



Contribution ID: 348

Type: **Paper Abstract (Closed Panels)**

From Revolt to Rule: Insurgency as Proto-State Formation

Thursday 26 June 2025 16:30 (20 minutes)

State formation is a continuous process, marked by the centralisation and monopolisation of power to establish authority over a population within a defined territory. This paper argues that insurgency is a centrifugal force challenging this centralisation. However, insurgents are not merely destructive but, driven by an idea of an alternative political order, are establishing a new form of formal or informal governance, though at the expense of the established state's authority and monopolies on using force, collecting taxes, and enacting laws. In its nature, an insurgency is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, itself analogous to state formation, similar in its evolution through the establishment of political authority by monopolising the use of force and generating revenue. Thus, the state and insurgents compete on three key axes of monopolisation: on legislation, on the use of force, and on taxation, each forming a critical pillar of governance and authority. These features distinguish the inherent use of force in insurgency from violence associated with mutiny, rebellion, criminals and terrorist organisations.

This paper addresses theoretical gaps between insurgency and state formation by using the latter as a framework to analyse the former. Using complexity theory, it presents a model illustrating how distinct non-state groups and social structures may evolve from coexistence through cooperation to convergence into a proto-state, influenced by specific internal and external contextual factors that may contribute to insurgent success or failure. It posits that successful insurgencies often are a symbiosis of non-state groups or social structures possessing political-administrative, financial-economic, and force-exerting capabilities, enabling the formation of a proto-state. An insurgency's nature lies in this process of integration, while its character is shaped by contextual factors. Additionally, the paper argues that securing and re-allocating revenue is a critical aspect in establishing insurgent governance and legitimacy, but often neglected the traditional political-military focus.

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War Studies

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Yes

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Session Classification: Private Actors, Armed Conflict and the State

Track Classification: Closed Panels: Private Actors, Armed Conflict and the State