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Path for Dominance

Disaggregating Intra-rebel Conflict between Parent and Splinter Group in Separatist Insurgency

Case Study: Moro National Liberation Front – Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, and Karen National Union – Democratic Karen Buddhist Army in Burma

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To my family – sister, dad, and my mum especially, thank you for encouraging me to finish everything I start.
Abstract

Common beliefs posit that rebel fragmentation and the emergence of splinter groups are often associated with intra-rebel violence. However, empirical evidence suggests that it is not always the case: there are cases of non-lethal competition between parent and splinter groups across time and terrain. This study explores the cause of lethal and non-lethal conflict between parent and splinter group that represent ethno-nationalist identity. By using theories of rational choice and outbidding strategy, I argue that lethal intra-rebel conflict are less likely when there is a balanced distribution of power between parent and splinter groups, subsequent to organizational fragmentation. This is because intra-rebel conflict against formidable opponents is costly. Further, it presents an existential threat in the event of counterinsurgency or retaliation. Thus, it is expected that rebel groups are more likely to employ non-lethal outbidding strategy in order to become the sole representation of their ethnic group. Using the method of structured focused comparison, this hypothesis is tested by comparing Moro insurgencies in Philippines and Karen insurgencies in Burma. The main finding demonstrates partial support to the causality of distribution power to the lethality of outbidding strategies. In addition, the empirical analysis also shows state intervention and social ties as influencing lethal intra-rebel conflict.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ARMM</td>
<td>Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao</td>
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<td>BMA</td>
<td>Bangsa Moro Army</td>
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<td>BIAF</td>
<td>Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Force</td>
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<td>DKBA</td>
<td>Democratic Karen Buddhist Army</td>
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<td>DKBA – 5</td>
<td>Democratic Karen Buddhist Army Brigades 555</td>
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<td>FPA</td>
<td>Final Peace Agreement</td>
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<td>GRP</td>
<td>Government of the Republic of the Philippines</td>
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<td>MILF</td>
<td>Moro Islamic Liberation Front</td>
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<td>MIM</td>
<td>Muslim Independence Movement</td>
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<td>SPDPC</td>
<td>Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development</td>
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<td>Tatmadaw</td>
<td>Burmese Military</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents
Acknowledgement .................................................................................................................. 2
Abstract .................................................................................................................................. 3
ABBREVIATION ...................................................................................................................... 4
1. Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 8
2. Literature Review ............................................................................................................... 11
3. Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................................... 14
   3.1 Conceptualizing Group-level Rebel Organization and Splinter Group ......................... 15
   3.2 Intra-rebel Conflict as Outbidding Strategy for Dominance and Control .................... 16
   3.3 Causal Story: Distribution of Power between Parent and Splinter Group and Expected
       Outbidding Strategies ....................................................................................................... 20
4. Research Design .................................................................................................................. 24
   4.1 Method of structured, focused comparison, and within-case process tracing ............... 25
   4.2 Operationalization ........................................................................................................ 29
   4.3 Time Frame and Data Collection ................................................................................... 32
   4.4 Structure of Empirical Analysis .................................................................................... 35
5. Case 1: Intra-rebel Conflict between MNLF-MILF ............................................................... 35
   5.1 Context of Insurgent Group: the Origin of Moro National Liberation Front ............... 35
   5.2 Non-Lethal Intra-rebel Conflict between MNLF-MILF ............................................... 37
   5.3 Assessing Power Distribution between MNLF and MILF ........................................... 38
   5.4 Examining the Mechanism: Outbidding Strategies used by the MNLF and MILF (1984-
       2000) ............................................................................................................................... 42
   5.5 Conclusion and Additional Observation ....................................................................... 47
6. Case 1: Intra-rebel Conflict between KNU-DKBA ................................................................ 48
   6.1 Context of Insurgent Group: Origin of Karen National Union .................................... 48
   6.2 Lethal Intra-rebel conflict between KNU and DKBA (1994-2010) ............................. 50
   6.3 Assessing Distribution of Power .................................................................................. 51
   6.4 Examining the Mechanism: Outbidding Strategies Used by the KNU and DKBA (1994 –
       2010) ............................................................................................................................... 55
   6.5 Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 59
7. Cross Case Comparison: Comparing the Case of Karen and Moro Insurgencies .............. 60
   7.1 Intra-rebel Conflict and Distribution of Power in two case studies ............................ 61
   7.2 How distribution of power influences outbidding strategies in both cases? .................. 62
   7.2 Extended Analysis ......................................................................................................... 64
7.3 Limitation and Bias ................................................................. 66
8. Conclusion ................................................................................. 69
Bibliography ................................................................................. 71
List of figures and tables

Figure 1 : Intra-rebel conflict between parent and splinter group ........................................ 17
Table 1 : Outbidding strategies in intra-rebel conflict ............................................................... 17
Table 2 : Causal Story .............................................................................................................. 22
Table 3 : Criteria of case selection .......................................................................................... 25
Figure 2 : MNLF-MILF Territorial Control ........................................................................... 38
Table 4 : Distribution of MNLF-MILF fighters ..................................................................... 40
Figure 3 : KNU-DKBA battle-related deaths ....................................................................... 49
Figure 4 : KNU-DKBA Territorial Control ........................................................................... 51
Table 5 : Distribution of KNU-DKBA fighters ..................................................................... 53
Table 6 : Cross-case comparison summary .......................................................................... 60
1. Introduction

Why co-ethnic rebel groups engage in intra-rebel conflict despite sharing self-determination principles still remains a puzzle. In Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Pakistan and Nagaland, we see cases of intra-rebel conflict between armed factions and splinter groups. They show us that insurgent group, albeit mobilized along similar lines of ethnic or religious identity, are rarely unitary. Kalyvas explains this as part of war where identity shifts and re-alignment within and between identity groups occur (2008: 1050). This is also illustrated in cases where rebel group’s fragment and emerge as co-ethnic splinter groups. Empiric studies show that such groups fight for either similar or contradicting goals with the parent organization. This further proves that even identity-based rebel groups hardly exist in a unitary form.

Most studies in relation to rebel fragmentation and splintering group provide hypotheses as to why intra-rebel groups engage in violence. Yet they fail to explain why splinter groups do not fight with its parent organization. In effort to address this gap, this paper seeks to explain this counter-factual. It presents a framework to explore why in particular cases there was no conflict, whereas in others there was. By conducting a structured focused comparison of two cases of rebel fragmentation from Myanmar and Philippines, it process traces the shift of distribution of power that occurred after the formation of splinter group and how it influences rebel group’s strategic choice to become the sole representative of self-determinism group.

Studies on rebel fragmentation and multi-actors intra-state conflict has rapidly expanded in recent years. Scholars have widely focused on the cause of rebel fragmentation and its impact on the use of violence in civil war, conflict duration, and peace processed between government and multiple rebel groups. Notwithstanding, the causal explanation for intra-rebel conflict is still undertheorized. Studies on the structural conditions in self-determination conflicts find that a greater number of armed factions within rebel movement are associated with inter-factional conflict and violence against co-ethnic civilian (K. G. Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour 2012a). Other studies find the presence of certain conditions, namely ethnic homogeneity; territorial control; drugs and diamonds cultivation; rebel groups relative strength; state weakness and the absence of state forces in rebel group’s controlled territory as associated with inter-rebel conflict (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012). Indeed, these findings have shed some light for understanding why rebel group fight with one another despite of existential threat posed by the state. However, such studies only explore the conditions of when or where rebel groups are likely to fight each other, and it offers little, or no
explanation as to why rebel groups avoid infighting despite the presence of aforementioned conditions. While some previous literature on inter-rebel conflict suggest that rebel actors always opt to employ violence to achieve their goals rather than utilizing other non-violent strategies, these assumptions contradict some empirical examples where there is a variation non-conflict relationship between parent and splintering group across time and space.

In effort to explore these academic and empirical questions, this thesis asks *why do some rebel organizations experience lethal intra-rebel conflict with its splinter groups, while others do not?*

This thesis is based on rationalist theory, and assumes that rebel actors engage in lethal intra-rebel conflict against the rival group only when they have the capacity to do so (Nygård and Weintraub 2015). I argue that, lethal intra-rebel conflict is more likely to occur when there is asymmetric or imbalanced distribution of power between parent and splinter group, following organizational fragmentation. Hence, lethal intra-rebel conflict is predicted when one group retains a relatively stronger powerbase while the other holds meagre capacity to defend or retaliate. The underlying assumption of this theoretical framework is that rebel fragmentation leads to the division of resources and man power, previously controlled by a single organization. As both parent and splinter groups had previously worked together, there is no information problem. Each are well aware of how many fighters, subgroups support, and territorial control remains with the parent group or has been taken away by the splinter group (Perkoski 2015). Based on this knowledge, significantly stronger group are likely to eliminate weaker group if it knows it has the capacity to do so.

The causal mechanism that links distribution of power to intra-rebel conflict is outbidding strategy (Kydd and Walter 2006; Lilja 2012). Outbidding strategy is defined as “a form of escalation … [where] an actor uses non-conciliatory deed and discourse to establish representation and leadership of the identity group” (Lilja 2012, 126). The condition needed to make outbidding strategy necessary for rebel groups is when there are two or more competing co-ethnic rebel groups, and the general co-ethnic constituents are uncertain about which group best represents their interest (Walter and Kydd 2006, 77). By linking distribution of power to outbidding strategy, this study hypothesizes that lethal outbidding strategy against co-ethnic rivals are likely to happen when there is an asymmetric balance of power between parent and splinter group. Conversely, non-lethal outbidding strategy is likely to be the preferred option where there is a balance of power.
In order to empirically test this hypothesis, an in-depth qualitative comparative study along with within-case process tracing, is conducted. The cases of KNU - DKBA in Burma and the MNLF - MILF in the Philippines are selected for comparison. The case studies are selected based on the similarity of structural conditions of the rebel groups, but different outcomes in the observed dependent variable. The MNLF-MILF rivalry, so far has not manifested into violent intra-rebel conflict despite the latter group splintered in 1984. After DKBA splintered from KNU in 1994, both groups immediately engaged in internecine conflict over decades that caused hundreds of casualties and internal displacements among Karen people.

The main finding is that balance of power between parent and splinter group influence rebel group’s non-lethal outbidding strategy to become the dominant actor in representing self-determination group. In the case of MNL-MILF rivalry, the conflict between both groups had not manifested into violent conflict between them. Both MNLF and MILF engaged in outbidding discourses in both domestic and international level to garner support from its audiences. Further, empirical analysis also finds that MILF purposely avoid violent confrontation with state or MNLF by focusing itself in organizational building from 1984 to 1990 as the distribution of power between both groups asymmetrically favours the MNLF. In KNU-DKBA case the distribution of power was asymmetric from 1994 to 2000. KNU engaged in lethal outbidding strategy against DKBA after the latter inception in 1994. However, additional observations that require alternative theoretical explanations are made in this study. First is the role of state intervention by manipulating the conflict between both groups altered the balance of power between two actors. Secondly, violent intra-rebel conflicts were not always occurred in accordance to the outbidding strategy posited in this thesis. Conflict over resources and trade routes in Karen-Thai become more prevalent as the DKBA became dominant actor in Karen state, particularly from 2000 to 2008.

This study aims to makes several contributions. Better understanding of rebel group behaviours and the cause of intra-rebel conflict have broad policy and academic relevance. First, Intra-rebel conflict leads to increase in violence against civilians, internal displacement, and force recruitments, and thus makes conflict harder to resolve. Effort of reconciliation and mitigating the risk of post-conflict violence involves not only between the state and ethnic minority group, but also within the minority group itself. By understanding the cause of conflict between co-ethnic rebel groups, the state or third-party conciliators can exploit this situation in order to bring reconciliation between them in effort to provide better and lasting settlement Secondly, this study also intends to show that, intra-rebel conflict to represent
identity group is not always a zero-sum game. State or external supporters can play positive role (i.e. mediating or enforcing commitment between fragmented rebel groups) that can mitigate anarchic condition of intra-state conflict and hostile competition over the access to resources or political leverage vis-à-vis the government.

The study proceeds as follows. In Chapter Two I discuss previous literatures on rebel fragmentation and identify recent studies on both inter/intra-rebel conflicts. Chapter Three outlines the concept of organizational fragmentation and splinter groups and the theory of outbidding strategy between co-ethnic rebel groups. I conceptualized the distribution of power between fragmented groups and how it affects outbidding strategy between parent and splinter group. In Chapter Four I present my research design and methodology to guide the empirical analysis. Chapter Five presents within case analysis of the first case study, the MNLF-MILF intra-rebel conflict. In Chapter Six, the case of KNU-DKBA is analysed. Chapter Seven is a structured focused comparison of the two case studies mentioned above. Lastly, Chapter Eight provides a summary and conclusion of the main findings and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

There has been an exponential growth in studies on insurgent dynamics in multi-actors civil wars. It is now commonly accepted that rebel groups, whether mobilized along identity or ideology line, are rarely unitary. They are prone to fragment throughout the course of war. One such proponents of this science is Kalyvas who asserts that separatist conflicts rarely consist of unitary actors (2006, 475). He notes that instead, they emerge in an “often complex and ambiguous process that lead to important shifts and re-alignment within and between identity groups” (Ibid). The prevalence of fragmentation is identified by Findley and Rudloff who, from studying 114 cases of civil war, find fifty cases, roughly 44 percent, have experienced fragmentation (2012). These findings contradict previous theories that treat insurgency and particularly ethnic rebel group as unitary actors (Gurr 1993; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Posen 1993).

Recent studies on insurgent dynamics have also shed light on the cause of fragmentation and the conditions within which it occurs. In the context of research on negotiations with state actors, Stedman finds that a rebel group can be divided in two, either as a moderate faction who supports settlement, or hardliners who oppose it (1997). In her detailed case analysis on
the civil wars in Bosnia and Afghanistan, Christia finds that perceived loss of power due to battle loss increases the risk of fragmentation. This is due to disagreements that arise about strategy or an asymmetric distribution of the perceived power loss amongst its constituent group, which threatens the group’s survival (2012, 53). Splinter group emerges when both incumbent and dissident factions retained enough power to operate independently (Ibid., 53). Similarly, Kenny argues that the Karen insurgent group and Irish Republican Army both had a the sense of collective burden which was shared across the organization decreases and thus cohesion is negatively affected, as “rebel elites are preoccupied with resource extraction rather than fighting for political goals” (2010, 552). Based on such literature, rebel groups are likely to fractionalize when there is a perceived asymmetric burden sharing between the group’s rank-and-files and the elites. Pearlman and McLauchlin argue that the state’s repression – or repression shocks – will decrease disunity within ethno-nationalist movement if there is a low satisfaction amongst members of rebel group with the pre-existing institutional arrangements (2012).

Using this literature as foundation and the condition of rebel fragmentation and the presence of multiple rebel actors in civil war, what makes violent conflict likely between previously unitary rebel groups? Anecdotal evidences show that some fragmented rebel groups manage to co-exist peacefully while simultaneously waging insurgency against the government. For instances, since its split in 1984, MNLF and MILF have avoided direct confrontation despite competing over the legitimacy to represent Bangsamoro self-determination movement (UCDP 2016). Nevertheless, both groups engaged in lethal conflict with their splinter groups: the MNLF launched major offensive against Abu Sayyaf in 2013, while the MILF have been engaging in sporadic clashes with Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter, since the latter broke-away in 2011.

