

International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict

Stathis N. Kalyvas (Corresponding Author) and Laia Balcells

Department of Political Science, Yale University
Yale University
8 Prospect Place, room 101
New Haven, CT 06511-3516
Email: stathis.kalyvas@yale.edu

One of the most striking recent findings is that the end of the Cold War had no impact on internal conflict. We show that this is an artifact of neglecting an important source of heterogeneity in civil wars: their “technology of rebellion.” After disaggregating civil wars into irregular (or guerrilla) wars, conventional wars, and symmetric non-conventional wars, we find a striking decline of irregular wars following the end of the Cold War, something that amounts to a profound transformation of civil war. Our analysis brings the international system back into the study of internal conflict, underlines the relevance of warfare for the study of civil wars, and demonstrates that the prevalence of irregular war is not transhistorical, as widely believed; rather, it is closely associated with the structural dynamics of the Cold War.

Key Words: civil war; rebellion; Cold War; insurgency; irregular war; guerrilla war; warfare

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1. Introduction

In 1975, most civil wars were located in Asia; all but one were guerrilla wars—contests entailing an asymmetric rebel challenge launched from the country’s rural periphery. In 1993, by contrast, less than half of all civil wars were guerrilla wars; and most were located in Sub-Saharan Africa. Much more common were conventional wars using heavy armor and artillery in a landscape dominated by trenches, as well as “primitive” wars between poorly armed and trained militias. We argue that this dual geographic and military shift is symptomatic of a broader transformation of internal conflict—the result of a major structural change in the international system: the end of the Cold War. This transformation has been overlooked because the literature on civil wars has tended to neglect the international system and has treated civil wars as a homogeneous phenomenon. We show that bringing the Cold War back into the analysis of civil wars is critical for understanding the evolution and transformation of internal conflict.

We identify the “technology of rebellion” as a key causal pathway in this process of change. A central assumption in the literature is that civil war onset is a function of structural factors that facilitate insurgency, a technology that can be deployed to serve all kinds of political ends (Fearon and Laitin 2003:75). We show that insurgency (or irregular war) is neither the only technology available to rebels, nor is it as time-invariant as assumed. It is, rather, linked to the international system. In addition to irregular warfare, we identify two overlooked technologies of rebellion: conventional warfare and symmetric-non conventional warfare (hereafter, also SNC). While insurgency is an instance of asymmetric warfare, conventional and SNC wars are both forms of symmetric warfare—the former militarily more sophisticated compared to the latter. We find that while irregular warfare is the dominant technology of rebellion between 1944 and 2004, it is just barely so: it is used only in 53.06 percent of all

civil wars.¹ Furthermore, we find a major, but hitherto concealed, underlying transformation: 65.35 percent of all civil wars fought during the Cold War were irregular wars compared to only 26.09 percent of those fought after 1991. Why?

During the Cold War, the two superpowers raised the military capacity of both states and rebels worldwide. This improved military capacity worked in favor of the rebels, a result of the rise and diffusion of a particularly robust version of the technology of insurgency. The end of the Cold War put an end to superpower support and corroded this technology, producing a bifurcation. Some states that had been vulnerable to insurgency during the Cold War experienced civil peace, whereas other states became vulnerable to a different form of civil war, symmetric non-conventional war. Furthermore, the dissolution of the USSR and Yugoslavia that accompanied the end of the Cold War produced a steep, yet temporary, increase in conventional civil wars.

Our contribution is threefold. First, we identify a key source of heterogeneity in civil wars: their technologies of rebellion; we provide a theoretical account of their variation and adduce additional implications about their temporal and spatial distribution. Second, we bring the international system back into the study of internal conflict and specify the impact of the Cold War; we demonstrate that insurgency is not a “modular” technology available to anyone, anywhere, and anytime; rather, its availability is shaped by the structural characteristics of particular historical periods; we also suggest that a full understanding of civil war onset requires a focus on both rebel and state capacity, rather than just the latter. Third, we confirm the importance of theoretical and empirical disaggregation as a way of uncovering causal mechanisms and effects likely to be obscured in more aggregate research designs.

The paper is organized as follows: in the next section, we present the main empirical findings and puzzles and underline the inconclusive and contradictory views about the effect of the end of the Cold

¹ Like most crossnational research on civil wars, we focus on the post-1944 period. The pre-1944 period includes a significant number of irregular wars, many of which were wars of colonial conquest pitting modern against “primitive armies,” rather than civil wars.

War on internal conflict. In section 3, we discuss the technologies of rebellion. In section 4, we show how the Cold War is connected to civil war onset via the pathway of technologies of rebellion. In section 5, we derive empirical predictions about the impact of the end of the Cold War, which we proceed to test in section 6. We conclude with a discussion of theoretical and policy implications.

2. Findings and Puzzles

The Cold War dominated international politics from the end of the Second World War until the collapse of the USSR in 1989-1991 (Hironaka 2005; Westad 2005; Gaddis 1997).² The theorization of the Post-Cold War world was undertaken primarily by scholars of International Relations. In contrast to students of civil wars, who focused on domestic structural characteristics,³ they were primarily concerned about interstate rather than intrastate conflict—either trying to understand the effects of shifts in system polarity on interstate conflict and global power relations (Goldgeier and McFaul 1992; Mearsheimer 1990), or their implications for theories of international relations (Lebow 1994). At the same time, many scholars turned their attention to domestic ethnic conflict (Brown 1996; Lake and Rothchild 1996); some connected the resurgence of nationalism to the end of the Cold War (Ellingsen 2000; Laidi 1994), while others challenged this connection (Ayres 2000). This literature was characterized by two tendencies. The first one was optimistic and predicted a more peaceful world following the end of the Cold War. The second one was pessimistic and predicted global mayhem. Nevertheless, both agreed that the end of the Cold War was bound to have important effects, though they differed about their direction (Stein and Lobell 1997:102).

² In fact, the origins of the Cold War can be located the midst of the Second World War, as mistrust between the USA and Britain on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other, grew while military clashes between communist and anticommunist factions took place in several countries.

³ An exception is Hironaka (2005), who examined the effects of the Cold War on the duration of civil wars.

Civil wars during the Cold War are commonly understood as “proxy wars.” The impossibly high stakes of a direct clash between the USA and the USSR turned conflicts in the developing world into the hot frontline of the Cold War (Mott 2001; Gaddis 1997; Westad 1992). Although it was possible to expect the number of civil wars to decrease with the end of the superpower competition, it was also possible to predict that it would remain unchanged, or even increase, absent the “disciplining” effect of the two superpowers.⁴ To complicate matters, the end of the Cold War spawned multiple processes: the dissolution of multiethnic states and the formation of new states with contested boundaries; the proliferation of cheap weapons from the former Soviet republics; the end of a global ideological struggle; and the weakening of client states following the reduction or withdrawal of superpower support (Stein and Lobell 1997; Wallensteen and Axell 1993). Stein and Lobell (1997) highlighted a variety of possible outcomes across geographical regions depending on the interaction of factors such as the role of superpowers in stoking or reducing conflict during the Cold War, the depth of the Cold War competition, and the regional penetration of superpowers. The complex and simultaneous occurrence of multiple, contradictory processes led many seasoned observers to recommend caution in formulating predictions (Huntington 1993:187; Jervis 1994:769-770).

