Self-Defense Militias, Death Squads, and State Outsourcing of Violence in India and Turkey

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ABSTRACT
What explains the variation in states’ nonstate partners in civil warfare? States often use nonstate actors to do what their regular military forces cannot do well – navigate the local population. Some of their nonstate partners are ordinary civilians, while others are battle-hardened fighters with a rebellious or criminal past. The choice of proxy carries serious implications for the patterns and effects of violence during civil war, human rights, and international security. This article is the first to disaggregate the nonstate counterinsurgents and offer an explanation for why and how states use each type. It brings together the politics of collaboration with the politics of exploitation. The article shows that the state’s use of nonstate proxies is shaped by the supply of willing collaborators, the state’s ability to exercise control over them, and the trade-offs underlying the use of the different types of nonstate actors. The empirical evidence used to support this argument comes from a novel, comparative study of Turkey’s counterinsurgency campaign against Kurdish separatists and India’s counterinsurgency against Kashmiri separatists. The original data were collected through fieldwork in the disputed territories of each country.

KEY WORDS Militias; Civil War; Counterinsurgency; India; Turkey

States rarely fight alone. In addition to forming alliances with other states, they often mobilize nonstate actors in times of war. Leo Tolstoy vividly describes thousands of Napoleon’s Grand Army troops mercilessly butchered by Russian Cossacks and muzhiks (irregular cavalymen and peasants) in War and Peace.1 Imperial Russia was not alone in its use of irregular units. More contemporary cases of state outsourcing of violence to nonstate actors include China’s increasing delegation of its internal security to “units that are not formally government employees, and probably have little or no legal training;”2 Britain’s collusion with loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland for targeted killings;3 and the

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1Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Books 2008), 1035.
2“Unrest catches China’s police by surprise,” Financial Times, 6 February 2012, 3.
3John Stevens, “The Stevens Inquiry: Overview and Recommendations,” Metropolitan Police Service, United Kingdom, 17 April 2003.

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Colombian government’s use of local self-defense groups to fight leftist insurgents since the late 1960s. Although centralization, bureaucratization, and nationalization of coercion are hallmarks of modern state-making,⁴ nonstate proxies feature significantly in conflicts across the world.

Irregular units help national militaries to counter the insurgents’ advantages in guerrilla warfare. While proxy use is controversial and risky,⁵ there is a general agreement in the civil war literature that it can be effective against rebels.⁶ This is because counterinsurgency is “an intelligence-driven endeavor” requiring high familiarity with the local context.⁷ As insurgents and states compete for local influence, nonstate partners can serve an important role in collecting tactical intelligence, building the state’s legitimacy at the local level, making credible threats against civilians in the case of noncooperation, providing the state with plausible deniability, supplying auxiliary manpower in operations, and carrying out selective violence on behalf of the state.⁸

Despite the growing scholarly interest in the role of nonstate actors in warfare, existing research does not address why states opt to use different types of proxies. The existing qualitative studies typically focus on one type of proxy at a time,⁹ while the quantitative work often aggregates different types of proxies under a “militia” umbrella.¹⁰ Yet, the irregular units employed by states exhibit remarkable variation. Some of them comprise former rebels and criminals (i.e. those with experience wielding illicit violence), while others

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⁴Among the prominent writings in this vast literature are Max Weber, “The Bureaucratization of the Army by the State and by Private Capitalism,” in H.H. Garth and C. Wright Mills (eds), Essays in Sociology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 980–82; Michael Mann, States, War and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1988); Charles Tilly, Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990 (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell 1990).

⁵Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice: Islamist Militancy in South Asia,” Washington Quarterly 33/1 (2010), 47–59; International Committee of the Red Cross, “Protocols I and II Additional to the Geneva Conventions,” 1 January 2009; Amnesty International, “Guatemala: The Civil Defence Patrols Re-emerge,” 4 September 2002, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3d99cd394.html>.

⁶Stathis N. Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War (New York: Cambridge UP 2006), 109.

⁷US Department of the Army, Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24 (Washington: 2006), 3–1.

⁸Corinna Jentsch, Stathis N. Kalyvas, and Livia Isabella Schubiger, “Militias in Civil Wars,” Journal of Conflict Resolution 59/5 (2015), 755–69; Kristine Eck, “Repression by Proxy: How Military Purges and Insurgency Impact the Delegation of Coercion,” Journal of Conflict Resolution 59/5 (2015), 924–46; Tomáš Smid and Miroslav Mareš, “Kadyrovtsy: Russia’s Counterinsurgency Strategy and the Wars of Paramilitary Clans,” Journal of Strategic Studies 38/5 (2015), 674; Lyall, “Are Coethnics More Effective Counterinsurgents?” Sunil Dasgupta, “Paramilitary Groups: Local Alliances in Counterinsurgency Operations,” Brookings Counterinsurgency and Pakistan Paper Series 6, June 2009. Ariel I. Ahram, Proxy Warriors: The Rise and Fall of State-Sponsored Militias (Stanford: Stanford UP 2011).

⁹Goran Peic, “Civilian Defense Forces, State Capability, and Government Victory in Counterinsurgency Wars,” Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 37/2 (2014), 162–84; Bruce B. Campbell and Arthur Brenner, Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2002).

¹⁰Sabine C. Carey, Michael P. Colaresi, and Neil J. Mitchell, “Governments, Informal Links to Militias, and Accountability,” Journal of Conflict Resolution 59/5 (2015), 850–76. Militias are defined as pro-government or government-sponsored armed groups that are not part of the regular security forces but have some level of organization. Sabine C. Carey, Neil J. Mitchell, and Will Lowe, “States, the Security Sector, and the Monopoly of Violence: A New Database on Pro-government Militias,” Journal of Peace Research 50/2 (2013), 250.
comprise inexperienced civilians. This article disaggregates nonstate proxies and offers an explanation of why and how states use each type. It focuses on the supply of collaborators, the state’s capacity to impose control over them, and the tradeoffs in working with different types of proxies.

The state’s choice of proxy depends in part on the capabilities of prospective recruits and the degree of control the state can reasonably expect to establish over them. Nonstate actors with significant experience wielding extra-institutional violence (“veterans”) are more militarily skilled than their counterparts who have little or no previous combat experience (“rookies”). For the same reason, veterans are more dangerous and difficult to rein in. Veterans are, therefore, more likely to be used in areas where the battle-ground needs call for highly targeted offensive operations and where the state possesses the means to control them. They often constitute “death squads” and work alongside special operations forces of the military or police. The militarily unskilled rookies are more likely to be used in areas requiring static defense – i.e. incorporated into “self-defense militias” – and where the state exercises relatively less control. While the comparative advantages and disadvantages of veteran and rookie proxies shape the “demand” for one over another, the “supply” of collaborators is a necessary condition of outsourcing. Where willing collaborators are scarce, states may resort to coercion for their recruitment and management.

The proposed theory is developed by combining the “most-different systems” research design and within-case analysis of India’s (1988–2003) and Turkey’s (1984–2002) counterinsurgency campaigns. This article is the first work that systematically compares these two important cases. The fine-grained analysis of within-case variation enables systematic process tracing, which boosts the internal validity of the argument. By focusing our attention on the similar features of an otherwise dissimilar pair of cases, the most-different systems design helps to eliminate other possible explanations. It allows us to identify the common logic of violence outsourcing that plays out in countries that have relatively few similarities. The observation of an analogous violence-outsourcing process across India and Turkey provides a robust confirmation of the argument and suggests its broader applicability for other non-weak states.

Turkey and India have distinct histories of state-building: the former was the heartland of the Ottoman Empire while the latter was a British colony. At the time of the insurgency, Turkey was a semi-democratic state under military tutelage, while India had a functioning civilian democracy. A long-time member

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11 The term “death squad” is used in this article to refer to armed groups carrying out targeted extrajudicial executions and mainly comprising nonstate actors.
12 The term “self-defense militia” is used to refer to armed groups performing mostly static (i.e. defensive) tasks and mainly comprising civilians.
13 Jason Seawright and John Gerring, “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options,” *Political Research Quarterly* 61/2 (2008), 298.
of NATO, Turkey has generally maintained a strong alliance with the United States, while India has historically pursued nonalignment and relative distance from Washington. Since the early Kurdish uprisings of the 1920s and 1930s, Turkey had not faced significant rebellion until the rise of Kurdish ethnic separatism in the late 1970s. India experienced rebellion almost continuously: in the northeast, beginning soon after the country gained independence in 1947, in the Punjab in the 1980s and early 1990s, and in Kashmir in the 1990s and 2000s. Despite these differences, Turkey and India responded very similarly to their respective insurgencies. The strikingly similar outsourcing patterns across India and Turkey and the variation within each country across space and time provide strong support for the proposed framework.

