

A Predatory State

Ayana Wilson, College of Arts and Science

When the Portuguese entered the Indian Ocean, they were the only ones to successfully use shipboard cannons in maritime warfare. This made the Portuguese a formidable opponent, nearly impossible to beat on the seas. Using this to their advantage, the Portuguese threatened or persuaded other countries to pay them for protection. From who? The Portuguese.

A rising theory in domestic and international politics is that of the predatory state. A complex theory with many moving parts, the foundation of the theory is that, assuming a ruler wants to stay in power, they will do what it takes to do so within the constraints of their resources. To loosen the constraints placed on them, the leader of a predatory state will often take part in racketeering, creating or exaggerating external threats in attempts to legitimize the state's place as a security provider, and persuading citizens to acquiesce to state authority more often or easily.

In life, there is the all-too-real phenomenon of the predatory partner. Like the predatory state, these individuals employ different methods for loosening the constraints placed on them and staying in power. Some, like Cliff, which you later learn is actually short for Clifford, seem to particularly favor the racketeering method.

While political scientists will acquiesce that it can be assumed that all rulers want to stay in power, only those who engage in racketeering will create or exaggerate the image of an external threat in an attempt to increase what is called their "bargaining power," or the influence they have over the party that they are negotiating with. Likewise, it can be assumed that most people want to stay in the romantic relationship that they're in. However, only those who engage in predatory, racketeering behavior will create threats with the sole purpose of solving them to increase their power or standing in the relationship.

In a measure that is unusual for predatory states, Cliff will, at first, make himself weaker, or, to be specific, drunker. This is the first phase of his plan, and often takes place behind the scenes. This is so that you, like the citizens manipulated by the predatory state, feel an allegiance, or at the very least, an obligation to him. If all is according to plan and he is drunk enough, or can convince you that he is, the feeling of obligation will last through the night until the next morning. If not obligation or allegiance, he will settle for pity, hopelessness, or the feeling of being *stuck* and without options. Whatever keeps you in the house the longest. Like the predatory state, the predatory partner doesn't want you to leave. They can't extract resources from people who aren't there. So he'll drink a few beers that night while you're on the couch; imply he had some before you got there. He probably did.

It is important to remember that rulers will devise and formalize structures that increase their bargaining power so as to better capture gains from political exchanges.

His bed is made of three mattresses piled on top of each other. The one on top is softest, and offers the least support; though, I must admit, I've never slept on the bottom one. I just know that, having slept on the top two on different nights, I prefer the top one. You told him that last time. That is the one he defaults to.

The next morning, he's going to drink a beer while you wait for the car to warm up. Technically, yes, it's 40 degrees outside, and technically, yes, it is 8 a.m., but don't freak out. When you notice the unopened beer sticking sideways out of his jacket pocket while you're stuck in the car, and it's 8:45 and he's driving you to your 9 a.m. class, don't freak out. You didn't want to walk to class this morning anyway.

Phase Two of his plan has a much shorter timespan. This is where he creates the threat, and if he is to succeed as a racketeer, the threat can't last forever. He doesn't want it to. The predatory state doesn't succeed if the citizens perpetually feel as if they are in crisis. By definition, a predatory state involved in racketeering must create or exaggerate the crisis, then resolve it. This is how he increases his bargaining power. This is how he convinces you to acquiesce later.

Rulers, like Cliff, are predatory in that they set the terms of trade to maximize their personal objectives. However, unlike the predatory state, Cliff doesn't have any crises to exaggerate, so he must create his own. This is crucial. He can't become a security provider, much less legitimize himself as so, without first providing a threat.

Cliff wakes you up in the middle night. He did this last time. Except, this time, it's not on purpose. This time, he meant to do this without involving you. Because he knew last time, when he woke you up on purpose, you asked him not to. Now, he's going to do it without asking. After all, it's his favorite. Sit there, relax, let him teach you. Even though you asked him not to. Or maybe because you asked him not to. I suppose that is how you create a crisis.

And thus begins Phase Three.

Resembling the flexible, structureless foam of a worn down couch, the top mattress has considerably more give than the middle. This means, when he slides his hand between your left hip and the mattress, and scoops you into the dip he's making in the middle of the bed, your shape sinks right into the crevice of the shape he's making, where it's less scary and cold than the edge of the bed.

He and the predatory state have convinced you and the other citizens that you need protection. This way, when he slowly lays his arm on your waist, which you don't see coming because you're curled up facing the wall, you've been facing the wall this whole time, though it shocks you at first, and your body seizes up, and you flinch, and your eyes fly open, and your arms draw in so they're not pushed out of the way again, after that first moment of panic, you feel a sense of comfort. Sure, his arm is heavy, and restrictive, oppressive, and a reminder of how small you are and how vulnerable, and how not in control, but he knows that. The predatory state knows how to use that to its advantage. That's what all this has been about, because he also knows that he's warm and

that his skin is soft. He knows that you think his beard is nice, even though the texture is a bit wiry, and that you like feeling it along with his breath on the back of your neck. He knows because you told him last time.

Firmly secured into the large, concave shape of his body, both by the arm still tucked under your hip, and the blanket that came with it, you feel reassured. It's warm, and it feels like shelter. It's not puzzle pieces, but it's close. And it's soft.

Most rulers must offer some return for the revenue extracted.