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“No peace, no war” proponents? How pro-regime militias affect civil war termination and outcomes

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Abstract: *Previous research on non-state actors involved in civil wars, has tended to disregard the role of extra-dyad agents in influencing conflict outcomes. Little is known as to whether the presence of such extra-dyadic actors as pro-regime militias affects conflict termination and outcomes. This article develops and tests a number of hypotheses on the pro-government militias’ effect upon civil war outcomes. It proposes that pro-regime militias involved in intrastate conflicts tend to act as proponents of “no peace, no war” favouring low activity violence and ceasefires over other conflict outcomes. These hypotheses are examined using expanded dataset on pro-government militias and armed conflict in a statistical analysis of 229 civil wars episodes from 1991 to 2015. These findings shed new light on the role of extra-state actors in civil wars.*

Keywords: Conflict outcome, civil war, armed groups, extra-dyadic, extra-state

Does termination of a civil war depend on types of armed actors involved in the conflict? Research on civil war dynamics identified the role of extra-dyadic actors as significant towards shifting the balance of powers and contributing to conflict termination (Gleditsch, 2007; Cederman and Gleditsch, 2009; Cunningham, 2006; Cunningham et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the literature continues to disregard the effect of extra-state agents existing outside of government-rebel dichotomy on civil war termination and outcome. Research on civil wars has thus far tended to generalise all conflict stakeholders as associated with either side of the dyad. Likewise, literature offers limited explanation about the contribution of extra-state actors, or non-state third

parties, towards the success, or the lack thereof, of a government, or a rebel group in a civil war. A voluminous body of literature exploring conflict outcomes focuses almost exclusively on various properties of belligerents, such as the balance of power, technology, leadership, external support and military tactics (Buhaug et al., 2009; Lyall and Wilson, 2009; Salehyan et al., 2011), or on structural factors, including but not limited, to economy, natural resources, geography, and ethnicity (Buhaug et al., 2008; Cederman and Gleditsch, 2009; Wucherpfennig et al., 2012).

This article contributes to this broader literature by further theorising and analysing the relationship between civil war outcomes and pro-government militias (PGMs). Of all other extra-state actors, pro-government militias¹ emerge not only as one of the most widespread types of conflict stakeholders (Carey et al., 2013), but also as a critically understudied phenomenon in research on intrastate conflict. Despite their association with governments, PGMs tend to exist outside formal institutional frameworks and, therefore, can influence conflict termination differently from non-state groups. Notwithstanding assumptions that PGMs “increase the length of civil wars” (Jentzsch et al., 2015: 6), existing literature offers limited insights into whether the presence of militias in intrastate conflicts is conducive to particular conflict outcomes. In contrast to the literature on rebels’ role in civil war outcomes (Buhaug, 2006; Nilsson, 2008), no studies have thus far explored the impact of PGMs on conflict termination. To fill this gap, this article seeks to expand our understanding of the extra-dyadic actors’ effect on civil war termination.

The main theoretical argument is that pro-government militias increase the likelihood of civil wars culminating in a stalemate or low intensity violence because neither peace agreements nor absolute victories by either side of dyad are in the PGMs’ interests. Based on this overall argument, I derive and test four separate hypotheses. *Firstly*, civil wars involving militias are unlikely to end in a peace agreement between government and rebels. *Secondly*, participation of PGMs does not increase the government’s chances of emerging victorious and defeating the rebels. *Thirdly*, conflicts with the PGM presence tend to result in ceasefire agreements. *Fourthly*, civil wars involving militias are likely to transform into low-intensity conflicts. Taken together these four hypotheses are employed to theorise the role of pro-regime militias in conflict

¹ I employ a definition of pro-government militias coined by Carey, Mitchell and Lowe (2013: 250), which describes PGMs as armed groups with some level of organisation, which are not part of regular security forces, and are identified as pro-government or sponsored by the government.

termination as of “no peace, no war” proponents. To empirically-ground these theoretical claims, I conduct statistical analyses of 229 civil war episodes between 1991 and 2015.

Government proxies in civil wars

For decades, militias were analysed through the prism of state security forces, or as tools of repression employed by authoritarian regimes against their political rivals (Campbell and Brenner, 2002). A growing body of literature on militias, which has only started to emerge during the past several years, argues that pro-government militias were involved in 80 per cent of civil wars since 1981 (Carey et al., 2013), and that militias function as crucial stakeholders in intrastate conflicts since the early Cold War period (Mazzei, 2009). As estimated by Mitchell et al. (2014: 812), pro-government militias were deployed by 60 countries engaged in civil conflicts since 1989.

In context of civil wars, PGMs often engage in various forms of civilian persecution (Mitchell et al., 2014; Ahram, 2015). The prominent role of Rwandan *Interahamwe* militias, Serb death squads and Sudanese Janjaweed in conducting mass atrocities in their respective countries perpetuates the image of militias as perpetrators of genocidal violence. A large and growing body of empirical literature explored PGMs’ involvement in genocide, mass killings, sexual violence, human rights violations and large-scale persecution of civilians (Koren, 2015; Cohen and Nordås, 2015; Stanton, 2015).

The bulk of existing research on the emergence of militias and their relationship with governments develops along the “delegation” and outsourcing” hypotheses. Whilst some scholars associate the appearance of militias with state weakness and deficiencies of regular security forces (Carey et al., 2015b; Stanton, 2015), others argue that militias emerge due to underlying structural and historical conditions (Mazzei, 2009; Ahram, 2011; Aliyev, 2016; 2017). This second strand of literature is closely intertwined with studies examining non-state agents through the lenses of state-militia relationship (Staniland, 2015). Scholars have insisted that governments mobilise militias when faced with the threat of internal disorder and when regular security forces fail to repress the unrest (Carey et al., 2015a). The logic of “delegation” has been exploited in the literature on non-state actors as the key incentive for governments to part with their monopoly on violence (Stanton, 2015). “Outsourcing” extreme forms of violence

to non-state agents enables governments avoiding accountability and allows them to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of population, as well as to preserve credibility within international community (Campbell and Brenner, 2002; Eck, 2015). Relying on militias in counterinsurgency campaigns is also described as a “budget” alternative to deploying more costly special counterinsurgency units and other elements of formal security forces (Carey et al., 2013; Peic, 2014). In addition, militias are well-known for their counterinsurgent capacities, such as access to local knowledge, and ability to disrupt rebel infrastructure and local support networks (Lyll, 2010; Aliyev, 2018a; 2018b).