The empirical findings are based on fieldwork in Srinagar (in Jammu and Kashmir) and Delhi, in India; Islamabad, in Pakistan; and Diyarbakır, Ankara, and Istanbul, in Turkey. Interviews and archival research were conducted during summer and winter research trips between 2012 and 2016 at these locations, as well as in Washington and London. Interviewees include state and military officials, journalists, local experts, civilian victims and witnesses of the conflict, and former rebels. In addition to providing first-hand accounts, the interviews and archival research helped to identify and discern the credible secondary materials from a plethora of partial, inaccurate, and ideologically biased accounts. The interview and archival sources are supplemented with reports from non-governmental organizations, newspapers, and scholarly works. Due to the highly sensitive nature of the subject, many of the interviewees are kept anonymous.

Explaining Proxy Selection

The terms “pro-government militia,” \(^{14}\) “partisan,” \(^{15}\) “paramilitary,” \(^{16}\) and “civilian defense force” \(^{17}\) are currently used in the literature to designate state-sponsored armed nonstate agents. There is considerable overlap and ambiguity among the existing terms, as the scholarship has not yet reached a consensus on these concepts. Nevertheless, what all of these groups have in common is that they comprise agents who are employed outside the regular military channels and have no prior professional ties to the state’s military or security apparatus. \(^{18}\)

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\(^{14}\)Carey et al., “States, the Security Sector, and the Monopoly of Violence.”

\(^{15}\)Carl Schmitt, Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political (New York: Telos 2007).

\(^{16}\)Daron Acemoglu, James A. Robinson, and Rafael J. Santos, “The Monopoly of Violence: Evidence from Colombia,” Journal of the European Economic Association 11/3 (2013), 5–44.

\(^{17}\)Peic, “Civilian Defense Forces.”

\(^{18}\)Reservists and veterans of military forces, who are civilians with military experience, do not fall under the nonstate proxy category because they are formally associated with the state’s military institutions through regular compensation and, in the case of the reservists, expectation of service. The mobilization of reservists and former soldiers by the state is a standard military practice.
Figure 1 displays the global prevalence and distribution of pro-government militias between the years 1981 and 2007. At least 64 percent of the 332 organizations identified had direct links to a state institution. Considering the challenges of collecting accurate data on violent groups’ relationships with state institutions, the number likely underestimates the incidence of state outsourcing of violence.

While the existing literature does not directly tackle the problem of proxy variation, emerging scholarship on rebel cooptation suggests two potentially useful mechanisms: fragmentation and patronage. I outline each and then propose a more comprehensive approach that combines the strategic logic of exploitation with the politics of collaboration.

**Fragmentation and Patronage**

Recent studies of imperial warfare suggest that when local elites are politically fragmented, states enlist collaborators more easily. The finding that fragmentation facilitates the recruitment of collaborators is also supported by the literature on insurgent fratricide. The logic is that deadly internal

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19GIS map compiled using Carey et al. dataset. Mercator projection used for better visualization of Europe. “Militias” are defined as pro-government or government-sponsored armed groups that are not part of the regular security forces but have some level of organization. Carey et al., “States, the Security Sector, and the Monopoly of Violence,” 25.
20Between the years 1981 and 2007, at least 332 pro-government militias were in operation. Statistics from Carey et al., “States, the Security Sector, and the Monopoly of Violence.”
21Paul MacDonald, Networks of Domination: The Social Foundations of Peripheral Conquest in International Politics (Oxford: Oxford UP 2014).
22Paul Staniland, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Insurgent Fratricide, Ethnic Defection, and the Rise of Pro-state Paramilitaries,” Journal of Conflict Resolution 56/1 (2012), 16–40.
disputes, be they among the local elites or the insurgents themselves, incentivize the weaker factions to seek an alliance with the state. This argument predicts higher rates of collaboration with the state among non-state actors that need physical protection.

A related supply-side argument points to the role of patronage in proxy selection. The relationship between the state and the proxy involves the latter’s provision of irregular military service in exchange for privileges supplied by the former on mutually beneficial terms. This argument predicts higher rates of state–proxy collaboration where the state is able to provide selective benefits to potential collaborators.

The classic patronage-based relationship is illustrated by the British strategy in the tribal territory of the North-West Frontier of colonial India. The British presence in the Punjab beginning in the mid-nineteenth century deprived the North-West Frontier Pathan tribes of “a field for raids and booty.” Cognizant of the impending security and economic threat, the British created an irregular armed force comprising local Pathan tribesmen. Their salary and pension were designed to keep the tribes from raiding and looting “the pride and backbone of British India” (i.e. the Punjab).

Fragmentation and patronage certainly enable state–proxy collaboration. However, neither of these mechanisms adequately accounts for the type of proxies states will be willing and able to work with in times of war. Existing research is also silent on the role of state coercion in proxy creation and use. Ranging from torture to a promise of a reduced prison sentence – or in combination with positive inducements – coercion often allows the state to recruit the more reluctant adjuncts and to ensure their compliance during the counterinsurgency campaign.

Proposed Framework: Control, Collaboration, and Comparative Advantage

States’ selection of nonstate proxies is a function of the former’s capacity to impose control over the latter, the supply of willing collaborators, and the comparative advantages and disadvantages of working with veterans and rookies. In confronting an insurgency, the state’s ideal partner is a highly skilled fighter who possesses deep knowledge of the insurgent network as

23 Idean Salehyan, “The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54/3 (2010), 493–515.
24 Lee J.M. Seymour, “Why Factions Switch Sides in Civil Wars,” *International Security* 39/2 (2014), 105.
25 Mason in Charles Chenevix Trench, *The Frontier Scouts* (London: Jonathan Cape 1985), xiv.
26 Trench, *The Frontier Scouts*, 1.
27 The reluctance to serve the state may be the result of ideological or very practical considerations. The nonstate proxies often become the favored targets of the insurgents, who see them as a serious threat to the insurgent operations and legitimacy yet, at the same time, easier targets than their regular counterparts due to inferior equipment and training.
well as local “cultures, perceptions, values, beliefs, interests and decision-making processes.”

Regular soldiers are highly skilled fighters, but possess limited local and insurgent knowledge. The disconnect between the soldiers and the local population may be traced back to the increased mechanization of militaries since the First World War, as well as modern military training practices that involve detaching the soldier from his or her familiar environment.

When a state partners with a group that is not part of its military or police forces, the former confronts the classic principal–agent problem. The state’s capacity to manage this problem is significantly shaped by its spatial reach – territorial control – across the theater of war. Figure 2 illustrates the different configurations of territorial control. In Zone A, the state exercises full control. Zone B represents the insurgent-dominated area, whereas Zone C is the contested region where both sides actively compete for influence. Zone D represents an area that has been largely neglected in the burgeoning civil war literature. It is a zone that is neither fully controlled nor, for the time being, actively contested. It is a so-called “brown” area where neither side exercises a

![Figure 2. Zones of Control.](image)

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28 US Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, 3–1.

29 Isaiah Wilson and Jason Lyall, “Rage against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars,” *International Organization* 1/63 (2009), 67–106.

30 Neil J. Mitchell, Sabine C. Carey, and Christopher K. Butler, “The Impact of Pro-government Militias on Human Rights Violations,” *International Interactions* 40 (2014), 812–36.

31 Guillermo O’Donnell, “On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Postcommunist Countries,” *World Development* 21/8 (1993), 1359.
high degree of penetration. Zone D exists because neither the state nor its rivals can, or necessarily desires to, be present everywhere at all times.

