Abstract: The “Arab Spring” uprisings of 2011 triggered a wide set of social movements and regime change across the Middle East and North Africa. While interconnected, uprisings in each nation took different forms and reached varied effects. This paper focuses on the development of conflict in Libya under Muammar Gaddafi and Syria under Bashar al-Assad in order to flesh out distinctions and interactions between uprisings, revolution, and civil war. My research first standardizes a conceptual definition of civil war from a long-standing scholarly debate. The presence or absence of civil war is examined in correlation to five specific independent variables drawn from the cases and past examinations of civil war: the nature of the governmental regime, territoriality of the conflict, militarization of the opposing sides, international influence, and regional players. Using Mill’s methods and qualitative analysis of field reports, media briefings, and political rhetoric, I find that the full presence of each of these independent variables accounts for civil war in the Libyan case. In the Syrian case, incomplete presence of the five independent variables has, for the moment, prevented full-fledged civil war. The research thus allows for a more complete understanding of what constitutes civil war and provides a framework for conflict analysis as Arab Spring movements develop.
Introduction

As the first flames of the 2011 “Arab Spring” swept from Tunisia through North Africa and the Middle East, authoritarian regimes thought invulnerable to protest and impossible to oust began to cede to massive protest. Attacks on governmental institutions and elite leaders ensconced from public opinion developed divergently in each nation, employing tailored strategies to mobilize the public and reap key support. This paper focuses on the nature and development of these Arab Spring uprisings in Libya and Syria, centering on civil war concerns in the two nations. I seek to identify the factors that influenced the 2011 conflict in Libya to evolve from uprising into recognition as a civil war, and the ways in which these factors were distinct from the development of conflict in Syria. I further use these distinctions to illuminate the conceptual, instrumental, and semantic nature of civil war in general.

In exploring the development of conflict in both cases and employing Mill’s methods of agreement and difference to contrast the uprisings, I find distinctions along several correlated environmental, institutional, political, and discursive factors. The conflict in Libya transformed into what was internationally recognized as civil war due to the presence of jointly necessary and sufficient variables. Harsh crackdowns, lack of civil society, and alienation of protestors by the Gaddafi regime exacerbated the grievances felt by rebel forces and smoothed over ethnic, religious, and tribal tensions. Militarization of coalition rebel forces and localization of the struggle to defined territories created the opportunity for defined rebel and loyalist troops. Finally, international intervention and training, regional rejection of Gaddafi’s regime, favorable media coverage, and recognition of the National Transitional Council as legitimate jointly pushed the conflict in Libya into civil war. Contrastingly, in Syria, instances of mild reform under Bashar al-Assad, popular concerns for security, and less territorial division prevented mass arming of the protestors under a defined rebel union, and international, media, and regional waffling on the Assad regime and the nature of the conflict has kept civil war at bay.

Conceptual Isolation of Civil War

This dependent variable of interest in the Libyan and Syrian conflicts is articulated as the presence or absence of civil war. However, the scholarly distinction between civil war and other types of conflict has been muddled, employing differing qualifications and varying thresholds. Civil war is frequently used in conjunction with or interchangeably with other forms of intrastate conflict, insurgency and counter-insurgency, uprisings, genocide or genocidal actions, and general loss of internal monopoly over the legitimate use of force. The lack of a cohesive definition of civil war confuses the framework of responses and semantically politicizes actions by regional and international players. Thus, in order to explore the causal factors in reaching civil war, the instrumental and semantic dimensions of civil war must first be isolated.

Instrumental Definition: Actors, Agendas, and Arms

The constitutive dimensions of civil war are conceptually under debate. The majority of scholarly literature derives from the Correlates of War (COW) Project, created to isolate thresholds of violence, statehood, territorality, and other markers that define the nature of conflict. However, the COW project’s reliance on quantitative data often glosses over distinctions between conflict

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1 See Max Weber on authority and state sovereignty, *Politics as a Vocation*, 1919.
zones and does not tightly define civil war versus other intrastate conflict. First, civil wars must be territorially enclosed exclusively within the borders of an internationally recognized state, a definition that can be further complicated by porous borders and regional balance and influence. To move forward, UN definitions of territoriality and statehood will determine the internality of conflict, distinguishing civil war from border disputes and separatist uprisings.

Second, the actors in a civil war must be clearly defined. The government must be one of the actors, functioning as an armed entity whose motive is to continue its control over resources, force, political mobilization, and self-determination. As statehood is determined through constitutions or other codifications of power, the government’s desire for control should have clear foundations in its political documents, troop deployment, and popular appeal. However, the breakdown between government actors, security forces such as the military and police, and loosely affiliated regime players can make pro-government forces less coherent. Instrumentally, the player in power in the years leading up to civil war constitutes the government side and struggles to maintain sovereignty through military and political control.

The opposition forces must also be delineated. Delineation is contentious: some rebel forces may be more loosely tied together than others, having multiple agendas, ethnic compositions, and territorial alliances. However, the rebel group must use violence to achieve a political and ideological agenda whose end goal is state control. The clarity of these objectives, whether for broader regime change or for a narrowly defined party platform, can vary, but rebels must be politically mobilized in their bid for legitimate authority and recognition. Rebel groups must also be able to credibly defend themselves and militarily confront the government forces in defined battleground regions: thus, rebels in a civil war are distinct from terrorists, insurgents, and other more delocalized conflicts. The rebel group necessarily has some means of financing and opportunity through which it can substantively challenge the government, but rebels are unified under defined leadership and shared objectives for political control rather than just desire for resources or economic exploitation. Rebel forces must be recruited locally, to focus civil wars away from multinational conflict zones and ideological struggles like jihadism that are not limited by state sovereignty. Indicators of these dimensions include the makeup of rebel forces, codification of objectives in speeches and disseminated documents, and recognition of the rebels by international players and the government as an opposing force.

