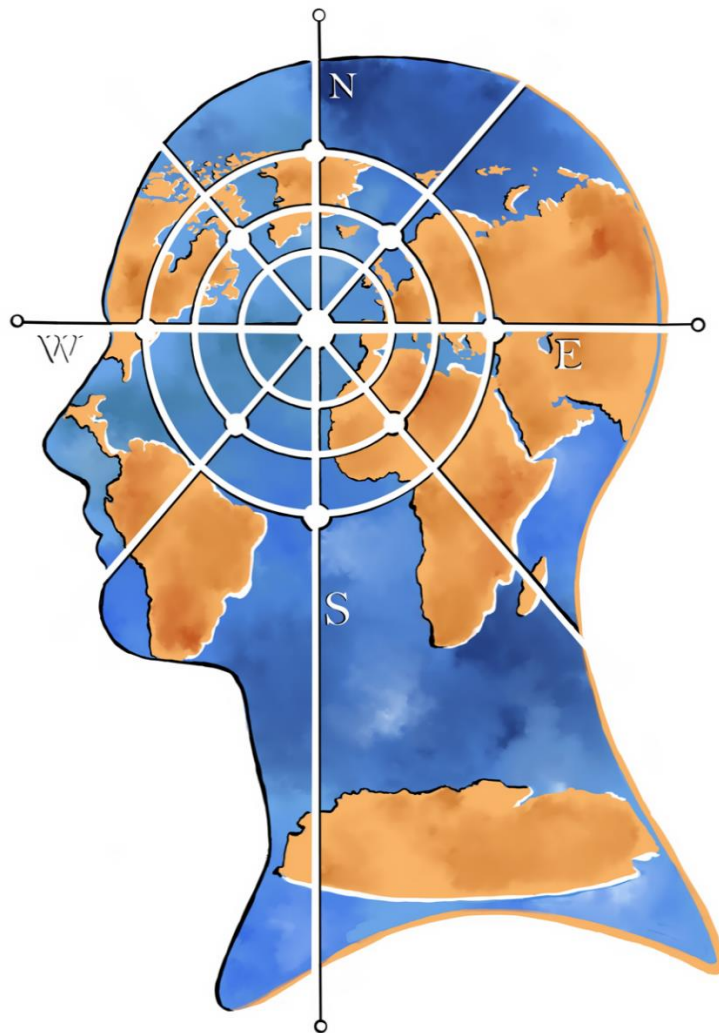


JOURNAL *of* EUROPEAN *and* AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE STUDIES

AN INTERNATIONAL PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL



Research Institute for European and American Studies – RIEAS
Department of Security and Intelligence Studies – Coastal Carolina University

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Editor's Note

Jonathan Smith

Chair and Professor, Department of Intelligence and Security Studies, Coastal Carolina University

Welcome to the December 2023 *Journal of European and American Intelligence Studies* issue. As with past issues, I believe it serves as a vibrant forum for disseminating and discussing groundbreaking research in intelligence studies. It provides a diverse array of studies that expand our understanding of security issues in our discipline. In this issue, we proudly present a collection of manuscripts representing the cutting edge of intelligence and security studies research. These articles cover contemporary and emerging security threats and the institutional responses to these challenges.

Our first article by Tuzuner and Cinoglu considers the issue of signaling in civil conflict using the case of Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). This case reveals the underutilization of theories on signaling in this area of study. It also highlights the significant complexity that is involved in civil conflict as actors seek to communicate with multiple audiences simultaneously. The analysis by Tuzuner and Cinoglu identifies the need for more research that employs the literature on signaling to understand the dynamics of civil conflict between state actors and insurgent groups.

Singh, Vig, and Kaunert provide an insightful exploration of the complexities of preparing, preventing, and responding to pandemics and bioterrorism in contemporary times. Drawing on both historical and contemporary challenges, the authors reveal the range of legal and sociological issues that complicate this endeavor. To overcome these challenges, they identify the need for enhanced global cooperation, data harmonization, and timely communication in addressing this challenge. They also highlight the critical role of health security intelligence in addressing the challenges of pandemics and bioterrorism, particularly from non-state actors. Lastly, the authors explore the ethical considerations in shaping a comprehensive strategy to address this threat is also explored.

In assessing the state of European Union (EU) accession by states in the Western Balkans, Nomikos and Delli analyze the range of internal and external security challenges that complicate this endeavor. Beyond their analysis of the internal social, economic, and political factors that challenge the goal of these states to join the EU, they also highlight the internal and geopolitical drivers that explain the behavior of the EU in this process. Ultimately, their analysis stresses the importance of institutions in the Western Balkan

states and the need for the EU to promote both democratization and security in this critical region of the world.

Kanellopoulos and Ioannidis explore the importance of counterintelligence practices in supporting national security. Specifically, they consider the significance of allocating resources for developing intelligence operational cultures to support the protection of a country's economy. This requires a complex relationship between counterintelligence professionals and leaders in government, the private sector, and academia. The authors ultimately conclude that most states have a need to further foster this culture of collaboration between these entities to protect the national interest. They also consider the endemic challenges that counterintelligence activities represent to civil liberties in democratic societies. Kanellopoulos and Ioannidis find that ultimate success in the area lies in the balance between national security interests and protecting core principles of liberal democracies.

Our last article in this issue is a long-term analysis of the security and human rights impacts of the U.S. War on Terrorism. Scrutinizing the records across four presidential administrations, Sinha finds that the U.S. approach to this new security challenge may have, counterintuitively, sustained the threat of terrorism by fostering negative sentiments in immigrant and non-western communities. Sinha explores how the United States' interpretation of human rights in this period was malleable to suit its immediate security interests. The author also notes how the evolution of U.S. security policy from a largely militaristic approach to a more civilian-based approach is a hopeful sign for U.S. counterterrorism policy and may be a more effective strategy in addressing the new threat of terrorism in the twenty-first century.

As we delve into the pages of this journal, let us appreciate the considerable efforts of our contributors and peer reviewers, who have worked tirelessly to uphold the standards of excellence and academic integrity that our journal is known for. It is my hope that this edition will not only serve as a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners alike but also inspire future research that continues to expand the horizons of our understanding.

In conclusion, the *JEAIS* editorial team is grateful to our authors for adding their informed voices to yet another insightful issue of this publication. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the reviewers and editorial staff for their invaluable efforts in bringing this edition to fruition. I believe the efforts of both of these groups serve as a testament to the vibrancy and relevance of the study of intelligence and security issues. I look forward to the continued scholarly exploration in this journal that is so essential for advancing our scholarly understanding, as well as informed policy-making, in this domain.

As always, the *JEAIS* editorial team would welcome our readers' comments, suggestions, and criticism regarding our content. Thank you for your continued support.

Letting Violence [or lack of it] Speak: Communication and Signaling in Armed Civil Conflict

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Abstract

In formulating policy, state actors must consider how others will react to their preferred approach and the alternative policies they can carry out. In this vein, the literature on signaling and communication is essential in understanding how signals are used and communicated to reach a less costly outcome for both actors. This paper applies the critical components of the signaling literature to understanding the communication that takes place in ethnic armed conflict between the state and an armed group. More research should be done regarding signaling between ethno-national separatist groups and states since these groups usually want to become legitimate state actors in the international arena. This paper aims to illustrate the use of signaling theory and its relevance to civil conflict through a case study. It will explore how the literature on signaling may be utilized to track and effectively communicate with non-state actors. This research investigates the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, an insurgent group involved in armed conflicts with the Turkish government. The PKK has demonstrated variations in its approach, alternating between using violent means to exert coercion and using diplomatic channels to interact with international political actors.

1. Introduction

The reciprocal process of sending and interpreting signals among nations is essential to international relations. The literature on signaling and communication refers to notions of bargaining, timing problems, making signals credible, and perceptions of threat. National security issues are vital in that states primarily signal as a mechanism to deter or compel the enemy or understand the adversary's intentions/determination on an issue to bargain. The signaling mechanism becomes even more complex, with this dynamic relationship susceptible to misinterpretation, shifting interests, and issues arising from multiple audiences. While the literature on signaling revolves mainly around state actors' primary use of signals over issues that can lead to conflict, some non-state actors use political violence to communicate their interests. Signaling between ethnonational separatist groups and states is a crucial lacuna in the literature, considering these groups usually aim to become legitimate state actors in the international arena.