Growing literatures on inter-rebel dynamics shed light for understanding the puzzling phenomenon of conflict amongst rebel group. Using data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program Non-State Conflict Dataset from the years 1989 – 2008, Fjelde and Nilsson find that inter-rebel conflict are likely to happen when a) rebel group are fighting in an area with drug cultivation, b) the group is in control of territory beyond the government reach, c) the rebel group is militarily strong or weak in relation to the other rebel groups, and d) the state authority is weak (2012). In this theoretical framing, Fjelde and Nilsson find that inter-rebel fighting can be explained as strategic action, instead of opportunistic moves. A rebel group is willing to spend its resources to fight other groups only if the benefits outweigh the cost
Building on Fjelde and Nilsson findings, Nygard and Weintraub develop a game theory model that explains violent conflict between rebel groups as likely when the “status quo distribution of benefits reflects the existing distribution of power” (2015, 557). Similar to strategic interaction among states, rebel groups are expected to bargain over access to resources if conflict is costly or if they are satisfied with the status quo distribution of resources.

In the context of rebel fragmentation, Christia predicts that intra-rebel conflict occurs if “one of the subgroups has been seriously compromised while the other is still powerful” (2012, 45). As a result, the stronger subgroup will takeover (Ibid.). However, if both groups sustain enough power to control constituents, resources, and territory, they are likely to split up and strike out their own relevant war. Christia argues that inter-rebel conflict or alliance formation in multi-ethnic failed states is not driven by ethnic kinship or common religion, but rather is driven to secure minimum winning coalition that guarantees participants the maximum shares of post-war political control, while also ensuring victory as achievable (Ibid.).

The salience of ethnic identity is questioned by Seymour in his study on non-state conflict in Sudan civil war (2014). Seymour argues that conflict between militant groups can be influenced by political rivalry and patron-based relations with third-party actors. He finds that co-ethnic factions switch sides and fight their former comrades, with powerful outside actors promoting or exploiting local rivalries by offering weaponries or material benefits (Seymour 2014). Although these findings have expanded our knowledge of civil war dynamics, patronage politics and its effect on armed group behaviour, it is limited in explaining cases of inter-rebel conflict outside the context of contemporary conflicts in Africa.

K. G. Cunningham, Bakke and Seymour (2012) study on self-determination groups provides directly relevant insight for the research question of this thesis. They find that the increase of armed factions representing an ethnic group increases the likelihood of conflict against co-ethnic rivals (2012). In a separate publication, K. Cunningham posits that divided self-determination movements generate commitment and information problems, thus making civil war more likely (2013; 2014). Fragmentation within self-determination groups incentivizes the state to select among a variety of bargaining partners that could in turn affect the competitive dynamics within the groups. That said, rebel groups can use violence against its co-ethnic rival to signal the state that they are an important partner to bargain with, as a form
of “outbidding strategy” (Kydd and Walter 2006; K. Cunningham 2014.). Lilja further develops the concept of outbidding strategy within the context of negotiation with the state (Lilja 2012). She argues lethal outbidding strategy is likely to be directed against co-ethnic factions prior to the onset of negotiations in order to eliminate potential spoilers and to establish hegemonic control. Establishing hegemonic control over ethnic or self-determination movement ensures for the dominant actor, access and control to co-ethnic constituents and increases its bargaining leverage vis-à-vis the government (Lilja and Hultman 2011).

Outbidding strategy provides a clear understanding as to why parent and splinter groups engage in intra-rebel conflict. However, Lilja conceptualization of outbidding strategy solely focuses on the timing of outbidding strategies in relation to the onset of negotiation. Lilja hypothesizes that lethal outbidding strategy against co-ethnic rival is expected prior to negotiation, specifically “during the consolidation phase in the conflict,” while non-lethal strategy is expected during the phase of negotiation, to garner support from co-ethnic constituency (2012, 128). Less attention is given to the means of outbidding strategies, and the conditions that influence rebel actor’s decision-making calculus. In actuality, a rebel group may rather avoid direct confrontation with its rival despite competing for popularity or establishing dominance over insurgency movement. That said, given all the conditions – fragmented co-ethnic rebel groups, competition over resources and political legitimacy – we expect lethal intra-rebel conflict. It becomes a puzzle worth exploring when the empirical evidences show otherwise. It is for this reason that this study aims to explore the variation of non-violent interaction among splinter groups.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study. It starts with the conceptualization of group-level rebel organization and the splinter group that emerges as a result of organizational fragmentation. These units are the primary observation of this thesis. It uses the definition of intra-rebel conflict between parent and splinter group as strategic violence, where both compete over dominance and control of the shared constituency in order to increase their political leverage vis-à-vis the government. The causal mechanism of intra-rebel conflict can be seen as “outbidding strategies,” where parent and splinter groups employ lethal or non-lethal means to eliminate or weaken their rival in a bid for hegemonic control over rebel movement. The causal story is then presented based on rational choice
understanding of inter-rebel conflicts to explain why division of power between parent and splinter group influences the rebel actor’s outbidding strategies. I argue that due to the condition of complete information between parent and splinter groups, asymmetric distribution of power between them will lead to violent intra-rebel conflict. A stronger rebel group are likely to employ lethal outbidding strategy by eliminating or weaken the weaker co-ethnic rival, in order to promote its position as the sole representative of an ethnic-identity group.

3.1 Conceptualizing Group-level Rebel Organization and Splinter Group.

In order to clearly capture the dynamics of rebel fragmentation and conflict between parent and splinter group, I use Christia’s conceptualization of rebel groups dynamics: (1) group-level rebel organization and, (2) alliance-based rebel groups (2012). In the in-depth study of Afghanistan and Bosnian civil war, Christia argues that group-level organizations mobilize along the line of homogenous ethnic group, whereas alliance-based coalition mobilize along the lines of different ethnic groups. In that sense, the dynamics of group-level rebel organization falls in between group cohesion and fragmentation, whereas alliance-based rebel groups in civil war are characterized with alliance formation and alliance-breakdown. For example, coalition of Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF) in 1985 comprised of four different group-level Tamil organizations: Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization, Eelam Revolutionary Organizations of Students, Eelam People’s Revolutionary Front and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). As each group has its own respective organizational structure and centralized leaderships, the break-down of ENLF coalition is not considered as rebel group fragmentation, but rather alliance break-down. Thereby, these militant groups did not become splinter groups. Whereas, later in the history of the Sri Lankan conflict, the Karuna’s faction, Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) was formed by breaking away from LTTE in 2004. This was considered as rebel group fragmentation because previously Karuna was immersed within the LTTE organisational structure. Hence, TMVP is categorized as a splinter group. This thesis will use this conceptualisation of what constitutes a splinter group for studying the dynamics of fragmentation and conflict between parent and splinter groups.

The underlying assumption of group-based rebel organization rests on the premise that rebel organizations are likely to comprise of multiple different warring subgroups or factions. As highlighted in the previous literature on insurgent dynamics, rebel organizations are rarely unitary: there are military or political factions within the group; tribal, clans, or other sub-
ethnic and religious cleavages; or between rebel elites and “revolutionary peasants” (Scott 1979; Kalyvas 2006; Christia 2012; Paul 2014). Rebel fragmentation and splinter group formation often follow along these internal cleavages. As previously noted, severe battlefield loss or unequal burden sharing suffered asymmetrically between warring subgroups, threatens group survival and can lead to organizational fragmentation and the emergence of splinter group (Christia 2012, 53; Kenny 2010). Similarly, McLauchlin and Pearlman argue that state’s “repression shock” amplifies fragmentation within rebel group when there is low-level of satisfaction over distribution of power between warring factions (McLauchlin and Pearlman 2012). In the context of negotiation and peace settlement, Stedman argues that hardliner factions are likely to break-away and continue armed insurgency in order to increase their political leverage, or extract greater concessions from the government (1997). By using the same example, Karuna’s group that splintered from LTTE in 2004 were mainly comprised of Eastern Tamils militants, whereas LTTE mainstream leadership was predominantly Northern Tamil (Staniland 2012, 34). Although he was labelled as opportunists, Karuna justified the break-away formation as due to Eastern Tamils militants suffering discrimination and unequal distribution of power that favour predominantly Northern Tamil LTTE leaders (Ibid).

Based on conceptualization presented above, the primary observation for this thesis is internal conflict (referred as intra-rebel conflict hereafter) between parent and splinter groups following organizational fragmentation. I focus on splinter group rather than factions because splinter group has organizationally separated themselves from the mainstream organization and no longer operate under their parent group’s jurisdiction or control (Christia 2012; Perkoski 2015). Factions, on the other hand, can comprise of political or military wings, or group of leaders within the organization that still represent the same rebel organization albeit under distinct characteristics or interests with the central leadership. That said, the existence of factions within insurgent group does not necessarily mean that each of them compete with one another. Splinter group, however, formed as an independent organization in lieu the parent group, and is likely to compete over resources, constituents and political recognition.

3.2 Intra-rebel Conflict as Outbidding Strategy for Dominance and Control

Rebel fragmentation and the proliferation of splinter groups exacerbate the competitive and anarchic environment of intrastate conflict. In the context of ethnic insurgency, the multiple
non-state armed groups create a volatile environment where each group tries to compete over their shared constituency, political leverage vis-à-vis the government, and post-war spoils (Christia 2012; Lilja 2012; Fjelde and Nilsson 2012; K.G. Cunningham 2014).

To respond to such volatility, conflict against co-ethnic rivals can be interpreted as outbidding strategy to establish hegemonic control over the identity group (A. Kydd and Walter 2002; Lilja 2012; Krause 2013). Kydd and Walter posit that outbidding between warring factions arises when “two or more domestic parties are competing for leadership of their side, and the general population is uncertain about which of the groups best represent their interests” (2006, 75). A group may portray themselves as “zealots” willing to defend the cause of insurgency and strive for highest goal (i.e. independence) and portray its rivals as “sell-out” or “doves” for compromising over government concession (Ibid.). This shows that outbidding strategy is used by rebel groups to show their audiences, government and/or co-ethnic constituency, that they are legitimate representative and worthy of being accommodated or supported, respectively (Lilja 2012). In other words, outbidding can also be seen as auction-like strategy, where rivalling rebel actors try to rally support from their co-ethnic constituency, and signal to the government that they are credible bargaining partner.

In the context of competition between parent and splinter group, outbidding strategy can be manifested through violent or non-violent means. Eliminating co-ethnic rivals ensures hegemonic control over the rebel movement. Being the most violent and militant actors – even by attacking co-ethnic rivals – can also bring benefits for a rebel group. The first benefit is to reduce the threat perception of the group (Pischeda n.d). Parent and splinter group possess private information about each other’s relative strength, military strategy and hideouts because of their history as a single organization prior fragmentation. One of the groups may use their knowledge of the rival group as a bargaining leverage in exchange for government concession. In response to this situation, hardliner group attack their moderate counterparts to prevent collaboration or collusion with the government that will present an existential risk for the former (de Mesquita 2005). By eliminating such counterpart, a hardliner group can maintain its dominant position over the rebel organization and prevent the former from aiding the government (Ibid.).

Secondly, eliminating or weakening rival groups also facilitate a group’s access to resources and support from co-ethnic constituents. Co-ethnicity makes acquiring resources at a
relatively low cost, such as civilian collaboration and recruitments.\(^1\) Given parent and a splinter group shared similar identity and shared constituency, the group that wipes out its rival can easily convert fighters and attract support from its constituents who were previously loyal to the latter (Lilja and Hultman 2011). Thus, in the bid for dominance and control, rebel group can overcome the fierce competition that hampers the capacity for an ethnic minority’s collective action and confronts the government militarily by eliminating its co-ethnic rivals (Ibid 2011, 180).

Thirdly, the existences of co-ethnic rivals lead to internal competition over the political bargaining with the state (K.G Cunningham 2014, 131). When a group uses violent means against its co-ethnic rivals, it sends a signal to the state and/or co-ethnic constituency that they are dominant within the group and have the ability to impose costs if they are being excluded from a bargained settlement (Ibid., 131). This supports the strategic end of lethal outbidding strategy which is that “the most-hardline and violent [group] will prevail, and their opponents will be killed, intimidated, or deprived of their constituency” (Lilja 2012, 127).

However, conflict between parent and splinter group may not always manifest through violent conflict. Within the scope of parent and splinter group conflict, rebel actors can bid for dominance and secure constituents support through non-violent outbidding strategies. Continuing armed struggle and refusing to negotiate with the government signals the group’s resolve and commitment to attain greater political goal (Pruitt & Kim 2004). Being represented by hardliner group can be better for the population as the group will force the government to make a better offer and reject inferior deals (Kydd and Walter 2006, 76). Meanwhile, moderate groups that accept concession are often labelled as betrayers of the group’s cause, therefore side-lined or suffer audience cost, resulting in the loss of popularity amongst its constituency (Fearon 1994).

Empirical cases show that rebel group often invite popular consultations or hold political rally as part of their outbidding discourse to increase their popularity and signal the government that they represent their identity group’s interest (Lilja 2012; K.G Cunningham 2014). Another non-lethal outbidding strategy identified by Lilja is building the capacity to

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\(^1\) Van Evera argues that war is more likely when resources are “cumulative”, that is when the control of resources enables warring actors to protect or acquire other resources at relatively low cost (Evera 2013). Coethnicty is also said to facilitate collective action through shared preferences, reducing coordination costs, and deters defection (Fearon and Laitin 1996; Gates 2002)
control information to discern threats against one’s own group (2012, 130). Consolidating a group’s own power base by securing international support, bureaucratizing information channel and coordination between exiled leaders and field commanders, can also be categorized as outbidding strategy (Lilja 2012, 130). By building cohesive and integrated rebel organization, rebel leaders can attract loyal constituents and convince the state that they are credible bargaining partners (Staniland 2014, 3). Nonetheless, rebel group can still remain politically relevant and outbid co-ethnic rivals for dominant control over the identity group without being trapped into costly intra-rebel fighting.

Figure 1: Intra-rebel conflict between parent and splinter group

In summary, it is important to recognise that non-lethal outbidding strategy happens within the scope of parent-splinter group rivalry. Indeed, parent or splinter groups may engage in non-lethal outbidding with one another, while at the same time escalating the conflict against the government. However, as this study is focused on intra-rebel conflict, a detailed analysis on outbidding strategy against the state is not pertinent to this research question.

Table 1. Outbidding strategies in intra-rebel conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic choice</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Predicted outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lethal Outbidding</td>
<td>Large scale attack against rival groups, assassinations, or purging</td>
<td>Lethal intra-rebel conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Lethal Outbidding</td>
<td>Outbidding discourses, political rally, organizational consolidation</td>
<td>Less or non-lethal intra-rebel conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Causal Story: Distribution of Power between Parent and Splinter Group and Expected Outbidding Strategies

So far, this thesis has presented the logic of lethal and non-lethal intra-rebel conflict between parent and splinter group as the form of an outbidding mechanism to establish hegemonic control over ethnic-insurgent movement. That being said, what influences rebel actors’ decision-making calculus as to whether or not they employ a particular outbidding strategy against their co-ethnic rivals?

This thesis theoretical framework posits that different degree of distribution of power between parent and splinter group influences the lethality of intra-rebel conflict through outbidding strategy mechanism. Specifically, asymmetric distribution of power – where one group is stronger, or weak, compared to the other group – increases the likelihood of lethal intra-rebel conflict where the stronger group opts to use lethal outbidding strategy against weaker group. My argument is based on rationalist choice theory and the assumption of complete information between parent and splinter group. The condition of complete information occurs due to the group’s previously history of working together as a single rebel organization. Parent and splinter groups are likely to possess each other private information particularly in regards to relative strength and support bases and territorial control. Further, both groups also understand each other military tactics and behaviour. Indeed, what distinguishes splinter groups from other new militant or terrorist group is that, the former has the advantage of having pre-existing networks, military experience and organizational knowledge which makes them capable to operate independently as a militant group at the expense of its parent organization (Perkoski 2015). Based upon that assumption, once the group fractionalized, it is likely that both central leadership and the splinter group will know how many fighters, territorial control and subgroups support are remained or taken away.

