Rival Consolidation in Nascent Insurrections: Why Some Militant Groups Wage Sustained Insurgencies

by Michael Shkolnik

Editor's Note:

This article has been written by invitation of the chairman of the jury of the Terrorism Research Initiative. It summarizes key aspects of Michael Shkolnik's doctoral dissertation, "Rival Consolidation in Nascent Insurrections: Why Some Militant Groups Wage Sustained Insurgencies" (Carleton University) for which he was the co-recipient of the TRI Award for the best PhD thesis in the field of terrorism studies written in 2019 or 2020. For more information on the Award, see the Announcement at the end of this issue of Perspectives on Terrorism.

Abstract

Why do some militant groups wage sustained insurgencies while other groups do not? This study shows that shifts in nascent rival relations between militant groups, from competition to consolidation, are key to understanding this puzzle. A militant group which has consolidated its rivals—whether by destruction, merger, or hegemonic dominance—should be in a stronger position to fight the target state than groups preoccupied with counterproductive violence against rivals within a militant movement. This study uses a multi-method, three-stage, research design starting with a novel quantitative regression analysis of 246 prominent militant groups worldwide from 1970–2007, featured in the Global Terrorism Database. I find that, on average, organizational capacity and constituency dominance are stronger indicators for engagement in sustained insurgencies than traditional proxies for observable group capabilities, thereby challenging conventional wisdom. The second stage focuses on a more bounded population (Middle Eastern and North African insurgent groups) and uses cross-case comparative methods to build my theory based on three forms of primary rival relations: competition (infighting or outbidding), strategic alliance, and hegemonic consolidation. Process-tracing methods are also used to explore within-case inferences and identify causal mechanisms in three diverse case studies: Hezbollah, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Rival consolidation helps dominant groups mobilize resources effectively and overcome two major organizational hurdles: collective action and principal-agent problems. Without major competitors, dominant groups attract recruits and support, while militant leaders divert their attention to strengthening organizational capacity and preparing for war with the target state. My temporal theory of rival consolidation offers a more compelling explanation that accounts for the timing of insurgency onset, compared to scholarly arguments that rely on largely static factors or remain incomplete. From a policy perspective, this study challenges assumptions and presents a generalizable framework identifying nascent rival relations as a pragmatic indicator that can help counterterrorism analysts and practitioners better anticipate potential insurgent threats.

Keywords: Terrorism; insurgency; armed conflict; militant group; Middle East; mixed methods

Introduction

Why do some militant groups wage sustained armed conflicts (or insurgencies) while other groups do not? It is puzzling why some armed groups, like the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) or Hezbollah, evolve from a ragtag group of fighters into formidable forces that confront far more powerful militaries. Most militant groups do not survive beyond their first, and most vulnerable, year of existence.[1] Even fewer wage full-fledged insurgencies. Some groups, like the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood or Egypt's al-Jamm'a al-Islamiya, launched armed insurrections but failed to sustain military operations against their respective target regimes beyond a few years. Among 246 of the most prominent militant groups featured in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD),

I identify 77 (~31 percent) groups that have waged a sustained insurgency against their target state.[2] What explains this variation?

Research on insurgency tends to focus on why some insurgent groups defeat the states they fight or why some groups fighting in a civil war target civilians under certain conditions.[3] A more recent research program assesses militant groups largely based on organizational cohesion or capability indicators such as group strength, size, or control of territory to help determine civil war dynamics and outcomes.[4] More importantly, this body of research tends to prioritize powerful militant groups that are already fighting in full-fledged insurgencies or civil wars. The processes and dynamics characterizing the initial stages of insurgency prior to armed conflict onset remain poorly understood. There are few scholarly attempts trying to explain why some nascent militant groups evolve to into viable insurgent threats in the first place.[5]

This research puzzle poses important implications for policy since militant groups that are capable of launching sustained operations gain more influence, enhance recruitment, and increase fundraising capabilities while further weakening the target state. The Islamic State's attacks on Iraqi police and military targets in 2014, for example, diminished government resources and deterred recruitment into the state's already-fragile security apparatuses, creating more power vacuums that enabled the insurgent group to seize territory and pursue its strategic objectives.[6] By launching a sustained armed conflict, organizations also improve their coercive bargaining power vis-à-vis the state.[7] From a policy-making perspective, nascent militant groups tend to be most vulnerable in their early stages and states maintain crucial influence over their trajectories. It is far easier for states to prevent a nascent insurrection from developing than defeating a matured and consolidated insurgent organization.[8]

This article summarizes findings from my Ph.D. dissertation and proceeds as follows. I briefly review related literature and present my theory before defining key concepts. Subsequent sections outline the multi-method research design and briefly discuss the results. The final sections identify implications for theory and policy, concluding with some future directions for research.

Indicators of Proto-insurgency Success

Byman (2008) launched a discussion that motivates this study's research puzzle by outlining key factors explaining why some nascent militant groups evolve into mature insurgent organizations. To facilitate this transition, a group usually needs to establish a salient identity related to a popular cause or grievances that resonate with constituents beyond the founding group members. Some militant groups should be more capable of capitalizing on grievances than others—particularly religious and ethno-nationalist groups that can draw on resources from a well-defined constituency.[9] Groups seeking to challenge the target regime need to also consolidate a safe haven to effectively train, recruit fighters, and hide from national counterinsurgent or local security forces. Territorial control plays a particularly important role—enabling militant groups to shift tactics, from bombings largely targeting civilians often associated with clandestine terrorist groups to hit-and-run guerrilla strikes against military targets.[10] Would-be insurgent groups also need access to sufficient resources to sustain militant operations and to develop durable organizational structures that ensure group cohesion. Outside support, like state sponsorship, is often cited as a key factor in a militant group's broader success.[11] But in some cases, state sponsorship can destabilize militant group objectives—especially if the sponsor shifts its support to a rival group to punish its proxy.[12] Other rival organizations, not the target government, are usually the focus of nascent militant groups during the initial phases of an armed insurrection. Competition with rival groups is a critical part of the origins story behind some of the most well-known militant groups, such as Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Palestinian Fatah, and Lebanon's Hezbollah.[13]

My dissertation starts with a comprehensive review of relatively disparate literatures on terrorism dynamics, insurgency development, and civil war onset. By integrating insights from related research, I identify debates and gaps in the literature that help produce testable hypotheses for further exploration. The literature review outlines rival explanations and different ways to assess militant group success, allowing me to build a new theory and test the argument against competing alternatives.