The final, and most contentious, dimension is the threshold of violence that differentiates civil war from other conflicts. The generally accepted scholarly threshold, determined by the COW project, is a minimum of 1000 deaths in the conflict’s first year and sustained violence in all following years at an average of 1000 deaths per year until the conflict’s end. Nicholas Sambanis instead posits a range of casualties between 500 to 1000 deaths per year; however, the cases at hand already meet the 1000 threshold, as have instances of insurgency, genocide, and other civilian-targeted violence. Thus, a dimension for death count on the government side is crucial. The threshold generally used is 100 deaths per year on both sides, thus necessitating active resistance on both sides and

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5 Sambanis; Fearon and Laitin.


7 See COW; Small and Singer.

8 Fearon and Laitin.
eliminating massacres, scorched earth policies, and genocide. To inflict at least 100 deaths on defined government forces, rebels must have a level of military mobilization that conceptually narrows civil war. This threshold need not be overly strict, but in being sensitive to government and rebel action can facilitate speedier identification of civil war and civil war-prone conflicts so that violence can be subdued.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constitutive Dimension</th>
<th>Indicator Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internality</td>
<td>Conflict contained borders of an internationally recognized state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government actor</td>
<td>Government is major actor, seeks to maintain political control in support and legal codification, deploys troops against rebels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition actor</td>
<td>Rebels are organized under leadership and party platform, command territory and local recruitment, bid for national control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of conflict</td>
<td>Around 1000 deaths/year total; at least 100 deaths per each side</td>
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**Semantic Definition: the Politics and Rhetoric of Naming**

Creating a conceptual framework of civil war is important not only in operational terms but also in semantic terms. Rhetoric in media coverage bi-directionally interacts with the instrumental dimensions of civil war: rhetoric is fed and changed by policy reports, and in turn conversely publicizes and mobilizes conflicts. In Darfur, action by Sudanese politicians, international NGOs, and individual media figures to reframe and depoliticize genocide by semantically separating it from the North-South civil war defined the government-led Janjaweed as reckless destructive forces and relocated conflict within the realm of international obligation.10 Contrastingly, characterizing Iraq as insurgency rather than civil war highlighted sectarian tensions and fragmented control, and removed the issue of breached domestic sovereignty from continued US troop involvement.11 The semantics of civil war thus mobilizes momentum and popular support by ethically confirming or denying the actors,12 and highlights or glosses over sectarian divisions, resource struggles, and conflicting political ideologies. Naming a conflict a civil war also limits justification for intervention by invoking sovereignty and domestic autonomy, often allowing self-interested players to defer to realist concerns.13 Dichotomies between a just side and an unjust side are often reduced through the label of civil war rather than separatist movement, genocide, or insurgency, reflecting the motivations of governmental officials, policymakers, and international actors to shy away from military or diplomatic action. Thus, the politics of naming bi-directionally shapes the conceptual framework of civil war.

**Research Framework for Civil War**

Overall, the conceptual framing of civil war used in this research is sensitive to both instrumental and rhetorical inputs. In a civil war, the government and rebel sides must be clearly defined and consolidated within an internationally recognized state’s territorial boundaries. Both must have

9 Sambanis.  
11 Wong, “A Matter of Definition.”  
12 Kalyvas, “New and Old Wars.”  
articulated political and ideological agendas that inhere desire for state control and sovereignty through force, economic resources, legal authority, and popular support. The government side must represent the current political order, and must mobilize troops to counter rebel forces. The rebel forces must be locally derived, organized under a common platform, and cohesive leadership. Both sides mobilize politically and militarily, and must both suffer casualties of at least 100 individuals per year, with a sum total of around 1000 deaths in the first year. The rhetoric of civil war should thus be strong, with media coverage and international recognition sanctioning the conflict as domestic civil war.

Causality and Independent Variables

Causation of civil war is examined through the contextual environments surrounding conflict in Libya and Syria by isolating several independent variables that jointly reach the threshold of civil war. These independent variables are exhaustive of the political, social, and economic conditions so as to control for confounds and better establish causality. They are also internally enumerated to allow qualitative, rather than merely dichotomous, analysis. Five independent variables are implicated in the presence of civil war in Libya versus conflict but not civil war in Syria:

1) *The nature and actions of the previous regime*, including rise to power, makeup of the regime, public access to information and political dissent, and amenability to reform;
2) *The territoriality of conflict*, or the division of the state into government- and rebel-controlled territories with loosely or clearly defined battlegrounds, and the ability of the players to gain local support and resource access in these home bases;
3) *Militarization of government and rebel forces*, including the loss of monopoly of force by the government and the ability and willingness of the rebel forces to arm and train its members through either internal or external means into cohesive and united troops;
4) *International influence*, in the form of state, international organization, and NGO approval, aid, and/or intervention, and the nature of international media coverage influencing policymaking; and
5) *Regional players*, including the approval of bordering nations, regional organizations, and the flow of goods and services through borders.

These independent variables are causal rather than descriptive: they do not address the motivations or grievances that sparked protests and caused them to spread. Rather, they explain the mechanism by which civil war develops from and is differentiated from other forms of conflict. When they are jointly present in the cases explored, the conflict is instrumentally and rhetorically identified as civil war. When not jointly present, however, conflict does not reach the constitutive dimensions of civil war, indicating that these factors are individually insufficient but jointly necessary and sufficient.14

Method and Case Selection

This article tests the relative causal importance and mechanisms of the five independent variables isolated for civil war, using qualitative data from the conflicts in Libya and Syria. These cases are selected for their inclusion within the 2011 Arab Spring, and for their difference on the dependent variable: while the conflict in Libya has been recognized as civil war, conflict in Syria, though reaching high casualty rates and strong dissent against the al-Assad regime, has not yet been denoted

a civil war. The case studies employ Mill’s methods and process-tracing to identify trends concerning the influence of each independent variable in triggering civil war. Initially using Mill’s methods of agreement, the research is carried out under the assumption that an independent variable is not necessary if it is fully present in both cases, as the presence of civil war is only being examined in one case. Using Mill’s methods of difference to establish sufficiency, I examine which independent variables were present in Libya’s case of civil war but absent in Syria’s conflict distinct from civil war. While this method cannot confirm independent variables as sufficient causes, it can allow for a parsing of crucial independent variables that did differ between Libya and Syria.\footnote{Mahoney; Collier, David, “Process Tracing: Introduction and Exercises,” Beta Version, September 22, 2010; Fahnestock, Jeanne, and Marie Secor, “The Kinds of Causes,” Chapter 9 in Fahnestock and Secor, \textit{A Rhetoric of Argument} (New York: Random House, 1982), pp. 134-62.}