Furthermore, the systematic use of political violence by the armed separatist groups to signal their interest and communicate their messages creates a sense of urgency to better understand the communication between these two actors, especially since miscommunications and issues of signaling lead to fatalities. This paper will be tracing the signaling and communication that has been taking place between the ethno-nationalist secessionist armed group in Turkey, known as the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and the Turkish government. It will attempt to combine the signaling literature with the ones of civil war and terrorism to create a means of understanding the dynamics of communication between a separatist group and the state.

2. Signaling and Communication

In formulating domestic or international policy, actors must consider how others will react to their preferred policy and the alternative policies they can carry out. In calculating these estimations of other actor's behavior, actors rely on informative behaviors. Jervis provides a typology of informative behavior as signals and indices. Jervis defines signals as "statements or actions the meaning of which is established by tacit or explicit understandings among actors" and indices as "statements or actions that carry some inherent evidence that the image projected is correct because they are believed to be inextricably linked to actor's capabilities and intentions"¹. According to

¹ Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 18.

Jervis² “beliefs require no explanation, implicitly assuming that they are self-evident and follow directly from commonly available evidence”. Therefore, it is safe to argue that signals lack indices’ credibility, like beliefs.

Similar to how actors look for signals from others to predict future behaviors, they also use signals to project desired images; these projected images may be true or false with incentives to misrepresent information³. On the other hand, for the behavior to be seen as an index, the perceiver must genuinely believe that it is nearly impossible or too costly to project a false image⁴.

As a general concept in the international relations literature, signaling refers to the communication method used amongst state actors to communicate their interests. States signal to indicate their intentions with the prospect of benefiting from engaging in such interaction. In many cases, signaling is not necessarily a zero-sum game of war or peace; signals are utilized to reach an outcome that is less costly for both actors, with particular consideration for the primary interests of the dominant actor⁵. Thus, signaling is part of a broader bargaining strategy.

One distinction made in the literature on signals is between cheap talk and costly signals. This distinction echoes Schelling’s insight, whereby any actor can pursue a behavior that is not costly and reveals nothing about the actor’s type⁶. In this regard, costly signals are the actions or behaviors that induce a separating equilibrium of actor types⁷. Fearon⁸ argues that separating equilibria can occur in two ways: tying hands or sinking costs. Tying hands is a cost whereby the actor faces a cost ex-post when it does not follow through. Dropping costs are ex-ante costs, whereby actors suffer from enacting the signal.

Ergo, statements that reveal intentions are cheap because any actor can make such statements to project the desired image. For example, despite deploying offensive missiles during the Cold War, the USSR was engaged in deception. It stated that all weapons were defensive, and the Soviet Union had no intention of crossing lines with the US. Thus, perceiving actors should distinguish between cheap talk and costly signals because

² Robert Jervis, “Understanding Beliefs,” *Political Psychology* 27, no. 5 (2006): 643.

³ Robert Jervis, “Signaling and Perception,” in *Political Psychology*, ed. Kristen Renwick Monroe (2002): 296.

⁴ Jervis, “Signaling and Perception,” 301.

⁵ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁶ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 150.

⁷ James D. Fearon, “Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1995).

⁸ James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995).

costly behavior is more complicated to fake or be a part of deception. In this sense, it is essential to point out that to be interpreted in the desired way of being a costly signal, the perceiver must see the cost to the sender. According to Kydd and Walter, employing terror tactics is an expensive signal that communicates resoluteness: the terrorist act induces a separating equilibrium between actors who will be “strong and resolute defenders of the cause” and those who will be “weak and ineffective stooges of the enemy”⁹. In elucidating its definition, Brown says, “Terrorism is a coercive instrument intended to communicate to target countries the costs of noncompliance with their policy demands”¹⁰.

Some costly signals fit the Jervis category of indices. For example, if a state finds it necessary to astonish others with its resolve, it may sometimes make certain statements or engage in firm actions to signal this. If the perceiving actor believes such behavior will change the balance of power between the actors, then such costly signals may be identified as an index. In this sense, terrorism, cited as a costly signal in the literature for its signal of resolve, may be considered an index in times of civil conflict. Crenshaw suggests, “[t]errorism is a logical choice when oppositions have such goals and when the power ratio of government to challenger is high”¹¹. Identified as the weapon of the weak, terrorism as a strategy is pursued to overcome the inherent power imbalance and thus an index. Suppose the perceiver interprets the act of terror to mean that the sender has no resolve. In that case, the perceiver will face either backing down or taking a very costly policy choice in return.

When engaging in costly signals/indices of terrorism, the civil conflict resembles a time of crises, where aims are centered on winning the conflict rather than realizing common interests. Ergo, a complex blend of coercion and accommodation occurs¹², and the bargaining spectrum becomes smaller. Under such a tense relationship, housing that is normally a signal of “amicable settlement” becomes a signal of backing down or painful compromise forced by the risk of all-out civil war and pressure caused by fear of escalation. In this sense, signals determine outcomes through a dynamic of psychological strength rather than one of physical strength and test how long the actors can stand the risk¹³. Use of signals in bargaining thus includes reaching an ideal amalgam of coercion and

⁹ Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006).

¹⁰ Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Coté Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, *Contending with Terrorism: Roots, Strategies, and Responses* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010), 139.

¹¹ Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (1981).

¹² Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 10.

¹³ Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations*, 10.

accommodation in strategy, where one can avoid all-out war while maximizing gains and minimizing one's losses.

One fundamental issue brought up in the signaling literature that may also apply to times of civil conflict is one emerging from miscommunications. Signals become susceptible to misperception with language translations and cultural norms differences. As Jervis points out, international relations is a game of Rashomon; the same story will be told differently based on the actors' interpretation of the events. The different worldviews intercept and cause signals not to be interpreted as they were often meant to be¹⁴. Ergo, misrepresentation, misperception, and miscommunication in international relations are relatively common.

Multiple audiences are another important issue in the signaling literature that is very prominent in civil conflict. State policies and acts signal to other states directly, to additional states indirectly, and to their domestic audiences. Considering the multiplicity of audiences, costly signals become further divided into two categories: cost experienced as a behavior taken versus costs stemming from living up to commitments.

Because signals lack credibility with an incentive to deceive, the actor's reputation becomes a key component of sending credible signals. As Mercer claims, "In strategic settings where deception is possible, rational actors' interpretations rely on their beliefs, intuition, and imagination; they rely on emotion"¹⁵. Despite the facts presented in a given situation, past experiences discolor the information and play a role in interpreting signals. If a state has a reputation for being peaceful and suddenly decides to invest in new military technologies, then others will most likely interpret this to be for defensive purposes. Yet, if another state has a reputation for being an aggressor and invests in these same technologies, others will most likely interpret this as a signal of aggressive intentions. Mercer describes this phenomenon about the importance of feelings influencing interpretation and explains that feelings about whether someone can be trusted influence the understanding of one's behavior.

As will be demonstrated with the case of civil conflict in Turkey, the signaling literature that explains the complications in state communication applies to non-state armed separatist groups. Like states that seek to protect their borders from surviving, ethnonationalist secessionist groups seek to create their boundaries in a particular territory and aim to preserve their "claimed" habitat.

¹⁴ Jervis, *The Logic of Images*.

¹⁵ Jonathan Mercer, "Emotion and Strategy in the Korean War," *International Organization* 67, no. 2 (2013): 221.

3. Theories of Civil Conflict

Intrastate conflicts or civil wars involve numerous parties in multilevel negotiations and other interactions. The essence of these exchanges is signaling, where armed groups express their preferences, capabilities, and resolve. Unlike highly structured interstate negotiations, intrastate conflicts are generally clouded by ambiguity and suspicion.

The Bargaining Theory of War offers invaluable insight into these dynamics, especially in civil war settings. The argument suggests that violence, however damaging, conveys information about each side's capabilities and intentions, highlighting its contradictory role. Reiter explains how combat outcomes and other factors can make a warring nation demand more or less in peace negotiations and why a country may refuse to negotiate limited terms and pursue absolute victory if it fears its enemy will renege¹⁶. Additionally, Barbara F. Walter examines the different negotiation failures that can occur before, during, and after intrastate wars¹⁷. Her research highlights the impact of information and commitment issues on disputes within states and explains why some countries struggle more than others to resolve them¹⁸.

According to Putnam¹⁹, two-level games go beyond international relations theories to illuminate the complex relationship between domestic politics and intrastate conflict dynamics. Putnam says, "Domestic politics and international relations are often somehow entangled, but our theories have not yet sorted out the puzzling tangle"²⁰. The two-level game model explains the intricate relationship between internal political maneuvering and exterior negotiations, enhancing our knowledge of state-rebel interactions. The "bargaining model" of war by Fearon²¹ emphasizes the importance of knowledge asymmetry in international warfare. His essay²² profoundly influenced the scholarly debate on war's initiation, prosecution, termination, and repercussions as a single bargaining process.