A Theory of Rival Consolidation in Nascent Insurrections

So, why do some armed groups wage full-blown insurgencies? And what explains the timing of insurgency onset? There is no single pathway that can explain all cases, and each counter-militancy campaign requires context-specific tools. However, I argue that shifts in rival relations between militant groups—from competition to consolidation—are key to understanding this research puzzle. A militant group which dominates its constituency and has consolidated its rivals—whether by destruction, merger, or hegemonic dominance—should be in a stronger position to fight the target state than groups preoccupied with counterproductive violence against rivals within a militant movement.[14] My research focuses on relations between prominent militant groups and rivals within a broader movement that represent a similar constituency (e.g., Turkish Kurds, Syrian Sunnis, Lebanese Shi'a). Rival groups may differ on ideology or ultimate objectives—like secession or regime change. But the unifying trait is the common constituency they emerge from and claim to defend.[15]

Highly competitive movements force groups to pay most of their attention to internal matters, such as enhancing recruitment and improving their own positions within the wider movement. Through the strategic use of violence, prominent militant groups can eclipse more established rival groups to gain dominance over their respective constituencies.[16] Militant groups vying for constituency support may escalate violence to outbid rivals or directly fight one another in an effort to destroy the competition. Militant groups that unite in a strategic alliance, however, should have a better chance at mounting a sustained insurgency than groups preoccupied with violent competition. Strategic alliances allow groups to plan and coordinate attacks against a common enemy. But groups in an alliance still maintain loyalty to their respective chains of command despite efforts to cooperate strategically. Disagreements over ideology and leadership are some of the reasons that militant alliances tend to be fragile and often break down, especially within civil war contexts.

In the nascent stages of an insurrection, I expect that militant groups are primarily focused on two organizational hurdles: overcoming collective action and principal-agent problems.[17] Consolidating constituent rivals and reducing counterproductive violence (e.g., infighting, outbidding) from within the militant movement should help alleviate these issues. Dominant militant groups that consolidate their rivals have access to new resources—pooled from other organizations or derived from the local constituency.[18] Without other viable options, dominant groups are in a stronger position to persuade nonaligned civilians to support or formally join the organization. While alleviating the more immediate collective action problem, militant leaders can divert more of their attention to strengthening their internal organizational capacity and preparing for war with the target state. Lacking major competitors, leading militant groups signal their credibility to members and are in a better position to keep lower-ranking fighters in line with leadership objectives, helping address principal-agent problems.[19] Hegemonic militant groups are also in a stronger position to secure a critical safe haven to sustain an insurgency, attract outside support, and effectively absorb new resources. My temporal theory of rival consolidation offers a more compelling explanation that accounts for the timing of sustained insurgency onset, compared to existing scholarly explanations that either rely on largely static factors or remain incomplete.

Unit-of-Analysis: Militant Group

I define militant group as a collective organization with a designated name that engages in the use of illegal violence to achieve a political or ideological goal.[20] My broader sample is drawn from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and encompasses prominent militant organizations that survive their most vulnerable first year and have conducted at least 10 attacks throughout their lifespan.[21] I argue that these organizations represent a set of potential militant groups that engage in sustained insurgencies because they demonstrate a willingness and serious capacity to use violence to address some grievance against their target states. My research focuses on militant groups operating primarily from the states where they emerge. Transnational terrorist groups, like the Japanese Red Army, which execute the overwhelming majority of attacks outside their origin state, are left out of the analysis.[22] Armed groups affiliated with transnational vanguard organizations like al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, which mainly participate in local insurgencies, are within this study's scope.[23]

Dependent Variable: Sustained Insurgency

I define insurgency based on the relatively fine-grained UCDP armed conflict data set which includes lower-intensity conflicts, characterizing the phenomenon as: “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year.”[24] A “sustained insurgency”, for this study’s purpose, refers to an armed conflict between a militant organization and an enemy state characterized by violent hostilities at this threshold for a minimum of five consecutive years.[25] It is important to avoid discounting prominent militant groups that participate in lower-intensity armed conflicts or those that never launch full-blown insurgencies in the first place.

Failing to sustain an armed conflict is conceptualized broadly as encompassing groups that do not get an insurgency off the ground or are defeated within the first few years after the onset of an armed conflict. Both militant groups and states would prefer to fight and win early, as opposed to sustaining operations for a long time. There are several ways that militant groups, who want to militarily challenge a state, fail to sustain an insurgency. Some groups may achieve their political objectives through negotiations or concessions from the state before widespread hostilities erupt. Other groups could ultimately defeat the target state within a few years and avoid a drawn-out conflict—although this outcome is extremely rare.[26] Some militant groups eventually renounce violence, while others are crushed militarily or through the efforts of law enforcement. This study does not explicitly distinguish between the various ways that militant groups cease to exist as violent threats or fail to launch a sustained insurgency.[27]

Research Design

Quantitative Regression Analysis (Large-n)

To test this puzzle, I use a mixed-methods, three-stage research design based on different ontological understandings of causation. In the first stage, I conduct quantitative regression analysis—using a probit estimating technique—on 246 prominent militant groups active between 1970–2007 and featured in the GTD. I code my dependent variable based on existing armed conflict data sets, primarily the UCDP, and secondary literature to determine which of the militant groups under study engage in sustained armed conflicts.

