War during a pandemic: How covid-19 influenced the conflict intensity in Libya

Buren, Emma van

Master thesis

War during a pandemic: How covid-19 influenced the conflict intensity in Libya

Universiteit Leiden

Emma van Buren (s1942549)

MSc Political Science: International Politics

Thesis seminar: Armed conflict

First reader/supervisor: Dr. J. Masullo Jimenez

Second reader: Dr. R. van der Haer

Submission date: June 11, 2022

Word count: 9841

Abstract

Recent studies have found a strong correlation between covid-19 and higher conflict intensity. Yet, scant attention has been paid to the ways in which covid-19 increased the conflict intensity of pre-existing conflicts. Therefore, this is the gap that this thesis aims to fill. From the disaster-conflict literature, and the covid-19-conflict literature more specifically, I derive three possible causal mechanisms concerning 1) state capacity 2) conflict mitigation, and 3) foreign backers. Consequently, I test these mechanisms with the use of process tracing in the context of the Libyan conflict. The evidence reveals that all three mechanisms were partly present, but did not exactly function as theorized. Indeed, in contrast to the hypothesized causal mechanism, no evidence is found for the suspension of military activities by the state, suggesting that the emergence of covid-19 did not weaken state capacity. Besides, the suspension of conflict mitigating activities and the involvement of foreign backers led to an intensification of violence, despite the continued attention for the conflict during the pandemic. More research, therefore, is necessary to further explore the mechanisms linking pandemics and conflict intensity in pre-existing conflicts.

Table of Contents

Introduction

On the 23rd of March 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) called for a global ceasefire so the whole world could focus on fighting a common enemy: covid-19 (Guterres, 2020). For a short period of time, it was believed that the pandemic may lead to increased cooperation, and generate incentives for a humanitarian pause in conflict (Polo, 2020). However, it soon became clear that this was not the case. As revealed by recent research, the covid-19 pandemic actually led to an *increase* in intrastate armed conflict in certain places (Berman et al. 2022; Polo. 2020, Ide, 2021). For example, in Libya the outbreak of covid-19 led to an increase in approximately five to ten violent battle events a day (Bloem & Salemi, 2021; Polo, 2020).

While previous research has statistically estimated the effects of covid-19 on armed conflict (Berman et al. 2022; Bloem & Salemi, 2021; Mehrl & Turner, 2021), less attention has been paid to the mechanisms that explain *how* covid-19 has led to an increase in conflict intensity in these places. Therefore, this research tries to explain the variation in conflict intensity by answering the following question; *How does covid-19 influence the conflict intensity in pre-existing armed conflicts?* Consequently, three coincident mechanisms – state capacity, conflict mitigation, and foreign backers – are tested in the context of the Libyan conflict at the start of the pandemic, to provide a detailed account of the relationship under study.

By better understanding the relationship between the current pandemic and armed conflict intensity, this study aims to contribute to the broader topic of disasters and conflict intensity. The added importance of this research is three-fold. First, the disaster-conflict literature extensively discusses the influence of disasters on conflict onset, mostly neglecting its effect on conflict intensity. Therefore, exploring this relationship can yield interesting insights. Second, as disasters, and specifically pandemics, are becoming more likely to occur (Dodds,

2019), understanding this relationship may help implement policies to better protect those who are most unsafe. This is particularly important considering that an intensification of conflict exacerbates the situation of already vulnerable populations (Polo, 2020, p. 2). Third, covid-19 is a recent phenomenon, and therefore, its effect on conflict intensity remains understudied. Furthermore, as the pandemic is still ongoing, looking deeper into the dynamics of conflict intensity in one existing conflict may also help us better understand the intensity dynamics of other conflicts.

In order to accurately address the research question, I first provide an overview of the existing literature on the disaster-conflict nexus as well as the more specific research on covid-19 and conflict. Next, I develop a theoretical argument which consists of multiple mechanisms. Following this section, I explain the research design and justify the choice for conducting a single case study of Libya with the use of process tracing. Finally, in the last section I discuss the found results of this research together with the further theoretical implications.

Literature review

Natural disasters and conflict

A natural disaster is identified as *natural* when it is caused by the natural forces of the earth and is considered a *disaster* only when it is "an unplanned event that disrupts society" (Reinhardt & Lutmar, 2022, p. 5). The covid-19 pandemic meets those criteria: it was created by nature and disrupted societies all over the world. Consequently, the broader literature on the disaster-conflict nexus is important to take into account when exploring the effects of covid-19 on conflict dynamics.

Natural disasters like, for example, earthquakes and floods, are not new phenomena, and

therefore already captured the attention of conflict scholars. Within this literature, two competing views can be identified, both exploring how disasters influence the onset of conflict. A first group of scholars argues that disasters decrease the likelihood of conflict onset, as it can foster cooperation by generating common dangers and challenges which overrule existing conflictual cleavages (Dynes & Quarantelli, 1971; Kreutz, 2012). While this research provides interesting insights, it does not speak directly to the relationship under study.

In contrast, the second strand, features environmental security scholars, who claim that disasters are likely to trigger conflict by exacerbating states' pre-existing vulnerabilities (Brancati, 2007; Ker-Lindsay, 2000; Nel & Righarts, 2008). For example, disasters create or intensify resource scarcities and weaken the state's capacity to counter violent opponents, which can both increase the risk of civil conflict onset (Brancati, 2007; Bagozzi et al., 2017). Even though the focus of this line of research is mainly on conflict onset, resource scarcities and the weakening of state capacity, can also be linked to conflict intensity (Brancati, 2007; Ide, 2021; Koehnlein & Koren, 2022).

Yet, as I argue below, state capacity is only one of the pathways through which natural disasters can influence conflict intensity in ongoing conflicts. Beyond domestic factors, there are valid reasons to explore international forces, such as international attention and the involvement of foreign backers (Asseburg et al., 2020; Ide, 2021; Polo, 2020).

Infectious diseases and conflict

While most research on disasters and conflict focuses on geological disasters (Brancati, 2007; Ker-Lindsay, 2000) or natural disasters in general (Nel & Righarts, 2008), there is also an area of research that focuses more specifically on the relationship between infectious diseases and armed

conflict. These studies can also be broadly divided into two strands. The first strand focuses on how contagious diseases influence conflict onset (Ide, 2021; Kustra, 2017).The main argument here is that infectious diseases reinforce social, economic, and political inequalities, which in turn, increase the likelihood of conflict. The second strand focuses on how infectious diseases influence conflict duration (Cervellati et al., 2017; Ide, 2021). Here the main line of reasoning is similar: by fueling existing grievances and cleavages, infectious diseases can make conflict last longer.

Although this research provides interesting insights into the relationship between infectious diseases and armed conflict onset and duration, it shows that there is a lack of focus on the influence of contagious diseases on other conflict dynamics. Consequently, focusing on how contagious diseases, more specifically pandemics, affect the *intensity* of existing conflict is an area of research that remains underexplored.

Covid-19 and conflict intensity

The outbreak of the pandemic generated research focusing exclusively on the relationship between covid-19 and armed conflict, with an explicit focus on intensity. Among these studies, some found a strong correlation between covid-19 and the dynamics of conflict intensity (Berman et al., 2022; Ide, 2021, Polo, 2020), while other studies did not find a correlation at all (Mehrl & Thurner, 2021; Obi & Kabandula, 2021). An explanation for these divergent findings may be the lack of long-term data, or the ongoing presence of the covid-19 pandemic. Despite these inconclusive results, multiple studies still find strong evidence that, at least in certain places, the covid-19 pandemic has led to an increase in conflict intensity.