¹⁶ Dan Reiter, "Exploring the Bargaining Model of War," *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 1 (2003); Barbara F. Walter, "Bargaining Failures and Civil War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009); Wolfram Lacher, "How does the Civil War begin? The role of escalatory processes," *Violence: An International Journal* 3, no. 2 (2022); Caroline Hartzell, "Bargaining Theory, Civil War Outcomes, and War Recurrence: Assessing the Results of Empirical Tests of the Theory," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2017).

¹⁷ Barbara F. Walter, "Bargaining Failures and Civil War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009).

¹⁸ Michaela Mattes and Burcu Savun, "Fostering Peace After Civil War: Commitment Problems and Agreement Design," *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2009); Valerie Sticher and Siniša Vuković, "Bargaining in intrastate conflicts: The shifting role of ceasefires," *Journal of Peace Research* 58, no. 6 (2021); Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988).

¹⁹ Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988).

²⁰ Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics," 427.

²¹ James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995).

²² Ibid.

Violence is a strategic choice; while theories in the civil war literature differ in their stance on the motivations for political violence as either greed or grievance, recent studies of scholars including Kalyvas, Pape and Valentino's articulate arguments that strongly suggest the strategic calculation behind political violence²³ and echo Arendt's assertions that violence is rational as long as it achieves given objectives²⁴. According to much of the extant literature on insurgency and counterinsurgency, the fundamental aim of violence in the civil war is the breakdown of the social and political relationships between civilians and the perpetrator's adversary, which is a question of legitimacy.

Legitimacy is fundamental for actors to gain or maintain their sovereignty. As Hafez points out, legitimacy is a crucial resource²⁵. Alagappa defines this intricate concept as "the belief by the governed in the ruler's moral right to issue commands and the people's corresponding obligation to accept such commands"²⁶. Rather than being simply present or absent, legitimacy is a complex conception that is gradational and amounts to various degrees; while some members in a state shell may deem a governing body's sovereignty legitimate, others may simultaneously regard it illegitimate. And it is at this point of incongruity that room for contestation emerges. Contestation refers to efforts to compete for the view of legitimate sovereignty in a target population.

In times of civil conflict, contestation for "legitimate" sovereignty occurs, where the key audience is the local people. Multiple actors compete for sovereignty within a state shell because sovereignty is recognition, and recognition is power; power allows access to more resources, whether money or kind. Recognition comes in two forms: de facto and de jure. Ethno- nationalist armed groups aim to gain both—de facto recognition from the territory's people and de jure recognition by the international community. Thus, viewing civil conflict in this manner portrays that the fundamental issue of signaling for an armed group has to signal to multiple audiences: the locals to gain legitimacy and support, the international community to gain legitimacy and become a state, and the state actor to push into accepting cession.

²³ Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 3 (2003); Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

²⁴ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1970).

²⁵ Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

²⁶ Muthiah Alagappa, "Part 1, Legitimacy: Explication and Elaboration," in *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 29.

3.1. Rebel Governance as an Index

As Ahmad points out, the insurgents don't simply aim to inflict military losses on the adversary. They aim "to destroy the legitimacy of its government and establish a rival regime through the creation of 'parallel hierarchies'"²⁷. Mampilly's work²⁸ further adds to Ahmad's notion of parallel hierarchies by specifying how parallel hierarchies play out through his "rebel governance" terminology. Secessionist armed groups are in the position to immediately prove themselves in the competition for creating alternative sovereignty that can better respond to the material welfare of the population targeted. Thus, the secessionist groups "mimic behavior of traditional state"²⁹ and are "more likely to develop an effective system of governance"³⁰. So, to gain legitimacy to form a national government representative of the target population, ethno-nationalist secessionist groups provide services and work towards establishing governance as soon as the targeted territory is under control. Just as Ahmad points out, rebels must build administrative structures like collecting taxes, education, and social welfare³¹. The armed rebel groups engage in activities of rebel governance to signal to the target population their commitment to the people and the international community and their capacity to act as legitimate governing bodies.

3.2. Political Violence as Signal

"Since war is always possible, the implicit or explicit threat of war is the ultimate form of political pressure, and the top means to security and other values"³². Armed groups, through their civilian and military targeting, manipulate the potential likelihood of all-out war to effect behaviors of states and locals. Three types of armed group violence can be used as signals: military targets as signals aimed at the government, and civilian targets aimed at controlling the locals and creating the threat of terror to coerce the government to concession.

²⁷ Eqbal Ahmad, "Revolutionary Warfare and Counterinsurgency," in *Guerrilla Strategies: An Historical Anthology from the Long March to Afghanistan*, edited by Gerard Chaliand (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 244.

²⁸ Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

²⁹ Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers*, 216.

³⁰ Ibid, 76.

³¹ Ahmad, "Revolutionary Warfare and Counterinsurgency," 249.

³² Snyder & Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations*, 4.

As is evident predominant in civil war literature, civilian targeting may be chosen as a strategy of coercion to “control” by Stanton’s terminology³³ or “intimidation” by Kydd and Walter³⁴. Such violence signals the civilian population that their cooperation with the government will not be tolerated³⁵. Terrorism, defined as “the systematic use of intentionally indiscriminate violence against public civilian targets to influence a wider audience”³⁶, is another form of civilian targeting. With terrorism, the signal is aimed at communication with the government rather than the populace. Likewise, military targets are signals aimed at the government. Carrying out attacks on the military signals a level of “strength” lacking in terrorism. Because terrorism is seen as the weapon of the weak, armed groups can attack military targets with signal capability. Regarding legitimacy, terrorism is a far more costly signal than military targeting.

3.3. Counterinsurgency Operations as Signals

Kalyvas’ work on civilian targeting in a civil war is also salient to understanding signaling to the locals. Kalyvas highlights the significance of information and territorial control in civil wars regarding civilian targeting. He argues that in a territory where armed groups, whether state or insurgent, have power, the group can identify sympathizers of the other side and target civilian support accordingly. On the other hand, in territorial zones where the armed group lacks control, indiscriminate targeting of the civilian population occurs³⁷. Thus, collective punishment can easily happen in counterinsurgency policies because as the state’s control weakens, violence becomes more indiscriminate.

Lake maintains that severe government response, such as indiscriminate counterinsurgency tactics, signals to moderates —whom the armed group sees as potential supporters— that the government is not moderate and unwilling to negotiate³⁸. Similarly, Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson also highlight that a harsh state response helps an armed group by signaling the government’s “type”³⁹.

³³ Jessica A. Stanton, *Strategies of Violence and Restraint in Civil War* (New York: Columbia University, 2008).

³⁴ Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 49-80, doi:10.1162/isec.2006.31.1.49.

³⁵ Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 49-80, doi:10.1162/isec.2006.31.1.49; Jessica A. Stanton, *Strategies of Violence and Restraint in Civil War* (New York: Columbia University, 2008).

³⁶ Virginia Page Fortna, “Choosing Terror: Rebels’ Use of Terrorism in Internal Armed Conflict 1970-2010,” Columbia University, 2015.

³⁷ Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁸ David A. Lake, “Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century,” *Dialogue IO* 1, no. 1 (2002): 15-29.

³⁹ Ethan Bueno de Mesquita and Eric S. Dickson, “The Propaganda of the Deed: Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Mobilization,” *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 2 (2007): 364-381.

Under the Kalyvas theory of civilian targeting⁴⁰, signaling can occur in two other ways depending on government territorial control and counterinsurgency policy pursued. First, if the state has control of the territory, then its counterinsurgency operations will discriminate and mainly avoid civilian casualties. In such processes, the state signals to the local population that if they join or support the insurgency group, the government has resolved the issue and will punish them.

On the other hand, if the state lacks control and counterinsurgency operations are indiscriminate, then the state operations signal to the locals its weakness in controlling the insurgency violence. According to Alagappa⁴¹, essentially, government use of force is identified as a diagnosis of legitimacy under question; “A massive use of [government] force reflects the ineffectiveness of coercion and the weakness of the government’s legitimacy”⁴². Nonetheless, indiscriminate targeting in populations with ethno-nationalist movements led to generations of more grievances where “state terror [makes] guerillas and guerilla supporters”⁴³.