Figure 1 tracks the total number of civil war onsets, terminations, and ongoing civil wars per year for the period 1944-2004.⁵ Ongoing civil wars increased steadily after the late 1950s and peaked in the

⁴ Perhaps the single most influential theoretical analysis linking the end of the Cold War to civil wars is Huntington’s (1993) “clash of civilization” thesis which predicted the intensification of civil wars in countries straddling “civilizational” divides.

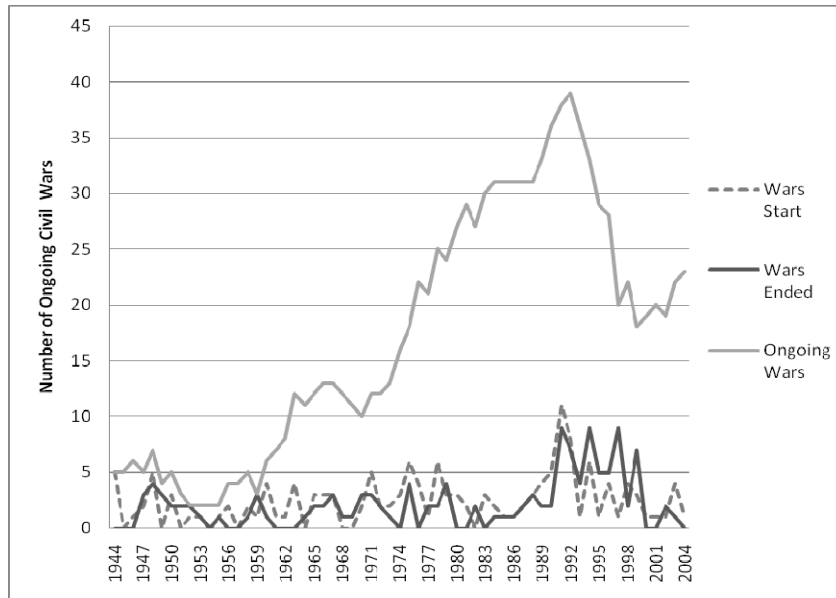
⁵ We rely on Sambanis’s (2001) dataset of civil wars, extended to 2004 and with some modifications (see the appendix). It is based on the standard definition of civil war, with the following criteria: 1) more than 1,000 war-related deaths during the entire war and in at least one single year of the war, 2) the war challenged the sovereignty of an internationally recognized state, 3) it occurred within the territory of that

early 1990s; civil war onsets peaked as well in 1991. Immediately afterwards, the number of civil war onsets declined,⁶ while terminations went up. These two trends converged to produce a decline of ongoing civil wars in the Post-Cold War period.

state, 4) the state was one of the principal combatants, 5) the rebels were able to mount an organized military opposition to the state.

⁶ Although our data extend only until 2004, the decline of civil war onsets has not been reversed in the 2005-2009 period. In 2008 only five civil wars were active worldwide: Sri Lanka (which ended in 2009), Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Somalia. A similar trend characterizes lower intensity conflicts (Harbom and Wallensteen 2009).

Figure 1. Civil Wars Starting, Ending and Ongoing (1944-2004)



Yet, no consensus emerged about these trends. On the one hand, the spike of civil wars following the end of the Cold War ended the “euphoria of the early 1990s” and gave way to “frustration” and “disillusionment in the mid-1990s” (Brown 1996:11); it also encouraged the view that the new era spelled a “coming anarchy” through the eruption of “new wars” (Kaldor 1999; Kaplan 1994). On the other hand, the subsequent emergence of a downward trend in both civil war onsets and ongoing civil wars, led scholars to speak of an “extraordinary and counterintuitive improvement in global security,” arguing that the end of the Cold War was the single most critical factor in this decline (Human Security Centre 2005). In other words, “the superpower military advisers moved out, and the Blue Helmets moved in” (Lacina 2004:192). The divergence between these two interpretations is largely a function of the timing of their observations; the Post-Cold War era appeared to be a disaster in 1992 but struck observers as a clear improvement by 2005.

The crossnational literature on civil war onset included the Cold War in the mix of variables examined. The main finding was that the end of the Cold War had no impact on civil war onsets (Sambanis 2004; Collier et al. 2003; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Jung, Schlichte, and Seigelberg 2000). In Fearon’s and Laitin’s (2003:77-8) words, “the prevalence of civil war in the 1990s was *not* due to the end of the Cold War and associated changes in the international system.” Unlike other findings that generated considerable controversy (e.g. the effect of natural resources or ethnic fragmentation), the Cold War “non-effect” met with universal consensus.

Yet, this non-effect is deeply puzzling. First, the end of the Cold War fundamentally changed the role of external actors in civil wars (Byman et al. 2001: xix). Second, it was associated with a regional outbreak of civil wars, especially in Eurasia (Zürcher 2007; Evangelista 1996) and Sub-Saharan Africa (Young 2006; Stedman 1996). Third it was also associated with a surprising reduction of civil wars in Latin America (Chernick 1996; Castañeda 1993) and Southeast Asia (Findlay 1996). Indeed, many seemingly intractable civil wars terminated with the end of the Cold War (Kanet 2006; Hironaka 2005). Is the non-effect an artifact of aggregation? Would a different theorization help us make more sense of it?

3. Technologies of Rebellion

Our starting point is that the Cold War raised the capacity of states worldwide—but it had a similar impact on rebel capacity. The two superpowers proceeded to infuse enormous military and economic assistance into allied states (Westad 2005); at the same time, they also supported a wide range of rebel movements throughout the developing world. Although the United States supported some rebel movements, such as the UNITA in Angola or the Contras in Nicaragua, it was much more common for the USSR to enter into alliances with Third World revolutionary movements, which were dominated or influenced by Marxist political groups (Westad 1992:461). During the Cold War, we argue, the rise in rebel capacity outpaced state capacity, leading to an eruption of civil wars that relied on the technology of irregular war or insurgency. More specifically, radical entrepreneurs with the support of the USSR and its allies turned the time-honored guerrilla warfare into a much improved technology of rebellion which we call “robust insurgency”.

Contrary to widespread belief, not all civil wars are insurgencies. When most people in the United States speak of “civil war,” they automatically think of the American Civil War. This brings up images of well organized, uniformed armies marching in the midst of explosions. This is very different from available depictions of Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan. Veterans of these conflicts are likely to evoke an invisible foe avoiding direct contact while constantly ambushing them or poker-faced civilians with inscrutable loyalties. At the same time, many journalists, development workers, and humanitarian volunteers working in Africa today would probably point to an altogether different experience of civil conflict, one populated by greedy militias preying on a defenseless civilian population in a context characterized by collapsed or predatory states. These three vignettes are not mutually exclusive; rather, they suggest that civil wars conceal considerable heterogeneity.