Given complete information as the condition between parent and splinter group, distribution of power can play a significant role for rebel actors as to whether or not to engage in lethal outbidding against their rival. That being said, it is important to define what rebel relative power is, how it is distributed between parent and splinter group after fragmentation, and how it affects rebel actor’s strategic choice to use force against its rival.
**Rebel group relative power**

Scholars have used various indicators to assess a rebel group’s relative power, including military strength, external support, mass popular support, social embeddedness to local communities, group cohesion, and territorial control (D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009; Staniland 2014; K. G. Cunningham, Bakke, and Seymour 2012; Christia 2012). While these indicators may not be mutually exclusive to each other, they are important and can highlight which variables may influence rebel group’s capacity to employ violence and resilience against enemy incursion. Military strength such as the number of fighters is the most obvious indicator of group power. Possessing firearms and having significant numbers of fighters facilitate rebel actor to launch lethal outbidding strategy against their rival. Third-party support is also important to assess a rebel group’s relative power and its capacity to employ violence. However, external support can be measured by proxy via an assessment of military power (i.e. weapons, training and funding) the group receives from third parties.

Staniland asserts that strong social ties to subgroups (sub-ethnic affiliations or local communities) facilitate rebel groups ability to draw loyal fighters and collaborators to wage protracted warfare against the government (2014). For example, Taliban groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan are able to wage protracted warfare against much stronger states albeit lacking mass support or being less cohesive in the case of Pakistani Taliban (Ibid.). On the other hand, mass support might not necessarily affect group’s capacity to use force; however it may affect the group’s political leverage against co-ethnic rival and the government. Having popular support is crucial because the state will seek to work with the group that can “deliver the population” (K.G Cunningham 2014, 131)

Lastly is territorial control. Possession of territorial control by having military bases in certain geographical locations, such as mountains, forest covers, or bordering neighbour country are relevant to a rebel group’s capacity to resist attack from its opponent (D. E. Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009; Buhaug 2010). Territorial control can also facilitate access to civilian collaboration, extracting resources and local recruits (Kalyvas 2006; Weinstein 2007). In short, rebel group that possess strategically located bases and uncontested control are likely to be able to build strong military power and capacity to resist incursion.

*Distribution of power between parent and splinter group and the cost-benefits of outbidding strategies*
Through field work in Bosnia and Afghanistan, Christia finds empirical support to argue that group fractionalization, where an internal take over occurs by a stronger subgroup happens when leaders lose enough relative power and thus control over the group (Christia 2012, 53). Fjelde and Nilsson also find significant correlations between group strength: rebel group that either military strong, or weak in relation to the other groups is more likely to experience inter-rebel violence (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012, 613). Following these findings, I argue that the same logic applies to parent-splinter group competition over dominance and control.

Rebel fragmentation divides power between parent and splinter group that previously was under control of a unified organization. Fighters and subgroups choose whichever faction to loyally follow, and thus territorial control or military bases go along with it. Rebel actors will only engage in intra-rebel conflict, aside from fighting the government, when it has the capacity to do so and when there is no other option to survive. If the cost of fighting outweighs its benefits and excessively endangers group survival, rebel actor may rather avoid direct confrontation against rival group. That means intra-rebel conflict is likely to occur when there is asymmetric distribution of power – wherein one group is significantly stronger and the other is significantly weaker.

That being said, launching large scale assault, assassination, bombing, or internal purging against weaker rival groups allows the stronger group quick and cheap fights. As previously emphasised, dominant group can easily recruits locals and convert former enemies when they have similar ethnic identities. Secondly, if a group possess formidable force and uncontested territorial control, it has the incentive to eliminate or repress smaller rival groups and their loyalists without excessively increasing the risk of government intervention. Indeed, lethal outbidding strategies are often found in cases where a dominant group possess uncontested territory and try to consolidate its power base by repressing weaker co-ethnic rivals (Lilja and Hultman 2011; K. G. Cunningham 2014). Cases of intra-rebel fighting such as LTTE against other Tamil insurgents group in Sri Lanka, and NSCN-Isak-Muivah against other splinter groups in Nagaland, occurred when the dominant actors decided to assert its dominance over the ethnic-identity group.

On the other hand, weaker group has also the incentives to attack stronger group in order to remain relevant to the insurgency, even when it only has a small chance of succeeding. Pischedda argues that weak group are likely to resort to “gambling for resurrection” by attacking their co-ethnic rival if the cost of inaction is likely to be steep, such as when major
loss of power is unavoidable or there is an imminent threat posed by another group (Pischedda n.d.). Moreover, fighting a stronger rebel group in a bid for political recognition can also be beneficial for a weaker group, especially when the potential gains from being part in the negotiation table is relatively higher to their weaker position (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012, 612).

However, if fragmentation situates both parent and splinter group in relative balance of power, wherein each of group still retain loyal and formidable forces, strong subgroups support, and their own respective territorial bases, launching lethal outbidding strategy can be too costly. The costs of conflict by attacking co-ethnic rival are not only limited to the manpower and resources spent for intra-rebel conflict, but also increase a group’s vulnerability to state’s counterinsurgency strategy. Splinter group that formed cohesive and preference-aligned members has significant advantages that bolster their durability and military power to resist or retaliate incursion attempts from its opponent (Perkoski 2015, 55). Furthermore, possession of military bases or strategic territorial control by the splinter group, facilitate capabilities to defend or avoid incursion. Here, in relation to outbidding strategy, the cost of lethal outbidding by the parent group against its co-ethnic rival outweighs its benefits as the targeted group has the capacity to retaliate the attack. Furthermore, the risk of being trapped in internecine conflict incentivizes the state to exploit this situation by attacking both groups or supporting one of them against the other.

Under these circumstances, non-lethal outbidding strategies are a rather preferable means to enhance a group’s popularity and political leverage in relation to its co-ethnic rivals. If organizational fragmentation left both parent and splinter group with relatively equal capacity to wage insurgency on its own, by continuing insurgency or refusing any inferior deals from the government – instead of engaging in costly intra-rebel conflict – can resonate positively among co-ethnic constituents. Indeed, group that are perceived to be hardliners or “zealots” are likely to be supported by the population and recognized by the government (Kydd and Walter 2006). A splinter group might rather preserve its own organizational autonomy and distance itself from the parent group while at the same time escalating its attack against the government in a bid for political recognition. Secondly, considerable subgroup support provides rebel leaders the opportunity to hold public consultation or popular rallies in order to gain popularity (Lilja 2012, 129). Through public discourse, splinter groups can sway supports from co-ethnic constituents without the necessity to directly confront the parent group. Lastly, such groups can build organizational capacity to control information, discern
threats, and protect themselves against them (Weeks 2008, Lilja 2012). This strategy is a defence mechanism against outbidding attempt. Defence against the rival group’s outbidding attempt or internal dissent which can challenge group leadership can be manifested through several means. This includes organizational consolidation, building networks of intelligence, and mainstreaming channels of information between exiled leaders, field commanders, and local supporters (Lilja 2012). Through effective information control, a rebel group can identify threats and dispel public defamations made by its opponents.

In summary, I argue that outbidding strategies are dependent on the distribution of power between parent and splinter group. A rebel group is likely to prefer lethal outbidding strategy when it has perceived the benefits of attacking its rivals to outweigh the costs of rival group retaliation and government counterinsurgency measures. I simplify distribution of power between parent and splinter group in two types: (1) asymmetric distribution and, (2) balance distribution. Following this categorization, I hypothesize that: *Asymmetric distribution of power following organizational fragmentation leads to lethal intra-rebel conflict between parent and splinter groups.*

The summary of my hypothesis are illustrated in the table below:

**Table 2. Causal Story**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution of power</th>
<th>Cost of conflict</th>
<th>Causal Mechanism</th>
<th>Predicted outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asymmetric/Imbalance</td>
<td>Dominant group: Low</td>
<td>Lethal outbidding</td>
<td>Lethal intra-rebel conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weak group: High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>Both groups: High</td>
<td>Non-lethal outbidding</td>
<td>Less or non-lethal intra-rebel conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Research Design**

The previous chapter provided an overview of the state of knowledge with regards to the research question at hand. Based on these studies, this thesis expect the hypothesis *Asymmetric distribution of power following organizational fragmentation leads to lethal intra-rebel conflict between parent and splinter groups* to hold true. This chapter outlines the research design by which this hypothesis will be systematically examined. The theoretical
framework expects power distribution to influence the risk of lethal of intra-rebel conflict between parent and splinter groups. Using the structured, focus comparison method this thesis compare two cases of rebel fragmentation and intra-rebel conflict in two different countries (George and Bennett 2005). The case studies selected for comparison are the Karen National Union (KNU) conflict with its splinter group Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in Burma, and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) with its splinter group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines. By engaging in a small-n case study analysis, this thesis traces the process of power distribution between parent and splinter groups, and identifies how this influences rebel actors’ strategic choices within case and across cases selected in this study (King et al. 1994; George and Bennett 2005). The analysis primarily draws from rebel actors’ statement, interviews and military action obtained from secondary sources, including media reports relevant to both cases.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, the method of the study is presented, along with the criteria for case selection. Second, the operationalization of this thesis, driven by the above presented theoretical framework is introduced, followed by identification of data and sources collected for that purposes. Lastly, an outline for the empirical analysis is presented.

4.1 Method of structured, focused comparison, and within-case process tracing
The method of structured, focused comparison is chosen to test the theoretical framework of distribution of power between parent and splinter group, and its influence on rebel actors’ strategic choice, whether or not to engage in lethal outbidding strategies against its co-ethnic rival. Thus, the observed dependent variable in this study is the lethality of intra-rebel conflict between parent and splinter group, indicated by the number of battle-related deaths.

It is however, highly probably that the lethality or non-lethality of intra-rebel conflict have multiple plausible causal and confounding variables. It is most probable that I have failed to identify or disregarded possibly relevant independent variables that may have better explanatory power to the outcome of the dependent variable. Hence, it is important to acknowledge problems of spuriousness, causal priority and causal depth might also be overlooked in this study (George and Bennett 2005). While the logic of causal inference inherent in the method of structured, focused comparison can be highly problematic where the phenomenon investigated has “complex, multiple determinants rather than a single
independent variable of presumed causal significance (Ibid.), the limited scope of this study makes it not something that can be mitigated in entirety.

To address such challenges in part, the use of within-case process tracing is employed for each case study. As Collier argues, “within-case comparison are critical to the viability of small-n analysis (1993). Therefore, process tracing is employed to examine the theoretical framework adopted in this study as well to identify the causal mechanism between observable independent and dependent variables. By tracing the causal process between the independent and dependent variable, it is possible to cautiously rule out potential intervening variables in imperfectly matched cases and observe the causal mechanism underlying the relations between independent and dependent variable (George and Bennett 2005). Moreover, it can also help to identify variables and interaction among them that have been previously overlooked, or have spurious effect to the observed dependent variable (Ibid.). In short, this study aims to trace the process of power distribution between parent and splinter group, and study how it causally affects rebel group’s decision about whether to employ lethal or non-lethal outbidding strategy against its rival. The set of questions outlined in the next section are formulated to trace the causal processes of outbidding strategy.

**Case selection criteria**

Selecting cases is critically important in order for the investigator to draw causal inferences (King et al.1994). Selecting cases based on randomisation would hardly serve my intention to compare cases that share similar resemblances in several aspects, while maintaining differences in key areas. As King et al. states “randomness in selection and assignment of units is appropriate for quantitative research, it has serious limitation when we apply it to a smaller number of cases (King et al. 1994, 144).”

Therefore, the method of most similar case design is adopted to compare cases of intra-rebel conflict between parent and splinter groups in different country. The cases are selected based on an observed variation on the dependent variable (King et al. 1994). This thesis selects cases where in one, lethal intra-rebel conflict occurred between parent and splinter group, and in another, non-lethal conflict occurred. Data on the lethality of intra-rebel conflict are drawn from UCDP Non-state Conflict Dataset v. 2.5-2015. The criteria of case selection is also guided from previous large-n studies that examine the causes of armed conflict between non-state actors and self-determination rebel groups (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012; K. G. Cunningham et al. 2012). Cunningham et.al. find that multiple co-ethnic factions, competing for self-
determination, are associated with higher instances of inter-factional fighting. Alternatively, Fjelde and Nilsson find several conditions to have significant correlation with inter-rebel conflicts, including: territorial control beyond government reach; area with drug cultivation; group’s military power; and weak state authority (2012). Based upon these findings I select cases where all identified variables remain clearly present in both cases. The exception being the variable of interests (rebel groups’ power balance) in which this thesis aims to examine. By isolating the variable relevant to this study, and aiming to keep all else constant (to the extent possible), I am able analyse the individual impact of variation in power balance and its impact on the type of outbidding strategy that is used between parent and splinter groups. The criteria with reference to the key variables for the two cases are presented in the two tables below (Table 3 and Table 4).

**Table 3. Criteria of case selection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study</th>
<th>Distribution of power</th>
<th>Number of armed groups</th>
<th>Territorial control</th>
<th>Drug cultivation</th>
<th>Weak state authority</th>
<th>Intra-rebel conflict casualties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MNLF – MILF</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Nur Misuari Group</td>
<td>mainland:</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Islamic Command Council</td>
<td>Manguindanao, Zamboanga, Lanao, Cotabato</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Executive Committee</td>
<td>Mindanao islands: Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi archipelago</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splinter group: MILF (1984 – Present)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNU – DKBA</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. KNLA (military)</td>
<td>Eastern hills (Karen –)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² The number presented in the table is collected from all reports that are accessible online. Most of the reported conflicts that involve MNLF and MILF members are related to clan conflict related to revenge or dispute over land ownership – or locally known as Rido conflict – that occurred from 2011 to 2014. For more information about clan conflict in Mindanao see: Wilfredo Torres III, *Rido: Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao*, Expanded Edition (Manila: Ateneno De Manila University Press, 2014)
As can be seen from the tables, both cases show similar aspects in the terms of co-ethnic and fragmented rebel groups, periphery territorial control, and protracted self-determination insurgency. Unlike some other ethnic rebel groups in Burma that were solely funded from drug cultivation, Karen armed groups support themselves from civilian and cross-border taxes, illegal loggings, and foreign investment (South 2008). In the terms of state authority, both Philippines and Burma government display strong authority and militarily outnumber any non-state armed groups in their respective sovereign territory. Insurgencies in both cases are also considered as protracted conflict as KNU have been waging armed insurgency since its organizational inception in 1946 while the MNLF since 1972.

Although KNU in Burma and the MNLF in Philippines mobilized along ethnic identity-based division, sub-ethnic cleavages are present in both cases. The KNU members comprised of Christians that are predominantly Sgaw speaking Karen and Buddhists that are predominantly Pwo speaking Karen. There are also smaller subgroups within Karen ethnic group, including Pa’o, and Karenni. In the Philippines, the Moro people comprised of 13 different Muslim ethnic-tribes in Mindanao with Tausug people of Sulu islands, Maranao of Lanao and Manguindanao of Central Mindanao as the three largest subgroups.

Nevertheless, both cases are not identical at some respects. First is geography: Moro territory in Mindanao comprised of archipelago and one mainland. Moro rebel groups have strong presence both in Mindanao archipelago (Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi) and the mainland (Central Mindanao). Karen state, on the other hand, is locked between Burma and Thailand

3 UCDP Conflict Data Program (2016) UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia (Myanmar): www.ucdp.uu.se/database, Uppsala University
northern border where KNU operates in between the borders of both countries. Second is state’s political system. Burma had been under the control of military junta since 1962 while the Philippines transitioned into democratic government after the overthrow of Marcos regime in 1986. Indeed, both cases are not representative of the population of ethnic rebel groups that fragmented and experienced intra-rebel conflict; however, they still demonstrate several conditions that are both generalizable and comparable as presented in table 3. Thus, a method of process tracing is adopted in this study to identify alternative explanations, such as whether there is the State’s role influencing distribution of power between parent and splinter group, or whether intra-rebel conflicts were unrelated to competition over ethnic dominance and control.

