

conflict dynamics in a theoretically coherent way. What sets this book apart is that, in its bid to be policy relevant, the author does not sacrifice nuance and complexity while providing parsimonious, elegant, and straightforward policy prescriptions. Without relinquishing the goal of generating theoretically rooted social scientific insights, it valiantly grapples with the intricate, synergistic, and even endogenous processes of interaction among multiple variables. The book is all the more engaging and useful for that. Duyvesteyn also concedes that conflict escalation cannot always be depicted as a rational, linear, and willful choice of rebels; as shown in the survey of historical cases, escalation can be accidental, messy, and even an uncontrollable outcome. This book shows that it is possible to do policy-relevant, theory-building social science research without making unsubstantiated assumptions of the linearity and rationality of conflict dynamics.

The primary weakness of this study follows from a methodological choice made in the book: its cherry-picking of truncated episodes of various cases of conflict as evidence. These vignettes are used to illustrate and even substantiate various pathways of escalation in the study. The crucial question here is whether it is possible that the book, unintentionally perhaps, presents only the evidence that supports the author's argument while ignoring evidence that would potentially contradict it (confirmation bias). In other words, why do we expect that conclusions derived from these vignettes of certain conflict cases will be generalizable enough to other cases to offer a basis for creating forecasting tools for policy makers? On a related note, because certain historical episodes are used to generate hypotheses about causal processes of escalation, the same cases can hardly be used to test those theories as well. In other words, the theoretical framework in this book needs further testing.

Perhaps in anticipation of this criticism, the author invites peers and future scholars to subject her hypotheses on escalation and de-escalation to further rigorous testing. Fieldwork, specifically interviews with rebel groups, could be a useful tool for exploring the causal processes of escalation. For example, Duyvesteyn theorizes that conflict escalation happens when there are extremity shifts within rebel groups caused by the situational entrapment of rebels. When rebels find no other way out of their lives as outlaws, a hardening of position and escalation ensue. On the flip side, de-escalation follows from rebels' willingness to put a brake on violence, either due to fear of losing public support and legitimacy or to defection and a loss of foreign sanctuary. Although these hypotheses are intuitively appealing, they can be substantiated through interviews with current and former rebels, which is difficult but not impossible.

This review would be incomplete without probing how the book conceives the role of the state in conflict escalation and de-escalation. Chapter 4 highlights four courses of action open to policy makers responding to violence. The state can use (1) moderate repression combined with

concessions, (2) overwhelming and outright force, (3) restraint and nonviolence, or (4) nonresponse (do nothing). However, this chapter offers no insights into why the state responds as it does. Perhaps this is not a question the author is interested in. However, because the book argues that strategic interaction among state and rebel actors shapes conflict dynamics, it is important to theorize drivers of state response. Political imperatives and social fragmentation within states would likely affect state interaction with rebel groups and their propensity to escalate or de-escalate. An apolitical, asocial, and undertheorized state might be an inevitable result of relying on earlier scholarship on interstate conflicts; for example, the idea of threshold as a route to escalation and that of norm convergence as a route to de-escalation are derived from Schelling's seminal contribution to nuclear strategy in the 1960s. At the very minimum, marrying Schelling's interstate framework with a Putnamesque two-level approach, which includes a domestic level of analysis, would have been more apt for explaining intrastate violence.

Unless we pry open this black box of what happens inside the state, the dynamics of conflict escalation will remain a mystery. For example, states in conflict zones are known to respond to rebel violence with welfare generosity, which weans supporters from rebel groups. If the state responds to escalation with a favorable response, including expansion of the welfare state, is that a recipe for escalation or de-escalation? In all fairness, the author anticipates some of the critical commentary made in this review about the paucity of empirical evidence and undertheorization of the role of the state and, as mentioned, invites rigorous testing of her hypotheses by peers and future scholars, which will undoubtedly enrich the field and generate new insights for policymakers.

In conclusion, Duyvesteyn chooses a historically attuned approach to predict the rise and fall in rebel violence and approaches the task of generating the policy implications of her research with cautious humility. If some find this expansive and authentic intellectual incursion into complex issues of conflict dynamics imprecise, it is more useful than the alternative of definitive and elegant quick fix policy prescriptions, particularly because it offers avenues for future research. *Rebels and Conflict Escalation* will be a valuable companion for conflict researchers and policy makers for many years to come.