As Kalyvas points out, in most places, local conflicts don’t erupt into violence because of state sanctions and mechanisms of social control⁴⁴. However, when external groups emerge and put forth a master cleavage of state repression that coincides with the local breakup of individuals held against state policy, violence erupts. The intersection of local and national separations intensifies the nature of political violence where there is “no frontier between private vengeance and collective vengeance,” and the private violence of individuals in aggregate is in public use⁴⁵. Thus, by its very creation, the armed group signals to the local population that its view of the state’s actions is unacceptable.

4. Case Study

This paper will attempt to apply the signaling framework used to shed light on political communications among state actors to one between a state and a non-state actor. Combined with civil conflict literature, particular states’ and armed separatist groups’ behaviors will be analyzed through signaling terminology. Furthermore, the issues that

⁴⁰ Kalyvas, Stathis N. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.

⁴¹ Alagappa, Muthiah. *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Alagappa (1995: 19)

⁴³ Alexander Avina, *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 112.

⁴⁴ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’: Action and Identity in Civil Wars?” *American Political Science Review* 1, no. 3 (2003): 485.

⁴⁵ Richard Cobb, *Reactions to the French Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 56-90.

arise in signaling and how they map into communications in civil conflict will be illustrated. The main question this paper aims to address is how the framework of the reciprocal signaling system serves as an outline to understand signaling between state and armed separatist groups through the case in Turkey.

Turkey's geopolitical tactics might appear contradictory in its interactions with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Hamas, and even on an unrelated issue of Kosovo's independence. Between 2015 and 2017, extensive military operations were held in Turkey's southeastern provinces to neutralize the PKK⁴⁶. In contrast, Turkey has vigorously rejected any recognition or assistance for the PKK, using its diplomatic ties to maintain its global terrorist status⁴⁷.

Turkey views Hamas differently and is reluctant to condemn the group's armed activities unconditionally. Turkey has had talks with Hamas and helped free people imprisoned or detained by Hamas⁴⁸. Turkey is no secret that it is eager to cooperate with groups aligned with its geopolitical objectives or narratives, even if other nations view or designate them as terrorist organizations.

Turkey's acknowledgment of Kosovo's independence complicates matters. Turkey's early recognition of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008⁴⁹ contrasted with its staunch hostility to separatist aspirations in its territory, notably among Kurds. The unique connections between Turkey and Kosovo, inspired by a shared history and Turkey's desire to preserve influence in the Balkans, demonstrate its pragmatic foreign policy⁵⁰). These incidents show that historical links, regional stability concerns, and national security considerations drive Turkey's geopolitical maneuvering.

⁴⁶ Berkay Mandiraci, "Turkey's PKK Conflict: A Regional Battleground in Flux," International Crisis Group, accessed [March 2023], <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/turkeys-pkk-conflict-regional-battleground-flux>.

⁴⁷ CRS Reports, "Turkey, the PKK, and U.S. Involvement: A Chronology," accessed [March 2023], <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/if/if11380>.

⁴⁸ Reuters, "Turkey discusses with Hamas the release of civilian hostages -foreign ministry source," <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-discusses-with-hamas-release-civilian-hostages-source-2023-10-16/>; Berman, Laura, "Turkey declines to condemn Hamas as it calls for restoration of calm," The Times of Israel, accessed [November 2023], https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/turkey-declines-to-condemn-hamas-as-it-calls-for-restoration-of-calm-in-region/.

⁴⁹ Lika, Liridon, ed. 2023. Kosovo's Foreign Policy and Bilateral Relations. 1st ed. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003371588>.

⁵⁰ Hoti, Afrim, Bardhok Bashota, and Bekim Sejdiu. 2022. "Relations between Turkey and Kosovo: Factors and dynamics." Southeast European and Black Sea Studies 22, no. 1: 145–163. DOI: 10.1080/14683857.2022.2026087.

4.1. Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

Ethnic Kurds make up about one-fifth of the Turkish population (MAR). PKK is the Kurdish acronym for the most deadly terrorist organization in contemporary Turkey⁵¹. Also known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the roots of Kurdish political activism in Turkey can be traced back to the early 1960s⁵². The group has a protean political platform, whereby it has vacillated between a call for Marxist revolution, promotion of jihad, and the creation of a Kurdistan⁵³. This armed group proclaims ethno-nationalist credentials as well as an irredentist agenda. Their political aim when resorting to political violence in 1984 was to establish an independent Kurdish state in Turkey's southeast region⁵⁴. However, now, it is more limited to having an autonomous region within the Turkish state shell.

Initially, hegemony was lacking, and disunity and internal conflict were rife within this organization in the late 1970s⁵⁵. This is quite natural, for organizations with similar political objectives generally engage in wars of eradication against one another, especially in the early stages of existence⁵⁶. This, too, occurred in the PKK, whereby PKK violence was directed against rival Kurdish organizations supporting the Turkish government⁵⁷.

However, the group's target shifted significantly after 1984. In 1984, PKK's armed campaign for Kurdish independence emerged⁵⁸. PKK's new target under this campaign became the Turkish army and the state's security forces. PKK engaged in coordinated attacks, predominantly in rural regions. These attacks aimed to initiate a popular national rebellion to overthrow Turkish rule in the Kurdish majority regions. Between 1986 and 1988, in addition to military targets, Kurdish civilians in the Southeastern region became targets of the PKK, both as a means to control and for logistical reasons. Later in his collection of the political reports for the Fourth Congress, Ocalan refers to how it depended too much on the villagers for logistics that made annihilation inescapable, with militants forcefully entering the villages⁵⁹.

⁵¹ Abrahms, Max. 2008. "What Terrorists Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy." *International Security* 32, no. 4: 88.

⁵² Gunes, Cengiz. 2012. "Explaining the PKK's Mobilization of the Kurds in Turkey: Hegemony, Myth and Violence." *Ethnopolitics: Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 12, no. 3: 247.

⁵³ Abrahms, Max. 2008, 88.

⁵⁴ Karen Kaya, 2012. "Turkish Commanders Discuss Counterterrorism Strategies and Lessons Learned from 25 Years of Fighting the PKK," 527.

⁵⁵ Gunes, 2012: 248.

⁵⁶ Abrahms, 2008: 90.

⁵⁷ Gunes, 2012: 248.

⁵⁸ Kaya, 2012: 528.

⁵⁹ Ocalan, Abdullah. 1993. *PKK IV. Kongresi'ne Sunulan Politik Rapor*. Istanbul: Aydinlar Matbaasi, 159.

By the early 1990s, the insurgency had increased, and the PKK had managed to mobilize many Kurds. It had become a transnational mass movement, organizing political and cultural activities in Turkey and European countries⁶⁰. In its Fourth Congress in December of 1991, the PKK escalated its armed activities through guerrilla warfare and terror⁶¹. From 1996 to 1999, to spread terror across Turkey, the PKK even took suicide bombing as a tactic in selected targets that would negatively affect the Turkish economy—infrastructure, tourist resorts, revenue sources, etc.⁶². In 1999, the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was captured, partially causing the group to withdraw into northern Iraq with a declaration of ceasefire. In January 2000, the PKK ceased violence as a means and worked toward forming itself as a legitimate armed force that would be on the defensive⁶³.

The ceasefire was called off when PKK demanded Turkey's negotiation with Ocalan. The attacks continued, with the main targets being Turkish soldiers and selected Turkish civilians in southeastern Turkey who worked as teachers, doctors, etc, in the region. This struggle has caused the death of approximately 40,000 people⁶⁴. To have a reason to reimpose martial law, the Turkish state attempted to stage an attack to make it seem like a PKK terrorism act in November of 2005. Known as the Semdinli affair, this event caused the Kurds to respond to mass protests across towns in the Southeast⁶⁵. According to Agence France Presse, more than 10,000 Kurds had come together to show their support for the PKK⁶⁶. The Turkish security forces' heavy-handed response to the peaceful protests led to the death of 4 civilians and condemnation by Human Rights Watch and other groups for its excessive use of force⁶⁷. Until 2013, clashes of violence between the two sides continued.

In 2013, another ceasefire occurred where the two sides observed a tentative truce with the Turkish government holding promising peace talks with Ocalan⁶⁸. Many citizens believed this would end the conflict, especially considering that in June 2015, for the

⁶⁰ Gunes, Cengiz. 2012, 248.

⁶¹ Unal, Mustafa Cosar. 2012. *Counterterrorism in Turkey: Policy Choices and Policy Effects toward the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)*. New York: Routledge.

⁶² Ibid.: 115.