I first adopt a macro-level approach to make cross-case inferences among a wider population: prominent militant groups from around the world throughout an almost 40-year time period. Large-n quantitative analysis relies on a variance-based ontological understanding of causation, which focuses on the average mean effects of certain factors—holding other variables constant.[28] While I make efforts to account for endogeneity, clear causal explanations are difficult to establish at this stage of the analysis.[29] However, my quantitative findings present generalizable empirical associations across diverse militant groups and highlight interesting factors to unpack in subsequent analyses.

Comparative Methods (Small-n)

The second stage of the research design explores a positive-on-outcome (similar to Mill’s method-of-agreement) comparative analysis of all 10 Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) militant groups that engage in sustained armed conflicts. Relying on a comparative logic of elimination, this exercise is used to disconfirm individually necessary conditions and to potentially identify one or more particular variables that are most commonly associated with the outcome of interest.[30] This method helps identify cross-case inferences across a more bounded population and develop more limited-scope conditions for a particular theory to operate.

Case-based researchers understandably find limited value in purely large-n quantitative approaches and often place a high value on similar contextual conditions. For example, comparativists are likely to point out that the causes of democratization in Latin America differ considerably from Western Europe. According to this view, lumping all cases of democratization (and lack of democratization) across the world would skew results

for a highly contextual phenomenon. Similarly, factors driving militant mobilization and armed conflicts in 1970s Latin America vary widely from post-9/11 Islamist insurgencies. Case study researchers therefore tend to prioritize a more in-depth analysis of a small number of militant groups, usually from a particular region and time period.

Whereas quantitative or variance-based scholars warn against selecting on the dependent variable, picking cases solely based on their membership in the outcome (or where the dependent variable equals one in variance-based terminology) can also yield interesting results in a search for a more generalizable theoretical understanding of the phenomenon in question.[31] My quantitative regression and qualitative comparative methods explore important, yet different, causal inferences and justify case selection for a deeper inquiry.[32]

Case Studies (n=1)

In the third and final stage of the research design, I carry out three in-depth case studies. I use process-tracing methods and a mechanistic logic of causation to explore within-case inferences.[33] Unlike the large-n quantitative or small-n cross-case comparative analysis, the case studies are used to identify specific causal mechanisms linking my cause of interest (i.e., rival consolidation) to the outcome (i.e., onset of sustained insurgency). Rival plausible explanations are taken into account throughout each case study. My approach mirrors the logic of historical explanation and the sequence elaboration method, whereby the relative importance of causes is evaluated based on their temporal position and role within a particular chain of events.[34]

To conduct the case studies, I primarily rely on prominent journalistic and historical accounts for each case, in addition to scholarly books and journal articles. I also consult older news articles, government sources, and declassified intelligence reports for specific pieces of evidence and information using source-aggregating programs such as Lexis Nexis, ProQuest, and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. This more detail-oriented approach better outlines how relations with rivals impact the trajectory of prominent militant groups during their nascent stages.

Some qualitative methodologists suggest that case study research should rely on an asymmetric understanding of causation.[35] Through this ontological prism, understanding why some militant groups engage in sustained armed conflicts is not necessarily the inverse of why others fail. However, keeping in line with variance-based logics of causation, I also explore a deviant or “negative” case—a group that seemed to have a chance to sustain a nascent insurgency but failed to do so.[36] The following table summarizes the different methods and logics of causal inference used in this study.

Table 1: Different Methods & Logics of Causal Inference in This Study

Method	Quantitative Regression Analysis (Large-n)	Comparative Methods (Small-n)	Process-Tracing Case Studies (n = 1)
Ontological Understanding of Causation	Variance-based, frequentist logic	Comparative logic of elimination	Mechanistic logic
Types of Causality Assessed	Mean causal effect of independent variable X on dependent variable Y	Necessary and/or sufficient conditions that produce Y	Identifying causal mechanisms, linking cause(s) to an outcome
Types of Inferences	Cross-case inferences to the broader population	Cross-case inferences to more contextualized population	Within-case inferences
Associated Components of this Study	Probit analysis of militant groups worldwide from 1970-2007	Theory-building exercise (Positive-on-Outcome analysis); disconfirming individually necessary conditions	Case studies identifying causal mechanisms

Summary of Findings

Quantitative Regression Findings:

Motivation, Organizational Structure & Competitive Environments

This study is the first attempt, to my knowledge, to empirically test determinants of militant group engagement in sustained insurgencies. By exploring a novel outcome of interest and incorporating all prominent militant groups—not just those groups already waging insurgency—the first stage of my analysis helps overcome selection biases prevalent in the quantitative literature on insurgency and civil war.[37]

Guided by a social movement framework, I find that proxies for organizational capacity and constituency dominance are stronger indicators, on average, for engagement in sustained armed conflicts than traditional proxies for observable group capabilities (e.g., group size, multiple & coordinated attacks, hard target strikes).[38] Overall, my quantitative model correctly classifies roughly 85% of the cases under study.

Religious groups rarely achieve their ultimate objectives.[39] But my findings suggest that religiously motivated militant groups are far more likely to engage in sustained armed conflicts than other ideologically oriented groups—whether they are ultimately successful or not. Religious militant groups often rely on relatively robust social networks and may be in a stronger position than other types of groups to mobilize resources for war. Religiously motivated groups also tend to be more lethal and maintain indivisible objectives, making negotiated settlements improbable and armed conflict more likely.[40]

More centralized and integrated groups are more capable of allocating resources effectively and keeping lower-ranking members in line with the group's broader objectives.[41] Militant groups with hierarchical structures tend to be more lethal and have a higher likelihood of ultimately defeating the states they fight.[42] But by

looking at a different dependent variable, my findings challenge conventional wisdom: groups with relatively less centralized command and control are similarly as likely to engage in sustained armed conflict as the most hierarchically structured organizations. It may be more difficult for states to disrupt less-hierarchical militant groups, which often rely on more autonomous and flexible units that better adapt to battlefield conditions.

