

Introduction

Why Engage, and Why Not?

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Fuad Ali Saleh, a radical Islamist head of a terrorist network, is about to be judged. Victims who have survived his bomb attacks are present, among them a woman on a wheelchair and another with her face horribly distorted by an explosion. The presiding judge begins the hearing by verifying the identity of the accused.

“Your name is Fuad Ali Saleh?”

“My name is ‘Death to the West!’”

(Paris: Jan. 29, 1990, the Law Court. *Le Monde* 1998)

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Contrary to popular notions, negotiating with terrorist organizations is not talking with the devil. It is not soul-selling or evil pacting, nor does it require a surrender of goals and values that the parties have held dear. Rather, the challenge is one of making extremist movements negotiable. This means inducing moderation and flexibility in their demands, reshaping their ends into attainable reforms, and forcing an end to their violent means of protest while, at the same time, opening the political process to broader participation and more effective policies on the deeper problems of society and governance that underlie extremist organizations’ protests. Without such movement on *both* sides, the horror of terrorism will stay with us.

But there is more. Unless the extremist movement’s tactics are shown to be counterproductive, it will not abandon them. Dealing with terrorism, therefore, means keeping its violent means in check, transforming its ends from destruction to participation, and undercutting the grievances

on which it rides. These three elements are the ingredients of a policy of engagement. Thus, confrontation and engagement are not just polar opposites; they are the two ends of a continuum, and the elements in a causal relationship. Engagement may appear to constitute a sharp change from a policy of confrontation, but containment and isolation are the means of causing the moderation that makes the extremists engageable. Engaging extremists, as the following chapters show, works as part of a broad policy that is complex in tactics, deliberate in balance, and, ultimately, indispensable.

This policy, like any other, does not always succeed, and there are terrorist organizations beyond even its reach. These are absolute terrorist organizations (Zartman 2003). As long as the organization's ends are millennialist dreams, globalist transformations, and activated worldviews that require terrorist means, there is no point in negotiating and no hope in engaging. Such groups require contact and surveillance to detect changes in ends, means, and personnel, for the category "absolute" is an attribute, not a permanent condition. However, for an organization to become engageable, its ends as well as means—and probably its personnel—must be changeable. To cite names, this means that al-Qaeda is not considered here to be engageable, whereas Hamas is, with the more complex Taliban located somewhere in between. Others, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic (CDR) in Rwanda, and Hezbollah in Lebanon—all identified more fully in the following chapters—may be difficult to engage but are not absolutes or intrinsically unengageable. Several chapters below deal with ways of separating engageable (contingent) terrorists from al-Qaeda absolutes, and the volume's conclusion will discuss development of criteria that help sort out possibilities in such cases.

This book concerns engagement and negotiation with political terrorist organizations, not just isolated hostage takers (Faure and Zartman 2010). Such groups include nationalist terrorist organizations, which use terrorist methods to gain self-determination and independence for their territorial claims, revolutionary terrorist organizations, which seek a change in government to accomplish deep-seated social changes, and also religious or millennialist organizations belonging to the fourth wave of modern terrorism, which seek to overthrow and replace a government they see as impious and unjust (Rapoport 2006).

Although these same organizations are also sometimes called "freedom fighters," "resistants," "national liberation movements," "holy warriors," or "martyrs," the important distinction is not whether the observer favors their

cause but whether they use violent methods directly against noncombatant civilian populations for the purpose of influencing policy—essentially the U.S. and UN definition of terrorism (UNSC 2001; U.S. Code 2001). The U.S. administration currently tends to avoid the term “terrorist” and prefers “extremist.” How synonymous the two terms are is a matter for a not-too-interesting debate, and they will be used more or less synonymously here. However, for the purposes of analyzing state decisions, the term “terrorist” must be accepted as meaning “any movement termed ‘terrorist’ by the state,” since it is that designation that underlies the state’s problem with engagement. Similarly, “engagement” and “negotiation” here are also used almost synonymously, although the latter refers to engagement undertaken specifically to reach an agreement.

It is more useful to see terrorism as a phase in a conflict waged by ethnic, religious, ideological, and other groups than as a distinctly separate phenomenon with no background, antecedents, or resemblances to other types and stages of identity conflicts (Zartman 2010; Anstey, Meerts, and Zartman 2011). This underlying assumption permits investigation of ends as well as means—a major theme of this book. Few terrorist conflicts start out as such. They begin with “lesser” means to the disaffected group’s ends and escalate into terrorism when those earlier means do not produce progress toward the group’s goals. This understanding allows the analysis to include relevant material from current understanding of other conflicts *before* they have reached the terrorist phase.

