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Diploma thesis project

Analysis of ISIS Insurgency through the theory of Revolutionary Warfare.



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ACRONYMS

AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
COIN	Counterinsurgency
IED	Improvised Explosive Devices
IS / Daesh	Islamic State
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIL	Islamic State of the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces (Kurdish)
YPG	Kurdish Militia

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ABSTRACT

Analysis of ISIS's Insurgency through the theory of Revolutionary Warfare, by Amerigo Piunti. Ever since the collapse of the brutal Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein, the Sunnis of Iraq were struggling as a minority in a nation governed by Shia. The government of Baghdad was constantly ignoring Sunni's grievances, and for many experts, this aspect was a driving point that led to the establishment of the IS Caliphate. Contrary to popular belief, the so-called Islamic State appeared only for the first time in October 2006. Abū Mus'ab al-Zarqāwī was the founder and first tenacious leader of the special detachment called "Al-Qaeda in Iraq." This group later on mutated itself into the notorious Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, and it obtained support from international sympathizers and local citizens. The terror group successfully recruited local tribes, experienced fighters and leaders, previous members of the Baathist regime, and it even cooperated with other Jihadists groups. The terror group itself also heavily relied on the spread of Jihadist-Salafist propaganda and eventually created an urgent need for a drastic change in society. The group then expanded its insurgency activities towards Syria, and after only eight years of fighting, it successfully covered each of the necessary stages to establish the well-known Caliphate.

To critically analyze the impressive IS insurgency process and potentially develop new ways to address this type of warfare, this paper focused on a comparative analysis based on the theory of Revolutionary Warfare. The framework of the research paper suggests that there is a whole level of adherence between the IS strategy and Mao's theory, which means that this approach can be applied to find more effective counterinsurgency methods against Daesh. This research recommends that the outcome of the conflict would have been better with a more significant focus on crucial aspects such as the Sunni grievances, the military unsuitability, the weak border security, the social and economic deployment, and much more.

1) Introduction

1.1) *History of ISIS*

Violent events like the brutal fall of Mosul did not just shock the Middle East but also the rest of the world. When the world news started to cover the brutalities committed by ISIS, the audience often misunderstood that the establishment of the IS Caliphate did not occur in just a few months of battle. However, instead, it was just the last phase of a long, unconventional warfare process. This type of conflict is called "Insurgency", a term used by experts to describe a type of conflict based on gaining territorial control through the winnings of the hearts and minds of the locals. Even though this type of warfare will be analyzed on a deeper level in the literature review, for now, it is essential to acknowledge that the rise of ISIS was for sure enabled by the withdrawal of US soldiers from Iraq in 2011. This episode eventually permitted Abus Mus'ab az-Zarqawi, the pioneer of the Islamic State that started back in 2004, to exploit the Sunni population's grievances successfully. In the years after, the insurgents became very active in the North-West of Iraq and consequently established a strong presence in different cities and provinces (Lewis, 2014). In 2013, after meticulous planning and successful execution of an underground military expansion towards Syria, the fighting group officially changed its name from "Islamic State of Iraq" into "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham" (Roggio, 2015). In just a few months, the governments of Damascus and Baghdad lost control over critical areas due to the impressive IS large-scale military operations that conquest different provinces like al-Anbar, Mosul, Fallujah, Raqqa, and many others (Sly, 2015). Luckily for the Jihadists, as an immediate consequence of their unexpected and unprecedented military advance, there was even almost a collapse of the Iraqi Security Forces. That is because after failing to contain the enemy's advance, the Iraqi soldiers had no better alternative other than to escape from the battle areas desperately. They then tried to stop ISIS by reorganizing themselves in Baghdad under the new task of defending the rest of the country.

Nevertheless, one of the major problems during the massive withdrawal of thousands of Iraqi soldiers was that they abandoned their military posts without destroying or bringing all their military weapons, vehicles, and equipment (Chulov et al., 2014). The Islamic State then looted everything it found on its path and even paraded with the stolen pieces of equipment in the newly conquered cities (VICE News, 2014). Many Sunnis gave a warm welcome to the IS fighters because, for them, this was allegedly a historical moment that would have put an end to their suffering (Zalin & Smyth, 2015). From the 19th of June 2014, the Islamic State declared the newly born Caliphate, an event that was totally in line with the IS propaganda (Kavalek, 2015).

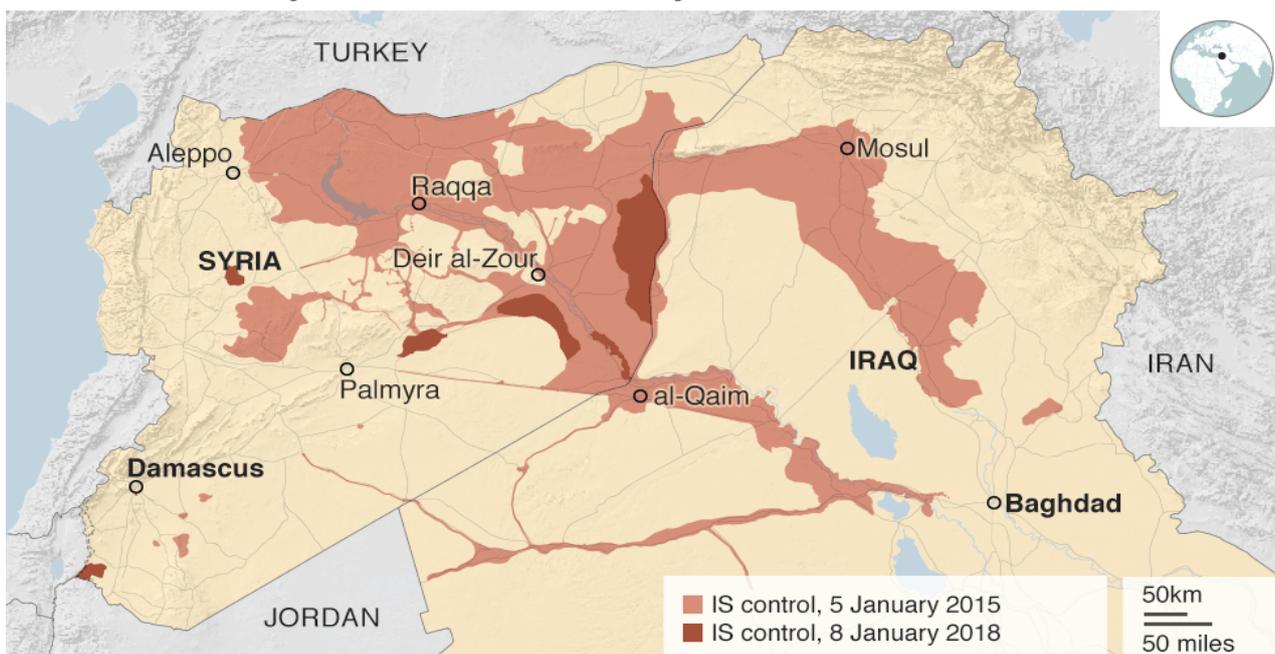
According to different experts, ISIS managed to conquer different territories as big as Jordan and eventually controlled more than 5 million citizens. The shocking IS military capacity brought together different fighting actors that were consequently struggling against a common enemy. The Combined Joint Task Force resulted from a mutual contribution between the ISF, Kurdish Peshmergas, Shia militia founded by Iran, and the US-led anti-ISIS Coalition (U.S. Central Command, 2015). Despite multiple initial difficulties, such as the long-term attempt to regather control over Mosul, the CJTF still managed in the short term to retake the city of Kobani and slow down the IS military expansion. In addition to that, it was also very challenging for the CJTF to gain the trust of the Sunni communities and entirely stop the IS advance, which in the meantime successfully conquered the cities of Ramadi and Palmyra (al Rifai, 2015). Later, in 2016, the Caliphate lost the city of Falluja, Mosul, and the Caliphate's capital Raqqa, due to the invasion of the Iraqi forces (The Guardian, 2019). After a total of five long years from the declaration of the Caliphate, in 2019, ISIS became almost entirely decimated and decided to strategically retreat into the city of Baghuz, which later became liberated thanks to the SDF and the anti-ISIS Coalition. The