“No peace, no war” proponents

Despite the voluminous theoretical and empirical literature on PGMs, a number of open questions about the effect of militias on conflict dynamics remain. Data on militia participation in armed conflicts demonstrates that PGMs were present in 60 per cent of conflict termination cases (Carey and Mitchell, 2016: 12). What role do PGMs play in conflict termination processes? What are the PGMs’ interests with the regard to conflict outcomes? Nuanced theoretically-grounded accounts of PGMs’ influence on conflict outcomes are notable by their absence in existing literature on militia violence. To date scholars have argued that extra-dyadic armed groups surviving until the end of conflicts are likely to pose challenges for peacebuilding (Giustozzi, 2008; Marten, 2006).

Powerful pro-regime militias might seek to cement their position in post-conflict administration, as was the case with Abdul R. Dostum’s militias in Afghanistan. Example of militia-incurred havoc from post-Gaddafi Libya demonstrates that PGMs may not only seek to exploit the conflict settlement towards their own interests, but might also precipitate the state failure. In the context of conflict termination, not only splinter groups, emerging from rebel organisations in post-conflict settings (de Mesquita, 2008), but also militias are often portrayed as unwilling participants in peace processes (Mueller, 2003).

There are many reasons to assume that pro-government militias would be unwilling actors of peaceful conflict termination. Since numerous militia groups are mobilised in response to

intrastate violence,² most PGMs are likely to have vested interests in the continuity of violence. Conflict termination and post-conflict peacebuilding pose not only a direct existential threat to PGMs – many of whom are demobilised in the aftermath of peace agreements – but also undermine their sources of funding: both government-provided and illicit incomes. Restoration of law and order and the end of conflict-related violence are disadvantageous for drug trade and trade in mineral resources, human trafficking, racketeering and other illicit activities, employed by militias to finance some or all of their activities.

However, long-lasting or high intensity conflicts are not always advantageous for militias. To start with, militias involved either in large-scale combat activities, or a long-lasting insurgency, are constantly suffering casualties, or remain under the threat of physical destruction. Deployed as counterinsurgents, PGMs are under pressure from their pro-regime patrons to deliver. Failure to meet the incumbent's expectations may lead to demobilisation of PGMs, or their merger with formal security forces. Along with the threat of demobilisation and destruction in combat, active conflict creates obvious obstacles for PGMs' economic activities. Control over illicit businesses, taxation of local population, racketeering and numerous other activities enabling militias to raise incomes remain under threat as long as the territory and resources are contested by rebels. Whilst powerful and resourceful PGMs, for example Iraqi Shia militias (*al-Hashed al-Sha'bi*) and Sudanese Janjaweed, are able to deter rebels and to protect their resource bases, smaller militia groups would find their resource-bases in constant threat of rebel advances.

Besides, not all PGMs are born out of conflicts. It has been recorded that over 50 per cent of all PGMs exist outside of armed conflict (Carey et al., 2013: 254). For groups mobilised prior to civil wars, engagement in conflict is both disadvantageous and perilous. For instance, civilian defence groups or village guards, as well as citizen militia, are lightly-armed, poorly-trained and simply unprepared to halt rebel offensives (Clayton and Thomson, 2014). Other peace-time PGMs might find it hard to compete for regime funding in conflict settings, or they might lose their previous sources of income.³

² According to Carey, Mitchell and Lowe (2013: 255), PGMs were involved in over 80% of conflict-years between 1981 and 2007.

³ For example, Syrian Shabihha militias were recruited from amongst pro-regime smuggling groups operating along the Mediterranean coast, most of whom lost their sources of income due to conflict.

This study argues that PGMs are unlikely to favour either peaceful conflict resolution, or a protracted high-intensity warfare, since both scenarios might result in demobilisation of militias, or in their weakening. Amongst all possible conflict outcomes, situations of “no peace, no war” – such as during ceasefire agreements and low-attrition conflicts – are the most preferable for PGMs types of conflict termination. Below, I describe the logic of PGMs as “no peace, no war” proponents more in detail.

Spoilers of peace?

The end of conflicts not only poses an existential threat to militias – many of whom can be disbanded after the fighting is over – or to reduce their opportunities for private gain (Hughes and Tripodi, 2009), but also to undermine ideological goals of militia organisations. Ukrainian pro-government battalions have continuously thwarted the government’s efforts to negotiate a peace treaty with pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine (Aliyev, 2016: 512). Similarly, Lebanese Hezbollah militias have acted as vigorous adversaries of peace with Israel, and Sudanese Janjaweed commanders have continuously opposed concessions to rebels in Darfur (Woodward, 2006). A similar attitude has been adopted by Iraqi Shia militias who, after the US withdrawal from Iraq, vehemently campaigned against Iraqi government collaboration with Sunni tribes and the deployment of “Sons of Iraq” Sunni militias.

