Aiding the Enemy? Foreign Aid and Civil Conflict Intensity: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

In a previous paper, Saroka (2023) theorizes that inflows of foreign aid into a state experiencing civil war will increase the conflict intensity, as measured by conflict deaths, in variable ways at the subnational level. As quantitative analysis did not provide much support for this theory, this paper turns to a qualitative analysis of civil wars in four states: the Republic of the Congo, Mali, Kenya, and South Sudan. This qualitative analysis similarly fails to offer substantial support for the theory.

Keywords: Civil war, conflict intensity, foreign aid, peace science.

1 Introduction

Saroka (2023) theorizes inflows of foreign aid into a state experiencing civil war would be expected to increase the intensity of that conflict. As foreign aid inflows threaten to upset the balance of power between the rebel group and the state, they create a shift in power that benefits one side at the expense of the other and motivates preemptive violence from whichever side will be disadvantaged by the power shift. This power shift is expected to vary by region, creating the hypotheses that increased aid inflows will increase the intensity of rebel (state) violence in more urban (rural) areas. These hypotheses were tested using subnational casualty data and geolocated foreign aid commitments for 27 states in Sub-Saharan Africa that experienced civil wars from 1995 through 2014. Unfortunately, empirical testing showed a general lack of support for this theory and its hypotheses.

This paper examines this lack of support through a qualitative approach, reviewing extant literature on four of the states from the quantitative analysis to see if there is any support for the theory. This support could take a variety of forms, ranging from stronger to weaker evidence. At the strong end of the spectrum, support would ideally take the form of "smoking guns" that directly agree with the hypotheses. A rebel commander attributing a rise in rebel activity in an urban area to increased inflows of foreign aid in that area, or a state leader attributing a rise in state violence in rural areas to the presence of foreign aid there, would be ideal examples. As such quotations are

likely to be rare, strong evidence could also come in the form of contemporary academic analysis coming to similar conclusions as the hypotheses. Weaker but still meaningful evidence, in the middle of the spectrum, could take the form of similar quotes from civilians, fighters for either side, or news media. While originating from the conflict, this evidence would be weaker due to the lack of direct insight into the strategic decision-making of either side that could be expected from state or rebel leaders. Finally, the weakest and most indirect support for the theory could come from analyses of conflict dynamics showing associations between foreign aid and increased violence in an area, or qualitative work showing the same. For a case to support the theory, there would have to be a pattern of both stronger and weaker supporting evidence from a reasonably broad range of academic sources. While no single piece of evidence would be conclusive, finding a pattern of supporting evidence would help to guard against the potential for a single source to bias this study's conclusions. For this theory to be supported, at least three of the four cases would have to show such a pattern.[1]

The four states chosen for this analysis were the Republic of the Congo, Mali, Kenya, and South Sudan. These states were chosen for two reasons. The first was their location relative to the values for the first and third quartiles of the data used in paper 1 for aid inflows and conflict deaths.

[1]This threshold was chosen so that a majority of the cases would need to provide support in order for the theory itself to be considered supported. This has the additional benefit of serving as a hard test for this theory, whereas a lower threshold, such as only requiring support from half of the cases, would be an easier test.

Unsurprisingly, no states matched up evenly with the exact values of the cut points for the first and third quartiles. Given this, as well as a desire to avoid both high and low outlier values for both the primary independent variable (aid inflows) and dependent variable (conflict deaths), the sample includes the four states with values closest to these cut points that are in the second and third quartiles for their respective variables. For the aid inflow data, these states are the Republic of the Congo and Mali. For the conflict deaths, these states are Kenya and South Sudan. The second reason these states were chosen was to provide useful variation not only on the primary independent variable, but also on the dependent variable as well.

While these qualitative analyses reveal some interesting patterns in the literature, they ultimately do not provide support for the original theory. The closest any of these cases come to support for the original theory is in the case of Mali, where economic underdevelopment was repeatedly stated as a reason (though not the only or even the most important reason) for successive Tuareg rebellions. As such, the conclusion to this paper is ultimately similar to that of paper 1, finding little support for the theory.