situation was so desperate that experts considered those that successfully escaped from Baghuz to be the lucky ones because the remaining stayed hid for days with low supplies in self-elaborated tunnels of the town (CNN, 2019).

The state of IS has collapsed, and nowadays, Daesh does not seem to control any significant territory in Syria and Iraq. However, the terrorist organization is still active, and many of the remaining high-ranking members of ISIS are imprisoned or at large. When discussing the collapse of the Caliphate and the IS loss, the IS propaganda claimed that this outcome was a human fault related to the lack of trust towards Daesh's authorities. The Jihadists interpreted this failure as God's punishment that tested the IS citizens' will and the Caliphate resilience. However, the propaganda machine of the Islamic State made it very clear that they will eventually rise again, and according to their ideology, they will eventually win the conflict against the infidels that declared war against Islam (The Guardian, 2019).

When talking about the end of the Caliphate, it is also important to mention that there are still many detention and prison camps that struggle to remain under the control of the security forces in Syria and Iraq. The local authorities often describe these places as a ticking time bomb because of the disproportionate number of prisoners that somehow keep trying to escape and attacking guards with melee weapons (Sky news, 2019). Despite the reports of successful escapes, other reports mention that it is not so unusual that an Islamic State's flag appears in the middle of the camps, followed by a chorus that said that "The Islamic State will rise again". Luckily, this event always lasted until the security forces managed to take the situation under control again (Global News, 2019). However, the war against ISIS did not just leave prison camps and deaths because there were also high costs due to the massive destructions and the low living conditions regarding unresolved issues from the sectors of the economy and politics. It is vital for the future of the Levantine region and Iraq to solve these Sunni grievances because otherwise, other Jihadist groups will likely exploit them and eventually rise again. Contrary to popular belief, the Islamic State has never just primarily focused on their fighters and territories, but actually, it prioritized the brainwashing of the citizens through the spreading of their ideology. This scenario means that potentially some of their previous members and current sympathizers are allegedly planning to restart the insurgency process and are already attempting for the second time to establish another Caliphate State (The Guardian, 2019).

How much territory IS has lost since January 2015



Source: IHS Conflict Monitor

BBC

Figure 1: How much territory IS has lost since January 2015. Source: BBC NEWS, 2018. Islamic State and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034>

1.2) Statement of the Problem

The world has acknowledged the impressive and unprecedented rise of Islamic extremists' activities that mainly consist of terror attacks and insurgency attempts. Terror groups like the Islamic State, Boko Haram, Al Shabab, al-Qaeda have successfully promoted their local and international agendas through guerrilla warfare and other unconventional fighting tactics against the local authorities and population (UNDP-RAND, 2018). In the case of ISIS, the group adopted the Jihadi Salafist ideology as a tool to justify their actions and for propaganda-related purposes, which also involved the recruitment of foreign fighters. ISIS became bolder by the day and grew up in multiple regions of the Middle East, consequently reshaping the map of the Levant and Mesopotamia. The group eventually became a real threat to the governments of Baghdad and Damascus, as well as many other anti-regime fighting groups like the Free Syrian Army of Aleppo (VICE News, 2014). When making a statement of the problem, it is also important to remind that the establishment of the Caliphate brought an impressive amount of genocide victims, massive immigration, and much more. The terror group managed to wake up old ethnic tensions in the surrounding areas, and because of their actions, many innocent civilians lost their lives, and multiple cities have been devastated by the battles (The Guardian, 2015). Despite the international condemnation of IS terrorism activities, reactions among the Sunni communities in Iraq and Syria differed. In fact, in some Iraqi regions affected by ethnic grievances, the IS members were even welcomed and perceived as liberators from the Shia hegemony (Frontline, 2014). Therefore, the research needs to develop a deeper understanding of the IS insurgency, its central concepts and use these understandings to prevent the IS or similar groups from gaining further territorial control.

1.3) The objective of the Study

The paper will focus on the insurgency strategy adopted by the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq and analyze it through the lenses of the theory of Revolutionary Warfare. Therefore, the research will explain all the three stages adopted by Mao in the theory of Revolutionary Warfare and use them to understand more about Daesh's approach. The thesis will also rely upon different literature reviews that can help to grasp in a more profound way the different concepts, definitions, stages, and the multiple forms of an Insurgency and Counterinsurgency strategy. At the end of any successful insurgency, concerning the accumulated power through the multiple stages of warfare, there is always a turning point in which the insurgents themselves start to challenge their enemies in the open field by mainly relying on conventional warfare tactics. According to experts, this implies that the rebels will gradually abandon the previous tactics of a guerrilla. Because of this, to avoid superficial and too broad research, the paper will mainly focus on the events that took place before the establishment of the IS Caliphate.

