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# Territorial Autonomy and Self-Determination Conflicts:

Opportunity and Willingness  
Cases from Bolivia, Niger,  
and Thailand

Roger Suso

INSTITUT  
CATALÀ  
INTERNACIONAL

PER LA PAU

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## ABSTRACT

The paradox of autonomy is about whether self-rule accommodates or exacerbates armed conflict. This study attempts to unpack the puzzle examining the effectiveness of territorial autonomy as a state response to self-determination conflicts throughout the world. It challenges the conflict-inducing features of autonomy arguing that territorial autonomy can mitigate armed conflict by channeling group grievances into peaceful forms of protest. Thus, this study aims at arriving at a comprehensive theory that identifies which factors are responsible for violent escalation of conflicts grounded in self-determination demands. By using the concepts of opportunity structures and willingness dimension, this study shows that conflict escalation only takes place when minorities with greater bargaining power vis-à-vis the center, in contexts of high levels of economic inequality within dyad, are mobilized around autonomy and separatist demands.

**Keywords:** territorial autonomy, self-determination conflicts, opportunity structures, willingness dimension, escalation/de-escalation, dyadic relationship

## RESUM

Aquest text estudia la paradoxa de l'autonomia (si l'autogovern atenua o exacerba el conflicte armat) examinant l'efectivitat de l'autonomia territorial com a resposta als conflictes d'autodeterminació. Així, s'argumenta que l'autonomia territorial pot mitigar el conflicte armat canalitzant els greuges grupals cap a formes de protesta pacífiques. Fent servir els conceptes d'"estructura d'oportunitat" i "dimensió de voluntat", vol arribar a una teoria integral que identifiqui els factors responsables de l'escalada de violència en els conflictes sorgits de reivindicacions d'autodeterminació. L'estudi mostra que l'escalada dels conflictes només es produeix quan es mobilitzen minories amb un alt poder negociador respecte del centre, en contextos de grans nivells de desigualtat econòmica al si de la diàda i al voltant de reivindicacions d'autonomia i separatistes.

**Paraules clau:** autonomia territorial, conflictes d'autodeterminació, estructures d'oportunitat, dimensió de voluntat, escalada/desescalada, relació diàdica.

## RESUMEN

Este texto estudia la paradoja de la autonomía (si el autogobierno atenua o exacerba el conflicto armado), examinando la efectividad de la autonomía territorial como respuesta a los conflictos de autodeterminación. Así, se argumenta que la autonomía territorial puede mitigar el conflicto armado canalizando los agravios grupales hacia formas de protesta pacíficas. Utilizando los conceptos de "estructura de oportunidad" y "dimensión de voluntad", quiere desarrollar una teoría integral que identifique los factores responsables de la escalada de violencia en los conflictos surgidos de reivindicaciones de autodeterminación. El estudio muestra que la escalada de los conflictos solamente se producirá cuando se movilicen minorías con un alto poder negociador respecto del centro, en contextos de grandes niveles de desigualdad económica en el sí de la diáda y sobre reivindicaciones de autonomía y separatistas.

**Palabras clave:** autonomía territorial, conflictos de autodeterminación, estructuras de oportunidad, dimensión de voluntad, escalada/desescalada, relación diádica.

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## ACRONYMS

4-S	stable, soft, self-serving stalemate
ADC	May 23 <sup>rd</sup> Democratic Alliance for Change
AIDSESEP	Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest
APB	Autonomy for Bolivia
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATNMC	North Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change
AU	African Union
BIPP	Islamic Liberation Front of Patani
BNPP	Patani National Liberation Front
BRN	National Revolutionary Front
CAINCO	Chamber of Industry, Commerce, Services and Tourism of Santa Cruz
CEN-SAD	Communities of Sahel-Saharan States
CPSC	Pro-Santa Cruz Committee
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
CRA	Coordination of the Armed Resistance
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FAN	Nigerien Armed Forces
FARS	Revolutionary Armed Forces of the Sahara
FFR	Front of Forces for Rectification
FLAA	Air and Azawad Liberation Front
FPN	Niger Patriotic Front
GMIP	Islamic Mujahideen Movement of Patani
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
KMM	Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia
MAR	Minorities at Risk
MAS	Movement for Socialism
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front

MNCL	Movement for the Liberation of the Camba Nation
MNJ	Nigerien's Movement for Justice
MNR	Revolutionary Nationalist Movement
MNSD-N	National Movement for the Development of Society- Nassara
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ORA	Organization of the Armed Resistance
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy
PAS	Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party
PODEMOS	Social and Democratic Power
PULO	Patani United Liberation Organization
RKK	Runda Kumpulan Kecil
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UDD	United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship
UFRA	Union of Forces of Armed Resistance
UJC	Santa Cruz Youth Union
UNASUR	Union of South American Nations
USA	United States of America



# 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Self-determination holds that certain groups<sup>2</sup> have the right to determine their own political status i.e. the nation-state ideal in which every nation has its own state, and every state its own nation. Yet, even when this principle clashes with the principle of territorial integrity or sovereignty, it has been legitimized and used to justify political agendas through modern political history. Consequently, since the end of the Second World War self-determination conflicts or identity-based territorial conflicts<sup>3</sup> have been among the most common, protracted, and intractable forms of political turmoil and armed conflicts in today's world (Gallagher Cunningham 2007, Jenne et al. 2007; Daftary 2008).

In order to address the problem posed by the conflict bound between self-determination demands and territorial integrity, autonomy arrangements have been institutionalized as serviceable mechanisms of conflict management. However, as previous research has suggested, autonomy can either accommodate violent conflict or reinforce it. Thus, a central puzzle remains to be clarified as no conclusive evidence is found in the literature concerning the impact of autonomy on self-determination conflicts. In this context, the present study builds on these studies by incorporating approaches from ethnic bargaining theories, societal security theories, and politico-economic theories of armed conflict outbreak to determine *under what conditions do territorial armed conflicts grounded in self-determination demands escalate or de-escalate*. This study aims at arriving at a comprehensive theory that identifies which factors are responsible for violent escalation of self-determination conflicts.

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1. The author would like to thank participants of a seminar held at the International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP) for their valuable input
  2. To be considered a group, it has to satisfy at least one of the two criteria established for being 'politically significant': (i) the group collectively suffers, or benefits from, systematic discriminatory treatment vis-à-vis other groups in a society, and (ii) the group is the basis for political mobilization and collective action in defense or promotion of its self-defined interests (Gurr 1993:6-7).
  3. The study will use these concepts interchangeably, referring to armed conflicts between a government and a minority group.

Thus, in order to enhance the understanding of why some groups engaged in collective action are able to advance autonomy and separatist demands<sup>4</sup> against the central government, the concepts of opportunity structures and willingness dimension are introduced to evaluate conflict escalation or de-escalation. Therefore, the study argues that escalation or de-escalation only occurs as a result of the presence or absence of these factors. The explanatory value of the analytical framework is assessed by applying opportunity structures and willingness dimension foci in a comparative analysis on three cases: Bolivia, Niger, and Thailand.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CAUSAL STORY

### 2.1. MAPPING THE RESEARCH FIELD

Armed conflict is generally waged either over the governmental control or the territory. Hence, in domestic-level territorial disputes, a substate actor challenges the sovereignty of the country's central government over a territorial area of the state in the name of self-determination. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account that territories, which may hold natural and/or economic resources, may serve as strategic security buffers, or may play a very symbolic role for a state. Accordingly, territory has two plausible characteristics, as its tangibility and its intangibility encourages central governments and opposing groups to fight over it (Tir 2006).<sup>5</sup> However, governments consistent-

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4. Separatism involves two different phenomena: secessionism i.e. the will and/or the actions of a group to create a new state; and irredentism i.e. the will and/or the actions of a group to join either a state dominated by its ethnic kin or to create a new state based on its own kinship.
  5. A tangible valuable territory means that the land can be used for a utilitarian, economic or military purpose, whereas an intangible valuable territory can take on several different forms, such as an ancestral homeland e.g. Kosovo to Serbians; a religiously significant site e.g. Jerusalem; or land inhabited by ethnic brethren e.g. Hungarians in Romania (Tir 2006:314).

ly refuse to negotiate with contenders, not because territory is perpetually valuable, but because they constantly fear that a concession to one separatist group will encourage other parties to seek their own share of a limited pie (Walter 2003:138). Accommodation of separatists' demands is costly for the government as it has to establish a tough reputation "in order to deter others from making similar demands" (Walter 2003:138).

There are two approaches that can be utilized in bringing identity-based territorial intrastate armed conflicts to an end (Lapidoth 1997; Nordquist 1998; Sambanis 2001; Ohlson 2008:145). On one hand, by creating new sovereign states, and conversely, by encouraging the parties to negotiate a settlement and undergo a war-to-democracy transition within the existing state. Yet, due to the bias against partition of the existing states in the international system, the latter approach is the most commonly used template in terminating such conflicts, implying that some form of power-sharing or decentralized governance must be applied. Therefore autonomy might be necessary to secure peace in conflict-torn societies in the short-term, and to foster democracy in the long-run because it overcomes two problems: one, the partition bias by offering territorial sharing, and two, the perception of a democratic deficit by permitting self-government and administration. Hence, autonomy has been one of the most important prescriptions to alleviate self-determination conflicts since the end of the Cold War. However, the assessments of its effects have not always been positive. In some cases autonomy has successfully created new institutional settings that have accommodated the demands, but in other cases, the provision of autonomy has increased rather than decreased the likelihood of conflict.

## 2.2. TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY AS A CONCEPT

Autonomy is taken in this study to mean "that parts of the state's territory are authorized to govern themselves in certain matters by enacting laws and statutes, but without constituting a state of their own" (Heintze 1998:7; Nordquist 1998). Autonomy is a type of transfer or

devolution of certain powers from a central government to that of the autonomous entity (Wolff and Weller 2005:12; Ghai 2000). Entities rightly entitled to autonomy have no such rights under international law, however, states have been endorsing autonomy as a means of state-building (e.g. Spain, Canada and the United Kingdom), and as means to address minority issues and ethnic conflict (e.g. Nicaragua, Sudan, Philippines and Papua New Guinea).

In general, four types of entities can be portrayed by taking scope, depth and territoriality into account: (i) territorially delineated entities holding legislative power like Catalonia, Euskadi, Galicia, Scotland, Gagauzia, the Åland Islands, Greenland or South Tyrol; (ii) non-territorially delineated entities holding legislative power like the Ottoman Millet-type systems of organization of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Israel and Egypt; (iii) territorially delineated entities holding regulatory/administrative power like Corsica, Crimea, Wales, Nunavut or the Karbi Anglong District in Assam; and (iv) non-territorially delineated entities holding regulatory/administrative power like the cultural self-governmental institutions in Estonia, and in some regions of Sápmi (Légaré and Suksi 2008). Other alternative typologies for understanding forms of autonomy can be framed concerning whether the purpose of the autonomy is conflict resolution/management, whether it was negotiated top-down or bottom-up, and even whether the achievement was a domestic agreement or an external imposition.<sup>6</sup> Autonomy will here, unless otherwise specified, refer to the entities of the type (i) and (iii), i.e. territorial autonomy.