A semantic equation also aids in this process of identifying jointly sufficient independent variables: if \( A = \) Regime History, \( B = \) Territoriality, \( C = \) Militarization, \( D = \) International influence, and \( E = \) Regional players, then I posit the equation:

\[
\text{Civil War} = A + B + C + D + E
\]

where + represents the logical “AND” and thus civil war is satisfied by the union of all five variables, indicating that none are independently necessary or sufficient but that in conjunction they are jointly necessary and sufficient.\footnote{Ragin.}

I also trace the development of conflict in Libya and Syria and the qualitative aspects of each independent variable to create a hierarchy of independent variables and to establish causal mechanisms from independent variable to civil war. The established constitutive dimensions of civil war are compared against the nature of conflicts in Libya and Syria, where each independent variable is explored not only in the dichotomous presence/absence quality employed through Mill’s methods and the posited semantic equation, but also in a qualitative sense through primary- and secondary-source historical, political, social, and economic data.\footnote{Collier; Mahoney; Fahnestock.}

\section*{Case 1: Libya – Recognized Civil War}

Mass uprisings in Libya began on February 15, 2011 in the city of Benghazi, focusing on human rights abuses, social program mismanagement, and political corruption and finally demanding the end of Muammar Gaddafi’s rule.\footnote{Zenko; “Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East: Making Sense of Libya.” \textit{International Crisis Group. Middle East/North Africa Report} No.107, 6 June 2011.} The National Transitional Council, a coalition body of anti-Gaddafi forces, formed on February 27\footnote{Zenko; ICG, “Libya,” Alessi, Christopher. “Challenges Ahead for Libya.” \textit{Council on Foreign Relations.} 21 October 2011; Lynch, Marc. “What the Libyan intervention achieved.” \textit{Foreign Policy,} October 27 2011.} to consolidate resistance efforts nation-wide. As the NTC solidified its agenda and mobilization and Gaddafi cracked down in retaliation, the peaceful protests developed into a bloody civil war that was only officially ended with Gaddafi’s death on October 20, 2011 and the NTC’s declaration of victory.\footnote{Zenko; ICG, “Libya,” Alessi, Christopher. “Challenges Ahead for Libya.” \textit{Council on Foreign Relations.} 21 October 2011; Lynch, Marc. “What the Libyan intervention achieved.” \textit{Foreign Policy,} October 27 2011.} This conflict developed into an internationally recognized civil war that met casualty thresholds and the requirement of defined government and rebel sides due to influence of each of the five isolated independent variables. Gaddafi’s harsh and repressive regime, territorial division of Libya into NTC and loyalist strongholds, NTC armament and military training, coalition rebel forces, and the influence of the UN, NATO intervention, and the Arab League jointly propelled Libya’s conflict inexorably from peaceful protest to bloody civil war.
1) Nature of Regime

After the 1969 coup, Muammar Gaddafi’s purportedly socialist political system of “Jamaahiriya” razed civil society and centralized the government around Gaddafi’s sultanistic rule, characterized by an underlying monopoly of processes by his cult of personality. The Green Book and other texts formed Gaddafi into the “Brother Leader and Guide of the Revolution,” at once title-less and the essence of a state closed to popular participation. This system of control, while bestowed with large welfare programs to buy loyalty, drove Libya into economic distress and failed to reap the benefits of oil endowments. Regardless, Gaddafi remained unrepentant throughout his 42 years in power in his domestic and foreign policy for Libya, isolating himself from Africa and the Arab League and leaving his agenda unresponsive to popular will.

As the Arab Spring swept closer to Libya, Gaddafi condemned the protests, extending his 1973 rhetoric of dissenters as “stray dogs” to describe challengers in Benghazi as “rats” and “cockroaches” to be exterminated. As the NTC’s anti-regime protests expanded, Gaddafi’s response was to assume the defensive, rallying supporters and refusing to cede control at any price. This defensive posturing remained unchanged throughout the conflict as he rejected UN sanction of his actions, denied human rights abuses, and deployed security forces for violent scorched earth policies to rout out dissent. Even after Gaddafi’s death, his sons refused to accept NTC control and deplored its illegitimacy. Though the NTC responded in bloody fashion to loyalist troops who did rally around Gaddafi due to his legacy of favoritism, its harsh response was predetermined by Gaddafi’s defiant and violence-heavy rhetoric. Thus, Gaddafi’s repression, isolation from reality, and unwillingness to change enhanced the grievance of the Libyan people and triggered backlash of violent and unwavering attacks. Regime crackdowns provided the underlying grievances for uprisings and then acted as the proximate cause for NTC militarization by increasing its platform strength. Harsh responses both incited conflict and attracted larger popular support, widening protests into violent rejection of Gaddafi with no possibility of compromise. Regime extremism thus solidified the bloody nature of conflict by forcing the NTC’s hand and preventing negotiations, thereby making civil war largely inevitable.

2) Territoriality

The Libyan protests and subsequent civil war were strongly rooted in territorial divisions, paring Libya into rebel-controlled and loyalist-controlled cities. Uprisings in Libya began in Benghazi, and NTC control extended to incorporate other tribal and rural areas. This exploitation of tribal versus Tripoli allowed the NTC to mobilize forces nationwide. While pre-existing tribal divisions were only temporarily subdued under the NTC’s anti-Gaddafi platform, the ability to conglomerate different sects based on shared anti-elite grievance strongly expanded the NTC’s territorial scope.