We disaggregate civil wars based on their technology of rebellion, which we conceptualize as the joint military tactics of states and rebels engaged in armed conflict. Drawing on a typology by Kalyvas (2005), we distinguish between three technologies of rebellion in civil war, based on two dimensions at

the outset of a civil war:⁷ the military capacity of states and that of rebels (Table 1). Conventional civil war takes place when the military capacity of states and rebels is matched at a high level; irregular civil war emerges when the military capacity of the rebels is low vis-à-vis the state; symmetric non-conventional war is observed when the capacity of states and rebels is matched at a low level. The fourth cell, where the capacity of the rebels outstrips the state's, effectively describes successful military coups rather than civil wars.

Table 1. Technologies of Rebellion in Civil War

		Military capacity of the state	
		High	Low
Military capacity of the rebels	High	Conventional	N/A [Successful military coup]
	Low	Irregular	Symmetric non-conventional

Irregular or guerrilla warfare is a technology of military conflict whereby the rebels privilege small, lightly armed bands operating in rural areas (Fearon and Laitin 2003:75);⁸ it is an expression of relative asymmetry between states and rebels: rebels have the military capacity to challenge the state, but lack the capacity to confront it in a direct and frontal way.⁹ Put otherwise, states can mount a devastating response to a direct armed challenge such that the rebels' only option is to fight asymmetrically. Think of civil wars in El Salvador (1979-1992), Peru (1980-1996), and Nepal (1996-2006). In those wars, rebels

⁷ By "outset," we refer to the first year of the conflict; given our definition, this is the point when a conflict has reached 1,000 battle-death fatalities per year.

⁸ Irregular warfare is seldom the dominant tactic of interstate wars (Harkavy and Neuman 2001:18-9).

⁹ Total asymmetry is reflected in the absence (or immediate suppression) of an armed challenge.

“hover just below the military horizon,” hiding and relying on harassment and surprise, stealth, and raid (Simons 1999), but are frequently able to achieve territorial control in the state’s periphery.

Rebels use a conventional technology of rebellion when they are able to openly match states that deploy heavy weaponry such as field artillery and armor. In conventional wars, military confrontation is direct either across well-defined frontlines or between armed columns; clashes often take the form of set battles and city sieges; there is a clear distinction between offensive and defensive actions and the emphasis on territory is alluded to in the use of the term “positional warfare” (Lockyer 2008:62).¹⁰ Classic cases include the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). More recent examples include the conflict of Biafra in Nigeria (1967-1970), of Abkhazia in Georgia (1992-1994), of Nagorno Karabach in Azerbaijan (1991-1994), and of Croatia and Bosnia in the former Yugoslavia (1992-1995). These conflicts saw the deployment of artillery and tanks in a landscape often dominated by trenches. The battle of Cuito Cuanavale, which took place in Angola in September 1987 between the pro-Soviet MPLA government and South African backed UNITA rebels, entailed clashes between heavily armored columns and is said to have been the largest conventional land battle in Africa since the Second World War (Chester 1992). Likewise, in Bosnia “virtually all of the fighting was done by professionally led, relatively well-organized citizen armies, and the contrary view is largely the

¹⁰ A US captain describes his experience in Iraq: “The difference between the two deployments involved primarily the positioning of the enemy relative to ourselves. In the ground war, we had definitive lines of battle. Saddam Fedayeen elements did make things tricky, as they were running around in pick-up trucks and taxis wearing civilian clothes, but we still knew generally the enemy’s territory versus our own. Returning in 2004 with the insurgency in full swing, while driving around Mosul, we never were sure when and where we might be attacked. Some neighborhoods were definitively safer than others, but there was no enemy zone versus friendly zone as mentioned earlier. Except for the U.S. bases, where mortar attacks were frequent but largely harmless, there was no place where one might feel completely safe” (Berschinski et al. 2007:136).

product of mirror-imaging by Western officers who regularly disparaged the appearance, discipline, and professionalism of the armies involved. The myth of the so-called “paramilitaries” has persisted, although few, if any, major independent paramilitary units operated after 1992 (United States, Central Intelligence Agency 2002 xii-xv).

Lastly, some conflicts do not fit well into the irregular war/conventional war dichotomy. They diverge from irregular wars because they lack the asymmetry between state and rebels characterizing these conflicts; they also diverge from conventional wars because the two sides are militarily very weak. When states are unable (or, in a few cases, unwilling) to credibly and systematically deploy heavy weaponry and armor against equally ill-equipped insurgents, the two sides are matched at a low level of military capacity. This mutual weakness produces a type of warfare often described as “pre-modern” (Earle 1997:108) or “primitive” (Mueller 2004), lending itself to comparisons with such conflicts as the Thirty Years’ War (Prunier 2009:336; Münkler 2005:2). Often mistakenly described as guerrilla wars, symmetric non-conventional wars tend to arise in contexts characterized by very weak or collapsed states. Consider the civil war in Congo-Brazzaville (1993-1997): the elections that followed the collapse of the single-party, Soviet-type regime produced inconclusive and contested results. The military effectively collapsed in 1992 and party militias (bearing names such as Ninjas, Cobras, or Zoulous) emerged to control different areas of the capital city clearly delineated by checkpoints or *bouchons*. Even the president of the country relied on his own militias alongside the scattered remnants of the old state army. By 1997, the armed actors involved in this conflict included the remnants of the old military, a new but very weak, military, several militias with unclear chains of command, foreign mercenaries, the remnants of Mobutu’s presidential guard from neighboring Zaire, and units of the Rwandan *Interhamwe* and the Angolan military. The fighting was conducted primarily with small arms (Yengo 2006).¹¹ Likewise, the

¹¹ It is possible to reduce this threefold distinction into a dichotomy between asymmetric and symmetric civil war, with the latter category containing both conventional and SNC wars. Nevertheless, we believe

United Nations described the conflict in Somalia as a situation where “armed clashes tended to take the form of wild, chaotic exchanges of fire, featuring front-lines which could shift fifty or one hundred kilometers in a day as lines of defense disintegrated and regrouped. Supply lines were ad hoc to nonexistent, relying mostly on looting (UNDOS 1998:75).

4. Cold War and Civil Wars: the Emergence of Robust Insurgency

Although guerrilla war is arguably as old as human history, robust insurgency is intertwined with the Cold War. The actual term “guerrilla” (small war) refers to the native resistance against the Napoleonic armies that invaded Spain in 1807; it was later analyzed by Clausewitz in his famous treatise *On War*. Most of what is described as guerrilla warfare in the pre-Second World War period consists of indigenous resistance against colonial encroachment, which often took the form of a frontal clash between vastly unequal armies, thus leading to a high propensity of (crushing) victory for the stronger actor.