This thesis is exploratory in nature, based on that above discussed criteria of case selection. The aim is to probe unspecified causal processes, particularly on how distribution of power between parent and splinter group influence rebel actors’ decision to employ different types of outbidding strategy for dominance and control.

4.2 Operationalization

In order to test the theoretical arguments and identify causal processes proposed in the hypothesis, a set of indicators are formulated to assess the value of the independent variable that can be compared across cases. By using the method of process tracing, several questions are formulated to identify the intervening causal processes between the independent variable and the outcome of dependent variable (George and Bennett 2005). Questions that generate alternative explanation are also examined case-specific and later in the comparative case analysis. These steps are used to assess the strength of the explanatory variable.

Dependent variable: the lethality of intra-rebel conflict

Guided by the conceptualization of intra-rebel conflict, this study examines the numbers of battle-related death resulted from violent conflict between the parent and its splinter group. While seemingly uncomplicated, assessing numbers of casualties from armed clash between insurgent groups can be a challenge. Firstly, armed incidents between insurgent groups are often under-reported because it tends to occur in peripheral areas with limited access to local journalists or media. Secondly, motives of conflict can be hard to distinguish, whether it is caused by rebel group strategic choice for dominance, private motivation, or merely a mis-encounter. Thirdly, the existing dataset on armed conflicts between non-state actors from UCDP only incorporated armed incidents that have resulted in at least 25 battle-related deaths
in a given year (Sundberg et al. 2012). However, since the purpose of this study is to explain the variation of lethality of intra-rebel conflict, having low numbers of battle-related deaths between parent and splinter group can be interpreted as ‘non-lethal’ intra-rebel conflict between an observed parent and splinter groups. Thus, the following questions will be posed to each case:

- Were the number of casualties resulted from intra-rebel conflict between parent/splinter groups high (25 casualties) or low (less than 25)?
- Were there any other forms of violence (i.e. assassination threat, torture, imprisonment) manifested from intra-rebel conflict?

**Independent variable: power distribution between parent and splinter group**

The independent variable in this thesis is dichotomous, whether distribution of power is asymmetric/imbalance or symmetric/balance.

\[ X1 = \text{Asymmetric distribution of power occurred when either parent or splinter group retain meagre powerbase in relation to the other group.} \]

\[ X2 = \text{Symmetric distribution of power occurred when both parent and splinter group retain considerable powerbase to operate independently as an insurgent organization.} \]

Relative power is measured through quantitative and qualitative assessment of three proxy variables: (1) number of fighters, (2) territorial control/military bases and (3) social ties. Distribution of fighter is measured by the proportion of the group members that splits to form a splinter group compared to those who remain in the parent organization. For example, if the original group consist of 4000 thousands members, and a group of 300 break-away to form a splinter group, this gives 300/4000 score as asymmetric distribution in favour of parent group.\(^4\) Distribution of power is balanced if there is only marginal difference between both groups’ manpower. The shift of rebel group’s fighter over the observed time frame will be presented as a graph in each case study’s empirical analysis.

\(^4\) In his study of rebel group cohesion and fragmentation, Kenny measures the extensive and intensive fragmentation by looking at the number of organizational splits from the parent group, and the number of members that either split or retain for each organizational split, respectively. This study uses Kenny’s operationalization of intensive fragmentation of rebel group. See more: Paul D. Kenny, “Structural Integrity and Cohesion in Insurgent Organizations: Evidence from Protracted Conflicts in Ireland and Burma1,” *International Studies Review* 12, no. 4 (December 1, 2010)
Territorial control is measured by looking at the number of military camps/bases retained by parent and splinter groups rather than calculating it by square kilo-meters. Since the scope of studies in this paper is secessionist insurgent group that operates within a country’s peripheral region, rigid territorial control in square kilo-meters would be hard to assess. Further, based on the preliminary findings of the case studies, insurgent groups in both cases are found to operate within close proximity or no permanent territory at all, especially when the group adopts guerrilla tactics. Nonetheless, possession of military camps and territorial influences are often mentioned in both case studies. For that reason, military camps are chosen as the main indicator for territorial control. Territorial changes before and after fragmentation will be displayed on a map to determine whether there is a competition for territorial control between parent and splinter groups.

Lastly, social ties are qualitatively measured by identifying whether parent/splinter groups emerged from subgroups that pre-exist the onset of conflict. In his study on insurgent cohesion, Staniland posits rebel group that has representation in local communities and promote participation of local cadres in the central leadership role are likely to be cohesive and resilient against enemy’s repression (Staniland 2014). Conversely, rebel organizers that have no representation or weak social ties with local communities (i.e. ethnic, tribe, clans, or religious community) are likely to suffer difficulty in accessing valuable information, seeking protection or recruiting loyal fighters. This in turn makes the group more vulnerable to defection or counterinsurgency measures (Staniland 2014, 35).

Based on this operationalization, the thesis poses several questions to assess the distribution of power between parent and splinter groups:

- Measuring number of fighters: How many members remain in the parent group, and how many others left to form splinter group? What are the proportion of the group members between parent and splinter group? How do number of fighters shift over the observed time frame?
- Measuring territorial control: How many military camps were retained by the parent group and how many were taken away by splinter group? How did territorial control of each parent and splinter group shift over time?
- Measuring social ties: Were parent and splinter group membership formed by distinct subgroups i.e. sub-ethnic cleavages? How strong are the ties between subgroups and the rebel group leadership?
Causal process: Outbidding Strategies

The causal process identified to link the observed independent and dependent variable was the outbidding strategy employed by parent or splinter groups. The strategic end of outbidding strategy for the rebel actors is to establish dominance and control over ethnic-identity group. Intra-rebel conflict can be interpreted as the group’s attempt to gain political recognition, constituents support and increase their bargaining leverage to gain post-war political control. Based from the theoretical framework proposed in this study, outbidding strategy is divided into two types: lethal outbidding and non-lethal outbidding strategy. In order to identify that processes, the following questions will be posed to each case:

- Lethal outbidding: Was the motivation of violent action against the other group related to group’s strategy for dominance and control over rebel movement and co-ethnic constituency? Was the conflict between parent and splinter group manifested through violent means? Was the conflict instigated by stronger or weaker actor? Were the outbidding strategies changed following the shift of power between parent and splinter group?
- Non-lethal outbidding: What were the outbidding discourse between parents and splinter groups? Who were the audiences of the discourse? Was there any non-lethal strategy employed by rebel group with the aim of outbidding its co-ethnic rival? Were these non-lethal outbidding strategies chosen as deliberate strategic decision to avoid costly lethal intra-rebel conflict?

Alternative explanations:

What are the main alternative explanations that have causality for the variation of lethal or non-lethal intra-rebel conflict?

4.3 Time Frame and Data Collection

In order to compare systematically across cases, this study chooses the emergence of splinter groups in each observed cases as the starting point of observation. The time frame of observation for both cases is fifteen years since the splinter group formally announced its formation. The primary reason of choosing 15 years as the time frame for observation is to assess whether the shift of power distribution over time between parent and splinter groups might change the rebel actor’s attitude towards its co-ethnic rival. Although conflicts in both cases are considered as protracted insurgency, the relationship between states and insurgent
groups in each respective case is not in constant warfare. Failed negotiations, peace agreement implementation, severe battle loss, government repression and defection, among others, might alter distribution of power between parent and splinter group. Therefore, by observing a fifteen year period for each case, this study can trace whether distribution of power and the lethality of intra-rebel conflict covary over time.

Data and Sources

The data collected for this thesis is drawn from multiple secondary sources and conflict dataset. The relative power of an insurgent group, measured by proxy from number of fighters, military bases and social ties, is collected from various secondary sources including published journals, government reports, statements made by rebel actors, memoirs, and interviews collected by local or international organizations. Not having primary sources data is a significant obstacle particularly in allowing us to understand the rebel group’s behaviour and strategic choice. However, access to such data is not possible for two reasons: (1) the conflict in both cases are still on-going – collecting raw data would be very difficult because of security reasons and limited access to relevant subjects; (2) conducting field studies in two different countries is time and resources demanding. Nevertheless, the data collection is still valid as the use of appropriate research strategy allows for a surprising volume of relevant data to be gathered (Nordstrom and Robben 1995).

For the observed dependent variable – lethality of intra-rebel conflict – I rely on UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset v. 2.5-2015 and the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset (UCDP GED) version 4.0. UCDP’s non-state conflict dataset includes “the use of armed force between two organized armed groups, neither of which is the government of a state, which results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a year” (Sundberg et al. 2012). For the purpose of this thesis, only armed conflicts between parent and splinter groups will be assessed. Additional sources including country specific local news, NGOs reports and local conflict monitoring systems are consulted in order to assess low-intensity conflict between parent and splinter groups that may be excluded from the UCDP datasets.

Source criticism is necessary when assessing the strength of particular insurgent group. Rebel actors have incentive to misrepresent the strength of their group in order the increase their political leverage vis-à-vis the state, or deter other armed actors from attacking (Hoglund and Oberg 2011, 189). Moreover, rebel actors may also include non-fighting members in order to inflate their group relative strength. There is possibility that information coming from the
sources linked to conflict parties will be misleading or distorted (Hoglund and Oberg 2011). In order to ameliorate such problem, I triangulate the information by corroborating it with multiple secondary sources. Credible reports on insurgent group strength often include not only number of members but also number of firearms and identification of insurgent base command, and military camps. That said, numbers of fighters might not be proximate, but hopefully a closer prediction can be achieved by resource triangulation. Rebel group network and social ties is assessed by consulting ethno-historical literature and other secondary sources which study ethnic insurgency and rebel fragmentation relevant to the observed case studies.

For Karen insurgency in Burma, I examine detailed interview reports collected by Non-Government Organizations (NGO) and conflict monitoring system, including Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) and Burma Peace Monitor. KHRG has been collecting interviews for 25 years. This interview inventory mainly consists of villagers and foot soldiers testimonies regarding wide range of issues, including human right abuses, force recruitment, armed clash, military activity, shadow economy, and the latest news about cease fire and the development of peace process (2016). Unfortunately, a similar source is not available on the Moro insurgency in the Philippines, as there is no rich interview material collected consistently over decades by any organization or scholars. However, there are vast number of studies on the Bangsamoro nationalist movement and the local narratives of clan conflicts in Mindanao, Philippines.

Notwithstanding KHRG rich interview materials, potential reporting bias is still evident (Hoglund and Oberg 2011, 191). In her latest study of ethnic politics in Burma, Ashley South remarks that reports produce by the human right industry “is not so much of being fabricated for political purposes, rather that advocacy groups were so closely aligned to the opposition [insurgent group] that they could not see or did not report abuse perpetrated by the good guys (2008, 68).” However, such reporting bias should not be a major problem for the data collection. The main variables to be observed in this paper are relative power of militant group and numbers of battle-related deaths resulted from intra-rebel conflict, rather than the nature of recruitments and human right violation perpetrated by warring actors. Nevertheless, any interview materials collected by either non-government or government organization will be treated with caution and it will be triangulated with other relevant secondary sources (Hoglund and Oberg 2011, 187).
4.4 Structure of Empirical Analysis

The structure of empirical chapter is divided into four sections. The first two parts of the analysis focus on the empirical cases individually, between the MNLF and MILF intra-rebel conflict in the Philippines, followed with KNU-DKBA in Burma. Each case begins with a short background on the insurgent group and the organizational fragmentation that led to the emergence of the observed splinter group. The formulated questions and indicators serve as a guideline for empirical analysis. It starts with tracing the process of power distribution between parent and splinter groups following organizational fragmentation. For the independent variables, proxy indicators including number of fighters, military bases and territorial influence, and subgroup affiliations will be used to illustrate the distribution of power. Thereafter, the section proceeds to within-case process tracing. This is done to examine whether the hypothesis in this study supports the causal relationship with the dependent variables via the causal mechanism identified, which is the lethal or non-lethal outbidding strategy.

The third section will discuss across case analysis and examines at the causal relationship between the values of independent and dependent variables of each case. Thereafter, discussion on cross-case comparison is provided. This section discusses to what extent the hypothesis of this study is supported by the empirical evidence of the two case studies analysed. The final section of the analysis discusses additional observation by extending the analysis. It will be discussed in order to assess another potential explanatory variables that has causal or confounding effect to the observed the dependent variable, in comparison to the main independent variables suggested. Lastly, the conclusion provides the analysis in summary, outlining the main findings and analysis of the paper.

5 Case 1: Intra-rebel Conflict between MNLF-MILF

5.1 Context of Insurgent Group: the Origin of Moro National Liberation Front

The Moro National Liberation Front was formed in October 1972 after the declaration of Martial Law by then-president Ferdinand Marcos in September. The declaration of Martial Law was the Philippines government (GPH) response to the outbreak of land and sectarian conflict between Christian Muslim Moro militant groups in Mindanao in late 1960s, and the increasing threat of communist insurgency in Central and North Philippines.
The catalyst of Moro separatist movement was the “Jabidah Massacre” in March 1968, followed with the inception of Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) in the same year (Noble 1976). The Jabidah massacre was a violent incident in the island of Corregidor, Manila, where dozens of local recruits from Sulu, Mindanao, were killed by their Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) officers. It is believed this occurred because of the former refusals to participate in the military operations invading Sabah, Malaysia. Jabidah massacre sparked public outcry and protests among Moro students and activists that led to the formation of several underground separatist organizations (Noble 1976).

The MNLF itself began as an underground movement in the youth section of the MIM. It continued to operate after the government forced the MIM to disband in 1970 (Noble 1976; Majul 1988). The organization was formally organized on Pangkor Island, Malaysia, where Nur Misuari and other founding members were the first batch that received military training facilitated by Malaysian government (Noble 1976, 410). After MIM was disbanded, Misuari who is also a member of Tausug tribe of Sulu was elected as the MNLF Chairman. Abu Khayr Alonto, a Maranaoan of Lanao became vice-chairman and Hashim Salamat, a Maguindanaoan of Central Mindanao became Chairman of the Foreign Affairs. The MNLF soon established Bangsa Moro Army (BMA) with roughly 30,000 armed fighters separated into three regional provinces: Sulu Revolutionary Committees, Maguindanao Revolutionary Committee, and Maranao Revolutionary Committees. Three regional revolutionary committees happened to be represented by three main leaders’ subgroups affiliation (Che Man 1990).

In the terms of funding, the MNLF was highly dependent to foreign sponsors particularly from Libya, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and other members of Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) (Noble 1976; Abuza 2005). The OIC countries and Libya in particular, have supported the MNLF cause by granting the organization special observer status, providing funding, weaponries and training, and international fora to present its case. Conflict between GPH and MNLF reached its stalemate in mid-1970s and both parties signed Tripoli Agreement in 1976 under the auspices of OIC.

**Group Fragmentation**

The 1976 Tripoli Agreement promised the MNLF the creation of Moro autonomous region comprised of thirteen provinces in West and Central Mindanao. However, this promise was not fulfilled as Marcos unilaterally held a plebiscite in April 1977 without the MNLF
consent. Only two provinces opted to join the new autonomous region: one in Cotabato, largely responsible for Manguindanao and Maranao affairs, and the other in Zamboanga, responsible for the Tausugs in Mindanao islands. Thus, ethnic and political antagonism between three Moro’s ethnic groups became aggravated with the institutionalization of two different autonomous governments (Molloy 1988). Later, conflict relapse between MNLF and GPH occurred after the breakdown of the Tripoli Agreement, with Misuari’s MNLF reverting to an intransigent position for complete independence.