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6. At least three further types of autonomy can be distinguished in the literature, these include, personal, cultural and functional (Lapidoth 1997; Safran 2000; Légaré and Suksi 2008). Personal and cultural autonomy are defined as the *de jure* specific civil rights and duties for persons belonging to certain communities to carry out their cultural activities, e.g. the Roma peoples in Europe, Oaxaca people in Mexico or the people of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan. In areas where communities are quite scattered, autonomy can only be functional as a self-management technique, with no law-making authority, as it is the case of the *de facto* autonomy of the “ghettos, gang ‘turfs’, Chinatowns, Harlems, barrios and Little Italies” (Safran 2000:12). Functional autonomy can also be found e.g. in the *de facto* micronation of Sealand, or even in the case of the *de jure* Freetown Christiania, Copenhagen, Denmark.

### 2.3. THE DEBATE ON AUTONOMY

The current state of the scholarly debate regarding the institutionalized empowerment of potentially separatist regional groups is confused. There is little consensus within the scholarly debate as to the effectiveness of autonomy as a response to identity-based territorial conflicts. However, general consensus exists that minorities with a legacy of autonomy are more likely to mobilize around separatist or autonomy demands against the central government (Gurr 1993; Jenne et al. 2007; Gallagher Cunningham 2007; Daftary 2008). Three positions are highlighted throughout the debate regarding the effect of autonomy on self-determination conflicts.

The first scholarship (i) holds that autonomy as a self-governing intrastate region is a widely used mechanism to solve identity-based territorial conflict. Its main characteristic, as a negotiated and agreed operative solution, is its ability to produce durable solutions that reflect and meet the needs and interests of the parties involved (Nordquist 1998:66). Yet, lasting autonomies tend to be those with low degrees of militarization of the conflict preceding the establishment of the autonomy (Nordquist 1998:72). It has the power to respond successfully to concerns about human rights among minorities and indigenous people in accordance with the domestic policies of the state in question, while maintaining the territorial integrity and the stability of the international order (Hannum 1990, 2004; Lapidoth 1997; Rothchild and Hartzell 2000). Thus, since autonomy is potentially responsive to both majority concerns-preserving the integrity of the state –and minority demands–exercising a meaningful degree of self-government– it is a useful tool of halting conflict (Hannum 2004:276). Another aspect of autonomy as a conflict-solving tool is illustrative in the rationale that autonomy emerges only in democratic settings as a counteracting agent against the detrimental effects of past violations (Ghai 2000:16; Safran 2000; Coakley 2003; Sorens 2004).

The second scholarship (ii) holds that autonomy, even if only a *façade*, exacerbates conflict and serves as a stepping-stone towards separation, as it serves to construct a national identity around which separatist movements may advance demands based on the right to self-determination (Cornell 2002a; Hale 2004). In addition, autono-

my is understood as discrimination against other inhabitants within the state, and as a tool that can increase the risk of a geostrategic foreign intervention (Cornell 2002b:246). Yet, the work of Suny (1994), Bunce (1999) and Cornell (2002a, 2002b), driven by their focus on the developments that took place in the former states of the Soviet Union, in Czechoslovakia, in Yugoslavia, and in Georgia, argue that the autonomous structures established top-down by Moscow generated cohesive national identities around which minorities mobilized for independence once the Soviet Union began to collapse. Another set of arguments focuses explicitly on the vague legacy of autonomous structures in Africa, the cases of unsuccessful separatist attempts of Katanga, Biafra, Southern Sudan and Anjouan, and the creation of Eritrea, to argue that territorial autonomy is not a viable option for managing conflicts as it fuels ethnic mobilization, fosters separatism and triggers armed conflict (Mozaffar and Scarritt 2000).

Lastly, there is a significant lack of determination to explain the following paradox: While autonomy may provide minorities with greater resources to engage in collective action, it may at the same time, accommodate armed conflict. An examination of this set of arguments (iii) may provide some clarifications. Thus, one explanation stems from the relations between minorities and central governments through autonomous regimes that are characterized for being asymmetrical, complex, nonlinear and context-based. Therefore, such asymmetry may lead minorities to push for greater autonomy or independence, and central governments to exercise domination (Stanovčić 1992; Ghai 2000; Erk and Anderson 2009). Similarly, in certain cases, autonomy can be seen by minorities as an insufficient compromise, or as defeat (Hannum 2004:278; Sorens 2004:741; Jenne 2006), since their ultimate goal is independence. This is evidenced by the so-called *de facto* states, which have acquired a number of state-like features, and yet do not enjoy majoritarian and formal recognition from the international community (Pegg 2004; Kolstø 2006).<sup>7</sup> However, this

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7. Examples of the *de facto* states include: Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Northern Cyprus, Tamil Eelam, Somaliland or even Chechnya, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Kurdistan, Kosovo and Taiwan.

school of thought holds that autonomy, despite its pitfalls, can play an important and constructive role in accommodating conflicts. It can be the balance between the common and the particular (Ghai 2000:24), because autonomy can match “the sense of regional self-administration and identity with the strengthening of an interest within the autonomous entity in the success of the overall state” (Wolff and Weller 2005:4). In turn, Daftary argues that it is not autonomy per se but rather its late arrival in a violent context, once group demands have moved beyond limited self-government and a separatist movement has consolidated itself, what causes armed conflict. Autonomy in such cases comes ‘too little, too late’ (Daftary 2008:2). Yet, even in the case of ‘late autonomies’, autonomous regimes can mitigate conflict by channeling group grievances into peaceful forms of protest rather than triggering violent conflict (Daftary 2008:2; Gurr 1993:301) because autonomy is a conflict management tool, a means rather than an end product in itself (Hannum 2004).

This distinction is important, illustrating that autonomous institutions cannot themselves explain group mobilization because they are structural traits that do not tend to change much over time. Therefore, autonomous institutions are taken as static variables and cannot be used to explain the dynamic process of escalation/de-escalation i.e. the timing of conflict, unless it is argued that the removal or implementation of such institutions is what provides opportunity windows for conflict. Hence, minorities with a legacy or history of autonomy, even if *de jure* or *de facto*, are more likely to mobilize around separatist or autonomist demands against the central government.

This study will test the assumption that autonomy itself does not determine the escalation of conflict but that escalation/de-escalation results from a dynamic process. Otherwise, how could something that does not change, in this case territorial autonomy, trigger escalation? In order to test this hypothesis and to theorize what causes escalation, this study will introduce two groups of explanatory approaches. Since this research field is currently analyzed in differing and independent schools of thought, this study will congregate the three most outstanding approaches under a new conceptualization and theoretical framework.

## 2.4. OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

The opportunity structures are the exogenous factors that constrain or fuel actors' collective action. In this case it refers to the structural and contextual factors and capabilities that encourage or hinder the escalation of conflict in the mobilization for, and the outcomes of autonomy and separatist demands. Therefore, variations in the opportunity structure can in turn help to explain the variation in the conflict escalation.

Ethnic bargaining theory holds that minorities advance separatist or autonomy demands, as strategic leverage against the central government, in order to obtain greater concessions from the state (Jenne et al. 2007:541; Walter 2006; Gallagher Cunningham 2007). Moreover, ethnic bargaining theory explains the variations in group behavior (i.e. from separatist, autonomist demands to claims such as power sharing agreements) as a function of strategic leverage against the central government (Jenne et al. 2007:541). Such demands, under certain conditions, can be resolved in an armed conflict. Hence, strategically powerful minorities can credibly threaten separation e.g. Transnistrians in Moldova, whereas economically powerful but politically weak minorities cannot, e.g. the Chinese community in Malaysia. As the literature highlights, the sources of strategic leverage may be internal or external.

On one hand, territorial compactness is crucial in this respect, since it serves, as both a basic indicator of minority strength, and as a justification of statehoodness (Gurr 1993; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Toft 2003; Jenne et al. 2007; Daftary 2008). Thus, territorially compact minorities are more likely to advance credible separatist or autonomist demands against the central governments than minorities that lack a clear regional majority as they would not be able to establish legitimate ownership of their territory (Jenne et al. 2007:542). Minorities far from their state capitals, and groups located in rough terrain tend to also advance these demands (Buhaug et al. 2008). The same dynamics are accounted for minorities residing in natural resources-rich regions because they hold a stronger bargaining position vis-à-vis

the central government than minorities from regions without abundant natural resources (Bakke and Wibbels 2006:24). Moreover, another internal source of power for minorities is the presence of a weak central government, indicating a clear signal of strategic leverage. Such weakness is understood as the low capacity to ensure territorial control, to extract resources, to provide human security, to apply the rule of law throughout the entire territory, to deliver welfare and social services, and to ensure the legitimacy of the government among the population (Holsti 1996:104-108). Minorities therefore advance autonomy or separatist demands when they expect that it will increase their chances of gaining concessions from the government. However, in a context where a weak state also faces stressful circumstances, the state actions and strategies' are more likely to be repressive rather than accommodative towards minorities due to the institutional incapacity to accommodate issues in a democratic fashion (Azar 1990:14; Walter 2003).<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, external support, or at least lack of resistance, is of paramount importance for the viability of the strategic leverage against the central government. Minorities require the military and/or political backing of secondary parties such as states, organizations, resourceful diasporas and interest groups to enable them to carry out their agendas aptly, e.g. South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Moreover, the use of identity to gain support both at home and abroad and to serve as a mobilizing resource for minorities is the most salient strategy that groups can pursue in gaining strategic leverage (Saideman et al. 2005; Tir 2006).

Yet, it is important to take into account the outstanding tendency to treat actors as unitary in a bargaining situation, missing the divisions within them. Thus, the degree of fractionalization within both governments and minorities affects the actions and the strategic incentives,

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8. In addition, governmental actors can have strong incentives to instigate, perpetuate, and escalate conflict within their borders through strategies of coercion, persuasion and neglect.

opportunities, and capabilities that they can take throughout the autonomy bargaining process (Gallagher Cunningham 2007).<sup>9</sup>

In this study, structural and contextual factors and capabilities, such as territorial compactness, weak central government and external support, are referred to as the opportunity structures that encourage or hinder the escalation of conflict.

## 2.5. WILLINGNESS DIMENSION

The willingness dimension of conflict implies the motives and reasons behind collective action. In this case it refers to the underlying causes and conditions that encourage or hinder the onset of conflict. It is, in part, both a product of, and an influence of, the opportunity structure. However, the underlying factors that may lead to hostilities remain latent until some effective triggers begin to operate. Therefore, variations in the willingness dimension can in turn help to explain the variation in the conflict escalation.

Concerning the societal security approach, governance and the state's role are critical factors in minorities' demands. The main characteristics of those states experiencing identity-based territorial conflicts are their weaknesses and the presence of a legitimacy gap<sup>10</sup> embedded in the system (Azar 1990; Holsti 1996; Buzan et al. 1998; Ohlson 2008). In this context, minorities usually "withdraw loyalty from both the political community and the state, and develops its alternative idea of a state" (Holsti 1996:85), while the government stands for policies

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9. In turn, Gallagher Cunningham (2007) finds that when states face highly divided minorities in their pursuit of autonomy or separatist demands, governments are more likely to make concessions to them than they would to a unitary movement with similar demands. Hence, fractionalization presents the government with the opportunity to use accommodation strategically in order to strengthen and buy off moderate factions of the minority groups.
  10. The legitimacy gap is the combination of, the vertical legitimacy i.e. "the belief by the population in the rightfulness and authority of holders of state power to rule" (Ohlson 2008:137) and the horizontal legitimacy i.e. "attitudes and practices of individuals and groups within the state towards each other" (Ohlson 2008:137). Therefore, "vertical legitimacy is about responsible authority and voluntary subordination; horizontal legitimacy is about mutual acceptance and tolerance at elite and mass levels" (Ohlson 2008:137).

that make ethnic groups living within their borders perceive “that obtaining self-determination will be costly and unproductive” (Walter 2006:106). A weak state environment constitutes the backdrop of resurgence to regionally, or identity-based structures of protection, distribution and accumulation that simultaneously reinforces the dynamic of state decay, the proliferation of autonomous non-state actors, and the triggering of societal security dilemmas. Therefore, as a clear attempt to manipulate the underlying interests of the conflict, the elites define themselves along “ethnic lines and consequently the territorial ethnic unity issue dominate the future political agenda” (Tir 2006:321; Zartman 2005a). For these reasons, the identity of the group undergoes a process of securitization that exacerbates the societal security dilemma i.e. in trying to secure one’s identity, one creates greater feelings of insecurity (Buzan et al. 1998:121). Hence, the outcome of securitization is a process of identification that involves highlighting the unity within the group and the difference between groups (McSweeney 1999:77) increasing the zero-sum thinking of the parties (Pruitt and Kim 2004:22). Under these circumstances, in a context of uncertainty and commitment problems over the bargaining leverage exercised, actions are mutually interpreted in the most threatening and blurred manner. This creates incentives for the minority group to pursue autonomy or separatism, and the central government to crackdown on minorities (Ghai 2000; Walter 2006; Gallagher Cunningham 2007).