1.4) Significance of the Study

The thesis has not just been written to extend the academic knowledge about the Islamic State of the Levant and Iraq in general, but also to close a particular informational vacuum about their insurgency process. The main reason is that behind the shocking advancing speed of IS, there is also the issue of lack of literature about their strategy, letting, therefore, questions about their insurgency unanswered. Further aspects of research are also about how to counter the Jihadists' insurgency at

best with suitable counterinsurgency strategies. There are already similar research papers about other Jihadists groups like Boko Haram, and according to experts, many Jihadist insurgency groups share a common or at least somehow similar warfare strategy. This aspect means that analyzing any of these insurgency groups might positively impact the available know-how of any of the other groups. This consideration becomes particularly true when we consider that the Islamic State has started already different years ago to export their terrorism and insurgency's approach like a franchising business in multiple areas like Libya, Afghanistan, Mozambique, Yemen, and the Philippines.

The research paper will also focus on grasping the ISIS difficulties throughout the process of insurgency, recognizing their advantages, identifying their insurgency stages, and trying to predict their next steps. The research will also analyze what did not work in preventing the ISIS arrival and what has to be put into account when developing long-term COIN strategies in the context of Daesh. According to different experts, IS insurgency can be considered a franchise business that exploits wealth disparity, ignorance, and different population grievances to spread its propaganda. This assumption means that the phenomenon of the Islamic State is very likely to appear more in different areas of the world, which is one of the main reasons to learn more from the previous mistakes and develop new ideas.

1.5) Central Question

What can we learn from applying the Mao Tse-tung theory of Revolutionary Warfare in the context of the Islamic State's insurgency in Iraq and Syria?

1.6) Subordinate Question

Can this framework provide an alternative but still practical, Counterinsurgency approach which will eventually become beneficial to prevent similar establishments to the IS Caliphate?

1.7) Research Target

If possible, it is crucial to define the requirements of Mao's theory and judge whether the general aspects of the theory can be successfully implemented in the context of ISIS. For this purpose, there will be a scale that will determine the level of adherence for every relevant subtopic.

1.8) Limitations

The paper, as already mentioned, will focus on the ISIS insurgency. Therefore it will be limited to the efforts made by Daesh and the governments of Iraq and Syria in countering the Jihadists. This research paper is based on different materials, like academic articles, books, documentaries, reports, internet articles, interviews, and news. It is essential to mention that no additional data has been generated for the research and that the framework has been based on already existing material.

1.9) Definitions of Key Terms

Guerrilla warfare: a type of warfare that is based on small and light-armed groups that take advantage of their fast mobilization to develop suitable tactics against more vigorous opponents. Guerrilla warfare rotates around the concept of small-scale attacks, and these approaches can quickly develop into tactics like raids or ambushes, which are not meant to lead to the victory of a battle per se, but only to harass and weaken the morale of their enemy (US Government, 2012).

Militia: This represents a body of armed fighters that get clumped in a significant group, and what usually defines their group identity could be based on their mutual religion, tribal group, ethnicity, political orientation, or other related reasons. Militias can also be deployed directly or indirectly in favour of the government as well, and they can also be used to fight independently against other non-government militias, insurgents' groups, warlords, or criminal groups (CIA, 2011).

Insurgency: "A state of revolt against constituted authority by rebels who are not recognized as belligerent communities. Hence, recognition by nation X of a state of insurgency in nation Y means that while the former nation acknowledges a state of rebellion or revolt in nation Y, it is not yet prepared to extend recognition of a state of belligerency to that nation. Such a decision is based upon the relative proportion and success of the rebellion or revolt within state Y" (Oxford Reference, 2021).

Government: This term, in the context of Insurgency, is always meant as the authority which is struggling against the insurgents (US Government, 2012).

Counterinsurgency (COIN): "The military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency" (Oxford Reference, 2020).

Terrorism: This is a politically motivated movement, like a clandestine or sub-national group, which is relying on premeditated violence against non-combatants actors. This aspect is meant to achieve their objectives and spread a message to the people (US Government, 2012).

Boko Haram: This is a term coming from the Nigerian tribes that speak the Hausa language, and it means "Western education is forbidden." (Majora Azam, 2017).

Caliphate: The position of a Caliph or an area of land ruled by over by a Caliph (Oxford dictionary, 2016).

Sharia law: "Is the fundamental religious concept of Islam—namely, its law. The religious law of Islam is seen as the expression of God's command for Muslims and, in the application, constitutes a system of duties that are incumbent upon all Muslims under their religious belief. Known as the Shari'ah (literally, "the path leading to the watering place"), the law represents a divinely ordained path of conduct that guides Muslims toward a practical expression of religious conviction in this world and the goal of divine favour in the world to come." (Shamsy et al, 2021).

Hisbah: Hisbah is a term used by the classical jurists, among them Ibn Taymiyyah, to describe the function of regulating the market place which is to be carried out by the Islamic authority (often called the Muhtasib in this sense). Hisbah includes taking whatever steps may be needed in order to maintain a fair and orderly marketplace. Historically, various Islamic rulers have undertaken the duty of Hisbah by supervising activities ranging from the inspection of eateries for sanitary conditions to the investigation of fraud. The basis of Hisbah is the Prophet's routine inspection of the marketplace of Madinah (IslamicMarkets, 2021).

2) Literature Review

2.1) *Introduction*

The paper will explain different vital topics that must be introduced in the literature review to understand the analysis chapter and conclusion fully. The topics discussed are the theory of Revolutionary Warfare with the explanation of each phase, the process of insurgency, counterinsurgency strategies, and the concept and leadership of the Islamic State.

2.2) *Guerrilla Warfare according to Mao Tse-tung*

It is vital to mention that Mao Tse-tung never attended any military school, which might explain why experts often considered his Guerrilla Warfare theory, also known as Revolutionary Warfare, as a basic knowledge of insurgency (Ghandhi, 1965). Nonetheless, his theory still helped identify every type of insurgency's main principles, which also contributed to defining the usual approach of insurgency. By analyzing the IS strategy and comparing it with Mao's theory, it will eventually be possible to recognize the main characteristics, essential elements, and tactics typical of the terrifying Jihadists groups of the Middle East.

Mao Tse-tung was born in 1893 in a rural area of the Hunan province, and thanks to his family, he grew up very disciplined. Thanks to his father, his family belonged to a privileged group in the Chinese society that had the opportunity to take advantage of the educational system. Thanks to the father's support, Mao continued his educational experience regularly, and through time he developed a strong passion for history in general and political science (Griffith, 2002). Despite his initial failed intentions to promote a better future for China peacefully, he still concluded that parliamentary socialism and liberalism were the cause for many problems in Chinese society and consequently felt the need to address these critical issues (Azam, 2017). In Mao's ideology, China needed urgent reforms and massive changes, especially in the political, economic, and social spheres. However, the most relevant aspect for this research paper is that there was no way of doing so harmoniously and peacefully according to his vision. Therefore he gradually fell in love with the idea that only a radical revolution would have been ideal for his task. Thanks to his job in the library, he then joined groups characterized by the communist ideology, which made him discover prominent figures like Lenin, Engels, and Karl Marx. This experience was a turning point in his life because immediately after, he started to align his beliefs with the communist ideology and, therefore, be willing to transform China in the same way as the Soviet Union did with the Russian Empire (Griffith, 2002).