21 Eljahmi.
22 Quinn, Ben, “Gaddafi speech and Libya unrest – as it happened.” The Guardian News Blog (22 February 2011)
23 CNN Wire Staff. “From voice said to be Gadhafi, a defiant message to his foes.” CNN World, September 1, 2011.
27 Collier & Hoeffler.
Shared agenda facilitated wide NTC home bases with popular support that deeply reduced loyalist troop efficacy. Finally, areas under loyalist control were rather centralized in areas with personal significance for Gaddafi but not for loyalist troops, including Tripoli and Sirte. Poor exploitation of territory by the government meant that despite defined frontlines, loyalist dissolution was a constant problem and required harsher control for military gains, solidifying the development of protests into civil war.

3) Militarization
After the NTC’s consolidation in ideology and territorial control, arms access and training crucially sustained conflict and prevented early NTC defeat. NATO intervention under UN Security Council approval provided air strikes, weapons, and military training to rebel forces, facilitating violent development of the NTC. Arms trade and mercenaries from regional allies such as Qatar and transnational businesses created mass militarization that tipped the balance from peaceful protest to armed civil war. While rebels were initially portrayed as unproven and incapable in war, foreign training and aid reduced risks of dissolved control and enforced shared NTC identity through similar troop experience. The ensuing lack of government monopoly over violence thus crucially allowed the NTC to militarize to counter bloody loyalist crackdowns. Militia formation and exploitation of tribal arms access allowed forces united by grievances to functionally achieve violence rather than being immediately subdued by loyalist military and security troops.

4) International Influence
International influence was a key cause of Libyan civil war through multiple mechanisms. Strongly favorable media coverage of the NTC and Gaddafi’s longstanding negative image justified international action. Even in rhetoric that described Libya as a civil war as early as February, news organizations and think tanks identified governmental repression as a legitimate reason for NTC violence. Such rhetoric was echoed in policy briefs and lobbyist statements that ultimately led to UN action through Resolution 1973 to establish a no fly zone and allow intervention under the Responsibility to Protect to prevent “widespread and systematic attacks against civilian populations”. This provided the framework for NATO intervention, which solidified both the instrumental capacity of the NTC as well as its anti-regime, pro-democracy identity. French ties to Libya as a sphere of influence, and European pushes for US involvement persuaded US government policy and rhetoric to act in favor of intervention to support the NTC due to fears of regime-led “massacres”, over-

30 Sharqieh; Al Jazeera, “Frontlines.”
32 ICG, “Libya”; Harris.
33 Al Jazeera.
34 Lynch.
36 ICG, “Libya.”
38 Spencer.
40 Zenko; UN Resolution 1973.
42 Hastings.
44 Al Jazeera.
whelming tenuous public support.45

Such strong international involvement on the side of the NTC, with clear UN codification of NTC legitimacy and NATO military support,46 defined and separated the opposing sides, delegitimized Gaddafi’s regime, and opened space for a policy of NTC military attack.47 Thus, the underlying condition of Gaddafi’s legacy of withdrawal from the international community, combined with proximate NTC-biased rhetoric and subsequent instrumental and legal support from NATO, the UN, and individual states, provided the causal mechanism that, following harsh regime crackdowns and NTC platform development, triggered the Libyan conflict’s development from uprising into civil war.

5) Regional Players

Gaddafi’s isolation from reality was also highly causal in Libyan civil war by motivating regional players to cast their favor for the NTC. As Gaddafi was already a pariah in the Arab and African world due to his support of despots, bizarre foreign policy, and general disrepute, regional nations did not have to consider a delicate balance of power in supporting the NTC.48 Instead, the framework of the Arab Spring allowed regional leaders like Jordan’s King Abdullah49 and Tunisia and Egypt’s interim governments50 to support liberalization with little political risk. Additionally, Libya’s geographical location in the Maghreb, balanced between the Middle East and Africa, allowed more removed Gulf nations like Qatar to donate troops and arms to the NTC51, and caused regional organizations like the Arab League to unanimously condemn the regime and encourage international intervention.52 Gaddafi’s ostracism in the regional community did not only provided the causal mechanism for civil war by privileging neighboring military and political support of the NTC: it also meant that there were no alliances to be lost or harsh perceptions to incur if loyalist reprisals were especially harsh, thereby eliminating political costs of harsh backlash.53 Thus, Libyan isolation reduced fears of civil war spillover, and caused regional players to support the NTC both politically under the framework of the Arab Spring as well as militarily through arms flow and troops. The combined political and military regional influence increased violent clashes between loyalist and opposition forces and spiraled heightened conflict into defined civil war.

Case 2: Syria – Fears of Future Civil War

The Syrian conflict, which began with protests on January 26th 2011 and escalated into a consolidated uprising on March 15th, has become the bloodiest conflict of the Arab Spring. Military and opposition forces have suffered over 9,000 casualties since the beginning of protests, violence, and army involvement.54 Similar to the civil war in Libya and the revolutions in Arab Spring Tunisia and Egypt, Syrian protestors have demanded an overarching campaign of regime change.55 While civil
war rhetoric surrounding the Syria abounded throughout the end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012 and even earlier, and the death toll has definitively reached thresholds overall and likely for each side as well, the conflict has yet to be conclusively denoted a civil war. Despite a harsh and repressive regime under Bashar al-Assad, the existence of small concessions for regime reform, the decentralized quality of violence due to high ethnic heterogeneity, incomplete militarization and mobilization of opposition forces, and waffling and inaction by international institutions and regional players are jointly insufficient to cause the conflict in Syria to reach instrumental and semantic thresholds for civil war.

1) Nature of Regime

Syria’s sultanistic system of control, characterized by leader monopoly of governmental and political processes, is similar to that of Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt, and strongly eliminated popular engagement in the political process and transition of power. However, succession by Bashar al-Assad in 2000 reduced dissatisfaction to a degree and opened space for reform. Syria’s history of sectarian conflict and instability forced civilians to accept higher repression in exchange for security, and loyalty to the regime was further bought with side-payments in the form of social programs and welfare. Additionally, al-Assad’s government countered its reliance on Alawite minority by attempting to integrate Syria’s heterogeneous population through elite representation of both Alawite and Sunni sects.