A militant group's competitive environment plays an especially important role. I find that the more militant groups there are operating in a state, the less likely a particular militant group is to engage in a sustained armed conflict. Environments with more militant groups likely reflect increased levels of competition for limited resources and constituency support. After conducting the comparative analysis presented below, I identify a new cause of interest (constituency dominance) and incorporate the variable into a more powerful quantitative model. I find that the proxy for constituency dominance outperforms many other measures. This type of iterative process, similar to other forms of nested analyses, better synthesizes the various components of my research design.[43]

Previous research shows that in a full-fledged war, governments are more likely to defeat a single-group insurgency compared to a multi-group insurgency.[44] But a single-group insurrection—featuring only one active group at the time an armed conflict is launched—is the strongest determinant of whether a particular militant group challenges a target state in a sustained insurgency or not. Dominant groups may have been embroiled in a more competitive environment prior to consolidating rivals and then challenging the regime. This dynamic is particularly crucial among militant groups in the early phases preceding the onset of insurgency, as organizations strive to dominate a wider movement in order to pursue more strategic objectives vis-à-vis the states they fight.[45]

Comparative Analysis Findings:

Constituency Dominance as a Key Determinant of Sustained Insurgency Onset

I develop my theory of rival consolidation in nascent insurrections based on this study's quantitative and qualitative comparative analyses, and insights from recent research on militant group relations. Militant groups engage (or do not engage) in sustained armed conflicts in a variety of contexts—in weak and relatively strong states, in democracies or autocracies, with the help of a state sponsor and without, with varying levels of capabilities, resource profiles, and territorial control, with different motivations and organizational structures, and facing diverse counterinsurgency campaigns.

A comparative analysis of all 10 MENA groups that wage sustained insurgencies in this study suggests that no single theoretically relevant causal factor can be deemed an individually necessary condition. Yet one factor stands out when comparing all positive-on-outcome cases: being the *Top Dog* (a militant group that commits the most attacks—against military and/or civilian targets—in a given year compared to all other active militant groups in their country of origin) at or around the time they begin engaging the target state in a sustained armed conflict. Of course, in reality, the most active group does not necessarily mean it is the most powerful. But being the most active militant group in a particular environment is a crude, yet intuitive, proxy for groups that dominate their constituencies before going on to challenge the regime.[46]

This proxy for constituency dominance further approximates reality when a particular militant group maintains its *Top Dog* status throughout the initial stages of the armed conflict. For example, the PKK and LTTE emerged in the mid-1970s and early 1980s and dedicated most of their attacks against rival Kurdish and Tamil groups, respectively, until challenging regime forces in an armed conflict in the mid-1980s. Both groups are the *Top Dog* groups in their respective environments throughout the early years of full-fledged armed conflict.

Table 2: Positive-on-Outcome Analysis

Militant Group	Country	Start Year (Insurgency Year)	Ideology	Goal	Militant Origins	Org. Structure	Regime Type	# of Groups	Criminal Engagement	External State Support	Territorial Control	Top Dog
Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK)	Iran	1965 (1979)	Religious (*Shia Islamist*)/ Marxist-Leninist	Regime change	Political party	Bureaucracy	Autocracy	1	None	Military	No	Yes
Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)	Turkey	1978 (1984)	Nationalist (*Kurdish*)/	Territorial control	Student group	Bureaucracy	Democracy	2	Trafficking; Extortion; Narcotics	Military	Yes	Yes
Polisario Front	Morocco	1973 (1975)	Nationalist (*Sahrawi*)	Territorial control	Splinter; student/youth group (Merger)	Bureaucracy	Autocracy	1	Trafficking; Robbery	Military	Yes	Yes
Hezbollah	Lebanon	1982 (1990)	Religious (*Shia Islam*)	Regime change	Splinter (Merger)	Bureaucracy	Anocracy	14	Fraud; Narcotics	Military	Yes	Yes
al-Jamma al-Islamiya	Egypt	1977 (1993)	Religious (*Sunni Islamism*)	Social revolution	Informal political/social movement	All-Channel	Autocracy	3	None	Military	No	Yes
Armed Islamic Group (GIA)	Algeria	1992 (1993)	Religious	Regime change	Political party	Bureaucracy	Autocracy	5	Extortion; robbery	Military	No	Yes
Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)	Algeria	1998 (1999)	Religious	Social revolution	Splinter	All-Channel	Autocracy	4	None	None	No	Yes
Hamas	Israel/ Palestinian territories	1987 (1993)	Nationalist/ Religious (Islamist)	Territorial control	Religious organization/ movement	Hub-Spoke	Democracy	8	None	Non-Military	No	Yes
Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)	Israel/ Palestinian territories	1964 (1965)	Nationalist	Territorial control	Refugee community; foreign fighters	Bureaucracy	Democracy	1	Extortion	Military	Yes	Yes
Palestinian Islamic Jihad	Israel/ Palestinian territories	1978 (2002)	Religious/ nationalist	Territorial control	Religious organization/ movement	Hub-Spoke	Democracy	9	None	Non-military	No	No

I narrow in on the MENA region because of gaps in related scholarly work and for policy-relevant reasons.[47] The few systematic studies that explore similar research puzzles from the militant group's perspective focus on other geographic regions, including Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South/Southeast Asia.[48] While other regions experienced declines in violent intra-state conflicts since the early 1990s, violent conflicts have generally increased in the MENA region over the past two decades.[49] The MENA region also witnessed the most dramatic rise in terrorist attacks during this period.[50] Compared to civil wars and insurgencies in other regions, violent conflicts in the MENA region are far more difficult to resolve and impact international security to a greater degree.[51]

Many comparative studies on militant groups set up a most-similar systems design, whereby groups are selected based on sharing all similar traits except for the cause of interest that seems to vary accordingly with the outcome. In reality, however, it is very difficult to control for all theoretically relevant variables given that insurgencies vary considerably across contexts. For example, two groups selected for comparison may emerge in relatively weak states with access to state sponsorship. Digging deeper into factors that are selected as qualitative controls may reveal that each group receives different levels of outside support (i.e., military assistance vs. logistical assistance) or face varying levels of repression or weak counterinsurgency campaigns. In this study, on the other hand, a positive-on-outcome design was adopted which is rarely used in the social scientific study of militant groups. As discussed, militant groups emerge in a variety of contexts. But constituency dominance is one factor that seems to unite prominent militant groups that fight in sustained insurgencies.