2 Case 1: The Republic of the Congo

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), the civil war in the Republic of the Congo was a conflict over control of the government. This conflict was motivated by power struggles between three main ethnic

and regional groups that formed during a democratization process: the PCT, MCDDI, and UPADS. UPADS won elections in 1992, and again in a repeated election in 1993, but the latter election's results were not accepted by opposition groups. Protests morphed into violence, also along political-ethnic divisions, with the main political parties developing armed militias: PCT's Cobras, MCDDI's Ninjas, and UPADS' Cocoyes. A ceasefire in 1994 was respected until 1997 when presidential elections sparked more violence, especially in the capital of Brazzaville. Angolan troops joined the conflict to support the Cobras, though this was not enough to prevent the PCT claiming control of the capital and victory in October 1997. Fighting continued, with the rise of a new rebel group the Ntsiloulou, until a cease-fire in 1999. The ceasefire held until 2002, when fighting began again between government and the Ntsiloulou group. A 2003 peace agreement was reached, only to be broken yet again by violence in 2005. Sporadic conflict continued until 2009, after which there was relative peace through the rest of the quantitative analysis' timeframe (1995-2014) (UCDP, 2023*a*).[2]

This first case is notable for the relative scarcity of literature covering it. The literature review found far fewer English sources covering this conflict than expected. This is partially explained by the fact that many scholarly accounts of this conflict were published in French (Yengo, 1998; Massamba-Makoumbou, 2013; Yengo, 2006*b*). Even accounting for that, this has not

[2]The data have a single instance of UCDP conflict 387 occurring in the Republic of the Congo, but according to UCDP documentation this was the killing of an Angolan rebel leader hiding in Congo.

gone unremarked by researchers, as (Cook and Lounsbery, 2017) does note a relative lack of scholarly focus on this conflict. This lack of scholarly interest is perhaps partially explained by the observation of (Mesquita and Seabra, 2022) that the civil war in the Republic of the Congo was overshadowed by the troubles of its neighbor, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which drew a majority of the attention from both regional and international actors. A similar phenomenon appears to have occurred in the scholarly literature. This necessitated the use of scholarly sources from outside of the discipline of political science. Even so, these sources do not provide much support for the theory, instead showing it to be a political dispute with relatively little to do with underdevelopment and foreign aid.

A relatively contemporaneous account of the conflict, published in 1998, notes French involvement in the finances of their former colony throughout the 1990s (Clark, 1998). Over the mid-1990s, France did help the Republic of Congo by writing off debt and providing support in international debt restructuring negotiations. However, at no point is foreign aid mentioned as impacting the decisions made by rebel or state fighters during the periods of violence. Insofar as the various armed factions of this conflict were considering the value of lootable goods and resources, foreign aid does not appear to have impacted their decision-making process. A study of the applicability of the resource curse theory to this civil war concludes that a struggle for the control of the Congolese state's oil wealth was a substantial motivation for the conflict, at least from the perspective of the elites driving it (Englebert

and Ron, 2004). However, the exclusively offshore nature of the Republic's oil wealth combined with a lack of other lootable onshore resources meant that rebel factions had incentives to focus on controlling the capital rather than rural insurgency, ultimately limiting the duration and spread of the civil wars in the Congo during this period. This account never mentions foreign aid (Englebert and Ron, 2004). A study of conflict dynamics in civil wars acknowledges external support received by multiple factions, including the importance of oil revenues to successive regimes, but there is no mention of foreign aid influencing the conflict or its outcomes (Cook and Lounsbery, 2017).

The closest this literature comes to any kind of support for the theory is noting that fighters from each of the groups could be motivated by opportunities for looting and extortion (Themnér et al., 2011). Other social science accounts of the waves of the conflict, including studies of how Congolese people framed and communicated ideas of the conflict (Eaton, 2006) or formed networks of solidarity based on social, religious, and gender ties (Yengo, 2006*a*), similarly do not provide any support for the role of foreign aid in driving or structuring the conflict. This is similarly absent from a country snapshot published by ProQuest (Anonymous, 2019).

