eastern “dominoes” never fell, in Southeast Asia, the rightist regimes were eliminated in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam. More generally, the majority of cases of regional conflict diffusion occurred mainly, though not exclusively, during the Cold War period underscoring the role of ideological factors. Of particular interest is to identify specific transmission channels (types of channels) and agents (both state and non-state) that were involved in the contagion mechanism associated with these cases.

Probably the most common channel of contagion during that time used to be *communist inspiration* transmitted between communist-affiliated political actors, the one which can be categorized as a combination of *transnational identity-based* (in this case – ideological) *ties* on the one hand, and *demonstration and learning effects (DLE)* on the other hand. One of the first instances where this mechanism led to conflict diffusion was the civil war in Burma. In 1948 the Communist party of Burma (CPB) decided to adopt the Maoist strategy of guerilla warfare against the government (Linter 1990: 14), though at the time there does not appear to have been actual material support from the Communist Party of China (CPC). However, Maoist inspiration went beyond just the CPB. In 1949, with the beginning of the conflict against the Karen movement, the latter was

heavily influenced by Mao's ideas and recipes which led to nationalist movement's ideological drift to the left through the entire 1950s period (Smith 1999: 93).

Another example of the communist inspiration channel in action was the early stage of the civil conflict in South Vietnam (1955) where Vietnam Workers' Party leaders were supportive of Mao's idea and practice of "people's war". The onset of internal armed conflict in Malaysia in 1963 between the government and the Clandestine Communist Organization (CCO) was preceded by the CCO leaders' trip to China and the resulting exposure to the CPC's doctrine (Porritt 2004: 83). Finally, Mao's brutal struggle was also inspirational for Khmer Rouge's Pol Pot who called for building of a new atheistic civilization (Deac 1997: 42) effectively facilitating contagion to Cambodia in 1967.¹³

The role of transnational ideological (communist) ties had not always been limited to just inspiration. In a number of cases, a *direct support* from China's and other regional communist parties to their foreign peers contributed significantly to armed conflict onset. In late 1950s, contagion effects took place between regional communist actors and Laos when Chinese, South Vietnamese, and especially North Vietnamese communists provided training and overt military support to the Pathet Lao movement which would later (in 1975) assume political power in Vientiane. In a different but related development in mid-1970s, the communist insurgency, already underway in Thailand, reflected similar communist vs. anti-communist dynamics in Laos, Cambodia, South Vietnam and Malaysia, while the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) received direct and indirect support from ideological allies in respective countries as well as from China and North Vietnam.

Another transmission channel for regional conflict diffusion in East and Southeast Asia can be described as *direct cross-border spillover of hostilities*. Probably the most vivid case of such a contagion was Burma in late 1950s – early 1960s when Chinese war with the Koumintang (KMT) sporadically spilled over to the Burmese territory. Firstly, when the KMT fled to the Burmese border following their defeat in the Chinese civil war it triggered the constant Burmese troop presence in the frontier Shan state. Although the 1960-1961 Sino-Burmese military operations finally succeeded at completely expelling the KMT to Laos and Thailand, still the influx of ethnic

¹³ The Khmer Rouge case may also be categorized as an example of negative learning (a subtype of demonstration and learning effects, DLEs). Norodom Sihanouk, a longtime leader of Cambodia, despite his sympathy for communist movements abroad, was so much concerned by the war exploding in neighboring South Vietnam in 1960s that he moved decisively against the left at home forcing many communist leaders, including some top members of Khmer Rouge's central committee, to flee the capital for a Vietnamese communist base along the border (Becker 1998: 10-11).

Burman troops and officials to Sham had considerably disturbed and sparked grievances among local Shan communities (Smith 1999: 190). It would later result in the Sham State Army being one of the largest anti-government insurgent groups in Myanmar. Secondly, when the anti-KMT hostilities spilled over to the northernmost Kachin State, China started to project claims on some of parts of the Burmese territory which led to the 1960 Burma-China bilateral treaty transferring the possession of three Kachin villages over to Beijing. The decision destabilized local Kachin communities so much that in February 1961 a popular uprising began accompanied by the formation of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) (Smith 1999: 157-158).