Militant groups that consolidate their constituent rivals are in a stronger position to mobilize resources and shift attention toward fighting the state than groups embroiled in counterproductive competition. Insights from this argument correspond to Peter Krause's (2017) work which argues that hegemonic movements featuring one clearly dominant militant organization are most likely to achieve broader strategic successes—such as statehood or the expulsion of an occupying force compared to united or fragmented movements lacking a clear hegemon. Internal power distribution is at the core of Krause's argument, whereby strength is operationalized as a function of a group's membership, popular support, and financial resources.[52] But these measures, including public opinion polling or seats in political institutions are not as useful or appropriate in the study of nascent militant groups prior to the onset of insurgency. Militant groups do not need large numbers of members to get an insurgency off the ground. Similarly, militant groups usually secure major forms of financing and domestic political support or representation only after developing sufficient coercive capacity and maturing into viable insurgent organizations. While Krause's movement structure theory is instructive here, I argue that the primary nature of nascent relations between rivals is a more appropriate and pragmatic indicator to address why some militant groups launch a full-fledged insurgency—irrespective of whether they attain other strategic or ultimate objectives.

The following table outlines the main types of militant group relations in descending order, from the highest level of rival consolidation to the lowest: hegemonic takeover/umbrella structure (merger);[53] strategic alliance;[54] destructive competition/competitive escalation.[55] Table 3 includes key attributes for each type of rival relation and expected outcome, from the perspective of the leading group in a wider militant movement. The more rival consolidation a dominant group achieves, the more likely it will wage a full-blown insurgency.

Table 3: Rival Relations and Expected Likelihood of Sustained Insurgency Onset

Rival Relations	Attributes	Implications	Sustained Insurgency: Expected Likelihood
Hegemonic Consolidation/ Umbrella Structure	Single hegemonic group or common command and control among constituent rivals led by dominant group; rivals are consolidated; pooled resources/fighters	Dominant group more prepared to overcome organizational hurdles, shift focus to combatting regime; subordinate groups too weak to challenge dominant group; prospect for counterproductive violence is minimized	Most Likely
Strategic Alliance	A coalition of groups maintaining independent chains of command; pooled resources/fighters among constituent rivals, more focus on targeting regime	Dominant group maintains leadership, but challenging groups could disrupt alliance through counterproductive forms of violence	More Likely
Destructive Competition / Competitive Escalation	Groups battling each other for resources and dominance, targeting rivals and/or constituent civilians to coerce support; groups may target the regime as part of competitive dynamics	Violent infighting; chain-ganging or outbidding may occur; counterproductive to strategic gains as groups mainly focused on internal fights	Unlikely

Case Studies: Consolidating Rivals on the Road to War

In my dissertation, I test my argument against other major explanations via case studies, using process-tracing techniques to identify causal mechanisms largely consistent with my theoretical expectations. The nascent trajectories of the Lebanese Hezbollah (1982–1991) and the PKK in Turkey (1976–1984)—from group formation to sustained armed conflict onset—are briefly outlined below. These two well-known groups are selected as *typical* cases (where both the main factor and outcome of interest are present) to assess the explanatory power of my theory.[56] My theoretical framework and case studies are explored in greater detail in my Ph.D. dissertation and forthcoming publications.

By successfully outbidding and eliminating its competitors, Iran-backed Hezbollah was able to siphon resources from its rivals, solidify territorial control in southern Lebanon, build its organization, and prepare for a sustained guerrilla war against Israel. Though initially seeking to derail Hezbollah, the Syrian government joined Iran to throw its full weight behind the militant organization only after it emerged as the hegemonic Shi'a militant organization in 1990.[57] Hezbollah was then able to shift its efforts from primarily internal fights to waging a sustained campaign of attrition against Israel's military presence in southern Lebanon.

Similarly, the PKK successfully outbid its more established Kurdish rivals through the strategic use of violence during its early years. By targeting landowning elite and leaders involved in tribal feuds, the PKK integrated itself among a rural base of support and gained notoriety as a credible militant organization willing to conduct risky operations for the Kurdish nationalist cause.[58] The PKK emerged as one of the only viable options for Kurds who did not want to side with an increasingly ruthless regime.[59] Syrian state support was critical for the PKK's early survival. But the Assad regime hosted many other anti-Turkey groups at the time and considerably limited the PKK's freedom of action. While failing to solidify a strategic alliance with weaker rivals, a hegemonic PKK was powerful enough to shift its attention from internal fights to waging an insurgency.

In 1983, the PKK relied on its hegemonic status to negotiate an agreement with Iraq-based Kurdish militants and secure a critical safe haven along a mountainous border region.[60] From its new base of operations, relatively safe from Turkish military reprisals, the PKK launched a sustained armed conflict which solidified its dominance over the Kurdish constituency in Turkey.[61] The PKK's leadership would have likely delayed or halted its decision to launch an insurgency had its main Kurdish rivals persisted to challenge the organization for dominance of the constituency.

The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (MB), on the other hand, is a type of deviant case that my quantitative model incorrectly expected to sustain an armed conflict. This "negative" case offers both support for my argument and exposes key theoretical limitations, since the MB's failure can be attributed to several causes. While the Assad regime's unrestrained counterinsurgency approach would have likely crushed the nascent insurrection regardless, the MB's failure to consolidate its rivals is a critical part of the story leading to its demise as a militant threat.

In 1979, the Combatant Vanguard, a radical faction turned splinter group, escalated attacks against the Assad regime which pressured the MB to join the fight or risk being sidelined.[62] In essence, the MB was chain-ganged into a war it was not ready to wage. Despite the establishment of a strategic alliance between the MB and its rivals, ideological and personal differences constantly disrupted any meaningful cooperation. Because of constant infighting within the Islamist movement, the Brotherhood also failed to overcome principal-agent problems as fighters in the field lacked direction and coordination at key turning points of the conflict.[63] As a result, the Syrian MB failed to secure sufficient sources of external support and failed to withstand the Syrian regime's onslaught culminating in the 1982 Hama massacre.