Yet, even among these studies, scant attention has been paid to how covid-19 increases

conflict intensity. Some studies do mention possible mechanisms that can influence this relationship, but they do not actually theorize this process in detail or test it empirically (Bloem & Salemi, 2021; Gugushvili & Mckee, 2022; Ide, 2021). The reason for this lack of attention probably rests with the fact that most research to date has focused on identifying general trends and estimating average effects, engaging in large-N cross-national comparisons, rather than looking deeper into the mechanisms that can explain a certain outcome within specific cases.

There are three exceptions, however. One is the study by Polo (2020), who used mixed methods to empirically support her theoretical claim that the covid-19 pandemic reinforces, rather than reduces, conflict violence. Although she proposes two phenomena that are likely to contribute to conflict escalation in Libya, she does not support them with empirical evidence.

Second, there is a case study of Syria by Asseburg et al. (2020), where the authors argue that, how covid-19 affects conflict dynamics, depends on its effect on military capabilities of both rebels and state forces. However, the authors do not actually empirically examine the proposed hypothesis, and therefore, do not provide evidence that the mechanism is present and functions as expected.

A third exception is the study by Koehnlein & Koren (2022), who argue that non-state actors increase conflict intensity in response to covid-19, because the government is forced to shift its activities and resources towards containing the pandemic, which weakens state capacity. Their statistical analysis on the general correlations is complemented by two case studies of Afghanistan and Nigeria that further explore this underlying mechanism. Although this research provided important insights on the role of state capacity, the authors themselves argue that future research should focus on better understanding and validating this, and other mechanisms, to further explain the relationship between covid-19 and conflict intensity (Koehnlein & Koren,

2022, p. 101).

In sum, over the last few decades, much literature has been written on the topic of disaster and conflict. Yet, the predominant focus has been on conflict onset, neglecting the effects of disasters on conflict intensity. Recently, because of the current pandemic, more specific research has focused on the relationship between covid-19 and conflict intensity in pre-existing armed conflicts. Despite existing empirical evidence pointing at an increase in conflict intensity since the start of the pandemic, no research has yet provided a detailed investigation of the mechanisms that might cause this effect. In this study, I contribute to this task by exploring three mechanisms to better understand the relationship between pandemics and the increase in conflict intensity.

Theoretical framework

Armed conflicts are complex settings; therefore, this research advances multiple mechanisms that together can provide a coherent explanation of how covid-19 influences the intensity of existing conflict. The first mechanism relates to state capacity. Following the disaster-conflict literature, weak state capacity can be an important mechanism for the onset of armed conflict (Brancati, 2007; Bagozzi et al., 2017). However, weak state capacity can also be linked to conflict intensity, as suggested by research focused on covid-19 (Berman et al. 2022; Ide, 2021; Koehnlein & Koren, 2022). Countries tormented by armed conflict often have weak state institutions and lack the ability to effectively govern and implement policies, especially in some remote parts of the territory (Chaudoin et al., 2017). The occurrence of a disaster like covid-19, thus, is likely to further weaken the capacity of these states, as they have to redirect their attention and resources to fight the pandemic.

More specifically, governments have to redirect attention from other administrative functions to fighting and controlling the virus, while at the same time being forced to protect government employees and combatants from infection with the disease (Koehnlein & Koren, 2022, p. 92). To do this, governments are compelled to minimize bureaucratic activities, and even to scale down military activities to a bare minimum (Koehnlein & Koren, 2022, p. 92). The occurrence of a disaster like covid-19 is therefore likely to further weaken the state capacity of such states, as they have to split their already limited resources between containing the pandemic and participating in the conflict. Non-state armed actors in pre-existing conflict may use this opportunity to *intensify* violence against the state, because the state has less capacity to survey the operations and counter the attacks from the opposition.

Mechanism 1: *Covid-19 influences the intensity of pre-existing armed conflict by redirecting government's attention and resources towards fighting the pandemic and away from administrative and military activities, providing non-state armed actors with the opportunity to increase violence against the state.*

The second mechanism linking covid-19 and conflict intensity concerns international oversight (Ide, 2021; Polo, 2020). Civil conflicts often involve external conflict mitigation activities, by the United Nations (UN) and other international actors, to contain the levels of violence between the parties involved (Cockayne et al., 2010). Examples of such activities are hosting peace talks, implementing peacekeeping operations, and imposing arms embargos.

As the emergence of a pandemic requires international cooperation and oversight in order to contain the spreading of a virus that is global, other activities, like conflict mitigation efforts, can get suspended or downsized. In other words, the prioritization of containing the covid-19 virus leads to the forced disruption of conflict mitigation missions by international actors in

conflict affected countries (Polo, 2020). Consequently, this lack of attention creates opportunities for armed actors to intensify their fighting efforts without exposing themselves to international backlash. Such international backlash can take the form of reputational costs, like decreased international legitimacy, especially when violating existing agreements (Ide, 2021).

Mechanism 2: *Covid-19 influences the intensity of pre-existing armed conflict by causing a suspension of conflict-mitigating activities by international actors redirecting their attention away from the conflict and towards fighting the pandemic, thereby reducing the costs of armed groups engaging in violent action.*

The third mechanism relates to the involvement of foreign backers, and partly overlaps with the second mechanism. Foreign backers are third parties to a conflict who provide armed actors with financial or military resources, such as weapons and mercenaries. However, the involvement of foreign backers is condemned by the international community, as it is a known contributor to the escalation of conflict (Polo, 2020). To limit the level of violence and stimulate the peace process, the UN, therefore, generally imposes arms embargoes on ongoing conflicts (Sprague; 2006; Tierney, 2005). An arms embargo prohibits the direct or indirect supply of weapons, as well as military training and technical assistance, by external parties to a conflict (Tierney, 2005; Vines, 2007).

Furthermore, the imposition of an arms embargo signals international disapproval of foreign involvement, which can be a hurdle for the continuation of military resource supply as it negatively impacts a state's reputation, and potentially leads to severe sanctions (Bove & Böhmelt, 2021; Burgoon et al., 2015; Cortell & Davis; 2000; Erickson, 2015).

As argued above, the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic is likely to redirect the attention of the international community away from the conflict, which prevents the UN and

other organizations from closely monitoring the transfer of arms. Consequently, this lack of attention provides foreign backers with the opportunity for the transfer of military and financial resources to go unnoticed. Because the covid-19 pandemic does not change the strategic interest of foreign backers in a conflict, the eased circumstances are a likely catalyst for the increase in military resources transfers (Asseburg et al., 2020). In turn, the increased availability of weapons to the armed groups involved in the conflict is likely to generate a further escalation of violence.

Mechanism 3: *Covid-19 influences the intensity of pre-existing armed conflict by redirecting international attention away from the conflict, thereby creating opportunities for foreign backers to increase their supply of military resources.*

Methodology

Research design

Previous research has established a correlation between covid-19 and conflict intensity. Yet, these studies have failed to provide a detailed account of how covid-19 leads to more intense conflicts (Bloem & Salemi, 2021; Ide, 2021; Polo, 2020). Consequently, conducting a within-case analysis focusing on mechanisms is essential to better understand how covid-19 influences factors that lead to an increase in conflict intensity. Therefore, to answer the research question this study employs a single case study and conducts a within-case analysis via theory-testing process tracing.