Negotiation and the broader policy of engagement, while ultimately necessary in the absence of one side’s clear victory, run through enormous associated difficulties and paradoxes and depend much on timing and diplomatic skills. Engagement has its risk for both sides, which explains their reluctance to engage. Before deciding the question of *how* to engage, we must grapple with the questions that precede them: Why engage? And why not? Both sides need to weigh carefully the benefits of engagement and its possible outcomes, as well as its dangers and obstacles, against the benefits and perils of continued confrontation and isolation. The first challenge is to clarify the risks and opportunities, in order to develop guidelines for the inevitable policy choices. If engagement were an obviously good thing, there would be no need to ask why, and we could immediately jump to *how*. But engagement is a risky choice, for both sides, which explains their reluctance to engage. There are many arguments against negotiating with extremists, and many of the same arguments the state makes, the extremists can also make against negotiating with the state—a parallel that is important to understand from the state side, as Camille Pecastaing’s chapter points out. That is why much of the analysis is relevant to both sides (even

though readers on the state side are likely to be more numerous than those on the terrorist side). This is not to suggest that the two sides are mirror images, only that questions of engagement that are often regarded from one side only are, in fact, posed to both parties.

Thereafter, the questions of *when* and *how* come to the fore. If engagement is inevitable, why not do it early and save all those lives, including those of the many innocent civilian bystanders? Part of the answer certainly comes from the difficulty of reversing a policy commitment to confrontation, but another part comes from the need to await or create appropriate conditions for a policy shift to engagement. When these conditions, including the possibility of conducting a policy reversal, are assembled, the final issue is *how* to engage. This introduction discusses why and why not engage. *When* and *how* to engage, and the consequences, are the questions the rest of this work addresses.

Obstacles to Engagement

Just as politics is the art of the possible, negotiation is the art of compromise. The basic question, therefore, is, what does engagement between states and extremist organizations seek to obtain, and what are the chances of obtaining it? Negotiations with terrorists to end hostage crises seek, above all, to save lives, both those of the hostages and those subject to the future hostage crises that negotiation might encourage (Faure and Zartman 2010). The negotiations occur between two parties that have something to trade—hostages in exchange for something else (demands, publicity, safety)—and who are looking for a deal. Negotiations with political terrorist organizations are much broader in scope. They involve national, not just personal, security, and the fate of friends as well as enemies. Unlike negotiations with hostage takers, they do not involve parties looking for a deal, who try to define a zone of possible agreement and find appropriate terms of trade. Negotiations with political terrorist organizations seek to change the means that terrorists use but also, to some degree, the ends they pursue. If the terrorists' ends were immediately acceptable, the extreme means (terrorism) would not be necessary.

Both the state and the extremist organization face these questions. Generally, the few works on terrorist negotiations examine the state's choices, as if to assume that the terrorists are ready to negotiate if only the state will (Rubin 1990; Hughes 1990; Beyer and Bauer 2009). While this may be true for terrorists as hostage takers, it is not true at all for terrorist political organizations, which often face the same sorts of questions as do states—a point of departure for William Donohue and Moty Cristal's chapter, and

of analysis for Aldo Civico's. In fact, the terrorist political organization lies midway on a continuum between the state at one end and looser rebellions and individuals such as hostage takers at the other. It usually develops an institutionalized structure, including a military and a political wing, a tax and service system, foreign diplomacy, and, often, actual territorial control (even if only at night), as well as a complex belief system. All these properties can combine to make the terrorist political organization a sort of proto-state, lacking only state status, as seen with FARC, the Afghan Taliban, and LTTE. "You are not dealing with a political party," declared LTTE's chief negotiator. "We have a judicial system, various structures where civilians are participating. So you have to take us seriously" (Sivaram 2006, 178). Yet the relative clarity of state-to-state negotiations, even with all the two-level international and domestic complexity that it might cover, is absent (Evans, Jacobson, and Putnam 1993).