What became known as “people’s war” or revolutionary guerrilla warfare emerged in the 1930s. It was honed by Mao Zedong in interwar China, “test-driven” by communist resistance movements in Europe and Asia during the Second World War, and reached its apex during the Cold War throughout the developing world. Although sharing the same moniker with traditional guerrilla war, this was a very different kind of war (Leites and Wolf 1970), a fact fully recognized by the counterinsurgency theorists (Trinquier 1964; Galula 1964). As Beckett (2001:viii) explains, traditional guerrilla warfare was generally understood as a purely military form of fighting using classic tactics of ‘hit and run’ and employed by indigenous groups where a conventional army either had been defeated or had never existed. Rarely, he argues, did its primarily unsophisticated practitioners display any wider comprehension of the potential of irregular models of conflict in the way that became commonplace after 1945, when guerrilla warfare became “revolutionary” and was termed “insurgency.” In fact, this period coincides with a remarkable reversal in the outcomes of irregular wars: whereas roughly before the Second World War, states

that the two categories of conventional and SNC war capture an important difference. Our empirical results do not change when we use a dichotomous instead of a threefold distinction.

routinely defeated irregular armies, this pattern was reversed following the Second World War, with insurgents increasingly more likely to force a “draw” or defeat their stronger foes (Lyall and Wilson 2009; Arreguín-Toft 2005). We argue that robust insurgency is linked to the Cold War via three related components: material support, revolutionary beliefs, and military doctrine.

First, whereas traditional guerrilla warfare depended on the mobilization of local resources with the occasional support of a neighboring state, robust insurgency benefited from extensive and multifaceted superpower support. A central aim of Soviet foreign policy was to train and motivate, directly or through surrogates, insurgents throughout the developing world (Westad 2005; Mott 2001). The initial beneficiaries included the Chinese and Greek Communists and the Third World became a foreign policy priority in the early 1950s (Kanet 2006:334). China, Cuba, Libya, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, among others, played an important role in providing training and support.¹²

The concept of “proxy war” is a poor description of Soviet policy, as it only stresses the mechanical infusion of material resources into rebel movements; often, it implies a purely instrumental relationship between opportunistic rebels who pretended to believe in socialism in order to receive Soviet weapons. Although opportunism was certainly present, it did not exhaust the range of motivations; and although material support typically included the supply of weapons and advisers, it extended to multiple forms of assistance, including political training and indoctrination (Dzhirkvelov 1989:271). Most importantly, assistance and support were channeled through transnational social movements. Thousands of radical activists built supra-regional and even global contacts and networks while training in Soviet-funded military camps and universities, the most famous of which was the “Patrice Lumumba Friendship University” in Moscow.¹³ The key role played by a transnational social movement clearly delineates

¹² For example, the civil war in South Yemen entailed the participation of “Cubans, Syrians, PLO units, and some personnel from Eastern Europe” (Kirkpatrick 1989:8).

¹³ The University’s first vice-rector and a number of its staff were KGB officers whose objective was to recruit revolutionaries from the student body (Andrew and Mitrokhin 2005:432). The Higher Party

robust insurgency from traditional guerrilla warfare. Whereas the latter was based on the mobilization of primarily conservative, local sentiments and/or local patronage tribal and kin networks, the former mobilized transnational revolutionary networks; these would link-up with traditional rural networks but assume the leadership.¹⁴

Revolutionary beliefs constitute the second critical component of robust insurgency.¹⁵ After all, the Cold War was also an ideological competition on a global level (Stein and Lobell 1997:109), with cognitive frames and ideologies that “aroused passionate ideological commitments among combatants, both domestically and internationally (Hironaka 2005:123). The power of these beliefs was well understood by counterinsurgents (Kirkpatrick 1989:7; Olson 1989:19) and is worth stressing, as recent research has tended to disregard the ideological Che Guevaras in favor of the predatory Charles Taylors

School for foreigners also played a key role in educating radical leaders from around the world, in programs ranging two years to two months (Dzhirkvelov 1989:271).

¹⁴ This is a point elaborated by Carl Schmitt (2007/1963:30) who distinguishes between two ideal types of irregular fighters: the traditional “defensive-autochthonous defenders of home” and the “aggressive international revolutionary activist.” Modern revolutionary guerrilla war, he argues, reached its fullest expression when it connected these two.

¹⁵ We are referring to the beliefs of rebel leaders, cadres, and activists. Rank-and-file fighters and sympathizers were typically motivated by a variety of heterogeneous concerns, of which ideology is not necessarily the most important (Kalyvas 2006). Also, while some rebel entrepreneurs may have been keen to disguise narrow or opportunistic goals under the cloak of socialist revolution in order to gain access to external support, many others were genuinely inspired and empowered by these beliefs. This was the case with several “national liberation” movements which blended nationalism with both Marxist ideology and revolutionary guerrilla principles—such as the Eritrean EPLF (Eritrean Popular Liberation Front) and the Kurdish PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan or Kurdistan Workers’ Party).

(Hirshleifer 2001; Collier 2007).¹⁶ Beliefs were relevant in three ways. First, the perception that a credible counter-hegemonic model of political and social organization was available and could be attained captured the imagination of millions. Specific ideas and labels varied, but the faith in the possibility, indeed inevitability, of radical political transformation did not. Second, beliefs were important as sources of motivation for the crucial “first movers” who were invested tremendous risk and suffered enormous deprivation for the cause of revolution. Lastly, beliefs mattered as perceptions about the feasibility of radical change via the specific path of armed struggle: subordinate or weak actors could successfully take on stronger actors provided they learned how to deploy the technology of robust insurgency. Writing in 1973, Wolin (1973:354) remarked how “the military mode of thinking has all but supplanted the political mode in revolutionary circles. Wherever one turns...one finds sophisticated discussions of tactic, firepower, guerrilla warfare, and combat techniques.” Indeed, leftist guerrilla movements used to host hundreds of activists and journalists from across the world, thus socializing them in the ways of armed struggle. Radical change became a matter of military doctrine.

The last component of robust insurgency was military doctrine. Revolutionary War was an innovation whose global breakthrough came about with the success of the Cuban Revolution, “which put the guerrilla strategy on the world’s front pages” (Hobsbawm 1996:438). The writings of Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, Régis Debray, and Amilcar Cabral, among others, were widely disseminated and read by thousands of activists and sympathizers in the developing world, especially among the educated urban youth. They provided a model of revolution that was supposed to start from the rural periphery and be

¹⁶ An ironic testament to the pervasiveness of radical beliefs during the 1960s is the fact that Paul Collier himself was tempted by the revolutionary winds during his youth: “I was a student at Oxford in 1968,” he recalls (2007:ix); “I remember joining something called the Oxford Revolutionary Socialist Students, a name now beyond parody. But it all seemed simple then.”

waged by guerrilla warfare by peasant armies.¹⁷ The examples of China, Cuba, and Vietnam confirmed that, despite occasional setbacks, guerrilla warfare correctly waged was both a feasible and successful path to political and social change. From this perspective, irregular war was never a mere military tactic, akin to insurgent “special forces” storming their way to power. Instead, rebel entrepreneurs learned that the key to success lay in the patient formation of a highly structured political organization, typically a party, in control of a disciplined armed wing. The objective was to acquire and govern territory. On the one hand, organization guaranteed discipline in the absence of which rebels could never hope to withstand, even more defeat, the state’s military superiority. On the other hand, territory constituted a key resource for armed struggle. Effective administration and mass mobilization in liberated areas were essential foundations for the development of armed struggle under conditions of military inferiority. This amounted to revolutionary state-building (Kalyvas 2006), which was absent in traditional guerrilla warfare.