Within-case analysis, and in particular, theory-testing process tracing is an effective way to test whether an existing causal mechanism is present in a case and operates as theorized (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). Theory-testing process tracing is a variant of process tracing which

aims to *test* causal mechanisms that are derived from existing theory (Beach & Pedersen, 2019). Consequently, as this research aims to test three theorized causal mechanisms, this type of process tracing is deemed most relevant.

Finally, it is important to note that theory-testing process tracing only enables conclusions to be made about whether a causal mechanism was present and functioned as predicted in the case under analysis. This means that it is not possible to test the relative explanatory power of the disparate mechanisms against each other, because this requires different types of evidence (Beach & Pedersen, 2019, p. 245).

Case selection

Theory-testing process tracing requires the selection of a typical case to determine if and how a causal mechanism links the independent to the dependent variable as theorized (Beach & Pedersen, 2018). A typical case is a case where the independent variable, the dependent variable, and the "required contextual conditions" for the hypothesized mechanisms are all present (Beach & Pedersen, 2018, p. 850). The selected case for this research is the ongoing conflict in Libya. Libya is considered a typical case for two reasons. First, previous quantitative, cross-national research shows that since the start of the covid-19 pandemic, Libya has experienced an increase in conflict intensity (Bloem & Salemi, 2021; Ide, 2021; Polo, 2020), which shows that both the independent and dependent variables are present and associated. Second, the required contextual conditions for the mechanisms are also present in the case of Libya because it features weak state capacity, international oversight, and the involvement of foreign backers (Weise, 2020).

Evidence for testing causal mechanisms

The causal mechanisms in this study are not mutually exclusive and, therefore, evidence for one mechanism does not automatically lead to the rejection of another (Zaks, 2017, p. 348). This means that the three mechanisms can all simultaneously be valid explanations for the link between covid-19 and conflict intensity. To prove whether the causal mechanisms are indeed present and function as theorized in the selected case, different sorts of evidence are necessary (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Zaks, 2017). More specifically, not only different sorts of evidence are needed for the distinct mechanisms but also for the different steps identified within the mechanism.

Yet, newspaper articles are a type of evidence that will be used for all three mechanisms. More specifically, the newspapers that will be used for the analysis are the *Libya Observer* and *Reuters*. The *Libya Observer* is a national news source and, therefore, likely to report on the ongoing conflict. Besides, this national source is considered particularly relevant as it also publishes news articles in English. In contrast, *Reuters* is an international news source with reporters all over the world. It is important to include both of these news sources, as they follow the conflict from a different perspective, and thus provide complementary information.

In addition, the period under study will be from January to May 2020. While the World Health Organization (WHO) shows an upsurge of covid-19 cases mid-March and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) displays a sharp increase in battle events in March and April (Raleigh et al., 2010), taking into account contextual information from a few months before is important to determine whether change was indeed caused by the predicted mechanisms. Moreover, contextual evidence is essential for all mechanisms when conducting process tracing because “observations only become evidence after being assessed for accuracy

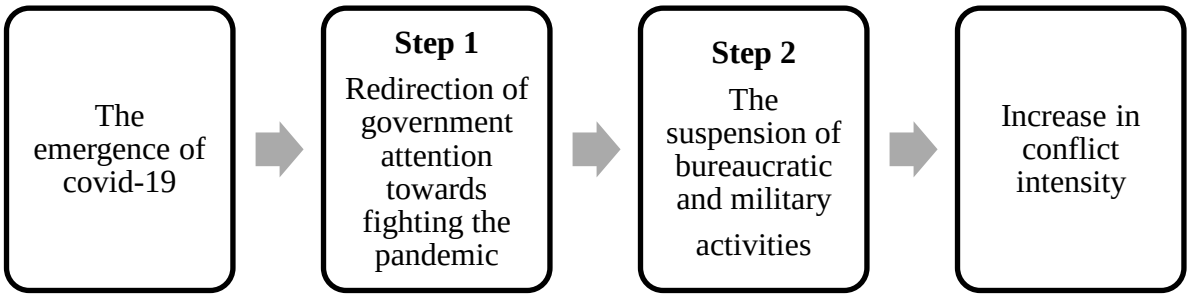
and interpreted in context" (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 73).

Finally, the analysis will be carried out manually with the help of a coding scheme. In this scheme the appropriate information concerning the mechanisms and the different steps within the mechanism will be written down.

Observable implications

Figure 1

Overview of the steps identified in mechanism 1

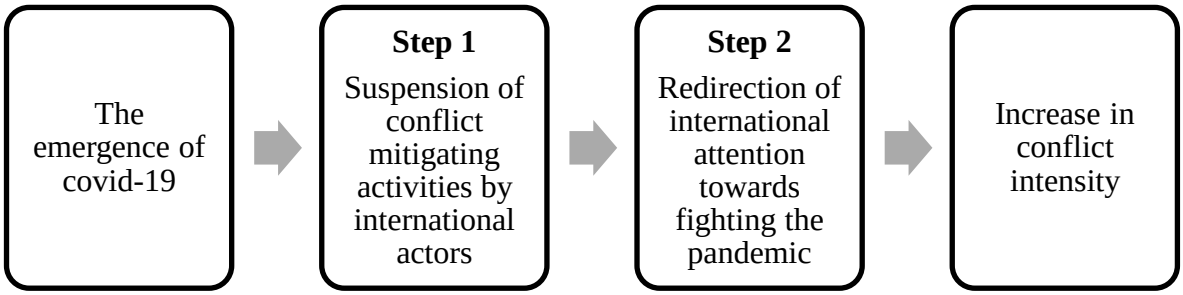


Figures 1, 2, and 3 show that all three mechanisms consist of two steps for which distinct evidence is needed. For the first step of *mechanism 1 (*see Figure 1) it is expected that, as soon as covid-19 becomes a threat, the Libyan government will publish statements about the importance of fighting the pandemic, hold extra meetings, and increase the funding of health institutions. As policy documents from the Libyan government are not available, evidence for this hypothesis is obtained from newspaper articles, because they are likely to keep up with the government response to covid-19. The second step (see Figure 1) requires evidence that shows a suspension of government activities. Suspension of both bureaucratic and/or military activities can be for

example, the closing down of government institutions. Consequently, such irregular activities are presumably mentioned in national newspaper articles.

Figure 2

Overview of the steps identified in mechanism 2

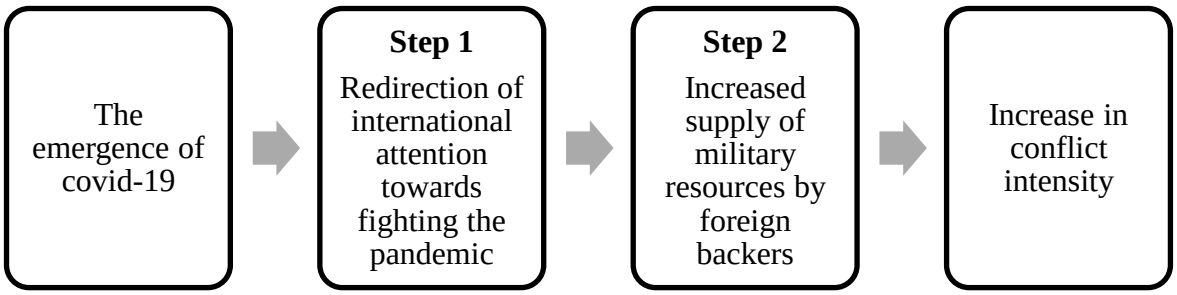


Evidence for the first step of *mechanism 2* (see Figure 2) should show the suspension of conflict mitigation activities by international actors, as soon as covid-19 becomes a global threat. The main focus for this mechanism will be on UN-led mitigation activities as this organization plays a prominent role in the conflict (United Nations Support Mission in Libya [UNSMIL], 2016). However, activities by other international actors, such as the European Union (EU), will also be taken into consideration.