Among the nonstate alternatives, the ideal partner for the state is a skilled fighter with insider knowledge of the insurgency and its logistics network. The disadvantage of using this type of a proxy is that their fighting skills are precisely what make them dangerous and difficult to control. The cost of losing control of skilled fighters can be unpalatably high. The global prominence of the standing army model owes much to the havoc wreaked by the skilled fighters-turned-bandits of the Thirty Years’ War. The “regular” armed forces represent the shift from the delegation to the centralization and professionalization of violence. Unless they are weak or collapsed, modern states are more likely to use skilled fighters when and where they can supervise them.

Nonstate actors that possess the desired local knowledge and have significant experience wielding extra-institutional violence, whether of a criminal or rebel nature, may be harnessed to counter the insurgents’ advantages over the state. These veterans’ comparative advantage is in performing specialized, offensive, and highly targeted tasks that take advantage of their high mobility and combat skills – e.g. as “death squad” agents. Consequently, they are likely to be used where the insurgents are actually located (Zones B and C). We should expect them in Zone C, where the state can exercise control over their activities. Using death squads in Zone B requires the state to create robust control mechanisms, such as embedding these groups firmly within special operations units of regular military or police forces. Where the state exercises full control (Zone A), or where the insurgents are not yet present (Zone D), states do not require highly targeted offensive operations and, consequently, veterans.

The next-to-ideal nonstate partner for a state is the rookie possessing high local knowledge, albeit poor fighting skills. The rookies’ comparative advantage is in static area defense aimed at cutting insurgent logistical links or preventing area infiltration – e.g. as members of a self-defense militia. Rather than directly targeting insurgents, self-defense militias typically “nibble” at the insurgency and defend specific areas from rebel incursion. Consequently, rookies are used mainly to facilitate the operation of state forces in contested regions (Zone C) or to deny the insurgency access to areas where neither side has effective control (Zone D). In Zone B, rookies

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32Both rookies and veterans are also sometimes used as auxiliary forces in offensive operations and, consequently, integrated into the regular military formations. Prolonged conflict may “professionalize” rookies, thereby transforming them into veterans. In such cases, they may be used by states for not only defensive but also for offensive operations. Moreover, while the rookies’ inferior combat skills make them less effective than their veteran counterparts in offensive operations, they may be easier to mold or manipulate to commit the kinds of violence veterans could refuse. John Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War’,” International Security 25/1 (2000), 42–70.

33Carl von Clausewitz, On War, trans. James John Graham (London: N. Trübner 1873), 480–81.
are helpless against the insurgents. Not only can their government-provided weapons easily fall into rebel hands, but also, given the high rates of defection in insurgent-dominated areas, they may become a fertile source of rebel recruits. Remnants of self-defense militias (once created in Zone C or D) may persist in Zone A, but only because demobilization of nonstate actors is usually slow and costly.\footnote{Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War, 196–97.}

The categories of “veteran” and “rookie” are ideal types. Most nonstate actors fall close to, but rarely completely on, each end of the martial prowess spectrum. Both veterans and rookies usually receive basic arms and limited training. They are distinct from mere informants in that the state expects them to engage in armed combat if and when necessary. Counterinsurgency operations involving these proxies can be either covert or overt. The former enables the state to carry out violence that may be deemed illicit or illegitimate by domestic or foreign observers. The latter allows it to signal having the support of at least some elements within the civilian population or the rebel ranks. Typifying state-supported nonstate violence with plausible deniability are the Shabiha forces used by Bashar al-Assad’s government during the Syrian Civil War. These irregulars have carried out executions, drive-by shootings, and sectarian attacks. On the other hand, some states purposely publicize their partnership with armed groups. The Russian state openly partnered with select Chechen ex-rebels to demonstrate that it enjoyed the support of some Chechen groups. Moreover, nonstate counterinsurgents may be co-ethnics of the insurgents, as in the aforementioned Russian case, or of the ruling elite, as in the Syrian case. There is some evidence to suggest that the former may be more effective than the latter.\footnote{Lyall, “Are Coethnics More Effective Counterinsurgents?”}

Counterinsurgency is a function not merely of the state’s battlefield needs, but also of the social conditions in which counterinsurgency takes place. An explanation of the recruitment and management of nonstate counterinsurgents is incomplete without the politics of collaboration. The supply of collaborators is a necessary condition of outsourcing. States usually enjoy highest levels of collaboration from the local population in areas where they have significant territorial control (Zone A).\footnote{Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War, 196. In Kalyvas’s “selective violence in civil war” model, Zone A is captured by Zones 1–2.} Everywhere else, they must actively seek collaborators to make their strategy work.

Rookies and veterans have a variety of interests that influence their willingness to collaborate. While the availability of veterans usually depends on opportunities for prior combat or criminal experience, states can be creative
in finding veterans. For example, during the civil unrest in Ukraine in 2014 the government used sportsmen-criminals, the so-called *titushki*, for “committing violence either alongside or under the watchful gaze of the notorious special police unit.”

The state’s previous ties to local ethnic groups or kinship and village networks could also lead to collaboration opportunities. Where “voluntary collaboration born of genuine attachment” or “alignment of incentives” is lacking, states may attempt to create it through coercive measures. The political arrangements states make with potential proxies affect the latter’s willingness and capacity to collaborate with the central government. The next two sections offer case studies that gauge the explanatory power of the proposed framework.

**Village Guards and Islamist Contras in Turkey**

In the 1970s, Turkey’s major cities were on fire. Right-wing and left-wing political organizations violently clashed on the streets of Ankara and Istanbul. The 1970s were also a time when a wave of Kurdish youth from predominantly rural southeastern Turkey arrived in the major cities to study and work. Among them were the founders of a militant organization that combined Marxism–Leninism with Kurdish separatist nationalism – the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). The goal, as articulated by PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, was to liberate “Kurdistan” from Turkish colonialism. Its attainment required not only attacking the institutions and agents of Turkish repression, along with their foreign supporters, but also the reorganization of the feudal power structure of Kurdish society.

The PKK inaugurated its violent campaign on 15 August 1984 with attacks on two gendarmerie (local police) stations in Siirt and Hakkari.

The PKK based its logistics network on local production and relied heavily on the local population for recruits, intelligence, and shelter. The region in which the PKK built territorial control was predominantly rural, characterized by low population density. The difficulty of policing dispersed population settlements, combined with rural norms of solidarity and honor and an economy based on subsistence farming, makes rural areas especially conducive to insurgent influence.

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38 Harriet Salem and Graham Stack, “Streetfighting Men,” *Foreign Policy*, 6 February 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/06/streetfighting-men/>.
39 Clausewitz, *On War*, 373.
40 Dipali Mukhopadhyay, *Warlords, Strongman Governors, and the State in Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge UP), 2.
41 Ceren Belge, “State Building and the Limits of Legibility: Kinship Networks and Kurdish Resistance in Turkey,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43/1 (2011), 105.
42 In the 1980s, 62 percent of the population lived in villages, and roughly 36,000 settlements had fewer than 2000 inhabitants. Matthew Kocher, “The Decline of PKK and the Viability of a One-State Solution in Turkey,” *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 4/1 (2002), 4.
43 Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 136.
concealment, while proximity to the Syrian and Iraqi borders offered “strategic depth” – the space to withdraw, regroup, and respond to state offensives.

The PKK’s rapid advances in southeastern Turkey surprised and initially elicited denial in Ankara. Turkish officials were, at the time, fixated on Greece. Prime Minister Turgut Özal referred to the PKK as a “group of marauders,” no more worthy of comment than the old bandits of the Anatolian mountains. As it became evident that the Kurdish separatists constituted a well-organized guerrilla force with local support, the army began to increase its presence in the region. On 19 July 1987, the Turkish Parliament granted a state of emergency rule (Olağanüstü Hal [OHAL]) in 11 provinces that faced substantial PKK activities and violence. An OHAL governor was appointed to coordinate the security forces (military, gendarmerie, and police) while exercising certain quasi-martial law powers, such as restricting press and freedom of expression and association, over roughly six million people.\(^{44}\) As the Turkish military transferred additional troops to the region and reorganized its activities, the initial insurgent strongholds in the rural peripheries of Diyarbakir, Siirt, and Hakkari became vigorously contested (Zone B → Zone C).

