

Transnational, violent non-state actors operate in weak states for a number of reasons. The most prevalent of these is the host state's inability to sustain the basic requirement of statehood: a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force. When the monopoly of force is lost, violent groups establish reciprocal relationships with the relevant marginalized populations, allowing these actors to not only exist in weak states, but to thrive. Disenfranchised ethnic and political groups provide either tacit

or active support and render transnational, violent non-state actors able to establish illicit economies in order to fund their activities.

One violent non-state actor in particular, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), found success in the 1990s launching cross-border attacks into Turkey from neighboring Iraq. Clearly Iraq's loss of control over its sovereign territories made this possible, but to blame weak borders oversimplifies

the politics; more moving parts were involved. Three successive factors allowed the PKK to operate from Iraq: the state's loss of monopoly on legitimate violence, the presence of marginalized populations, and access to illicit economies. The academic theories of political scientists Boaz Atzili, Michael Klare, and Daniel Posner demonstrate that these factors contribute to the efficacy of violent non-state actors residing in weak states in a broader sense.

fied, but they also had few opportunities to be incorporated into Lebanese society. They were true outsiders and therefore easily rallied to support the PLO with whom they identified more readily than their host state. The PLO's ability to act as a surrogate state in the absence of Lebanese state services solidified the relationship between two groups whose identities and ideologies had already aligned.

At times, the alignment of marginalized groups with non-state actors is accelerated

by the politics of the state. For example, politics in Malawi have historically divided along ethnic lines, much like in Lebanon. Daniel Posner describes the historical circumstances in which this climate developed as a result of antagonism between Malawi's major ethnic groups, Chewas and Tumbukas. Malawi has a history of political mobilization of ethnic groups, a practice that tends to marginalize particular populations relative to those in favor; the Tumbukas were intentionally marginalized under Chewa president Hastings Kamuzu

Banda. Although there is no evidence of the co-optation of the marginalized groups by transnational, violent non-state actors, one can imagine that, were a Tumbuka-based insurgency to seek refuge from the Zambian state, they would find their presence welcomed among marginalized Tumbukas in Malawi.

In fragile states we find an almost formulaic pattern by which marginalized populations are forced to ally with transnational, violent non-state actors when the formal

Wide Open Spaces

The PKK Shows Violent Non-State Actors Need More Than Weak Governance to Thrive | Katherine Holmes

Monopoly on the Use of Legitimate Force

For a transnational violent non-state actor to move into a third party host state, that state must be weak in the most basic sense; it must be unable to maintain a monopoly on the use of force throughout its sovereign territories. This loss of sovereignty over territories distant from the capital, weak regulation of borders, and incapacity to maintain rule of law allows stateless groups to move into the country. These circumstances are necessary but not sufficient for the proliferation of these groups, or for the success of their operations. It is simply the first of several conditions that create an ideal refuge for terrorist or guerrilla groups.

Boaz Atzili considers the lack of a monopoly of force a prerequisite of residence in a third-party host state as well, but looks deeper into the ways these actors take advantage of the lack of control the state has over its land and people. He posits that the conventional wisdom on the vacuum of power in weak states is "grossly underspecified." In order to supplement this dearth of understanding, he explores several more specific facets of state weakness and their implications in regards to transnational, violent non-state actors. This article, on the other hand, argues that state weakness opens the door for violent non-state actors, but does not independently provide an environment in which these actors can flourish or even carry out their basic functions absent the marginalized populations necessary for support and, subsequently, access to illicit economies.

In the case of the PKK, Iraq's state weakness is not the sine qua non to the organization's success. State weakness is, however, a precursor to the PKK's decision to utilize Iraqi territory in order to launch cross-border attacks into Turkey. While Northern Iraq is one of the few regions of the country with little violence, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), not the central government, holds a monopoly on force there. Had the Republic of Iraq continuously controlled their northern territories, the PKK would not have had the option to rally in the Zagros Mountains. Nevertheless, in their search for a refuge from Turkish forces, PKK leadership did not relocate their forces into neighboring Armenia, Syria, or even Georgia, despite those states' fragility. Clearly state weakness and the state's lack of a monopoly on force is only one of the factors that influenced their decision to go to Iraq.

Marginalized Populations

Beyond the basic capacity of a transnational violent non-state actor to penetrate a state's territory and seek sanctuary there, a second element is essential to a violent group's success: the presence of a relevant marginalized population that is readily co-opted into the violent actor's cause. Atzili cites the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as the marginalized population essential to the operations of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO); the parallels between the PLO and the PKK are undeniable in this respect. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were not only displaced and dissatis-



government is unable to offer them protection. In states where the central government lacks a monopoly on the use of force, fringe groups have few choices; they must either flee or seek protection from a secondary source. This is especially true for marginalized groups who are excluded from state patronage networks. They must consequently build relationships with non-state actors and, as a result, are able to maintain some normalcy and a measure of control. This type of alignment happens in Pakistan, where the residents of ungoverned tribal areas seek protection from the Pakistani Taliban, and in Colombia, where isolated rural populations are protected by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

where the state was lacking) and had its own Kurdish paramilitary units. What they were able to lend to the PKK was sympathy and, to an extent, legitimacy. As a consequence of the KRG's autonomy, Iraqi Kurdistan's support for the PKK fluctuated over time. Complicating this matter was the KRG's dependence on Turkey for economic and political support. As a result, the KRG at times supported the PKK, even providing fertile ground for recruitment, and at times actively fought to expel them from Iraq.