The suspension of conflict mitigation activities can be observed, for example, when peace talks meetings are canceled. Information on the suspension of such activities is retrieved from the Secretary-General Reports on the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) written for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), newspaper articles and other documents related to international actors involved in conflict-mitigating activities. Next, for the second step (see Figure 2), it is expected to see a decrease in international attention for the conflict in Libya, translating to less reporting and fewer updates. Evidence for this step is accessed through UN Daily Press briefings and newspaper articles.

Figure 3

Overview of the steps identified in mechanism 3



The first step of *mechanism 3* (see Figure 3) is expected to show a decrease of international attention for the conflict in Libya in order to fight the pandemic. Because this step is similar to the second step of *mechanism 2*, the same sources of information are used. However, the focus for this step will be on the international attention paid to the involvement of foreign backers rather than the conflict in general.

The second step (see Figure 3) predicts an increase in the supply of military material by foreign backers after the redirection of attention by the international community. The focus here is on military resources rather than financial resources, because it is more empirical observable. Indeed, foreign backers do not report on the military equipment they send to armed actors and, therefore, the precise numbers remain unknown. However, newspaper articles are likely to provide regular updates on a conflict, including the growth of foreign involvement, which makes it an admissible source. Moreover, an increase is observed when there is mention of *extra* and/or *more sophisticated* military equipment.

Analysis

Background of the conflict in Libya

The revival of the conflict in Libya in April 2019 follows a series of events that started in 2011. That year, uprisings against the forty-two year rule of Muammar Gaddafi led to a full-blown revolution followed by a civil war (Winer, 2019). As the government increased violence against civilians, the UN created the UNSMIL to assist the democratization process in Libya (UNSMIL, 2016). With the overthrow of Gaddafi, however, armed groups with rival political beliefs established local power bases, complicating the democratic transition (Lewis, 2020b). One of these groups was the Libyan House of Representatives (HoR), who after a failed battle for Tripoli, relocated itself to East-Libya. Here, Khalifa Haftar was appointed as military chief of the HoR and created the Libyan National Army (LNA). Together, they established a parallel government with corresponding key institutions (Al-Warfalli, 2015).

Around the same time, the Government of National Accord (GNA) was formed in Tripoli (West-Libya) under the auspices of the UN. This interim government with Fayez al-Sarraj as Prime Minister was recognized by the UNSC as the only legitimate executive power in Libya (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2015). The following years consisted of stable instability with both parties in the position to limit each other's influence, but unable to rule Libya as a whole (Winer, 2019, p. 1). This relative stability ended on the 4th of April 2019 when general Haftar launched an attack to capture Tripoli, which led to a renewed escalation of the conflict.

Mechanism 1: State capacity

The ongoing civil war in Libya also has consequences for the state capacity in the country. As mentioned before, the country has two co-existing governments, each with its own national institutions. Having such parallel institutions on opposite sides of the country makes it hard to implement national policies; therefore, both the GNA and LNA follow their own (Winer, 2019). For this mechanism the GNA is considered the legitimate government as it is internationally recognized. Therefore, the GNA is expected to experience a weakening of state capacity, while this provides the LNA with the opportunity to increase conflict intensity.

Step 1: Redirection of government attention

The first case of covid-19 was recorded on the 23rd of March and it is expected that from that point onwards the government redirects its attention to fight the pandemic. But the government already took action before the virus arrived in the country. On the 14th of March, the Prime Minister, al-Sarraj, announced "a state of emergency in Libya and allocated 575 million Libyan dinars (about $406 million) to covid-19 preparedness and response" (UNSC, 2020b, p. 2). The government declaring a state of emergency because of covid-19 shows that attention is being paid to fighting the pandemic.

Besides, the Libyan Presidential Council also held an extraordinary meeting to assess the impact of covid-19 on health, and the economic, and political status of the country (Abdulkader, 2020c). During the meeting the Council agreed "to form committees chaired by the deputy ministers to follow up on the economic impact of any possible outbreak of Coronavirus in Libya" (Abdulkader, 2020c, para 3). The creation of special committees to address the impact of covid-19 is also considered evidence for an increase in attention towards the pandemic.

Although these pieces of evidence show that the government directed attention toward fighting the pandemic, due to a lack of access to policy papers it is unclear whether this attention is redirected from other bureaucratic activities. Therefore, the found evidence is considered a weak confirmation.

Step 2: Suspension of bureaucratic and military activities

The evidence for the first step shows that the government directed attention towards handling the covid-19. Next, the government is expected to reduce both bureaucratic and military activities in order to fully control the virus.

After Prime Minister al-Sarraj announced a state of emergency, the Libyan government started to reduce its bureaucratic activities. On the 14th of March, the government advised state institutions "to oblige employees to use their yearly holidays and to start shift-based work systems so that less employees show up to work for the safety of people amid the outbreak of Coronavirus" (Abdulkader, 2020b, para 1). A reduction in the presence of state personnel leads to less bureaucratic activities because there are less people to actually execute the work.

A few weeks later on the 29th of March, the government announced the implementation of curfew hours which reduced the daily working hours from 9.00 to 12.00, including for state institutions (Abdulkader, 2020e). The next month, the Presidential Council added that government institutions would continue "to function at 10% of its normal capacity, during the time between 9 am and 2 pm" (Golden, 2020, para 2). State institutions working at 10% of their normal capacity for only three hours a day, confirms the suspension of most of the bureaucratic activities.

Although there was a decline in the bureaucratic activities amid the covid-19 pandemic,

this is not the same for military activities. In contrast, on the 26th of March, three days after covid-19 arrived in the country, "the Libyan Army forces under the command of the Government of National Accord launched Operation Peace Storm to respond to Haftar's attacks on civilians, achieving several advances on different frontlines" (Abdulkader, 2020d, para 5). While the military operation was a response to Haftar's heavy bombing of Tripoli, it still demonstrates the continuation of military activities.

The following month the forces of the GNA continued the attacks against Haftar. On the 18th of April, the government said they had advanced on Tarhouna, a key support base of Haftar in eastern-Libya (Lewis, 2020a, para 1). Afterwards, the GNA focused "on trying to push its enemies out of artillery range of Tripoli" (McDowell, 2020, para 1). Again, both examples show the persistence of military activities by the legitimate government despite the outbreak of covid-19.

While the evidence shows that an increase in government attention towards the pandemic led to the suspension of bureaucratic activities, it also shows that it did not cause a suspension of military activities. Despite the conforming evidence for the suspension of bureaucratic activities, the fact that the military forces of the GNA continued their activities indicates that covid-19 did not really weaken state capacity. A possible reason for why the LNA still increased violence against the GNA is that they expected the GNA to have weaker state capacity because of covid-19, but that this turned out not to be the case.