As a result, the process of arriving at an agreement is complex, time-consuming, and frustrating, and even when the parties get there, the result is unstable, unreliable, unencompassing, and unenforceable. Negotiations with terrorist organizations are notoriously difficult, as evidenced by the long negotiations with the LTTE, described in the chapters by Kristine Höglund and by Maria Groeneveld-Savisaar and Siniša Vuković; with Colombia's ELN, described in the chapter by Aldo Civico; and with the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA), the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), and the various Darfur rebel groups, among others. Indeed, "organization" is usually a misnomer. Usually there are many organizations, of unclear structure, competing with one another, riddled with factions, torn over the tactical question of whether to talk or fight (Haass and O'Sullivan 2000; Zartman and Alfredson 2010). Over these "organizations," whether territorial or millennialist, often hangs a maximalist goal sanctified by an absolute, all-justifying religious or ideological mandate. And beneath the "organization" often lie substrata of tribal, ethnic, and traditional groups and allegiances, increasingly mingled with, or replaced by, criminal elements as time goes on. The ethos of both the state's and the terrorists' mandate permits temporary agreements and justifies their rupture.

To begin with, engagement and negotiation carry with them the recognition of the terrorist organization (and, for the terrorists, the recognition of the state). Recognition confers a degree of legitimacy and status, and an implication that the party speaks for the client population it claims to represent. For the state, engagement gives the terrorist organization legitimacy that overshadows its illegitimate tactics. For the terrorists, recognition of

the state weakens their own claim of exclusive legitimacy. Even for the mediator, recognition of the terrorists weakens its state-to-state relations with the terrorists' opponent (the state), and its own moral standing against terrorist tactics. No side can expect the other to give up its general goals and claims of representation, whatever the deal finally struck in negotiation. Regime change may come about, but for the moment, the terrorist organization makes its deal with the enemy state. Terrorists may moderate, but for the moment, the state makes its deal with the illegal terrorist organization. And the mediator deals with both as "unsavory characters," in President Jimmy Carter's characteristic phrase. Since terrorist groups, like any other rebel group, seek, above all, status and representational recognition, engagement carries them a long way toward their goal.

In sum, recognition weakens the state's position and strengthens the terrorist's—something the state does not engage in without some initial payment or expectations of a later one. Since reciprocity is the expectation, state engagement actually compromises the terrorist group as well, particularly if it has not actually beaten the state into submission. Thus, engaging extremists raises problematic implications, setting up precedents for future encounters, rewarding extremist methods, risking entrapment in a relationship that may elicit more and more concessions to reward the other side. The question of recognition of organizations termed "terrorist" paralyzed potential negotiations between the Algerian government and the Islamic Salvation Front in the early 1990s, as it had between the French government and the Algerian National Liberation Front, and also between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) until 1993 and then in the next round between Israel and Hamas. Negotiations in Mozambique and South Africa in 1990–94, with the National Resistance Movement (Renamo) and the African National Congress respectively, were carried out not with the state but with the governing parties in order to avoid these problems, and led to serious regime changes.

Deeper than the problem of status is the way the two sides see each other. States (and their populations) and terrorist organizations tend to demonize the opponent (Spector 1998; Martin 2003; Faure 2007; Staub 2010). Demonization is the characterization of individuals, groups, or political bodies as evil, for purposes of justifying and making plausible an attack, whether in the form of assassination, legal action, circumscribing of political liberties, or warfare. The purpose is to facilitate killing or destroying the demonized group and to rally support for the demonizers. It is a double process, addressing first the psychological dimension, by building on the anxiety, and then the strategic dimension, by degrading the opponent to justify extreme policies against it.

Governments and media demonize the extremists by developing a Manichaean worldview with “us” facing the “Green Peril” (successor to the “Red Peril”), by defining the Quran as a “war plan against non-Muslims,” by referring to Muslims as “Islamofascists,” or, indeed, by loose use of the label “terrorist.” Terrorist groups demonize their enemies in no less caricatural ways. The United States is the “Great Satan” to Iran and the “head of the snake” to al-Qaeda. Westerners are labeled *kuffar* (unbelievers, against whom strong action is encouraged), heads of moderate Arab countries such as Egypt or Jordan are “apostates,” the world is in a state of *jabiliyya*, or pre-Islamic ignorance, and “unreformed” governments are “lackeys of the United States.” The moral disqualification of the counterpart on both sides is used to authorize behaviors that otherwise would not be countenanced, such as terrorism and torture, or, in a negotiation, lying, tricking, manipulating, and deception. The role of a negotiator is then viewed as a way to distract the enemies while the state or organization is preparing to attack them.