Rival Relations and Rival Explanations: Implications for Theory

By pitting my theory against rival explanations, this study poses important implications for theory and scholarship. Rival consolidation theory offers a stronger account of why the PKK and Hezbollah engaged in a sustained armed conflict (and why the Syrian MB failed) against more powerful states than other explanations that rely on largely static factors or remain incomplete. The temporal nature of my theory also better explains the timing of sustained armed conflict onset than rival explanations. Grievances, ultimate goals, and group ideology remained largely constant during each group's nascent stages. Both the PKK and Hezbollah's organizational structure and military capacity to wage guerrilla war expanded as they consolidated their main rivals. Both groups only secured critical forms of outside support and solidified access to a robust safe haven after they emerged as the hegemonic militant group among their respective constituencies. Without viable competitors and counterproductive violence minimized, Hezbollah and the PKK mobilized resources and shifted their focus to fighting Israel and Turkey respectively, in sustained campaigns of attrition.

The Syrian MB's leadership, however, remained distracted with internal fights which proved destabilizing during Syria's nascent Islamist insurrection. The MB's failure to consolidate rivals inhibited the group's ability to mobilize sufficient resources and support to sustain an insurgency.

Policy Implications and Future Directions for Research

My findings also pose important implications for policy. Counterinsurgency analysts and practitioners tend to assess insurgent threats based on observable group capabilities, like territorial control or weapon stockpiles, but should divert more attention to analyzing the primary nature of rival relations in the nascent stages of a potential insurgency. It should be easier for analysts to monitor and assess the consequences of different rival relations than to try measuring more complex and clandestine indicators in real time, such as an organization's prewar social ties or the relative power distribution within a wider movement.

The period between rival consolidation and insurgency onset is itself an overlooked indicator which may reflect a relative calm before the storm. In both the Hezbollah and PKK cases, violence temporarily dropped after each group sufficiently consolidated their rivals and emerged as the hegemons of their respective constituencies. Without viable competitors, both groups' leaderships increasingly focused on absorbing new resources, solidifying safe havens, and preparing for an insurgency against their target states. Both Israel and Turkey, to different extents, underestimated the nascent militant threats they faced and paid a heavy price as a result. While neither militant group achieved its ultimate objectives, they are enduring and resilient organizations that continue to pose threats to their enemies.

Analysis of nascent rival relations should be incorporated in government foresight exercises and intelligence assessments focused on identifying plausible insurgent-related trends or futures. If a dominant militant group is preoccupied with fighting and competing with constituent rivals, then it is unlikely to be in a strong position to shift its attention and capabilities toward launching a sustained insurgency against a target state. If, however, a group successfully consolidates rivals, to the point that counterproductive intra-movement violence ceases, then the likelihood of sustained insurgency onset increases. However, more research is needed before specific policy recommendations can be prescribed.

As part of my broader research program, I am working on projects using new data to evaluate why some insurgent organizations escalate their level of violence to higher-intensity armed conflicts or civil war. One co-authored study (forthcoming in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*) emphasizes the importance of insurgent alliances in fueling armed conflicts to new heights.[64] Out-of-sample case studies from diverse regions will also expand our understanding of proto-insurgency development. For the sake of parsimony in this study, I am fairly agnostic on how militant groups consolidate their rivals to explain insurgency onset. But why do some groups mainly destroy their rivals during stages of infighting while others consolidate by merging under an umbrella structure? What are the implications for diverse consolidation processes on insurgent trajectories? Future research can dig deeper into my findings to enhance our understanding of insurgency onset, given that rival relations play a critical role in explaining why some militant groups pose insurgent challenges to the states they fight.

About the Author: **Michael Shkolnik** *is a fellow and sessional lecturer at Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA), focusing on the evolution of terrorist and insurgent organizations. He is also a policy analyst with the Government of Canada. Michael was a senior advisor with the Strategic Foresight unit in Canada's foreign ministry, where he previously served as the Cadieux-Léger fellow on a scholar-in-residence program. Over the past decade, Michael worked with various counterterrorism and international security institutes in Ottawa, Washington DC, and Israel. He received a Ph.D. in international affairs from NPSIA and an MA in counter-terrorism and homeland security studies from the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya in Israel. His award-winning Ph.D. thesis is available at: https://curve.carleton.ca/a1dc7fa6-b609-40a8-a8de-59b6905f8740.*

Disclaimer: The views expressed here are strictly those of the author and do not reflect endorsement by the Government of Canada.

Notes

[1] Bruce Hoffman, "The Modern Terrorist Mindset"; in: Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer (Eds.), *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment,* (Gilford, CT: McGraw Hill, 2002), 84. Dugan (2012) finds that 74 percent of the militant groups in the Global Terrorism Database between 1970 and 2007 ceased to operate within their first year. See Laura Dugan, "The Making of the Global Terrorism Database and Its Applicability to Studying the Life Cycles of Terrorist Organizations"; in: David Gadd, Susanne Karstedt, and Steven F. Messner (Eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Criminological Research Methods*. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012). Brian Phillips, however, examines the most prominent data sets on militant group longevity and finds that—depending on the sample—25–74 percent of groups do not survive past their first year. See Brian J. Phillips, "Do 90 Percent of Terrorist Groups Last Less than a Year? Updating the Conventional Wisdom," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 6 (2017): 1255–1265.

[2] The 246 prominent militant groups are identified in Joshua Kilberg, "Organizing for Destruction: How Organizational Structure Affects Terrorist Group Behaviour" (Ph.D. diss., Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, 2011).

[3] Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010); Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III, "Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars," *International Organization* 63 (2009): 67–106; Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, "Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 3 (2006): 429–447; Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[4] Sarah E. Parkinson and Sherry Zaks, "Militant and Rebel Organization(s)," *Comparative Politics*, 50, no. 4 (2018): 271–293.

