

ABSTRACT

This dissertation will explore the US-led coalition's strategy for disrupting ISIS's oil network in Iraq and Syria. Scholars have debated the desirability of third-party interventions and strategies for countering financing structures of violent non-state actors. However, remarkably limited research exists on ISIS's estimated largest source of revenue during the existence of its caliphate: the production and distribution of petroleum. This study will therefore introduce a framework for analysing the military response enacted by the US-led coalition between September 2014 and October 2017. It will do so through a mixed method study that includes the first-hand generation and analysis of a dataset containing 5,768 unique data points that present both an insight into the strategy behind the strikes and vulnerabilities in ISIS's oil network. Findings demonstrate how the coalition was able to exploit vulnerabilities specifically in the production, transportation, and refinement stages of the production chain. It will be argued that, as the campaign proceeded, the coalition became increasingly willing to take risks of collateral damage as a means of improving effectiveness. These are findings that have implications for academic debates in two fields: that of terrorism studies and the field of conflict studies. This dissertation will, therefore, make use of an interdisciplinary approach and demonstrate the often-neglected desirability of integrating both disciplines – as they complement and can build upon each other.

Keywords: ISIS • oil financing • strategy-making
third-party interventions • United States