Beyond their images of each other, states and terrorist organizations differ fundamentally on policy, and so engagement signals a policy compromise. Almost universally, when engagement is sought, it is the state that does the seeking and, thus, is the *demandeur*—the side with the weaker negotiating position. When the terrorist organization talks of negotiation, it means the state’s surrender (sometimes total), as in Iranian president Ahmedinejad’s 2005 letter to President Bush, or Osama bin Laden’s 2003 offer to the United States. Terrorists are the weaker party in the conflict, who overcome their weakness with high-cost means—the use of violence against civilians—to gain a stronger position. They seek to buy compromise on policy and sometimes on the very existence of the state, using unconventional violence as currency. Thus, engagement with terrorists can be seen as both admitting compromise on policy (and on the state’s existence) and accepting unconventional violence as terms of trade. Since the terrorists’ goals are considered unacceptable, there is nothing to engage or negotiate.

Both sides are in the conflict to win, and attempts at conciliatory policy undermine the commitment to that effort. Even when victory is not imminent, part of a winning strategy is simply to hold out until the effects of failure sink in on the other side. Very often, victory is achieved not by a single salient battle but by showing the opponents that their tactics are unavailing. To sue for peace is to destroy this effect.

Thus, dealing with terrorists demands a major policy shift, from total confrontation to a position admitting that the terrorists are at least engageable and that there is something in their position that can serve as

the basis for a negotiated compromise. They are no longer the devil, with whom one should not shake hands, or the enemy, against whom one wages a total confrontation. The same is true on the extremists' side. Of course, tactical shifts are part of any conflict, but potential damage to one's political support and career is a strong inhibitor of shifts too radical. President George W. Bush was criticized by his own supporters for his engagement, in his second term, with North Korea, a state classified as a supporter of terrorism, as President Ronald Reagan also was criticized for his constructive engagement with Angola and South Africa over Namibia. A shift to engagement may gain new allies, but it will certainly lose old support and credibility. It rarely occurs without an important change in leadership. Policy changes toward dealings with terrorists after the elections of Charles de Gaulle in France (1958), Alfredo Christiani in El Salvador (1989), and Barack Obama in the United States (2008) are examples of the latter effect.

In any case, engagement may be rejected, leaving the engaging party with a hand extended into the void, and weakened by the attempt. In fact, engagement is quite likely to be rejected initially, so the initiator will have to persist and insist, accentuating its position as the weaker *demandeur*. There are many reasons why the attempt to engage may face rejection, at least initially and possibly for a while: misperception, reactive devaluation, or issues of credibility, justice, or obligation, to name a few.¹ The party being petitioned may find it hard to believe the policy change and may suspect the change as a trick to disarm it and rearm the initiator. The new signals may be misperceived, particularly because of contradictory noise or old signals coming at the same time. The opening may be dismissed as a sign that the initiators are suffering, so why not make them suffer more? Or it may be seen as something the initiators should be doing anyhow, so let them continue to move toward surrender. Finally, there is the known psychological reaction that devalues what the other part offers, and overvalues what the perceiver offers, making satisfactory reciprocation difficult (McDermott 2009). Iran's, North Korea's, Cuba's, and Venezuela's reactions to President Obama's extended hand in 2009 are cases in point. All these are common reactions to a conciliatory move by one party in a conflict, and stand in the way of a mutually beneficial engagement and negotiation.

Nonetheless, the state, as a legally responsible organization, engages itself in a long-term contract. For many, terrorism is an economic issue, if not over a penury of resources then over control of resources: desperate at not finding satisfactory conditions for themselves, their families, and their community, terrorists take refuge in extremist demands and millennialist goals, as explored in the chapters by Zartman and Khan, Lambert, and

Donohue and Cristal. To undercut these aspirations, the engaging state must provide measures to assure a better life, lest the terrorists return to their old ways. If territorial demands are involved, the states must provide development aid and call donors' conferences to underwrite the results of the negotiations. Engagement in Palestine, Kosovo, and Mozambique, to name a few conflicts labeled "terrorist," has been expensive and not particularly satisfying to donors and recipients. Engaging terrorists is ultimately as costly as fighting them, although in different terms. If the economic issue is control rather than supply of resources, satisfaction is available only through costly high-level negotiations, as seen in the oil crisis of the mid-1970s and the associated terrorism it unleashed.

On the moral level, the terrorists' choice of means—violence against civilians—makes engagement and negotiation unethical. The very act of dealing with terrorists, particularly given the status and equality that engagement and negotiation imply, tarnishes the state, since the state is supposed to represent the highest values of legality and legitimacy. No government wants to recognize a terrorist group of extortionists, civilian killers, and suicides as a legitimate counterpart. The terrorist organization's very tactics disqualify it from the recognition, status, and credibility that negotiation confers. Politics, as noted, demands compromises, procedural as well as substantive, but dealing with terrorist organizations compromises the very nature of the state—procedurally as well as substantively.