In sum, the Cold War combined material support, revolutionary beliefs, and military doctrine to turn irregular war into a credible and effective technology of rebellion. The application of the doctrine required highly motivated individuals; their beliefs were sustained and disseminated by examples of

¹⁷ Around these principles grew a rich global discussion about the best way to organize, fight, and win. Proponents of Che Guevara’s *foco* theory emphasized the voluntaristic action of a party vanguard that would catalyze popular discontent through highly visible actions from the periphery; supporters of Carlos Marighela’s theories argued in favor of urban guerrilla that would strike directly at the center; the readers of Võ Nguyên Giáp pointed to the long term process of building a proficient insurgent military force; and so on. It would be, perhaps, only a slight exaggeration to say that the organizational principles of revolutionary guerrilla warfare achieved in their temporal context a functional equivalence with that of present-day corporate management principles: they were a thriving intellectual enterprise on a global scale with its gurus, global best selling textbooks, universities, summer schools (or camps), and practical applications.

successful wars that relied on this doctrine; and both the dissemination of beliefs and the implementation of the doctrine required training and material assistance. Although it was possible for each of these factors to operate alone (some leftist insurgencies succeeded in the absence of external support), the combination of all three contributed to raise rebel capacity during the Cold War. In contrast, although the United States assisted rebels challenging pro-Soviet regimes, it primarily directed its support toward governments professing anticommunism. US military assistance to friendly regimes boomed and the US invested in the development of a counterinsurgency doctrine closely tailored to match revolutionary guerrilla war (e.g. Leites and Wolf 1970). Military personnel from many countries trained in the United States, and the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia acquired a notorious reputation.¹⁸

Because the Cold War raised the capacity of both states and rebels, the asymmetry characterizing the relation of governments and rebels remained fundamentally in place: states were still militarily superior to rebels. However, the Cold War turned the “deep weakness” of rebels, which prevented many budding rebellions from reaching the stage of civil war, into “relative weakness,” a situation allowing rebels to mount an effective military challenge against a stronger state using robust insurgency.

5. The Impact of the End of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War is associated with three key processes: the decline of rebel capacity; the decline of state capacity; and the emergence of new postcommunist states. These processes had distinct implications for the technologies of rebellion used in civil wars.

First, the end of the Cold War hurt rebels in a decisive way; it put an end to superpower competition, the USSR itself, and the abundant provision of material support to rebel forces across the world. Byman et al. (2001) document a dramatic shift in the sources of insurgent support during the post-Cold War era toward diasporas, refugees, and neighboring states, most of which were as poor as the states facing insurgencies and contributed little training: all in all, a poor substitute for superpower support. Among rebels, the end of the Cold War hurt disproportionately the revolutionary types, since it destroyed

¹⁸ The Soviet Union also helped allied states in places such as Angola, Nicaragua or Afghanistan.

the belief in radical political change (Przeworski 1991:100). Radical activists across the developing world awoke in a new world with their ideology shattered.

Second, the end of the Cold War also hurt states. With the Soviet threat gone, the United States lost interest in propping up client states in the developing world and divested itself from many weak states, thus weakening them further (Hale and Kienle 1997:5); things got really bad for Soviet client states which, on top of losing massive aid, also saw their legitimizing principles melt away (Kanet 2006:343).¹⁹ With superpower support reduced or gone, states had to rely primarily on their domestic capacity, which was notoriously wanting in Sub-Saharan Africa (Herbst 2004; 2000; Reno 1999; Clapham 1996; Stedman 1996) and had required enormous efforts to prop-up in the first place.²⁰ Low capacity states faced daunting prospects as they became vulnerable to equally low capacity rebels who were able to challenge them directly, foregoing the painstaking process of organization, indoctrination, and peripheral state-building required by insurgency. Thus, our analysis suggests that states whose residual capacity was wanting were more likely to experience symmetric non-conventional civil war following the end of the Cold War.

¹⁹ Data from USAID (2009) shows a decrease in total US Military Assistance to third countries since the early 1980s. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates that world military expenditures dropped from \$1.1 trillion in the late 1980s to \$740 billion in 1997. There was also a drastic reduction in international arms sales: from 1986 to 1995, they plummeted 55 percent (SIPRI 2008).

²⁰ The Soviet Union became actively involved in Sub-Saharan Africa which came second after the Middle East in the volume of Soviet Assistance it received; during the 1956-1988 period, it received 23 billion dollars (Mott 2001:52). In 1974 there were approximately 3,600 Soviet advisers only in Somalia (Andrew and Mitrokhin 2005:449). Such aid may have been militarily effective in the short term but did not strengthen weak states in the long term. In fact, Clapham (1996) argues the opposite in the case of African states.

Third, the end of the Cold War resulted in the dissolution of states such as the USSR and Yugoslavia; this process was accompanied by the division of existing armies into competing factions that could fight against each other conventionally: hence our expectation of a rise in conventional civil wars in new postcommunist states. Table 2 illustrates how the three processes activated by end of the Cold War produced distinct outcomes.²¹

Table 2. Cold War and Technologies of Rebellion

	A Robust Peace	B Irregular War	C Peace	D SNC	E Conventional War
State					
α					
State		State	State		State & Rebels
β		↑		↓	↑
Rebels		Rebels		State & Rebels	
γ		↑	↓		
Rebels			Rebels		

-----> Cold War effect
 -----> Post-Cold War effect

Consider three capacity thresholds affecting both states and rebels. The first threshold α marks a superior level of state capacity: above this level civil peace is robust (outcome A). The end of the Cold War made no difference for these countries. The second threshold β marks the level above which states or rebels are able to field a conventional army with heavy artillery and armor. Below that threshold, states or rebels cannot field such an army: rebels are organized irregularly and states are considered to have “failed.” Lastly, γ marks the threshold of rebel capacity below which armed non-state actors are too weak to mount a military challenge against the state: this is the realm of “bandits” and mafias.

²¹ We are grateful to Referee 1 for his/her suggestions in that respect.

Through the three mechanisms described above, the Cold War lifted rebel capacity above γ thus increasing the incidence of irregular war (outcome B). In contrast, the end of the Cold War pushed many potential rebels below threshold γ , thus sheltering many states from insurgency (outcome C). Note here that our argument captures the fact that states with similar capacity may experience either civil peace or conflict (outcomes B and C): this variation is driven exclusively by rebel capacity. At the same time, the end of the Cold War caused states whose residual capacity was low (and had been previously propped up by superpower assistance) to fall below γ . There, rebels were able to challenge these weakened states by means of a symmetric non-conventional war (outcome D). Lastly, the emergence of new states following the end of the Cold War allowed rebels to move above threshold β and mount a conventional challenge (outcome E).

In sum, our analysis produces a clear set of empirical predictions while acknowledging multiple pathways. Next, we incorporate these theoretical insights into a crossnational analysis.