In general, the politico-economic theories of separatism pinpoint that demands for autonomy are the outcome of economic trade-offs between the minority region and the central government. Two opposite schools of thought can be found, the greed *versus* grievance or incentives debate. On the one hand, some researchers suggest that greed is the driving feature for separatist demands (Collier 2000; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Jenne et al. 2007; Collier et al. 2008). Thereby, armed conflicts are waged because there is a profit to be made out of them. The basic tenet of the greed approach is that natural resource dependence plus economic development and access to finance, in the form of foreign contributions or control over natural resources, provides the key opportunity for armed conflict. The

explanation of causality stems from the defining feature that armed conflicts occur due to the feasibility, emergence and durability of a private rebel army (Collier et al. 2008) and the presence of strategic resources and leverages (Jenne et al. 2007). Therefore, minorities use networks of social capital to generate grievances and associated group identities, with ideology then used as a tool in a rent-seeking strategy for leaders to fuel insurgencies (Collier 2000). Thus, behind this rationale, economically advanced minorities in an unequal society may find subsidizing the rest of the country too demanding and troublesome and hope to improve its economic performance by advancing demands for autonomy or separation (e.g. Slovenia in former Yugoslavia, or Northern Italy (Padania) in Italy) (Alesina et al. 2000:1294; Jenne et al. 2007:543). Yet, it can also be the opposite. Poor and marginalized people in resource-rich regions, but which possess unequal societal settings may hope to improve its economic development and environment by advancing demands for autonomy or separation (e.g. Niger Delta in Nigeria) (Collier and Hoeffler 2004).

Conversely, some researchers suggest that grievance is the driving force for autonomy and separatist demands (Horowitz 1985; Azar 1990; Gurr 1993; Ghai 2000; Buhaug et al. 2008; Daftary 2008). This means that conflict is caused by exclusive governance, political and economic marginalization, social and cultural deprivation and that issues of identity and ethnicity are just proxy causes. Hence, these grievances provide the underlying reasons for emancipation through armed conflict i.e. rebellion. Behind this rationale, in response to perceptions of political cleavages and economic discrimination, minorities are more likely to mobilize via nationalism against the center to achieve their separatist or autonomy demands (e.g. Tibet in China, Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan, or the Shan State in Burma/Myanmar) (Gurr 1993; Ghai 2000).

Apparently, the greed approach is concerned with the factors conducive to the onset of armed conflict i.e. it explains rebellion in terms of both opportunity structure and rational choice theory in which actors seek to maximize profit from looting. However, even though the conditions of need, creed, and greed are necessary, they are not a sufficient factor for the onset of conflict (Zartman 2005a; Ohlson 2008).

Hence, “greed is a form of grievance, albeit one that may be immoral or not objectively legitimate” (Ohlson 2008:140). In other words, greed in the minds of the people is a grievance, and the existence of lootable resources and easy-to-procure commodities is an opportunity. For these reasons, the greed approach is considered together with the grievance approach, as a part of the willingness dimension that explains the outbreak of conflict through motives. Indeed, as a comprehensive understanding of politico-economic theories, this study argues that the greater the economic differential between the regional minority and the central government, or dyad,<sup>11</sup> the more likely the minority is to advance demands for separation or autonomy.

In this case, the willingness dimension of conflict refers in this study to the perceived presence of societal security dilemmas, the existence of a high economic inequality within dyad and the persistence of politico-economic grievances that encourage or hinder the escalation of conflict.

Thus, consistent with the expectation that the interaction of opportunity structure and willingness dimension explains the escalation and de-escalation of conflict, this study has the following hypothesis:

*The interaction of opportunity structures and willingness dimension conduces to generate or impede the escalation of self-determination conflicts.*

## 3. THE NUTS AND BOLTS

### 3.1. DESIGN AND METHOD

This study will conduct an empirical analysis of three self-determination armed conflicts from different continents through a comparative method called structured focused comparison and process-tracing. The aim of this study does not serve any theory-testing purpose, but rather strives to illustrate and validate the explanatory factors on the es-

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11. A dyad is two conflict units, a contender and a defender, that are parties to a conflict. In this case the regional minority and the central government.

calation and de-escalation of self-determination conflicts. Therefore, the opportunity structure and the willingness dimension are the independent variables of this study that serve for testing the hypothesis and explaining the causal mechanism associated with the dependent variable, escalation. This variable is outlined to include quantitative and qualitative elements. The outcome is divided into two distinguished parts i.e. either the conflict escalates or de-escalates. In reality, the outcome of the dependent variable is likely to place itself in a process of ups and downs along the escalation or de-escalation of the conflict episode.

### 3.2. CASE SELECTION

The population of this study is identity-based territorial communities currently mobilized around separatist or autonomy demands against the central governments, where at least one rebel group has been engaged in violence. On that account, communities of this kind, which have not committed or resumed acts of violence, can thereby be seen as not representing the population in which the study is conducted.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, many of the generalizations that the analysis of this study will produce may be applied to communities that have not taken arms in order to understand the dynamics of potential causes-of-war, as well as to get the picture of violent conflicts and former identity-based territorial conflicts grounded in sectarian violence and protracted social conflicts.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, this study has strategically selected three cases where the basic incompatibility concerned control over territory: Bolivia, Ni-ger and Thailand, respectively (i) the non-indigenous inhabitants, self-referred to as Camba, of the Bolivian Eastern Departments of Santa

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12. Examples include Casamance in Senegal, Zanzibar in Tanzania, Bioko in Equatorial Guinea, Volkstaat in South Africa, Dagestan and Tatarstan in Russia, Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Adjara, Kvemo Kartli, and Samtskhe-Javakheti in Georgia, Guayas in Ecuador, Flanders in Belgium, the Mon State in Burma/Myanmar or Punjab/Khalistan in India, Puerto Rico in USA, among others.
  13. Examples include Boko Haram vs Nigeria, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region/East Turkestan vs China, ETA vs Spain, Sendero Luminoso vs Peru, Zapatistas vs Mexico, the al-Houthi and South Yemen insurgencies, the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency, the Fiji crisis, the Kashmir, Darfur, Ingushetia, Macedonia, Rwanda, Balochistan, Lebanon and North Kivu armed conflicts, or the East Timor independence, among others.

Cruz, Pando, Tarija and Beni, also known as Media Luna; (ii) the Tuareg inhabitants of the Nigerien Regions of Agadez and Tahoua; and (iii) the Thai-Malay Muslim inhabitants of the Thai southernmost Provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and the western part of Songkhla, also known as Patani.<sup>14</sup> These cases are examples of territorially delineated entities facing armed conflicts caused by the non-implementation of the autonomous arrangements and by the removal of the *de facto* autonomies by central government policies.

Concerning the time period of the selected cases, focus is placed upon the last conflict dynamic that has unfolded in the theatre. Historically, the struggle for autonomy has been most significant in the Bolivian case since 2005, in the Nigerien case since 2007, and in the Thai case since 2003. All three conflicts are still ongoing, therefore, the analysis includes up to the present. Since this study measures the ups and downs of escalation and de-escalation in cases that are ongoing and unresolved, originating in demands for self-determination, all three cases will be analyzed during the same time period, 2000-2009. This choice can be explained through the fact that prior to the outbreak of violence the separatist and peaceful autonomy demands have been advanced.

### 3.3. ESCALATION AND THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

According to Pruitt and Kim (2004:88), there are two related meanings of the term escalation. It may mean that one of the sides of the conflict is using heavier and more forceful tactics than previously, or that there is an increase in the intensity of the conflict as a whole. Therefore, as a domino effect, escalation by one side normally leads to escalation by the other, and as a result, an integral intensification of the conflict occurs. Moreover, escalation can also have a third meaning i.e. when more parties join the fight or add themselves to the list of helping one of the conflict sides. In addition, escalation hinges on two

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14. The Malay spelling of Patani is used in this study to refer to the area currently affected by insurgency, whereas the Thai spelling, Pattani, is used to designate the province of that name.

contending processes that occur within and between the sides as the conflict intensifies i.e., the contender-defender model, and the conflict spiral model.

The first model asserts that the contender's goal of creating change places it in conflict with the defender (Pruitt and Kim 2004:93). The contender commonly starts with mild contentious tactics, however, if these tactics are not successful, the contender moves to use heavier tactics in an effort to prevail. In response to this offensive, the defender may remain passive, or escalate defensively. The second model traces escalation to a vicious circle of action and reaction and mirrored retaliation (Pruitt and Kim 2004:96). Nevertheless, all escalated conflicts before eventually ending either by victory for one side, mutual withdrawal, an arbitrated settlement or a mediated and negotiated agreement, undergo phases of de-escalation prior to the ripe moment for resolution (Pruitt and Kim 2004:96). Under these circumstances, de-escalation will be defined as the opposite to escalation i.e. as a gradual reduction of intensity, as actions leading to the belligerents' perception that the conflict is deadlocked, painfully costly and ripe for resolution, also known as a mutually hurting stalemate (Zartman 2005b; Ohlson 2008:146).

For the purpose of this study, the dependent variable is defined to capture and reflect quantitative and qualitative elements of escalation. Hence, it is the result of the operationalization and denomination of several sets of indicators. First, for a broad indicator of conflict escalation, the Intensity of Conflict measure from the UCDP data-set is employed. This measure ranges from no armed activity, to low armed activity (below 25 battle-related deaths), to minor conflict (at least 25 but less than 1000 battle-related deaths) to war (at least 1000 battle-related deaths) on the basis of annual deaths per calendar year in one conflict dyad. Second, to assess the degree of the actions carried out by identity-based territorial communities mobilized around separatist or autonomy demands against the central governments that potentially can trigger escalation, the MAR data-set indicators for ethnic protest and rebellion is employed in a qualitative basis. Third, to assess the degree of government actions towards minorities, the MAR data-set indi-

cator for government repression is employed. These measures indicate the tactics that may be used by any government agencies at any level.

### 3.4. MEANING OF THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The levels of the opportunity structures (i.e. the territorial compactness, the external support, and the weak central government scenario) and the willingness dimension (i.e. the perceived presence of societal security dilemmas, the existence of a high inequality within dyad, and the persistence of politico-economic grievances), can be either measured as *low*, *moderate* or *high*. These measures are designed to capture the relative presence or absence of such levels in the empirical contexts. If all aspects of the independent variables hold, it will be referred to as high levels of either opportunity structure or willingness dimension. In situation where only some of the aspects apply, it will be referred to as a moderate level, and finally if very few aspects operate, it will be regarded as a low level.