Overall, these sources show a lack of support for the theory in this case. While this is exacerbated by the relative scarcity of sources covering this conflict, a phenomenon noted by (Cook and Lounsbery, 2017), it seems unlikely from the existing sources that support would be forthcoming even if

the literature were more developed.

3 Case 2: Mali

The quantitative conflict data for Mali, used in Saroka (2023), included two conflicts that were separate according to UCDP coding, but share substantial geographical, temporal, and actor overlaps. The first of these is UCDP conflict 372, which is a conflict over territory in northern Mali. While comprising a substantial amount of Mali's total area, the northern region of Mali is sparsely populated and has experienced a pattern of economic and political neglect since Mali's independence which has motivated rebellious sentiment amongst nomadic Tuareg groups in the region. This area is frequently referred to as "Azawad" by Tuareg rebels. Since independence in 1960, various Tuareg and Arab rebel groups have periodically fought for either the independence of this self-defined Azawad region from the Malian state, or for greater autonomy for the region. Within the timeframe of the analysis, this rebellious sentiment has translated to three distinct periods of civil conflict.

The first period of the conflict was marked by the formation of the MPLA rebel group, which began fighting the Malian government in 1990. In 1991 the MPLA and Mali signed the Tamanrasset Accords under Algerian mediation, indirectly causing the splintering of two additional rebel groups, FPLA and ARLA. Negotiation, attempted implementation of the accords, and fighting

continued intermittently until 1995, when further negotiations successfully ended the violence (UCDP, 2023*d*).

The second period of this conflict began in 2007 with the formation of a new rebel group, the ADC-IB (later renamed ATNMC). Incorporating veteran rebels from the 1990s rebellions, it had similar aims. Military victories by the Malian armed forces in 2009 marked an end to this period, though the rise of AQIM led to a secondary conflict happening during this time (see next paragraph). The third period of this conflict began with the formation of the Tuareg rebel group MNLA in 2012. MNLA enjoyed a brief period of substantial victories in 2012 before Islamist rebels, fighting for control of the central government, forced them to flee. French intervention against those rebels allowed the MNLA to experience a resurgence. Fighting continued along with negotiations into 2014 (UCDP, 2023*d*). These second and third periods of civil conflict overlapped substantially with the second UCDP conflict recorded here, which was conflict 11347.[3]

This second conflict, while occurring over control of the central government, is still intertwined with the previous conflict due to overlapping geographies and actors. Violence between AQIM and the Malian military initially flared in 2009, overlapping with the ongoing second phase of the Azawad-related rebellion. The conflict then went dormant until 2012, when

[3]There are single instances of conflicts 386 and 442 appearing in the data, which are instances of conflict between the governments of Algeria and Mauritania (respectively) and AQIM. While technically a separate conflict, in practice these are both effectively part of the AQIM-Mali conflict.

the renewed violence of the third phase of civil conflict related to Azawad allowed AQIM and related Islamist rebel groups to launch a new offensive against the government. A brief Islamist alliance with MNLA saw substantial victories against the Malian government, before the Islamists turned on the separatist rebels to take control of most of northern Mali. This situation continued until the international intervention in 2013, which pushed these rebels away from urban centers and back into the northern desert. However, fighting continued throughout the rest of my study's timeframe of 1995-2014, as international intervention did not succeed in destroying the Islamist rebels entirely (UCDP, 2023*e*).

Literature on the Malian civil wars tends to focus on one of these three phases. While the particular details differ, a pattern throughout this literature is that foreign aid, when it is mentioned, is portrayed as either a motivating factor for conflict due to its biased allocation by the state (usually to Mali's southern areas, neglecting the north) or an element of reconstruction after conflict has subsided. This phenomenon of biased allocation may be partially explained by the concentration of most of Mali's population and economic activity in the south of the country, meaning the southern region draws more government attention and resources due to its greater importance for both government support and to the economy. While this may motivate grievances in the north, aid is never discussed in the literature as a reason for conflict in specific areas of the north, as the theory predicted.