Although the regime remained largely repressive and not amenable to dissent, political prisoners were released and popular debate was initially allowed in the beginning of al-Assad’s “Damascus Spring.” However, the regime remained fairly dysfunctional and schizophrenic, engaging in cycles of “escalating protests and repression” and eventually cracking down after small reforms failed to satisfy the public. Similarly, Al-Assad referred to the outbreak of the Arab Spring as a “foreign conspiracy” while concurrently discussing lifting Syria’s state of emergency, but denied a hand in the unrest when his forces crushed dissent. While al-Assad’s initial popularity prevented protests as vehement as those in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt, his toothless speeches for regime reform and purported cease-fires and accompanying stifling of calls for regime change incited protests to continue and heighten. Thus, the government’s consolidation and military mobilization against civilians and opposition forces meets that dimension of civil war. However, while protestors see through al-Assad’s unaccountability and lack of commitment to non-violence, cease-fires, or true change, the regime’s higher degree of fluidity and stronger control of force meant the regime was insufficiently repressive and violent to propel opposition protests to all-out civil war.

2) Territoriality

The strongest evidence of conflict centralized around specific locations has been in Homs,
Syria’s second-largest city. Government forces attempted to regain control of Homs from majority Sunni armed rebels, as they had previously completed in Hama and other large towns. Massive resistance by the people of Homs turned the conflict into a “siege city,” where violence between government and opposition forces and shared casualties acted as a microcosm for a potential civil war. However, beyond spotlights of siege cities under disputed control, the conflict in Syria is largely more decentralized. Neither rebels nor government forces have amassed large tracts of territory to serve as home bases, and ethnic heterogeneity prevented rebels from controlling and exploiting regions for military gains. Though these siege cities provide a reference for how conflict in Syria could develop into civil war, and such harsh government action may incite wider public support of the opposition, the current lack of popular support for one defined rebel organization extends the rebels’ decentralized and heterogeneous nature. Thus, while it is possible that conflict will continue to become more territorialized, the status quo lack of divided regions prevents the rebel forces from consolidating and combating governmental forces to a degree that meets the standards of internal military mobilization and recruitment for civil war.

3) Militarization
Non-consolidation of multiple rebel groups also prevented the tactical military deployment and arms access necessary to cause civil war. Contrary to biased international media reports that indicate no armament of rebel forces, there have been instances of violence and casualties inflicted by protestors against regime forces. However, overall the Syrian rebel forces lack arms, training, and centralization. Rebels are split between the Turkey-based Syrian National Council, the Damascus-based National Council of Coordination, and the Syrian Free Army: the three disagree on the use of violence and the scope of negotiations with Assad, with none representing overarching public desires. Though the Syrian Free Army is made up of professionally trained defecting soldiers from the government army, the rebel forces lack coherence in both political and military mobilization and fail to command a wide base of troops. Of the 9,000 casualties since the conflict’s beginning, a conservative estimate indicates that a majority of deaths were inflicted by Alawite loyalist forces against Sunni protestors, as in the case of Alawite shabiha against Sunni protestors in Homs. While loyalist forces command access to heavy weaponry and tanks, rebel forces are unable to attain major access to weaponry or training and thus cannot complete wide-scale resistance against the regime. Without adequate militarization of the opposition, Syrian conflict cannot develop into civil war.

4) International Influence
Media coverage and international perception of Syrian conflict has largely been inconclusive...
and uncertain. Media sources and scholars have alternately been favorable to government-persecuted civilians and uncertain on the nature of the conflict as civil war; Andrew Tabler of the Washington Institute indicates, simply, that it is “kind of a civil war”\textsuperscript{77} while additional scholars warn of the conflict’s increasing intensity. Uncertainty is heightened due to the political implications of naming the conflict: identifying Syrian conflict as sectarian civil war reduces the legitimacy of any future intervention\textsuperscript{78}, allowing the international community to “wash [their] hands”\textsuperscript{79} as accused by Arab press. The inert nature of the international community can largely be explained by overstretch in Libya. Though the UN High commission on Human Rights warned that as civil war “happened in Libya, it may happen in Syria”\textsuperscript{80} and Secretary of State Clinton echoed civil war fears\textsuperscript{81}, actors remain largely disinterested in aiding regime change or consolidating civil war sides.\textsuperscript{82} Generally, in conjunction with the Syrian’s Foreign Minister’s desire to prevent “internationalization”\textsuperscript{83} of the conflict, European disinterest\textsuperscript{84} and international paralysis\textsuperscript{100} represent insufficient international involvement to consolidate rebel capacities and cause civil war. The international community throughout the spring of 2012, however, has been increasingly spurred by mass atrocities in Syria to take action, culminating in a decision on April 1\textsuperscript{85} to approve limited rebel support. The “Friends of Syria” coalition members have, in the case of Arab nations, approved $100 million in funding to the Syrian opposition, while the US has pledged non-arms based communication equipment to facilitate rebel cohesiveness and mobilization.\textsuperscript{85} This decision signals a shift towards international reinvigoration, a move that, while perhaps shortening the conflict, may likely move the conflict’s nature further towards definitive civil war.

