



**Doctoral School of
International
Relations and
Political Science**

Ph.D. Thesis Summary

Bálint Kása

**Efficiency of international organizations' conflict
resolution strategies in the midst of intra-
organizational incoherence**

The Libyan civil war as a proxy stage

Supervisor:

Dr. László Csicsmann

Associate Professor

Budapest, 2022

Department of International Relations

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1. Justification of the Topic

Various topics interested me at the time I applied to the Doctoral School but I was mostly aiming for scrutinizing conflict zones, or a single war. Having completed my Masters studies at a period when the Arab Spring's impact was already debated, the Crimean Peninsula was already under Russian annexation and a questionable coup-attempt took place in Turkey, I was equally ambitious and undecided in terms of where to proceed, what field to research in depth. I finally began conducting an investigation of hybrid warfare predominantly motivated by the events in Ukraine at the time. Still, after a relatively short time — and based on the advice of my supervisor — I changed my field due to multiple practical reasons.

First of all, I had to find a reasonably narrow angle, while keeping the work sufficiently comprehensive. Secondly, I wanted to avoid reliance on easily-debatable buzzwords and concepts at the core of the methodological framework. Lastly, I ran into numerous obstacles in relation to data collection. However, this experience also

equipped my research-planning skillset with a lot of practical aspects that I was able to rely on later.

Leaning on these, it felt natural to opt for conducting my doctoral research on the Libyan proxy war. Among the motivations behind was the many layers of relevance Libya had — and continues to have — from a European perspective. The vacuum emerging after the removal of Mu’ammar Al-Qadhdhafi directly impacted European security, which naturally made me interested in the topic. One aspect I started to investigate early on was the issue of energy security not necessarily purely due to the previously existing ties with European countries, or the potential lying in advancing those collaborations, but also because of the country’s role on the international energy markets.

Another angle, which was a lot more palpable at the time was of course evolving around the higher ratio of migration towards Europe. Weak or even non-existent state authority seemed to have posed no challenge to those deciding to flee the continent for any reasons as the island of Lampedusa became the symbol of persisting anarchy.

The relevance of European Neighborhood Policy seemed obvious but as I perceived the events in direct opposition to European interests, I wanted to investigate the reasons behind that perception. Also, out of the multiple countries severely hit by the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Libya was a relatively calmer case as compared to Syria or Yemen. Still, this made me even more curious to learn why the obvious economic, security and political interests were insufficient — or so I have thought — to impute Libya greater significance in European foreign policy.

This all have coincided with a shock stemming from the U.S. presidential elections that seemed to have altered its foreign policy behavior in the region. Today, the significance or in some instances even the occurrence of this phenomenon is questioned, but as I started my research, it seemed that a new regional balance of influence was in the making, at least this was a factor I took into consideration when analyzing foreign influence in Libya.

This initial idea was significantly supported by the strengthening Russian and Turkish regional rivalry that I wanted to analyze in the Libyan context. It was just another angle that I believed to have further contributed to this important discourse that was ongoing in the Syrian context as it existed there on a much more tangible scale. This led me to the idea of considering every state level foreign-actors' role in Libya. It has to be pointed out that throughout the examined period, the level of foreign interference was anything but constant, and that it was around the time of the Skhirat Agreement from where a strengthening will for influencing domestic events in Libya started to materialize.

Having elaborated on that, I wanted to understand how the dynamics of competing and occasionally rival foreign parties' actions functioned, especially in comparison with their officially declared agendas. At that point, I got curious about how these state-actors managed to pursue whatever interests they have had while being attached to multiple international organizations and alliances that albeit carry no supranational authority,

represent the highest level of international diplomacy and collaboration.

An interesting problem came to the fore with this line of thinking. Namely, how do competing state-actors for obtaining greater influence at a given location — in this case in Libya — manage to keep their alliances functioning while acting against each other under the surface. This notion motivated the hypothesis of my dissertation as I perceived alliance politics of the time failing or at least insufficient, and so it argued *international organizations' (IO) conflict resolution strategies in Libya proved to be insufficient because of persisting intra-organizational incoherence.*

2. Methodological Framework

The methodological framework was built upon a simple notion of the contradictory nature of conflict resolution agendas and pursued overt as well as selfish agendas. Certainly, I was aware at the time that this logic would fail in some instances where declared and perceived goals and actions did not differ meaningfully. Still, I felt confident that I would find enough examples to prove the accuracy of the hypothesis.

Conflict resolution is of course an important notion in every state's official agenda today. Still, in the Libya case where there were clear signs that a proxy war has developed through the years, these agendas appeared to have lost from their weight. Certainly, no nation state would officially claim the accuracy of this but I felt that by comparing statements, interviews and directives with tangibly-documented evidence of proxy warfare by these same actors, not only would the readers get a clearer picture in terms of real interests in Libya, but they could potentially witness the tendencies of means and frequency of the proxy capabilities as well as their change of intensity

over the course of the investigated period. The expectation was that this could provide a good level of transparency on how these actors defined the risks and stakes in the country.

Since conflict resolution agendas in today's international politics is most widely-articulated within international organizations, it seemed rational to conduct this research with the involvement of those and thereby have a layer of international organizations and another of individual states.