3.1 Phase One (1990-1995)

Most scholarly work regarding this phase of the conflict focuses primarily on the outcomes related to the negotiated end of the conflict, with the 1991 Tamanrasset Accords and the 1992 National Pact both serving as primary focuses (Seely, 2001; DeRouen et al., 2010; Keita, 1998; Clark, 1995; Blaydes and De Maio, 2010). The bulk of this work focuses on the analysis of the peace deals, their implementations, and their failures (especially of the Tamanrasset Accords, whose failure necessitated the National Pact). Those articles and monographs written prior to 2007 tend to be more optimistic in their assessments, while the assessments of later scholarship are influenced by the recurrence of violence in 2007.

One recurring theme is a repeated mention of attempts during the peace process to address the economic marginalization of the north. This economic marginalization, which generated substantial grievances, was a pattern of state neglect which stretched back to independence (Keita, 1998). This marginalization can be explained by the north's sparse population and low economic potential, and was exacerbated by the transnational outlook of many Tuaregs who were initially reluctant to accept their citizenship in a state. Unsurprisingly, this would become a frequent rallying cry of the rebels that led to an awareness on the part of the Malian government of the role of long-term economic marginalization in motivating rebel grievances, and the need to address it via economic integration (Seely, 2001). While the integration of Tuaregs into the military and police forces helped the peace process to

progress, and served to provide at least some rebels with government-funded jobs (Keita, 1998), this was not a cure-all. Unequal distribution of resources and aid combined with lower preexisting state capacity in Mali's north to contributed to the uneven cycles of violence and peace during the 1990s, including the failure of the Tamanrasset Accords (DeRouen et al., 2010). While the type of aid is not specified in (DeRouen et al., 2010), Keita (1998) does mention the role of the Malian Army in the provision of food aid in the north. Another source agrees the Accords were hamstrung by lack of funding and foreign aid, leading to reciprocal violence (Collier and Sambanis, 2005; Kisangani, 2012). Aside from these instances, foreign aid is not mentioned in these accounts, especially not as a motivator for fighting in specific areas during the civil war.

Other scholars do mention the role of foreign aid, but these mentions provide no more support for the theory. While Mali attracted foreign aid and development programs in the aftermath of devastating droughts that afflicted the Tuareg communities in Mali's north during the 1970s and 1980s, these international efforts often failed to translate into meaningful aid in the north in particular (Gutelius, 2007; Kisangani, 2012). The north's low population and perceived lack of Tuareg support for the Malian state did not help this situation. Similarly, foreign aid was a factor before and after the civil war of the 1990s, and aid organizations provided help with reconstruction, but the source says nothing about any role of aid during the conflict (Gutelius, 2007). Others support this account of neglect, noting the limited amount

of aid programs that successfully served inhabitants of the north (Krings, 1995).

3.2 Phase Two (2007-2009)

This second phase of rebellion attracted comparatively little scholarly attention, overshadowed by the phases before and after it, due to its comparatively short extent. The literature that does cover this period emphasizes the role of ongoing economic neglect of the region. While meaningful amounts of foreign aid have been sent to Mali, especially since 2001, they were not enough to remove the stigma of economic marginalization afflicting the northern region. Additionally, population patterns within Mali have also impacted aid allocation, as both the majority of the population and the majority of government support come from the south, not the north. This created incentives for the state to allocate aid to more densely populated areas in the south, which are also more likely to be filled with supporters (Cline, 2013). This ongoing economic marginalization was one of the key Tuareg grievances that motivated this phase of the conflict (Emerson, 2011). While the history of perceived bias in aid allocation likely contributed to more general Tuareg grievances regarding underdevelopment and economic marginalization, foreign aid was not specifically mentioned in these sources or their accounts of the actual conflict. As such, even if it did motivate general violence, it does not appear to have motivated fighting in specific areas, meaning that this phase provides no support for the theory.