Mechanism 2: Conflict mitigation

As previously mentioned, the UN has been involved in the conflict in Libya since its start in 2011. In that year, Security Council Resolution 2009 was approved and established the

UNSMIL, an integrated special political mission aimed at finding a peaceful and sustainable solution for the conflict in Libya (UNSMIL, 2016), that falls under the leadership of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). Despite the two parallel governments on opposite sides of the country, Libya experienced relative stability for years until Haftar's attack on Tripoli in April 2019. This revived escalation of the conflict, consequently, also led to renewed mitigation efforts by the UNSMIL.

In July 2019, the then SRSG in Libya, Ghassan Salamé, proposed a three-parts plan to achieve peace in Libya consisting of a ceasefire, increased enforcement of the arms embargo, and an internal Libyan conference between the two parties, which in turn, include an economic, military, and political track (Salamé, 2019). Although a short ceasefire was agreed upon mid-August, the plan only became operational in January 2020. On the 6th of January the inter-Libyan component of the three-point plan started off with the economic track in Tunis. This was followed by the Berlin conference, on the 19th of January, hosted by Germany to support the three-point plan. The main conclusions of this conference were the creation of a 5+5 Libyan Joint Military Commission for the military track consisting of five senior military officers chosen by the GNA and five by the LNA, and the International Follow-up Committee to oversee the continuation of the peace process (The Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, 2020).

The next month marks the launch of both the military and political track, with the first meeting of the 5+5 Libyan Joint Military Commission on 3 February, and the first political talks on 26 February. Besides, on the 12th of January the GNA and LNA agreed to a ceasefire proposed by Turkey and Russia. Nevertheless, it was violated a few hours later.

Step 1: Suspension of conflict mitigating activities

The outbreak of covid-19 started to constitute a public health emergency of international concern around midway March 2020 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Therefore, from that period onwards, it is expected that international actors suspend the mitigation efforts in Libya because of the covid-19 pandemic. The UN is the main actor involved in conflict mitigation efforts in Libya, overseeing the inter-Libyan talks. The first round of talks for the economic track was followed by a second round from 9 till 10 February. However, the UNSG, António Guterres, mentioned in his report to the Security Council on the UNSMIL that "the third meeting of the economic track of the dialogue, scheduled for 15 March, was postponed owing to covid-19" (UNSC, 2020b, p. 3).

A second round of talks was also held for the military track between 18 and 23 February. During this meeting, the participants from both sides created a draft for a ceasefire to make it possible for refugees to return to their homes. The draft also included the implementation of a monitoring mechanism to be supervised by the UNSMIL and the Joint Military Commission. The UN Secretary-General Report (UNSC, 2020b) reveals that:

> It was agreed that the two delegations would present the draft agreement to their respective leaderships for further consultations and that the Joint Military Commission would reconvene in March to finalize the terms of reference of the subcommittees in charge of the implementation of the agreement. Because of covid-19, that meeting was postponed. (p. 4)

For the political track of the intra-Libyan talks only one meeting was held before the outbreak of the pandemic, on the 26th of February. Unlike the military and economic track, for the political track no date was scheduled for a follow-up meeting. However, the report does state that "as at

27 April, the meetings of the three UNSMIL-facilitated tracks had been postponed owing mainly to measures taken in response to covid-19" (UNSC, 2020b, p. 4), which indicates that follow-up meetings for the political tracks were actually postponed due to covid-19 as well.

The EU is another international actor that is involved in the Libyan peace process, but their support mainly consists of funding the UN-led peace mediation efforts (European Union External Action, 2022). From 2018 till 2022, the EU has supplied 9.3 million euros to support peace dialogues. However, there is no information available on the annual funding of the EU, which makes it unclear whether covid-19 influenced the amount of funding provided by the EU and, if this consequently, had an effect on the suspension of conflict mitigation efforts.

In sum, the pieces of evidence all explicitly mention that the UN conflict mitigating activities were postponed due to the outbreak of covid-19. Consequently, this is considered strong confirmatory evidence as the political, military, and economic talks of the internal Libyan conference were the main conflict mitigating activities at the time.

Step 2: Redirection of international attention

The evidence for the first part of the hypothesis shows indeed that the UN suspended conflict mitigating activities in Libya due to the rise of covid-19 infections. Consequently, it is expected that the UN pays less attention to the conflict, because the institution is busy handling the pandemic, but multiple sources of evidence show this is not the case. After the suspension of the conflict mitigation activities, the Secretary-General mentioned in his report that the "UNSMIL, continued to engage with all Libyan representatives on the three tracks with a view to resuming the meetings as soon as possible" (UNSC, 2020b, p. 4). Although no detailed information is provided on the frequency and depth of engagement, the text indicates that the UN was still

paying attention to the conflict.

Moreover, the UN also "maintained a continuous international civilian's staff presence in Tripoli on a rotational basis of generally between 80 and 90 persons" (UNSC, 2020b, p. 14). The presence of personnel in Libya shows that there is still attention for the conflict, because they update the UN on the ongoing events in Libya.

Not only did the UN continue to report on the situation in Libya, but it also strongly condemned attacks of the LNA on multiple occasions. For example, on the 25th of March, the Libya Observer mentioned that "The head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Stephanie Williams has strongly condemned the repeated shelling on Ain Zara district, including the Al Rwemi Prison" (Al-Harathy, 2020a, para 1). A few weeks later, on the 7th of April, the UNSG issued a statement, saying he "strongly condemns the heavy shelling, for the second consecutive day, of Al Khadra General Hospital in Tripoli" (Dujarric, 2020b, para 1). By condemning attacks, the UN shows that violence used in the conflict does not go unnoticed and that their actions are still being watched.

By looking at the Daily Press Briefings by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General from January till June, it becomes clear that the UN continues to report on the conflict during this period. However, when taking the number of press releases per month into account a small decline of attention can be observed. In January, ten Press Briefings addressed the conflict in Libya, in February eight, while in March this number dropped to six Press Briefings. The next month this number increased again to eight and finally to twelve Press Briefings in May. Interestingly, conflict intensity was the highest between March and April, the period with the lowest number of Press Briefings reporting on the situation in Libya. Nonetheless, the differences between the amounts of articles remain relatively small and,

therefore, do not constitute strong evidence for the second step of the mechanism.

Other international actors also continued to pay attention to the conflict. For example, on the 29th of March, the EU "expressed its regret at the escalation of fighting in Libya despite internationals calls for a truce to help contain the coronavirus pandemic" (Al-Harathy, 2020b, para 1). Although not very elaborate, the statement does show that the EU still monitors the conflict to some extent.

The non-governmental organizations "Amnesty International" and "The Human Rights Solidarity Organization" likewise continued to pay attention to the conflict by reporting on war crimes, the number of civilian casualties, and other human rights violations between March and June 2020 (Al-Harathy, 2020c; Amnesty International 2020). Again, this evidence indicates that non-governmental organizations did not completely redirect their attention towards fighting the pandemic.

While evidence shows that the emergence of covid-19 indeed led to a suspension of UN-led mitigating activities, it does not necessarily bring less international attention to the conflict. Despite the small decline of Daily Press Briefings, no strong evidence is, therefore, found for the confirmation of step 2.