After the First World War, China was still not a recognized country by the rest of the world, and the conditions in which the Chinese families were living were disastrous. That was because many hundreds of millions of peasants struggled every day by having a mere existence. Millions of families did not own any land, and those who did own just a small field that was not big enough to provide the family with enough food to endure their life (Anchor press, 1978). There were even natural phenomena such as pandemics, diseases, starvation, floods, and droughts areas already impacting society. Many areas struggled with typical third-world issues, such as the lack of electricity, health systems, schools, running water, sewages, and paved roads (Azam, 2017). However, despite all of that, one of the most challenging aspects of Chinese society was the impressive number of avaricious soldiers and local bandits that were further deteriorating the living conditions of the Chinese people (Griffith, 2002).

In 1921 Mao joined the Communist Party of Shanghai and developed the theory that China was nothing else than a feudal and semi-colonial state for him. Furthermore, with the previous brutal

abuse of power from foreign countries, China had all the alleged requirements to escalate into a brutal revolution (Anchor press, 1978). Five years after joining the Chinese Communist Party, Mao decided to go back to his province and start promoting land reforms. He wanted to address the unfair relations between the farmers and owners of the lands and solve the issue by suggesting redistributing them. The nationalists were against Mao's policy, but he successfully convinced the people about the importance of shifting the power away from the landowners (Griffith, 2002).

There was already a failed attempt on behalf of the revolutionary forces, which also included some Communists groups. This event explained the already low level of morale because, in 1927, their sudden uprising movement failed as soon as Chiang's army advanced to the rural area of Shanghai. In addition to that, thanks to the national secret police, the government managed to kill crucial labour leaders and purge away the rest of their enemies (Griffith, 2002).

However, the revolutionary movement was so unlucky that things went even worse because many politically oriented administrations got dismissed, and the Soviet advisers retired back home. Considering that the secret police were chasing most members and active sympathizers of the anti-government movement, those who managed to survive took the drastic decision to escape in the rural areas and reorganize themselves by creating a new army (Griffith, 2002). They started recruiting local criminals, provided propaganda to the locals and consequently started an aggressive expansion campaign. All these minor signs of progress illuded the communist party about the feasibility to conquer different regions and cities, which eventually remained under the control of the Nationalists. The outcome turned out to be a total defeat (Anchor Press, 1978).

In the meantime, Mao managed to become one of the foremost leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, and, along with his fellow companions, he decided to aim for a completely different strategy (Anchor press, 1978). Despite the critics, Mao successfully reassured the party members by saying that his strategy relied on peasants' support because the industrial proletariats were too few to contribute to the cause effectively. It took a while to execute this strategy, but at around the beginning of the next decade, when things started to get better for the Communist movement, the powerful Chiang decided to condemn the "Communist-Criminals" and declare total war against them. After a short time, it was already clear how much the Nationalists were incapable of retaking the rural area, and many escaped in high numbers to avoid being captured by the Communist forces (Azam, 2017). Despite the progress made on behalf of the Communists forces, things worsened once again because Chiang deployed very well-suited and loyal troops that managed to push away the revolutionaries' forces and separate them from the peasants. After this terrible defeat, Mao decided to shift their movement to a different province and came with the so-called theory of Guerrilla Warfare. This approach is based on three main phases (Griffith, 2002).

▪ Phase 1

The initial stage of the theory developed by Mao rotates around three key concepts, and it must be carried further in a methodological, progressive, and underground way (Anchor press, 1978). These critical areas are focused on consolidating, setting a well-suited organization, and successfully safeguarding through time the base and the surrounding rural areas of the different regions. Generally, the regional bases are in rugged terrains with a limited number of entrances distant from the surrounding areas and cities, usually due to mountains and seashores. This insurgency's aspect is vital because it gives an advantage to the revolutionary forces that can benefit from the low presence of the governmental forces and police, and consequently, start to recruit at ease (Azam, 2017). The recruitment will primarily take place among volunteers who have to be indoctrinated and trained. One of the first tasks that the new members eventually need to carry out in groups or alone is spreading propaganda and agitating or soliciting the citizens for support when needed. Ideally, the insurgents must gain the peasants' trust or even achieve some sympathetic feeling from

them because this will eventually help them receive valuable resources such as information, volunteers, and even food supplies (Thomas, 2009).

During the initial stage, one of the biggest challenges for their enemy counterparts will be to identify the location of the threat. Therefore, they need to gather information concerning the enemy's organization and military size, revolution's stage, fighting capacity, and leading activities (Anchor press, 1978). Nevertheless, with all things considered, the government will eventually be the one with the most challenging scenario, which could be true for many reasons. First things first, the population witnessed more grievances in the rural areas than those who live in the cities. This circumstance means that the people in peripheral areas are more likely to favour the insurgents. An insurgency aspect like this will help the revolutionary forces to control China's remote areas and impede any potential infiltration or penetration on behalf of the enemy for intelligence gathering purposes (Griffith, 2002).

▪ Phase 2

This chapter is described by Mao himself as the phase of progressive expansion. This time the focus will be shifted towards engaging and carrying dynamic tactics such as guerrilla warfare, military actions, and armed struggles. According to Mao, this implies that the rebels will rely on extreme unconventional warfare actions like terrorism and sabotage to accomplish the necessary tasks to progress successfully towards the next stage. Military planning on behalf of the revolutionary's force will mainly focus on strategic and weak targets. A few examples could be surprise attacks or ambushes against vulnerable convoys, police stations, or other similarly protected military targets (Thomas, 2009). The guerrilla tactics will be essential to weaken the morale of the enemy troops, but it will also be fundamental to acquire through stealing military-fighting equipment and vehicles. Other unconventional warfare tactics such as terrorism will become helpful to spread fear among the governmental forces. Moreover, in the case of execution and kidnapping of key figures, it will help the group build up their reputation and prove to their enemy and general audience that they can target even far-reaching enemies that felt safe (Azam, 2017).

A vital element of this chapter must be the capacity to involve and persuade as many citizens as they can. This process should reach already big masses of people by the end of this stage. Like this, it will be possible to expand their networks and appear as an armed group and a politically oriented one. It will be crucial for them to rely on indoctrination campaigns and extend them to all those areas that will have to be liberated from the government presence (Griffith, 2002).