For ethnic militias, peace agreement between the government and rebels is often tantamount to defeat and betrayal of ethnic interests. Similar to right-wing militia battalions (“Right Sector”) in present-day Ukraine, Serb militias during Yugoslav wars and Afghan Uzbek *Junbesh-e-Milli* have acted as committed peace spoilers, determined to prevent incumbents from making concessions to rebels. For PGMs recruited from the same ethnic group as rebels (Stanton, 2015), peace treaty with rebels implies – along with defeat – the need to coexist with former enemies within the same community and the ensuing fear of revenge. Fearing post-conflict score-settling, Kurdish anti-PKK “Village Guards” (Gurcan, 2015), as well as Tamil anti-LTTE militias (“Green Tigers”), and Chechen *kadyrovtsy* (Souleimanov et al., 2016), have sought to thwart peace talks with insurgents.

A lot can change for militias after a peace agreement is implemented. Peaceful conflict resolution may deliver a heavy blow to PGMs’ financial security. PGMs-survivors of peace

agreements may find themselves severely deprived of funding and means to procure it. Governments may decide to scale down funding and other forms of material support to militias. After peace agreements, illicit activities of PGMs are unlikely to be tolerated by governments. For example, following a peace deal between Myanmar's government and Karen rebels in 2012, pro-government Karen BGF (Border Guard Force) militias found it harder to maintain their involvement in drug trade (BurmaNetNews, 2014). In a similar vein, Friman and Reich (2008) describe how Serb "Arkan's Tigers" have lost access to lucrative human trafficking and arms trade after the end of Yugoslav Wars. After the Good Friday Agreement, as detailed by McKittrick (2001: 42), the Ulster Volunteer Force's (UVF) involvement in drug trade, protection services and other illegal activities was no longer condoned by local authorities.

Militias may or may not succeed in their efforts of thwarting incumbent's peace-making initiatives. Nevertheless, the presence of PGMs in civil wars increases the number of conflict stakeholders and makes it harder to achieve a peace agreement. Negative effect of multiple parties involved in conflicts on peace-making has been emphasised by Bakke et al. (2012) and Cunningham (2006). Although PGMs are rarely invited to peace talks, they often represent interests of elite circles, or some groups of society. Even if the militias' influence on decision-making processes is limited, their patrons in government might still yield sufficient informal support to affect the peace deal. This means that PGMs might act as spoilers to peace agreements indirectly; through their sympathisers in government, or amongst economic and political elites.

There is also a flip side to PGM presence at the time of conflict termination. Provided that PGMs are mobilised by incumbents to harass regime opponents, the existence of militias at the time of conflict termination indicates that incumbent still needs PGM services. When government fails to succeed in its goals, it may not be interested in disbanding PGMs, or integrating them with regular security forces, but may instead preserve militias in case if the war recurs, or in order to put pressure on its opponents. The presence of militias – who are rarely included in peace processes – indicates to rebels that the conflict is not over, and that the conflict resolution may not be effective.

Governments might be even more willing to keep militias if they are forced to make concessions to rebels. In that case, preserving PGMs would serve as a deterrent strategy: militias can still be deployed as secret death squads against the incumbent's political opponents, without violating conditions of a peace agreement. For example, Serb "White Eagles," "Arkan's Tigers"

and “Red Berets” – deployed by Slobodan Milosevic’s regime in Yugoslav wars – continued functioning well after the end of Balkan conflicts and were only disbanded after the fall of nationalist government. A similar strategy towards militias was adopted by the government of Ivory Coast after the end of civil war in 2004 (PGMs disbanded in 2008), and by the Sudanese government, which has never formally disbanded the Janjaweed and other militias fighting in southern Sudan. Hence, the presence of PGMs not only increases the number of (negative) conflict veto players, but also indicates the incumbent’s lack of commitment to peace. Thus:

H1: Presence of pro-government militias in civil wars reduces the likelihood of conflicts terminating in a peace agreement.

Saboteurs of victory?

The next assumption is that civil wars involving PGMs are unlikely to culminate in victory by either side of dyad. On the one hand, government’s victory might cause PGMs problems analogous to peaceful conflict resolution. The end of violence signals militia demobilisation, reduction of funding, challenges for illegal activities and obstacles for recruitment. Having defeated their opponents, incumbents are eager to demobilise militias not only as part of post-conflict reconstruction, but also in order to restore their monopoly on violence, which no longer has to be shared with extra-state agents. Although most PGMs are mobilised to protect the regime from succumbing to rebels, few PGMs would directly benefit from the defeat of rebels. Despite sharing the regime’s goals, PGMs tend to have agendas of their own (Carey et al., 2015a: 871), and demobilisation or merger with formal security forces are rarely on the top of militias’ priorities (Theidon, 2007). That said, however, PGMs cannot be expected to directly obstruct the incumbent’s success and prevent governments from emerging victorious in civil wars. Rather, the presence of PGMs might potentially have a negative impact on the probability of incumbent’s victory.

Two interrelated and somewhat contradictory mechanisms might help explaining why PGMs inadvertently obstacle the incumbent’s success. In most intrastate conflicts with militia deployment, PGMs are involved in various forms of civilian victimisation (Ahram, 2011; 2015; Cohen and Nordas, 2015). Scholars link civilian persecution with higher levels of violent

mobilisation and pro-insurgent support (Kalyvas, 2006: 151-59; Goodwin, 2001). Civilian persecution may not only be conducive to increased popular support for rebels, but it may also reduce international legitimacy of the regime and encourage external support for rebels, as is the case with Bashar al-Assad's regime in present-day Syria.⁴ These factors make government victory even more distant and unlikely. PGMs' role in these processes may not be a direct one, rather militias can function as one of the factors negatively affecting the incumbent's success.

