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We Are Peers Now: States' Relations with Violent Non-State Actors That Became State/Sub-State Actors

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The relationship between states and violent non-state actors (VNSAs) has been widely explored in International Relations and Security Studies over the past two and a half decades. Scholars have examined state-VNSA dynamics through frameworks of sponsorship, alliances, delegation, and proxy warfare, as well as through conflict and rivalry. However, a growing yet underexplored phenomenon is the transformation of some VNSAs into state or sub-state actors after gaining territorial control and governance capabilities. Cases such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon, and various rebel groups in Syria illustrate how VNSAs can transition into sovereign entities, thereby reshaping their international roles. This article investigates how such transformations affect their relationships with states. Do states that previously supported a VNSA continue their backing once it assumes statehood? Do adversarial states reconsider their stance toward the newly established state actor? Based on a within-case analysis of the Taliban in Afghanistan after the 2021 takeover and the existing literature on state-VNSA dynamics, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the evolving interactions between states and VNSAs that turned into state or sub-state actors. Furthermore, it identifies the mechanisms that drive change or continuity in these relationships.

What discipline or branch of humanities or social sciences do you identify yourself with?

International Relations; Security Studies

If you are submitting an Open Panel proposal, have you included all four abstracts in attachment?

No, I am submitting a Closed Panel abstract

Are you a PhD student or early-career researcher?

Yes

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