## 4. STUDY CASES

### 4.1. REPÚBLICA DE BOLIVIA

Modern Bolivian political history is characterized by a state that strongly centralized political and economic authority in the national government, after the Chaco War (1932-1935) and especially after the 1952 Revolution, which led by Víctor Paz-Estenssoro and the MNR sought to transform Bolivia into a modern national state, accentuating even further the political and functional dependence of regional departments on the central government. The following period was described by instability and the authoritarian rule of both the MNR and several splintered military juntas, particularly those led by René Barrientos and Hugo Banzer which lasted until 1982. Noticeable events of this period include the Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's Ñancahuazú guerrilla group activity and the Operation Condor.

The Bolivian authoritarianism-to-democracy transition (1982-1993) is an interval period characterized by neoliberal economic restructuring, political stabilization and popular mobilization that represents the refraining of the military from politics and the reformation of the 1952 state model. The following period, 1993-2001, was based on a multiparty governmental system led, in different terms, by Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and Hugo Banzer, that engaged in pluralist institutional reforms aimed to decentralize and devolve political power to the regions of the country, to privatize most of the country's state-controlled industries, and to acknowledge the country's multiethnicity and pluriculturality. Unlike the previous two periods, between 2001 and 2006 the Bolivian political landscape was marked by political instability and corruption, the failure of the neoliberal economic policies, the spread of social discontent and violent riots, the war on coca leaf, the collapse of traditional party systems, and a severe crisis of state legitimacy (Centellas 2007:13). By 2003, "indigenous groups achieved sufficient political power to begin to veto national governments they perceived to be acting against their interests" (Eaton 2007:73). Thus, as a consequence of the so-called Bolivian gas conflict, the indigenous, labor, and *campesino* social movements successfully influenced the eviction of presidents Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and Carlos Mesa, in 2003 and 2005, respectively, who refused to support the nationalization of the hydrocarbon industry demanded by the majority of the public (Gustafson 2006; Eaton 2007).<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the structural political transformation of Bolivia culminated in the electoral victory of the MAS in December 2005, and the inauguration of Evo Morales as President and Álvaro García-Linera as Vice President, in January 2006. This led to a period of political instability as a result of the increasing threats of separation from the eastern lowland regions that has continued to the present day.

Media Luna is home to the country's most productive economic activities and the most well-organized business associations. Hence, one

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15. Bolivian courts are still seeking to establish criminal responsibility for the killing of more than sixty people in anti-government protests during the 2003 gas conflict, when the army used lethal force to quell violent protests in the city of El Alto (HRW 2009:3).

of the most important measures that Morales pursued was the opening of a constituent assembly in December 2007 to write a new constitution aimed at changing the legal framework dating from 1967 and to re-found the country. The new constitution was approved in a referendum held in January 2009,<sup>16</sup> after being postponed from the initial planned date of 2008 due to turbulent unrest during 2007 and 2008. The new constitution aims to empower the country's indigenous majority with cultural autonomy and regulatory/administrative power, and allows for land reform to redistribute under-used and corruptly obtained land to rural communities, and for the nationalization of strategic companies.

In this trajectory, the sticking point in the political scenario left by the new constitution is the demand for territorial autonomy led by the wealthy eastern department of Santa Cruz. The movement for autonomy in Santa Cruz emerged during Mesa's presidency and is clustered around the CPSC led by Branko Marinkovic and Luis Núñez, and the APB party of the Governor of Santa Cruz Rubén Costas. The APB is integrally bound to the CPSC.<sup>17</sup> Their initial principal activities were signature-gathering campaigns demanding a referendum on autonomy, and engaging in department-wide strikes. The referendum on territorial autonomy was held in July 2006. Although the majority of Bolivians (56 per cent) rejected it, 71 per cent of voters in Santa Cruz voted in favor of autonomy (Eaton 2008:7). Morales vowed that the government would respect the results in Santa Cruz and that it would open up a debate on autonomy in the constituent assembly. The passed constitution, however, failed to include significant autonomy proposals. In response, to achieve regional legislative power and fiscal sovereignty, Santa Cruz scheduled an unofficial ref-

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16. The new constitution was confirmed by the referendum of January 2009 with 61 per cent of the votes in favour. The constitution's support was highest in the western highlands and Chuquisaca and lowest in Media Luna (von der Heydt-Coca 2009:367).

17. The CPSC was formed in 1950. Currently, "it acts as an informal government, a forum for resolving local conflicts and promoting civic and business interests in the city" (ICG 2004:15). Moreover, the UJC is the CPSC's militant right-wing division along with some organized football supporters, known as Barras Bravas, of two Santa Cruz teams i.e. Oriente Petrolero and Club Blooming (Gustafson 2006:354).

erendum on autonomy for May 2008 which was approved by 82 per cent of voters. In June 2008, the other three eastern departments “followed suit and staged their own successful autonomy referenda” (Eaton 2008:7).<sup>18</sup> Notwithstanding, in addition to the non-sanctioning by the central government, the Bolivian justice considered these results to be invalid. The aftermath of the political impasse was a recall referendum in the President, the Vice President, and eight out of nine departmental Governors celebrated in August 2008. The result was to not recall from office the Morales–García-Linera ticket, and six of the eight governors were restituted.

Consequently, since being popularly backed by voters, Morales reignited his push for reform implementation. In this case, the central government diverted shares of oil and natural gas to fund a pension for the elderly which triggered massive strikes, riots, sporadic violent attacks, the storming of government buildings, and the sabotage of natural gas pipelines on August 2008 by government opponents in Santa Cruz (HRW 2009; Keesing’s 2008:48770; von der Heydt-Coca 2009). The tense deadlock between Morales’s largely indigenous supporters and the Media Luna’s Governors and their supporters, coupled with the involvement of the police, the military, and some Media Luna paramilitary groups, led to violent clashes and the spread of political violence across the country, with deaths and injuries on both sides (HRW 2009:2). The most serious eruption of political violence involved a massacre of pro-Morales protesters by regional government supporters in September 2008 in Porvenir, Pando department, prompting the government to impose martial law in the department (HRW 2009:2).<sup>19</sup> Despite talks between the Media Luna opposition and the central government with the aim of addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, the

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18. The movement for autonomy in Pando, Tarija and Beni is the spillover effect of the CPSC’s policies and is gathered around Mario Cossío, Ernesto Suárez-Sattori, Manfred Reyes-Villa, and certain regional factions of the nation-wide PODEMOS party.

19. Sixteen indigenous peasants were shot dead, more than thirty-five others were injured and there are dozens still missing. Later, the Governor of Pando, Leopoldo Fernández, was arrested and accused of having hired hitmen to perpetrate the Porvenir massacre. Ricardo Shimokawa was the agitator (HRW 2009; Keesing’s 2008:48770).

stalemate and the demonstrations, sporadic violent attacks, lynchings, mob violence and plots orchestrated by the CPSC still continue to occur.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.1.1. THE BOLIVIAN TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY MOVEMENT

The current Bolivian conflict can be essentially understood, as a struggle between a long-abused indigenous majority against a patron-client system inherited from the Spanish Empire, dominated by the non-indigenous minority and its counterattack. The result is a wide societal polarization. Given that democratization has facilitated the gains made by indigenous groups, the quest of regional autonomy rather than authoritarianism has defined the elite response to indigenous mobilization in Bolivia (Eaton 2007:72). Whereas the indigenous cultural autonomy movement and the central government seek to achieve alternative models of governance, political organization and decentralization, the conservative autonomy movements in Media Luna seek to defend both the private property and neoliberal models that are currently being challenged by the Morales Administration. Yet, Centellas (2007) indicates that the conservative autonomy movement is mirror reflection of the indigenous-popular movements loyal to Morales, because they emerged simultaneously and from the same altered political landscape left by political reforms in the 1990s.

Therefore, for the Media Luna's conservative autonomy movements headed by the CPSC, autonomy goes beyond the holding of elections for regional political authorities to also include (i) regional control over natural resources e.g. arable land, timber, gas, and oil; (ii) the

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20. Bolivian security forces thwarted an alleged assassination plot against Morales in April 2009 by a gang of foreign mercenaries linked to the Hungarian right-wing group Szekler Legion, who were helping the CPSC, by way of a group called La Torre, to proclaim independence and create a new country. Eduardo Rózsa-Flores was the ringleader. For the source information see:

<http://ar.reuters.com/article/topNews/idARN2250630320090422>,

<http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSN21499904>

(accessed October 25, 2009).

right to retain control over two-thirds of all tax revenues generated in the department; and (iii) authority to hold legislative power and to set all policies other than defense, currency, tariffs, and foreign relations (Eaton 2007:74; Roca 2007). In order to understand the rise of the conservative autonomy movement, and its subsequent backlash, it is necessary to pinpoint the explanatory conditions of the phenomena. The first condition is the structural disjuncture that exists between the concentration of political power in La Paz as national capital, and the concentration of economic power in Santa Cruz as a would-be autonomous region (Eaton 2008:12; Roca 2007). Moreover, it is important to emphasize that the second condition is a result of the loss of Media Luna's elite participation in the national institutions, rather than the absence of decision-making authority in the departments, and the threat that the Morales policies pose for the CPSC (Eaton 2008:20). Hence, the Santa Cruz business associations have successfully reframed their sectoral demands as broader territorial demands through the CPSC, whom they finance and control (ICG 2004; Gustafson 2006; Eaton 2007; Roca 2007). Thus, they have allied as a regional class in response to the Morales Administration and the indigenous emancipation, and have victoriously sought to co-opt nonelite actors in the department, as labor and indigenous leaders – particularly Guaraní, in the attempt to constitute a social movement and to deflect criticism that their autonomy demands are purely economically driven (Eaton 2007:75; von der Heydt-Coca 2009:365).

Bolivia has an overlapping ideological and territorial conflict in the form of a conservative autonomy movement, that has deeply polarized the country i.e. the schism between the eastern lowland and the western highland. As a response to the indigenous mobilization, and as a clear attempt to play the ethnic card, the CPSC define themselves along ethnoterritorial lines. Thus, the identity of Media Luna undergoes a process of securitization that exacerbates the societal security dilemma. In this case, all lowland Bolivians independent of their ethnic, linguistic or socioeconomic status are referred to as *Camba*, against the *Collas* or highlanders, comprised mainly of Aymara and Quechua indigenous peoples (ICG 2004; Gustafson 2006; Eaton 2007). This enables the

CPSC “to portray Santa Cruz as the victim of Collas, and thereby to refrain from explicitly anti-indigenous rhetoric” (Eaton 2007:92; ICG 2004:15).<sup>21</sup> Bolivia is therefore experiencing a conflict where two types of incompatibilities overlap deeply polarizing the country, as the conflict is over government and territory combined.

#### 4.1.2. BOLIVIA WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS

In recent years, Bolivia has experienced an outstanding ongoing bottom-up transformation according to which long-excluded segments of the society, mainly indigenous groups, have mobilized to play new roles in the state. Nonetheless, this transformation is also characterized by the established elites’ backlash to the process. Thus, the analysis of the opportunity structures in the Bolivian case involves the following three aspects:

The first aspect is the fact that the elites’ counteraction is characterized by the autonomy demands advanced, as strategic leverage against the Morales Administration by the Camba, a territorial compact minority constituting the major economic power in Bolivia and a clear regional majority in the resources-rich lowlands and oil, gas, and soya-producing departments of Media Luna.