3.3 Phase Three (2012 to Present)

This third and final phase of the Malian civil war benefited from similar levels of scholarly attention as the first phase. This increase in attention was driven in part by the way this phase contained two interconnected but distinct conflicts: a resurgent separatist movement that briefly allied with a jihadist movement fighting for control of the central government. This jihadist involvement drew greater scholarly attention in part due to both the international intervention it triggered, and its location within the larger context of the global War on Terror.

As in the other literature, coverage of the initial Tuareg separatist movement emphasizes the role of economic grievances in motivating this conflict. Kisangani (2012) argues that the primary motivations for the Tuareg rebellion in 2012 were political exclusion and lack of economic development of the north. This is supported by Solomon (2013), who notes that despite substantial aid inflows, living standards of many ordinary Malians failed to substantially improve in the 2000s. This poverty is hypothesized to have had negative impacts on the stability of the region (Ping, 2014), exacerbated by corruption and lack of state commitment to the decentralization process promised in the 1990s (Wing, 2013).

These articles continue the pattern of economic neglect as a motivator for violence, but not as a contributor to micro-level processes of violence in specific areas itself. This pattern is reinforced by how studies of conflict micro-dynamics (Bencherif, Campana and Stockemer, 2023) and micro-level

process of political economy in the region (Raineri and Strazzari, 2015) both fail to mention foreign aid or assistance. More technical accounts of the military aspects of the conflict show a similar absence of mentions of aid (Heisbourg, 2013). This pattern persists in those papers covering the international intervention in 2013 (Malejacq and Sandor, 2020; Solomon, 2013; Bere, 2017; Fearon, 2017) as well as histories of the Tuareg movements of the 1990s and 2000s (Lecocq and Klute, 2013).

4 Case 3: Kenya

The incidents of violence that occurred in Kenya from 1995-2014 stemmed from three distinct conflicts, all of which were conflicts originally occurring outside of Kenya itself. This means that the incidents of violence in Kenya are best described as spillover from other conflicts, not as conflicts between the government of Kenya and rebel groups.

4.1 Kenya Spillover Conflict 1: Ethiopia (Ogaden Region)

The first and most minor conflict reflected in this data is a single occurrence of a single death in 2011. This is a minor spillover from conflict in neighboring Ethiopia (UCDP conflict 329). That conflict concerns the status of the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. It has involved multiple rebel groups as well as territorial claims on the area by Somalia. Kenya's involvement in

this conflict was primarily as a mediator between Ethiopia and ONLF rebels (UCDP, 2023*b*). According to UCDP data notes, this was a targeted killing of an ONLF rebel leader located in Kenya by Ethiopian government agents. This provides no support the theory.

4.2 Kenya Spillover Conflict 2: Ethiopia (Oromiya)

Similarly to the first conflict, this conflict accounts for only three distinct incidents of violence across the entire timeframe. Two of these occurred in 1999 and one in 2001. This long-running conflict concerns the status of the Ethiopian state of Oromiya, and was motivated by the economic and political marginalization of the Oromo ethnic group. Unlike the case of Somalia (see below), Kenyan involvement in this conflict has been limited. While some OLF rebels fled into Kenya after their military defeats in 1992, Kenya was not a meaningful participant in this conflict until 2010. Since then, it has increased cooperation and intelligence-sharing with the Ethiopian government, which has led to arrests and deportations of rebel OLF fighters from Kenya (UCDP, 2023*c*).

While this indicates that OLF fighters have been exploiting the Ethiopia-Kenya border, the UCDP description of the conflict contains no indicators that they engaged in any meaningful sustained violence within Kenya, which would be a prerequisite for the theory to apply. A case study of Ethiopia by Walter further supports this, noting that this was a separatist conflict concerning Oromiya and Ethiopia (Walter, 2019). Given this, it seems rea-

sonable to conclude that this violence does not support the theory.

4.3 Kenya Spillover Conflict 3: Intervention in Somalia and Al-Shabaab

The third source of violence is a long-running conflict in Somalia (UCDP conflict 337), specifically the conflict over government control fought by Al-Shabaab. Kenyan involvement in this situation began in 2007 with its contribution of peacekeepers to a UN and African Union peacekeeping mission to Somalia. This mission changed to a peace enforcement mandate in 2012, which was specifically aimed at Al-Shabaab. In response, Al-Shabaab targeted Kenya as retaliation for the involvement of its troops in Somalia, which only escalated the efforts of the Kenyan state to wipe out the group (UCDP, 2023*f*).