6. Empirics

Our first empirical task is to ascertain whether there has been a significant shift in the technologies of rebellion following the end of the Cold War. In line with our theoretical conceptualization of technologies of rebellion as the joint military tactics of states and rebels, we proxy them with the type of weaponry used by the contending armed actors during the first year of the conflict. We use a dataset of 147 civil wars between 1944 and 2004.²² We code as conventional wars those conflicts where both incumbents and insurgents use heavy weaponry (artillery and armor); as irregular wars, the conflicts where incumbents deploy heavy weaponry but insurgents rely on light weapons; and as symmetric non-conventional (SNC) wars, the conflicts where neither incumbents nor insurgents use heavy weaponry.²³

²² Our argument applies to conflicts that have already reached a considerable level of intensity; we, therefore, use a dataset with a 1,000 battle-deaths threshold rather than those with a much lower threshold (e.g. PRIO-Uppsala). For a description, see the appendix.

²³ The coding protocol is described in the Appendix.

In Table 3, we can observe that irregular war is the dominant technology of rebellion during the entire period 1944-2004, thus justifying the scholarly attention it has received so far. However, it accounts for just over half of all civil wars (53.06%): conventional wars are much more common than generally thought (33.33%), and SNC wars account for slightly over 13% of the total. When we partition the data in two distinct periods, the Cold War (1944-1990) and the Post-Cold War (1991-2004),²⁴ we find that the end of the Cold War is associated with an important shift: although irregular war completely dominates the Cold War period (65.35%), it is much less frequent after it (26.09%). Conventional war becomes the dominant type after 1990 (47.83%); SNC wars go up as well, rising to the level of irregular wars (26.09%).²⁵ The decline of irregular wars following the end of the Cold War is striking (Figure 2), a trend that is robust to normalization (i.e. onsets by year).

²⁴ We establish 1991 as the cutoff year since it corresponds to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of several new states. We have estimated the regression models below with different dummies for Cold War (exploring cutoff points from 1985 to 2000) and found that the critical year for conventional and irregular war is 1991, and the critical year for SNC is 1989 (these are the years for which the dummy has the greatest substantive effect on the occurrence of these types of wars.)

²⁵ Setting the cutoff year in 1989 does not change the picture. During the 1944-1988 period, 65.22 % of all civil wars were irregular, 28.26% conventional and 6.52 % SNC. During the 1989-2004 period, 32.73% were irregular, 41.82% conventional and 25.45% SNC.

Table 3. Civil War Onsets, by Technology of Rebellion (1944-2004)

Technology of Rebellion	Cold War		Post-Cold War		Both Periods	
	N (1944-1990)	% (1944-1990)	N (1991-2004)	% (1991-2004)	N (1944-2004)	% (1944-2004)
Conventional	27	26.73%	22	47.83%	49	33.33%
Irregular	66	65.35%	12	26.09%	78	53.06%
Symmetric non-conventional	8	7.92%	12	26.09%	20	13.61%
Total	101	100%	46	100%	147	100%

Figure 2. Irregular Civil Wars as a Proportion of All Civil Wars, by Decade



Geographic and temporal patterns tell a story that is consistent with our argument. With the end of the Cold War, civil wars shifted away from Asia and Latin America and toward Eurasia, Sub-Saharan Africa and, to a lesser degree, the Middle-East and North Africa (MENA). After 1990, irregular war declined steeply in both Asia and Latin America.²⁶ In contrast, Eurasia experienced a rise of conventional civil wars linked to processes of new state formation, the split of the Soviet military arsenal, and frequent Russian military intervention (Evangelista 1996). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the most remarkable Post-Cold War trend is the explosion of SNC wars; the abrupt interruption of superpower assistance to low capacity states degraded their ability to deter even poorly organized rebels.²⁷ Lastly, the MENA region appears idiosyncratic in that both conventional and irregular wars experienced a rise in the Post-Cold War period despite the relatively high capacity of states there. The resilience of irregular war, in particular, can be traced to the emergence of transnational, militant Islamism and the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Having laid out the main trends, we analyze the determinants of each of the three technologies of rebellion in a regression framework. We use a multinomial logit estimation to examine the likelihood that a specific technology of rebellion is used in a civil war, given its onset. The dependent variable is a categorical variable (*Technology of Rebellion*), taking value of 1 for conventional wars, 2 for irregular wars, and 3 for SNC wars. Our main explanatory variable is a dummy differentiating the two periods under consideration (*Post 1990*), which we expect to be positively associated with conventional and SNC civil wars, and negatively associated with irregular civil wars.²⁸ We also use two additional

²⁶ Castañeda (1993) notes that in Latin America the era of armed politics and guerrilla insurgencies ended with the Cold War.

²⁷ According to Stedman (1996:236), these conflicts are closely connected with the end of the Cold War which “undermined the external sources of support for Africa’s patrimonial regimes and left some with no legs to stand on.”

²⁸ Post 1990 takes value 1 for all years between 1991 and 2004 (including both these years) and value 0 otherwise.

specifications of the explanatory variable to better capture the mechanisms at work: the first is a dummy variable marking new countries emerging from a communist state (*New Post Communist*);²⁹ we expect it to be positively associated with conventional civil wars since these processes of state partition tended to leave behind them large military arsenals. The second one is a dummy variable indicating whether a major rebel actor claimed to be broadly guided by Marxist ideas (*Marxist Rebels*); civil wars featuring such rebels were naturally much more common during the Cold War, but they were far from the only ones.³⁰ This variable should be associated with irregular war given our posited link between a Marxist ideological platform and robust insurgency. We use these three variables in separate models to avoid collinearity issues.

We include an additional set of independent and control variables in order to test a number of competing hypotheses on the determinants of Technology of Rebellion, as well as to avoid omitted variable bias. *GDP per capita* is a general proxy of state capacity, which should be positively associated with conventional and irregular wars, and negatively associated with SNC wars.³¹ Likewise, *Oil Exporter* should have a positive effect on state capacity due to revenues and, therefore, increase the likelihood of irregular and conventional war vis-à-vis SNC.³² Both GDP per capita and Oil Exporter are problematic

²⁹ We code as such all countries that emerged from a communist state, not necessarily in 1991, but always after 1990. The corollary here is that these new states result from processes of partition of old states that entail the partition of their armed forces. The list of cases is depicted in table A4 of the Appendix.

³⁰ Of all civil wars that took place before 1991 (a total of 101), 33 (32.67%) involved Marxist rebels.

³¹ We include Fearon and Laitin's (2003) lagged measure of GDP (Log of GDP per capita in thousands of 1985 U.S. dollars, in World Bank data), but we also run a set of robustness tests (available upon request) with two alternative measures: lagged constant 2000 U.S. dollars, also from the World Bank (2007); and lagged value of current international dollars, from Penn World Table 6.1 (Heston et al. 2006).

