

# **Socializing Militants**

How States End Asymmetric Conflict with Non-State Militants

**Jeremiah Rozman**

Association of the United States Army

**Series in Politics**



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# List of Abbreviations

AIS	Armée Islamique du Salut
ANC	African National Congress
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AQ	al Qaeda
AQAP	al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQI	al-Qaeda in Iraq
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AUMF	Authorization of the Use of Military Force
C2	command and control
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CT	Counterterrorism
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FIS	Islamic Salvation Front
FLN	National Liberation Front
FSB	Federal Security Service
GIA	Armed Islamic Group
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HUMINT	human intelligence
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
IED	improvised explosive device
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
ISAF	International Security Assistance Forces
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISR	intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance

NDS	National Defense Strategy
NMSP-WOT	National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism
NSA	Non-state actor
NSC	National Strategy for Counterterrorism
NSS	National Security Strategy
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PA	Palestinian Authority
PFLP	People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PIJ	Palestinian Islamic Jihad
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PNC	Palestinian National Conferences
ROEs	rules of engagement
RSM	Rational Security Maximizer
SIGINT	signals intelligence
UAS	Unmanned Aerial Systems
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

# Abstract

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen states engaged in long-term conflicts with asymmetrically weaker non-state opponents. States seek to end these conflicts as quickly as possible by combining force and diplomacy to socialize these militants—meaning give them the characteristics of states—in order to make a credible bargain achievable. The desired outcome is not necessarily peace, although a negotiated settlement is preferable to the costly use of force. In cases where force cannot be avoided due to the opponent's characteristics, the state seeks an end to the conflict through decisive military victory. The militant's characteristics determine the state's optimal strategy. The state's actual strategy is distorted by its internal and external constraints. Through interviews, primary and secondary source data, I analyze the United States' Russia's and Israel's asymmetric conflicts with militants and demonstrate that socialization logic most comprehensively explains their strategies throughout those conflicts.



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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

Conflict is costly. As is the case with interstate wars, states want to end their conflicts with non-state opponents. Furthermore, states face their greatest security threats from other states, while protracted asymmetric conflict with non-state militants drain resources needed to deter and defend against state rivals. This book seeks to help leaders end asymmetric conflicts with non-state opponents by providing them with a logically sound and strategically useful typology of non-state militants based on three characteristics that determine whether the state believes that it can reach a trustworthy bargained end to the conflict with that opponent. These characteristics are ideological drive, governance function and leadership targetability. This book then introduces socialization logic, which shows how leaders, when unhindered by constraints, use force and diplomacy to shape their opponents' characteristics to make them more amenable to a negotiated settlement. This study tests socialization logic in several case studies. By providing a formal and well-supported articulation of this logic through case study analysis, this book can help leaders form strategies best suited to ending their conflicts and correct deviations accordingly.

In times of conflict, politicians and pundits often march out the oft-cited cliché: “if you want to make peace, you do not talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.” This is only possible when the opponent is willing to make peace under acceptable terms and able to enforce abidance to those terms. Some opponents have an ideologically driven fundamental purpose that precludes renouncing violence under terms that a state could accept. Others have reasonable demands, and a governance structure that allows for productive negotiation. In other cases, the non-state militant is not yet the type, meaning it does not yet have the characteristics that convince a state leader that it can be bargained with.

### **a. Socialization logic**

Socialization logic is the method by which states seek to shape the characteristics of their non-state opponents through the correct application of force and diplomacy in order to make them better suited for successful negotiation. I argue that optimally, states tailor their strategy to “socialize” their opponent, meaning to give it the characteristics that make it possible to successfully negotiate an end to the conflict. There are three key characteristics