Related to the above point is the PGMs' reliance on selective violence, described by scholars as due to militias' ability to effectively obtain intelligence from the local population (Lyall, 2010; Kalyvas, 2006; Souleimanov et al., 2016). Selective targeting has been identified as efficient in weakening insurgencies (Kalyvas, 2006: 146). It also enables rebels to adopt and to improve their tactics, and therefore to wage longer wars (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2009). The use of death squads and of individual targeting in order to eliminate rebel commanders, as well as selected rebel sympathisers, can make rebels less willing to engage in dialogue and might further convince them in the importance of struggle. Since weaker rebel groups no longer pose existential threat for incumbents, governments may not be willing to invest further resources in completely defeating rebels, as detailed by Fearon (2004: 283). As I will explain in further sections of this article, low attrition conflict – as a likely outcome of such a stalemate – would work in PGMs' favour.

The argument that PGM presence is not conducive to government victory does not exclude the probability of victory in conflicts involving militias, rather it emphasises that victory by either side is not a preferable conflict outcome for PGMs and that militias would instead seek “no peace, no war” outcomes. Both of the above described mechanisms present militias as one of the factors that is likely to hamper decisive victory by dyad actors.

For obvious reasons, rebel victory is even less preferable for PGMs conflict outcome. Defeat of the incumbent equals to militia demise, or their transformation into a rebel movement. For example, the victory of Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1994, forced *Interahamwe* Hutu militias to flee into mountainous parts of the country. Following the failure of Sandinista regime in 1990 Nicaragua, the pro-regime militias (*Milicia Popular Sandinista*) morphed into “Re-

⁴ Particularly the heavy use of pro-regime Shabihha militias during the early stages of Syrian civil war.

Compass” armed groups. More commonly, rebel victory results in persecution of PGMs, as was the case with Gaddafi’s Revolutionary Guard corps. Thus:

H2: *Presence of pro-government militias in civil wars reduces the likelihood of conflicts terminating with a victory by either side of dyad.*

Ceasefire beneficiaries

Ceasefire, as a condition of “no peace, no war” (Mac Ginty, 2010), offers PGMs an opportunity to mobilise combatants, upgrade weaponry and enjoy support of patrons in government. For incumbents, ceasefire indicates uncertainty with a high chance of conflict recurrence (Call, 2012). Governments may choose to preserve and maintain armed extra-state groups in case of renewed military activities, or they can deploy PMGs to harass their opponents on both sides of the frontline. Bearing in mind that PGMs often function in “shadows,” they can proliferate unobstructed by ceasefire treaties. For PGMs, ceasefire agreements provide excellent conditions to engage in illicit economic activities, both in conflict areas and beyond. Alongside plentiful opportunities for illegal profits, militias might benefit from government support and funding. Cessation of large-scale fighting during ceasefire periods enables PGMs to regroup, reorganise and train their fighters without a threat of rebel offensives.

For example, Aliyev (2016: 508) explains that following the September 2015 ceasefire between Ukraine and pro-Russian separatists, PGM battalions deployed in Donbas region expanded their numbers and managed to upgrade their arsenal. Mobilised on the line of contact with rebels, Ukraine’s militias functioned as a buffer between the army and separatists. Not only they receive funding from the government, but they also obtain resources from racketeering and protection services: the former and the latter flourish under ceasefire conditions (Aliyev, 2016: 510-11). Maher and Thompson (2011) describe that during the 1999-2002 ceasefire between FARC and Colombian government, right-wing AUC militias succeeded in expanding their zones of influence and increasing their engagement in drug trade. Ceasefire periods were similarly beneficial for Mexican anti-EZLN “Peace and Justice” militias in Chiapas, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Serb battalions during Yugoslav wars, and the Rwandan Hutu (FDLR) militias involved in the Second Congo War.

Ceasefires create favourable operating environment for PGMs with limited threat of demobilisation, or merger with the army, and plentiful opportunities for gain due to the persistence of conflict-related instability and perils of renewed war. Thriving under unstable conditions of ceasefires, PGMs enjoy operational and financial stability, enabling them to justify and reinforce their purpose. Hence:

H3: *Presence of pro-government militias in civil wars increases the likelihood of conflicts terminating with a ceasefire.*

Advantages of low intensity conflict

In the words of Kreutz (2010: 3), *low activity conflict* is a condition of ongoing armed confrontation at very low intensity, operationalised as not reaching 25 battle-related deaths per year. Whilst some conflicts emerge as low intensity confrontations, others transform into low activity stages following the de-escalation of violence. It is not unusual for intrastate conflicts to drag on as low-attrition confrontations for decades. For instance, Islamist insurgency in Russia's Chechnya and Ingushetia claims less than 25 lives per year, but continues to persist since the end of Second Chechen War in 2006. Persistence of the low-attrition insurgency in the North Caucasus region encouraged Russian authorities to maintain *kadyrovtsy* militias in Chechnya and to deploy similar indigenous militia groups in Dagestan (Aliyev, 2010; Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2016). Low activity conflicts are characterised by occasional armed confrontations between regime opponents and security forces and unstable security situation.

Scholars have shown that PGMs emerge as effective and low-cost option of dealing with low intensity conflicts (Peic, 2014: 166). Governments involved in low activity civil violence tend to rely on militias for intelligence gathering, protection services, and the hunt for militants. Employing militias in the context of low activity conflicts enables incumbents to conduct counterinsurgency and civilian persecution with limited accountability (Carey et al., 2015a: 852-4). Since many low activity conflicts are characterised by high levels of crime (Kalyvas, 2015), governments find it easier to conceal violence committed by militias. For PGMs, low intensity conflict provides excellent operational conditions. Similar to ceasefire periods, low-attrition violence justifies the existence and funding of militias and enables PGMs to engage in illicit

profiteering. The lack of law and order which dominates post-conflict context, enables PGMs to continue extracting incomes from illicit trade and protection services. In contrast to periods of high intensity violence and active combat,⁵ PGMs suffer limited casualties in low intensity conflicts. The probability of military defeat of militia groups deployed to suppress a low-level insurgency is non-existent. Analogous to organised crime groups, who as detailed by Kalyvas (2015: 1518), prosper during low activity conflicts, militias are yet another category of extra-dyadic agents which manage to thrive in “no peace, no war” environment of low-level violence and lawlessness.