⁶³ Ibid.: 122.

⁶⁴ Kaya, Karen. 2012, 528.

⁶⁵ Phillips, David L. 2009. *From Bullets to Ballots: Violent Muslim Movements in Transition*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 123.

⁶⁶ Agence France Presse. 2013. "Thousands march in Paris in memory of 2013 murder of Kurdish activists." France24. Accessed January 7, 2023. <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230107-thousands-march-in-paris-in-memory-of-2013-murder-of-kurdish-activists>.

⁶⁷ Phillips, 2009: 123.

⁶⁸ Kafanov, Lucy. 2015. "End of Turkey-PKK Ceasefire Puts HDP in a Tough Spot." Aljazeera, August 10. Accessed from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/8/10/end-of-turkey-pkk-ceasefire-puts-hdp-in-a-tough-spot>

first time, the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party, HDP, passed the threshold and took seats in the parliament. However, the peace negotiations ended with a crisis that erupted on July 20, 2015, when a suicide bombing in Suruc killed 33 Kurdish and Turkish activists⁶⁹. When the government failed to investigate the case thoroughly, the PKK accused the government of siding with ISIS and retaliated to the bombing by killing two Turkish police officers identified as ISIS supporters. As a response, governmental authorities detained hundreds of suspected PKK supporters nationwide. Several towns, including Silvan, Batman, and Sur in Diyarbakir, have declared autonomy⁷⁰. As violence escalates, curfews and lockdowns of Kurdish-dominated cities like Cizre and Diyarbakir have occurred, where clashes between PKK and the Turkish military continue to restore order⁷¹. Since the escalation of violence in July 2015, almost all attacks of PKK have targeted the army and the police.

Several governments and international organizations consider the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) a terrorist group. On October 8, 1997, the US labeled the PKK a Foreign Terrorist Organization⁷². The European Union (EU) has designated the PKK a terrorist organization, requiring all EU member states to extradite terrorists, freeze assets and transactions, and coordinate with foreign governments⁷³. Countries such as Canada and Australia consider the PKK a terrorist group as well. According to Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NATO additionally deems the PKK a terrorist group⁷⁴.

Despite these classifications, the PKK's terrorist status has been questioned multiple times. In 2020, the Belgian Court of Cassation declared the PKK non-terrorist⁷⁵. That sparked a heated debate in the UK Houses of Parliament about whether the UK should reconsider its PKK listing stance⁷⁶.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Geerdink, Frédérique. 2015. "PKK Prepared for 'People's War' During Ceasefire." Beacon Reader.

⁷¹ Reuters. 2015. "PKK Bomb Attack Kills Two Turkish Police, Curfew Declared." International Business Times, September 13. Accessed from <https://www.ibtimes.com/pkk-bomb-attack-kills-two-turkish-police-curfew-declared-2094376>

⁷² U.S. Department of State. 2023. "Foreign Terrorist Organizations." Accessed from <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>

⁷³ Onay, Abdulkadir. 2008. "Divergent European Approaches to Combating PKK Terrorism." Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

⁷⁴ Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011. "PKK." Accessed from <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/pkk.en.mfa>.

⁷⁵ Apelblat, M. 2020. "Belgian government defies ruling of its supreme court on PKK." The Brussels Times. Accessed [March, 2022]. <https://www.brusselstimes.com/belgium/92787/belgian-government-defies-ruling-of-its-supreme-court-on-pkk>.

⁷⁶ Akartuna, E. Arda, and Amy Elise Thornton. 2023. "The Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) in London: Countering Overseas Terrorist Financing and Support with 'Nudge' and Situational Approaches." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 35, no. 2: 470-496. doi:10.1080/09546553.2021.1941902.

4.2. Tracing Communication and Signaling over Time

The Turkish government's signals to the PKK, public, and international community have been thoroughly analyzed in the previous sections. The following section examines the PKK's signals to these three audiences. Understanding the PKK's diverse communication methods is crucial to understanding this complicated conflict. PKK campaigns, especially in the peace process with the Turkish government, mirror political shifts inside the Turkish state and within the PKK⁷⁷.

Signals to the Turkish government and the Public:

The PKK has been known to signal the Turkish government to express its demands, complaints, or intentions. The signals might take the shape of ceasefires, strikes, or discussions. With regard to the public, the PKK has sent mixed signals, with leaders making conciliatory comments and trying to utilize demonstrations and protests highly, notably in Europe⁷⁸.

International signals:

The PKK uses ideological sympathy and social dependency to legitimize itself in diasporas to increase international cooperation, especially with its diasporas in Europe⁷⁹.

Bjørkheim⁸⁰ highlights the PKK's use of global terrorist discourse to address regional problems and demonize foes through speeches and newsletters.

On the one hand, you say that the Kurds are as much owners of these lands as the Turks and that all their national and social rights will be recognized; on the other hand, even our name is denied. This is what led to the violence. We are indeed the side that should be least responsible. We wanted our identity. We enjoyed our democracy. We enjoyed our culture. Can anybody live without culture? Can anybody live without democracy? What do you expect us to do after even our name has been denied?"

⁷⁷ David Walsh, "Kurdish Separatism in Turkey: The PKK's Changing Strategy," International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), accessed [March 2022], <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09446>.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group, "Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement," accessed [November 2023], <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/turkey-pkk-and-kurdish-settlement>.

⁷⁹ Akartuna, E. Arda, and Amy Elise Thornton, "The Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) in London: Countering Overseas Terrorist Financing and Support with 'Nudge' and Situational Approaches," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 35, no. 2 (2023): 470-496.

⁸⁰ Anders Sundstøl Bjørkheim, "One terrorism to rule them all: Turkey, the PKK, and global terrorism discourse," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 23 (2020): 487-510, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-00167-z>.

The statement above, which the PKK leader Ocalan made during the 1998 ceasefire⁸¹, echoes and signals that political agitation led to violence. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, various efforts were taken to consolidate Turkish nationalism through a mono-ethnic nation-building project. The central theme behind the policy of Turkish nationalism was that all Turks were originally from Central Asia and spread across the globe to spread civilization. Under this project, by 1936, the principal notion of the Kurdish ethnicity was that Kurds were part of the Turkish population known as “Mountain Turks”⁸², a name originating from the sound their boots made while walking on snow in the mountains. Nonetheless, centralized control within the new republic signaled its authoritarian position by brutally suppressing Kurdish revolts. Similarly, when the insurgency came about, the security apparatus aimed to stop the movement.

4.3. Counterinsurgency Operations as Signals

To proactively break PKK’s ability to attack, there has been constant military action against the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey. Looking at the history of Turkey, it is essential to note the peculiar characteristics of the civilian-military relationship. Unlike other democratic republics, Turkey’s military was not under civilian control, remained relatively autonomous from politics, saw itself as the guardian of secular democracy, and intervened in any attempts by civilians to expand their influence. The military had full responsibility for matters of national security⁸³. A controversial Turkish Gendarmerie known as Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counterterrorism (JITEM) was created regarding the PKK. This institution is critical in analyzing the Turkish government’s indiscriminate counterinsurgency policies.

To offer a succinct understanding of the critical roles of JITEM (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Unit) and MIT (National Intelligence Organization) in decoding signals the PKK conveys, it is imperative to consider the contextual backdrop of the enduring Kurdish-Turkish conflict. The abovementioned struggle is the primary backdrop under which these intelligence services execute their operations. The protracted conflict between Turkish forces and the PKK has exerted a substantial influence on Turkey’s modern history, reflecting the profound consequences it has

⁸¹ Kani, (Unknown). Ocalan Declares Cease-Fire. Retrieved from <https://kurdistan.org/ocalan-declares-cease-fire/>

⁸² Ceng Sagnic, “Mountain Turks: state ideology and the Kurds in Turkey,” *Information, Society and Justice* 3, no. 2 (2010): 127-134.

⁸³ Umit Ozdag and Ersel Aydinli, “Winning a Low Intensity Conflict: Drawing Lessons from the Turkish Case,” in *Democracies and Small Wars*, ed. Efraim Inbar (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 2003), 104.

generated and the persistent security challenges it poses to national security⁸⁴. MIT and JITEM are tasked with acquiring and assessing intelligence related to the PKK. The extensive range of paramilitary interventions carried out by various actors presents an immense obstacle to intelligence and counter-terrorism efforts⁸⁵. Eccarius-Kelly⁸⁶ finds in her notable investigation of the interpretations of PKK's signals that the functions and structures of MIT and JITEM are not distinctly defined. This underscores the necessity for conducting a more comprehensive investigation to fully grasp the roles of JITEM and MIT in deciphering the nuanced signals from the PKK. This suggested future research also will provide light on the broader implications for Turkey's national security and counter-terrorism strategies.