Transborder arms flow can be identified as another transmission channel for regional conflict diffusion. In Indonesia, the second phase of the separatist insurrection by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) was at least partly facilitated in 1990 by weapons transfers (financed by profits from marijuana production) from Thailand and Cambodia, the latter at the time having been engaged in internal armed conflict of its own (Schulze 2004: 28). Later on, in Thailand, another separatist insurgency, the one in southern Patani region, was preceded in 2003 by transnational arms trade that involved groups in Cambodia, Mindanao (the Philippines) and Sri Lanka (Croissant 2007).

The same Patani case also exemplifies the role of *foreign fighters*, coupled with their *cross-border training and military experience*, as yet another physical spillover turned to be a channel for conflict contagion. Specifically, some Patani insurgents had received training in Aceh, Indonesia, which in 2003 was still in a state of internal armed conflict. Besides, many Patani natives had also fought alongside the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, but returned to Thailand in 2003 and comprised a significant segment of Patani insurgent leadership in 2004 (Utitsarn 2007: 2).

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

Internationalization of some Southeast Asian conflicts contained elements of outward-directed vertical escalation (externalization). For example, Myanmar (Burmese military) has on many occasions pursued rebels from the Karen National Liberation Army across the border into Thailand, in some cases clashing with Thai troops (Brown 1996: 594). As a specific example, in 1990 over 300 Myanmar troops had crossed the Moei River into Thailand while trying to take over the base operated by Karen rebels. The subsequent clash with Thai military forces resulted in at

least eight Burmese soldiers killed and two captured with the rest withdrawing back across the border.¹⁴

However, for the most part, externalization in the region has not been as common as intervention (inward-directed vertical escalation). Many of those interventions, especially during the Cold War era, unfolded along the same ideological communist vs. anti-communist dynamics as did conflict diffusion. What is notable, however, is a strong connection between contagion processes and intervention processes that reinforced and facilitated each other in many cases, including those already discussed above.

When the Royal Lao Government (RLG) meddled in the South Vietnamese civil war in late 1950s providing diplomatic support to the government side, it constituted clear violation of the 1957 neutrality agreement between the RLG and the communist Pathet Lao. It also alarmed North Vietnam which was the chief sponsor of South Vietnamese communist rebels. As a result, Hanoi decided to step up its support for the Pathet Lao which represented a kind of retaliatory low-level intervention and came to be one of the decisive factors in the onset of a civil war in Laos itself.

Despite obvious ideological affinity between China and Cambodia's Khmer Rouge, Prince Norodom Sihanouk who opposed the KR eventually aligned his policy towards the Vietnam War with the one of Beijing by beginning in 1964 to covertly assist Chinese military aid to the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF, or Viet Cong).¹⁵ This low-level interference with the South Vietnamese conflict would later play against Sihanouk since his support to the NLF substantially enhanced the latter's capacity to harbor the brotherly KR allowing it to regroup and to start an insurgency against Sihanouk in 1967.

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

¹⁴ Kyodo News Service, "Thai Force Kills Eight Myanmar Soldiers, Captures Two", February 11, 1990.

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

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

A notable exception to the pattern presented above is the fate of North Vietnam that directly intervened into four nearby intrastate conflicts: 1) backing the insurgent NLF in South Vietnam from 1959 to 1975, 2) patronizing the communist Pathet Lao in Laos, 3) having invaded Cambodia and having successfully toppled the Khmer Rouge (through the Kampuchea United Front for National Salvation, KNUFNS) in 1978, and finally 4) supporting – on a smaller scale – the Communist Party of Malaysia. Despite these multiple interventions, at the time conflict never spread to North Vietnam which was a “puzzling non-recipient of contagion” – a deviation specifically addressed and explained by Black (Black 2012: Chapter 5).

The Vertical – Systemic Connection: Interventions and Connectedness within Broader Regional Settings

The renowned case of the Vietnam war (1955 – 1975), partly addressed above, represents the most distinctive illustration for a complex interplay between the vertical and the systemic dimension of intrastate conflict internationalization in Southeast Asia.