5) Regional Players

The balance of power in the Gulf is more complicated than Libya’s isolation in the Maghreb. Ethnic and religious heterogeneity and sectarian ties within Syria have divided already antagonistic actors and confused regional action overall.\textsuperscript{86} Individual states have recently denounced Assad’s regime: King Abdullah of Jordan argued that Assad’s lack of reform will extend violence and make his regime unsustainable\textsuperscript{87}, Iraq’s Prime Minister al-Maliki denounced the regime and warned of Syria’s “spring” turning into a “winter” civil war\textsuperscript{88}, and Turkey’s Prime Minister Erdogan went as far as to call Assad “someone who has fought until the death against his own people, [like]…Hitler”\textsuperscript{89}. These vocal denouncements of Assad’s regime influenced the Arab League to first suspend Syria if it did not halt its violent repression\textsuperscript{90} and then to approve unprecedented economic and political sanctions in a 19:3 vote.\textsuperscript{91} Its actions overall, however, were waffling, as though the league deployed observer

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Choucair, Walid. “The West doesn’t mind a civil war.” \textit{Al Arabiya}, 27 November 2011.
\textsuperscript{81} Abdulrahim.
\textsuperscript{82} Krause-Jackson.
\textsuperscript{84} Debieuve.
\textsuperscript{87} Weymouth.
\textsuperscript{88} Tehran Times.
\textsuperscript{89} Erdogan, Tayyip. “Turkish PM: Syria on a Thin and Dangerous Line.” \textit{Telegraph}, 15 November 2011.
\textsuperscript{91} BBC News, “Syria Unrest.”
groups, it did not call for intervention,\textsuperscript{92} Iraq and Lebanon abstained from the vote due to concerns about spillover of Syrian instability, and the balance of power between Iran support and Saudi Arabian support of Sunni rebels made cohesive Gulf action impossible.\textsuperscript{93} The “Friends of Syria” cohort, however, has further pushed Arab nations towards military and non-military aid of rebels, approving $100 million for rebel support that, while it does not explicitly include armaments, will certainly improve rebel mobilization and military capacity.\textsuperscript{94} However, barring an explicit rebel strategy, it is uncertain whether salaries and other rebel payments will instrumentally shorten the conflict. Thus, while the recent approval of sanctions signal increasing Syrian isolation in the Gulf and increasing regional consolidation against Assad, and Arab states’ approval of explicit foreign aid to Syrian rebels pushes the conflict more towards the brink, the complex sectarian ties and desire for power in the Gulf have so far prevented entirely cohesive regional influence for one side.

\textbf{Comparison Summary and Implications}

The difference in each independent variable for both cases is portrayed in the table below. Conceptually, both cases meet the dependent variable dimension of 1000 deaths/year, and Syria likely (though not definitively) meets the standard of 100 government casualties. Both cases are limited to the territorial boundaries of the state, and despite regional and international influence in militarization, rebels are still recruited locally. The government sides in both cases were clearly defined and militarily mobilized against both civilians and rebel fighters, though Gaddafi retaliation to protestors was more swiftly and overtly violent than Assad’s flip-flopping promises of reform. In Syria, however, contrasting from Libya, rebels lack coherence in a common struggle beyond regime change. The major opposition groups disagree on strategy and utilize separate leadership and mobilization systems, and thus do not harness public support. As such, the Syrian case did not meet the constitutional dimension of rebel consolidation and political and military mobilization, though its conflict currently meets two out of the three constitutive dimensions.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Nature of Regime} & Libya & Syria \\
\hline
\textbf{Territoriality} & Harsh, isolated, no reform & Harsh, but some reform \\
\hline
\textbf{Militarization} & Divided rebel / loyalist control, tribal unification & Siege cities, but not defined \\
\hline
\textbf{International Influence} & Yes: Arms, training, casualties on both sides, coalition force & Weak: Death count met, but little rebel arms access \\
\hline
\textbf{Regional Influence} & Strong: UN recognition of NTC, NATO intervention, media favorable to rebels & Weak: international refusal to act, some diplomatic pressure / US communications $, media waffling \\
\hline
\textbf{Civil War?} & Strong: Gaddafi isolation from Arab League, AU, Maghreb; Qatar forces, arms, training & Some: Arab League sanctions / funding, Turkey / Iraq disapproval, but regional Gulf allies \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Libya versus Syria, Conflict and Civil Wars}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{92} Zenko.
\textsuperscript{93} Rafizadeh.
\textsuperscript{94} Myers.
Syria’s decentralized and fragmented rebellion can thus be traced back through the mechanisms of territoriality, militarization, and international and regional influence. Harsh governments existed in both cases, and while Assad made toothless promises for reform, this was not enough either to propel or subdue conflict. Similar regime problems triggered the uprisings, and similar harsh regime reactions increased violence: the area of concern then is what prevented high militarization of Syrian rebel forces. Where Libyan uprisings began in tribal locations and expanded through tribal regional networks under the NTC coalition, Syrian uprisings began small and did not bridge gaps of extreme heterogeneity. Thus, territory under rebel control was ill-defined outside of certain siege cities, preventing adequate home base advantage and popular support to house and refurbish troops and carry out civil war.

Next, such disjointed opposition and fragmented territories made militarization near impossible. Except for defectors from the army, most troops were poorly trained and poorly armed, as arms inflow from other nations or from nation-wide militias did not exist. Dispute over military strategy and the viability of violence against the Assad regime versus negotiation again meant that mass militarization could not be carried out. Even if small victories were won in control of individual cities, violence was generally initiated by government forces due to the lack of means on the rebel side. Thus, civil war was not reached due to the low opportunity of the rebels to inflict military losses on the government in any sustainable way.