The Turkish army was a conscription-based NATO military designed predominantly for inter-state warfare under the conditions of the Cold War. Its weaknesses vis-à-vis the guerrillas soon became apparent. The PKK was far more skilled at navigating the mountainous terrain and the co-ethnic rural populations. The army overshadowed the guerrillas in terms of sheer numbers and firepower, but found it difficult to isolate and engage them to its advantage. The PKK dictated the terms of military engagement – it was able to avoid detection, gain materiel and intelligence support from the local population, and attack military targets of its choosing.

Rookie Proxies: The Kurdish Village Guards

In April 1985, the Turkish government amended the Village Law of 1924 authorizing the provincial governors to appoint “temporary” (paid) and “voluntary” (unpaid) village guards\(^ {45}\) in the contested provinces (Zone C). Figure 3 displays the distribution of the village guards in 1988.\(^ {46}\)

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\(^{44}\)Mustafa Coşar Ünal, Counterterrorism in Turkey: Policy Choices and Policy Effects toward the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) (New York: Routledge 2012), 56.

\(^{45}\)The scheme was reminiscent of the Hamidiye corps, the local militia system used in the late Ottoman period. For a detailed account of the Hamidiye, see Janet Klein, The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone (Stanford CA: Stanford UP 2011). On the long tradition of state–nonstate collaboration and nonstate violence in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire, see Ugur Ümit Üngör, The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950 (Oxford: Oxford UP 2012); Karen Barkey, Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization (Ithaca NY: Cornell UP 1994).

\(^{46}\)The data were provided by Minister of Internal Affairs Nahit Menteşe to Mehmet Emin Sever of the Social Democratic People’s Party at the 18 April 1995 Turkish parliamentary session in response to a parliamentary inquiry about the village guards.
The new legislation allowed the Turkish military to train and arm civilians to guard their villages against PKK militants. Some also served alongside the regular soldiers when the military sent troops near their villages. The village guards received two weeks of training at military bases. Their syllabus covered the use of weapons, wireless communication technology, and basic tactics, such as keeping the heels down while exchanging fire with the enemy, as the PKK snipers notoriously targeted the heels.

The village guards used in operations typically walked in front of the regulars while carrying automatic rifles and radios. Most of them did not wear uniforms, though some preferred the uniform because they were otherwise the first ones to be targeted by the PKK. These rookie proxies were tied to the army and gendarmerie (rural military police), not the police. As one Turkish Ministry of Interior official explained: “The civilian authority often did not even know when, where, and how they [the village guards] were used.”

Figure 3. Location and Numbers of Village Guards in 1988.

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47 Nadir Gergin, Fatih Balci, and I. Sevki Eldivan, “Turkey’s Counter Terrorism Policies against the PKK: The ‘Fish’ or the ‘Water’?” in Siddik Ekici, Ahmet Ekici, David A. McEntire, Richard H. Ward, and Sudha S. Arlikatti (eds), Building Terrorism Resistant Communities (Amsterdam: IOS Press 2008), 269–70.

48 Mesut Değer, former parliamentarian from Diyarbakır on Republican People’s Party (CHP) ticket, interviewed by author, Ankara, 17 August 2013. Değer led the investigation of the government’s relationship with the village guards and illicit organizations, especially the Hizbullah.

49 Human Rights Watch, Turkey: Forced Displacement of Ethnic Kurds from Southeastern Turkey (Helsinki: 1994), 27.

50 Kurdish academic and field researcher who “interviewed dozens of village guards,” interviewed by author, Ankara, 17 August 2013.

51 The gendarmerie is formally under the control of the Turkish Minister of the Interior. Its members are trained as soldiers and spread across a network of police stations and outposts to control rural areas, patrol villages, and gather intelligence. During conflict, the gendarmerie is under the jurisdiction of the military.

52 Official from the Turkish Ministry of the Interior, interviewed by author, Ankara, 16 August 2007.
When the Turkish state first started recruiting village guards in the late 1980s, they were stationed primarily in the contested areas between the state and the PKK (Zone C). As the OHAL region expanded, the PKK strongholds (Zone B) began to shrink. The Turkish state supported the village guards “both financially and logistically” and made no effort to keep the system a secret. The existence of the village guard system, composed of ordinary Kurdish civilians, was meant to signal the Kurdish people’s support of the Turkish state. The PKK, threatened by local collaboration, called for the village guards’ “mass destruction” in its 1987 “Decree on Village Guards.” Turkish soldiers taken prisoner were often exchanged, while captive village guards faced summary execution. The PKK carried out numerous violent raids and attacks specifically in the villages whose members had volunteered to become part of the village guard system. The majority of the civilian casualties between the years 1986 and 1988 were of individuals living in villages whose members participated in the village guard system.

To fill the village guard ranks, the Turkish military initially reached out to local clans that were known to be sympathetic to the state. Ankara had been suspicious of Kurdish political mobilization ever since the Sheikh Said uprisings shook the republic soon after its founding. The state’s intelligence agencies closely monitored the local power struggles between the Kurdish clans and noted their pro-state and anti-state sentiments. Army conscripts provided a continuous flow of valuable intelligence about clan elite fragmentation in the region. This intelligence enabled the armed forces to identify the clans most likely to support the central government in its struggle against the separatists. In the late 1980s, state officials made informal deals with influential clan leaders (aghas) from the sympathetic clans to guard their own villages against PKK militants.

The first clans to collaborate with the state were those identified with the right and far-right (ultra-nationalist) political parties. Some of them “were already in conflict either with the PKK directly, or with local clans which enjoyed PKK support.” By acting as intermediaries, the aghas made it possible for the Turkish military quickly to recruit thousands of village guards in the contested areas of the region. Among the most notorious was the Jirki clan in Hakkari, whose chief was still wanted for the killing of six gendarmes in 1975. The tribal chief struck a deal with state officials and, after a token court appearance, raised a force of Jirkis as village guards around the Beytussebap region. Another Hakkari chief demanded the

53 Ünal, Counterterrorism in Turkey, 51.
54 Kurdish academic and field researcher, interviewed by author, Ankara, 17 August 2013.
55 Human Rights Watch, Turkey, 28.
56 Ünal, Counterterrorism in Turkey, 54.
57 Belge, “State Building and the Limits of Legibility,” 106.
58 Emre Uslu, former police officer and academic, interviewed by author, Istanbul, August 2013.
59 David McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds (New York: I.B. Tauris 2004), 424.
The aghas usually collected and were responsible for distributing the monthly salaries of their clan’s village guards, which reinforced their local influence.

In order to prevent the insurgency from spreading further to the north and northeast of the conflict zone, the Turkish state decided to widen the scope of the village guard system. By the early 1990s, the clan-based approach to recruitment had been depleted, and so the military began directly approaching villagers about joining the self-defense militias. The state applied this strategy both in the contested regions (Zone C) and in the rest of the Kurdish-majority areas in the north and northeast of the conflict zone which had not been so affected by the fighting (Zone D). Figure 4 maps the geographical expansion of the village guard system in the early 1990s from Zone C to Zone D.

By expanding the village guard system to the periphery of the conflict zone, the state sought to prevent the PKK from acquiring new territory. The main function of the rookie proxies in these areas was to guard the territory against insurgent incursion. They were primarily tasked with protecting their villages as well as the roads and mountain paths the PKK could use to traverse the territory. Zone D served as a buffer zone between the insurgent-filled and the insurgent-free areas, and the village guards served as the buffers.

Patronage played only a partial role in the state–proxy relationship in the 1990s. The official village guard salary was significantly higher than the average per capita income in the region, which was plagued by high unemployment and underemployment. The monthly stipend of a village guard in 1992, for example, was approximately US$250 in areas where the

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60 Official from the Turkish Ministry of the Interior, interviewed by author, Ankara, August 2013.
61 Kurdish academic and field researcher, interviewed by author, Ankara, 17 August 2013.
annual per capita income was about US$400.\textsuperscript{62} However, when the financial incentives did not work, military commanders threatened the civilians with village evacuation\textsuperscript{63} or made village guard service “an informal requirement for return” after the evacuation had taken place.\textsuperscript{64} There were cases of villagers being tortured for refusing to collaborate with the state.\textsuperscript{65}

The patronage hypothesis over-predicts collaboration. The Turkish state used selective material inducements successfully during the late 1980s and the 1990s to recruit thousands of village guards. The Kurdish regions of Turkey were among the poorest in the country. The relative wealth of the central state meant that it could afford to purchase cooperation widely among the Kurdish villages. However, patronage was insufficient to meet the state’s proxy needs. The PKK made collaboration with the state very costly by brutally targeting village guard members, their families, and even entire villages.