Literature studying this conflict is consistent in its framing of Al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya as motivated by a general strategy of retaliation for Kenyan interference in Somalia (Anderson and McKnight, 2015; Lind, Mutahi and Oosterom, 2017; Makanda, 2019). This is a view shared by at least some Kenyan defense officials (Odhiambo et al., 2013). Actions taken by Kenya have exacerbated this situation. In addition to a failure to develop grassroots support for this intervention amongst ordinary Kenyans (Makanda, 2019), Kenyan authorities have engaged in indiscriminate repression against groups in Kenya thought to be hiding Al-Shabaab members or having sym-

pathy for its cause, primarily Somali refugees and Kenyan Muslims (Papale, 2022). This has, predictably, fueled recruitment for Al-Shabaab within Kenya itself by encouraging radicalization (Lind, Mutahi and Oosterom, 2017; Papale, 2022). Some scholars have also argued that these indiscriminate responses constituted a successful strategy of provocation by Al-Shabaab (Ibrahim Shire, 2023).

Overall, this literature clearly shows that instances of violence in this conflict were motivated by strategic terrorism and counter-terrorism considerations (Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, 2019), rather than by concern for foreign aid. Foreign aid does not appear to be directly affecting the patterns of violence in this conflict. Even if foreign aid to Kenya is being used for conflict-adjacent purposes, such as addressing refugee issues or being used by the state to try to gain citizen support, it does not appear to be impacting the locations of violence. As such, this conflict does not meaningfully provide support for the theory.

5 Case 4: South Sudan

The conflict in South Sudan begins almost immediately after the independence of South Sudan, which occurred via referendum in July 2011. The new government of South Sudan was quickly attacked by two Sudan-supported rebel groups, the SSDM/A and SSLM/A. Conflict with the SSDM/A ended with a peace agreement in February 2012, while conflict with the SSLM/A

continued until an amnesty in April 2013. These peace agreements did not mark an end to the violence, as a splinter group of the SSDM/A called the Cobras was active from 2012 until a cease-fire in January 2013 and eventual peace agreement that year. Additionally, in late December 2013, fighting began between the government and a rebel group formed from factions of the South Sudanese presidential guard, SPLM/A-IO. This fighting continued through 2014, and thus through the end of the 1995-2014 timeframe. Notably, UCDP itself states that this conflict was sufficiently chaotic that there is substantial uncertainty surrounding casualty estimates from this period, such that UCDP numbers should be interpreted as conservative baselines (UCDP, 2023*g*). While there is no mention of aid in this account, South Sudan's rich oil reserves undoubtedly loom large in the considerations of all actors here.[4]

Unsurprisingly given its newly independent status, a substantial amount of the scholarship on South Sudan has focused on the challenges facing the new regime and the causes of the civil war that began in 2013. A common theme is that at independence, the new state inherited weak state structures that were insufficient to quell the internal tensions facing South Sudan, which also allowed the spread of corruption, kleptocracy (including the looting of foreign aid inflows), and extensive patronage politics which further undermined any efforts at robust state-building (De Waal, 2014; Craze and

[4]The data also contains two other individual instances of conflict codes, 309 and 314. 309 is an incident in which Sudanese planes reportedly attacked South Sudan, with 7 deaths, while 314 is from the ongoing Uganda-LRA conflict, with 4 deaths.

Tubiana, 2016; Rolandsen et al., 2015; Rolandsen, 2015; Frahm, 2015; Sørbø, 2014; Kuol, 2020; Ženková Rudincová and Rudincová, 2017; Wassara, 2015; Pinaud, 2014). These problems were not only obvious in retrospect, as the potential failure of the South Sudanese government to address the challenges facing it was noted even before the outbreak of civil war (Belloni, 2011; Lacher, 2012). One of these authors, writing prior to the outbreak of civil war, noted that the South Sudanese government used foreign aid intended for health and education as an impromptu subsidy, enabling the clientelism of elites (Lacher, 2012). While this aid may have been misused, and accusations of aid misappropriation were leveled against President Salva Kiir by former Vice President Riek Machar and others, it does not appear to have contributed to specific instances of violence in specific areas in the civil conflict, even if it contributed to hostility between the two SPLM factions that would ultimately lead to civil war.

