ABSTRACT

Conventional wisdom and academic literature posits state weakness as the dependent variable for intrastate conflict, low- or un-governed space and, by extension, non-state armed group (NSAG) presence. Moreover, it is asserted that NSAGs seek to exploit and/or establish safe-havens in low- or un-governed areas, which yields further instability, weakness and hence internal war. However, this has never been empirically demonstrated. This study employs a hybrid quantitative and qualitative methodology to address the following research questions and falsify the hypotheses.

Q₁ Are measurements of governance indeed reflective or parallel to metrics of state strength/weakness? H₁ The prevailing hypothesis is that low-governed states are weak states. Q₂ Are existing metrics regarding intrastate conflict appropriate measures of NSAG presence? H₂ Intrastate conflict data require modification to reflect many contemporary NSAGs. Q₃ Is high NSAG presence positively correlated to low-governance metrics? H₃ The prevailing hypothesis is that NSAGs are primarily located in low-governed or weak states.

Q₄ Is high NSAG presence positively correlated to variables such as male youth bulge, high poverty and low secondary-school education? H₄ It is uncertain whether variables positively correlated to existing civil war data would also maintain in areas where NSAG are dominant since H₂ implies needed data modification. Q₅ What are the theoretical and practical implications of NSAG presence in un- or low-governed areas for peace and conflict studies? H₅ If NSAGs exist primarily in low- or un-governed areas, deny the legitimate use of violent instruments of power by states and/or have legitimacy among the populace, they may in effect be para- or proto-states engaged in “informal governance” per James Rosenau’s definition (1997). This requires a different strategies and tactics to fully defeat or co-opt them for humanitarian and conflict
resolution purposes. $H_{3b}$ “Insider-partials” as espoused by Wher and Lederach (1991) are needed as “cultural translators” who liaise between state and non-state parties in negotiations thus ensure peace agreements trickle down.

Chapter 1 argues this study on the nexus of governance, intrastate conflict and armed groups addresses a lacuna in existing literature. Types of intrastate conflict and its evolution are surveyed in Chapter 2. Modern facets are addressed in Chapter 3, which analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of studies over the past 15 to 20 years. An extensive analysis of the state strength-governance thesis is presented in Chapter 4. The NSAG-governance metric relationship is addressed in Chapter 5, detailing the methodology employed to modify an existing governance dataset, create two NSAG datasets and correlate the variables from 1996-2006.

Findings and steps for further research are identified in Chapter 6, followed by 18 appendices containing most of the data. This research demonstrates that NSAGs are prevalent in all governance quartiles but are prevalent in Q2 and Q3, not Q4. Moreover, it challenges youth-bulge, poverty and male secondary-school education as a dependent variables for intrastate conflict. Finally, five organizational typologies in which NSAGs may appear, evolve or devolve are created. Policy implications for all governance quartiles are forwarded, arguing how insider-partials may provide a pulse on NSAG dynamics.