Illicit Economies

Much of what can be gained from the support of local marginalized populations comes in the form of access to illicit economies. Indeed, transnational violent non-state actors need recruitment and political support, but they also need funding and weapons.

Michael Klare is an expert on illicit economies' funding for transnational violent non-state actors. In the book *When States Fail*, he describes the system through which illicit commodities flow out of weak states and small arms flow in. He claims that paramilitary groups form on the basis of ethnic-political factions or are co-opted by marginalized groups once the monopoly on the use of legitimate force is lost. The resident populations then aid the paramilitary groups in accessing illicit economic networks. These economies can be based on drugs, diamonds or human trafficking, but they must exist under the radar of the central government, an easier task in weak states than in strong ones. According to Klare, the system of exchange of illicit goods for light weapons is dependent on state weakness and an environment of lawlessness in order to take advantage of and, in some instances, create the networks of illicit trade.

In many cases, marginalized popu-

lations removed from the patronage networks have already established illicit economies by the time foreign terrorist or guerrilla groups move in. Because weak states are often rife with corruption, those who fall outside the groups receiving preferential treatment and the majority of the state's resources may be forced to operate in the trade of illicit goods, or at the very least in semi-formal economies outside the sphere of state influence. Transnational, violent non-state actors simply use the populace they have co-opted into their cause as an entry point to these economies.

Still other groups bring illicit economies with them when they move in and exploit friendly, local populations for logistical assistance. This is the case with the PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan. The group claims to acquire only weapons and funding from the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, but it is widely believed that there is an illicit element to the flow of resources from Europe to Kurdistan. The PKK was reported to facilitate 60-80% of the European drug trade in the mid-1990s, overseeing the drug traffic between Central Asia and Western Europe. Although this is not an endeavor the populations of Iraqi Kurdistan had previously undertaken, it is unlikely that such massive smuggling networks could be managed without their support if drugs and weapons do indeed move through the Zagros Mountains. Whether this support is an active economic exchange or merely willful ignorance of the PKK's activities is a matter of debate.

Multiple Causes

State weakness, specifically the lack of a monopoly of the legitimate use of force, is not enough to support transnational, violent non-state actors in search of sanctuary. The loss of control over territories and other aspects of statehood are only the most

basic attributes of a weak state that invite terrorist and guerilla groups in. More important to the success of these groups is the presence of relevant marginalized populations and the ability of those populations to provide the non-state actor access to illicit economies. These economies can be either pre-existing as a result of state weakness or established by the violent non-state

actor as a funding mechanism with the tacit or active assistance of the marginalized population.

The case study of the PKK and its incursion into Iraq supports this model, albeit not as forthrightly as Atzili's example of the PLO in Lebanon. The complex web of interactions between Iraq, Turkey, the PKK, the KRG and

even political parties within the KRG make controlling for outside influence challenging and comparisons difficult to draw. What is clear, however, is that the PKK's presence in Iraq is based upon more than the weakness of the Iraqi state; it is dependent on the sympathy and support of marginalized Iraqi Kurds and the help they can offer in utilizing illicit economies. ■■■



Kurdish Man | Photo by: Murat Yazar

The PKK did, of course, find marginalized populations in Iraq, specifically the populations of Iraqi Kurdistan. Their affiliation, however, was never as straightforward as the PLO's relationship with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. While the Kurds of Northern Iraq certainly were marginalized within their state and identified more with Greater Kurdistan than with the Republic of Iraq, they never depended on the PKK for the provision of services or even protection from the state. Prior to the incursion of the PKK, the KRG was already home to political competition between rival Kurdish political parties (both of whom were willing and able to provide services



Who are the Kurds?



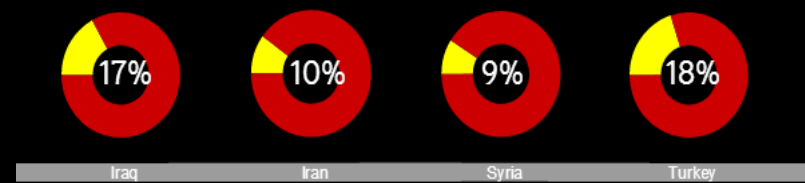
The Kurdish people, or Kurds (Kurdish: کورد), are a largely Sunni Muslim ethnic group in Western Asia, mostly inhabiting a mountainous region known as Kurdistan, which includes adjacent parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

What is the PKK?



The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is a militant Kurdish separatist group which has engaged in an armed struggle against the Turkish state for over 30 years. The organization agreed to a ceasefire in March 2013 and is currently in the process of retreating into the predominantly Kurdish areas of Northern Iraq. The PKK is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States.

Areas Where Kurdish is the Language of the Majority



Concentration of Kurdish Populations