Fragmentation also provides an important but partial account of collaboration. Kurdish clan elites who were threatened by the PKK’s anti-feudal ideology collaborated with the state. However, when the agha channel dried, the state did not shy away from applying coercion. Whereas in the late 1980s the Turkish state relied on fragmentation and patronage to recruit and manage the rookie counterinsurgents, in the 1990s the benefits of fragmentation diminished and patronage was supplemented by intimidation.

The village guards earned “a reputation for being the least disciplined of the Government’s security forces.”\textsuperscript{66} Hundreds of them were involved in crimes, including drug trafficking, corruption, theft, rape, and murder of rivals falsely identified as terrorists. Some, willingly or unwillingly, collaborated with the PKK.\textsuperscript{67} The state turned a blind eye to many of these offenses so long as the village guards facilitated its primary military objective of wresting territorial control from the PKK. The impunity for criminal offenses served as a reward for loyalty by the state to its proxy and, thus, facilitated the collaboration.

\textbf{Veteran Proxies: The Kurdish Hizbullah and Ex-rebels in Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism (JITEM)}

On 16 December 1990, the OHAL governor was granted the authority to evacuate residential areas and transfer the local population. An official from

\textsuperscript{62}McDowall, \textit{A Modern History of the Kurds}, 424.
\textsuperscript{63}Gergin et al., “Turkey’s Counter Terrorism Policies against the PKK,” 274.
\textsuperscript{64}Holly Cartner, “Turkey: Letter to Minister Aksu calling for the Abolition of the Village Guards Human Rights Watch,” Human Rights Watch, 7 June. 2006, \langle\url{http://www.hrw.org/news/2006/06/07/turkey-letter-minister-aksu-calling-abolition-village-guards}\rangle.
\textsuperscript{65}A lawyer and member of Goc-Der migrant’s association and a lawyer associated with the Diyarbakir Bar Association, interviewed by author, Diyarbakir, 14 August 2013.
\textsuperscript{66}US Department of State, “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices,” Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 31 March. 2003, \langle\url{http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18396.htm}\rangle.
\textsuperscript{67}Gergin et al., “Turkey’s Counter Terrorism Policies against the PKK,” 274.
the Diyarbakır branch of the Human Rights Association estimates that roughly 4000 villages were forcefully evacuated in the 1990s. Officials report 905 villages and 2523 hamlets (a total of 378,335 forced migrants) evacuated in and around the provinces under emergency rule by 1997, while some nongovernmental organizations estimate the number of internally displaced persons in the region to be between one and four million in 2005. Population resettlement is a classic tool of counterinsurgency. The logic is that, “since the government does not have the capability of dispersing and projecting its military strength to cover these important remote settlements … it must bring the inhabitants of these villages to areas which it can directly control.” The cities and large towns of southeastern Turkey were the strongholds of the Turkish government (Zone A), and consequently the Kurdish villagers were moved into the urban areas where they could be more easily monitored.

The village evacuation policy accelerated the urbanization of the Kurdistan region. Along with the heavy inflow of Kurdish villagers into the cities of southeastern Turkey was a corresponding inflow of PKK followers and sympathizers. Beginning in 1990, the PKK began contesting the state’s authority in what was formerly a state stronghold (Zone A → Zone C). A former provincial governor and official with the Turkish Ministry of Interior describes: “As a result of the village evacuations, the PKK’s military power in the rural areas was broken. But, it resulted in the urbanization of the PKK. The migrants from the villages formed the support bases of the PKK in the cities. They took over areas where the government previously had full control.”

The towns of Cizre and Bismil (Diyarbakır Province) had several PKK-occupied “liberated zones.” In Cizre, the Nur and Cudi neighborhoods were under PKK control. Multiple armed confrontations involving the PKK took place in the Bağlar and Suriçi districts of the city of Diyarbakır.

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68 Official of the Human Rights Association of Diyarbakır Branch, interviewed by author, Diyarbakır, 13 August 2013.
69 A reputable Turkish nongovernmental organization, the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), regards the figure of three to four million as “a rather high estimate.” Aker, A. Tamer, Betül Çelik, Dilek Kurban, Turgay Ünalan, and Deniz Yükseker, The Problem of Internal Displacement in Turkey: Assessment and Policy Proposals (Istanbul: TESEV 2005), 4.
70 John S Pustay, Counterinsurgency Warfare (New York: Free Press 1965), 100.
71 Kocher, “The Decline of PKK,” 5.
72 The absolute size of the rural population in the OHAL provinces fell by 11.9 percent from 1990 to 1997, despite a population growth of 14 percent. The population in the districts centers in the same region increased by 45 percent. The rural depopulation in the OHAL region proceeded nearly three times faster than in the rest of Turkey, while the OHAL population grew faster. Ibid., 6–9.
73 Official of Mazlum-Der (religiously conservative human rights association), interviewed by author, Diyarbakır, 15 August 2013; Kurdish academic and field researcher, interviewed by author, Ankara, 17 August 2013.
74 Official from the Turkish Ministry of the Interior, interviewed by author, Ankara, 16 August 2013.
75 Official of Mazlum-Der.
76 Official from the Turkish Ministry of the Interior.
77 An official of Mazlum-Der.
The Petrol district of the city of Batman had a strong PKK presence. The PKK was highly active in Hakkari Province, especially in the towns of Yüksekova and Şırnak. The latter was transformed into a city as the army built up its capacity there against the PKK with a large military installation. About 950 houses in Şırnak became unusable after the military assaulted them while targeting PKK supporters.

As the insurgency spread to the cities, the Turkish military began collaborating with individuals who were highly skilled at wielding illicit violence – members of the militant Islamist organization called Hizbullah. The Kurdish Hizbullah in Turkey was a Sunni Islamist group that traced its origins to the Iranian Revolution. Some youths in Diyarbakır and the surrounding provinces had traveled to the Iranian city of Qom for short-term religious training. The pro-Iranian Kurdish youths began to organize in Diyarbakır at the Menzil bookstore. However, after the 1980 Turkish military coup, the organization splintered. The moderate faction pursued political and social activities, while its radical counterpart, now organizing at the İlim bookstore, argued that armed warfare was the only way to bring about an Islamic revolution in Turkey. What also separated the radicals from the moderates was that the former deemed religion, not ethnic identity, to be the main source of unity. Incidentally, the İlim faction leader, Huseyin Velioglu, is known to have studied at the Ankara Political Science Faculty at the same time as Öcalan.

The İlim faction of the Hizbullah (henceforth referred to as “the Hizbullah”) was “a mainly urban phenomenon” operating in cities such as Nusaybin, Batman, Diyarbakır, and Van. It began its violent urban campaign against PKK members and sympathizers in October 1991. By 1992, it had become “the second most violent and ruthless organization – after the outlawed PKK.” The locals began to refer to the organization as “Hizbul-contra” due to its suspected connection to the state, as evidenced by the high degree of immunity it enjoyed from the secular Turkish government and military.