that make states believe this is possible: (1) pragmatic drive, (2) high governance function, and (3) high leadership targetability. These characteristics will be unpacked briefly in this chapter and thoroughly in chapter two. I say “end the conflict” instead of “ending hostilities” because the latter includes short-term ceasefires, while socialization logic claims that states, when possible, seek to secure a permanent end to the fighting. This is not the same as “peace,” which implies amicable relations. Socialization logic only claims that states aim to socialize the non-state opponent into a type that it can pursue a bargain with that it trusts will be permanently upheld by a non-state actor (NSA) that is both deterred from resuming hostilities and able to enforce that its members do not resume violence. This is certainly a first step towards peace. If the state is facing an NSA that it deems impossible to ever succeed in trusting to uphold a bargained end to conflict, socialization logic claims that absent real-world constraints, the state’s optimal strategy aims to eliminate the opponent, thus ending the conflict. This certainly cannot be called “peace,” rather it is “total victory” which socialization logic considers a successful, although generally more costly end to the conflict. Therefore, according to socialization logic, states seek to end the conflict, not to “make peace” or to “end hostilities.” The search for peace is beyond the scope of socialization logic which simply focuses on achieving a permanent end to fighting.<sup>1</sup> In practice the state’s strategy is often distorted by its internal and external constraints. These include, but are not limited to: divided government, democratic checks and balances, public opinion, vulnerability to external intervention, sanctions or isolation, and military weakness. I further unpack the impact of internal and external constraints in chapter two.

Socialization logic explains the variation in strategy that a state employs against a non-state opponent over time. Empirical examples of fluctuations in a state’s use of force and diplomatic initiatives abound. These include but are not limited to: U.S. strategy against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Israel’s strategy towards the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Hamas and Russia’s approach to its conflict in Chechnya. I examine socialization logic against three general explanations for state strategy and several case specific explanations for a state’s strategic shift. The first general explanation examines changes in the state’s relative power. The second looks at domestic politics and bureaucracy. The third examines specific leaders’ characteristics. Even when the aforementioned variables are held constant, state strategy has fluctuated against non-state opponents over time. State strategy has also shifted in directions opposite to what would be expected by the shift in these

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<sup>1</sup> The 17th century philosopher Spinoza stated, “peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice” (Spinoza 1670).

variables. Case specific arguments explain only a specific fluctuation within a single conflict. The empirical record suggests that most of the states' strategy shifts in the conflicts that this book examines can be explained by state leaders applying the principles of socialization logic to pursue an end to their conflicts.

The state's optimal strategy is both determined by the non-state opponent's type and aims to shift its type. The state's goal is to make the non-state opponent into a more "state-like" type, one it believes it can credibly bargain with as it would a rival state. The term "state-like" describes the NSA's characteristics and will be further unpacked in chapter two. At one extreme, if the state believes it is facing an archetypal terrorist group, it will see its optimal strategy as pursuing decisive victory to end the group's ability to pose a threat, not to socialize it and bargain. At the other extreme, if the state believes that its opponent already has the characteristics necessary for credible bargaining, it will likely pursue negotiations to end the conflict. States whose leaders see themselves as being more constrained in the actions that they can take are coded as having higher constraints. These states are more likely to deviate from their optimal strategy when the strategy warranted by their non-state opponent requires politically difficult policies such as hardline force or unpopular concessions. This deviation often takes the form of management strategies which will be unpacked later in this chapter and the next. This is likely to increase conflict duration, all else held equal.

This study is concerned with non-state militants, those engaged in organized violence. This study does not focus on purely criminal enterprises driven by profit, such as cartels or mafias. It encompasses and differentiates between groups that are driven by absolutist ideology versus pragmatic political aims, those that are hierarchical and those that are decentralized, and those that seek to govern within a specific territory versus those without a strong governance capacity or a governance agenda. Socialization logic provides a rubric for countering non-state opponents, providing a valuable tool for leaders who will likely continue contending with non-state militants for the foreseeable future.