▪ Phase 3

This phase is the last stage of the theory developed by Mao concerning his interpretation of Guerrilla Warfare. According to his theory, this passage could potentially end up only in two scenarios. The first one is the victory over the government's forces, and the second will be a final decision, such as an agreement or negotiations. There are many other Insurgency theories in line with Mao's theory that suggest that a gradual process will eventually occur (Thomas, 2009). Similar theories concerning the insurgency process refers to the fact that the insurgents will have to put themselves at eye levels with the government's forces, which means that they must undertake some military reforms that will eventually transform their current unconventional fighting force into a conventional one, or at least a mix between the two. This slow conversion will finally enable the revolutionaries' forces to challenge their enemy in conventional fighting scenarios and face them in the open fields (Griffith, 2002).

According to Mao, a valid alternative to the previous scenario is the negotiations process, which the revolutionaries' members should never initiate. That is because it is not in their nature to belittle themselves and their achievements by accepting some sort of a compromise that will not offer them a further strategical advantage (Azam, 2017). In the theory of Revolutionary Warfare, this path should only be considered when obtaining some gain in the military, economic, social, or political

sectors. However, whenever the government face this outcome, there is also the possibility of being deceived by the rebels. Usually, concessions on behalf of the government's enemy are made very rarely and only as a tool to achieve conditions that will prolong their existence or eventually lead them to victory (Anchor Press, 1978).

It is essential for this final stage that the revolutionary fighters emphasize the vital concept of military intelligence. This attitude will contribute hugely to the planning of military operations and exploit any weak points that will give them the upper hand. When gathering valuable information about their enemies, it will be vital to focus on the constitution, military formation, number of deployed soldiers, routine, and significant supply routes. There are many other types of information that should be collected, but the priority is to gather them underground to enable a continuous flow of information without facing the risk of infiltration (Anchor Press, 1978).

From a military point of view, it is critical for the survival of the revolutionary forces that they only assault when the conditions are favourable to them (Griffith, 2002). A famous statement made by Mao suggested that ideally, the insurgents should always run fast because this requirement will be needed multiple times during the insurgency process. This requirement means that the rebels deployment has to be planned covertly, swiftly, and dynamically. Strategies with these elements will ensure that the rebels will always succeed because they will eventually attack the most minor expected enemies (Azam, 2017).

2.3) Analysis of Insurgency

- Definitions

According to the Government of the US, the concept of insurgency is defined as “is a protracted political-military struggle directed toward subverting or displacing the legitimacy of a constituted government or occupying power and completely or partially controlling the resources of a territory through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations. The common denominator for most insurgent groups is their objective of gaining control of a population or a particular territory, including its resources. This objective differentiates insurgent groups from purely terrorist organizations. It is worth noting that identifying a movement as an insurgency does not convey a normative judgment on the legitimacy of the movement or its cause; the term insurgency is simply a description of the nature of the conflict” (US Government, 2012. page 1).

The CIA gave a similar explanation of the term “insurgency”. Their definition differs only slightly on the concept of political-military struggles because, for them, this type of conflict primarily focuses on the resources of a country, and it heavily relies on unconventional fighting tactics like guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and political mobilization. Following these definitions, insurgency-related activities also involve spreading propaganda through covert organizations and activities that shift the control and legitimacy away from the government. This territorial aspect should per se help explain why the insurgents should not be confused as pure terrorists (CIA, 2011).

- Common Characteristics

It is essential to mention that all types of insurgencies are a violent political struggle, and therefore it is critical that the group takes away the legitimacy from the government and shifts it in their favour. This prominent common insurgents' objective requires gaining control over people and resources (Merari, 1993). Further typical actions undertaken by the enemy of the government are, for example, the capacity to undercut the government's ability to provide types of services that affect sectors like security, justice, education, and utilities. The insurgents will eventually and gradually try to replace these services with similar improvised ones. Another distinctive aspect of

all the types of insurgency is the need to gain support from the population, which can take place in either an active or passive way. It is crucial to mention that population support does not come exclusively from sympathizers. Tools like intimidation tactics and terror are also handy to gain the obedience of locals (US Government, 2012). Insurgents also usually provoke the governments and their armed forces to commit crimes because events like these will eventually positively influence the neutral standpoint of the population (Merari, 1993). Finally, one of the last common characteristics of all insurgencies is undermining the governments' national and international support. Moreover, simultaneously try to get their group and their struggle recognized and consequently do their best to obtain all types of assistance (CIA, 2011).

Insurgencies are always about legitimacy on the political level. However, insurgents do not just rely on violence to confirm their existence but also to be taken seriously by their enemies (Merari, 1993). This type of warfare is so unconventional that military campaigns, battles, front lines, strategies, or even the distinction between civilians and non-combatants are blurred or inexistent. Most of the time, these types of warfare can lead to terror attacks, ethnic cleansing, and much more. The outcomes are so brutal that the amount of death among civilians is disproportionate compared to conventional wars (US Government, 2012).

- Types of Insurgencies

Indeed, there are different ways to categorize this type of unconventional warfare, but the leading approaches are based either on the methods employed by them or by their respective goals. It is essential to mention that this is more of a theory because insurgency can potentially exhibit a combination of the different types and their goals, which might eventually also change through time (CIA, 2011). There is also a possibility that different insurgency groups that are active in the same conflict might end up in different scenarios because eventually, they can put their temporally differences aside and start to cooperate and fight a common enemy. In addition to that, it is worth mentioning that the motivations of each member might be completely different from one another, mainly because each fighter has different beliefs and reasons to join the fighting group, which means that the leaders will have to deal with a disunited group (US Government, 2012).

When analyzing the different categories of insurgency and focusing on the different potential goals that they might pursue, five major categories can be summarized. The first is the Reformists, who want to fight the government without changing the political order and emphasizing different political, social, and economic sectors. The Revolutionaries subgroup differs from the previous ones by being willing to change the political order and radically transform the economic and social institutions. Contrariwise the insurgents who want to fight for the independence of a specific region are called Separatists, and the ones that fight to enable a military withdrawal from a territory are called Resistance. Finally, the last group is called Commercialists, and the element that identifies them is that they seek to gain material resources and wealth due to exclusive access control (CIA, 2011).

An alternative way to identify all the types of insurgencies is by analyzing their structure, which allows us to divide them into two main groups depending on whether they have a more assertive military orientation or a political one. Here once again, the movement settings and choices might easily change through the insurgency process.

The first variant is the so-called Military Organized type of insurgency, and it is mainly focused on the military aspect of the conflict against the government, and only secondarily on the population and the political mobilization. This type of unconventional warfare needs to gather more military leaders to weaken the government militarily.

An alternative version is the Politically Organized form of insurgency, and it focuses on the political structure that stills undertake some military actions against their enemy. This type of

insurgency is notorious for consolidating territorial control thanks to the creation of shadow governments and not just through the exclusive use of military power.