In 1977, Hashim Salamat, then-Chairman of MNLF Foreign Affairs, declared “Instrument Takeover” – a document signed by fifty-seven leaders mostly coming from Central Mindanao – against Misuari, during Central Committee meeting in Mecca in December 1977 (Che Man 1990). However, Misuari’s control over MNLF remained unperturbed. He dismissed Salamat as incompetent and insubordinate, and accused him of treachery (Noble 1978, 5). Thereafter, Salamat’s faction – MNLF New Leadership – had moved its headquarters to Cairo, and later to Lahore, Pakistan to secure support from both countries. In March 1984, Salamat completely separated from the MNLF and announced the formation of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF emphasised Islam as the rallying point of Bangsamoro struggle in contrast to MNLF secular and left-leaning ideology (Salamat 1985).

5.2. **Non-Lethal Intra-rebel Conflict between MNLF-MILF**

Until now, enduring rivalry between the MNLF and MILF is still on-going since the latter inception in 1984. Both parties compete to become sole legitimate representative for Bangsamoro people. However, rivalry between the MNLF and MILF has not manifested into lethal intra-rebel conflict yet with a lack of reported incidence of violent clashes between both groups.

That being said, based on the theoretical framework that assumes co-ethnic groups compete for political leverage, resources, territorial and civilian control, it is important to trace how MNLF-MILF rivalries manifested over the years. The hypothesis of this paper argues that lethal intra-rebel conflict is less likely to occur when there is a balance of power between parent and splinter group. This is because the group will try to avoid costly conflict while opting for non-lethal outbidding strategy to promote its dominance position and control over co-ethnic constituency. The indicators for relative power between parent and splinter group are proxy measured, by looking at the territorial control, subgroups affiliation and numbers of fighters.
During this time period, there were 3 peace talks and one major military offensive launched by the government. The first peace talk was initiated by President Corazon Aquino in 1986 resulting in the establishment of Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1989. In 1996 there was the Final Peace Agreement between the MNLF and President Ramos; and the start of peace talk between MILF and Ramos in 1997. ‘All-out-war’ declaration against the MILF was announced by President Estrada in 2000, but abruptly ended after he was impeached and replaced by Arroyo in 2001. Arroyo resumed the peace negotiation with the MILF in the following year.

5.3. Assessing Power Distribution between MNLF and MILF Subgroups

The MILF was formed by Hashim Salamat and his faction that was predominantly made up of Maguindanao and Maranao subgroups of Central Mindanao. After failed attempts to outbid Misuari’s MNLF leadership, Salamat saw no hope for future control of MNLF or to reconcile with Nur Misuari (Che Man 1990, 85). The cause of split was due to political difference and ethno-tribal sentiment towards Misuari and his Tausug cohorts that predominated the MNLF Central Committee (Majul 1988; McKenna 1998; Abuza 2005). Moreover, Salamat and other MNLF leaders accused Misuari of manipulating the MNLF towards Marxist-Maoist orientation instead of Islam. In his criticism, Salamat stated that the “mysterious, exclusive, and arrogant nature of the MNLF leadership resulted into confusion, suspicion and disappointments among the members of mujahideen [...] resulting in the loss to the cause of a great number of fighters” (Che Man 1990, 85).

As a result of organizational fragmentation, a large bulk of Kutawato Revolutionary Committee (KRC Central Mindanao), who was mostly from Maguindanao and Maranao, joined Salamat to form the MILF. El Haji Murad Ebrahim, then commander of KRC, became MILF vice-chairman for military affairs (Abuza 2005). The MILF also established a delicate alliance with former MNLF members from Maranao tribe of Lanao province (Che Man 1990). Most of MILF high ranking officials had been educated from Al-Azhar university in Cairo, or other Middle-eastern countries for Islamic study. Thus, the MILF emphasised Islamic principles as the rallying point for Bangsamoro self-determination. Throughout the years, the MILF members remained predominantly Maguindanao and Maranao, while the MNLF is supported by Tausug, Yakan, Sama of Mindanao archipelago (S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010). However, some accounts also note that the MNLF still have mass bases in
Central Mindanao and the MILF has considerable loyal supporters among Yakan people of Basilan island in Mindanao islands (S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010; Abuza 2005).

In terms of general support, the MNLF constituency is rather broad throughout Mindanao, cross-class and between secular revolutionaries, traditional elites and local communities who have participated in the struggle against the Philippine government. Meanwhile, the MILF’s strongest subgroups are concentrated in Central Mindanao, particularly in Maguindanao, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Lanao provinces. The MILF aligned itself with Muslim *ulemas* and counterelite politicians from Cotabato who opposed Moro traditional elites as they were perceived as corrupt and collaborators with the Filipino government (McKenna 1998).

**Territorial Influences**

Prior to MILF splinter, the MNLF controlled most of Muslim Moro territories in West Mindanao islands and Central Mindanao mainland. After the fragmentation, the MNLF possessed at least 13 permanent camps and ten Provincial Armies, each with Zone Forces, Municipality Forces, and Village Defense Forces (Che Man 1990, 191). While the MNLF areas of influence are wide-spread throughout Mindanao, MNLF’s core territory with defensive capacity is concentrated in Western Mindanao, particularly in Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, and Zamboanga provinces (Noble 1981; Majul 1988; Santos, Jr and Santos 2010, 335).

In the mid-1980s the MILF established seven major camps in Maguindanao, Bukidnon, Zamboanga del Sur, Cotabato provinces and Lanao del Sur, close to where the MILF largest headquarters Camp Abu Bakar and Camp Bushra were located. The AFP recognized MILF’s seven major camps and 33 ‘satellite’ camps (Office Strategic and Special Studies 2008). By 1996, the MILF controlled roughly 10 percent of Central Mindanao, with 13 major fixed camps and 33 secondary ones, and dominated two provinces (Tiglao 1998, 26–27; Santos, Jr and Santos 2010). For instances, camp Abubakar had 10,000 hectare area with its own sovereign administration consisting of dozens of hamlets, solar energy systems, *madrasah* (Islamic schools), public administration, sharia court, military barrack and armament factories (Che Man 1990; McKenna 1998; Abuza 2005).
Figure 2: MNLF-MILF Territorial Control and Military Bases

Sources: (Che Man 1990; S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010; Office Strategic and Special Studies 2008)
Needless to say, the MNLF and MILF were able to wage defensive conventional warfare against the AFP in their core territory despite previous organizational fragmentation. Even though the MILF lost many of its fixed military bases, including camp Abubakar as the result of ‘all-out-war’ in 2000, the group was able to recover and re-built many new field camps in remote and hidden areas of Central Mindanao (S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010; Vitug 2002).

**Number of Fighters**

According to AFP assessments in 1987, the MILF had 10,600 fighters (Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, BIAF) concentrated in Central Mindanao. The MNLF had 19,695 fighters (Bangsa Moro Army, BMA) concentrated in Western Mindanao, and 8,850 in Central Mindanao (Majul 1988). As of September 1996, military records showed some 17,700 MNLF BAF members (Makinao and Lubang 2001; S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010).

However, MNLF military strength declined after Misuari signed the Jakarta Final Peace Agreement in 1996 with President Ramos. The FPA was widely unpopular and Misuari, along with other MNLF leaders, and the group leadership were accused of corruption and mismanagement of Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) (Bertrand 2000). Around 5000 BAF, mostly from Central Mindanao, joined MILF ranks to continue armed insurgency against the government (Bertrand 2000; Abuza 2005). Moreover, around 6,905 MNLF fighters were also integrated to the Philippine security forces as a part of security cooperation provided in the FPA, or left the organization (Makinao and Lubang 2001). Many MNLF camps were also transformed into ‘peace zones’ where it members and local communities cooperated with the government to develop agricultural and infrastructure projects (Santos 2005).

The then MILF Vice Chairman, Murad Ebrahim admitted that after the exodus of MNLF fighters, MILF strength surged to 15,420 fighters in mid-1999, and firearms from 10,227 in 1998, to 11,351 in 1999, (Makinao and Lubang 2000, p.160). Off all MNLF Revolutionary Committee in Mindanao, only MNLF’s core territory, Sulu Revolutionary Committee is still actively engaged in armed hostilities against the AFP (S. Santos, Jr 2005; S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010).

After the MILF-GRP war in 2000, the joint coordinating Committee on the Cessation Hostilities (CCCH) estimated the BIAF’s strength to be around 20,000 with additional
irregulars. Zachary Abuza, who conducted in-depth research about MILF in 2005, estimates 15,000 fighters with an irregular force of at least 10,000 men (Abuza 2005b, 465). The MILF sudden growth in late 1990s makes the MILF currently the strongest and most well-armed rebel group in the Philippines (S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010; Podder 2012)

Table 4: Distribution of MNLF-MILF fighters

5.4 Examining the Mechanism: Outbidding Strategies used by the MNLF and MILF (1984-2000)

The theoretical framework of this study suggests that rebel groups are less likely to employ lethal outbidding strategy against their co-ethnic rivals if there is a balance of power that makes intra-rebel conflict costlier as it risk retaliation and government intervention. Based on the empirics presented previously the distribution of power between the MNLF and the MILF, following fragmentation, was marginally in favour to MNLF in late 1980s, but became relatively balance throughout the 1990s. MNLF and the MILF subgroups are divided along the lines of sub-ethnic cleavages that are also separated geographically. Each group has its own military bases and “liberated zones” that are recognized by the Filipino government. With the relatively power balance between the MNLF and MILF, what are the outbidding strategies employed by both groups to become dominant actor? This study’s theoretical framework suggests that rebel group opt for outbidding discourse and non-lethal strategy such as organizational building in order to discern threats and bid for constituent support and political recognition, instead of engaging in violent intra-rebel competition.

1984-1990 Period
One of non-lethal outbidding strategies suggests that a rebel group consolidates its organizational capacity to control information and discern threats (Lilja 2012). The MILF’s ‘Five-Year Plan’ from 1985 – 1990 conforms to this theory. After its formation, the MILF initiated ‘Five-Year Plan’ to build its organizational capacity, information control, military strength, and established quasi-government within their controlled territory (Cheman 1990). By securing the loyalty from one of MNLF largest regional committees, Kutawato RC, Salamat was able to secure strong foothold in Central Mindanao. Major camps such as Camp Abubakar and Camp Bushra, in North Cotabato and Lanao del Sur, respectively, were built to strengthen MILF military and economic power through the self-reliance principle by building solar energy, armed factories, farms, and public administration (Che Man 1990; Abuza 2005; S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010, 347). Camp Abubakar’s territory covered 10,000 hectares of area and served as communication hub to channel communication between other MILF bases across Central Mindanao and external headquarters in Middle East countries (Che Man 1990).

However, the MILF’s intentional strategy to build some of its major bases close to AFP military compounds is unexpected with regards to non-lethal outbidding strategy proposed in this study’s theoretical framework. Camp Abubakar and Camp Badre were located virtually in front of the headquarters of AFP 6th Infantry Division in Maguindanao. Camp Busrah and Camp Ali were found near 4th Infantry Division in Cagayan de Oro City (Office Strategic and Special Studies 2008). This strategy clearly demonstrates the MILF’s confidence of its military strength to show that they could not be defeated by the government. The MILF stated its strategy was to “operate as parallel government vis-à-vis the enemy government within its area responsibility and exercises influence extensively among the Bangsamoro masses in a degree more effective and binding than that of the enemy administration (Mastura 1985, 18). The MNLF, on the other hand, retained uncontested control over Sulu islands countryside and its Tausugs constituents, while the government controlled its capital, Jolo (Che Man 1990).

MNLF and the MILF’s territorial control in Lanao (Mindanao mainland) are rather overlapping as there are no strict boundaries between both groups’ military camps (S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010). Several reports also noted that, unlike the Tausugs and Maguindanaoans who generally adhered to their own ethnically based factions, the Maranoans of Lanao joined the MNLF or the MILF on the basis of their ideological orientations and personal loyalties (Che Man 1990, 97; Abuza 2005). Nonetheless, there are
no reports of violent conflict between both groups in Lanao region within the observed time period, despite the overlapping territorial control and fluid membership between both groups.

Accounts on MILF’s initial territorial expansion and recruitment also did not mention the use of violence against civilian or state security forces. This might be due to GPH’s unwillingness to confront both MNLF and MILF at the same time and the strong support from Maguindanao and Maranao constituents as well. The MILF also reportedly avoided direct military confrontation with the government as there were only 2 attacks that allegedly involve MILF members in Central Mindanao between 1984 to 1990 (Mapping Militant Organizations 2015; UCDP 2016).

The MILF strategies to bid for political recognition and supports from Bangsamoro constituency in opposition to MNLF’s popularity were rather manifested through outbidding discourses. Salamat presented the MILF as Islamist group in contrast to Misuari’s leftist and secular rhetoric. MNLF and the MILF diverging preferences and subgroups affiliation – albeit common self-determination goals – had also attracted different constituents, both domestically and internationally. MILF Islamic rhetoric attracted sympathy from more conservative Islamic countries including Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan (Che Man 88). Domestically, the MILF has strong support from local counterelites politicians and ulemas from Maguindanao. Salamat also positioned the MILF as a more moderate group and opted for autonomy, in contrast to Misuari’s MNLF which became recalcitrant since the breakdown of the Tripoli Agreement (McKenna 1998).

After Corazon Aquino’s election in 1986, Misuari and Salamat briefly reconciled after Aquino signalled her intention to re-open the peace talk with the Moro rebels (Tan 2009, 231). However, in September Aquino visited MNLF headquarter in Jolo to meet Misuari privately, signalling her preferences of who should represent Bangsamoro people (Majul 1988). Aquino preferential treatment towards Misuari might be due to him being the signatory of Tripoli Agreement, his recognition as the observer member of OIC, and his closeness to Aquino’s late husband, Senator Benigno Aquino. Hence, Misuari was more familiar with the international and Filipino audiences (McKenna 1998, 242).

In response to MNLF exclusive attention and lack of recognition at international and national level, the MILF staged mass rally in Cotabato in late March 1986 (McKenna 1996, 243). The MILF consulted community leaders and ulemas from Cotabato and relied on them to prepare and carry the rally (Ibid.). The mass rally was held for three days and attracted fifty to one
hundred thousand people from all around Central Mindanao which was, according to McKenna, the largest mass demonstration ever held in Cotabato city (Ibid., 244). Some of the stated objectives of the rally were announced as “Bangsamoro people – Muslim, Christians, and the tribal Filipinos – support Hashim Salamat,” and to pressurize the government that there should be negotiation between the MILF and GPH before any implementation of the Tripoli Agreement (Ibid.). Later on, the MILF launched short offensive measures by bombings buildings and government infrastructures across Central Mindanao (Mapping Militant Organizations 2016).

Similarly, Misuari also engaged in outbidding discourses. He attended a four-day Bangsa Moro Congress in Sulu, where his speech was heard by at least 20,000 people (Majul 1988, 915). In the same year, Misuari made a trip across Mindanao to rally support and renew local commanders’ personal loyalty with him (Ibid.). Moreover, the MNLF was more active in engaging armed conflict against GPH in contrast to the MILF, with an estimated 304 battle-related deaths resulting from MNLF-GPH conflicts between 1984 to 1990 (UCDP 2016).

Period 1990-2000

The MILF continued to distinguish itself from its parent group by engaging in a consultative committee system across Central Mindanao, in contrast to MNLF’s centralized command under Misuari. The group actively sought local communities’ input with regards to policy ideas and Islamic governances (Abuza 2005). Throughout the 1990s, the MILF expanded its capacity to challenge GPH sovereignty by offering public services including marriage and birth certificates, Sharia court, and Islamic education (McKenna 1998). Camp Abubakar became the largest rebel base in the Philippines with its own economic and commercial activities, solar energy, and production of weapons. Thus, the MILF became widely popular among Bangsamoro constituents especially in Central Mindanao because of its effective community engagement, public services, and dedication to Islamic values.