There is a rich body of theory regarding conflict between states. Only recently have NSAs eclipsed rival states as the most active threats, although not the most existential. Interstate bargaining concepts do not apply to all NSAs, but they can apply to some. Bargaining may never be feasible with the most extreme types of NSAs. Against these types, a state is forced to, either ignore them and face the consequences, manage the threat through perpetual denial and punishment, or fight until the opponent is no longer a threat. Some NSAs already resemble states in the characteristics that make bargaining possible. In these cases, bargaining can be pursued at the outset. However—as in interstate conflict—along the logic of Fearon's concept of private information,

if states do not know how much cost and risk an opponent is willing to incur over an issue of contention, or what the actual military balance is, violence might be necessary to reveal the bargaining space. Fearon calls this “private information about capabilities and resolve and the incentive to misrepresent it” (Fearon 1995, 379). For example, as will be shown in chapter seven, Russia needed (and failed) to demonstrate that it was capable of crushing the Chechen separatists before it could deter them from resuming conflict, a necessary step towards securing a bargain. This was the case despite their having the characteristics that suggested that they could be bargained with to end the conflict in 1994.

Most often, the non-state opponent is not, at the outset, the type that can be with, but can, through the application of force and political incentives, be changed into a type to which bargaining logic applies. States vary their application of carrots and sticks as they seek to change their opponent to this type and continually reassess their success with the goal of eventually securing a bargained end to the conflict. In order for a state to use force to socialize its opponent, the opponent must believe that the state is willing and able to threaten it with decisive defeat. A state’s behavior signals its intentions (Jervis 1978, Kydd 2003, Copeland 2015). This applies to NSAs as well as other states. Force can signal resolve to defeat the NSA, while diplomacy can signal willingness to negotiate. A state can also pursue diplomatic initiatives to give the NSA state-like attributes. Technology is increasingly providing leaders with better capabilities to minimize their non-state opponent’s ability to cause harm, perhaps even to a politically acceptable level. In other words, technology is allowing leaders to better manage their asymmetric conflicts with NSAs. Management strategies do not signal either the intention to defeat, or to bargain with the opponent. Therefore, they are not useful for socializing an opponent or revealing bargaining space, and unlikely to advance a conflict’s resolution or termination. Management strategies are especially alluring for state leaders who see themselves as more constrained in the use of large-scale force aimed at achieving decisive victory.

The availability of management options makes more constrained states less likely to pursue hardline policies or painful concessions. Successful denial capabilities increase the allure of management.<sup>2</sup> This increases incentives to develop denial technologies in a self-reinforcing feedback loop. Therefore, capabilities that ostensibly give states more strategic options, instead increase their constraints on pursuing the optimal strategy to end the conflict. As

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<sup>2</sup> “Denial” is the ability to physically mitigate attack. It can be passive or active, defensive or offensive. The key factor is that it mitigates an adversary’s ability to damage a target, not their drive to do so.

hardline strategies become less politically tenable, the state's threat to use them is made less credible. Because management is politically easier to pursue than victory for a highly constrained state, focusing defense procurement on denial capabilities can signal a lack of resolve to defeat the opponent, making bargaining more difficult and increasing conflict duration.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, leaders who perceive themselves to be too constrained to pursue the strategy best suited to socialize the non-state opponent into having characteristics deemed necessary for achieving a bargained end to the conflict, will likely pursue a strategy more aligned with these constraints than with socialization logic. In these cases, the state will be more likely to pursue a management strategy than seek to end the conflict.

Socialization logic is novel in three ways. First, it provides a typology of non-state militants based on how well interstate bargaining concepts can be applied to them. Second, while most research on state conflict against non-state opponents has been at the tactical and operational levels, including: decapitation, and population-versus enemy-centric counterinsurgency, socialization logic looks at the strategic level, to systematize a framework for understanding how leaders pursue the optimal political goal, defined in this book as an end to the conflict on acceptable terms.<sup>4</sup> Third, some studies categorize NSAs; but—unlike socialization logic—they do not explore the possibility that an NSA's characteristics are endogenous to the strategy that the state employs.<sup>5</sup> Nor do they provide a framework that can guide leaders in designing a strategy to end the conflict.<sup>6</sup> Socialization logic synthesizes critical NSA attributes (ideology, leadership structure, and governance function) and the state's strategy (distorted by constraints) into an interactive model.