³² We use Fearon and Laitin's (2003) dummy variable, which has value 1 if the country is an oil exporter, and 0 if not.

proxies for state capacity (Collier et al. 2003; Hegre et al. 2001), but we lack a better measure and it is standard practice to include them in civil war models. As a way to address this, we include *Military Personnel*, a proxy for the strength of a state's military, taken from COW 3.02 (Singer et al 1972), in thousands, lagged one year. We include *Rough Terrain*, which should have a positive effect on irregular war compared to the other two types, since mountainous terrain has been claimed to favor this technology of warfare (Fearon and Laitin 2003).³³ *Ethnic War* is included to account for potential differences in warfare driven by the presence or absence of an ethnic cleavage, following Kaufmann's (1996) argument that ethnic civil wars are more likely to be fought conventionally compared to non-ethnic civil wars, and Kaldor's (1999) conjecture that they are more likely to be SNC wars after the end of the Cold War.³⁴ In contrast, our theoretical prior is that ethnic cleavages should not drive technologies of rebellion. Last, we include the variable *Trade*, a measure of the magnitude of trade flows (imports plus exports) as a percentage of GDP. This is a standard proxy for globalization,³⁵ which serves to test for the competing hypothesis that the change in type of warfare is explained by economic integration. Indeed, the share of

³³ We include Fearon and Laitin's (2003) measure of Rough Terrain, which is the log of estimated % mountainous terrain in a country.

³⁴ Kaldor (1999) uses the term "new wars" to describe wars motivated by ethnic animosities. We include ethnic war as a dummy variable: 1 if the civil war is ethnic, 0 if not, as coded by Sambanis (2001). Sambanis defines ethnic war as that taking place between communities (ethnicities) who are in conflict over the power relationship that exists between those communities and the state; and he codes as ethnic civil war "episodes of violent conflict between governments and national, ethnic, religious, or other communal minorities (ethnic challengers) in which the challengers seek major changes in their status... Rioting and warfare between rival communal groups is not coded as ethnic warfare unless it involves conflict over political power or government policy" (6-7).

³⁵ Sachs and Warner (1995); Garret (2001); Dutt and Devashish (2002). We use the World Bank (2007) indicator.

open economies in the world increased in the early 1990s, particularly because of the opening of the postcommunist and developing economies (Sachs and Warner 1995), and world trade as a percentage of world's GDP "increased from around one-third of world output in the early 1970s to almost 45 percent in 1995" (Garret 2001:7-8).³⁶

The results are presented in Table 4, which displays the estimated coefficients for conventional and SNC wars; irregular war is the reference category.³⁷

³⁶ Kaldor (1999) connects the rise of "new wars" to globalization. However, the effect of globalization (i.e. increased commercial and financial openness of states) on the likelihood of internal conflict has received no empirical support (Hegre et al. 2003; Fearon and Laitin 2003).

³⁷ We included Military Personnel and Trade in a second set of models (models 4, 5 and 6, which add these two variables to models 1, 2 and 3, respectively). Data on Military Personnel is missing in 18 cases and data on Trade is missing in 58 cases (many of these are wars taking place before 1960, as well as wars taking place in new states for which we lack a lagged indicator on these variables). Note that the number of cases in the second set of regression models shrinks due to these missing cases. Also, the high correlation of Trade with GDP per capita (0.4) raises collinearity concerns. In fact, both Hegre et al. (2001) and Fearon and Laitin (2003) have advised caution on the inclusion of this variable in civil war models.

Table 4. Multinomial Logit Regressions on Technology of Rebellion (1944-2004)

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Conventional						
Rough Terrain	0.003 (0.01)	0.003 (0.00)	0.007 (0.01)	0.002 (0.00)	0.003 (0.00)	0.004 (0.01)
Oil Exporter	0.072 (0.58)	0.372 (0.53)	-0.024 (0.58)	0.071 (0.76)	0.083 (0.89)	0.057 (0.76)
Ethnic War	0.199 (0.45)	0.083 (0.43)	-0.443 (0.52)	0.696 (0.76)	0.494 (0.78)	0.216 (0.87)
GDP per capita	0.003 (0.16)	-0.109 (0.18)	0.22 (0.16)	-0.344 (0.36)	-0.759 (0.52)	-0.179 (0.39)
Trade				-0.004 (0.02)	0.012 (0.02)	0.006 (0.01)
Military Personnel				-0.001 (0.00)	-0.002 (0.00)	-0.001 (0.00)
Post 1990	1.469** (0.49)			1.527** (0.74)		
New Post Communist		2.769** (1.21)			5.262* (3.1)	
Marxist Rebels			-1.843*** (0.68)			-1.312 (1.13)
Constant	-1.090** (0.45)	-0.705 (0.42)	-0.305 (0.48)	-1.148 (1.05)	-0.839 (1.18)	-0.788 (1.15)
SNC						
Rough Terrain	-0.022 (0.01)	-0.025 (0.02)	-0.023 (0.02)	-0.046*** (0.01)	-0.034** (0.01)	-0.031** (0.01)
Oil Exporter	-1.248 (0.82)	-0.883 (0.87)	-1.275 (0.79)	0.409 (0.9)	0.694 (1.02)	0.031 (0.8)
Ethnic War	-0.021 (0.58)	0.006 (0.57)	-0.846 (0.67)	0.229 (0.76)	-0.572 (0.77)	-1.09 (0.75)
GDP per capita	-0.248 (0.26)	-0.077 (0.22)	0.049 (0.22)	0.361 (0.56)	-0.673 (0.65)	0.167 (0.59)
Trade				-0.030* (0.02)	0.003 (0.02)	-0.004 (0.02)

Military Personnel				-0.021** (0.01)	-0.010* (0.01)	-0.010** (0.00)
Post 1990	2.539*** (0.63)			4.019*** (1.10)		
New Post Communist		-32.637*** (1.23)			-23.478*** (6.32)	
Marxist Rebels			-2.856** (1.23)			-36.257*** (0.78)
Constant	-1.207** (0.51)	-0.647 (0.66)	0.243 (0.78)	-0.628 (1.07)	0.633 (0.92)	0.936 (0.85)
Observations (N)	137	137	137	78	78	78
Chi2	27.285	4230.232	18.978	34.188	3176.507	5897.789

The results of model 1 reveal a strong and significant robust effect of the end of the Cold War (proxied with Post 1990) on technologies of rebellion, in the expected direction – showing that the descriptive patterns we presented above are robust to a multivariate regression specification.³⁸ According to this model, and holding all other variables at their sample mean, the probability that a civil war is fought conventionally increases from 29.02% during the Cold War to 59.6% after it; the probability that a civil war is fought irregularly decreases from 66.09% to 26.01%; and the probability of a civil war being SNC increases from 4.9% to 24.4%.³⁹ We obtain similar results in model 4. In model 2, and consistent with our theory, New Post Communist is highly significant, substantively and statistically, in accounting for the likelihood of conventional vis-à-vis irregular civil wars. Everything else equal, the probability of a civil war being fought conventionally is 89.3% if it takes place in a postcommunist new state; this probability is 58.3% lower (31%) if the civil war takes place in any other country. This variable displays a strong effect on SNC wars, reducing their likelihood.⁴⁰ This result holds in model 5. Lastly, in model 3, the variable Marxist Rebels displays a significant negative effect on both conventional and SNC wars. With all other variables at their sample mean, the probability of a civil war being irregular if the insurgents adopt a Marxist outlook is 85.34%, almost twice as high compared to insurgents who lack a

³⁸ Note that in models 1, 2 and 3, we lose 10 observations. This is due to missing data on GDP per capita. Of these cases, 4 correspond to conventional, 5 to irregular, and 1 to SNC civil wars; two are Cold War observations and eight are Post-Cold War ones. We ran the analyses excluding GDP per capita (thus, with all 147 cases), and the coefficients for the key variables remain consistent, although two variables become significant for SNC: Rough Terrain (with a negative sign, consistent with our hypothesis), and Oil Exporter (also taking a negative sign).