The civil war in 2013 started due to conflict between two factions of the ruling SPLM party, controlled by President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar. The violence began in the capital of Juba before spreading into Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile states (Rolandsen et al., 2015; Rolandsen, 2015). Initially this conflict appeared to be ethnic in nature, as Kiir was a Dinka, South Sudan's largest ethnic group, while Machar was a Nuer, the second largest ethnic group. While the violence did sometimes split along ethnic lines (Rolandsen, 2015), discrepancies in ethnic targeting show that ethnicity was not the only cue being used in this conflict (Sørbø,

2014), multiple scholars have cautioned that a purely ethnic interpretation of this conflict would be inaccurate (Sørbø, 2014; Ženková Rudincová and Rudincová, 2017). This conflict was exacerbated by a poorly integrated central army containing former rebels who were dissatisfied with prior reconciliation deals (Sørbø, 2014) as well as lingering poor social cohesion due to a history of conflict in the area (Kuol, 2020; Rolandsen, 2015).

Similarly to other cases, there is no clear mention of aid motivating conflict in specific areas. However, the literature around this case is notable for acknowledging the role of international aid in this conflict. Beyond providing for the needs of displaced civilians (Rolandsen et al., 2015; Knopf, 2018), it has also played a minor role in peace negotiations. The threat of the suspension of aid was used, ineffectively, during international attempts to force compromise between the warring factions (Jok, 2015; Kalpakian, 2017). One report by an NGO quotes a senior South Sudanese government official who says that humanitarian aid fuels conflict "to a certain degree" (15) by allowing the state to gain the loyalty of civilians through the steady provision of aid, thereby prolonging the conflict by shoring up the support base of the government (Moro et al., 2017). However, this is contradicted by another article that notes that most of South Sudan's population is not regularly reached by humanitarian aid (Rolandsen and Kindersley, 2017). While this is not the role of aid theorized in Saroka (2023), the acknowledgement of its impact on conflict processes is still notable.

6 Discussion

While these reviews of the literature expose some interesting trends for these conflicts, they ultimately do not support the theory from Saroka (2023). Inflows of foreign aid do not appear to increase the intensity of the conflict by region, providing no support for the hypotheses that increased aid inflows will increase the intensity of rebel (state) violence in more urban (rural) areas. There are at least three possible reasons for these results.

The first and simplest reason is that rebel and state forces simply do not consider foreign aid in their tactical calculations. In the complexity and chaos of a civil war, it is possible that both government and rebel leaders have other considerations in mind during the conflict. While plausible, confirming this reason would require fieldwork and interviews that are beyond the scope of this paper. A second reason for these results could be that foreign aid's impact on a conflict, if any, happens at the national rather than the local level. Foreign aid could motivate grievances and fuel conflicts at the national level, providing reasons for different factions to engage in conflict, without driving conflicts in specific areas at the local level. This is most clearly illustrated in the case of Mali, where Tuareg grievances relating to uneven distribution of economic benefits by the state, including development aid, are repeatedly mentioned as a reason for violence. However, while these grievances motivate macro-level conflict between the Tuaregs and the state, they did not appear to drive micro-level incidents of violence in specific areas

of Mali. A third reason for these results could be a lack of qualitative research designs that include questions about the role of foreign aid in sparking conflict. It is theoretically possible, though highly unlikely, that current and former combatants are not asked about this topic despite having thoughts on the matter. While this may be more plausible in under-researched cases, such as the Republic of the Congo, this still seems unlikely. On the whole, it seems that the most reasonable conclusion to draw from this review of the literature surrounding these cases is that the theory of conflict intensity it tests lacks substantial support.

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