The continuity of low activity violence is welcomed by PGM groups. For instance, the Head of Chechen Republic and the leader of *kadyrovtsy* militia, Ramzan Kadyrov, encouraged selective violence against families of insurgents in order to maintain and finance his militias from the federal budget (Souleimanov et al., 2017). Similar conclusions were drawn by Mazzei (2009) who describes the sustained use of low-level violence by death squads across Latin America during the Cold War era. Shirlow (2012) explains the patterns of low activity conflict practiced for decades by the UVF militias in Northern Ireland, and Hedman (2000) details the proliferation of death squads in the context of low activity violence in the Philippines. All of the above suggest that rather than favouring high-intensity warfare, PGMs tend to prosper in the context of low activity conflict, characterised by high levels of insecurity, lack of law and order, and relatively low intensity of conflict-related violence. Thus:

H4: *Presence of pro-government militias in civil wars increases the likelihood of conflicts terminating with a low-intensity insurgency.*

Data and variables

⁵ For example, Driscoll (2015: 117) illustrates how Georgian pro-regime *Mkhedrioni* militias suffered heavy casualties during the Abkhaz War (1992-93), and were never able to recover. In a similar vein, during the battle of Debaltseve in 2015, several of Ukraine’s militia battalions lost nearly 70 per cent of their personnel.

This study analyses the effect of PGMs on civil war termination in 229 conflict episodes from 1991 to 2015. Conflict episode is a continuous period of conflict activity (Kreutz, 2010: 2). Each dyad constitutes a separate conflict episode, even if more than one dyad is active during the same period. Data on intrastate conflict episodes was collected from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)/Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD) v.4-2015. The UCDP/PRIO dataset lists all civil wars between 1946 and 2015. The UCDP/PRIO's definition of civil wars covers all intrastate conflicts fought between a government and one or more rebel groups with at least 25 battle-related deaths in a given calendar year (Gleditsch et al., 2002). The dataset consists of 229 terminated intrastate conflict episodes. Conflict termination is defined in terms of the cessation of armed activity for at least one year (Kreutz, 2010: 2). Each recurrent conflict that develops after one year of inactivity between the same actors is treated as a new conflict episode. Each terminated episode is coded in accordance with its precise termination date (day/month/year). Conflict outcome is a dependent variable. It brings together four most probable conflict termination scenarios: *peace agreement*, *ceasefire agreement*, *victory*, and *low activity*.⁶ There are 32 cases of peace agreements, 43 ceasefires, 32 victories, 93 low activity episodes, and 30 cases of other conflict termination outcomes.⁷

PGM presence is an explanatory variable. For data on PGMs, I rely on the recent database of pro-government militias (PGMD) (Carey et al., 2013). The PGMD contains data on 330 pro-government militia groups. The database covers period between 1989 and 2007. Missing data on militias emerging and operating after 2007 was collected using the PGMD coding methodology.⁸ The variable controls for active militia groups present during the last three months of each conflict episode. PGMs were found to be present in 134 conflict episodes. Table 1 presents cross tabulation between PGM presence and different conflict outcomes. This initial analysis of the dataset demonstrates that the highest number of episodes with militia presence ended with either ceasefire or low activity violence.

⁶ For definitions of these outcomes see Kreutz (2010: 244-45).

⁷ "Other" outcomes include conflicts which fail to reach 25 battle-deaths a year, but also do not fall into any of the above categories. These cases usually include transitional episodes, such as periods between ceasefire and low activity.

⁸ LexisNexis search engine was used to filter international news sources for key terms defined by Carey et al. (2013: 251).

Table 1. Cross tabulation of PGM presence and civil war outcomes

		PGM presence		
		No	Yes	Total
Peace agreement				
<i>No</i>	87 (91.5%)	111 (82.8%)	198 (86.4%)	
<i>Yes</i>	8 (8.4%)	23 (17%)	31 (13.5%)	
Victory				
<i>No</i>	77 (81%)	120 (89.5%)	197 (86%)	
<i>Yes</i>	18 (18.9%)	14 (10.4%)	32 (14%)	
Ceasefire				
<i>No</i>	82 (86.3%)	105 (78.3%)	187 (81.6%)	
<i>Yes</i>	13 (13.6%)	29 (21.6%)	42 (18.3%)	
Low intensity conflict				
<i>No</i>	55 (57.8%)	81 (60.4%)	136 (60%)	
<i>Yes</i>	40 (42.1%)	53 (39.5%)	93 (40.6%)	
Total	95 (100%)	134 (100%)	229 (100%)	

The literature suggests that structural and conflict-related factors might have an effect on civil war outcomes. To account for these factors, I organise control variables into two clusters. The first cluster of controls focuses on structural factors. To start with, political regime type might influence both conflict outcomes and the willingness of conflict participants to commit to peace. The variable on *regime type* is based on Polity IV dataset⁹: it differentiates between full democracies (10), autocracies (-10), and everything in between. Research on conflict outcomes highlighted ethnic and religious fractionalisation as possible indicators of conflict outcome. To

⁹ See <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>.

take these factors into consideration, a measure of *ethnic fractionalisation* (percentage of ethnically excluded population), borrowed from Wimmer et al. (2009), and a variable on *religious fragmentation* (Fearon and Laitin, 2003), are included. Since both population size and economic development have been employed by previous studies on conflict termination, I add a variable on *population size* from the World Bank data. A log of real Gross Domestic Product (*GDP*) per capita in current US dollars was also adopted from the World Bank database. In order to account for terrain-related factors, a variable on percentage of *mountainous terrain* was added. The variable was calculated by Fearon and Laitin (2003), and employed by a number of studies on civil war (Gleditsch, 2007; Salehyan et al., 2011; Carey et al., 2013).