[5] One notable exception is Janet Lewis's (2012) dissertation, which tackles a similar puzzle concerning why some nascent rebel groups in Uganda evolve into viable threats. See Janet I. Lewis, "How Rebellion Begins: Insurgent Group Formation and Viability in Uganda" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2012).

[6] Will McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), 80–81.

[7] The probability of militant group collapse is highest at the early stages of an insurgency; groups significantly improve their chances of survival over time. See Navin A. Bapat, "Insurgency and the Opening of Peace Processes," *Journal of Peace Research* 42 no. 6 (2005): 699–717.

[8] Once an insurgency survives its most incipient and vulnerable stages, the likelihood that the armed opposition will either achieve its objective or secure a negotiated agreement increases considerably. See David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, "It Takes Two: A Dyadic Analysis of Civil War Duration and Outcome," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (2009): 570–597, 574.

[9] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008).

[10] Luis De La Calle and Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, "How Armed Groups Fight: Territorial Control and Violent Tactics," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 38, no. 10 (2015): 795–813.

[11] Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau, and David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001; David B. Carter, "A Blessing or a Curse? State Support for Terrorist Groups," *International Organization* 66, no. 1 (2012): 129–151.

[12] Henning Tamm, "Rebel Leaders, Internal Rivals, and External Resources: How State Sponsors Affect Insurgent Cohesion," *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2016): 599–610.

[13] Daniel Byman, "Understanding Proto-Insurgencies," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008): 165–200.

[14] This argument is developed in greater detail in this author's Ph.D. dissertation's theory-building chapter. See Michael Shkolnik, "Rival Consolidation in Nascent Insurrections: Why Some Militant Groups Wage Sustained Insurgencies," (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2020). I was inspired by Peter Krause's (2017) recent work on national movement effectiveness in formulating the logic of my argument: Peter Krause, *Rebel Power: Why National Movements Compete, Fight, and Win* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017). I am exceptionally grateful for his comments on my thesis.

[15] Brian Phillips refers to this type of rivalry as "intra-field" rivalries, as opposed to "inter-field" rivals that have considerably different ideologies or represent different ethnic or religious groups. Brian J. Phillips, "Terrorist Group Rivalries and Alliances: Testing Competing Explanations," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42, no. 11 (2018): 997–1019.

[16] Examining the early stages of the Sri Lankan Civil War, Lilja and Hultman (2011) show that rebels target co-ethnic rivals to consolidate dominance over their constituency and target co-ethnic civilians to ensure cooperation against the government. In the pre-armed conflict phase, militants "try to establish social control over a population to become an efficient fighting unit" capable of

challenging the regime. See Jannie Lilja and Lisa Hultman, "Intraethnic Dominance and Control: Violence Against Co-Ethnics in the Early Sri Lankan Civil War," *Security Studies,* 20, no. 2 (2011): 171–197, 175.

[17] See Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and The Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Mark I. Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma*, (University of Michigan Press, 1998). On militant organizations and principal-agent problems, see Jacob N. Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013) and Scott Gates, "Recruitment and Allegiance: The Micro-foundations of Rebellion," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002): 111–130. Organizational and strategic goals are often at odds as militant groups face considerable trade-offs between organizational security and effectiveness.

[18] Kristin M. Bakke, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and Lee J. M. Seymour, "A Plague of Initials: Fragmentation, Cohesion, and Infighting in Civil Wars," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (2012): 265–283.

[19] For more insight on agency issues facing militant groups fighting in civil wars, see Peter Schram, "Managing Insurgency" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2017).

[20] This author's first chapter of the dissertation reviews definitions of terrorism and insurgency to explore different ways of conceptualizing armed non-state actors who pursue political objectives. Most prominent militant groups rely on nonviolent methods as well. However, my baseline definition binds my unit of analysis to organized oppositional groups that engage in political violence to help achieve their objectives.

[21] The GTD's broad definition of *terrorism* is appropriate for this project's conception of militant violence. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), *Global Terrorism Database (GTD) Codebook: Inclusion Criteria and Variables*, 2016. Retrieved from https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf, 9. While there is no universal definition, many definitions specifically reference that targets of *terrorism* are primarily soft targets or civilians. A major aspect of most terrorism definitions relates to whether the attack was intended to send a psychological message to a wider audience beyond the immediate victim of the violence. See Alex P. Schmid, "Frameworks for Conceptualizing Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 2 (2004): 197–221. It is important to clarify that the GTD's definition may encompass incidents that might not be traditionally viewed as terrorist attacks by some, including civil war–related violence and classic guerrilla hit-and-run attacks targeting military convoys for example. Since most prominent militant groups tend to include both civilian and military targets within their attack profiles, this broad definition is appropriate for the present analysis.

[22] Following a similar logic, De la Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca (2012) dismiss groups that conduct over 95 percent of their attacks beyond their host state. See Luis De la Calle and Ignacio Sanchez-Cuenca, "Rebels without a Territory: An Analysis of Nonterritorial Conflicts in the World, 1970–1997," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 4 (2012): 580–603, 585.

[23] Some have referred to al-Qaeda (AQ) as a global insurgency, posing unique threats which require new understandings of insurgency. Yet territorial control and violent escalations in local theaters remain core objectives for Islamic State and AQ affiliates. See David Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 48, no. 4 (2006): 111–130.

[24] Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), *Definition of Armed Conflict*, 2016. Retrieved from http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/

[25] According to one prominent study, the average length of an insurgency is approximately 10 years. See Connable & Libicki, "How Insurgencies End," 27. After presenting my quantitative analysis at various scholarly conferences, the discussants agreed that the five-year mark is an appropriate threshold for this research puzzle. Additional thresholds and extensions can be explored in future iterations of this research.

[26] Only 13 (five percent) of the militant groups in this author's sample ended by achieving victory.

[27] Cronin (2006) outlines how terrorist groups might end, including transformation toward insurgency, but stops short of analyzing this transition. Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 7–48.