The Traditionally Organized form of insurgency differs from the previous ones because it is based on clan, tribal, religious groups, or even ethnicity. From this context, their members establish their hierarchies which must be suitable for both main aspects of insurgency, military and political.

The Urban Cellar form of insurgency is typically an unconventional warfare type that operates only in cities, and it is notorious for being structured without a hierarchy. According to different experts, this type of insurgency operates in smaller groups with a semiautonomous fighting approach and a strong orientation towards terror attacks (US Government, 2012).

- The life Cycle of an Insurgency

In each insurgency, there are always different factors that affect each conflict in different ways. A few examples are the culture, history, or grievances of an involved population. Nevertheless, it is remarkable how many insurgencies still have a standard development path (Merari, 1993). However, not all insurgencies attempts went through the entire ideal cycle, and that is because many of them never really managed to progress further fully. Alternatively, it is also very likely that many insurgency groups like al-Qaida in Iraq went even back to the previous stage because they did not fully develop to successfully progress in the next stage and eventually ended up taking a precarious jump forward and not a safe step. However, with all things considered, it is also fundamental to point out that the amount of time required for each stage varies hugely between insurgency groups and that different factors play different roles throughout the stages (US Government, 2012).

1) The First Stage: The Preinsurgency

In the beginning, it is challenging for the government to detect a Preinsurgency stage, especially when we consider that most of the insurgents' activities are not carried in the open. Therefore, there is not much violence or show of force that proves their existence at this stage. The few actions conducted publicly might even quickly get confused with simple nonviolent protest within the political sector (Merari, 1993). On the contrary, what is seriously fundamental for the initial stage of the insurgency is to get organized, which means establishing leadership and finding a suitable group identity that emphasizes the population's grievances. Other primary tasks of the first stage are for sure the recruitment process and the training for future insurgents' sieges (CIA, 2011).

Further requirements like providing arms, ammunition, and military equipment should already get started. According to different experts, one of the pre-existing conditions for a successful insurgency group is to emphasize propaganda's activities that dismiss the government and promote the own group as saviour. It is also essential that the insurgents' propaganda should also provide a reasonable political explanation for their future violent actions. The rebels themselves must also establish safe sanctuaries in areas with low government presence and inspire enough faith to successfully convince the people to get recruited (US Government, 2012).

Territorial aspects like rugged terrains such as deserts, mountains, and forests, are for sure a pre-existing condition that will give an advantage to the insurgents. Thanks to this inhospitable environment in which the rebels are supposed to live, they can eventually, easily hide, move, get trained, organized, and be sure that those governmental forces will not suddenly appear. There should also be a solid incapacity to counter corruption in an ideal insurgency scenario and provide an equal and fair approach to the entire population. Additional problems such as economic crises, discontent, unemployment, natural disasters, and assassinations of key figures are all circumstances that will eventually let an open door of opportunities ready to be exploited by insurgents. These

dreadful conditions can eventually help the different insurgents' groups to get along and establish cooperation that pushes them to promote similar agendas (CIA, 2011).

Most insurgencies always draw a compelling narrative that focuses on the grievance of a population. This tool is handy to justify the insurgents' actions and eventually gain legitimacy in the eyes of the locals. Also crucial is the concept of group identity, which must be based on a logic that reaffirms the concept of insurgents against the government only. For this purpose, the group's identity is always focused on elements such as ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, class, and regionalism (Merari, 1993). Strong indicators of this strategy are, for example, when propaganda describes the current situation like an ideology that provides a unique interpretation of facts and the government is described as the occupier. During this stage, the government needs to acknowledge if there have been any disappearance of young men that were previously active in subgroups. Reports about people practising with guns, stealing from military checkpoints and police stations, or discovering irregular military training sides are always indicators. Nevertheless, activities like rackets, kidnapping in exchange for ransom, new massive drug selling, and armed robberies are, on the other side, almost a confirmation of the existence of an insurgency group (US Government, 2012).

2) The Second Stage: The Incipient Conflict

According to analysts, the second stage starts as soon as the rebels rely on violence to achieve their objectives. Unluckily for the governments that face an insurgency attempt, these violent actions get most of the time confused with mere criminal activities or acts of terrorism, which might lead the authorities to the wrong type of countermeasures (Merari, 1993). When talking about the insurgents at their second stage, it is essential to mention that this part is crucial and extremely risky. On one side, the insurgents must carry violent attacks, show their force, provoke their enemy, and gather sympathizers. However, on the other side, they seriously struggle with military weaknesses, inexperience, and a weak organizational setting. With all things considered, they have no other choice than to rely on asymmetric tactics like kidnappings, EODs, assassination, and terror attacks (US Government, 2012).

Usually, behind the Insurgents' strategy, there is always hope in the definitive victory based on the popular uprising and the consequent government's defeat. Thanks to the intervention of international actors, the rebels usually manage to find an agreement with the authorities that start to comply with the rebels' demands. On a tactical level, the most usual form of support is food, shelters, intelligence, advisors, medicine, and doctors. Analyzers also consider that the rebels seriously attempt to loot from the government forces, purchase from the black market a massive quantity of weapons, and obtain international military (US Government, 2012).

3) The third stage: The Open Insurgency

There is absolutely no doubt that an insurgency is taking place at this stage because the insurgents are overtly challenging the government and slowly gaining territorial control from the political point of view. From a military point of view, this stage is characterized by a higher frequency of military attacks, a more significant number of fighters involved in the attacks, and a higher level of violence. A more visible aspect would also be that external military support will become easier to spot (US Government, 2012).

When describing the limited military capacity of any insurgency group during the Open Insurgency Stage, it is evident that the rebels are avoiding prolonged fire exchange with the government forces, mainly because of their firepower disadvantage. However, it is also true that the insurgents' attacks

become more sophisticated and with more types of military operations, even though they are still mainly based on terrorism and guerrilla warfare. A few new tactics are assassinations, IEDs, hit-and-runs, and ambushes against symbolic targets (CIA, 2011).

Usually, at this stage, experts witness a massive change in the insurgents' composition, and most probably, some of the new members are forced to join the group, while others are only part-time involved. It is also very likely that the rebels get equipped with vehicles and become a mobile force, precisely as Daesh did with their militarized Toyota's pickup. According to different experts, it was only towards the end of this stage that the world news started to report the brutalities committed by ISIS (Brožík & Kaválek, 2015).