The second cluster of control variables prioritises dynamics of intrastate conflicts. Civil war severity may influence the conflict stakeholders' decisions with regard to conflict termination (Lacina, 2006). To control for the effect of conflict lethality on conflict outcomes, I add *battle deaths* variable as a log of battle field lethality amongst the belligerents (excluding civilians), taken from the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2016. Given that parts of the theory relate to increased complexity with more actors, a control on the number of conflict veto players is added. This variable is designed upon similar variable by Cunningham (2006). In order to take into account temporal aspects of conflict intensity, I add variable *cumulative intensity*, borrowed from the ACD dataset, which codes whether the conflict episode has more than 1,000 battle-related deaths since its onset. Interventions by United Nations are known to have both positive and negative impact on conflict termination (DeRouen and Sobek, 2004: 310). To control for international intervention, I add a dummy variable *UN* designed by Doyle and Sambanis (2000), and updated in accordance with their definitions. I add a counter for *conflict years* to control for temporal aspects of conflict intensification.

Empirical results

I employ multinomial logit models to test the hypotheses. Bearing in mind that the outcome variable is nominal rather than ordered, multinomial logit regression would suit the purpose of the study better than logit or probit models. As baseoutcome (comparison group), I use the episodes listed under "other" category. The statistical results are displayed in Table 2. H1 predicted that PGM presence in intrastate conflicts negatively affects peace agreements. The

PGM coefficient for peace agreements is in positive direction, but it is not statistically significant. The finding suggests that militia presence at the time when peace agreements are signed does not have a notable effect on peaceful conflict termination. Plotting the multinomial models' predicted probabilities (Figure 1) shows the likelihood of the conflict outcomes. Descriptive statistics provide additional information on PGM presence in peacefully terminated conflicts. During the observed period, only 31 conflict episodes terminated in peace agreement. However, it is noteworthy that militias were present at the moment of peace treaty signing in 23 conflict episodes. This notably high number of episodes with PGM presence suggests that despite signing peace treaties, incumbents remained either unwilling or unable to disband militias prior or during signing of peace treaties.

Table 2. Multinomial logit regressions of conflict outcomes and PGM presence

	Peace agreement	Victory	Ceasefire	Low intensity violence
PGMs present	0.453 (0.751)	-0.291 (0.808)	1.651** (0.805)	1.681*** (0.585)
Political regime	0.205 (0.105)	-0.829 (0.098)	-0.315 (0.107)	0.264 (0.077)
Ethnic fractionalisation	1.027 (1.428)	-1.871 (1.731)	-1.129 (1.547)	1.995 (1.168)
Religious fragmentation	-0.716 (1.126)	-0.281 (1.716)	0.615 (1.867)	-0.587 (1.335)
Population size	-0.023 (0.164)	0.924 (0.171)	-0.130 (0.175)	0.190 (0.125)
rGDPpc	-0.195 (0.202)	0.526 (0.210)	-0.195 (0.223)	-0.184 (0.146)
Mountainous terrain	0.980	0.292*	-0.139	-0.488

	(0.124)	(0.132)	(0.149)	(0.107)
Battle deaths	-0.240 (0.463)	0.961* (0.455)	0.385 (0.477)	-0.169* (0.780)
Cumulative intensity	0.327 (0.707)	-2.641*** (0.785)	-0.420 (0.717)	-0.531 (0.531)
UN	0.876 (0.743)	0.284 (0.874)	-1.755 (0.924)	-1.027 (0.626)
Number of veto players	-0.728 (0.764)	-0.999 (0.823)	-2.761* (1.254)	0.205 (0.534)
Conflict Years	-0.215 (0.644)	-0.183 (0.139)	-0.248 (0.833)	-0.469 (0.453)
Constant	-1.145 (1.186)	0.281 (1.074)	-0.589 (1.248)	1.118 (0.824)
<hr/>				
N	229			
Log ratio ²	132.52			
Pseudo ratio ²	0.1888			

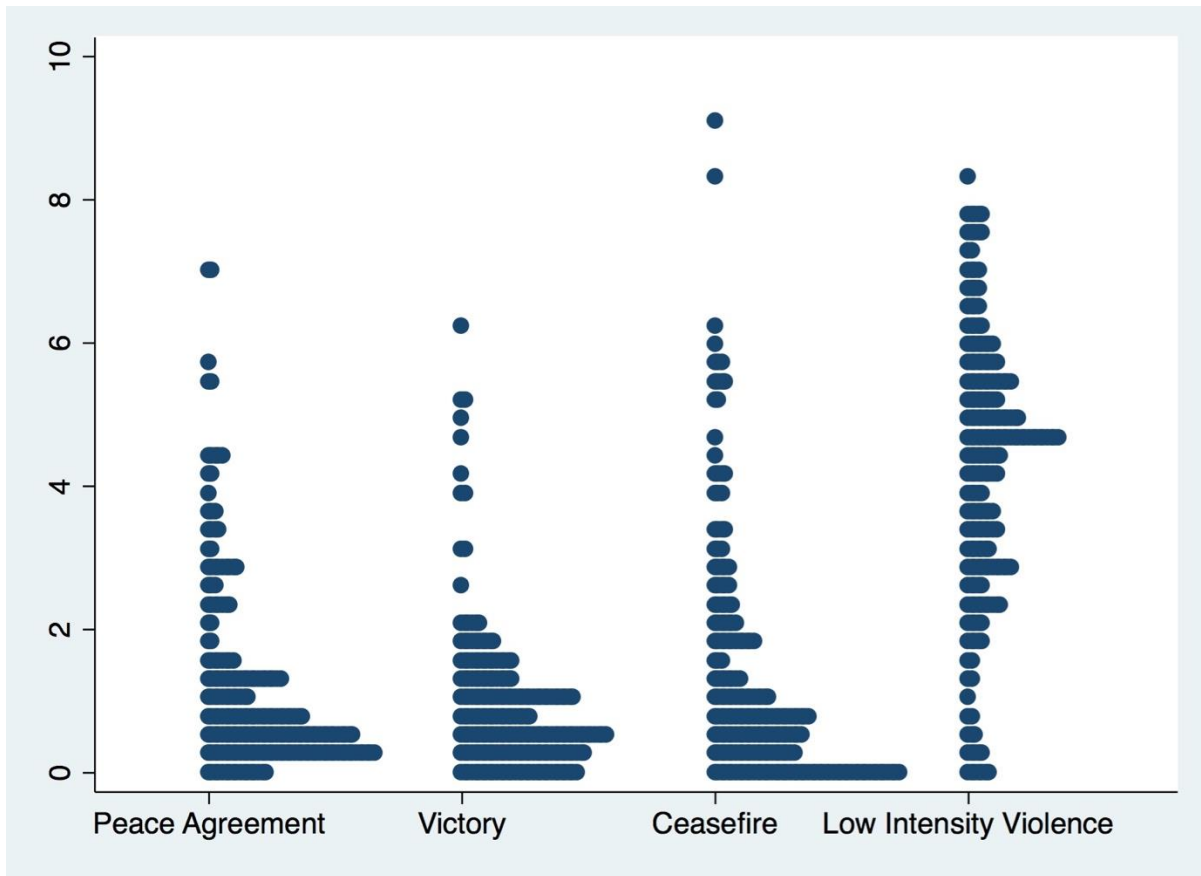
Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses) indicate effects on log odds of base outcome over ongoing conflict.