Nevertheless, the MNLF still had the upper hand in the terms of political leverage vis-à-vis GPH. After Aquino presidency, President Ramos initiated another peace talk with Misuari in 1992 to finalize the Tripoli Agreement. In 1996, the MNLF-GPH signed Jakarta Final Peace Agreement. Nur Misuari became the governor of Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and chairman for Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). Conflict between MNL-GPH no longer reached more than 25 battle-related deaths from 1994 to 2000 (UCDP 2000).
The MILF rejected the FPA and ARMM outright because it only included four out of thirteen provinces promised by Tripoli Agreement (Abuza 2005). Interestingly, MILF did not try to challenge the MNLF-GPH agreement for post-war political control and remain consistent with its “non-participation” of any election or political post (GMA News Online 2008). Instead, the MILF started to launch major offensive campaign against GPH from 1994 to 2000, resulted in 1535 battle-related deaths in total (UCDP 2016). Although the MILF had expressed its intention to not stand in the way of MNLF-GPH peace agreement or ARMM, it still demanded the government to initiate separate peace agreement in lieu of MNLF. Indeed, the MILF’s bid for political recognition by escalating conflict was relatively successful. President Ramos initiated preliminary peace talks with MILF in January 1997 that continued until 2000.

The MILF increased in terms of military power and political leverage in the 1990s, not only due to intentional outbidding strategies. ARMM and SPCPD under Misuari was remarked as “exclusive club of the MNLF,” corrupt and mismanaged, and the benefits of FPA were accrued mainly to MNLF supporters in Western Mindanao, but not in Cotabato and Lanao (Bertrand 2000, 48; Makinao and Lubang 2001). To save his face, Misuari organized a “peace caravan” across the fourteen provinces and nine cities to promote peace process and rally support (Bertrand 2000, 47). The peace caravan indicates Misuari’s outbidding discourse to maintain his popularity which was dwindling due to his failure to address the poverty and insecurity in Mindanao. However, Misuari’s outbidding discourse seems to be unsuccessful. Thousands of disappointed MNLF fighters defected to the MILF, and many others demobilized, or joined other splinter groups such as Abu Sayyaf. By 2000, factionalism further fractured the MNLF. With the support of Arroyo government, MNLF Executive Council of 15 (EC-15) ousted Misuari from all of his political positions as he was deemed to be unfit to rule (Bacani 2005). Angered towards Arroyo alleged manipulation, Misuari and hundreds of his followers launched poorly executed attacks against military outposts in Jolo and Zamboanga in 2001. He was later captured and placed under house arrest until 2008.

As a result of MNLF diminishing popularity and the mismanagement of ARRM, the MILF became the most well-armed rebel group in the Philippines and perceived as the new standard bearer of Bangsamoro self-determination struggle (S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010). Despite Estrada’s all-out war declaration in 2000, report from International Monitoring Team and GRP Coordination Committees on Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) 2004 estimated that the
losses suffered in 2000 were rather low (Abuza 2005b, 463). The MILF continue to assert its dominance especially in Central Mindanao by establishing new military bases and showing its forces by opening up 11 of it camp to an international monitoring team and AFP officers (Ibid.).

5.5 Conclusion and Additional Observation

In conclusion this study’s theoretical framework finds empirical support in the case of MNLF-MILF non-lethal conflict over representing Bangsamoro constituency and political recognition by the government. In spite of organizational fragmentation, distribution of power between both groups was relatively balance throughout observed time period. MNLF and the MILF managed to operate independently and even wage conventional warfare against the government. Both groups also managed to consolidate its own power bases and retain solid support from their respective core territories. These territorial influences also followed along the line of sub-ethnic cleavages of Bangsamoro people and was reinforced over the years: the MNLF became predominantly supported by Tausug people of Sulu and other islanders’ tribes, whereas the MILF mainly supported by Manguindanao and Maranao tribes that are indigenous to Central Mindanao region.

MNLF-MILF outbidding strategies to become the sole representative of Bangsamoro largely consisted of discourses and lethal outbidding against the state. While the MNLF retained its dominance in the terms of political recognition, the MILF asserted its credibility as a legitimate Moro rebel group by facilitating political rally, establishing quasi-governance, accommodating for local aspirations, and showing its dedication to promote Islam. Moreover, the MILF successfully built its power bases in Central Mindanao without challenges from the government, or taking over MNLF territories. On the contrary, the MILF seems to be very confident with its own military strength and organizational capability, and defiantly challenged the government sovereignty by establishing large rebel bases close to military compounds.

Nevertheless, the causal links between balance of power and MNLF-MILF non-lethal outbidding strategies need to be treated with caution. In Lanao area where MNLF and the MILF bases seem to be overlapping, there were no reports of violent clashes between both groups within the observed time period. Moreover, statements made by Salamat and Misuari during their first meeting after two decades states that the split between the MILF and MNLF was a “tactical approach to the solution to the problem of our Bangsamoro people” (MNLF
If these statements are valid and reliable, the absent of violent intra-rebel conflict might be due to strong social ties and strategic choice between both groups to maximize the concession from the government, rather than balance of power. Unfortunately, this statement cannot be triangulated as it only published in the MNLF website and no other media news corroborated the statement. Furthermore, if one extended the observed time-frame, there are reports of violent intra-rebel conflict between the MNLF and Abu Sayyaf Group in Sulu, and between MILF and its splinter group, Bangsamoro Freedom Fighters in Central Mindanao (UCDP 2016). Distribution of power between MNLF-ASG and MILF-BIFF, are rather asymmetric; both ASG and BIFF have only several hundred fighters and hold no permanent military bases in their respective domains. Thus, in spite of strong social ties between myriad of Moro armed groups, balance of power seems a matter between MNLF-MILF non-lethal rivalries for dominance and control of the Bangsamoro contituency.

6. **Case 1: Intra-rebel Conflict between KNU-DKBA**

6.1 **Context of Insurgent Group: Origin of Karen National Union**

Since its inception in 1947, Karen National Union (KNU) is in a continuous armed struggle against the Burma government. This makes the KNU, also known today as the KNLA, the longest running insurgency in the world. Prior the insurgency, Karen armed militias had sided with the British Government during the colonization of Burma and the war against Japanese invasion during World War II. This was done on the promise that they can have their own independent state called *Kaw Thoo Lei*, comprising of the Karen hills, Tenasserim Division and Irrawady Delta (Smith 1999, 72). However, after the end of the Japanese occupation, the British government did not deliver its promise. Karen state, along with other ethnic minorities, were integrated into the newly-independent Burmese government in 1948. After KNU was established, the organization tried to co-exist peacefully with the Burman ethnic majority (South 2008). However, in 1948, a group of Burmese paramilitary under the command of Major General Ne Win, went on rampage through Karen communities and massacred hundreds of Karen people. Since then, KNU has been constantly fighting against Burmese government and provides basic public goods and protection for those affected by the insurgency (Ibid.).

Karen National Defence Organization (later re-named as Karen National Liberation Army) was formed as the KNU military wing. Subgroups within the KNU were divided between
sub-ethnic cleavages – among them are: Christian – predominantly Sgaw speaking Karen (35% of Karen population), Buddhist – predominantly Pwo speaking Karen (65% of Karen population), Karenni and Kayan (belonging to Sgaw branch) (Hayami 2011). The group funded itself from mining, illegal logging, taxation of its local population and trade routes between Thailand and Burma border. KNU also received significant external support from Karen refugees in Burma-Thailand border, missionaries, and various other international aid agencies. At the peak of its strength, the KNU had 10,000 fighters, divided into seven districts, corresponding with the seven KNLA Brigades (South 2011; UCDP 2016). KNU’s decision making process is that of a one party state, where its leader is chosen by a periodic party congress (South 2008, 55).

**Group Fragmentation**

The KNU experienced major fragmentation in 1994-1995, after the splinter of Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in the late 1994. The group was established as a protest against Christian dominance within the KNU leadership who were perceived to have discriminated the Buddhist majority of KNU rank-and-file, and neglected their religious and political interests (South 2008; Gravers 2015). Intra-group grievances were also further exacerbated as most KNU elites had the privilege to access lucrative businesses in Burma-Thai border, while most of the foot-soldiers took the brunt of facing the Burmese military (Tatmadaw) violent “Four Cuts” counterinsurgency campaign that was escalated after the Burma communist insurgent was defeated in late 1980s.

The fragmentation was incited by an influential Sgaw Karen Buddhist monk and former KNLA members, U Thuzana, who led a protest against KNU leadership for religious discrimination and abuse against Buddhist Karen. After U Thuzana’s demand to build a pagoda close to KNU HQ was rejected due to security concern, approximately 300 KNLA soldiers deserted their frontline and pledged allegiance with the monk to form Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization (DKBO) and army (DKBA) (Kenny 2010, 542). As the clash between KNU-DKBA worsened, the latter signed cease fire agreement to acquire Tatmadaw military support. DKBA-Tatmadaw cooperation successfully overran all major camps and liberated zones within the course of three years. Devastating battle and territorial loss led to

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5 I use the term of KNU (insurgent group) and KNLA (armed-wing) interchangeably.
6 “Four Cuts” strategy campaign was to cut supplies of food, funds, recruits, and intelligence to opposition forces. The Tatmadaw has been using this strategy since early 1970s, resulted in gross humanitarian and refugee crises particularly in Burma-Thailand border area. Some of the main methods are scorched earth strategy and forcibly relocating ethnic civilians to Burma army-controlled area (South 2008, 86).
further fragmentation within KNU where many KNLA local commanders surrendered, formed their own militia group, or joined DKBA.

6.2 Lethal Intra-rebel conflict between KNU and DKBA (1994-2010)

Lethal conflict between the KNU and DKBA occurred right after the latter was conceived in 1994. According to UCDP Non-State Violence Dataset, total casualties caused by KNU-DKBA resulted in 233 battle-related deaths. The most intense conflict between both groups occurred during the early phase of DKBA’s formation in mid 1990s. Intense conflict between both groups subsided after 2000, but briefly escalated in 2007. However, other reports claimed that both armed clashes and casualties between KNU-DKBA conflicts are higher than UCDP has estimated. According to KNU official report, between 1996 and 2006, the group had engaged 441 clashes with the DKBA, resulted in 455 “enemy deaths” (South 2008, 57). Reports on battle-related deaths also noted KNU’s effectiveness in dealing costly damaged against both Tatmadaw and DKBA: South reported 6,635 casualties suffered by Tatmadaw and 510 casualties by KNU between 1996 and 2006 (Ibid.). In 2007 to 2008 alone, Kenny records 50 skirmishes, which resulted in 41 casualties from DKBA and 5 from KNU (2010, 548). According to Kenny’s findings, in spite of losing territorial ground and organizationally fragmenting, KNU was remarkably cohesive on the battlefield (Ibid., 547). Similar remarks were also shared by South, who noted that KNU’s military effectiveness was ironically improved after they lost most of their permanent military bases to DKBA, forcing them to adopt guerrilla tactics and increasing their reliance to land mining (South 2008, 56). Meanwhile, the DKBA is perceived to have weak command structure and low-level of commitment amongst its rank-and-files (KHRG 1998; Human Right Watch 2002). DKBA ranks often reportedly deserted or surrendered when fighting against the KNU. Many DKBA fighters also returned to KNU due to the lack of political ambition for Karen-self-determination among DKBA leaders (Ibid.).
The hypothesis of this paper argues that lethal intra-rebel conflict is likely to occur when there is an asymmetric or imbalance in distribution of power between parent and splinter group. Stronger group will resort to lethal outbidding strategy to establish dominance and control over its constituency if the benefits of conflict outweigh the initial cost. The following section will assess the distribution of power by looking at subgroups, territorial control, and numbers of fighters, and how this relative power shifts over time. Thereafter, the causal mechanism will be examined in order to trace whether distribution of power influences the lethality of intra-rebel conflict, motivated by outbidding motives as proposed by this study’s theoretical framework. This thesis also explores alternative explanations (i.e private motives/local cleavages, conflict over natural resources) that might have explanatory power to the outcome of the dependent variable.

6.3 Assessing Distribution of Power

Subgroups

Prior fragmentation, 70-80 percent of KNLA rank-and-files were Buddhist and predominantly Pwo Karen soldiers, whereas most of the leadership and the commissioned officers (20-30 percent) were Christian predominantly Sgaw Karen (Gravers 1999, 92). The

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Buddhist KNLA soldiers are mostly recruited from the poorer villages and did not have the same education as the Christians. Most KNLA foot soldiers did not have access to resources coming from taxation and trade that was enjoyed by most KNU elites.

At the outset, DKBA’s split with the KNU was seen to be a split along Buddhist-Christian lines. However, it was later widely reported that to be a rebellion due to the lack of accountability of the KNU leadership. Many Christians and Animist rank-and-files joined the DKBA mutiny, while most of those who remained with the KNLA were Buddhist and Animists (KHRG 1996). The religious split was instead vertical, with the rank-and-file being predominantly Pwo and Buddhist, and the KNU elites being predominantly Sgaw and Christian. From 1994 to 2000 the KNU was led by long-time leader, Bo Mya, a Sgaw Baptist Karen. After his health decline, and eventual death in 2006, the KNU leadership has been elected periodically by the executive committee members. DKBA, on the other hand, is led by Spiritual leader U Thuzana and former KNU chairman of Thaton district, U Thar Htoo Kyaw (Keenan 2013, 215). However, as DKBA conflict with KNU escalated, U Thuzana had limited, or no longer control over all of DKBA brigades (Gravers 2015). Instead, most of DKBA soldiers follow their direct local brigade commanders, under whom their lives are dependant (South 2011).
Figure 4: KNU-DKBA Territorial Control

Source: Ashley South, Burma’s Longest War: Anatomy of Karen Conflict, ed. Nick Buxton (Transnational Institute, Burma Center Netherland)
Territorial control:

Prior to the DKBA split, the KNU controlled large swathes of territory across Karen State, including Bago Yoma highlands and Irrawaddy Delta, where many Karen people live. By the 1960s, the KNU retreated from lowland Irrawaddy delta to eastern border hills as the Tatmadaw had increased their pressure against ethnic rebel groups (South 2008). In 1995, DKBA launched sudden attacks and successfully overran KNU’s headquarters, including Manerplaw and Kaw Moo Rah. In 1997, after another failed cease fire agreement, Tatmadaw launched a devastating offensive against the last KNU liberated zones, in Fourth and Sixth brigades – again causing thousands of civilians to flee across the border, as well as further splits within KNU ranks. By late 1990s, KNU had no longer held any fixed bases in the Karen state. However, it retain solid control of Karen refugee camps in Thai-border side where more than 140,000 Karen currently live (Thawnghmung 2012). Further, KNU has limited de facto control of the Papun hills of Northern Karen State and small areas of Tenasserim Division (Myanmar Peace Monitor 2016). On the other hand, DKBA took control of most former KNU bases and established Myaing Gy Ngu as its main headquarter.

Number of fighters:

Prior to fragmentation, KNU regular army, KNLA was made up of around 10,000 fighters (Human Right Watch 2002; South 2011; Keenan 2013). Following DKBA split and major battle losses throughout the 1990s, almost half of KNU fighters surrendered, joined DKBA, or formed their own local militia group (Kenny 2010). According to a KNU official statement in 2009, KNU’s strength was around 3000 and they could no longer afford to engage in offensive operation, but rather used hit-and-run tactics with small arms and landmines (South 2009). However, its strength seems to have grown again recently, particularly after DKBA transformed into BGF, which was rejected by many DKBA ranks (Myanmar Peace Monitor 2016). Although it no longer holds any fix camps, KNLA brigades still operates in 7 districts: First Brigrade (Thaton District), Second Brigrade (Toungoo District), Third Brigade (Nyaunglebin District), Fourth Brigade (Mergui-Tavoy District, Tenasserim Division), Sixth Brigade (Duplaya) and Seventh Brigade (Pa’an District) (South 2008).