Beyond the unethicality of dealing with terrorists is the compounded moral problem that negotiation actually encourages terrorism. President Richard Nixon's statement on hostage negotiations that "saving one life endangers hundreds" can be expanded by orders of magnitude in regard to negotiations with political terrorist organizations. It is irresponsible to let terrorists shoot their way through civilian casualties into policy decisions; rewarding their blackmail only encourages others to do the same. Repeated negotiations with Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia spawned new rebel movements claiming a place at the table every time talks were revived, and negotiations in Darfur and northern Pakistan have had the same effect. Thus, engaging terrorists to bring terrorism to an end carries the moral hazard of doing the reverse (Kuperman 2006).

It is also a slap to one's allies, particularly those in the conflict area. Not only does a shift to engagement alienate former domestic support, it also leaps over moderates in the region to extend a hand to their radical rivals. Not only is undercutting the moderates politically incorrect, it also risks alienating significant parts of the population whose support the state seeks. Engagement with Hamas undercuts Fatah of the PLO; engagement with Hezbollah weakens the moderate parties in Lebanon; engagement with

Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) circumvents the democratic Basque parties in Spain. Thus, engagement tends to be counterproductive, in many ways undoing the very goals it purports to achieve.

The Benefits of Engaging Terrorist Organizations

The preceding risks and objections are logically tight and telling. Yet there must be another side to the question, since engagement does occur and would not if no benefits were forthcoming. Many of these benefits accrue to both sides, providing a positive-sum outcome for engagement that itself can be useful in moderating the terrorist organization. Others fall to one side or the other, so that they are of tactical use.

The least benefit of engagement is to gain information. Public statements by terrorists, usually for propaganda purposes, are an unreliable source about what they really want, think, believe, will accept, or seek to achieve. In fact, these ideas are often very unclear in their own minds, so that a chance to articulate them can lead to more reasonable formulations and more realistic thinking. It can also raise internal doubts about the validity of arguments and beliefs, as Zartman and Khan discuss and Lambert and Goerzig show (Staub 2010). Even before any negotiations are on the horizon, contacts and talks with terrorist organizations' representatives can elicit useful information. Such talks proved effective in successful cases such as Northern Ireland, Mozambique, and Kosovo, among others (Irwin 2005; Hume 1994; Judah 2008). They can also bring out differences of opinion among the representatives, preparing the ground for internal splits, promising contacts, and appropriate tactics, as occurred with LTTE in 2005 and with FARC in 1986. Incidentally, these benefits and effects may also come to light on the government's side, sometimes in response to clarifications and differences on the terrorists' side, feeding on each other and giving rise to improved government and terrorist policy. Thus, talks can provide useful inputs into intelligence and, eventually, policy, on both sides.

Moreover, communication is a potential path to influence (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991). Negotiation is a mechanism for influencing other parties' decisions, and given adverse or suboptimal circumstances, negotiation may be the best, if not the only, way of avoiding an undesirable outcome. The point, therefore, is not *whether* to negotiate but *how* to negotiate creatively (Zartman 2003). A decision to negotiate does not mean accepting the other side's behavior or values—means or ends. What one must accept is that the underlying humanity deserves due process and that the desire for recognition and dignity often lies at the bottom of terrorists' needs and drives.

At the other extreme, negotiation may be a necessity, the only alternative to defeat or endless, costly conflict. Holding out may be a way to avoid giving in, but the holdout must weigh the cost of such a policy. When a stalemate hurts, it is rational for the parties to come to terms; if both are caught in the impasse, the conditions are set for negotiations to provide a way out that benefits each (Zartman 2000). This situation does not guarantee a positive result, but it does provide the minimal conditions for one. Thus, the benefits of engagement are not fixed but depend on the conditions of the conflict.

The greatest benefit of engagement is to end the conflict or, at least, its terrorist form. If the terrorists can be pulled away from their violent methods, the state can meet them by getting off its nonengagement stance. This initial exchange is the beginning of the process of further exchanges. This brings up a previous objection: that negotiating with terrorists only encourages other terrorists. But it is not the act of negotiating that encourages or discourages further terrorist blackmail; it is the terms of the negotiated agreement (Zartman 2003). If the terrorists win their goals in the negotiation process and give the state little or nothing beyond the end of conflict in exchange, others will indeed be encouraged to follow the same course. Large-scale sociopolitical movements, such as the decolonization struggle, illustrate this effect, and the numerous recent secessionist movements (e.g., in Sudan, Eritrea, Casamance, Sri Lanka, Euskadi, Kosovo, Western Sahara, Tamil Eelam, and Aceh) involve a struggle over precedent as well as the individual secession cases. The normal “deal” is abandonment of terrorist means in exchange for entry into the competitive political system, with some moderation of ends as well. This is the basis of agreements with GAM in Aceh, the PLO in Palestine, Renamo in Mozambique, UNITA in Angola, the Macedonian National Liberation Army (NLA), reconciliation groups in Afghanistan, and the Sunni Awakening groups in Iraq.