[28] Stephen L. Morgan and Christopher Winship, "Regression Estimators of Causal Effects," in *Counterfactuals and Causal Inference: Methods and Principles for Social Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 188–225.

[29] Jason Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools, Strategies for Social Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 55.

[30] James Mahoney, "Strategies of Causal Inference in Small-N Analysis," *Sociological Methods & Research* 28, no. 4 (2000): 387–424.

[31] For more on methodological debates about "selecting on the DV", see Barbara Geddes, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics," *Political Analysis* 2 (1990): 131–150; David Collier and James Mahoney, "Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research," *World Politics* 49, no. 1 (1996): 56–91.

[32] Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools*.

[33] Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Causal Case Study Methods: Foundations and Guidelines for Comparing, Matching, and Tracing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016).

[34] James Mahoney, Erin Kimball, and Kendra L. Koivu, "The Logic of Historical Explanation in the Social Science," *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 1 (2009): 114–146.

[35] Beach and Pederson, *Causal Case Study Methods.*

[36] James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, "The Possibility Principle: Choosing Negative Cases in Comparative Research," *The American Political Science Review* 98, no. 4 (2004): 653–669.

[37] Charles W. Mahoney, "More Data, New Problems: Audiences, Ahistoricity, and Selection Bias in Terrorism and Insurgency Research," *International Studies Review* 20, no. 4 (2018): 589–614.

[38] Michael Shkolnik, "Organizational Capacity and Constituency Dominance: Why Some Militant Groups Wage Sustained Insurgencies, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 5 (2020): 103–116.

[39] In a study of 648 terrorist groups between 1968 and 2006, Jones and Libicki (2008) find that no religious group, which ceased to operate during that time period, achieved victory. See Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End,* xiv.

[40] Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism*; Eli Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 2009); Monica Duffy Toft, "Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War," *International Security* 31, no. 4 (2007): 97–131.

[41] Paul Staniland, "Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia," *International Security* 37, no. 1 (2012): 142–177.

[42] Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer, "The Nature of the Beast: Organizational Structures and the Lethality of Terrorist Attacks, *The Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (2008): 437–449; Connable, Libicki, *How Insurgencies End.*

[43] Evan S. Lieberman, "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research," *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 3 (2005): 435–452.

[44] Seth G. Jones, *Waging Insurgent Warfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[45] Daniel Byman, "Understanding Proto-Insurgencies," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008): 165–200.

[46] *Top Dog* status can also be viewed as a potentially tautological cause since elements of the outcome of interest (sustained insurgency) may include attributes of the cause. The *Top Dog* proxy is a function of a particular militant group's attack profile and whether the group commits the highest number of attacks against either civilian or military targets, or both. The outcome of interest, sustained insurgency engagement, is derived from a threshold based on annual battle-related deaths (among all belligerents) during an armed conflict. As best as possible, I classify the *Top Dog* variable prior to the onset of an armed conflict. However, due to data limitations described in chapter 3 of the dissertation, many prominent militant groups begin appearing in the Global Terrorism Database only after crossing UCDP's 25 battle-related deaths threshold for armed conflict.

[47] My quantitative model correctly classified or closely predicted most (7/10) of the MENA insurgent organizations explored here. The three incorrectly predicted groups are Hamas, AQIM, and MEK.

[48] Charles W. Mahoney, "Hearts and Minds or Blood and Guts? Strategy, Terrorism, and the Growth of Proto-Insurgencies" (PhD diss., University of California, 2011); See Janet I. Lewis, "How Rebellion Begins: Insurgent Group Formation and Viability in Uganda" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2012); Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[49] For example, Fearon (2017) identifies a jump from three civil wars in MENA in 2002 to 12 ongoing civil wars in 2014. See James D. Fearon, "Civil War & the Current International System," *Daedalus* 146, no. 4 (2017): 18–32.

[50] Institute for Economics and Peace (2018), Global Terrorism Index 2018: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, Retrieved from https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018.pdf.

[51] Fearon, "Civil War & the Current International System."

[52] Peter Krause, "The Structure of Success: How the Internal Distribution of Power Drives Armed Group Behavior and National Movement Effectiveness," *International Security* 38, no. 3 (2013/14): 72–116, 77; Krause, *Rebel Power*.

[53] Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Fotini Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[54] Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad;* Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars.*

[55] Clint Watts, "Deciphering Competition Between al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State," *Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) Sentinel* 9, no. 7 (2016): 1–7; Lilja and Hultman, "Intraethnic Dominance and Control;" Pischedda, "Wars Within Wars;" Bloom, "Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding."

[56] I provide additional justification for this study's case selection based on my quantitative model and qualitative comparative findings in my Ph.D. dissertation.

[57] Augustus R. Norton, *Hezbollah* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2007); Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah's Thirty-Year Struggle Against Israel* (New York, NY: Random House, 2011); Eitan Azani, "The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36, no. 11 (2013): 899–916.

[58] David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization, and Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[59] Güneş Murat Tezcür, "Violence and Nationalist Mobilization: The Onset of the Kurdish Insurgency in Turkey," *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 2 (2015): 248–266.violence is counterproductive and undermines the ability of a movement to achieve mass support. At the same time, studies of ethnic insurgencies suggest that violence is the only available method of mobilization in political systems characterized by entrenched ethnic hierarchies. Engaging with these arguments, this article addresses a historical puzzle: What factors explain the timing and ability of the PKK's (Partiye KarkerÃªn Kurdistan

[60] Hannes Černy, "Ethnic Alliances Deconstructed: The PKK Sanctuary in Iraqi Kurdistan and the Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict Revisited," *Ethnopolitics* 13, no. 4 (2014): 328–354.

[61] Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

[62] Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[63] Brynjar Lia, "The Islamist Uprising in Syria, 1976–82: The History and Legacy of a Failed Revolt," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 4 (2016): 541–559.

[64] Victor Asal and Michael Shkolnik, "Crossing Battle Death Lines: Why Do Some Insurgent Organizations Escalate Violence to Higher-Intensity Armed Conflicts?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. (Forthcoming).