4) The fourth stage: The Resolution

Even though the stages are somehow similar for all insurgencies, it is also very likely that their path might differ hugely. Because many can progress steadily through the different stages, while others can regress multiple times to earlier stages or even remain stuck for decades, Stalemated or Stagnant Insurgencies can occur whenever the insurgencies struggle for years become just a nuisance for the government's security. It is also very usual that during these prolonged insurgencies, the goals of the insurgents may almost wholly change. A possible worth mentioning scenario when analyzing the conflict in Syria is when the insurgency becomes a purpose of life for the rebels. This outcome is typical because it eventually helps the insurgents reach a status otherwise not obtainable for them (US Government, 2012).

The last stage is entirely different from the others because it can lead to three different endings: insurgent victory, negotiated settlement, and government victory. Interestingly enough, there have been since the end of World War 2 till 2012 a total of 130 confirmed conflicts with insurgents' groups, and on average, this type of conflict usually lasted for 21 years. Historically speaking, 36% of all the insurgencies ended with an insurgent victory after ten years of fighting. Only around 28% ended up after an average period of 8 years with a mixed outcome. This scenario was possible due to the impressive belligerent capacity of the insurgents that somehow forced the government to accept concession of national significance. Furthermore, the remaining 36% ended up after 12 years of war with a transparent government victory (US Government, 2012).

I. Insurgent victory

This outcome is always apparent, and it usually ends with the insurgents' achievement of territorial control, the expel of foreign forces or independence from the government. The negative side of this ending is that sometimes this scenario might automatically lead to another brutal conflict because the sympathizers and supporters of the defeated regime might become insurgents themselves.

II. Negotiated Settlement

This scenario is complicated to implement because it is always associated with false starts, late delays, and unnecessary spoilers. Usually, in this case, there is the risk of a potential escalation of violence since most probably not all of the involved actors in the conflict will eventually be satisfied with the agreement. At this stage, it is very challenging to establish if certain groups are genuinely willing to reach a negotiation or if they are doing so to win some extra time to maximize their possibilities.

III. Government Victory

This type of victory is usually characterized by a continuous decrease in violence due to a lower level of support from the population and a general decrease in military actions. All this would eventually lead to a scenario with no decisive final battle and no clear end of the conflict. It is also

very realistic to claim that if the conflict has been protected in the long term, the insurgents will eventually remain fighters, even though their goals can not be considered any longer as realistic and feasible.

2.4) *Analysis of Counterinsurgency*

- Definition

According to the US government, Counterinsurgency is “Frequently referred to by the acronym COIN—is the combination of measures undertaken by a government to defeat an insurgency. Effective counterinsurgency integrates and synchronizes political, security, legal, economic, development, and psychological activities to create a holistic approach aimed at weakening the insurgents while bolstering the government’s legitimacy in the eyes of the population.” (US Government, 2012. page 1).

- COIN Approaches

The strategies used to fight the insurgents depend mainly on their targets. Therefore it is essential to mention that all approaches will lead to violence against the terrorists, but what will differ is in the aspect of emphasis (Lt. Col. McIntyre 2018). A specific type of COIN strategy chosen by the government will depend on different variables like the military history, the capacity of a nation, the culture, the insurgents' strategy, and much more. A COIN approach will eventually still change throughout the process and become more and more adapted to the latest developments of the conflict. Here below there is a description of the three main COIN strategies.

An ***Enemy-Centric*** path will focus on the destruction and eradication of the insurgents and their infrastructure. Typical operations of this strategy are the Search and Destroy, which will require heavy resilience. In this scenario, the government’s forces will have to continuously and meticulously pursue their enemies.

A ***Population-Centric*** strategy will focus on the population and their securitization to obtain the support needed for the government. It is essential to mention that the destruction operations against the insurgents will still take place, but less than the previous approach. This procedure will expand through the territories like an oil spot, which means that once a small area has been cleared from the insurgents, the government will maintain control clear over the area. Once that this is eventually achieved, it will be vital to rebuilding the area because the final objective is still to regain the support of the locals and avoid any insurgents' comeback.

An ***Authoritarian*** approach will do its best to punish the insurgents and the locals who helped them. With this approach, it will be essential not to fall into the disrespect of Human rights and the applying of overuse of force. This approach must make the cost of helping the insurgents so high that supporting them will become economically unfeasible. Initially, colonial powers were the ones that relied on this approach mainly because they stood inconsiderate regarding the international opinions (US Government, 2012).

2.5) *The concept and the leadership of ISIS*

The Islamic State’s ideology differs hugely from the traditional interpretation of Islam (Didi, 2015). One of the main divergences is the lack of tolerance toward other religions, especially against

Jewish and Christians, which, referring to the holy Qur'an, these populations should receive a special status when living within an Islamic society (Jaynal, 2019). Another critical difference between Daesh's ideology and the traditional concept of Islam is the broad rejections of any ideologies developed by the Westerners. A few examples are the concepts of nationalism and modernism, all ideas that go against the IS's faith. When talking about democracy, this, according to ISIS, is illicit because it will bring just a government of human beings that are not representatives of the Almighty God (Jaynal, 2019). The last contrast is based on the fact that their brutal actions towards other Muslims, such as genocide, can only be explained through their ideology and not through Muslim beliefs (Didi, 2015).

When discussing the Islamic State, it is also essential to cover the function behind the latest official IS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. According to multiple sources, he was an ultraconservative Iraqi student who was passionate about Islamic studies. At the time of the US invasion of Iraq, he became arrested and placed in Camp Bucca, a US military Jail in Iraq which for many was considered a radicalization centre. In June 2014, he reappeared on the radar by publicly declaring in a Sunni Mosque about establishing the newly Caliphate (PBS NewsHour, 2018). On that specific occasion, he recited the Koran and referred to that event as a historical turning point for Islam (McCants, 2016). In October 2019, the media reported the successful attempt on behalf of the US Delta forces to kill the alleged leader of ISIS in a nearby Syrian city of Idlib. All this international attention, also coming from President Trump's statement, made the world believe that IS was consequently finished and entirely stopped. However, many experts are convinced that al-Baghdadi's covered a symbolic role for propaganda purposes due to his knowledge of Islamic studies. He was only a credible religious figure in the population's eyes and not a charismatic figure with leading capacities. (Vice News, 2019).

3) Research Methodology

3.1) Introduction

Considering that the Caliphate of the Islamic State already collapsed a few years ago, this research paper will most certainly have no direct significance on the civil conflict. However, it could become very relevant for future conflicts because many field experts mutually agreed on a future possibility on behalf of Daesh to potentially rise again between Syria and Iraq. In addition to that, the IS terrorist group is also very notorious for making an international franchise of their insurgency approach, which means that this research paper could become helpful in future and current conflicts that are somehow affected by the Islamic State. It is essential to remind that the terror group already operated in Afghanistan, the Philippines, Egypt, Yemen, Lybia, Saudi Arabia, West Africa, Somalia, and many others (BBC NEWS, 2019).