Certainly, I had to determine what international organizations were relevant to this research. It seemed rational to conduct the selection while already considering the membership of states that — based on qualitative sources — could be proven to have intervened in any form in Libya since the civil war begun, which marked the beginning of the investigated period. For example, the signs of contribution by the United Arab Emirates as well as Qatar led me to the inclusion of the Arab League on the list of international organizations investigated in this work because I hoped to find a correlation between the

seemingly-certain rivalry between these two — in Libya too —, and the unalignment with alliance level conflict resolution goals.

The five international organizations selected in this research were the United Nations, NATO, the European Union, the Arab League and the African Union. Out of these, certain individual member states were also investigated according to the same criteria and based on a similar set of qualitative sources. At the end, the actions of these were also compared with some visualizations.

3. Scientific Results and summary of the Dissertation

As a result of the applied methodological framework, the dissertation's main findings were the followings:

- The Libya proxy war provides room to refute Oye's argumentation on the retaliation mechanisms of international regimes. On the other hand, political weight of certain regime members inevitably seems to have influenced intra-alliance processes. They could slow down bureaucracy or divert attention in a favorable manner occasionally jeopardizing the regime's proposed agenda i.e. to attempt conflict resolution.
- The explanation on the development of proxy environments by Hinnebusch seems to be accurate inasmuch as the domestic unrest with mass protests that most likely would not have led to a change of government was followed by an external intervention that took place in Libya backing up anti-establishment militias, which eventually led to a situation where various parties started to receive

additional sources to pursue their resist. This immensely contributed to the escalation of what started out to be a domestic revolution and has created a paradox situation where foreign actors possessed greater influence on developments than domestic ones. Influence of domestic stakeholders was tied to the number of foreign supporters; hence at the time it was more limited than at later stages where the abundance of foreign supply created an environment the proxies could easily exploit. In some instances, though, proxies became exceedingly vulnerable and dependent on their masters (most notably Haftar). An applicable formula in this case study was that the less patrons these proxies had, the more dependent they were on them and more defenseless they proved. Henceforth, their de facto room for movement was dependent on their masters' preferred and uncoordinated unilateral support that significantly outlived the revolution.

- Relationship between patrons and pawns in Libya followed a fluctuating and constantly changing

pattern, which was understandable given the fact that both parties attempted to receive tangible benefits but could only do so if the other party continued to prove its value, otherwise the relationship would be terminated. Following the same rationale, the most frequent scenario that prevailed in Libya and oftentimes led to an alteration within such a relationship was the strengthening of a proxy—which in any case was the result of multiple support it received besides other strengths it possessed on the ground—after which the nature of the given relationship also altered provided by the increased potential of the proxy actor to succeed via maneuvering among the numerous suppliers while also carrying out the essential military, etc. success.

- An accurate formula to explain patterns of relationship would be an *intermediate model* that characterizes the relationship between proxy and master through acknowledging the prominent role of local proxies, but which also recognizes the

need from masters to provide the decisive support in an environment full of such proxy relationships.

- Efficiency of intra-organizational cooperation is fatally harmed when standards of behavior are not harmonized among members and there are no deterring measures in place against means of exploitations.
- All the selected five international organizations' conflict resolution strategies were predominantly affected by the most influential states.
- The scale of involvement did not necessarily have a positive impact on the magnitude of influence. On the other hand, higher risks and stakes were likely to trigger higher involvement.
- The accuracy of Walt's conclusion on alliance-forming of strong and weak states alongside a shared sense of outside threat of relative or absolute power was justified via the Libya example as several cases have shown that there was a direct connection between rise of threats and strengthening of alliances among already existing,

but in a way insufficiently harmonized international organizations.

- Negative effects stemming from intra-regime rivalries in member states' interests was a decisive factor throughout the investigated period, and compliance with regime agendas on conflict resolution were much better followed at times of better-balanced interests.
- The evolution of the past decade's Russian involvement in Libya – with the extension of historic ties – enabled the revelation of a fairly wide-scale of interests predominantly concentrating on the geopolitical and commercial aspects while neglecting any signs suggesting ideological interests. The related toolset of Moscow contained a proportionately covert, but wide spectrum of means that have been well-synchronized especially in the post-2015 period. The timeline of Haftar's military advancement provides an accurate indicator on the relative magnitude and effectiveness of these as compared to other foreign involvement.

- The role of European countries was different considering the intra-organizational lack of political coherence that reached beyond the Libyan case but that had significant implications on it too. Out of those states with perceivably visible interests, the oil and gas sectors were of importance to all that had a related major corporation. Investments and ideological motives were not meaningful characteristics, but several states have shown regional geopolitical aspirations. The single unilaterally shared aspect was of course related to migration given its role in contemporary European agenda. Having elaborated on this, the only proven applier of proxy was France. This individually taken on covert strategy was necessitated by the more ambitious geopolitical goals as compared to the regime allies and involved an immensely diverse and oftentimes tangible support provided in favor of the local agents.
- The Arab League had a similarly disproportionate internal division, which also contained a divide

amongst means of support. Precisely, due to member states' obvious interests in favorable developments within the oil market, the constantly changing status of Libyan fields and facilities was one of the concerns. Geopolitical and migration related interest were only applicable in a limited number of cases, but the ideological questions were monitored closely by all members. This latter actually fueled internal division due to Qatar's opposing views. Nevertheless, the small state used effectively its non-military arsenal at disposal. On the other hand, there was a perceivable segregation of tasks at the other branch of the regime. Specifically, apart from the UAE's extensive involvement that included all investigated means, it also pertained to Saudi financial, Jordanian weapon supply and Egyptian training while almost all parties utilized their diplomatic tools.

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