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

One possible explanation of these findings is that peace agreement is one of the least likely outcomes of conflicts with militia participation. Yet, when and if the dyad actors are committed to peace, the PGMs' leverage on the peace process appears to be limited. Provided that militia groups emerged unsuccessful in thwarting peace talks, their veto powers (if any), become irrelevant during the final stages of conflict termination. PGMs surviving peaceful conflict

termination may either be perceived by incumbents and their peace partners as of limited risk, or might be at various stages of integration into formal security forces, or demobilisation. Thus, the high percentage of militia presence during the commencement of peace agreements may indicate not only the PGMs' failure to thwart peace treaties, but also their capacity to adapt.

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of conflict outcomes



H2 expects that militias negatively affect the victory by dyad actors. The findings of the statistical analysis offer mixed support for the assumption. The PGM dummy for victory is negative, but not significant. Only 32 (12%) conflict episodes out of 229, ended with victory by either government or rebels, which shows, that similar to peace treaties, victories are a relatively rare type of civil war outcomes. PGMs were present in less than half of victories. Controlling for the number of government victories reveals that incumbents emerged victorious only in 46 per cent of conflict episodes with the PGM presence. Bearing in mind that rebels succeeded in more

than half of conflicts with the PGM involvement, it seems that PGM participation had a fairly negative effect on the incumbent victory. Taken together, these findings show that the presence of militias in intrastate conflicts does not increase the probability of incumbent victory: governments tend to win in less than five per cent of conflict episodes with militia participation.

The negative effect of pro-regime extra-dyadic actors on incumbent success can also be interpreted from the perspective of rebel adaptation (Johnson et al., 2011; Chad, 2014). The presence of pro-government militias might erode insurgents' civilian support bases, reduce their military capacities and undermine their procurement networks. Yet as rebels adapt to the "changing reality," they might become more resilient to the incumbent's counterinsurgency tactics. As rebels become more self-reliant and adaptive, it is even harder for the incumbent to dislodge them. Targeting rebel civilian support bases was widely practiced by Colombia's AUC, Chechen *kadyrovtsy*, Mexican anti-EZLN "White Guards," as well as by Myanmar's anti-KIO Border Guard Force (BGF). In each of these civil wars, militias succeeded in weakening the rebels, but neither of these conflicts ended in a decisive victory by the incumbent. Rather, the presence of PGMs in irregular wars has a potential of extending the conflict by "honing" the rebels' survival skills and increasing their resolve to fight on.

The assumption raised in H3, that conflicts with PGM presence tend to culminate in a ceasefire agreement, finds direct support in the statistical analysis. PGM dummy for ceasefires is both positive and statistically significant (at .01). This result finds further confirmation in descriptive statistics. Although only 42 conflict episodes ended in a ceasefire agreement, PGMs were present at the time of conflict termination in 29 of them. Unlike peace agreements, ceasefire agreements are not always designed to terminate conflicts, and most of these treaties – unless followed by more comprehensive post-conflict "road maps" – offer limited possibilities for post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. Hence, PGMs present at the moment of ceasefire are likely to retain significantly more veto powers and stakeholder weight than militias facing peace agreements. High survival rate of PGMs in conflict episodes with ceasefire deals suggests both incumbent willingness to retain militias and the PGMs' confidence in their post-conflict future.

The last hypothesis predicted the relationship between PGM presence and low activity violence as form of conflict termination. The assumption finds strong support in the regression analyses. PGM presence is highly significant (at .001). Predictive values in Figure 1 support this

finding, showing that the increase in PGM presence correlates with a robust increase of low activity violence. Some 40 per cent of conflict episodes ended with low activity violence, which makes this type of conflict outcomes as the most probable form of conflict termination in civil wars with PGM participation. With militias present in 57 per cent of low activity cases, this type of conflict outcomes emerges as second after ceasefire agreement in terms of its correlation with militia involvement.