³⁹ When we pool together the two symmetric types (SNC and conventional), we again observe that the end of the Cold War has a positive effect on symmetric civil wars vis-à-vis irregular wars.

⁴⁰ Of all civil wars that take place in New Post Communist states (a total of twelve), ten are conventional, two are irregular and none is SNC.

Marxist platform (44.27%). This result supports our argument that a key mechanism explaining the dominance of irregular wars during the Cold War is the Marxist character of rebellions. Note that this variable loses its statistical significance in explaining conventional civil wars in model 6, a result due to the unavailability of data on Military Personnel for several of these cases.

GDP per capita and Oil Exporter are not significant across all specifications. Contrary to our expectations, irregular civil wars are no more likely in wealthier or oil exporter countries. We have already mentioned the problems associated with using GDP per capita and Oil Exporter as proxies for state capacity; moreover, given the robust correlation between GDP per capita and civil war onset, our sample contains primarily poor states. We find instead that Military Personnel has a negative and significant effect on SNC wars, confirming that these wars entail states with lesser military capacity. The non significance of this variable for conventional civil wars is also consistent with our conjecture that states fighting conventional wars have a military capacity comparable to those fighting irregular wars. Rough Terrain is not significant in the first three models, but is statistically significant for SNC wars in the last three specifications.⁴¹ Assuming that rough terrain favors rebels taking on stronger states, the negative sign here is consistent with our understanding of SNC wars as requiring a lower “geographical threshold” for rebellion.

We find no support for the two alternative hypotheses, ethnic war and globalization. Ethnic War never achieves significance demonstrating that it does not correspond to a specific technology of rebellion. Likewise, Trade has no significant effect on the technology of rebellion, indicating that the competing hypothesis on global economic integration can also be rejected.⁴²

⁴¹ Rough terrain suffers from some measurement error: this variable captures the proportion of a country that is “mountainous”, yet insurgencies can emerge in swamps, jungles, and other geographical contexts (Fearon and Laitin 2003:81).

⁴² The only exception is the negative coefficient of Trade for SNC wars in model 1, significant at the 10% level.

Overall, the empirical analysis supports our theoretical arguments. The descriptive data show that the end of the Cold War was a key turning point for civil wars: it is then that irregular war ceased to be the dominant technology of rebellion. In turn, this shift was accompanied by a change in the geography of civil war. Our interpretation stresses the degree to which states were able to withstand the shock of the end of the Cold War by drawing on their own resources. Sub-Saharan African states were clearly the most affected in this respect, as indicated by the rise of SNC wars in that region. The overall significance of the coefficients of our three measures capturing the shift in the international system (Post 1990, New Post Communist and Marxist Rebels) suggests the pathways through which the end of the Cold War affected internal conflict. Importantly, the multivariate regression specification allows us to confirm that the descriptive trends are robust to the inclusion of control variables, as well as to variables capturing competing mechanisms.⁴³

Finally, although our primary focus is on civil war onsets, we also examine the irregular civil wars that were ongoing when the Cold War ended. We find that most of these wars were affected by the end of the Cold War. First four irregular civil wars terminated as a result of the end of the Cold War: these were primarily Marxist insurgencies, as in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala; the insurgency in Mozambique against the Leftist government of the country also ended. These terminations are clearly linked with the end of the Cold War (Hironaka 2005). Second, three conflicts continued but switched away from irregular war after the end of the Cold War: Afghanistan, Angola, and Somalia. Third, three irregular wars persisted. These were Marxist insurgencies that did not receive external funding: Cambodia, Peru, and Colombia. Because of their autonomy, these rebels were able to withstand the shock of the end of the Cold War at least for some time (the rebels in Peru and Cambodia were eventually defeated). The Colombian FARC is an example of a rebel organization that managed to maintain its

⁴³ In a set of additional analyses, we use panel data and find that our results are also robust to a country/year specification. For this analysis, not included here but available upon request, we use Fearon and Laitin's (2003) dataset as our template.

ideological character, type of recruitment, and technology of rebellion despite having to resort to narco-trafficking for its financing (Gutiérrez Sanín 2004).

6. Conclusion

Our analysis contradicts the widespread belief that the end of the Cold War did not affect civil war; on the contrary, we find that it was transformed by it in a fundamental way. The prevalence of irregular war as a way of waging civil wars turns out to be a historical phenomenon associated with the characteristics of the international system during the Cold War.

Although irregular war is no longer dominant, it has not disappeared. An examination of Post-Cold War irregular conflicts suggests that they come in two major types. The first one consists of minor, peripheral wars, which Fearon (2004) describes as “sons of the soil” insurgencies (e.g. Aceh in Indonesia, South Thailand, Cabinda in Angola); these rebellions do not threaten power at the center and can be contained or resolved without major international repercussions. The second type consists of insurgencies with a radical Islamist outlook (e.g. Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Chechnya, Tajikistan, Afghanistan) which cluster in the Middle East/Central Asia and North Africa. This limited resilience of irregular war is indicative of a persisting link between strong ideological beliefs and irregular war.

While research on civil wars has recently turned its sight to the international *dimension* of civil wars, including the role of neighborhood contagion (Hegre and Sambanis 2006, Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008), refugees (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006), and transnational diasporas (Collier and Hoeffler 2004), it has been surprisingly neglectful of the international *system*. By identifying a major and overlooked process of transformation of civil wars, we are able to provide empirical support for the theoretical link between system polarity and internal conflict. This is a key point: just because they are domestic wars, civil wars are no less influenced by the international system than interstate wars.

By focusing on how civil wars are fought, we show the importance of taking the logic of warfare seriously in theorizing about civil wars. In doing so, we also address the current gap in the comparative civil war literature between two research programs: one focusing on the macro, crossnational level and another one privileging the micro, subnational level. We show how insights generated by micro-level

studies have implications for assumptions informing macro-level models. For instance, our analysis questions the central assumption of a major theory of civil war onset, namely the equation of civil war with insurgency (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Our findings reinforce the call for theoretical and empirical disaggregation (Wimmer, Cederman and Min 2009), place natural scope-conditions on existing theories of rebellion that are based primarily on state weakness, and redirect the theoretical focus on the role of multidimensional external support (as opposed to mere financing), beliefs, and military doctrines. We also suggest that a full understanding of both civil war onset and dynamics requires a much more refined understanding of the relationship between state and rebel capacity than we have developed so far.

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