Second, despite the Morales Administration’s progress and success in passing reforms, another source of the CPSC’s strategic leverage is the presence of a weak central government unable to ensure full territorial control, to stop the organized violence, to extract and allocate revenues, and to ensure the legitimacy of the government within Media Luna.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the third aspect is the CPSC’s external support, or at least, the lack of resistance to carry out its agenda. Thus, the CPSC is integral-

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21. The most important group promoting the Camba identity is the MNCL headed by the former president of the CPSC and member of Costas’ regional government, Carlos Dabdoub and Sergio Antelo-Gutiérrez (ICG 2004:15).

22. It is important to pinpoint that the military, following a tradition of intervention, has been assigned a new role i.e. the defense of national resources, and its institutional strength has operated as a constraint on the conservative autonomy movement (Eaton 2008:31; von der Heydt-Coca 2009:368). Yet, it has not been capable of matching organized violence and paramilitary activity in Media Luna.

ly linked to the CAINCO, to the Bolivian think tank FULIDE –which is in turn close to the US think tanks Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation-, and to the large agribusiness and energy multinationals companies, such as Archer Daniels Midland, and Cargill, and Repsol YPF, Petrobras, BG Group and Total, that play a major role in Media Luna’s economy (Burbach 2008; von der Heydt-Coca 2009:353). In addition, the CPSC attains political backing from the MNCL, the conservative autonomy movements of Guayas in Ecuador and Zulia in Venezuela, and from conservative and liberal parties across Latin America, the USA, and Europe (Eaton 2008). Bolivian possession of vast natural resources exposes the country to international geopolitical struggle for control over these energy sources, with the CPSC playing an important role in capitalizing on such endeavors.<sup>23</sup>

Consistent with the analysis framed above, the level of opportunity structures in the Bolivian case can be described as high because all three aspects of the independent variable hold.

As regards to the willingness dimension of the Bolivian case, it is important to point out the following aspects:

First, the perceived presence of societal security dilemmas as a result of the weak state environment is outlined. The Media Luna’s alternative proposal of governance and culture, the permanent CPSC’s confrontation with the Morales Administration, and its resultant societal polarization has produced the securitization of the identity of the inhabitants of the lowland eastern departments, and the dyadic mobilization in the defense of their idea of state and nation. Therefore, as a response to indigenous mobilization, a new identity for Media Luna has been constructed and securitized along ethnoterritorial lines. The

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23. Nevertheless, on the governmental side, Morales and the MAS government receives strong support from the Chávez Administration (Venezuela), the Castro Administration (Cuba), the Correa Administration (Ecuador), the Lugo Administration (Paraguay), the Bachelet Administration (Chile), the Lula Administration (Brazil), the Vázquez and Mujica Administrations (Uruguay), and the Fernández-Kirchner Administration (Argentina), as well as from AIDSESEP, the Peruvian coalition of indigenous community organizations. Moreover, it is remarkable that following the 2008 conflict escalation and the Porvenir massacre, the heads of state of the member states of the UNASUR held an emergency summit in Chile on September 2008, and decided to support Morales.

result has been the exacerbation of the societal security dilemma, in which Media Luna has portrayed itself as the productive and internationally-minded Bolivia victim of an antiquated and protectionist centralized Republic, with the power concentrated in the national government at the expense of regional governments, run by leftist indigenous and Collas (ICG 2004:15; Eaton 2007:92).

The second aspect concerns the high economic differential within dyad, and the third with politico-economic grievances. Thereby, the explanation of the feasibility, escalation, and durability of the conflict is related partly to the Media Luna's access to finances and control over the natural resources that have turned the region into the most productive economic area and the strongest private sector, and has made it easier for elites to drive towards territorial autonomy, to generate grievances and the associated group identities, and to fuel the insurgency.

Regarding the level of the willingness dimension in this case, it can be described as high as, in the analysis of the opportunity structure, all three aspects of the independent variable hold.

Hence, even though both sides have differing points of view, the high levels of both the opportunity structures and the willingness dimension, and the interaction of the two variables, make the conflict over the autonomy, the direction of the economic policy, and land reform more likely to escalate rather than de-escalate.

## 4.2. RÉPUBLIQUE DU NIGER

The Tuareg are Tamasheq speaking communities encompassing nomadic pastoralists, cattle breeding and camel herding people<sup>24</sup> that are scattered in many regional confederations across northeastern Niger, northernmost southwestern Mali, southern Algeria, southeastern Libya and northwestern Burkina Faso (Krings 1995). In all these states the Tuareg are a minority living in the most peripheral and dri-

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24. Tuaregs are socially heterogeneous with representatives of all the differing social classes; warriors, religious groups, vassals, lower status groups, blacksmiths, and Bella i.e. slaves and ex-slaves.

est regions with high drought risks alongside the Sahara Sahel Region, far away from the capitals (Krings 1995:57). The largest group of Tuaregs can be found in Niger followed by Mali.

Niger was a French colony from the end of the nineteenth century until 1960. Paris did not have full control over the Tuareg until the end of the First World War when they crackdowned on the first Tuareg revolt. After independence, Niger was headed by a single-party civilian regime led by Hamani Diori, for its first fourteen years of sovereignty and afterwards by military juntas until the end of the Cold War when the country underwent a democratization process that brought about multi-party elections in 1993. Nevertheless, French colonial rule left in place centralized structures of governance that conflicted with the Tuareg and the Toubou ways of life. Tuaregs were left out of the new government and were forced to convert from a nomadic herding to a sedentary agriculture community by the post-colonial administrators, the southern Hausa, Djerma, and Fula communities (Krings 1995; UCDP 2009a). This influenced the 1962 Tuareg rebellion against the newly independent Malian state policies, which were in the same vein of the above stated Nigerien ones. This rebellion was met with harsh repression, resulting in an exodus of nomadic groups towards southern Algeria and Libya, and the institution of a military rule by the governments of both Mali and Niger in their respective Tuareg populated regions (UCDP 2009a).

The most famous Tuareg rebellion, however, took place between 1990 and 1995 in Niger and Mali. In northeastern Niger, specifically in the Agadez and Tahoua Regions, where the Tuareg constitutes a clear majority of the population, armed Tuareg-dominated groups rose up seeking self-determination and autonomy for their territory. These regions contain the world's top five producing areas of uranium, and the French nuclear energy company AREVA is the main responsible of the majority of uranium mining in Niger, followed by the Chinese uranium company SinoU, and the Canadian company Cameco. Accordingly, the first group to emerge was the FLAA that fought for a federal system in Niger. Despite tendencies of fragmentation, an umbrella group, the CRA, was developed to provide a united front for the fight for autonomy and for the negotiations. However it was its successor,

the ORA, which signed the 1995 Ouagadougou peace agreement with the central government, ending the conflict (UCDP 2009a).<sup>25</sup> The accord provided certain aspects of cultural autonomy, regional development aid, and the disarmament, demobilization, and integration of Tuareg fighters into the FAN.

After a military coup led by Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara in Niamey in 1996 against the democratically elected Mahamane Ousmane, violence resumed in 1997 as a ORA-split faction, the UFRA, retaliated for the non-fulfillment of the peace agreement and attacks on Tuareg peoples. A ceasefire agreement the same year ended this conflict episode. Baré Maïnassara remained in office until 1999 when he was killed in a coup led by Daouda Malam Wanké, aimed at restoring democracy. Tandja Mamadou was elected president in 1999 in a largely free and fair election, which was won by his party, the MNSD-N. By early 2000s, while Tuaregs and the government were at peace, apart from the resource conflict caused by environmental degradation and desertification (Benjaminsen 2008), many of the underlying causes and grievances remained unsolved. Hence, after ten years of relative stability, in February 2007 the newly-created Tuareg-dominated MNJ, lead by Aghali Alambo, rose again seeking territorial autonomy and the full implementation of the 1995 peace agreement. Similarly, Mali witnessed a Tuareg rebellion from mid-2006 to mid-2008.

The renewal of the armed conflict has been characterized by irregular warfare, with the MNJ seeking to win by not losing while imposing unbearable costs on the central government (Kalyvas 2005:91). During 2007, MNJ attacks on FAN and paramilitary police force emplacements, and on AREVA's and SinoU's installations, as well as military engagements, were frequent in the whole of the Tuareg territory. Furthermore, hostage-taking of foreign personnel and uranium company workers, and the defection to the MNJ of a significant number of men from the FAN also occurred (Keenan 2008:451). On the other side,

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25. Being inferior in both equipment and fighters, the Tuaregs have used classic guerrilla warfare, relying largely on the element of surprise and their intimate knowledge of the terrain. The government troops have, in turn, retaliated with one-sided violence (UCDP 2009a).

throughout the entire rebellion, the FAN has been unable to match the MNJ in open combat, therefore, wreaking their frustration and vengeance on the civilian population (Keenan 2008:450). Consequently, the FAN has been denounced for committing war crimes, including summary executions of civilians, scattering land mines, looting, and killing animals across the Air Mountains in the Agadez Region (HRW 2007).

On August 2007, the Mamadou Administration declared a state of emergency, effectively placing the region under martial law, expelling the international NGOs and press agencies from the area and sealing it off from the outside world (Keenan 2008:452; Martin 2008). In the vein of fighting in 2007, irregular fighting took place throughout the entire period of 2008. Nevertheless, in spite of some USA-trained FAN victories and some successful MNJ guerrilla-style raids, the situation in 2008 remained at a stalemate (Keenan 2008; Martin 2008; UCDP 2009a). Besides, sporadic attacks from both sides occurred leading to renewed deadlock during the first quarter of 2009, with the government continuing to refuse to negotiate with the MNJ whom they deem to be armed bandits and drug-smugglers (UCDP 2009a). However, as a result of a stable, soft, self-serving (4-S) stalemate,<sup>26</sup> the Mamadou Administration and the MNJ and its two split factions, i.e. the FFR created on May 2008 and lead by Mohamed ag Aoutchiki Kriska; and the FPN created on March 2009 and lead by Aklou Sidi Sidi; agreed to Libyan-sponsored talks in April 2009 to initiate formal negotiations to end the ongoing armed conflict, which include the declaration of a truce, freeing prisoners, and the lifting of state of emergency.<sup>27</sup>

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26. Instead of a mutually hurting stalemate “pushing the parties into a search for solutions, there is only a stable, soft, self-serving (4-S) stalemate” (Zartman 2005b:52). A 4-S stalemate does not hit the sides at the same time, but it is manageable to the warring parties because “it leaves each of the parties in control of some portion of the territory and population, able to claim that it has not been defeated, which is a victory of sorts” (Zartman 2005b:52). Thus, whereas Mamadou can claim victory by securing the territorial integrity of Niger, the MNJ can also claim the same by securing the right to territorial autonomy.

27. The talks in Sirte, Libya, had taken place under the endorsement of the Libyan President Muammar al-Gaddafi, the current chairperson of the AU and higher permanent peace mediator within the CEN-SAD. For the source information see: [http://www.reuters.com/article/homepageCrisis/idUSL789895.\\_CH\\_.2400](http://www.reuters.com/article/homepageCrisis/idUSL789895._CH_.2400) (accessed April 13, 2009).

#### 4.2.1. THE NIGERIEN TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY MOVEMENT

The current Nigerien conflict can be understood, essentially, as a struggle between a long-marginalized Tuareg community against a patron-client system inherited from the French Empire dominated by the southern communities, and its counterattack. The armed conflict is in many ways more complex than the one from the 1990s due to the presence of a wide variety of background reasons conducive to conflict.

