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Gambling with Violence: State Outsourcing of War in Pakistan and India

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addition of such strong scholarship means that policymakers would do well to pay attention to his book.

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Gambling with Violence: State Outsourcing of War in Pakistan and India by Yelena Biberman. New York, Oxford University Press, 2019. 240 pp. \$29.95.

A century after Max Weber famously posited that the state is defined by holding a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a territory, it is abundantly clear that states rarely hold such a monopoly, and they may in fact willingly cede it, both in wartime and in peacetime. Yelena Biberman's deeply researched book *Gambling with Violence* takes up the question of when and why, exactly, states engaged in civil wars decide to work with preexisting armed groups, organize civilian militias, or set up squads of ex-insurgents to secure areas or carry out attacks, "outsourcing" violence instead of monopolizing it.

This outsourcing is a gamble: for states, alliances with armed groups may be a force multiplier, provide local intelligence and legitimacy benefits, or offer insulation from accountability for human rights abuses. Yet outsourcing can also backfire: armed groups may turn defect, use state resources for their own ends, or commit counterproductive violence against civilians.

Biberman moves beyond state-centric perspectives, arguing that state–armed group relationships in civil war depend on the "balance-of-interests" between two potential allies (pp. 24–30). When a state has the upper hand in a region, it has little incentive to risk allying with an armed group, and so Biberman predicts that state–armed group alliances will emerge only when and where the state–rebel power balance is at parity or favors rebels. Where the state has socio-ideological links with an armed group—for instance, shared ethnicity—it may be able to forge an alliance and be more confident the armed group will be a good partner because of shared interests. When a state is weaker than the rebels in an area, however, it may engage in "transactional" alliances with more "opportunistic" armed groups (pp. 25–28), which carry higher risks of armed group defection.

The majority of *Gambling with Violence* comprises case studies of state–armed group relationships in South Asia, based on rich interview and archival data that provide both colorful and somber anecdotes and quotes. Biberman examines Pakistan's alliances with activist Islamist youth groups and oppor-

tunist Razakar volunteers in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) during the brutal 1971 campaign against Bengali autonomy or independence, demonstrating how power shifting toward rebels as they received increasing Indian aid made Pakistan more willing to work with opportunists. In Jammu and Kashmir, disillusioned insurgents and other Muslim opportunists forged alliances with Indian security forces to fight against pro-Pakistani rebels, while India later organized Hindu villagers into communal defense militias. Pakistan's and India's mobilization of tribal militias to fight against the Taliban and the Naxalites, respectively, are also compared.

One of the book's greatest strengths is its extension beyond South Asia, with Biberman's original research on Chechnya and Turkey helping establish her theory's generalizability. She shows, for example, how the staunchly secularist Turkish military even collaborated with Islamist militants to fight Kurdish rebels. Biberman is also critical and careful in offering policy recommendations, focusing on the imperative for states and their military commanders to avoid treating civilians or captured rebels as "cheap weapons or cannon fodder" (p. 163).

As with any book, some questions or areas for potential extension remain—for instance, how ideology and interests can shift over time, just as power does, or the ways that states may, effectively or not, substitute private military contractors for local allies, as is occurring today in northern Mozambique. Yet *Gambling with Violence* remains a key contribution to understanding state-armed group alliances in civil wars. The temptation for states to outsource violence is hardly new, and the enduring prevalence of civil wars and weak international accountability means that states will continue gambling on alliances with armed groups.

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These Islands Are Ours: The Social Construction of Territorial Disputes in Northeast Asia by Alexander Bukh. Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2020. 232 pp. \$70.00.

The location of the nation-state, or which territories are part of "our homeland" and which are not, is socially constructed and given to changes and fluctuations. Often, such shifting stances of territorial possessions stem more from domestic politics than from international ones. Yet most works on the subject focus on governments that are using territorial issues as a powerful tool to garner domestic support and legitimacy.