The creator of this organization is known to be retired Colonel Arif Dogan. In his book titled "JITEM'i Ben Kurdum" roughly translated as "I Founded the JITEM," Dogan says, "The task of JITEM is to both gather intelligence and to execute actions based on this intelligence"⁸⁷.

With the lack of civilian-military control, the indiscriminate nature of JITEM's operations fueled support for PKK by revealing the "type" of the Turkish government as an aggressor.

As Teymur's work highlights, mistreatment by security forces while in custody had been a leading factor in strengthening locals' attachment to the PKK⁸⁸. JITEM even viewed HADEP (People's Democracy Party) as a potential terrorist organization and took measures to abduct members of the party to pressure them into joining an armed counter-PKK organization called AMED under the command of JITEM. AMED has been identified as a group that has kidnapped and eliminated Kurdish intellectuals in the southeast region, solely based on the belief of the Turkish authorities that the scholars were supporting the PKK⁸⁹.

⁸⁴ Yeliz Budak, "Dealing with the Past: Transitional Justice, Ongoing Conflict and the Kurdish Issue in Turkey," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 9, no. 2 (2015).

⁸⁵ Ayhan Isik, "Prostate paramilitary violence in Turkey since the 1990s," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 21, no. 2 (2021) ; Ayhan Isik, "Turkish Paramilitaries during the Conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK," *The Commentaries* 2 (2022).

⁸⁶ Vera Eccarius-Kelly, "Interpreting the PKK's Signals in Europe," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 11 (2008): 10–14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26298383> .

⁸⁷ Ahmet Dogan, "Prostate paramilitary violence in Turkey since the 1990s," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 21, no. 2 (2021): 33.

⁸⁸ Samih Teymur, *A Conceptual Map for Understanding the Terrorist Recruitment Process: Observation and Analysis of DHKP/C, PKK, and Turkish Hezbollah Terrorist Organizations*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of North Texas, 2007.

⁸⁹ Z. Ayik, "PKK Confessors Turn into State Hitmen," *Turkish Daily News*, 1997.

Sehildans were also a key component of such a provocative phenomenon, whereby PKK became deemed more legitimate in the eyes of the people vis-à-vis de-legitimation of the state by its harsh actions. As the PKK had said, such indiscriminate attacks signaled to the locals that the government could not be trusted.

I knew the resistance better during Serhildan in 1991 and 1992. The police were always controlling the streets and stopping people. In a demonstration, the tanks crushed two persons. I knew one of them; His death brought fear unto me. I told myself that if we are killed or killed like that, I have to participate in the struggle. So, I made my decision⁹⁰.

This is a quote from someone who participated in Serhildans in the 1990s, collected by the fieldwork scholar Mehmet Orhan, conducted in Batman, Turkey, in 2005. From this quote, one can see how the locals received the counterinsurgency operations as signals.

A former militant cited in Orhan's work hints at how the violence in the Southeast region established a relation between PKK and its social base; "[O] you're people started to think after these actions. They thought that they were not alone or left behind. The action made them feel that there were always people who would protect them in Pazarcik and Maras"⁹¹. Becoming victims of the state's harsh counterinsurgency tactics, the militant's words refer to the legitimacy gained by the armed group. Victims of state terror perceived the propaganda efforts that signaled PKK's commitment to the people as accurate.

Severe responses by the police, military, and JITEM, all institutions associated with the Turkish government, allowed PKK to generate more support for the overall cause. The apparent damage the counterinsurgency operations were causing to innocent Kurdish civilians perpetuated the Turkish state's cycle of producing grievances, causing social isolation and calls for revenge. As the urban insurgent in Avina's book pointed out, "the state is the great maker of guerrillas"⁹². State repression is recognized as one of the elements responsible for the emergence and perpetuation of violence in armed insurgencies⁹³. State repression and terrorism combined polarized the two communities⁹⁴. As an outcome, socially isolated Kurds resorted to joining the PKK, which provided them with social solidarity.

⁹⁰ Mehmet Orhan, *Political Violence and Kurds in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 187.

⁹¹ Ibid, 103.

⁹² Alexander Avina, *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 111.

⁹³ Christian Davenport, "State Repression and Political Order," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007).

⁹⁴ Daniel Byman, "Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities," *International Security* 28, no. 1 (2003): 153.

4.4. Political Violence as Signals

In April 1985, the Provisional Kurdish Village Guards System (GKK) was set up by the Turkish government as the first counterinsurgency policy. This system was aimed at recruiting Kurdish local leaders as heads of militias in rural villages of southeastern Anatolia⁹⁵. By 1987, 70,000 Kurdish locals were recruited as village guards. The PKK's view of GKK was apparent with Ocalan's public statements deeming them as "traitors to the Kurdish nation"⁹⁶. As Unal points out, most civilian casualties between 1986 and 1988 included the deaths of those residing in villages who took part in the GKK system. Terrorist attacks and victimization of innocent Turkish people signaled to the government the PKK's resolve to continue the conflict; such victimization signals to the government that the armed group is willing to continue the war by any means necessary. Thus, the conflict will likely be long and brutal even if the state can win.

5. Reputation, Desired Images, and Costs Incurred by Commitments

As Synder and Diesing point out, the perennial and central dilemma in diplomacy is the policy choice between coercing and conciliating adversaries⁹⁷. Upon awareness that armed propaganda and violent terrorist acts were not sufficient to realize the PKK's goal of an independent Kurdish state, the PKK engaged in a dramatic adjustment in its organizational goal, ideology, and strategy. In the Seventh Congress in January 2000, the PKK ceased violence as a means. This congress had broken the PKK's 4-year routine schedule and was seen by the PKK itself as a congress of transformation. In the sixth conference to follow in August of 2001, the PKK aimed to become a legitimate armed defense only at times necessary⁹⁸.

In its commitment to avoiding violence, the PKK went through two processes pointed out in the signaling literature: 1.) In terms of its reputation, it had to send out a series of signals to change its image as a terrorist organization both domestically and internationally 2.) with the Turkish governments' harsh counterinsurgency policies to crush the PKK, the armed group incurred significant costs as an organization with a commitment to avoid violence as a means.

⁹⁵ Matthew Adam Kocher, "The Decline of the PKK and the Viability of a One-state Solution in Turkey," *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 4, no. 1 (2002).

⁹⁶ Mustafa Cosar Unal, *Counterterrorism in Turkey: Policy Choices and Policy Effects toward the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 54.

⁹⁷ Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 4.

⁹⁸ Mustafa Cosar Unal, *Counterterrorism in Turkey: Policy Choices and Policy Effects toward the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 122.

5.1.Reputation Effects on Signals

In attempts to change its reputation, the first step taken by the PKK was to dissolve itself and found Kongra Azadiya Demokratika Kurdistan (KADEK), translated as Kurdistan's Independence and Democracy Congress, in the eighth congress of April 2002. With the name change, the PKK had attempted to reform itself into another organization to avoid being identified as a terrorist organization. However, due to its reputation, the international community perceived this signal as cheap talk. This act was viewed as a simple name change, and KADEK continued to be recognized as a terrorist group⁹⁹.

Yet, PKK continued to put forth tremendous effort to change its image. Again, outside the routine schedule, the ninth congress was convened, and KADEK was dissolved. It was replaced by a new organization, "KONGRA-GEL," standing for Kurdistan's People Congress. Moving a step forward and creating this new organization, the PKK aimed to signal its desire to be a political party and portray its desired image as one distanced from its former bloody reputation¹⁰⁰. Along with the creation of KONGRA-GEL, the ninth congress of PKK included two other major decisions: the rejection of secession from the Turkish Republic as a primary goal and emphasis on the democratization process. Furthermore, the refusal of terror and violence as a means was once again reiterated during this congress¹⁰¹.

The PKK declared a ceasefire on September 1, 1999, to demonstrate its resolve towards peace. Yet, this was a unilateral ceasefire, like the name changes and formation of KONGRA-GEL, which Ankara viewed as cheap talk and never recognized by the authorities in the capital. To send a costly signal, the PKK had to engage in behaviors that would also be perceived as expensive from the perceiving side—the Turkish government and the international arena. As an indication of ceasing violence, the remaining 3,000 to 5,000 militants were taken outside of Turkey and moved into Northern Iraq¹⁰². Ergo, the PKK took various measures to use vivid information to signal its concrete intentions.