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78 An official from the Turkish Ministry of the Interior.
79 An official of Mazlum-Der.
80 An official from the Turkish Ministry of the Interior.
81 The Kurdish Hizbullah, comprising Sunni members, is not linked to the Shia organization operating under the same name in Lebanon.
82 The Iranian Revolution inspired a variety of Islamist movements in the Middle East in the early 1980s, including some Sunni groups such as the Kurdish Hizbullah.
83 İmset G. İsmet, The PKK: A Report on Separatist Violence in Turkey (Ankara: Turkish Daily News 1992), 123.
84 “Human Rights Watch, “What Is Turkey’s Hizbullah?” 16 February 2000, <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/english/docs/2000/02/16/turkey3057_txt.htm>.
85 Henri J. Barkey and Graham Fuller, Turkey’s Kurdish Question (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 73.
86 İsmet, The PKK, 124
87 Değer.
The state used the Hizbullah for death squad activity, pitting “the Kurdish Islamists against the atheist PKK.”\(^88\) The secular Turkish military and the Islamist organization made scandalous partners. Consequently, the Turkish military pursued covert collaboration with select Hizbullah leaders who agreed to work with the state on the common goal of defeating the PKK. State agents also infiltrated the organization. The rank-and-file members are unlikely to have known of their leaders’ collaboration with the state.\(^89\)

Much of the Hizbullah violence was skillfully coordinated. Each operation was carried out by two to four militants, some of whom were under the age of 18.\(^90\) Their targets were PKK insurgents and suspected PKK sympathizers.\(^91\) The militants “operated in broad daylight in the mainly Kurdish cities of southeastern Turkey. People who opposed the state’s policy were being killed at the rate of two a day; in all, more than a thousand people were killed in street shootings from 1992 to 1995.”\(^92\)

The state allowed the death squads to operate with impunity in public areas such as busy streets and coffee houses. Even when the assassins were apprehended by the public and taken to police custody, “they were let go with bogus claims, like they ran away from the second floor of the police station. The people who reported assassins to the police were often then assassinated by the Hizbullah.”\(^93\) The year 1993 witnessed the largest number of incidents caused by Hizbullah militants. In the town of Silvan, about 300 people were assassinated that year. In the city of Diyarbakır, about 800 individuals and, in the city of Batman, approximately 300 people were killed.\(^94\) As a former parliamentarian who headed the investigation of the state’s relationship with the Hizbullah put it, “This is at a time when the area was so securitized that if a kid threw a stone at somebody, he would be immediately surrounded by plainclothes police. But these assassins could walk in broad daylight, shoot someone in the head, and walk away.”\(^95\)

The Hizbullah militants were notorious for their execution and torture methods. Their signature execution style was shouting the Tekbir before shooting their victims with one bullet in the head. Their weapon of choice was usually a Makarov pistol.\(^96\) The Hizbullah’s signature method of torture was the domuz bağı (hogtie). Corpses were frequently found in refrigerators.\(^97\) Court testimonies indicate that the Hizbullah executions

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\(^88\)Official of Mazlum-Der.
\(^89\)Lawyer who handled legal cases involving the Hizbullah, interviewed by author, Diyarbakır, 15 August 2013.
\(^90\)İsmet, *The PKK*, 123.
\(^91\)Human Rights Watch, “What Is Turkey’s Hizbullah?”
\(^92\)Ibid.
\(^93\)Former state official, interviewed by author, Ankara, August 2013.
\(^94\)Debeğ.
\(^95\)Ibid.
\(^96\)Lawyer in Diyarbakır, interviewed by author, Diyarbakır, 15 August 2013.
\(^97\)Debeğ.
usually took place in the morning or evening, when the targets were traveling to or from work.98

Hizbullah “contras” operated in the urban areas comprising Zone C. However, where the PKK had particularly strong control (Zone B) – specific neighborhoods, villages, and in the mountains – the Turkish military employed ex-PKK fighters. The Turkish state never officially admitted the existence of Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele (JITEM), but the organization is widely viewed in the country as an important element in the counterinsurgency campaign. Soner Yağcın, a controversial journalist who wrote an early and influential account of JITEM, argues that the organization was initially founded as part of the Özel Harp Dairesi (Unconventional War Directorate) in the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces.99

With the rise of the PKK’s guerrilla activities, JITEM began recruiting captured and surrendered insurgents into special death squads. The mechanisms by which the state used the ex-insurgents show that maintaining control of the veterans in insurgent-controlled areas was a top priority. Those with knowledge of the PKK’s hideouts, contacts in the cities and rural areas, and combat experience were considered valuable assets. Ex-insurgent prisoners were used in assassinations of Kurdish rebels and PKK sympathizers.100 JITEM officers took the ex-insurgents to sting operations, during which time they were closely monitored and supervised. At the end of the operation, the death squad members were returned to their prison cells. Keeping the nonstate counterinsurgents in prison when they were not in use ensured the state’s control of their activities.101 The veterans who worked for JITEM were often promised reduced prison sentences.102

Neither patronage nor fragmentation fully account for the relationship between the Turkish state and its veteran proxies. To classify prison sentence reduction as patronage would involve significant conceptual stretching. Even then, it does not account for Turkey’s relationship with the Hizbullah. The Turkish state found collaborators amongst radical Islamists and captured ex-PKK insurgents. By the late 1990s, it gained the upper ground against the PKK. The Turkish security forces captured Öcalan in 1999. This marked the beginning of a new PKK strategy that emphasized political participation (i.e. working with the legal Kurdish parties) over violence. The goal of establishing an independent Kurdish state was largely abandoned in favor of a negotiated settlement based on Kurdish rights and

98 Lawyer in Diyarbakır.
99 Soner Yağcın, Binbaş Ersever’ın İtirafları (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap 1994).
100 Kurdish expert, interviewed by author, Ankara, August 2013.
101 Human rights activist in Diyarbakır, interviewed by author, August 2013. The mechanism was not, however, abuse-proof. Yağcın claims that an influential officer in JITEM, Major Cem Ersever, formed a team of over forty ex-rebels and village guards that he used to assassinate his rivals as well as those of the state. Yağcın, Binbaş Ersever’ın İtirafları.
102 Kurdish expert.
autonomy within Turkey’s existing borders. The Turkish government lifted the state of emergency law in 2002. The Islamist Justice and Development Party (JDP) that came to power that year sought to gain support from Turkey’s Kurds by expanding social and economic opportunities as well as recruiting local clan elites into the party.103

Lessons from Turkey

Fragmentation and patronage offer only a partial account of collaboration. The proposed framework, which brings together the politics of collaboration with the strategic logic of exploitation, offers a fuller understanding of Turkey’s proxy choices across space and time.

The Turkish military had found its match with the rise of the PKK. The state turned to local collaborators to counter the insurgents’ guerrilla tactics. It employed village guards comprising militarily inexperienced rookies in the contested rural areas and, later, in the periphery of the conflict zone to prevent the insurgency from spreading. While some village guards served in offensive operations, most formed essentially static units engaging the PKK if and when it traversed their territory.

The state also recruited veteran proxies from the local population – militarily skilled individuals who could mount highly targeted offensive operations against the insurgents. The Hizbullah was mobilized in the contested urban areas to intimidate and assassinate PKK members and sympathizers with the support of state functionaries. JITEM was manned by ex-PKK insurgents, and its members were integrated into special operations forces to launch surgical strikes against the insurgency. While the state relied on a variety of recruitment and control mechanisms, the veterans were used only in the areas where the state forces could monitor, guide, and, if necessary, terminate their activities.

Renegades and Village Defense Committees in India

How far does the proposed framework travel beyond Turkey? This section traces the logic of violence outsourcing during an insurgency in Kashmir, India. The analysis supplements the evidence provided in the case study of Turkey with the intention of teasing out the similarities of proxy incorporation across different contexts.

In the late 1980s, an insurgency broke out in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (henceforth referred to as “Kashmir”). Decades of frustration over the former princely state’s unresolved status and the Indian

103Feryaz Ocakil, “Notable Networks: Elite Recruitment, Organizational Cohesiveness, and Islamist Electoral Success in Turkey,” Politics & Society 43/3 (2015), 385–413.
government’s manipulation of Kashmiri politics fueled strikes, public protests, and occasional violence. The opposition joined forces under the Muslim United Front (MUF) to run in the 1987 state elections. The rigged outcome and subsequent crackdown on the opposition party roused the onset of an uprising. Hundreds of Kashmiris crossed the Line of Control into neighboring Pakistan to receive arms and training. A militant nationalist organization, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), emerged as the vanguard of the insurgency.

The insurgency was marked by a March 1988 bomb blast at the telegraph office on the main street of the summer capital, Srinagar. The JKLF claimed responsibility for the blast, and the many that followed. “The long, hot summer of 1989 saw languid Srinagar descend into violence,” described an observer. In December 1989, the JKLF kidnapped the daughter of India’s newly appointed home minister, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, and then freed her when the government released five detained militants.