In order to understand the outbreak of this conflict three explanations of the remote causes are identified. First, the destabilization of the Tuareg region since 2003 as a result of the Bush Administration's fabrication of a Saharan-Sahelian front in the US-led 'global war on terror' due to the presence of the jihadist organization the GSPC, currently known as AQIM across the Sahara (Keenan 2008:453; Martin 2008:36). Niamey had used global war on terror securitization to confront the MNJ despite the fact that the presence of the AQIM in the Agadez Region was one of the grievances of the MNJ against the central government (Keenan 2008:453; Martin 2008:37). Second, the Tuareg grievances rooted to the expansion of uranium mining and oil exploration across the Agadez and Tahoua Regions, which were taken up by the MNJ, i.e. the exploitative nature of foreign companies, the threat of an impending ecological disaster around the pasture and the abuse by both the Niger government and the enterprises of the Tuareg's indigenous rights (Keenan 2008:454; Benjaminsen 2008; Martin 2008). Third, the central government's failure to comply with the 1995 Ouagadougou peace agreement, and the Mamadou's strategy to exclude and disenfranchise the Tuaregs on the grounds of nonkinship influenced the conflict (Keenan 2008:457). Furthermore, the role of competing external interests such as France via AREVA, China via SinoU, Canada via Cameco, the USA, Algeria, Libya, Chad, Mali and its Tuareg communities, the AQIM and the vast drug trafficking organizations operating in the Sahara, play a part in the causation and escalation of the armed conflict.

The movement for autonomy in the Agadez Region and the Tahoua Region is centered around the MNJ and its two split factions. For the Tuareg autonomy goes beyond the holding of elections for regional political authorities to also include (i) the full implementation of the 1995 peace agreement; (ii) a comprehensive political reform and a deeper decentralization in order to hold regulatory/administrative power; (iii) inclusion and military power sharing; (iv) a holistic economic development; (v) cultural autonomy and education in the Tamasheq language; (vi) a greater share of uranium wealth for local communities and the request to the uranium companies to hire local workers; and (vii) the repatriation of refugees and displaced people, mostly from camps across the Libyan border. Yet, although the different Tuareg factions agree on the nature of the issues claimed and stated above, the difference between their agendas is related to both the mechanisms of implementation of those claims and the tribal conflict bound between different Tuareg families (Martin 2008). Niger is therefore experiencing a conflict where two types of incompatibilities greatly overlap since the conflict is over government and territory combined, polarizing the country.

#### 4.2.2. NIGER WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS

The modern political history of Niger is characterized by the experiences and legacies of Tuareg rebellions against the central government aimed at changing the status quo of the state. The analysis of the opportunity structures in the Nigerien case involves the following three aspects:

Firstly, although made up of mostly nomadic communities, the Tuaregs are a territorial compact minority being a clear regional majority in the resources-rich, peripheral, rough and driest, and uranium and oil producing regions of Agadez and Tahoua, particularly in the Aïr Mountains, Azawad, Kaouar, and the Ténéré.

Second, despite some progress of the Mamadou Administration in implementing power decentralization towards regions and municipalities, and in fulfilling the 'democracy template' i.e. elections,

state institutions, and civil society, the Nigerien central government is characterized by an ethnic informal governance based on patron-client structures commanded by the southern communities. Hence, one of the main sources of the MNJ's strategic leverage is the presence of a weak central government.

Finally, the third aspect is the MNJ's external support to carry out its agenda. Thus, the MNJ is essentially linked to the Tuareg organizations spread around the Sahara Sahel Region, particularly with the Malian ones. The MNJ has received political and military backing from two Malian rebel groups, the ADC, and the ATNMC, both of which are led by Ibrahim ag Bahanga (Keenan 2008:450; Martin 2008:20). Moreover, the MNJ has also received political and military support from various Toubou rebel groups operating in easternmost Niger, especially from the FARS (UCDP 2009a). Due to the lack of wide external support, the MNJ has engaged in kidnappings and has engaged in drug trafficking to finance its rebellion (Keenan 2008:462). In addition, the MNJ receives economic backing and lobby support from the diaspora in France.

The possession of vast uranium resources exposes Niger to an international geopolitical struggle for control over these energy sources, especially since France lost its monopoly on Niger's uranium in 2006. This situation has been exploited by the MNJ to channel its grievances against the foreign companies. The MNJ's attacks on uranium interests have to be understood as strategic leverage exercised in an effort to force the Mamadou Administration to bargain, owing to the government's reliance on uranium for revenues, rather than as actions aimed to control, to loot and to profit from the uranium (Martin 2008:31).<sup>28</sup>

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28. On the governmental side, Mamadou and the MNSD-N government receives support from the ECOWAS members, particularly from the Toumani Touré Administration (Mali), the Compaoré Administration (Burkina Faso), the Yar'Adua Administration (Nigeria), and from the Sarkozy Administration (France), the Jintao Administration (China), the Bush and Obama Administrations (USA), the Harper Administration (Canada), and to a lesser extent the Bouteflika Administration (Algeria), and the Déby Administration (Chad). Moreover, Libya's primary role so far has been as a potential peace broker. However, "this role should be seen as part of the regional competition for influence in the Sahel being played out between Algeria and Libya" (Keenan 2008:461).

Considering the levels of opportunity structures, the analysis showed that two aspects of the independent variable are high and that therefore, the opportunity structure can be described as moderate. Since the external support is not very strong, one cannot speak of a high level of opportunity structures.

As regards to the willingness dimension of the Nigerien case, it is important to point out the following aspects:

Firstly, the perceived presence of societal security dilemmas as a result of the weak state environment. The Tuareg's legacy of autonomy, its completely distant conception of governance, the permanent MNJ-FPN-FFR's confrontation with the Mamadou Administration, and its resultant societal polarization has produced the securitization of the identity of the inhabitants of the northeastern regions, and the dyadic mobilization in the defense of their idea of state and nation. Therefore, as a response to both the Tuareg and Toubou uprisings, and Niamey's policies, the identities of Niger have been securitized along ethnic lines. The result has been the exacerbation of the societal security dilemma, in which the Agadez and Tahoua Regions have portrayed themselves as victims of an exclusive, corrupted and militarized centralized Republic, with power concentrated in the national government, at the expense of local governments run by southern ethnic groups. Even though, the sides have agreed in April 2009 to initiate peace negotiations to end the armed conflict, the prospects for mutually enticing opportunities and trust-building are low. This is due to the fact that Mamadou is personally committed to pursue a military solution, because uranium accounts for over half of Niger's exports, giving the central government incentives to fight any calls for decentralization (Martin 2008:31), and as a result of the 2009 constitutional and electoral crisis and turmoil in Niamey between the Mamadou Administration and the opposition.

The second aspect concerns the high economic differential within dyad, and the third aspect is the politico-economic grievances. The Tuareg, who live in one of the poorest and most underdeveloped regions of one of the poorest countries on earth (UCDP 2009a) perceive that resource extraction is evidence of economic discrimination, and

central government theft as they do not receive enough economic benefits from uranium mining. Also, anti-drug-smuggling campaigns and counter-terrorism policies have become evidence of marginalization, especially as the Mamadou Administration has classified traditional Tuareg trading routes as illegal (Martin 2008). These kinds of dynamics have raised and reinforced the existing perception of grievances.

When it comes to the level of the willingness dimension in this case, it is described as high, because, contrary to the analysis of the opportunity structure, all three aspects of the independent variable hold.

Hence, as a result of the moderate levels of the opportunity structures and the high levels of the willingness dimension, plus the interaction of the two variables, the conflict over the autonomy, the full implementation of the 1995 peace agreement and the 2009 peace negotiations, and the greater share of uranium wealth, is likely to remain deadlocked, as a 4-S stalemate, with punctual escalations during the dry seasons, as mirrored retaliation, rather than de-escalate.

### 4.3. KINGDOM OF THAILAND

Modern political history of Thailand<sup>29</sup> until the 1980s can be characterized by a state that strongly centralized political, cultural and economic authority in the national government. The development of the centralized structures was especially marked by the 1932 coup that replaced the Siamese absolute monarchy with a constitutional one, and the military regimes of Plaek Pibulsonggram (1938-1944 and 1948-1957) that sought to transform Thailand into a modern national state.<sup>30</sup> Yet, despite the gradual democratic development that the country has experienced since the end of the Cold War, instability and authoritarian rule of a military and civilian bureaucracy continue to characterize the Thai state.

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29. Thailand was known as the Kingdom of Siam before 1939, and briefly again between 1945 and 1949.

30. Since 1946 Thailand has experienced interstate armed conflicts (French Indochina, Cambodia, Laos), intrastate armed conflict (the Thai government against both, the CPT between 1974 and 1982; and currently, the southern insurgency) and one-sided violence (UCDP 2009b).

Patani refers to the former sultanate of Patani, a prominent Malay-Muslim center of commerce and Islamic learning, which was founded in 1390 and annexed by Siam in 1902. Moreover, the majority of Patani's inhabitants are of Malay ethnicity, Muslim, and speak Malay, while the rest of Thailand's inhabitants are mostly of Thai ethnicity, Buddhist, and speak Thai.

The current separatist and autonomy demands in Patani are not a new phenomena, dating back to the region's incorporation into Siam. Despite the fact that a variety of Patani rebel groups aimed to carve out an independent Patani, most of them pursued distinctively different political objectives, often suffering from substantial in-fighting (UCDP 2009b).<sup>31</sup> Hence, between the 1950s and 1990s, organizations, such as the BNPP,<sup>32</sup> the BRN, and the PULO –the most significant group and led by Tengku Bira Kotanila (alias Kabir Abdul Rahman)-, operated in southern Thailand as the forefront of the insurgency. This low-intensity armed conflict, therefore, fell into the classic pattern of irregular warfare, with several groups seeking to place pressure on the central government to accede to the autonomy demands by attacking both the government and civilians. However, between 1980 and 1988, under the government of Prem Tinsulanonda, Bangkok enacted various nation-wide decentralization projects sought at partially empowering Muslim minorities and boosting economic development in the south. As a result, the majority of the 1990s, in the transition-to-democracy times and under the government of Chuan Leekpai, Patani was relatively stable and experienced a decline of insurgency activity. Nevertheless, unrest continued, and as the Asian financial crisis peaked in 1997 other groups emerged or split apart, becoming the principal players in the insurgency. These organizations consisted of groups such as the BRN-Coordinate, a splinter group of the BRN created in 1984; the New PULO, a splinter group of the PULO created in 1995;

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31. Hereafter, the Patani rebel groups will be referred to as Patani insurgency, consisting of members of several different organizations who have been involved in coordinated activities with the aim of both creating an independent Patani state and/or achieving territorial autonomy.

32. The group was renamed in 1986 to the BIPP.

the GMIP formed in 1995 by Afghan veterans; and Bersatu, a joint command between PULO, New PULO, BRN and GMIP established in 1997 and led by Wan Kadir Che Wan (Cline 2007:278; Croissant 2007:5; UCDP 2009b).