Moreover, even considering engagement brings a salutary focus to the understanding of various national issues and conflicts. The end of the Cold War has made it possible for politicians and analysts alike to examine root causes of protest movements that use terrorist methods and to recognize that, unacceptable though the methods may be, they are a symptom that something is wrong. This is not to say that their cause, any more than their methods, is “right,” but only that their actions are signs of a problem that needs—and indeed cries out—to be solved. Quite often, the extremists’ protest echoes widespread public sentiment, even while at the same time eliciting strong disapproval of their methods. Research shows, strikingly, that every actual or threatened electoral or nonelectoral takeover by an Islamist movement—beginning with Iran in 1979 and continuing to Algeria

in 1991, Afghanistan in 1997, Somalia in 2004, Palestine in 2006, and Egypt in the 2000s—was not the result of a mass religious revival movement but a protest vote against a corrupt and incompetent government. Thus, terrorist outbreaks are warning signals of a deeper problem, and a call for governments to pay attention before it is too late.

The broadest benefit of engagement is lowered tensions as a general tone in international relations. “Reach out and understand” replaces “combat and isolate.” Concrete results may be slow in appearing, but the approach puts the state on the high moral ground, gives it a positive image among the undecided populace, and ultimately sends the message that “he who is not against us is with us,” rather than the reverse. In so doing, an approach of engagement can reach out as well to other states supporting the terrorists for their own purposes. To conduct operations, terrorist groups have to rely on foreign sympathy, support, and asylum. When the terrorists’ base lies within a host’s territory, the group is subject to the host’s authority. Thus, a host with sufficient political capacity may influence a group’s behavior and ability to operate (Zartman 1995; O’Brien 1996). Countries hosting or supporting terrorist groups are often labeled “rogue states.” According to U.S. intelligence, seven of them—Iran, Cuba, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria—have recently been involved in state-sponsored terrorism, covering a wide range of actions including embassy bombings, suicide missions, and hostage taking. By controlling weapons supplies, funding, and political support, states such as Iran and Syria strongly influence terrorists’ ability to operate (Ranstorp and Xhudo 1994).

Reducing tensions with sponsors also serves the secondary function of improving the terrorists’ credibility in negotiation, thus enabling states to expect terrorists to implement an agreement once it is reached. The likelihood of negotiation increases if terrorists are constrained by a host state that has something to gain or lose (Zartman 1992). While unconstrained terrorists may defect from agreements without cost, constrained terrorists face punishment from host states that have an interest in pursuing a peaceful settlement. Since host states can also be punished for supporting terrorists, hosts have incentives to resolve terrorist events peacefully. Such is the hope, at least, in U.S. engagement with Syria regarding the actions of Hezbollah. Thus, engagement is aimed as much at third-party states and populations as at the terrorists themselves, and it can provide a ripple effect of benefits.

To begin and pursue engagement, third-party mediation is generally necessary. This also serves to improve relations between the necessary mediator and the parties—a theme examined in the chapters by Pettyjohn, Civico, and Groeneveld-Savisaar and Vuković (Zartman 1995; Greig

2005). The importance of relations with a mediator is not to be underestimated in international politics. Mediator pressure for negotiations was a decisive element in conflicts with terrorists in Kosovo, Indonesia, Macedonia, Angola, Sudan, Mozambique, and Palestine. Even if mediator pressure to pursue negotiations fails, as it did in Sri Lanka and Colombia, the state can at least point out that it tried before returning to the “tactical alternative”—the use of force.

Engagement also provides tactical benefits. Negotiations may split the terrorists’ unity or facilitate divisions already latent (Cronin 2008, 2009). When moderates in the organization see that partial gains (“half a loaf”) can be made or costs lowered by coming to terms, they are encouraged to reach out to the engaging hand. Engagement frees the moderates from the constraints of internal unity under which they operated and allows them to argue that the state will meet them halfway. Extremists will continue to operate, but they will be in the minority, sidelined by the engaging movement, and can be more easily controlled, as in the case of the Jund Ansar Allah in Gaza in 2009–10, Hamas in Palestine in 1993–96, and Front Nord in Casamance in 2000–2004. There will be internal conflicts as the moderates move to pull the mantle of the movement over themselves, but the need to cover the moderates will encourage the state to move further toward them. As in most instances of negotiation, these dynamics are reciprocal, even if not necessarily equally so, and each side’s need for an agreement affects where “in the middle” the outcome will be.