Response to Rumela Sen's Review of *Rebels and Conflict Escalation: Explaining the Rise and Decline in Violence*

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— Isabelle Duyvesteyn 

Our two books share three important messages. First, the causes that can explain the outbreak of conflict, or the

motivations to start participating, do not say much about the factors that either cause escalation or rebel retirement. It would be interesting to probe this finding further by enlarging the case material on which it is based. Moreover, this message has very practical implications. Although the reasons to become engaged in conflict tend to say very little about why conflict de-escalates or why individuals withdraw, these motivations deserve to be recognized more in the policy debates. Identifying and actively offering pathways out of conflict could and should more strongly influence realistic policy choices. Sen's book offers very concrete starting points for this discussion.

Second, the evidence from the detailed case material helps us significantly to understand these conflict dynamics. Sen's book takes this to a new level by talking to terrorists and proposing that we do this more. She also suggests this approach would provide a way forward to research escalation and de-escalation. Although I largely agree with her proposition, there are important considerations that need to be highlighted. For instance, I engaged a figurehead of an important Asian rebel movement, who lived in exile in Europe, in discussion with my students. I wanted them to talk to this person and gain a deeper understanding of individual pathways into violence and justifications for its continuation. After the event, I received scathing criticism from some of my colleagues for offering a platform to an individual with blood on his hands. This is a dilemma, and we need obviously to give serious consideration to these ethical issues.

Third, the books share a core idea that the prevalence of norms matters in explaining retirement and de-escalation. Sen stresses that entrepreneurs, who facilitate the social acceptance of retired rebels, play a key role in the transition out of violence. I argue that norm convergence holds important explanatory power in assessing de-escalation. We can clearly see new and exciting research questions emerging in this area, and I hope very much that scholars will take them up. Moreover, the perspective on norms offers alternative ways for thinking about policy options. Instead of a focus on economic incentives or degrading rebel capabilities, working toward common understandings and perceptions is likely far more productive.

Although we agree on these points, there are also areas where the books diverge. Sen focuses on the conflict in India, which was fought based on the principles of Mao and fits into the classification of an insurgency in my book. The lack of social embeddedness of terrorist groups, she argues, can explain their problematic pathways out of violence; Sen clearly explains the why and how. My book discusses a possible counter-case: Italy in the early 1980s. The social embeddedness of the Brigade Rosse was in decline after the murder of Aldo Moro, and the Italian penitence laws are credited with facilitating rebel exit. We do not see any entrepreneurs or stewards, but still this was seen as a successful example of conflict de-escalation and

termination on the individual level. This highlights, I think, again the potential multiplicity of pathways out of violence, which deserve our scholarly and policy attention.

Farewell to Arms: How Rebels Retire Without Getting Killed. By Rumela Sen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

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— Isabelle Duyvesteyn, *Leiden University*
i.duyvesteyn@hum.leidenuniv.nl

How do fighters leave rebel groups and live to see another day? This is the main puzzle of Rumela Sen's book, *Farewell to Arms*. In six concise and focused thematic chapters, she outlines her case for rebel retirement as a complex process focused on social embeddedness and reintegration agency. Her argument ties in with important theoretical debates about deradicalization, disengagement, and countering violent extremism. Using a mixed-methods approach of analysis of quantified data, as well as fieldwork in India in areas affected by Maoist rebel groups since the late 1960s, she details the social process that explains the peaceful exit of rebels. The author deserves high praise for breaking barriers by actually talking to rebels, which is done insufficiently in the field of conflict studies. Moreover, her conflict ethnography has yielded wonderfully detailed stories of the Maoist fighters, also called Naxalites, after their place of origin.

The book makes two important contributions. First, it offers a rethinking of the concept of rebel disengagement. Sen convincingly argues that the process of saying goodbye to life as a rebel cannot be captured by the terms, definitions, and conceptualizations so far offered in the literature. The book masterfully unpacks these pathways out of rebel groups and makes clear that they are distinct from surrender, disengagement, disarmament, and deradicalization. She introduces the term "retirement," which focuses on the larger social processes of transition out of violence. The author shows that retiring by no means signals a lessening of the degree of radicalization nor a disassociation with the rebel group: rebels can retire without deradicalizing. Retiring focuses not only on the exit but also on reintegration into the general population and civil society, gaining employment, and acquiring a livelihood. The process is thus far broader than has yet been recognized. This is a very valuable contribution.

Second, the book offers a theoretical model of retirement from violence, one in which the social structure and embeddedness of rebels take center stage. The case material presents an interesting paradox that departure occurred during the height of the struggle and differed across the affected regions in India, with larger numbers in the south compared to the north, even though both areas were subject to the same set of government