An explanation for the continued attention by the UN for the conflict may be the importance of the WHO. In one of the Press Briefings in February, the Spokesperson for the Secretary- General mentions that "the WHO is firmly in the lead on this" when referring to covid-19 (Dujarric, 2020a, Q&A). In the same briefing, he also mentions that covid-19 "is a medical scientific issue in which the WHO is the natural leader within the UN system" (Dujarric, 2020a, Q&A). Taking these statements into account, it can be argued that the UN was able to

continue paying attention to the conflict in Libya because the WHO, which is a different body of the UN, was in charge of handling the covid-19 crisis.

Mechanism 3: Foreign backers

The Libyan conflict has experienced an interference of foreign powers since the beginning of the conflict when NATO powers carried out airstrikes against the Gaddafi regime (Asseburg et al., 2018). In the following years, it was not Western powers but regional powers that started to get involved in the conflict by supporting different factions. The United Arab Emirates and Egypt both provided military and financial support to Haftar, while Turkey and Qatar delivered arms to the GNA (Asseburg et al., 2018). With the launch of the battle of Tripoli in 2019, as far as we know, both sides have continued to receive most military aid from the same regional powers. However, one discrepancy during this period is the increasing involvement of Russia supporting the faction of Haftar.

Interestingly, the UNSC has imposed an arms embargo on Libya since the beginning of the conflict in 2011 (UNSC, 2011). This embargo entails "that all Member States shall immediately take the necessary measures to prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, from or through their territories or by their nationals using their flag vessels or aircraft, or arms and related materiel of all types" (UNSC, 2011, p. 3). Despite the clarity of the document, various states have continued to violate this embargo over the years, as mentioned above. Yet, no sanctions for violations of the international arms embargo have been enforced (UNSC, 2021).

Step 1: Redirection of international attention

Similar to the second step of the previous mechanism, this step indicates that the emergence of covid-19 leads to a redirection of attention by the UN and other international actors, away from the conflict in Libya towards the pandemic. Indeed, from those observations it becomes clear that there is no concrete evidence for a decline of international attention towards the conflict in Libya.

More specifically, it is also important to look closer at the level of international attention towards the support from foreign backers, because less international oversight may make states more willing to violate it (Erickson, 2015). Even though there is a continuation of awareness for the conflict in general, there may be less attention for the actions by foreign backers, which can be assessed by looking at attention for the arms embargo. At the start of the pandemic the UNSG continued to be "deeply concerned by the persistent violations of the arms embargo" (UNSC, 2020b, p. 15). He also mentioned "reports continued of foreign mercenaries providing the Government of National Accord and the Libyan National Army with enhanced combat capabilities, amid persistent reports of military equipment and arms being supplied to both sides in violation of the UN-imposed arms embargo" (UNSC, 2020b, p. 1). This indicates that the UN was still monitoring the supply of foreign weapons, which can be a hurdle for foreign backers.

Besides, on the 31st of March, the EU launched a Common Security and Defense Policy military operation in the Mediterranean, called IRINI, to assist with the implementation for the UN arms embargo in Libya (UNSC, 2020b, p. 5). The goal of the operation was to monitor flights and board ships suspected of bringing military resources to Libya. Although a month later it was announced that IRINI "doesn't have the needed mechanisms and capabilities to start work" (Abdulkader, 2020f, para 1), the operation eventually started its first activity at sea in the

beginning of May 2020 (EUNAVFOR Med, 2020). The launch of such an extensive operation shows that the EU continued to pay attention, or even increased attention, to the problem of foreign backers in Libya despite the pandemic.

In contrast to the hypothesis, evidence from both the previous and this mechanism confirm that there was a continuation of international attention towards the conflict in general, as well as toward the supply of military resources by foreign backers more specifically.

Step 2: Increased supply of weapons by foreign backers

The redirection of attention by the international community was expected to lead to an increase in military resources from foreign backers. But evidence for the first step proved the contrary which, in theory, also makes it less likely for foreign backers to increase their weapon supply, because it is too risky. Nonetheless, the evidence reveals that Haftar's attack on Tripoli already led to an upsurge of the involvement of foreign backers, even before the global outbreak of covid-19. For example, in January, the UNSG already commented that "there have been persistent reports of the growing involvement of foreign mercenaries providing both sides with enhanced combat capabilities" (UNSC, 2020a, p. 1) and that "external interference further increased, in particular in terms of war materiel" (UNSC, 2020a, p. 15).

Moreover, foreign backers also continued to increase their military resource provision during the outbreak of the pandemic. Although evidence on the precise numbers of material flow remains absent, multiple statements do mark a military build-up. For instance, in May, the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General mentioned "over the past weeks and months, we have seen people, materiel, flow into Libya to increase…which has led to an increase in violence and increase in fighting" (Dujarric, 2020c, Q&A). Not only does this statement provide evidence for

the continued increase in weapon supply, but it also emphasizes the link between foreign backers and the increase in conflict intensity. In addition, another statement highlights the "uninterrupted dispatch by the foreign backers of increasingly sophisticated and lethal weapons" (Williams, 2020, para 4), specifying the upsurge of more dangerous weapons.

Contrary to the hypothesized causal mechanism, the covid-19 pandemic does not lead to decreased attention to the conflict, and violations by foreign backers more specifically. Yet there is still an increase in support by foreign backers for both sides of the conflict in terms of the number of weapons as well as their sophistication. Consequently, this raises the question: why was there an increase in support by foreign backers, while there was a continuation of international attention?

Additional findings: The absence of sanctions and reputational costs

What becomes clear from the analyzed documents is that there was a continuation of international attention towards the violations of the arms embargo, but that there were never any sanctions enforced on the actual violators. As mentioned, in January, the UNSG already declared that "during the reporting period, external interference further increased, in particular in terms of war materiel and the reported arrival of additional foreign fighters and mercenaries into the country" (UNSC, 2020a, p. 15). Despite this information, no further measures were taken to increase the enforcement of the arms embargo.

Even after the Berlin conference, during which the arms embargo was a central theme, Angela Merkel said "world leaders did not discuss possible sanctions for violations of an international arms embargo" (Nienaber, 2020, para 1). More importantly, a report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said that "despite the violation of the

UN arms embargo in Libya, which has been in effect since 2011, no country has been sanctioned for such violations" (Abdulkader, 2020a, para 3). Consequently, the absence of sanctions lowers the cost for foreign backers to send military resources.

Furthermore, while the nationalities of the foreign backers in the Libyan conflict are known, the UN never individually calls them out when reemphasizing the importance of the arms embargo or condemning the violations of the arms embargo. For example, in his report update for the UNSMIL on the 30th of January, SRSG Salamé (2020) states the following:

> There are unscrupulous actors inside and outside Libya who cynically nod and wink towards efforts to promote peace and piously affirm their support for the UN. Meanwhile, they continue to double down on a military solution, raising the frightening specter of a full-scale conflict and further misery for the Libyan people. (para 24)

From this statement, it becomes clear that the UN knows who the dishonest actors are, but made the decision to not individually call them out. However, by not doing this, the violating states do not face the reputational costs they may otherwise have endured for the illegal support of a foreign conflict.