This lack of military aid can be traced even further back to the lack of international and regional support. Where Libyan rebels were given arms, training, troops, and tactical strikes by neighbors and NATO, the Syrian conflict remained largely only fought and funded by Syrians. The international community focused on rhetoric that was uncertain about the conflict, and exploited this uncertainty to assume inaction due to malaise and embroilment in Libyan intervention. While funding has recently been approved by Arab nations and the US, such funding is labeled as non-lethal and does not explicitly provide arms or training, as in the Libya conflict. Thus, waffling on civil war concerns allowed international organizations to stay removed, as there was no clearly identified coalition rebel force to support either militarily or with humanitarian aid. Instead, international organizations could use the semantic uncertainty of civil war to defer to Syrian sovereignty and their own self-interest to refuse getting involved. Similar waffling occurred on the regional front as well, due to complicated sectarian tensions and the need to maintain a balance of power in the Gulf. Syria’s ethnic makeup and ties with neighbors meant that one framework of action by bordering states would not be taken, as it was against Gaddafii in Libya. Rather, while individual states have become more vocal against Assad and while the Arab Spring has voted for sanctions against Syria, it articulates these sanctions as a way to prevent international involvement in stark contrast to the League’s call for international help to topple Gaddafii. All funding pledged by Arab nations for the Syrian rebels have been allotted discursively towards salaries and non-lethal support, again toeing the line of regional conflagration versus the explicit armament in the Libyan conflict. The prospect for Syrian instability to spill over, Assad’s history of providing security, and an uncertain balance of power means that regional players will not offer any sort of military or political aid that could favor one side or another. In the short-term, instead of attempting to nurture the Arab Spring in a way that could spark all-out civil war, the neighboring states prefer to wait to see which side’s victory can achieve the most profitable stability. However, as the Arab League increasingly turns against Syria in joint actions against Assad’s regime, it remains to be seen if this influence will remain merely political and financial, or if explicit military involvement will begin to favor rebel leaders and consolidate the opposition’s offense.
Conclusion

Two main conclusions derive from this article’s tests of causal mechanisms and independent variables for civil war. First, the Libyan case of Arab Spring uprisings clearly met the threshold of civil war, both instrumentally and semantically. The war was contained within Libya’s borders, mobilized clearly defined Gaddafi-led loyalist and NTC-led opposition forces, and spotlighted differing calls for political and military control. In the months-long war, casualties vastly exceeded 3500 and were born to large degrees on both sides. Presence of civil war can be traced to Gaddafi’s harsh regime causing grievance and forcing violent backlash, Libya’s territorial division between Tripoli-centered loyalist forces and tribally-linked, internationally supported, and regionally and internationally armed and trained rebel troops, and Gaddafi’s ostracism causing swift legitimization of the NTC and regime change.

Second, the Syrian case currently fails to meet the threshold of opposition consolidation and capacity for parallel reasons. While the conflict has been confined within the state and the government forces are mobilized, having waged reprisals against protestors that met the death count threshold, Syria’s opposition lacks cohesive rebel leadership, agenda, political strategy, or military mobilization. While Assad’s bloody crackdown on protestors continues to grow, his waffling promises of reform prevented popular grievances from yielding one rebel identity. Such fragmentation caused conflict to be decentralized and largely on the defensive in siege cities where opposition forces lacked the military aid, arms, and training to inflict substantial government losses. International paralysis post Libya and regional uncertainty due to closer geographical and sectarian ties are evidence of the delicate balance in Syria, though paralysis has been challenged by recent UN, Arab, and US decisions for limited rebel support.

As international and regional actions have been determined as lynchpins in driving conflict to civil war, it remains to be seen what will happen with increasing Arab League sentiment against Assad. While international influence, let alone intervention, is not strictly permitted by the UN Charter since it militarizes one side, such action may be shown to heighten the conflict’s intensity but reduce its costs in death and destruction. Manipulating the semantics of what qualifies count as civil war, as has been seen in Syria, can focus tensions on civilian control and allow rebels to more efficiently overthrow a bloody and repressive government. If, as seen in the Arab Spring, prospect for regaining control is slim, then motivations to shorten conflict, subdue violence, and prevent attacks on unarmed civilians, may win out when weighed against international fears of bog-down. As conflict in Syria heightens and international consensus grows, the international community has a possible decision to eschew inaction and sovereignty concerns in favor of security and stability. As the international community does move towards increased engagement, decisions supporting limited or substantial intervention may in fact tip the balance of conflict in Syria towards civil war; this throws into question the assumption that civil war is necessarily the worst outcome, and posits that perhaps, a civil war that ends quickly is more favorable from a security as well as human rights standpoint to drawn-out mass governmental violence against its citizens. Tactical intervention under the framework of Libya may then be increasingly employed as a mechanism to turn conflicts of attrition into shortened civil wars in the hopes of toppling autocracies, consolidating rebel allies, and fundamentally reshaping the political and strategic makeup of a new Middle East.
Primary Sources


Gaddafi-led military coup, takeover from King Idris, used military rhetoric and apparatuses.


Western coverage of Syria: warnings, predictions, and foregone conclusions about civil war. Homs, population transfers, behavior of Syrian regime support – Assad assurance to fight to end. Means leadership more likely to induce civil war – but outside forces refusing intervention – “washing hands”?


Quotes: Gadhafi family refusal to step down, demonizes NATO as occupier, unwillingness to lay down arms.


Video recording of Erdogan speech denouncing Syria; calls for Assad to step down.


Al-Maliki rejection of Assad, warns of civil war and regional spillover.


Explores Libya as civil war rather than rebellion; contrast between narrative of organic rebellion versus longterm existence of armed militias; NATO intervention formative to TNC identity and force.


Approves US intervention in Libya to prevent “massacres” and protect civilians.


“It happened in Libya, it may happen in Syria. More and more soldiers refuse to become complicit in international crimes and are changing sides. There is a serious risk of Syria descending into armed struggle.”

Quinn, Ben, “Gaddafi speech and Libya unrest – as it happened.” The Guardian News Blog
Transcript of Gaddafi’s speech and journalistic response in February; rhetoric of martyrdom and rebels as “rats,” rally cry to Gaddafi supporters.

Authorizes all necessary measures to protect civilians in Libya (invoking R2P), establishes no-fly-zone, enforces arms embargo, strengthens sanctions.

Commitment to sovereign integrity of Libya, condemnation of human rights violations; recognizes NTC as legitimate ruling body in Libya and authorizes UN Support Mission in Libya deployment.


Describes movement of Syrian conflict in phases, as articulated by rebels in Syria. Focuses on conflict in Homs and development of uprising versus government in civil war format.


Early use of civil war rhetoric following Gaddafi and son speech; geographic centralization of forces in Benghazi versus Tripoli and Sirte; army inaction for revolution or necessarily for loyalist forces either.