Or the move can strengthen the formerly dominated moderates to the point where they can pull in the extremists and draw the mantle of unity over all the factions. Such was the effect of engagement with the NLA rebels in Macedonia, bringing both the Albanian parties and the National Liberation Army together around a common moderate platform at Prizren in 2001, and of engagement with GAM in Indonesia, uniting the factions around an agreeable “half loaf” in self-government. Properly presented, engagement can show that further confrontation is pointless and that the opponents can reach their goals by other means. Terrorism is, after all, the weapon of the weak and the tactic of desperation, in the absence of success with other tactics. When the weak see how weak they really are, how their tactics are only alienating both the state and the surrounding bystanders, and that alternative tactics are open to them, they can be brought to the engagement table. Thus, engagement can encourage and facilitate the evolution of the terrorist group.

Either way, negotiation is on the path to moderation, which is, in turn, the necessary condition for engagement. The circularity is obvious: moderation is both the result of, and the requisite for, negotiation and engage-

ment. The terrorists' willingness to negotiate is a sign of the broadening or relaxing of their tactics, as it is for the state. But the state offers engagement and negotiation (since it usually is the initiator) only when it perceives enough relaxation of means—and, possibly, of ends—to indicate further movement in the same direction. The description makes clear the delicacy of the operation: the state has to elicit indications of moderation from the terrorists and encourage them in the same process—a complicated balance analyzed in Pettyjohn's chapter. Moderation is the goal of engagement, and the major benefit to be obtained from it. It aims at producing some agreement: the renunciation of terrorist means, in exchange for some concession that the state can provide, from either its own means or its ends.

When and How to Engage

The reasons against engagement outnumber the reasons for, but they do not outweigh them. Taken together, the reasons for and against indicate two things: that engagement and negotiation are difficult, risky challenges and that their opportuneness depends on evolving circumstances. The difficulty and the risk are clearly shown by the reasons not to engage and by the problems to surmount before negotiations can succeed. The evolving circumstances need further elaboration, for they indicate why negotiations are unlikely to be an opening strategy yet are bound to be a concluding strategy.

It is often true that the whole terrorist challenge might be prevented if original grievances had been handled by "normal politics" in the petition phase, although in many cases this is a frivolous suggestion: either the original grievances are beyond human capacity to meet (e.g., immediate economic development, total government benevolence, or restoration of the Golden Caliphate), or they are high goals, not to be met lightly and worth fighting for (e.g., independence or total revamping of the sociopolitical system). So the combat begins with the means at hand. Terrorism, like any other type of internal rebellion, works both to equalize power and to contest power, seeking desperately to overcome the power asymmetry enjoyed by the state. And so the fight goes, to victory/defeat, continued escalating confrontation, or stalemate—the only possible outcomes. In the absence of the first outcome, the two parties edge warily toward the realization that engagement is the only alternative, that there are other ways to achieve goals than by terrorism, that half a loaf now is indeed available.² There are ripe moments for engagement as for any other negotiatory path. The challenge is to sense them and seize them (Zartman and de Soto 2010).

In rational terms, the bargaining dynamics are simple and straightforward. The state wants the extremists to give up their terrorist means, but in

exchange for what? Ultimately, for a better chance by using other, “lesser” means to get less of what they had hoped to get. Those terms are scarcely appealing *unless* a new condition is introduced: the impossibility of getting all they want by terrorist tactics. This means that the possibility for the extremists to achieve their current goals must be convincingly blocked, and also that the possibility of achieving at least something of those goals by alternative means must be convincingly open. Any other terms are of too little appeal to bring the parties to the table. Engagement and negotiation are about both means and ends and about impossibilities and possibilities. Civico and Groeneveld-Savisaar and Vuković lay out the drama and disappointments of this equation; Goerzig shows the effects of constrained options.