Although the absence of reputational costs and sanctions may be an explanation for why foreign backers provided continued support under the attention of the international community, it does not yet explain why there was an *increase* in conflict intensity. A possible explanation for this is the belief by foreign backers that covid-19 will influence the capabilities of the faction they are supporting. The outbreak of covid-19 can weaken the armed group and, therefore, foreign backers feel the need to increase the supply of military research, especially since their strategic interests in the conflict are not likely to change (Asseburg et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Recent studies found a strong correlation between covid-19 and conflict intensity. Yet, among this research, scant attention has been paid to the ways in which covid-19 increases conflict intensity. Therefore, this research aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between covid-19 and conflict intensity in pre-existing conflicts by testing three coincident mechanisms concerning 1) state capacity 2) conflict mitigation, and 3) foreign backers.

The evidence suggests that all three mechanisms were in part present in the case of Libya, but did not exactly function as theorized. Consequently, the answer to the question under study is three-fold. First, while the outbreak of covid-19 led to an increase in government attention towards fighting the pandemic and the suspension of bureaucratic activities, it did not affect military activities. In this sense, the weakening of state capacity is unlikely to have provided the LNA with the opportunity to increase violence against the state, because the state was able to continue and even launch military operations.

It may be possible, however, that, due to the government directing attention towards the pandemic and suspending bureaucratic activities, the LNA *expected* weaker state capacity and, therefore, increased violence against the state. From this perspective, it is not the actual state capacity, but rather the perception of state capacity, that explains the increase in conflict intensity which can be an interesting direction for future research.

Second, evidence shows that covid-19 caused the suspension of conflict mitigating activities in Libya, but also that there was a continuation of international attention for the conflict. As such, it seems likely that the suspension of mitigating activities by itself is attributed to conflict escalation. More specifically, the suspension of mitigating activities alone reduced the costs for engaging in violent action in such a manner that it was acceptable for the armed groups

to increase conflict intensity despite the continuation of international attention.

Third, from the analysis it becomes clear that there was a continuation of international attention for the conflict in general, as well as for the involvement of foreign backers and the arms embargo more specifically, during the pandemic. Yet, the continued presence of international oversight did not constrain the involvement of foreign backers, but rather led to a continuation in the supply of military resources. For this reason support from foreign backers seems not to be linked to international attention towards the violations of the arms embargo, but to the actual consequences attached to it. Moreover, this may also be true for the previous mechanism, as due to the suspension of mitigating activities there were no actual consequences attached to violations of the peace process, even though there was a continuation of international attention towards the conflict.

In turn, the actual increase in military support may be explained by foreign backers' presumed effect of covid-19 on the armed groups. For example, the foreign backers may fear that their respective armed groups become weaker due to sickness and local scarcities of resources and, therefore, decide to increase their supply of military resources.

Overall, while the theoretical assumptions for certain parts of the mechanisms are supported by evidence, other parts are not. Therefore, future research may use theory building to further explore the workings of these mechanisms as evidence suggests they do form a link between covid-19 and conflict intensity.

Although this study tried to answer the research question as precisely as possible it was subjected to certain limitations. First, the lack of primary data, especially for the state capacity mechanism, made this research much dependent on newspaper articles for the analysis. Newspapers are likely to cover irregular activities and developments regarding covid-19, but

there is always a chance they do not provide the correct information about activities or not mention certain activities at all. Second, the study focused on the presence and functioning of multiple mechanisms within the context of Libya, therefore, caution is required when generalizing the evidence to other cases. However, with pandemics likely to occur more frequently, future research on these mechanisms in a variety of contexts will be academically and socially valuable.

Reference list

Abdulkader, A. (2020a, March 9). Egypt, UAE, Jordan and Belarus have supplied military for Haftar in Libya, report says. *Libya Observer*. https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/egypt-uae-jordan-and-belarus-have-supplied-military-haftar-libya-report-says

Abdulkader, A. (2020b, March 14). Government announces new preventive measures against Coronavirus in Libya. *Libya Observer*. https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/government-announces-new-preventive-measures-against-coronavirus-libya

Abdulkader, A. (2020c, March 16). Presidential Council reviews, political economic and health issues in Libya. *Libya Observer*. https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/presidential-council-reviews-political-economic-and-health-issues-libya

Abdulkader, A. (2020d, March 26). Security Council urges Libyan conflict parties for immediate ceasefire. *Libya Observer*. https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/security-council-urges- libyan-conflict-parties-immediate-ceasefire

Abdulkader, A. (2020e, March 29). Curfew hours in Libya extended, cross-country travel prohibited amid Coronavirus outbreak. *Libya Observer.* https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/curfew-hours-libya-extended-cross-country-travel-prohibited-amid-coronavirus-outbreak

Abdulkader, A. (2020f, April 22). EU's High Representative: Operation IRINI lacks necessary capabilities to start. *Libya Observer*. https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/eus-high-representative-operation-irini-lacks-necessary-capabilities-start

Al-Harathy, S. (2020a, March 25). UNSMIL condemns shelling of Al Rwemi Prison. *Libya Observer*. https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/unsmil-condemns-shelling-al-rwemi-prison

Al-Harathy, S. (2020b, March 29). EU calls for de-escalation in Libya to fight covid-19. *Libya Observer.* https://www.libyaobserver.ly/inbrief/eu-calls-de-escalation-libya-fight-covid-19

Al-Harathy, S. (2020c, April 13). Human Rights Solidarity: War civilian victims in 2020 over 230, more than 40 are children. *Libya Observer.* https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/human-rights-solidarity-war-civilian-victims-2020-over-230-more-40-are-children

Al-Warfalli, A. (2015, March 2). Libya's Haftar appointed army chief for recognized government. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-army-idUSKBN0LY1AB20150302

Amnesty International (2020, June 5). *Libya: Retaliatory attacks against civilians must be halted and investigated.* https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/libya-retaliatory-attacks-against-civilians-must-be-halted-and-investigated/

Asseburg, M., Lacher, W., & Transfeld, M. (2018). Mission impossible? UN mediation in Libya, Syria and Yemen. *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 8*, 1-60.

Asseburg, M., Azizi, H., Dalay, G., & Pieper, M. (2020). The covid-19 pandemic and conflict dynamics in Syria: Neither a turning point nor overall determinant. *SWP Comment, 21*, 1-8.

Bagozzi, B.E., Koren, O., & Mukherjee, B. (2017). Droughts, land appropriation, and rebel violence in the developing world. *Journal of Politics, 79*(3), 1057–1072.

Beach, D., & Pedersen, R. B. (2013). *Process-tracing methods*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Beach, D., & Pedersen, R. B. (2018). Selecting appropriate cases when tracing causal mechanisms. *Sociological Methods & Research, 47*(4), 837–871.

Beach, D., & Pedersen, R. B. (2019). *Process tracing methods: Foundations and guidelines*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Berman, N., Couttenier, M., Monnet, N., & Ticku, R. (2022). Shutdown policies and conflict worldwide. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, *50*, 240-255.

Bloem, J. R., & Salemi, C. (2021). COVID-19 and conflict. *World Development*, *140*, 1-9.

Bove, V., & Böhmelt, T. (2021). Arms imports in the wake of embargoes. *European Journal of International Relations*, *27*(4), 1114–1135.

Brancati, D. (2007). Political aftershocks: The impact of earthquakes on intrastate conflict. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution, 51*(5), 715–743.

Burgoon, B., Ruggeri, A., Schudel, W., & Manikkalingam, R. (2015). From media attention to negotiated peace: Human rights reporting and civil war duration. *International Interactions, 41*(2), 226–255.