Interview with King Abdullah – open communication with Syria but sustained violence and lack of reform under Assad (rebels as “thugs”); immediate support of NTC.

Secondary Sources


Rhetoric of “degeneration” of peaceful uprising into civil war; doesn’t articulate formation of TNC leadership or true military coalition status.


Some reform by Assad in past, but regime is dysfunctional and ultimately lost credibility by brutally crushing reform; public demands regime change, not reform. Some sectarian tensions and militarization, but protest began small and national identity and popular culture are more unifying: lesser likelihood of civil war.


Arab League 19:3 voted up sanctions against Syria, after Syria refused Arab League monitors on the ground; avoiding “internationalization” of conflict; Syrian isolation.


Disunity of NTC, civil war rhetoric, need civil society and smoothed regional rivalries.


NTC regional and tribal factions remain undetermined, and require codification of internal balance of power plus institutional consolidation.


Importance of tribal factors and moderate NTC coalition.


Industry and factory production down. Defections in Syrian army. Arab press reports: hyping up conflict. Assad won’t regain control; lack of domestic and international support except for Iran, Lebanon. Violence against Sunnis means Saudi Arabia against Syria. However, disinterest from Europe. Risk of civil war, but not realized yet.


Gaddafi unwillingness to reform; strong legacy of political crackdown, total control of state under Gaddafi or family; Jamahiriya and Five Point address established absolute rule, totalitarian statehood, criminalized dissent and political organization.


Gaddafi’s desire for pan-Africanism buoyed his megalomania and motivated his support for Charles Taylor in Liberia’s civil war, and also influence in Burkina Faso.


US public opinion against Libyan intervention overwhelmed. NATO training of NTC increased regionalization and unification of troops, and defined loyalist forces who had already shed
blood. Gaddafi already a pariah so less concerned about negative perception concerning harsh treatment of rebels.


Articulation of French role and Lévy force in pushing American intervention through NATO in Libya; analyzes development of NATO operation and civil war characteristics of TNC-Gaddafi conflict.


Libya as sultanistic inclusionary regime, myth of popular participation, military coup, cult of personality and Gaddafi as state and military itself.


Degree of reform under Assad: “containment system” (10), government representation of heterogeneity through Sunni and Alawite presence, “Damascus Spring” with reform and “mutual tolerance” under Baathism but still repressive, anti-dissent regime.


Heterogeneous ethnic population, lack of national identity, minority Alawite sect supported by Al-Assad pitted against rest of population. Assad rhetoric for reform (obviously not true). “Foreign conspiracy” = rhetoric about Arab Spring by Assad regime.


Security Council veto by Russia and China against UN action in Syria – against measures for regime change. 3500 dead in Syria uprisings since March. Military forces using tanks and heavy weaponry against civilians (siege in Homs).


End of civil war post Gaddafi death; lack of monopoly over force, need to dismantle militias and smooth tribal and regional conflicts with new civil society.


Arab League voted to suspend Syria – economic and political sanctions threatened against al-Assad’s government if violent repression of demonstrators not stopped.


Libya: mass public opposition to Gaddafi, international consensus against, regional powers like Tunisia and Egypt occupied with their own revolutions and generally in favor of liberalization. Syria: more regime loyalty for security concerns, disjointed opposition with SNC, NCC, and SFA disagreeing on agenda, regional waffling because balance of power, instability spillover, international consensus increasing but inaction.

Argues for Western pressure in the UN and individually for punitive measures against Assad, and for diplomatic pressure on Russia and China. Recognition of Syrian National Council to head off conflict before civil war status.


Implications of Qaddafi’s death: end of military campaign in the North; dissolution of loyalists; possibility of insurgency in the South, and implications of Qaddafi’s sons still campaigning against NTC; psychological closure / catharsis for Libyans.


Pro-civilian UN rhetoric, UN Resolution 1970 arms embargo, no fly zone and framework for NATO intervention to protect civilians. Impartiality: military training, arms. Similar action in Syria unlikely: lack of Arab League support, Russian UN veto, international community inert. Argues for key role of international institutions in conflict in Libya, and impact on mandate.

Framework and Methodology Sources


Rejects argument for globalization changing civil wars; historical context key.


Semantics and state self-interest in naming conflicts: politicized process.


Method of tracing events and processes to establish causal mechanisms.


Economic motivation and opportunity (greed) are superior to grievance in causing civil war; financing, military advantage, cost of rebellion, and mobilization of population key.


Method to establish causal hierarchy and time-dependence.


Geography and population key to civil war, subsume grievance. Civil war: 1) fighting between “agents” (alleged or actual) of a state and organized, non-state groups who seek control or violence for regime change. 2) at least 1000 killed in conflict; at least 100 per year. 3) At least 100 killed on both sides – to rule out massacres.


Mechanisms for establishing causality, including Mill’s methods to identify necessary and or sufficient causes.

Argues dichotomy between new and old wars, with old based on grievance and justice versus new based on greed and wanton violence, is false; politicized regard of conflict.


Similarities in death count between Iraq and Darfur, also military versus civilian groups; but insurgency versus genocide, mobilization and depoliticization (genocide) versus complex histry and politics (civil war, insurgency).


Impact of realism, rational decision-making versus ideology, state calculations and self-interest.


Argues for qualitative nature of independent and dependent variables, and use of semantic equations.


Definition: internal to state, political and military organization, government versus local insurgency, territorial control, 500+ deaths/year, 500-100 in first year.


Civil war definition: “any armed conflict that involves a) military action internal to the metropole, b) active participation of the national government, c) effective resistance by both sides.” Distinction between civil and extrastate or interstate is participation of government, and internality of war based on territoriality. More than 1000 deaths.


Common scholarly definition: warring groups from same country, fighting for political control and autonomy; at least 1000 killed, at least 100 per side. Iraq: why not civil war (Fearon)? Political decision-making in naming: UN resolutions, ability of foreign intervention and withdrawal, crucial to conceptualize definition to accurately address it.