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

and the Kingdom of Laos – on the one side, and the Khmer Rouge, Laos, Pathet Lao, People's Republic of China and North Korea – on the other side (to name just those taking a direct part).¹⁶

The Vietnam War exhibited a substantial systemic dimension, not just by shaping international agenda and drawing the resources of major regional and global actors thus affecting the balance of power on a larger scale, but also by having long-term implications for the structure of the international system. The first steps towards rapprochement between the United States and China took place in early 1970s exerting some positive influence over multiple conflict developments in Indochina. But it really was only after the end of the Vietnam War that favorable conditions were created and capitalized upon to move Washington and Beijing towards full-fledged bilateral normalization which had a substantial impact on the Cold War dynamics and the nature of relationship within the U.S.-China-Soviet Union triangle.

A number of conflicts in Southeast Asia validly prove (by contradiction) the relative significance of issues at stake and of state's own capacities for triggering systemic escalation. Thus, in some cases, the potential for systemic internationalization remained suppressed because the issues within the object of incompatibility were of low importance to the system (e.g., Thai support for ethnic insurgents in Burma), while in other cases a state managed to contain conflict making the situation seem less precarious at the systemic level and therefore resulting in less international attention (e.g., Muslim separatism in the Philippines up to 2001).

Transnational ideological ties were not the only factor that united multiple internal conflicts in southeast Asia into a regional conflict complex (RCC). Whereas communist vs. anti-communist paradigm ceased to shape regional conflict developments, the problem of interdependent war economies lived through the end of the Cold War and even exacerbated in 1990s. Links between various stakeholders in the production and trade of war timber contributed to the interconnectedness between conflicts in Burma/Myanmar, the Philippines, and Cambodia (e.g., Thomson and Kanaan 2004) in the same way as conflict diamonds entangled the war economies of multiple civil conflicts in Africa. That said, based on the overall assessment of post-Cold War dynamics, it can be argued that Southeast Asia, which used to be categorized as a regional conflict complex on par with South Africa and Central America, has since lost this status.

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

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Based on the presented application of the integrated three-dimensional conceptual model to a realm of cases of intrastate conflict internationalization in East and Southeast Asia a few preliminary conclusions are to be made. Conflict processes that took place in the region between 1945 and 2010 represent all three dimensions of the internationalization model. Since the majority of cases covered in this paper date back to the Cold War period, transnational ideological ties (built around transnational communist movements) constituted the main driving factor behind the way regional intrastate conflicts acquired international and transnational dimensions.

The most common transmission channel that facilitated conflict diffusion (by contagion) across the region (i.e. horizontal escalation) used to be communist inspiration (a combination of transnational identity-based ties and demonstration-and-learning effects), in some cases coupled with direct support provided to each other by communist-oriented regional political actors. Other transmission channels included direct spillover of hostilities, and cross-border flows of arms and foreign fighters.

Of the two directional processes of vertical escalation, intervention (inward-directed) was much more common than externalization (outward-directed). However, what the attempted application of the model has clearly revealed is the tight interrelation and correlation between the processes of vertical escalation with the ones of the other two dimensions. On the one hand, direct or indirect intervention (interference with a neighboring internal conflict) often led to contagion or to a proxy-type structure of mirrored cross-intervention. On the other hand, both low-level and high-level interventions amounted to single elements within larger processes of systemic escalation which was exemplified by the Vietnam War case.

The attempted model application has also exposed some constraints on its empirical use. Firstly, the model by itself does not offer any case selection algorithms and thus, in this regard, relies on third-party methodological approaches. Secondly, some of the real-world conflict internationalization processes are so complex and entangled with one another that it is often difficult to unequivocally categorize each one of these as representing specific elements of one of the three dimensions and not some others. Finally, further conceptual integration of the model is required, not just by identifying other analytical prisms of interplay between the three dimensions but also by bringing together state-based and non-state actors, their affective and instrumental motivations, opportunities and mobilization strategies, transmission channels, institutional and

systemic constraints as well as other elements into a coherent internationalization mechanism in order to describe how it functions under different structural conditions.

Still, I see vast potential in model application to other regional realms of conflict internationalization processes. It can be employed at both conflict-specific and region-specific levels of analysis to study conflict internationalization in South and East Europe, Central and South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Central and South America. In the ultimate sense, any such application needs to be linked to identifying country-specific, region-specific and system-specific factors that are to be addressed in order to block and prevent violent escalation processes that lead to intractable complex emergencies.

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