The first signs of a return to violence surfaced during 2001 when sporadic attacks on infrastructure occurred in Patani, and the central government, headed by Thaksin Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai party,<sup>33</sup> ceased to implement the decentralization and development programs towards the Thai southern provinces, dismantling many of the political structures in Patani which supported his political opponents (Cline 2007:279; Melvin 2007:29; Chalk 2008:9).<sup>34</sup> Thus, the number of assaults and casualties increased during 2003, escalating dramatically in 2004. The most serious eruption of political violence involved a large and well coordinated raid carried out by the Patani insurgents on governmental targets simultaneously in the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat in January 2004 (ICG 2005; Sugunnasil 2006; Melvin 2007; UCDP 2009b). The Thaksin Administration responded by declaring martial law in Patani and by managing the situation with security forces. Sporadic acts of violence followed suit, soon giving way to an unprecedented and sustained wave of incidents that still continue today, often involving direct confrontations between security personnel and militants, ambushes, assassinations and campaigns of terrorism (Sugunnasil 2006:120). Notable events during the first stage of the armed conflict include the 2004 Krue Se mosque siege in Pattani and the 2004 Tak Bai massacre in Narathiwat, where hundreds of suspected insurgents, militants, and civilians were killed by security forces, on one hand; and the 2006 Hat Yai bombings in Songkhla, and the frequent military engagements, drive-by shootings and shellings, on the other hand.

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33. The party was banned in 2007, after ruling from 2001 to 2006. Its successor the People's Power party was dissolved in 2008. Presently, the Thaksinism is found within the 2008-created, Pheu Thai party.

34. As part of the reorganization, Thaksin shifted security responsibility for Patani from the military to the police. This shift was significant because in general, the Royal Thai Armed Forces had better relations with the Muslims than the police forces did (Cline 2007:280).

Following the protests of the so-called “yellow-shirt” movement PAD against Thaksin during 2006, the military launched a bloodless coup on September 2006 that overthrow Thaksin and appointed an interim civilian-military government lead by Surayud Chulanont. During the interim period there were attempts to initiate negotiations and promote development in Patani, however, the emergency rule was not removed and the conflict continued unabated. Following the 2007 general election, Samak Sundaravej, a stand-in for Thaksin, assumed office in early 2008. Yet, after massive PAD protests and the judicial removal of the Samak Administration in mid 2008, Abhisit Vejjajiva, from the Democrat Party, was appointed Prime Minister by the Parliament at the end of 2008. Nevertheless, during April 2009 the Abhisit Administration also faced enormous protests and riots carried out by the so-called “red-shirt” movement UDD. As a consequence of the protracted political turmoil in Bangkok, the security forces have been assigned the full responsibility for tackling the insurgency in Patani (ICG 2008). Hence, between 2007 and 2009, violence continued with insurgency and paramilitary activity,<sup>35</sup> and attacks on government troops, civilians and infrastructure, e.g. the 2009 Al-Furqan mosque attack in Narathiwat. However, while the attacks are declining in quantity, the death toll increases every year (UCDP 2009b). Even though there is no official rapprochement between the parties and the fight continues, the Abhisit Administration is exploring the possibility of granting greater local autonomy in Patani and shifting southern policies from a security-oriented approach towards development and justice.<sup>36</sup>

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35. The main Thai paramilitary organizations involved in Patani are: the ranger force Thahan Phran linked to the military, the Village Defence Volunteers (Chor Ror Bor) a civilian militia linked to the Ministry of the Interior, the Village Protection Force (Or Ror Bor) a Buddhist militia under Queen Sirikit's patronage, and Ruam Thai, a private Buddhist militia (ICG 2007; Chalk 2008:17).

36. For the source information see: <http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-03-18-voa36.cfm> (accessed April 17, 2009).

#### 4.3.1. THE THAI TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY MOVEMENT

The current Thai conflict can be understood, essentially, as a struggle between the historical grievances of the Patani minority against Bangkok, which in turn is dominated by a Thai majority and characterized by the battle for power between the Thaksinism and the establishment, and therefore, the issue of religion is only a proxy cause. Broadly, the grievances' approach points to the fact that Patani constitutes one of the poorest regions in Thailand, lacking access to political, social, economic and judicial institutions, partly because of the country's centralized administrative system and the non-accountability of the security forces. Another set of grievances arises from the government's imposition of both the Thai language and the Buddhist religion upon the Patani people through its education and assimilation policies (Croissant 2007:6; Melvin 2007:17). Further, new conditions were involved in the triggering of the 2003 armed conflict. In order to understand the breakthrough, it is important to take into account the following. Despite the common bias to portrait both the post-Cold War southern Thailand conflict as a religious one, and the insurgency as a new front for jihad, religion has not replaced nationalism as the main driving force of the insurgency (Sugunnasil 2006:140; Melvin 2007:20; ICG 2005, 2008). The current religious unrest in Patani has its origins in Bangkok's cultural deprivation and politico-economic marginalization of the Malay-Muslim population, and the collapse of the first insurgency wave to achieve its political goals, which helped to create conditions for the development of an Islamic element in the insurgents' ideology (Sugunnasil 2006:140; Cline 2007:285; Croissant 2007:8; Melvin 2007:21).<sup>37</sup> Therefore, Islam, or even jihad, are rhetorical resources selectively appealed to by the Patani insurgents to legitimate attacks, rather than the source

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37. International events such as the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the wars in Afghanistan and the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, which the Thaksin Administration supported, facilitated the revival of Islam in Patani.

of their core motivation.<sup>38</sup> Thus, religion is a mere marker of the Patani identity and it has not neither altered nor reignited the patterns of the conflict.

Regardless of the centrally planned general strategy of the rebel groups, the current insurgency consists of several different independent groups organized in a clandestine cell structure. Such groups focus their activities on both the irregular warfare and the political front; being particularly the BRN-Coordinate lead by Sapae-ing Basor –and its linked cell-like armed wing RKK-, and PULO the main organizations (Croissant 2007; Melvin 2007; ICG 2008; UCDP 2009b). Hence, concerning the fact that the insurgency is marked by demands for an independent state, or at least an autonomous region, (i.e. Aceh or Moro Mindanao alike), the lack of political leadership is a major impediment in the search for the clearly formulated Patani claims and the settlement of the conflict (Melvin 2007:33; ICG 2008). For the Patani insurgents, therefore, autonomy encompasses *inter alia* (i) self-governance and the holding of elections for political authorities; (ii) a comprehensive political reform, a deeper decentralization and the holding of legislative power; (iii) a security sector reform; (iv) the reintroduction of certain elements of sharia law through Islamic courts; (v) cultural autonomy, education through traditional Muslim boarding schools (ponoh), and the right to use the Malay language; and (vi) a holistic economic development. Thailand is therefore experiencing a conflict where two types of incompatibilities overlap deeply polarizing the country since the conflict is over government and territory combined.

#### 4.3.2. THAILAND WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS

Since 2003, Thailand has experienced an upsurge of the Patani insurgency as which long-excluded Thai-Malay Muslim communities have mobilized to resume the territorial armed conflict once waged during

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38. Groups that harbor Jemaah Islamiyah, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami and Abu Sayyaf – style tendencies are present in Patani, e.g. the Ustadz Soh’s Brotherhood, however they are an insignificant minority that does not capitalize on the conflict dynamics (Cline 2007:283; Croissant 2007:6; Melvin 2007:17; Chalk 2008:20; ICG 2005, 2008).

the Cold War era. In the next paragraphs the opportunity structures that explain the emergence of an autonomy movement in Thailand will be introduced:

Firstly, the rebellion is characterized by the autonomy demands advanced, as strategic leverage against the central government, by the Thai-Malay Muslim, which are a territorial compact minority that are a clear regional majority. This autonomy claims are brought together around the Patani insurgency, however the absence of groups claiming responsibility for the attacks or advancing specific demands makes it hard to identify the present-day leading figures and the valid spokesperson for the movement. In addition, most of the leaders of the 1990s are exiled abroad, mainly in Sweden and a few in the Middle East (ICG 2005, 2008).

Secondly, although the central government set up a National Reconciliation Commission in 2006 to find a long-term solution to the conflict, its report outlining the causal factors behind the violence and suggesting ways of alleviating the problems in Patani, has never been implemented. Yet, the Thai central government is characterized by unstable governance based on patron-client structures, corruption, havoc and competition. Hence, one of the main sources of the Patani insurgency's strategic leverage is the presence of a weak central government.

Finally, the third aspect is the Patani insurgency's external support to carry out its agenda. Thus, the Patani insurgency is fundamentally linked to the Thai-Malay Muslim organizations spread across Patani and the state of Kelantan, Malaysia. However, the external support, either in the form of training facilities, ammunition, funds, or ideological influence, is difficult to determine due to a lack of clarity over the insurgency. However, the Patani insurgency does receive political backing from parties such as PAS, inspiration and assistance from groups such as the KMM, the MILF, and from Acehnese and Sri Lankan groups; and economic backing and lobby support from the diaspora in Malaysia, Sweden and Germany (ICG 2005; Cline 2007:283; Croissant 2007:6; Melvin 2007:24). The new nature of armed activity, reportedly carried out cell-like by the RKK and to a lesser extent by the BRN-Coordinate and the PULO, the members of which are trained

in using improvised explosive devices, automatic rifles and grenade launchers –most of which are locally made, stolen from the security forces or procured from former Bersatu stocks (Chalk 2008:11), keeps the groups from being fully dependent on wide external support, and allows them to continue to exercising their strategic leverage and baffling the Thai security forces.<sup>39</sup>

Consistent with the analysis conducted above, the level of opportunity structures in the Thai case can be described as high, because all three aspects of the independent variable hold.

The analysis of the willingness dimension of the Thai case illustrates the following.

The perceived presence of societal security dilemmas as a result of the weak state environment and the insurgency: The Patani's legacy of autonomy, its alternative idea of governance and culture, the permanent confrontation with Bangkok, the security forces and the paramilitary militias and its resultant societal polarization has produced the securitization of the identity of the inhabitants of the southernmost provinces, and the dyadic mobilization in the defense of their idea of state and nation. Therefore, as a response to Patani uprisings and the education and assimilation policies of the central government, the identities of Thailand have been securitized along ethnoterritorial and religious lines. The result has been the exacerbation of the societal security dilemma in which Patani has portrayed itself as victim of an exclusive, corrupt and militarized centralized Kingdom, with power concentrated in the national government, at the expense of regional governments and rural municipalities, run by Thai Buddhist elites endorsed by the monarchy.

The second aspect concerns the high economic differential within dyad and the third factor is the politico-economic grievances. The

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39. On the governmental side, Abhisit and the Democrat Party government, like the previous governments, receive support from the ASEAN members, in particular from the Macapagal-Arroyo Administration (Philippines) and the Yudhoyono Administration (Indonesia), as well as from the Bush and Obama Administrations (USA), the Howard and Rudd Administrations (Australia), and to a lesser extent the Badawi and Najib Razak Administrations (Malaysia).

Thai-Malay Muslim, who live in one of the poorest and most underdeveloped, marginalized and untouristed populated regions of Thailand, perceived an increase of marginalization when the Thaksin Administration ceased to implement the decentralization and development programs towards Patani and torn down many of the security guarantees and political structures, instead imposing exceptional measures and harsh counter-terrorism policies.

With reference to the level of the willingness dimension in this case, it can be described as high, because, as in the analysis of the opportunity structure, all three aspects of the independent variable hold.

Hence, as a result of the high levels of both the opportunity structures and the willingness dimension, plus the interaction of the two variables, the conflict over the autonomy, the direction of the cultural policies and the economic development is more likely to escalate rather than de-escalate, in the context of political deadlock in Bangkok, continuing tensions in civil-military relations and with no specific rebel groups stepping forward to demand concessions.