Cervellati, M., Sunde, U., & Valmori, S. (2017). Pathogens, weather shocks and civil conflicts. *The Economic Journal, 127*(607), 2581–2616.

Chaudoin, S., Peskowitz, Z., & Stanton, C. (2017). Beyond zeroes and ones: The intensity and dynamics of civil conflict. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution, 61*(1), 56–83.

Cockayne, J., Mikulaschek, C., & Perry, C. D. (2010). The United Nations Security Council and civil war: First insights from a new dataset. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 1-48.

Cortell, A. P., & Davis J.W. (2000). Understanding the domestic impact of international norms: A research agenda. *International Studies Review, 2*(1), 65–87.

Dodds, W. (2019). *The world's worst problems.* Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Dujarric, S. (2020a, February 3). *Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General* [Speech transcript]. United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. Available at https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/db200203.doc.htm

Dujarric, S. (2020b, April 7). *Secretary-General condemns continued attacks on medical facilities in Libya*, SG/MG/20037, available at https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20037.doc.htm

Dujarric, S. (2020c, May 27). *Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General* [Speech transcript]. United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. Available at https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/db200527.doc.htm

Dynes, R.R., & Quarantelli, E.L. (1971). *Community conflict: Its absence and its presence in natural disasters* (Working paper No. 34). Colombus, OH: Disaster Research Center, Ohio State University.

Erickson, J. (2015). *Dangerous trade: Arms exports, human rights, and international reputation*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

EUNAVFOR Med (2020, March 31). *Mission*. European Union External Action. https://www.operationirini.eu/about-us/

European Union External Action (2022, February 11). *EU-Libya relations.* https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-libya-relations_en

Golden, R. (2020, April 25). PC extends the curfew but reduces restricted hours. *Libya Observer.* https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/pc-extends-curfew-reduces-restricted-hours

Gugushvili, A., & Mckee, M. (2022). The COVID-19 pandemic and war. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 50*(1), 16–18.

Guterres, A. (2020, March 23). *The Secretary-general's virtual press encounter on the appeal for global ceasefire* [Speech Transcript]. https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2020-03-23/transcript-of-the-secretary-generals-virtual-press-encounter-the-appeal-for-global-ceasefire

Ide, T. (2021). COVID-19 and armed conflict. *World Development, 140(105355),* 1-6.

Ker-Lindsay, J. (2000). Greek–Turkish rapprochement: The impact of 'disaster diplomacy'? *Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 14*(1), 215–232.

Koehnlein, B., & Koren, O. (2022). COVID-19, state capacity, and political violence by non-state actors. *Journal of Peace Research, 59*(1), 90–104.

Kreutz, J. (2012). From tremors to talks: Do natural disasters produce ripe moments for resolving separatist conflicts? *International Interactions, 38*(4), 482–502.

Kustra, T. (2017). HIV/AIDS, life expectancy, and the opportunity cost model of civil war. *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 61*(10), 2130–2157.

Lewis, A. (2020a, April 18). Libyan forces loyal to Tripoli government try to build on military momentum. *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/libyan-forces-loyal-to-tripoli-government-try-to-build-on-military-momentum-idUSKBN2200VS

Lewis, A. (2020b, June 9). Explainer: Untangling the conflict in Libya. *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-explainer-idUSKBN23G28Z

McDowall, A. (2020, April 22). Libya's GNA focused on Tripoli battle, interior minister says. *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-artillery/libyas-gna-focused-on-tripoli-battle-interior-minister-says-idUSKCN2241YA

Mehrl, M., & Thurner, P. W. (2021). The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on global armed conflict: Early evidence. *Political Studies Review*, *19*(2), 286–293.

Nel, P., & Righarts, M. (2008). Natural disasters and the risk of violent civil conflict. *International Studies Quarterly*, *52*(1), 159–185.

Nienaber, M. (2020, January 19). Berlin summit on Libya did not discuss sanctions: Merkel. *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-merkel-sanctions/berlin-summit-on-libya-did-not-discuss-any-sanctions-merkel-idUSKBN1ZI0QS

Obi, C., & Kabandula, A. (2021). Covid-19, peace and security in Africa: Challenges and opportunities. *African Security*, *14*(4), 307–317.

Polo, S. M. (2020). A pandemic of violence? The impact of COVID-19 on conflict. *Peace Economics, Peace Science, and Public Policy, 26*(3), 1-13.

Raleigh, C., Linke, A., Hegre, H., & Karlsen, J. (2010). Introducing ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data. *Journal of Peace Research, 47*(5), 651–660.

Reinhardt, G.Y., & Lutmar, C. (2022). Disaster diplomacy: The intricate links between disaster and conflict. *Journal of Peace Research, 59*(1), 3-11.

Salamé, G. (2019, July 29*). Remarks of SRSG Ghassan Salamé to the United Nations Security Council* [Speech transcript]. https://unsmil.unmissions.org/srsg-briefings-un-security-council

Salamé, G. (2020, January 30). *SRSG Ghassan Salamé Briefing to the Security Council* [Speech transcript]. https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/srsg_ghassan_salame_briefing_to_the_security_council_30_january_2020_-_as_delivered_eng.pdf

Sprague, O. (2006). *UN arms embargoes: An overview of the last ten years*. Oxfam. https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/un-arms-embargoes-an-overview-of-the-last-ten-years-123930/

The Press and Information Office of the Federal Government (2020, January 19). *The Berlin Conference on Libya* [Conference Conclusions]. The Berlin Conference on Libya, Germany, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Federal%20Government%20_News%20_%20The%20Berlin%20Conference%20on%20Libya.pdf

Tierney, D. (2005). Irrelevant or malevolent? UN arms embargoes in civil wars. *Review of International Studies*, *31*(4), 645–664.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (2011, February 26). *Adopted by the Security Council at its 6491st meeting*, S/RES/1970, available at un.org/S/RES1970(2011)

UNSC (2015, December 23). *Adopted by the Security Council at its 7598th meeting*, S/RES/2259 available at undocs.org/S/RES/2259(2015)

UNSC (2020a, January 15), *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Support Mission in Libya*, S/2020/ 41, available at https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_to_sc_15_january_2020_eng.pdf

UNSC (2020b, May 5), *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Support Mission in Libya*, S/2020/360, available at https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2020_360_e.pdf

UNSC (2021, March 8*), Letter from the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973(2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2021/229, available at https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/037/72/PDF/N2103772.pdf?OpenElement

United Nations Support Mission in Libya (2016, October 13). *Mandate*. https://unsmil.unmissions.org/mandate

Vines, A. (2007). Can UN arms embargoes in Africa be effective? *International Affairs*, *83*(6), 1107–1121.

Weise, Z. (2020, January 20). *The Libyan conflict explained*. POLITICO. https://www.politico.eu/article/the-libyan-conflict-explained/

Williams, S. (2020, May 19). *Acting SRSG Stephanie Williams Briefing to the Security Council* [Speech Transcript]. https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/acting_srsg_briefing_to_the_security_council_-_19_may_2020.pdf

Winer, J.M. (2019, May). *Origins of the Libyan conflict and options for its resolution*. Middle East Institute. https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2019-05/Libya_Winer_May%202019%20update_0.pdf

World Health Organization (WHO) (2022, May 11). *WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard*. https://covid19.who.int/

Zaks, S. (2017). Relationships Among Rivals (RAR): A framework for analyzing contending hypotheses in process tracing. *Political Analysis, 25*(3), 344–362.