Unlike its Kurdish counterpart, the Kashmiri insurgency started as “a largely urban movement.” It then spread across the entire Kashmir Valley. The bulk of rebel violence (93 percent) and the vast majority of deaths (95 percent) were reported there. Figure 5 displays the distribution of rebel violence across the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Between 1991 and 1992, old-city areas in Srinagar, Baramulla, and Sopore “had in effect become no-go zones for Indian forces.” Srinagar was the hotbed of rebel activity. Over half (58 percent) of all Kashmir Valley violent incidents and over one-third (35 percent) of all Kashmir Valley deaths from rebel violence were reported there. However, while most violence was reported in the urban districts, Kashmiri interviewees cited a high prevalence of violence in the rural parts of the Valley as well. “They [the rebels] were everywhere in the Valley, in many villages,” recalled one local. Rural

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104 Many of those who worked for the Muslim United Front were imprisoned for months without charge or trial; some of them were tortured.
105 Upon their arrival in Pakistan, the insurgent hopefuls were “taken, often blindfolded, to secret training camps and taught to make bombs, fire anti-aircraft guns and wage guerrilla war.” Mehboob Jeelani, “The Departed: The Return Home of Kashmir’s Disillusioned Militants,” Caravan, 1 September 2012, <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/departed>.
106 Wajahat Habibullah, My Kashmir: Conflict and the Prospects of Enduring Peace (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press 2008), 68.
107 C. Christine Fair, “Military Operations on Urban Areas: The Indian Experience,” India Review 2/1 (2003), 61.
108 Robert G. Wirsing, India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Dispute: On Regional Conflict and Its Resolution (New York: St Martin’s Press 1994), 130.
109 Ibid.
110 Praveen Swami, India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad: The Covert War in Kashmir, 1947–2004 (London: Routledge 2007), 179.
111 Wirsing, India, 130.
112 Local Kashmiri journalist, interviewed by author, Srinagar, March 2012.
violence is typically under-counted due to the “urban bias” in civil war reporting.\footnote{Stathis Kalyvas, “The Urban Bias in Research on Civil Wars,” \textit{Security Studies} 13/3 (2004), 1–31.} The insurgents rallied the local population across the Valley, much of which was sympathetic to their cause. The area became an insurgent stronghold (Zone B).

The initial response of the Indian government to insurgent violence was to treat it “as a routine law and order problem to be handled through conventional law enforcement techniques by local police forces.”\footnote{V.G. Panankar, “Insurgency, Proxy War, and Terrorism in Kashmir,” in Sumit Ganguly and David P. Fidler (eds), \textit{India and Counterinsurgency: Lessons Learned} (London: Routledge 2009), 70.} However, the 34,000 local policemen proved ineffective, and New Delhi began to grow suspicious of their loyalty. Many of them had social and family ties to the militants.\footnote{Former Police Service officer in Jammu and Kashmir, interviewed by author, New Delhi, October 2011.} The Indian government responded by bringing in the army and federal security forces, the Central Reserve Police Force, the Border Security Force, and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. The number of Central Reserve Police Force and the Border Security Force personnel grew roughly tenfold between the years 1989 and 1993.\footnote{Wirsing, \textit{India}, 145.}

The Indian army’s role expanded in 1993 with the introduction of the Rashtriya Rifles, an elite army unit created specifically for counterinsurgency
operations, especially in the rural areas of the Kashmir Valley. In mid-1993, the total strength of regular Indian army troops in the Jammu and Kashmir state was between 300,000 and 400,000. “Indian troops had been ill-prepared for dealing with the forces arrayed against them,” explained Indian journalist Praveen Swami. “By 1992, however, the rudiments of a counter-terrorist grid were in place.” The Valley transformed from an insurgent stronghold (Zone B) to a contested territory (Zone C).

**Veteran Proxies: The Renegades**

India’s use of death squads in Kashmir may be traced to the December 1992 murder of human rights activist H.N. Wanchoo. It was allegedly ordered by a Border Security Force officer and carried out by former insurgents who were compensated with their release from prison. Other assassinations in 1993 and 1994 also appeared to have been the work of hired gunmen working for the security forces. In 1994, with the transformation of the Valley from an insurgent stronghold to a contested zone, the Indian armed forces began using death squads on a routine basis.

The death squad recruits were a mix of surrendered and captured insurgents. Several factors inspired their collaboration. Insurgent fratricide played an important role in making a large pool of former rebels available to the state. By 1993, the Indian military had gained territorial control over the Valley, and the JKLF lost the leading role in the insurgency to its rival group, the Hizb-ul Mujahideen (Hizb). The JKLF’s initial patron, the Pakistani military’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), contributed to the JKLF’s demise. The Kashmiri nationalist organization’s main goal was Kashmir’s independence, rather than accession to Pakistan, which was the ISI’s objective. The JKLF’s rallying cry was “Kashmir banega khudmukhtar” (Kashmir will be sovereign), while the slogan of the Hizb-ul Mujahideen was “Kashmir banega Pakistan” (Kashmir will be one with Pakistan). In 1991, Pakistan began to shift its support from the JKLF to the Hizb and orchestrate splits and defections in the former. In 1994, the debilitated JKLF surrendered and its leader called for peaceful struggle. As the Hizb emerged as the dominant insurgent organization in the Kashmir Valley, it sought to consolidate its power. Much of the insurgent defection occurred among members of the pro-Pakistan armed groups threatened by the Hizb’s “bid for dominance.”

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117 Praveen Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad: The Covert War in Kashmir, 1947–2004* (London: Routledge, 2007), 146.
118 Ibid., 179.
119 Human Rights Watch, *India’s Secret Army in Kashmir: New Patterns of Abuse Emerge in the Conflict* (Helsinki: 1996).
120 Staniland, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” 27.
The fragmentation mechanism accounts for much, but not all, of the collaboration. While many of the militants surrendered voluntarily while fleeing the Hizb, some were forcibly recruited. The Indian security forces were known for detaining and torturing many suspected insurgents into collaboration.\footnote{Human rights activists and a former insurgent in Srinagar, interviewed by author, March 2012. The finding is confirmed in Rakesh Shukla, “The Life and Death of a Surrendered Militant,” Himal Southasian, 20 February 2013, \url{http://himalmag.com/component/content/article/5148-the-life-and-death-of-a-surrendered-militant.html}; Human Rights Watch/Asia, \textit{India’s Secret Army in Kashmir}.}

Equally importantly, the state began to employ the veteran militants after it had gained the ability to control them. It designed two mechanisms for recruiting, monitoring, and managing the death squad members. The first was the special counterinsurgency division of the Jammu and Kashmir police, known as the Special Operations Group (SOG). The SOG was formed on 2 June 1994. It started its operations with just ten personnel who were a mix of surrendered insurgents and Kashmiri police officers. The number of SOG recruits eventually grew to about 4000. Each district had a senior superintendent and a superintendent of police who was in charge of the SOG. “[T]he SOG does not exist on papers, yet they are all over the Valley … people recount ruthless tales of extortion, rape, molestation, robbery, kidnapping and killing,” described a Kashmiri human rights organization, which also estimated that the SOG was involved in about 80 percent of counterinsurgency operations in the Kashmir Valley.\footnote{Public Commission on Human Rights, \textit{State of Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir, 1990–2005} (Srinagar: Coalition of Civil Society, Bund, Amira Kadal, 2006), 243.} The SOG was notorious for “corruption and brutality.”\footnote{Sumantra Bose, \textit{Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace} (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP 2003), 134.} It tallied the highest number of custodial killings, after the Border Security Force.\footnote{Public Commission on Human Rights, \textit{State of Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir}, 244.}

The “special police officer” (SPO) system was the second channel through which the Indian state controlled the veteran proxies. Hundreds of ex-insurgents were given the status of SPO and attached to paramilitary and army units operating in their localities. They were armed with lathis or canes, but not required to wear regular police uniforms.\footnote{Kashmir-based activist, interviewed by author, Srinagar, 22 March 2012.} On 12 March 2012, the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly reported that the Indian state recruited 23,000 SPOs,\footnote{Indo Asian News Service, “475 special police officers killed in Kashmir militancy,” 31 March 2012, \url{http://in.news.yahoo.com/475-special-police-officers-killed-kashmir-militancy-100356335.html}.} though the local estimates range from 26,000\footnote{Public Commission on Human Rights, \textit{State of Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir}, 247.} to 30,000.\footnote{Kashmir-based activist.}

