

THE FRIEND, THE ENEMY, AND THE REVOLUTION

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS WITHIN THE LOGIC OF WAR

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Influenced by ongoing conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, the role of transnational insurgents has become subject to a growing body of academic literature. Counterinsurgency studies, for instance, focus on how these foreign fighters participate and impact on a given conflict. Other work, operating in the realm of security studies, lays emphasis on the (future) threat such fighters pose upon return to their home countries. While this literature concentrates on how transnational forces impact on the strength of existing conflict groups, I contend that it is misguided in identifying the source of the problem because it neglects to account for the effect of foreign fighters on the configuration of actors present in the conflict under focus. In contrast, I maintain that foreign fighters can not only change the existent power structure during the conflict but also constitute a new party and a dominant force for future events. Moreover, their mere presence in a given conflict challenges the entire spatial-political construction of intra- and inter-state wars, and by extension the localization of conflict within a political space. In order to make my case, I contrast the recent phenomena to the historical example of the Spanish Civil War. In this context, I advance a theoretical framework drawing on Modern Systems Theory which highlights the constitutive relationship between war and foreign fighters. Based on this, I argue that the recent upsurge of foreign fighters is an indicator of a global counter-hegemonic movement that needs to be addressed through the framework of Gramscian theory.

Keywords: Foreign Fighters, Spanish Civil War, Modern Systems Theory, Counter-hegemonic Movement