## 5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

### 5.1. OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES AND WILLINGNESS DIMENSION IN COMPARISON

In all the three cases analyzed, the presence of opportunity structures and willingness dimension was a key aspect for generating escalation. Without its active involvement, minorities would never have been able to mobilize and violently escalate around autonomy demands. Therefore, the comparison of the cases illustrates that when controlling the territorial compactness and the presence of a weak central government, and considering them as a permanent condition of the territorial armed conflicts grounded in self-determination demands in Bolivia, Niger and Thailand, the escalation can only take place when the contenders (the ethnic entrepreneurs), have access to external support, or at least a lack of resistance, to carry out first, protests and then trigger rebellion.

Hence, a look on the study cases illustrates that, when the leadership benefits, or believes it does, from the strategic leverage and the socio-economic networks that these conditions bring, it will be more inclined to advance self-determination demands and eager to take up arms. Accordingly, although to a large extent the opportunity structures of the CPSC and the APB come from the domestic nature of its economic power and leadership, they receive large political and economic backing and recognition from transnational companies and foreign organizations. Thus, Marinkovic and Costas, as businesspeople and politicians, are legitimated by the secondary parties in their quest for the autonomy demands, and in addition, their struggles are galvanized by the popular support received among Media Luna population. Compared to Bolivia, in the Thai case, opportunities exist for the Patani insurgency, particularly for the RKK, who has taken advantage of the cell-like tactics and the little reliance on groups such as the KMM, the Jemaah Islamiyah or the MILF. The BRN-Coordinate and the PULO have also benefited from the financing and backing of a resourceful diaspora and the political backing of the exiled former leaders and the PAS (ICG 2008). In contrast, in the Nigerien case, moderate opportunities exist for the insurgency despite enjoying (i) the strategic leverage of being far from Niamey and being based in rough terrains, (ii) the substantial military support from Malian-Tuareg and Toubou rebel groups, and (iii) the popular support towards their leaders.<sup>40</sup> The problem remains that the Tuareg movement is fractionalized and lacks financing and the backing of a resourceful diaspora.

Moreover, the Bolivian case shows that, although the explanation of the CPSC's actions display the greed approach logic, i.e. an economically advanced minority in an unequal society that find subsidizing the Andean and mostly indigenous populated departments too demanding and troublesome, and hope to improve its economic performance by advancing demands for autonomy, the reality is that a more nu-

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40. In August 2009, the MNJ ousted Alambo accused of tricking the group and the countries working to end the armed conflict. The new leader is Amoumoune Kalakouwa. For the source information see: <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL2551220> (accessed September 4, 2009).

anced look to this argument suggests that Media Luna is seeking to defend both the private property and the neoliberal model that is currently being challenged by the Morales and the MAS government. Hence, greed confirms to be a form of grievance, albeit one that may be dishonest or illegitimate.

As regards to the other two cases, it is necessary to mention that the Nigerien Tuaregs and the Thai-Malay Muslims, whose self-determination demands are mainly grievance-based, resorted to violence after employing peaceful means, in response mainly to the persistence of exclusive governance, political and economic marginalization, social and cultural deprivation, and accommodation denial of their central governments. Nevertheless, those demands, consequently, can also be traced to the setting left out by the existence of a wide economic gap between the central government and the regions where these communities live. Therefore, despite the different nature of the study cases, when controlling the societal security dilemmas and the politico-economic grievances, and considering them as permanent conditions of the territorial armed conflicts grounded in separatist or autonomy demands in Bolivia, Niger and Thailand, the conflict escalation can only take place when the contenders have willingness to mobilize as a result of the existence of high economic inequality within dyad.

## 5.2. EXPLAINING ESCALATION AND DE-ESCALATION

Over the course of the analysis several similarities were observed in the three study cases i.e. on one hand, the war of attrition against the central government in order to gain autonomy concessions or to change the status, and, on the other hand, that, although the CPSC, the MNJ, and the Patani insurgency control a territory within the state, the reality is that they do not function as separate entities. Common also to all the three cases is unresolved electoral violence; spoiler dynamics of the sides; uprisings, protests and demonstrations; human rights violations; lingering violence; occurrence of political assassinations; and sporadic armed clashes and terrorist attacks, that generates mirrored retaliation.

The Bolivian and the Nigerien cases fall under the contender-defender model of escalation, i.e. the contender (in this case, the CPSC and the MNJ) started with mild contentious tactics, such as demonstrations and protests, but as a result of the non-accommodation of their demands, moved on to irregular warfare in an effort to prevail. However, the governments' response to the offensive has been different in both cases; the Morales Administration has remain passive and is tackling the rebellion through policing measures, whereas the Mamadou Administration has reacted strongly escalating defensively. Conversely, the Thai case follows the conflict spiral model of escalation based on a vicious circle, characterized by terrorist activity, of action-reaction, and mirrored retaliation between the Thai security forces, the Thai-Buddhist paramilitary organizations, and the Patani insurgency. As regards to the Intensity of Conflict measure from the UCDP data-set, Bolivia is facing low armed activity, whereas Niger and Thailand are facing minor conflicts. The causes of the different intensities of conflict can be traced therefore on the different escalation paths of the study cases.

After the events of the 2003 gas conflict, the main escalation of violence that occurs in Bolivia usually takes place around electoral periods, like during the 2007 opening of the constituent assembly and the 2008 unofficial Media Luna's referendum on autonomy. Yet, the 2008 Porvenir massacre and the so-called 2009 Rózsza-Flores incident have also been among the most significant instances of escalation that have increased the ongoing ethnic protest and political violence. Thus, the conflict escalation in the Bolivian case can be described as gradual aggrandizement where the sides have become increasingly committed to the struggle, stimulating the nexus between external support and high levels of economic inequality within dyad.<sup>41</sup> Although very low levels of electoral violence were reported during the December 2009 re-election of Morales and the referendums on empowering decentralized in-

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41. The potential for violent clashes is high, apart from the involvement of foreign mercenaries, organizations such as the UJC, the indigenous group Ponchos Rojos, and some Barras Bravas bands, have been building up militia forces that are currently capable to fight.

digenous governance in the Andean departments, the dispute remains alive because the incompatibilities have not yet been resolved and the polarization is entrenched.

Since the renewal of the armed conflict in the city of Iferouane in 2007, the conflict in Niger has been characterized by military engagements between the FAN and the MNJ, the use of one-side violence against civilians by the Nigerien government, the kidnappings of foreign personnel and uranium company workers by the MNJ, escalation of violence during the dry seasons, and de-escalation during the rainy season. Although ethnic protest, sporadic attacks and political violence continue, since the 2009 Sirte talks Niger has experienced an important de-escalation of the armed conflict. Hence, the conflict can be described as gradual lessening as a result of a 4-S stalemate, the diminishing of the MNJ's external support, and the emergence of a moderate splinter group, the FPN, willing to end the armed struggle in favor of negotiated peace agreement. However, since the process began, no formal document legitimizes the process in progress. Thus, such impasse spoils possible peace negotiations and indicates an inevitable failure.

In the Thai case, since the beginning of the conflict in 2003, the major events were the Krue Se mosque siege and the Tak Bai massacre in 2004. Subsequently, 2005 was marked by a gradual escalation of violence as a consequence of a strengthening of the external support for the insurgency. After the Hat Yai bombings, the escalation of violence peaked during the 2006-2008 period nearly leading to war i.e. when Chulanont led the interim civilian-military government. Although ethnic protest, political violence, the Buddhist backlash and RKK-led terrorist campaigns prevail, since Abhisit became head of the government, Thailand has experienced a tiny de-escalation of the conflict. Beyond the Abhisit goodwill in finding an autonomous arrangement solution for Patani, the political turmoil in Bangkok has left the insurgency expectant. Nevertheless, the security forces are still in charge of the dispute, which is likely to provoke a spiral escalation in the long-run because the Patani insurgency, well-established and hardened, is far from being defeated (ICG 2008:1).

### 5.3. ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS OF THEORETICAL INTEREST

Concerning Walter's (2003) approach, the investment of the governments in a toughness reputation to discourage territorial demands follows this line of reasoning: First, the Morales Administration and the Bolivian central government will never accept the self-determination of Media Luna because the government fears it will lead to a reduction of public funds available for much needed investment in the Andean departments and to the undermining of democracy and the rule of law. Besides, La Paz considers the politico-economic grievances of the CPSC immoral and not objectively legitimate. Second, due to the Nigerien central government's failure to comply with the 1995 Ouagadougou peace agreement and the Mamadou's strategy to exclude and disenfranchise the Tuaregs on the grounds of nonkinship, it is likely that Niamey will never accept the full implementation of the Tuareg's claims, because, in addition to the 4-S stalemate situation with the MNJ, it has to deter the autonomous claims of the Toubou people in the easternmost Agadez Region and in the Diffa Region. Furthermore, it has to deal with the grievances of the Mahamid Arab minorities of the Diffa Region's Chadian border, who have been threaten with expulsion from the country after being accused by the Mamadou Administration of wrongdoing. Third, beyond the government and the military's strong incentives to instigate, perpetuate, and neglect the conflict in Patani, Bangkok has a long history of investing in a toughness reputation in order to tackle the Patani demands, particularly since both the resumption of violence has been marked by the religious dimension, and political turmoil left by the struggle between the Thaksinism and the Thai establishment. Moreover, the Abhisit Administration has to deal with the status issue of the Burmese refugees and Burmese undocumented migrants in Central Thailand demanding recognition, the economic development demands of the Thai-Lao and the Thai-Khmer minorities of the Isan Region, and the Preah Vihear temple dispute with Cambodia.

## 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

If autonomy itself does not determine the escalation of territorial armed conflicts grounded in self-determination claims, why do some minorities engage in organized violence, while others embrace peaceful channels. Aimed at arriving at a comprehensive theory that identifies which factors were responsible for violent escalation, the present study has sought to fill this research gap by answering under what conditions those kinds of conflicts escalate or de-escalate. This study assumed and it was argued therefore, that the explanation of causality stems from a dynamic process in which willingness and opportunity factors interact.

By using the concepts of opportunity structures (contextual factors and capabilities) and willingness dimension (background reasons and requirements), my main theoretical findings were that escalation of conflict only takes place when autonomy and separatist demands are used by minorities as a strategy to influence government response and improve their bargaining position as a consequence of the interaction of the opportunity and the willingness that binds together ethnic entrepreneurs that have access to external support with high levels of economic inequality within dyad. Hence, entrepreneurs of violence, by having minorities rallying around the flag, are able to generate the needed attractiveness to resort to arms, to securitize identity, and to exploit the politico-economic grievances.

Since research that seeks to understand the causes, dynamics, escalation/de-escalation, and outcomes of nationalist intrastate armed conflicts waged over the control of territory is still in its infancy, the theoretical framework introduced in this study can be a suitable avenue for future research. Thus, to apply a crucial case as e.g. Northern Ireland to test the findings of this study is a case in point. In this context, the impact of the 2008 Kosovo and South Ossetia/Abkhazia 'independence' on the development of autonomy arrangements worldwide and in the understanding of the opportunity structures and the willingness dimension is of paramount importance. Likewise, almost no

consideration in terms of empirical and theoretical evidence has been put on the fractionalization within both governments and minority groups, in contexts of 4-S stalemates, when it comes to the negotiations of autonomous arrangements as a result of self-determination conflicts. Hence, the findings of this study should be of relevance to both researchers and policymakers to ascertain, through opportunity structures and the willingness dimension, when territorial autonomy arrangements are needed to deter the escalation of conflicts grounded in self-determination demands.

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