Furthermore, the guerilla army of the PKK, known as ARGK, was abolished. In its place, Hezen Parastina Gel (HPG), in English People's Defense Units, was created. By creating a legitimate defense unit, the PKK hoped to signal its commitment to avoid violence as a means¹⁰³. The Turkish state never accepted the PKK's desired image as a defensive arms unit for the Kurdish people's rights. Statements of Turkish security forces echoed the distrust towards PKK at all times. For instance, the Turkish chief of staff, Gen. Hilmi Ozkok, said, "The Turkish armed forces aim to ensure that the separatist

⁹⁹ Lawrence E. Cline, "From Ocalan to Al Qaida: The continuing terrorist threat in Turkey," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 4 (2004).

¹⁰⁰ Mustafa Cosar Unal, 2012, 123.

¹⁰¹ Mustafa Cosar Unal, 2012, 122.

¹⁰² Evren Balta, "The Ceasefire This Time," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 2005.

¹⁰³ Mustafa Cosar Unal, 2012, 123.

terrorist organization bows down to the law and the mercy of the nation” in response to the unilateral ceasefire announced by the PKK (what was at the time called KONGRA-GEL) on August 19, 2005. The PKK’s reputation for declaring ceasefires to rebuild its forces was too strong of a memory to override the distrust towards the armed group¹⁰⁴.

5.2.Desired Image: Question of True Intention

Similar to how states have difficulties in signaling their true intentions to other states, as can be seen in the case of PKK, armed rebel groups also face similar troubles when signaling. With their aim to gain recognition by the international community as an official representative of the Kurds, the PKK focused on developing its diplomatic relations. To do so, it sent signals through an emphasis on the fundamental human rights of the Kurds rather than its widely stated aims of a united or autonomous Kurdish state. Various signals were sent to portray PKK’s intentions of gaining constitutional protections for the Kurdish population’s social and political rights through a democratic solution. State officials continued to view these as feigned goals to influence the international community’s stance on the PKK; to them, the PKK’s goals had never changed¹⁰⁵.

In 1999, the pro-Kurdish party HADEP won political power over 37 municipalities with a majority Kurdish population, including the major cities of Diyarbakir, Batman, Siirt, and Bingol. Although mayors in these cities had entered the political sphere as representatives of the Kurds, the Turkish state elites refused to accept them as legitimate actors and accused them of PKK sympathizers. This was mainly due to mixed signals perceived from the behaviors of the HADEP members. For instance, the mayor of Diyarbakir, Osman Baydemir, visited the family of a PKK militant who had lost his life in a clash with Turkish troops to show his condolences. This was a behavior that the Turkish officials perceived as being in line with their bias of HADEP as an affiliation of PKK. Turkish media distributed this story as a visit to “the mother of a terrorist”¹⁰⁶.

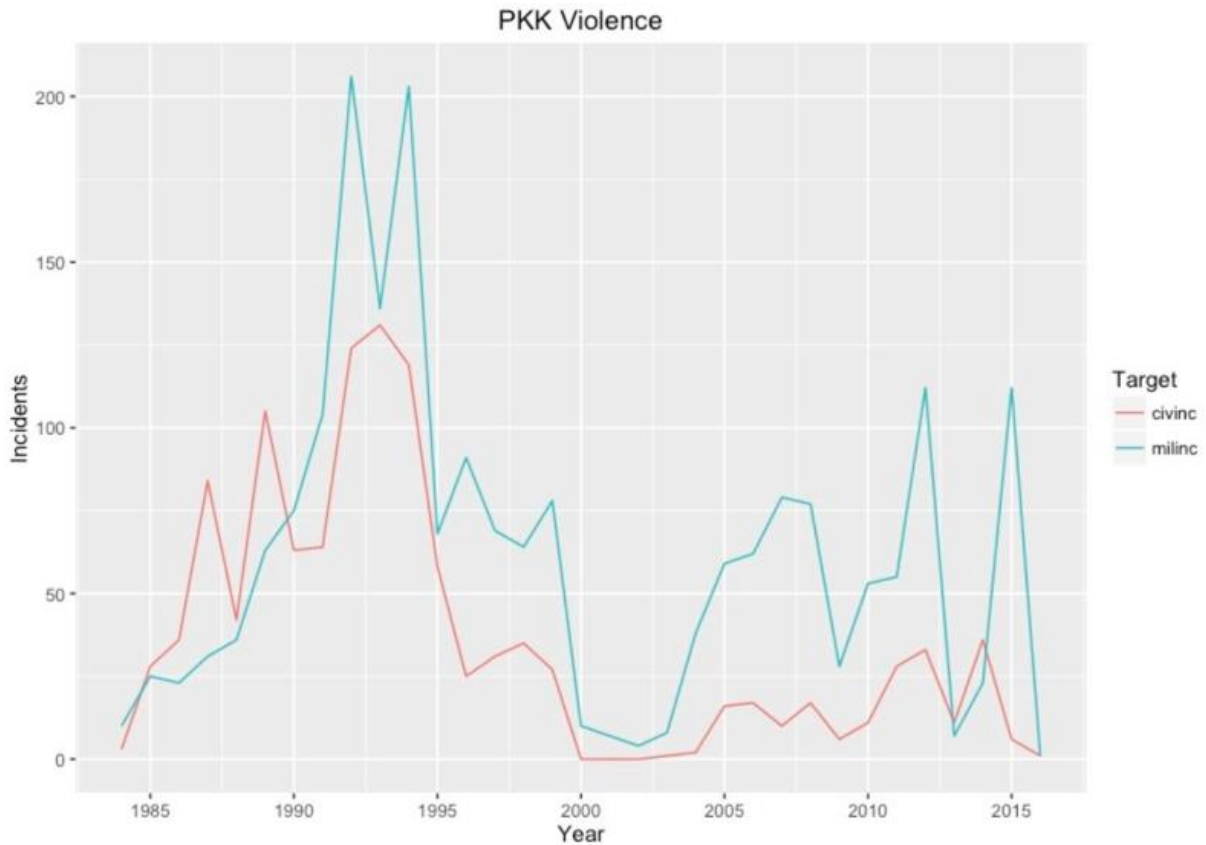
5.3.Sinking Costs Incurred by Commitment

Violence as a means only to defend the Kurds is a commitment that the PKK made in the early 2000s. This commitment has been tested very firmly by the Turkish government’s harsh crackdown in the Kurdish-majority cities last year. The graph below was created with data compiled from a refined dataset on violent incidents by PKK. It portrays the trends of PKK’s attacks by incident type as either military or civilian targeting (terrorism). As is evident from the red line, since its commitment to avoid employing terrorism, the PKK’s attacks targeting civilians have significantly dropped in the 2000s.

¹⁰⁴ Evren Balta, 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Mustafa Cosar Unal, 2012, 123.

¹⁰⁶ Evren Balta, 2005.



Despite significant costs faced by the PKK, the group strives to portray itself as avoiding acts of violence. Since the counter-insurgency operations started in July 2015, 5,000 PKK militants have been killed. In light of such a significant loss in PKK recruits, one of the top leaders of PKK, Murat Karayılan, made a public statement saying it was a mistake to confront the Turkish government in urban guerilla warfare¹⁰⁷. Another prominent PKK leader, Duran Kalkan, said, “This has been a harsh reaction. We were not expecting a counter-reaction this harsh from the government. We were wrong, and we made a mistake. Although the state may be the enemy, we expected our adversary to be humane”¹⁰⁸.

Yet, the cost incurred by the commitment is changing the reputation of the PKK in the international arena. There has been a push by a group of academics to remove the PKK from the terrorist list of the USA¹⁰⁹. Furthermore, there has been increasing external

¹⁰⁷ Haber 7, “Terör örgütünden tarihi itiraf: Hata yaptık!” 2016, 7, accessed May 1, 2022, <http://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/1868725-teror-orgutunden-tarihi-iraf-hatayaptik>.

¹⁰⁸ Abdullah Kiran, “Hatadan dönmek zor mu?,” 2016, accessed from <https://serbestiyet.com/yazarlar/hatadan-donmek-zor-mu-29169>.

¹⁰⁹ David L. Phillips and Kelly Berkell, “The Case for Delisting the PKK as a Foreign Terrorist Organization,” Lawfare, February 11, 2016, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/case-delisting-pkk-foreign-terrorist-organization>.

support for PKK by prominent actors representative of the international community. Recently, an appeal was signed by more than 100 members of the European Parliament to remove the PKK from the list of terrorist organizations.