Next, I discuss findings pertaining to control variables. Ethnic fractionalisation is positive for peace agreements and low activity violence, but both coefficients have no significance. Political regimes, religious fragmentation, population size, UN presence, and GDP produce no significant or positive findings. Roughness of terrain positively correlates with victory. This result requires further analysis; as previous studies cite mountainous terrain as irrelevant for conflict outcomes (Buhaug et al., 2009: 560-61). The number of battle deaths positively influences victory and negatively affects low activity violence. Both findings are logical since victories are often casualty-intensive and low level of violence correlates with lower number of battle-deaths. Higher number of veto players has negative effect on all tested conflict outcomes except low intensity violence. Conflict intensity emerges as insignificant in all models, except victory, where it is in expected negative direction.

To assess the robustness of these findings, I run OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) and logit regressions on the same set of models. The findings of these tests are comparable to multinomial logit models in Table 1 (see Appendix). In order to check whether a few frequently recurring conflicts with multiple episodes do not influence the results, I run similarly structured multinomial logit models with some of the most influential cases excluded (Angola, Yugoslav Wars, Ethiopia and Myanmar).¹⁰

Alternative explanations

Statistical analysis of the relationship between conflict outcomes and PGM presence provides support for the suggested theory of militias' role as "no peace, no war" proponents in civil wars. However, the effect of militia participation on conflict termination and outcomes is likely to be also filtered through other factors. In some intrastate conflicts, PGMs play significant roles, and,

¹⁰ Plots of these models are presented in Supplementary Materials.

therefore, are capable to function as veto players influencing incumbents' policies and decisions. In other civil wars, militias are present as low-profile death squads, commando units, vigilante groups, or as village or community guards with limited influence and low elite or popular support. Controlling for militia strength and capacity may shed more light on the PGMs' potential to affect conflict termination. Owing to the lack of reliable data, this task remains beyond the scope of this study.

The will and capacity of militias to function as veto players and peace spoilers are likely to be affected by their relationship with patrons. As seen from the "Sons of Iraq" case, mobilised by the US forces and disbanded by the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad soon after the US withdrawal, PGMs might change or lose their patrons. Along with militias' own interests, designs of their patrons are crucial towards understanding the role of PGMs in conflict termination processes. Whilst formally supporting peace talks with rebels, state patrons may decide to position militias as peace blockers.

Some PGMs, particularly ethnic militias or community defence groups, would find either peaceful conflict resolution or government victory as preferable conflict outcomes. Mobilised to protect their co-ethnics or communities from rebels – often with limited assistance from the state – such groups might benefit from the end of hostilities. However, the fear of retaliation, score settling, or the general lack of security may force such militia groups to act as peace spoilers. The cases of Peruvian *Rondas Campesinas* after the weakening of the Shining Path (Fumerton, 2001), and Kurdish village guards on the eve of the 2013 ceasefire between the Turkish government and PKK, demonstrate that concerns about post-conflict violence may affect PGMs' choices and encourage them to act as peace-blockers.

Planned incorporation of PGMs into formal security forces may have a serious impact upon militias' stance with the regard to peace. Militias still functioning on the eve of conflict termination may not necessarily be "veto-player losers", as assumed in the previous section. Rather, the PGMs present during peace talks may have the government assurances of their inclusion in armed forces, or some other guarantees for their post-conflict future. Provided that incumbents are keen on post-conflict reintegration of armed groups, they might seek to co-opt militias into accepting the terms of peace deals.

Conclusion

How does the presence of extra-dyadic actors influence civil war termination and outcomes? This study has argued that pro-regime militias involved in civil wars are likely to favour “no peace, no war” conflict outcomes. This theoretical assumption rests upon a number of hypotheses predicting that PGM presence in intrastate conflicts is likely to lead to incomplete peace, or “no peace, no war” outcomes. The statistical analysis conducted through a series of multinomial logit regression models confirms that low activity violence is one of the most typical outcomes of intrastate conflicts with PGM participation, and that peace treaties and victories by either side of dyad (and particularly incumbents) are least expected forms of outcomes in such conflicts. Whilst ceasefire agreements have slightly higher chance to occur, this type of conflict outcomes is characterised by high militia presence, indicating that many PGMs continue functioning after the signing of ceasefires. These findings are theoretically suggestive as they illustrate that pro-regime militias may pose as peace spoilers with vested interests in a certain type of conflict outcomes. Scholarly work on conflict termination can no longer discard the role of pro-government militias during conflict cessation.

This article makes at least two important contributions to the study of civil war. This analysis of pro-government militias’ effect on civil war outcomes improves our understanding of the role of extra-dyadic actors in intrastate conflicts by demonstrating that the presence of militias may potentially influence the patterns of conflict termination. Future applications of “no peace, no war” proponents’ theory should include analyses of other extra-dyad actors, such as criminal organisations, right- or left-wing groups and other quasi-state conflict stakeholders. The other valuable finding suggests that pro-regime militias can be expected to act as proponents of conflict continuation, particularly in the form of low activity violence. The existence of militias during conflict settlement processes serves as an obstacle, indicating that the incumbent is unwilling to demobilise militias and seeks to preserve them. This shows that either the conflict outcome does not accommodate the incumbent, or that the government has failed to achieve its goals and therefore is unwilling to wholeheartedly engage in peace process. The presence of militias at the time of peace talks provides an additional explanation as to why a particular outcome occurs.

Beyond theoretical and empirical contribution offered in this study, the analysis on the role of extra-dyadic actors in civil war termination has valuable policy implications as well. Given

the unique role of pro-regime militias – most of which remain beyond formal institutional frameworks – in civil wars, it is imperative for peacemakers and mediators to consider extra-dyadic actors as crucial veto players of conflict termination. Disaggregating PGMs from other pro-government actors and treating them as unique actors is essential towards successful peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Improving our understanding of PGMs role in conflict termination may have multiple applications for post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives. Similarly to situations with other armed groups, demobilisation, or the lack thereof, of militias at the termination of armed conflicts affects post-conflict reconstruction, human security and reconciliation. Amongst other outcomes, failure to include militias in peace processes might result in transformation of PGMs into criminal organisations.

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