Socialization logic applies to all regime types. The argument that only autocracies can successfully pursue hardline strategies is misleading. Historically,

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the contrast between Israel's 2008/9 Operation Cast Lead against Hamas in Gaza, and Operation Protective Edge (2014), demonstrates how denial options can overdetermine management strategies. Israel was more hesitant to use decisive force in 2014, after integrating Iron Dome into its defensive arsenal.

<sup>4</sup> For a broad sampling of tactical and operational level scholarship on countering NSAs, see: Galula 1964; Nagl, Amos and Petraeus 2007; Lyall 2009 and 2010; Zhukov 2010; Johnston 2012; Jordan 2014; Price 2014; Byman 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Richardson (2006), and Jordan (2014) classify terrorists according to characteristics (ambition and public support for the former, bureaucratization and public support for the later), their research sheds light upon which groups are most difficult to fight, but not when they will be fought versus managed or bargained with.

<sup>6</sup> Richardson (2006) claims that NSAs with political objectives that give them a local constituency are the most difficult to fight. Jordan (2014) argues that a NSA's reaction to decapitation depends on its bureaucratization and popular support.

democracies have been just as capable as autocracies of utilizing hardline force (Lyal 2010).<sup>7</sup> Powerful autocracies have advantages when it comes to leveraging brutality and stifling domestic opposition and usually face lower internal constraints. However, they are still sensitive to these constraints. Democracies and autocracies alike aim to reduce constraints when their optimal strategy demands hardline force. Like democracies, autocracies must maintain a level of domestic support. They vary in their ability to maintain order due to the strength of their military, economy, and repressive capabilities. Conversely, democracies can face low constraints when they have high public support and political unity. Both types of governments can manipulate their constraints. External constraints are a factor of a state's power within the international system.

In the interstate conflict literature, a state uses force to reveal bargaining space by exposing information about capabilities and resolve. This signals to the actors what they must accept based on the costs they are willing to pay (Fearon 1995; Wagner 2000; Schultz 2001; Reiter 2003; Weeks 2009). In asymmetric relations, capability disparities are largely known. The weaker side clearly knows that it cannot defeat the stronger. However, there is an opposite asymmetry of resolve. The state cares less about destroying the weaker rival than the rival cares about surviving. Therefore, the state is less willing to pay the high costs needed for victory. When the actors acknowledge this, Womack calls this "mature asymmetry." The larger power respects the rival's autonomy while the smaller power respects the larger state's red lines (Womack 2016). If the weaker party is an ideologically driven NSA, absent the threat to defeat the opponent, the state cannot indefinitely deter hostilities with material cost-benefit threats. Therefore, the state must use force to signal resolve to decisively defeat the ideologically driven NSA.

Reiter explains why a state might tenaciously pursue victory instead of negotiating terms if it fears that its opponent might renege. He argues that deterrence is necessary for trusting an opponent's commitments and therefore necessary for concluding a bargain (Reiter 2009). An opponent's credibility does not stem from its prior actions so much as from whether or not it is deterred from those actions in the present and if that deterrence can be expected to persist in the future. To negotiate peace, the state must believe it can come to acceptable terms with its opponent. This is possible with groups espousing pragmatic goals, not with those motivated by absolutist ideologies. The state

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<sup>7</sup> It is a commonly accepted myth that democracies pursue softer-line population-centric counterinsurgency while autocracies pursue enemy-centric strategies. In reality, both strategies entail substantial use of force, showing that democracies are just as capable of hardline strategy. For further discussion see Boot (2013) and Hazelton (2017).

must be able to threaten unacceptable costs for defection and to reward compliance. Finally, the state must believe that its opponent is able to enforce the terms of a bargain and check potential defectors. This means the NSA must have high governance function. Most importantly, the state must believe that it can deter its opponent from resuming conflict. States see this as impossible against an ideologically driven NSA that prioritizes pursuing an absolutist hostile agenda over material wellbeing. The state can socialize some ideologically driven NSAs by demonstrating that it is willing and able to decisively defeat it. Assuming that even the most radical leaders want to survive (if only to fight another day), demonstrating the targetability of NSA leadership greatly boosts the state's belief that it can deter the opponent from resuming conflict in the event of a negotiated settlement. When used as a threat, demonstrating that the state has made the NSA's leadership more targetable, is an important step in socializing the opponent.<sup>8</sup>