5.4. Peace Process: Failure of Communication?

The peace process that involved bargaining between the two sides included talks between the PKK leader, who is currently in prison, Abdullah Ocalan, and representatives from the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) as intermediaries for the bargaining. The ending of the bargaining process reflects external developments influencing both sides. The PKK signaled its discontent with the Turkish government's support for ISIS and threatened to take action. When the Turkish government did not respond to this signal, the PKK retaliated with a terrorist act against two police officers whom they identified as having relations with ISIS, and the Turkish state responded to this attack by abolishing the peace process and calling for security operations and city lockdowns in the Eastern parts of Turkey where PKK is primarily active.

Furthermore, there was a shift in the Turkish state's interest due to external developments, which simultaneously influenced Erdogan's decision to end the bargaining process. While the peace process signaled the PKK that the Turkish government wanted to negotiate rather than go to war, it also showed the Turkish state's interest in entering the EU.

In July, the Turkish state dropped the peace process to gain more votes and sustain political power. By signaling to the PKK that the peace process was over, the Turkish state created a state of terror and chaos, which portrayed to the public that only Erdogan could fix the problem, increasing his party votes. Thus, this "signal" had underlying elements of desire for power, which mechanistically involved destabilizing the Eastern part of Turkey to allow for further securitization policies in Turkey. When considering who benefits from the increasing violence in the Eastern part of Turkey, one can observe that its principal beneficiary is the Turkish government, which continues to increase its powers through the possible state of emergency. As Erdogan recently stated, he will continue the security operations in the Eastern part of Turkey until every last one of the terrorist are dead, even if it means civil war. By stopping the use of terrorist tactics, the PKK has been signaling to the Turkish government and the rest of the international community that they are "freedom fighters" protecting the rights of the Kurds in the war crimes committed by the Turkish state.

The signaling and communication process between the PKK and the Turkish government is complex, with intervening and shifting incentives that make them move across the bargaining process model. Threat perception and making credible signals are all part of the dynamics of communication between the two sides. As highlighted above, the signals communicated amongst the actors during the peace process period show that signaling failures or misperceptions did not cause the breakdown and continued conflict but resulted from the actors' preferences change. Thus, more and better communication will not likely lead to a return to the cease-fire. In this sense, the PKK has been acting to send signals to the international actors and locals to further its de jure legitimacy in the locals and potential de facto legitimacy from the international community.

5.5.Rebel Governance as an Index

In laying out a part of the civil war literature in light of the scholarship on signaling, the author has claimed that the behaviors under rebel governance signal the armed group towards its target population. For rebel governance to occur, territorial control is a necessity.

This necessity has been partially fulfilled in the case of PKK for this kind of signaling to occur. Recently, in the summer of 2015, the Kurds declared autonomy in Silvan and Sur in Diyarbakir, Batman, and Hakkari. Inhabitants have faced fierce retaliation by the government forces. In mid-August, the clashes between armed citizens and security forces had become so intense in Silvan that the government placed a curfew in the town, where the Turkish army cut off all communication and aimed to restore order. The four mayors who declared autonomy have been arrested¹¹⁰. The Turkish Ministry of Interior has started taking precautions against the potential spread of the declaration of independence. All 93 municipalities ruled by the Democratic Regions Party (DBP), linked to the national-level HDP, are currently under legal investigations for accusations of declaring self-governance under PKK orders¹¹¹.

In light of this, various efforts have been made by the PKK to establish governance to gain legitimacy from the locals, which has been salient. As Mampilly and Ahmad point out¹¹², to gain legitimacy from the locals, rebel governance is vital; to form a national

¹¹⁰ Frédérique Geerdink, "PKK Prepared for 'People's War' During Ceasefire," Beacon Reader, 2015.

¹¹¹ Fevzi Kizilkoyun, "Turkey's Interior Ministry Probes 93 Municipalities for Supporting PKK," Hurriyet Daily News, 2015, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-interior-ministry-probes-93-municipalities-for-supporting-pkk-87337>.

¹¹² Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Eqbal Ahmad, "Revolutionary Warfare and Counterinsurgency," in *Guerrilla Strategies: An Historical Anthology from the Long March to Afghanistan*, edited by Gerard Chaliand (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

government representative of the target population, ethno-nationalist secessionist groups provide services and work towards establishing authority as soon as the targeted territory is under control.

As Mustafa and colleagues point out, “protecting civilian life is deemed one of the basic duties of governments. Yet it is not only civilian biological lives that are to be protected, but also how they live those lives”¹¹³. PKK is “out-administering” the Turkish state in both aspects through its service provisions; it provides the Kurds with both physical security and the preservation of their human rights. As one of the interviewees pointed out in a different study the author has conducted on Kurdish rebel governance:

Aside from security, the most fundamental service PKK has given us is to keep our identity alive. Thanks to the PKK, not all of us faced the destiny of the Laz people or Circassians. Yes, some Kurds did become assimilated and live in the Northwest with the Turks, forgetting their identity, but overall, Ataturk’s efforts failed to incorporate us. We are still a community and continue speaking our language. This is all thanks to the PKK.

Putting this notion in context, the “Turkification” policy set up by Turkey’s founding father, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, had been in place until 1991. This policy denied the existence of a separate Kurdish ethnicity and banned the use of the Kurdish language. Kurds were distinguished as “mountain Turks” due to the geographical surroundings of their residence (MAR). However, the efforts to assimilate the Kurds failed with a history of Kurdish struggles, including the PKK, aiming to keep their ethnicity alive.

Just as Ahmad points out, the necessity of rebels to build administrative structures like collecting taxes, education, and social welfare¹¹⁴ is being offered by the PKK. However, they may still be in rudimentary form. A school in Quandil Mountains was established, providing training and education in Kurdish nationalism and Marxist-Leninist Ideology. Taxation had been found in the early stages of the armed group, as it was the primary revenue source. As one of the interviewees stated, “The PKK has developed a security system that the state has failed to provide. Its rudimentary court system to keep order within the PKK has evolved into a traditional court system used to resolve civilian disputes.” However, most of the services offered are at a rudimentary stage; such efforts

¹¹³ Daanish Mustafa, Katherine E. Brown, and Matthew Tillotson, “Antipode to Terror: Spaces of Performative Politics,” *Antipode* 45, no. 5 (2013): 1110-1127.

¹¹⁴ Eqbal Ahmad, “Revolutionary Warfare and Counterinsurgency,” in *Guerrilla Strategies: An Historical Anthology from the Long March to Afghanistan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 249.

of the PKK signal to the Kurdish population the PKK's commitment to the Kurds, which the Kurds have very much appreciated. The peace process that involved bargaining between the two sides included talks between the PKK leader, who is currently in prison, Abdullah Ocalan, and representatives from the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) as intermediaries for the bargaining. The ending of the bargaining process reflects external developments influencing both sides. The PKK signaled its discontent with the Turkish government's support for ISIS and threatened to take action. When the Turkish government did not respond to this signal, the PKK retaliated with a terrorist act against two police officers whom they identified as having relations with ISIS, and the Turkish state responded to this attack by abolishing the peace process and calling for security operations and city lockdowns in the Eastern parts of Turkey where PKK is primarily active.

6. Conclusion

The literature on signaling is very robust, incorporating aspects of psychology to make sense of the interaction among state actors. Yet, it is just as limited with a specific focus on state actors. Moving beyond this limitation, this paper has attempted to use the framework of signaling and communication in combination with the scholarship on civil conflict to shed light on the interaction between the state and armed separatist groups. With the analysis of the case at hand, the author has attempted to show how the dynamics present in state communications are also present among state and non-state actors: issues of reputation affecting the perception of signals, sending credible signals, costs of commitments, projecting desired images, etc. Furthermore, signals specific to civil conflicts, such as rebel governance, political violence, and counterinsurgency operations, were laid out. The main issue of signaling in civil conflict interactions is the one of multiple audiences.

In sum, signals are vital to communicating interests to reach a less costly outcome for both actors. In cases of civil conflict, communications of claims become very salient, where lack of it could easily lead to escalation of violence. Although this analysis was limited to civil conflict with separatist aims, it has value, as it is the first step towards viewing armed group and state interaction through a signaling framework. Future research should focus on center-seeking groups such as ISIS, who have no intention of gaining international legitimacy. Such analysis could shed more light on the dynamics of communication not captured in this analysis.

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