The Kashmiri ex-insurgents, whom the Indian state called “renegades,” were popularly known as Ikhwanis, a reference to the most notorious state-sponsored organization of former insurgents, Ikhwan-ul Muslimoon (Muslim Brotherhood). The Indian state used the renegades to assassinate rebels and
their sympathizers.\textsuperscript{129} Their main targets were powerful insurgent organizations such as the Hizb, the Harkat-ul-Ansar, and the Lashkar-e-Taiba, as well as members of the banned pro-Pakistan party Jamaat-e Islami. The renegades were also used in joint patrols and as provocateurs and informants.\textsuperscript{130}

The Indian military forces closely monitored the activities of the renegades. Some were even housed in military compounds.\textsuperscript{131} “Many militia members wear civilian clothes but live in military camps, are fully armed and harass people in full view of the personnel,” described the International Crisis Group. “There are any number of reports of abusive militia members taking refuge on military bases after fleeing angry locals. If arrested, most militia members are released through the intervention of military personnel.”\textsuperscript{132}

About five renegade outfits operated in the Kashmir Valley. The most notorious of them, the Ikhwan-ul Muslimoon, was headed by the folk singer and former JKLF rebel Kuka Parray. The organization was closely linked to and monitored by the Rashtriya Rifles. It was also involved in illegal timber trade and drug-running, to which the Indian state turned a blind eye.\textsuperscript{133} Another prominent former insurgent outfit was called “the Taliban.” The name was deliberately chosen to create confusion with the militant Islamic Afghan group of the same name. The Indian Taliban’s principal patron was a powerful Congress leader in Kashmir. The organization worked with the Indian army and the SOG.\textsuperscript{134}

\textit{Rookie Proxies: The Village Defense Committees}

The Indian military and police used veterans in Zone C and, with the Rashtriya Rifles, in Zone B. In Zone D – the mountainous areas of the Jammu region – the state instituted the rookie proxies: the Village Defense Committee (VDC) system. The VDCs were “self-defense” organizations set up “in remote and inaccessible mountainous parts of the state.”\textsuperscript{135} Men and women were given arms and trained to fight the insurgents. According to an official statement released by the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly in 2012, the number of VDC volunteers was roughly 6000.\textsuperscript{136} The figure is likely to be a significant underestimate. A reputable Kashmiri NGO puts the number in the Jammu province at over 15,000,\textsuperscript{137} and a prominent Kashmiri journalist estimates the number to be as high as 23,000.\textsuperscript{138}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{129} International Crisis Group, “Kashmir: The View from Srinagar” (Islamabad: 2002), 10.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Kashmir-based human rights activist, interviewed by author, Srinagar, 23 March 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Public Commission on Human Rights, \textit{State of Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir}, 244.
\item \textsuperscript{132} International Crisis Group, “Kashmir.”
\item \textsuperscript{133} Swami, \textit{India}.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Human Rights Watch, \textit{India’s Secret Army in Kashmir}.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Indo Asian News Service, “475 special police officers killed in Kashmir militancy.”
\item \textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Public Commission on Human Rights, \textit{State of Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir}, 247.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Kashmir-based journalist in Srinagar, interviewed by author, March 2012.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Most of the recruited villagers were Hindus, while some were Sikhs. The Indian military and security forces had largely focused their efforts on the Valley, where the predominantly Muslim locals were highly sympathetic to the insurgents: “Valley Kashmiris took pride in the militants’ exploits because the ‘boys’ had somehow restored Kashmir’s pride.” Supply-side politics played an important role in India’s choice of rookie proxy. In Jammu, rather than relying on coercion, as did their Turkish counterparts in the north and northeast of Kurdistan, the Indian military worked with ethnic groups that were deemed more likely to collaborate against the Muslim Kashmiri rebels. Rural Jammu had a significant Hindu and Sikh contingent, which was politically motivated to accept arms from the state. In 1996, members of the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the right-wing Hindu nationalist militant organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), volunteered for the VDC system, and successfully used it to score “political mileage” for the BJP in the 1996 general election.

While the VDC members were “valorized in the Indian media as the vanguard of patriotic resistance to Pakistan and its agents,” many of them were “poor, simple villagers, dressed in soiled, tattered clothes and scuffed shoes, clutching antiquated .303 rifles.” There were reports of widespread misuse of weapons for settling personal scores. The arming and training of selected ethnic groups also aggravated the existing communal tensions at the local level between the Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. The administration of the Doda community, where the measure was first introduced, initially opposed the VDC system for fear of communal violence. “Hindus and Muslims have been living amicably in the areas but with the introduction of the VDCs, a change in the attitude of the people is perceptible,” reported a Kashmiri NGO.

The Kashmiri insurgency had waned by 2003. Although insurgent violence did not cease completely, it was no longer “the primary means by which Kashmiri political aspirations for political change are manifested.”

Lessons from India

The Kashmiri insurgents exploited the advantages of guerrilla warfare as they battled the Indian forces. The military and security forces expanded their presence in the Kashmir Valley once state officials recognized the

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139 Navnita Chandha Behera, *Demystifying Kashmir* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press 2006), 147.
140 Public Commission on Human Rights, *State of Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir*, 247.
141 Sumantra Bose, “Session 3 – Geography, Politics and the Fighters of Kashmir: An Eyewitness Account,” Conflict in Kashmir Seminar, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 15 September 2012, <http://fathom.lse.ac.uk/seminars/10701013/>.
142 Public Commission on Human Rights, *State of Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir*, 248.
143 Paul Staniland, “Kashmir since 2003: Counterinsurgency and the Paradox of ‘Normalcy,’” *Asian Survey* 53/5 (2013), 940.
extent of the rebels’ influence there. The state began employing veteran proxies, the so-called “renegades,” after the military and police forces had built up the mechanisms necessary to recruit and manage them. Similarly to Turkey’s use of the Hizbullah in the contested areas (Zone C), India used the renegades under the supervision of its army and police forces across the Kashmir Valley.

The logic of the 1990s village guard system in Turkey and VDCs in India was also similar: the civilian defense units were formed to keep the insurgency from establishing a foothold in the areas where the state was largely absent (Zone D). While the fratricidal flipping mechanism explains the collaboration of the ex-insurgents in the Kashmir Valley, it does not explain the formation of the VDCs in Jammu. Neither does patronage, though the BJP and RSS may have exploited the predominantly Hindu-manned VDCs for propaganda purposes. The state used ethnic divisions in Jammu to recruit reliable proxies, and, in doing so, further aggravated the communal tensions. The supply of collaborators was a necessary condition for forming the death squads and self-defense militias, and, like Turkey, India used all means it could to generate it.

Conclusion

States outsource violence in civil war to counter the advantages insurgents gain through guerrilla warfare. Some of the counter-guerrillas states employ are ordinary civilians; others are experienced in wielding illicit violence. While the former’s abilities are often limited to static, defensive functions, the latter may be used for mobile, offensive operations. Ordinary civilians (rookies) are less militarily skilled than their veteran counterparts, but are also less likely to inflict serious damage beyond their immediate field of operation. The comparative advantages and disadvantages of using rookie-manned self-defense militias and veteran-manned death squads shape the state’s preferences of when and where to use them. In order for states to be able to recruit proxies, nonstate counterinsurgents must be available. Mechanisms such as fragmentation and patronage play an important role in increasing the supply of collaborators. However, where a supply of willing collaborators is absent, the state may use coercion to generate it.

State-sponsored death squads and self-defense militias are a product of calculated decisions states and collaborators make. Attempts to limit them must, consequently, take these calculations into account. Given the challenges of conducting counter-guerrilla operations, states are unlikely easily to forgo the benefits nonstate actors offer. Considering the willingness of many states to resort to coercion to recruit and manage collaborators,
neither rookies nor veterans can easily reject the state’s invitation to fight on its behalf.

Appreciating the logic of state outsourcing of violence deepens our understanding of what it means to be a modern state and what constitutes security. Violent nonstate actors do not automatically signal state weakness or collapse. They can, in effect, indicate the presence of a robust coercive apparatus. The Weberian conception of the state is not threatened by the phenomenon of states outsourcing violence to nonstate actors. Just because the modern state has a monopoly on all legitimate violence does not mean that nonstate actors have a monopoly on all illegitimate violence. The state is just as capable of illicit behavior as its nonstate counterparts.

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