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8 The KNU moved its headquarter to Mae Sot in Thailand border area, while most of the seven brigades shifts their strategy into guerrilla-based warfare. Since then, the KNU has continue to operate in remote mountain and forest localities. See more: Ashley South, Burma’s Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute and Burma Center Netherlands, 2011), 15
DKBA military strength, on the other hand, grew from 300 fighters in 1994, to 1500 – 2000 in 2002, and 5000 fighters in 2009 (Kenny 2010; KHRG 1996; Human Right Watch 2002; South 2011). Thus by late 2000s (before DKBA-5 splintering), DKBA became most powerful Karen non-state actor, both militarily and economically (South 2011, 10). The group was divided into 4 brigades: Brigades #333 in Papun and Nyaunglebin, 555 in Myaing Gyi Ngu (Headquarter), 777 in Hlaingbwe and 999 in Pa-an. DKBA-5 is estimated to have 1,500 fighters (Myanmar Peace Monitor 2016).

Table 5: Distribution of KNU-DKBA fighters

6.4 Examining the Mechanism: Outbidding Strategies Used by the KNU and DKBA (1994 – 2010)

The theoretical framework for this study suggests that lethal intra-rebel conflict is likely to happen when the militarily stronger group tries to assert its dominance and control in order to maintain its position as the sole representative of an ethnic-identity group. Given the condition of complete information between parent and splinter groups, a group that has military advantage will exploit the situation by subduing the weaker groups in order to maintain its dominant position. Based on the battle-related deaths between KNU and DKBA shown in previous section, the lethality of intra-rebel conflict between both groups has some support with the hypothesis of this thesis. However, empirical findings also show that the causal mechanism between distribution of power and lethal outbidding strategies was not the
only main contributing factor to the lethality of KNU-DKBA conflicts, and violent conflict is not always the nature of interaction between both groups.

The period of 1994-1998 conflicts between KNU and DKBA are in line with the theoretical framework posited in this thesis. The initial strength of DKBA was approximately 300 troops concentrated in Myaing Gyi Ngu, closed to KNU headquarter Manerplaw, whereas KNU had 10,000 fighters spread in all Karen State 7 districts. Four days after DKBA was formed, KNU local battalions attacked U Thuzana’s monastery at Thu Mwe Hta – few miles north of KNU HQ, Manerplaw (Gravers 2015, 56). Three civilians and three DKBA fighters were killed from the attack (Ibid.). KNU also attacked DKBA headquarters, Myaing Gyi Ngu and threatened the monk that they would destroy the pagodas and monasteries in KNU-controlled area (Ibid.). There were also several failed assassination attempt against U Thuzana (Ibid.).

The reasoning behind KNU lethal outbidding strategy was that U Thuzana had challenged KNU leadership by holding a protest at his headquarter, demanding the KNU to end the decades of futile war against Burma (South 2008, 57). Then-KNU leader, Bo Mya viewed U Thuzana as a traitor, trying to divide the Karen and having ambitions as a ruler of Karen state (Ibid.; South 2009).

Conflict soon escalated as KNU lethal outbidding strategy backfired; the majority of KNU rank-and-files who are predominantly Buddhist and Pwo speaking Karen sympathized with U Thuzana’s rally for peace in Karen joined DKBA mutiny. In between 1994-1996, DKBA members grew from 300 to around 2000, while KNU military wing shrunk to almost half of its former size (KHRG 1998). However, despite this, DKBA was still outnumbered by its parent group, and so it quickly signed the cease fire with Burmese military – Tatmadaw – in 1995. With the logistical and financial support from the latter, DKBA managed to overrun almost all KNU’s military bases within a few months after its inception (South 2008). DKBA feats in taking over KNU’s military bases – something that the Tatmadaw never had been done in decades – provides convincing support for the complete information assumption between parent and splinter group. However, the perceived balance of power between both groups and the assumed strategic dilemma between parent and splinter groups in KNU and DKBA conflict is outside of the theoretical prediction. Tatmadaw’s intervention (or manipulation) radically altered the distribution of power and the threat perception in favour of DKBA. Indeed, the government had promised the group widespread control in Karen state if it managed to eradicate the KNU networks within Burmese border (KHRG 2006).
The successful takeover of KNU bases in Karen state and tacit support from the government turned DKBA into the dominant actor within the Karen-Burmese border (South 2011). On the other hand, KNU remnants were forced to retreat either into Karen refugee camps in Thai-border area, north into the Papun hills, or south to Sixth Brigade in Three Pagoda Pass where many Karens, both Buddhist or Christians, lived in refugee camps and were in particular still fervently supportive to KNU’s cause (South 2008, 60; Thawnghmung 2012). DKBA in turns launched numerous attacks against KNU-controlled refugee camps as a bid to control Karen population by forcing them to return to DKBA controlled territory. U Thuzana idea for DKBA was to “liberate Buddhist refugees from the KNU’s control and guide them back to their villages in Burma in order to restore peace” (Gravers 2015, 57). The DKBA saw Karen refugee camps in Thai-border as the last of KNU’s strongest support bases where KNU received its legitimacy as the sole representative of Karen self-determination (South 2011, 10). However, many of DKBA local battalions reportedly operate with complete autonomy or deferred to Tatmadaw commanders, rather than to DKBA leaders at Myaing Gy Ngu (HRW 2002; Keenan 2013). Thus, there was a lot of reports of gross human rights violation, force recruitment, forced labour, and revenge-related killings when DKBA attacked or visited Karen refugee camps in Thai-border (KHRG 1998; HRW 2002).

KNU, on the other hand, became insulated in Thai-border area and received most of its recruits and financial supports from refugees who wanted to take revenge against Tatmadaw and DKBA abuse in the past (HRW 2002). Moreover, being able to resides in Thai-border area allowed the group to wage cross-border guerrilla warfare against DKBA or Tatmadaw as the support from international humanitarian aid, financial and political back up from countries such as Thailand and the US, provide the need of Karen refugees and KNU family members in the border (South 2011). KNU launched major attacks against DKBA from 1996 to 1998, as a retaliation to “outrageous acts” committed by DKBA and Tatmadaw, reported as related to the latter assault to Karen refugee camps (Cusano 1998). KNU also briefly recaptured some bases but soon abandoned it as the group forsook any attempt to hold permanent bases inside Karen state due to further loss of military strength and organizational fragmentation (Keenan 2013). For example, KNU managed to briefly recaptured Ta Ok base from DKBA in 1996, which resulted in 13 killed (Burma Library 1996). In 1998, KNU attacked DKBA headquarter, Myaing Gy Ngu, and launched simultaneous offensive attack against three DKBA camps, resulting in 50 people killed (Refugees 2016). Again, in April
1998, KNU launched another simultaneous attack against 4 Tatmadaw DKBA bases, resulting in more than 30 casualties among the latter actors.

KNU offensive strategies against DKBA and Tatmadaw – despite being outnumbered when considering Tatmadaw presence – is in line with the theoretical argument of “gambling for resurrection” posited in this thesis (Pischedda 2014, 3). With the ascendancy of the DKBA, KNU faced a rapid decline in economy, political and symbolic power as the standard bearer of Karen self-determination struggle. As a result, KNU was no-longer able to maintain the loyalty from many of its locally-based commanders. Between 1996 and 1998, three groups broke-away from KNU and continue to engage in low-level racketeering inside Burma, namely: Karen Peace Army (former 16th battalion), Perry Moe faction (former second brigade), and Karen Peace Force (Kenny 2010, 542). Thereby, KNU’s aggressive attack despite its inability to maintain its re-captured territory can be seen as desperate gambit to fight off DKBA’s growing influence in the Karen state and to maintain its relevance as the traditional standard bearer of Karen people.

KNU-DKBA intra-rebel conflicts have decreased by the turn of the millennium (except in 2006 and 2007). This is possibly correlated to DKBA’s uncontested grip inside of Karen state and growing military strength that match, if not outnumbered, that of KNU. (South 2011; Keenan 2013). Moreover, statements collected by Human Right Watch indicates that KNU could no longer afford equipping or feed many of its new recruits, let alone recapturing its former bases by waging offensive measures against both DKBA and Tatmadaw at the same time (2002, 123). Furthermore, many of violent clashes within this time period were reportedly caused by competition over access to resources, such as trade routes, illegal loggings and taxation, rather than outbidding for Karen people support or to increase political leverage against Burmese government. For instances, low intensity clash in April 2001 was caused by the KNU attempt to take over DKBA-controlled area that served as transit point for drug trafficking (Reuters 2001). Similarly, conflict escalation in 2006 and 2007 caused by DKBA-Tatmadaw joint offensive to clear out KNU’s remaining bases adjacent to Thai-border (KHRG 2006). Reports of violent clashes in those years often occurred in the area where development projects were initiated, such as Asian Highways construction that crossed Thaton and Pa’an, districts where KNU still has presence (Ibid.). Regarding these attacks, DKBA official stated that the KNU has broken the agreement with the Myanmar government by sabotaging the Asia 1 highway during the temporary ceasefire (AAJ News Archive 2007).
Similarly, in 2008 after another skirmishes, KNU claimed that the DKBA planned to wrest control of Kawkareik town from KNLA, “expecting to earn from agriculture, logging and mining” (BurmaNet News 2009). However, the high number of casualties on the part of DKBA and Tatmadaw, and low KNU casualties despite having much larger forces was due to landmines that became under-gunned KNU’s weapon of choice (Kenny 2010)

Deviating from the theoretical expectation, this study finds a case of non-lethal interaction between DKBA and KNU. In sixth Brigade territory (Three Pagoda Pass), KNLA and local DKBA battalions enjoyed a cordial relationship based on mutual business interests in natural resource extraction (South 2011, 20). Further, in 2010, the same battalions joined with DKBA Brigade 5 defection from the DKBA mainstream and attacked Tatmadaw by briefly taking over several areas, including Three Pagoda Pass, Myaing Gy Ngu and Myawaddy town (South 2011; Keenan 2013). The defection was reportedly led by DKBA 5 commander Saw Lah Pwe who rejected Tatmadaw demands to transform all DKBA units into Border Guard Force (Mizzima 2010). In spite of being offered steady salary, permission to control their business activities, DKBA-5 rejected the notion of surrendering their arms and uniforms as it betrayed the spirit of Karen revolution (Ellgee 2010). Since the break-away from its mainstream organization in 2010, DKBA-5 strength has attracted 1000-1500 fighters while DKBA-Border Guard Force (BGF) was left with 4000 fighters (Keenan 2013). Ironically, with the help of U Thuzana, DKBA-5 and KNU reconciled and have been involved in joint-offensive against DKBA BGF and Tatmadaw since 2010 (South 2011).

6.5 Conclusion

The hypothesis argued in this study finds mixed support from empirical analysis. The causal mechanism of distribution of power indeed influenced KNU and DKBA lethal outbidding strategies in the 1990s; however, there is a lack of convincing evidence to show that violent conflict between both groups in the period of the 2000s was caused by a group’s attempt to outbid its rival. Instead, the highest number of casualties resulted from KNU-DKBA clashes caused by competition over access to resources and trade routes. Nevertheless, the shifts of power balance between KNU and DKBA within the observed time periods finds considerable support to the theoretical argument that group will only engage violent intra-rebel conflict when the benefits outweigh the cost, or when the cost of inaction would be detrimental to group survival.
Indeed, KNU aggressive outbidding strategies against DKBA’s rising popularity among war-weary Karens were dominated by violent acts, including repressions and assassination attempts against U Thuzana. However, given the majority subgroups of KNU ranks were predominantly Buddhists fighters, KNU repression against U Thuzana and its Buddhist followers triggered mass defection within the organization, that lead to the ascend of DKBA military and political power, and further fragmentation within the KNU. The assumption of complete information between parent and splinter groups also finds support from the empirics. DKBA was able to take many of KNU strongholds within a very short time period, something that the Tatmadaw had never accomplished in decades. On the other hand, KNU large scale attacks against DKBA and Tatmadaw from 1996 to 1998 is in line with the argument of “gambling for resurrection” as KNU tried to remain relevant and to prevent further loss of power.

However, much of violent clashes decreased after the year 2000 and skirmishes were rather related to control over access to resources as DKBA’s dominance and military strength inside Karen state became prominent while KNU retreated to areas adjacent to Thai-border. Secondly, violent conflict was not always the case, some local battalions from both groups managed to coexist peacefully through resource sharing and mutual business interest. These findings suggest that KNU-DKBA relationship was not marked with constant competition for dominance over identity groups as expected in the theoretical frameworks. On the contrary, as KNU-DKBA conflict became increasingly protracted, both groups seem to become less cohesive in attaining their political goal, with local commanders contending to enrich themselves at the expense of Karen self-determinism movement.

7. Cross Case Comparison: Comparing the Case of Karen and Moro Insurgencies

This chapter presents a structured and focus comparison between MNLF-MILF intra-rebel conflict in Philippines and KNU-DKBA in Burma. The purpose of comparison between two cases is to deepen the understanding of the cause of lethal and non-lethal intra-rebel conflict that goes beyond the case-specific analysis. The empirical findings indicates that distribution of power between parent and splintering groups do influence rebel’s group outbidding strategy to establish dominance and control over ethnic-identity group. However, as discussed in each case study’s empirical analysis, there are several factors, specific to each case that might also have explanatory power for the rebel group’s behaviour, particularly to
their decision to avoid lethal conflict, and reconcile. The presences of these factors will be further discussed as additional observations and alternative explanations. The last section discusses the limitation and biases in this study.

7.1 Intra-rebel Conflict and Distribution of Power in two case studies

The cases in this study are selected based on the variation of the dependent variable: non-lethal conflict between the MNLF and MILF from 1984-2000, and lethal conflict between KNU and DKBA from 1994 – 2010. The aim of this study is to explore the plausible independent variable that may explain the variation in the dependent variable. This will provide insights into our research question on how distribution of power between parent and splintering group influences the lethality of intra-rebel conflict through outbidding mechanism? With caution, the empirical analysis finds partial support to the theoretical framework proposed in this thesis. Non-violent rivalry between relatively equal sized MNLF and MILF is supported by reports and the statements from both groups indicating their unwillingness to engage in costly violent intra-rebel conflict. On the other hand, the case of KNU-DKBA lethal rivalry only finds support to the causal mechanism of lethal outbidding strategy within the early period of intra-rebel conflict. Indeed, violent conflict between KNU and DKBA gradually decreased as both groups’ military strength became relatively balanced. However, reports on high number of low intensity clashes related to resource competition and high number of landmine casualties suggests that both groups did not resort to non-lethal outbidding strategy to improve its position as the sole representative of Karen people, regardless of the balance of power.

Table 6: Cross-case comparison summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Outbidding Strategies</th>
<th>Support for hypothesis</th>
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<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
<td>Power Distribution</td>
<td>(Qualitative Assessment)</td>
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<td>MNLF</td>
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<td>Maranao-Maguindanao</td>
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7.2 How distribution of power influences outbidding strategies in both cases?

The causal argument of violent intra-rebel conflict is that the stronger group is likely to employ lethal outbidding strategy against the weaker group because of the low cost of fighting and benefits of acquiring dominant control over self-determination group. This in turn increases the rebel group’s bargaining leverage against the government. When the rival group has formidable military power, non-lethal outbidding strategy is likely to be chosen by the rebel actor because of high cost of intra-rebel conflict and the existential threat coming from state-based counterinsurgency. In order to test the causality of proposed theoretical framework, this study needs to determine whether the relationship is causal or confounded by other explanatory variables.