The following nine chapters address this challenge from various angles. They contain a mixture of conceptual discussions illustrated by case analyses. The cases have been chosen from salient conflicts of the moment, as particularly apt examples of points laid out in the conceptual discussions and as generators themselves of conceptual lessons and insights, on which original research could be conducted. The chapters are divided into questions of “when” and of “how.” Admittedly, the two aspects are inherently inseparable and mutually dependent: “when” conditions “how,” and “how” depends on “when” in the life of the terrorist phase of the conflict. So the distinction is a matter of emphasis. Logically, “when” comes first, in part I, as an important factor in conditioning appropriate ways of engagement. The first two chapters examine the life cycle of terrorism in order to identify times and tactics for engagement. The chapter by Zartman and Khan examines the life cycle of terrorists into an extremist group, evaluating ways that engagement and negotiation can be conducted at various moments—within the broad sociopolitical context, on the individual’s path from context to group membership, with and within the group, and on the path to violence and beyond. To interrupt the cycle that leads to violence, there must be alternatives appropriate to the particular moment. The chapter by Donohue and Cristal views terrorism’s life cycle as that of an organization, with openings for negotiation and engagement as the organization begins, matures, and declines. Again, from a different angle, it identifies appropriate times and tactics to take advantage of the terrorist organization’s cycle.

The next two chapters illustrate some of these moments via two successful experiments in engaging potential terrorists and winning them away from tactics of violence. Robert Lambert describes the work of the Muslim Contact Unit in London, engaging the help of the Salafi community to counter recruiting tactics of extremists. By taking on existing groups and

establishing a counterextremist presence, alternative teams were able to split al-Qaeda groups, win followers away from radical spiritual leaders, and delegitimize extremist means and, to some extent, extremist ends. Two other chapters, by Maria Groeneveld-Savisaar and Siniša Vuković and by Stacie Pettyjohn, examine attempts at engagement in Sri Lanka and in terrorist conflicts in the Middle East, South Africa, and Northern Ireland, to identify the conditions necessary for a powerful third party such as the United States to engage as a mediator in other states' terrorism problems. The Sri Lankan government and LTTE conducted on-again, off-again negotiations under international mediation, in which both sides underwent deep splits over the engagement issue. As a result, neither side was fully committed to the process, and the powerful mediator was not deeply enough engaged to press them to overcome their hesitations. When negotiations collapsed, the government dropped all pretense and wiped out the LTTE. On the other hand, at times when the third party felt its own interests in danger and a more moderate alternative to the terrorist organization was not available, engagement and mediation were pursued, often with positive results. The answer depends on the degree of vital interest by the third party, the degree of moderation shown by the terrorist organization, and the absence of more moderate alternatives, which in turn relates to the stage of organizational life, discussed in the Donohue-Cristal chapter.

Part II deals with the question of "how" in its own terms, independently of "when." Camille Pecastaing presents terrorism as a confrontation with the state over the grievances felt by the population, showing how a bottom-up strategy is best suited for bridging the gap, handling grievances, and reducing violent protest tactics. Two additional chapters examine ways of engaging extremists through delegitimization and suspension of violence and through isolation. Carolin Goerzig shows how the Islamic Society (Gama'a Islamiya) in Egypt examined its beliefs while in jail for terrorist assassinations (of tourists and President Sadat), to find that they did not justify killing in the name of Islam—a striking case of "burnout, . . . declining commitment [and] doctrinal debates" (Ross and Gurr 1989, 409). Kristine Höglund examines such measures as cease-fires as a step in incremental engagement, and banning as a way of isolating and weakening the extremists. She shows that both tactics can have positive effects on the process of engagement but can also make engagement more difficult. Finally, Aldo Civico illustrates the difficulties in pursuing a consistent policy of unmediated negotiation—in this case, the nation of Colombia and the terrorist organization ELN. During its four decades of protest and revolt, ELN, one of several revolutionary terrorist movements in Colombia, underwent a significant moderation, both in its terrorist means and in its process of engagement. But international

politics over mediation, and the state's insistence on negotiating means only, without considering the protest's deeper causes, sank the negotiations.

The concluding chapter presents some remaining conundrums regarding talking versus negotiating, ends versus means, absolutes versus contingents, moderation as a process versus as a condition, and extremist divisions versus unity. It ends with some analytical insights into ways of moving the engagement process ahead. States and terrorists do negotiate and engage on occasion. Understanding the nature of those occasions can bring benefits that make the state more effective, and extremism and terrorism unnecessary.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Anthony Wanis-St. John for his suggestions.
2. It has been indicated elsewhere that there are two types of stalemate: the mutually hurting stalemate of ripeness and the S⁵ (soft, stable, self-serving stalemate), also referred to as the mutually profitable stalemate (Zartman 1989, 2000, 2005; Wennmann 2011). The latter is not discussed here in detail.

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