### **b. Theory in brief**

In this book, I apply a variation of Reiter's interstate logic to state versus non-state conflict termination. States aim to end conflict, but the main barriers are problems of trust due to uncertainty of present and future intentions. Reiter argues that in interstate war, states solve these problems by obtaining the ability to threaten to impose costs that the opponent is unwilling to pay if it reneges on the deal. Once this is obtained, it can make peace without fearing the opponent's unknowable future intentions (Reiter 2009). This rests on the assumption that states are rational security maximizers. With non-state opponents, states cannot automatically make this assumption. Therefore, to end these wars, states aim to socialize the NSA into a type that pragmatically values security maximization as states are assumed to, can be deterred from resuming violence and can keep its members from resuming violence, as is expected of states. I call the state's efforts to shape the opponent's characteristics in this direction, "socialization." Building on Reiter's logic that sees deterrence as a prerequisite for peace, the three key NSA characteristics for socialization logic: (1) ideological versus pragmatic drive, (2) high versus low governance function and (3) high versus low leadership targetability, enable the state to determine the feasibility of bargaining with a NSA by

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<sup>8</sup> Leadership should not be targeted simply for the sake of eliminating them because this can make bargaining more difficult if it splinters the group or brings about more extremist leaders. (Dear 2013). With groups considered impossible to bargain with, leadership targeting is part of a decisive victory strategy. With constrained states it is often used as a form of management by degrading an opponent's operational capabilities.

defining: (a) if the state can deter its opponent from resuming conflict and (b) if its opponent can suppress hardline “spoilers” to keep the peace.<sup>9</sup>

I define ideological motivation as the extent to which the group is driven by the imperatives of an absolutist ideology versus the pragmatic aims that realists define as states’ primary motive—security maximization to ensure survival. Governance function refers to capacity and accountability; whether the group controls a monopoly on violence, has bureaucratic capacity and faces credible competition. Leadership targetability refers to how easily the state can target its non-state opponent’s leadership. This is a function of geography, intelligence, military capabilities and the NSA’s structural organization.<sup>10</sup> These variables impact whether the NSA can be deterred and can prevent the resumption of violence.<sup>11</sup>

States view NSAs with low ideological motivation, high governance function and easily targeted leadership, as those most suitable for bargaining. With these types, a state’s optimal strategy is to pursue soft-line policies, e.g. concessions, supporting and augmenting the NSA’s governing capacity, and negotiation. At the other end of the spectrum are groups with high ideological motivation, minimal governance function and difficult to target leadership. States deem these “archetypal terrorist organizations,” impossible to deter or bargain with, leaving the state with the optimal strategy of pursuing decisive victory to end the conflict.<sup>12</sup>

The majority of NSAs fall between these two extremes. It is against these opponents that a state’s optimal strategy involves socialization logic’s carrot and stick approach. Force is needed to socialize the opponent into a more moderate type by threatening its continued existence unless it moderates its ideology, and by threatening the lives of its leadership by demonstrating the ability to eliminate them. Diplomacy is needed to build trust and increase governance function. Here, the goal of force and diplomacy is to socialize the opponent into the type most amenable to bargaining and then negotiate an end to the conflict.

Socialization logic bridges theories of interstate conflict and what is often called the counterinsurgency or terrorism literature. This makes it difficult to

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<sup>9</sup> For further reading on the spoiler concept see Stedman (1997).

<sup>10</sup> Hierarchical groups are generally more vulnerable to decapitation.

<sup>11</sup> The capacity component of governance function is critical for how the state views the ability of the non-state opponent to uphold the terms of the bargain and suppress violence by spoilers aimed at derailing negotiations.

<sup>12</sup> In these cases, decisive victory can mean permanent and complete dominance, disarmament, and even annihilation. This strategy can be extremely materially and politically costly.

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