In the case of Moro insurgencies, the asymmetric split between MNLF-MILF influences the latter’s strategic choice to avoid violent confrontation either against the MNLF or the state during the period of 1984 to 1990. However, by assessing subgroups support and territorial control, the MILF clearly has strong support from the two largest Moro tribes in Central Mindanao, Maranao and Maguindanao, whereas the MNLF was rather concentrated among Sulu and other islanders’ tribes in Western Mindanao and parts of Lanao. MILF retained formidable strength as the military wing of the group was the former MNLF Kutawato Revolutionary Committee based in Central Mindanao. The MILF’s embeddedness in local population and its considerable military strength allowed it to establish its own “liberated zones” across Central Mindanao and was also able rally political support from Moro people within their sphere of influence without directly confronting MNLF’s position. Yet, in spite of avoiding military confrontation against its opponents, the MILF was confident enough to
outwardly challenge the government by building many major camps close to military compounds to signal its capacity in providing public goods and shadow government within its controlled territory. In the later period, the MILF’s successful strategy in organizational building and self-sufficiency, and concurrently, MNLF’s dominant national as well as international recognition – allowed both groups to gain concession from the government through their own respective means, without the urgency of eliminating each other.

In the case of KNU-DKBA conflict, asymmetric distribution of power influenced KNU’s violent repression against the smaller Karen Buddhist dissents, led by U Thuzana. Violent outbidding strategies employed by KNU leaders sought to suppress DKBA protest consisted of assassination attempts, violent repression against U Thuzana followers, attacks against Buddhist holy sites, and offensive attack targeted to DKBA’s military camps. Later, with the DKBA ascendancy as the dominant non-state armed actor in Karen state and KNU’s diminishing military strength, lethal outbidding strategy by forcibly removing Karen refugees from Thai-border back to Karen state was often employed by DKBA. On the other hand, KNU could no longer afford military offensives against both the DKBA and the government troops, leading it to become increasingly reliant on anti-personnel land mine and road ambushes. Nevertheless, empirical analysis indicates that there is no convincing finding that suggests the shifting distribution of power between KNU and DKBA in 2000-2010 period to correlate to both groups outbidding strategy to represent Karen people. In fact, several reports noted that leaders and local commanders from both groups were often criticized for not genuinely carry Karen self-determinism struggle. Instead, both of DKBA and KNU leaders were perceived as warlords who sort exploitive and lucrative business opportunities with Thailand (Thawnghmung 2012; South 2011)

With regard to the partial support of the causal mechanism proposed in this study, two additional observations were made in the empirical analysis that correlate to the observed independent and dependent variable. The first observation is the tacit cooperation between DKBA and Burmese military, Tatmadaw, in waging the war against KNU. Cooperation with the Tatmadaw altered the assumption of distribution of power between two rebel groups. This was shown during DKBA successful retaliation against KNU in mid-1990s, where it cooperated with the government to overrun KNU’s major military bases despite having smaller forces compared to the parent group. The accusation of Tatmadaw manipulation of DKBA did emerge, where the government promised DKBA to be the sole representative of Karen people provided it helped counterinsurgency operations against KNU. Not
surprisingly, lethal intra-rebel conflict between KNU and DKBA in mid-1990s and later in 2007 coincided with Tatmadaw offensive campaign against KNU. Nevertheless, the government never fulfilled its promised to DKBA, which eventually led to DKBA fragmentation and the formation of DKBA-5 which later reconciled with KNU. State manipulation used in attempt to fractionalize rebel groups is also noted in the within case analysis of Moro insurgency. The government under Marcos and Aquino tried to manipulate tribal sentiments between Tausugs and other islanders Moro tribes in Western Mindanao with Maguindanao and Maranao from Central Mindanao. However, ethnic sentiments between MNLF and MILF were never escalated to violent conflict within the observed time period.

The second additional observation is competition over resources and the variation of competitive and/or tacit coexistence and interaction across different rebel groups. As noted in chapter 6, skirmishes and conflict relapse between KNU and DKBA in 2007 were caused by business opportunities becoming more apparent with intra-rebel conflict being protracted (ex: Asian Highways construction, illegal loggings, trade routes taxation, etc.). Non-lethal rivalry between DKBA’s battalions 906 and 907 which operated in KNLA 6th brigade territory (Three Pagoda Pass) was also reportedly due to mutual business interests in logging and mining (South 2011). In the case of Moro insurgency, it is unclear whether there is competition over resources between MNLF and MILF. There is no report relating to armed conflict between MNLF and MILF within the observed time period, even in the Lanao region where both groups operated within close proximity. Instead, reports from government and statements from both rebel groups indicate that each group seems to be self-sufficient, relying on foreign donations, alms, farming and other agricultural activities (S. M. Santos, Jr and Santos 2010).

7.2 Extended Analysis

Additional observations highlighted above suggest that the pattern of violent and non-violent relationship between co-ethnic parent and splintering groups cannot be explained purely by balance of power between parent and splintering group. By comparing Moro and Karen case studies of intra-rebel conflict, several theoretical arguments provide an alternate explanation to understand the pattern of violent and non-violent conflicts between co-ethnic parent and splintering group in both cases.

The state of “wartime political order” often occurs in cases of protracted insurgenicies, wherein state and non-state actors might share territorial sovereignty, cut deals in exploiting
economic benefits, or merely try to minimize violence by demarcating –formal or non-formal – territorial line (Staniland 2012, 250). Conflict between rebel groups can also be explained as a strategic violent competition over scarce resources (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012). Thus, the eruption of violent inter-rebel conflict are likely to occur when the benefits of controlling wartime economy outweighs the cost of conflict, in which distribution of power plays an important part in the actor’s decision making calculus (Nygård and Weintraub 2015).

Civil war in Burma often display variations of relationship between the military –Tatmadaw- and rebel actors, regardless of what ethnic groups they represent. The Tatmadaw often share sovereignty, or colluded with some rebel actors in exploiting resources (i.e. loggings and drug trade), while engaging ruthless counterinsurgency measures against some other rebel group. Indeed, while KNU and Tatmadaw constantly engaged in violent conflict, DKBA was allowed to establish its own territorial control and business. Karen people who lived in DKBA controlled villages were spared of Tatmadaw abuse and experienced significant development compared to those located in contested area or refugee camps. Nevertheless, as noted in the additional observation, tacit coexistence between DKBA and KNU mid-level commanders occurred even though both group, at the outset, engaged in violent intra-rebel conflict. Thus these findings suggest that wartime political order exists and varies between Tatmadaw, KNU and DKBA units across the different areas they operate. Violence erupts when one of the actor violate the “red-line” that were formally or informally established between three actors. For instance, DKBA justified their large scale assault against KNU in 2007, claiming the latter had violated the ceasefire agreement by sabotaging the construction of Asia Highway construction in Karen state. Likewise, collusion between DKBA and Tatmadaw broke-down when segments of DKBA brigades refused the government proposal to transform all ceasefire groups into border guards, dismantling the group’s right to bear arms and operate autonomously.

Bargaining between armed actors can also be compared if one extends the unit of analysis to the Moro insurgencies in the Philippines. While both MNLF and MILF shared sovereignty with the Filipino Government (GPH) in their respective territories to some extent, both groups sometimes cooperated, or allowed the government to launch counterterrorism measures against other splintering groups, such as Abu Sayyaf in Western Mindanao, and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Central Mindanao. For instance, the military refused to intervene in the violent clash between MNLF and ASG in Sulu, 2013 – which resulted in more than 26 killed – in order to avoid conflict spill-over (Alipala 2013).
The MILF had engaged violent conflict with the BIFF in 2012, after the latter launched a violent campaign in Maguindanao to undermine MILF-GPH peace process (Mapping Militant Organizations 2016). With regards to counterterrorism, both MILF and MNLF often complied and allowed the government to run operations against ASG or BIFF at some extent, either by allowing the military to access their territory or by providing information (ICG 2008). Yet, violent clashes, or “misencounter” resulted in high-numbers of casualties sometime still occurring particularly when actors failed to establish mutual arrangement. For instances, in January 2014, the police’s Special Action Forces (SAF) failed to notify local MILF commanders during the counterterrorism operation in Maguindanao, and later were trapped fighting against BIFF and MILF at the same time (IPAC 2015).

This extended analysis made from cross-case comparison between two case studies provokes another question that is equally important to address in order to fully explain the patterns of violence in multi-actors civil war. Why armed actors – states or non-states – are willing to cut deals with some actors but engaged in violent conflict with the others. How do such bargaining take place, and what causes the relapse of conflict. Indeed, distribution of power and territorial control can explain each actor’s strategic choice at some extent, but it overlooks the narrative of the actors when there are variations of interactions between them, across time and territory, even though the balance of power remains relatively the same. In reality, both states and rebel actors often do not devote all of their resources to monopolize violence and exterminate their enemies (Staniland 2012, 253). Shifting political interest and strategic goals between armed actors – both high-level and mid-level commanders – and how it varies across time and territory is important to help us understand how conflict and/or “order” established in multi-actors civil war occur. However, these questions are outside the scope of this paper as it requires theoretical framework and research design that can be comparable across case studies. In-depth field research is necessary in order to gain information on how, for example, MILF and MNLF commanders in Lanao region or Basilan island establish security arrangements in order to avoid violent misencounter, or how tacit coexistence relationship were established between 906 and 907 and KNU 6th Brigade, in Tree Pagoda Pass area. Without field based research, the nuances of causality can be missed.

7.3 Limitation and Bias

The main limitations of this study are the generalizability and representativeness of the case selection. The main criterion of case selection in this study is to compare typical case with
case that deviate the assumption that rebel fragmentation and the existence of parent and splintering group always lead to violent intra-rebel conflict. Cases of MNLF-MILF and KNU-DKBA rivalry is selected to explore undertheorize patterns of violent and non-violent conflict between fragmented rebel groups. However, cases where there is non-lethal interaction between parent and splintering group is empirically underexplored due to data and theoretical limitation. Given the low number of case studies, it is necessary to study more cases with most similar case design where there is similarity on the dependent variable, which in this case is non-lethal conflict between parent and splintering groups. By doing that, one can test whether the same theoretical framework will hold in other cases while at the same times identifies other potential alternative explanations that have explanatory power to the observed dependent variable.

Secondly, the limitation of studying rebel group’s behaviour is the availability and validity of the data. As noted in the research design section, this study found that most of the reports made by humanitarian organizations are bias to the KNU because its heavily dependent on statements made by KNU members and Karen refugees that live in Thai-border because the lack of access to Karen state. The lack of reliable reports that cover DKBA leaders statement is likely due to the lack of access to DKBA controlled area within Burmese border. Nonetheless, data triangulation is made to corroborate information with multiple independent sources. However, when it comes to rebel group’s statement regarding their policy or action done in the past, this study suffered information bias due to overly reliance on low number of sources. This problem is hard to mitigate as there are only few scholars or reliable reports that managed to record rebel actors’ statement – both high-level and mid-level rank leaders – particularly during the early phase of intra-rebel conflict in both case studies. Although this problem can be addressed by conducting in-depth field research, the problem of data proximity is nevertheless remains (Hoglund and Oberg 2011, 188).

Third is theoretical limitation. This study struggled to find causal mechanism that explains the variation of non-lethal intra-rebel conflict that can be measured and compared across cases. For instances, social ties between rebel actors are often overlooked when explaining the patterns of conflict and cooperation (Bapat and Bond 2012; Staniland 2014). While in reality, perceived feeling of camaraderie or former collaborative behaviour might influences rebel actors to avoid conflict, albeit competing over resources and political leverage vis-à-vis the government (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012, 608; Parkinson 2013). Yet again, in order to the role of social ties in reducing the risk of intra-rebel conflict one should consider other
variables, such as the size of constituency and how rebel actors perceive whether scarcity of such resource influence their strategic choice. Unfortunately it is difficult to deduce theoretically the impact of social ties to rebels’ behaviour, and it is also restricted by the lack of available data across cases and over time (Fjelde and Nilsson 2012). Lastly, this study lacks a proper bargaining theory models that predicts the relationship between distributions of power among parent and splintering group, the cost-benefits calculation, and its impact to violent intra-rebel conflict. Unfortunately, due to the fact that this study is small-n qualitative analysis, using or formulating rigorous theoretical model is beyond the scope of this thesis.
8. Conclusion
The study on rebel fragmentation and the proliferation of splintering groups have been expanding over the past few years. It impacts to conflict dynamics and the use of violence have also been scrutinized; the emergence of splintering groups are found to be positively correlated with the increase of violence between rebel groups – among others. Yet, many of these studies are often treat inter-rebel or intra-rebel conflict dyad as a single observation, which tell us whether violent conflict is either present or absent between the observed unit analysis. It tell us little about the variation of violent or non-violent relationship between parent and splinter group across time and territory throughout the course of war. Thus, the purpose of this study is to address this gap by exploring the cause of violent and non-violent conflict between parent and splinter group following organizational fragmentation. Deriving from rational choice and outbidding theory developed by Kydd and Walter (2002), this thesis argues that lethal intra-rebel conflict is likely to occur when the distribution of power between parent and splinter group is asymmetric. The underlying assumption is rebel group will resort to violent outbidding strategy to eliminate, or weaken its co-ethnic rival in the struggle to become the sole-representative of an identity-group. Conversely, non-lethal outbidding strategy is expected to be employed if there is balance of power between both groups that makes intra-rebel conflict costlier due to the risk of retaliation, or state intervention.

This theoretical framework was tested by conducting structured, focus comparison and within-case process tracing. The cases of intra-rebel conflict between MNLF and MILF in the Philippines and KNU-DKBA conflict in Burma are analysed within fifteen year time frame. The findings from the empirical analysis demonstrated support from the case of MNLF-MILF intra-rebel conflict, and partial support in the case of KNU-DKBA intra-rebel conflict. In the latter case, violent clashes and high number casualties between both groups in the period of 2000 to 2010 were reportedly related to conflict over economic resources and land-mines related incidents rather than violent bid for political recognition as posited in this thesis. Moreover, state intervention by supporting DKBA’s bid for sole-representation of Karen people also altered the assumption of balance of power between KNU and DKBA. Nevertheless, the assumption of complete information between parent and splinter group finds considerable support. The case of KNU-DKBA conflict shows how relatively weaker splinter group exploits its knowledge of the parent group private information by cooperating
with the government. DKBA were able to overrun most of KNU’s permanent bases within few years after its inception – a feat that never been achieved by Burmese military after decades of fighting the KNU.

Due to theoretical and data limitation, the findings presented in this thesis need to be treated with caution because of several reasons. The impact of social ties between rebel leaders to the patterns of intra-rebel conflict is under researched due to lack of accessible data. Secondly, this thesis also suffered potential reporting bias by relying on few accessible secondary sources that report statements made by rebel actors in the past. Lastly, the theoretical framework formulated in this thesis was constrained to solely explain intra-rebel conflict that caused by political motivation. In reality, violent intra-rebel conflict may be caused by other variables, including non-strategic violence such as clan-conflict or revenge killing between members of different rebel groups. With regards to these limitations, future research is encouraged in order to develop more rigorous theoretical framework that can capture the complexity of relationship between rebel groups in multi-actor civil war. In-depth field based study is therefore suggested to gain fine-grained and reliable data on how bargaining – or fall out – between rebel groups had took place. Lastly, understanding short-term and long-term goals of rebel actors particularly in protracted conflict is necessary to develop more nuance causal explanation rather than assuming conflict as a competition between actors to monopolize violence.
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