The paper will also explain the very complicated concepts that characterize the IS insurgency and its strategies. It will examine the conflict and suggest possible ways that could have helped in preventing the establishment of the Caliphate in the Levant and Mesopotamia. The main questions of the paper will be: What can we learn from the application of the Mao Tse-tung theory about the “Revolutionary Warfare” in the insurgency context of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria? Can this framework provide an alternative but still practical, Counterinsurgency approach, which will eventually become beneficial to prevent any similar establishments to the IS Caliphate?

3.2) Purpose of the Paper & Research Methodology

This chapter will give a broader explanation about the framework of the paper, and it will focus on the analysis of data, which will be relevant for the research study. The paper's first objective is to gather a more unconventional point of view of the recent events of the insurgency of ISIS. The reason is that there is still so much to learn about this recent event, hence the importance of identifying possible solutions to counter this very influential and brutal radical group. The paper will rely on qualitative content for the RQs, which hopefully will make the research relevant for future studies and the authorities involved in future conflicts against Jihadist groups like Daesh.

Thanks to Mao's theory about the concept of Revolutionary Warfare, it will be possible to obtain a bodywork that will eventually give us a deeper understanding of the true nature behind the rise of the Islamic State and the establishment of the Caliphate. The paper will rely on a qualitative method approach, and the case study of the Islamic State insurgency will be evaluated on the theory of the Revolutionary Warfare. Therefore, the research will analyze the level of attachment to Mao's theory and refer to it as the dependent variable. Consequently, the null hypothesis will be associated with the invalidity of Mao's theory to be applied in the ISIS scenario. Ideally, the research must reject the adherence behind the null hypothesis and give evidence that the conflict of the Islamic State can be compared to Mao's theory. For this methodology, it will be necessary to rely on a comparative type of analysis that will determine if the two topics are somehow compatible.

By referring to the Revolutionary Warfare theory as a guide to analyzing the IS insurgency, it will finally be possible to answer the central research question and find more about the IS strategy. Nevertheless, it will also be necessary to compare the COIN strategies adopted against ISIS and analyze similar studies to answer the subordinate question.

3.3) Data collection & Research Process

The research will rely on books, news reports, academic and journal articles written by different sources. The organization of the paper will be divided into three major subdivisions. At first, the paper will primarily focus on data regarding events like operations, conquests, and propaganda material. It is, therefore, essential to gather and filter the correct information from the start. The next chapter will focus on the comparison metrics required to establish the level of adherence between ISIS and the theory developed by Mao. Moreover, all the relevant data will be used again to write a rational conclusion based on the comparison and analysis of the research paper.

3.4) Level of Adherence

The dependent variable is the level of cohesion that must be evaluated between Mao's theory and the IS insurgency in Syria and Iraq. This method will require each criterion to refer to its different metrics already mentioned in Mao's theory. This methodology will eventually help us to determine if this approach can be considered feasible for this research paper or not. In other words, for each of the main topics of the theory of Revolutionary Warfare, it will be necessary to examine its level of adherence to Mao's theory. Depending on the gap between the Daesh insurgency and the Revolutionary Warfare theory, a different score will be put together for every aspect mentioned by Mao Tse-tung's theory (Major Azam, 2017). If the analysis result gives us zero, then there is 0 = no adherence to the theory. Further possibilities are the number one that stands for a 1 = acceptable level of adherence, and the number two for a 2 = whole level of adherence.

Level of adherence (Table 1)

0 =	No adherence
1 =	Acceptable level of adherence
2 =	Whole level of adherence

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The theory of Revolutionary Warfare covers crucial topics such as:

1. *Intelligence* is a crucial aspect of an insurgency's organization, and according to Mao's theory, this should primarily involve all the valuable information for planning military operations. Intelligence gathering is considered one of the most decisive factors for a successful conflict (Anchor Press, 1978). Basically, for this type of guerrilla warfare, it is crucial to obtain military intelligence about the weaknesses of the government forces and exploit them to gain the upper hand. Thanks to the knowledge concerning the surrounding areas, this approach will allow the insurgents to gather intel about the enemy's movement troops, their supply chain, and much more. Usually, the rebels build well-organized networks that can be very difficult to infiltrate for the government. Within these intelligence connections, the rebels must gain the advantage by establishing if the regular army is efficient, well trained, and professionally organized. Like this, everyone could gain valuable information about the enemy, especially in the rebels' territories. For this topic, the reference metrics will regard arguments like; A) Organization, B) Civilian HUMINT, C) Knowledge of the surrounding area, D) Military information about their enemies (Griffith, 2002).
2. *Violence* is considered a vital aspect of the military advance for the insurgents. In the research paper, violence will always be referred to as the tool to intimidate people, threaten them, or cause any damage relevant to the conflict. Experts believe that its usage is entailed in its

strategy, representing a crucial part of their struggle, terrorism, and propaganda (Marks, 2009). The metrics that refers to the adherence to Mao's theory will be A) Violence with strategical implications, B) Violence related to propaganda, and C) Violence in the form of terrorism (Major Azam, 2017).

3. *Politics* is probably the most crucial element out of all the theories of Revolutionary Warfare, and that is because fighting groups get united and become willing to use force and violence to obtain their area of influence. Usually, the insurgency fighters that tend to participate in guerrilla military actions become always politically oriented due to the propaganda's exposure and political influence. Their leaders will always remind them what is at stake and why they fight against the government (Department of State, 2016). According to Mao's interpretation of the meaning of the word politics, it is a group of activities that impact the policies made by the political class or represent a particular type of actions made by a societal group that helps them maintain or gain power (Starr, 1976). When discussing the political aspects of an insurgency, there are many subtopics mentioned in Mao's theory which will be thoroughly analyzed in the next chapter. Among them, there are aspects such as A) Organization, B) Propaganda, and C) the Ideology within the doctrine and instruction (Griffith, 2002).
4. *Continuous Growth* is another vital aspect of successful guerrilla warfares. According to Mao's theory, this is a progressive expansion of the guerrilla movement. At first, the rebels will need to expand and recruit new members and gather more sources to reach an appropriate number of soldiers. Once the new members are sufficiently trained, they will have to carry all sorts of terrorists' attacks and loot as much ammunition and arms as possible from their enemies (Starr, 1976). The subtopics used to compare the IS Insurgency of the Levant with Mao's theory are: A) Capacity of coordinating attacks towards exposed enemy positions, B) Territorial expansion, C) Gain additional military equipment, and D) Recruiting (Major Azam, 2017).
5. *The centralization level* refers to the rebels' approach, which allows them to keep fluid fighting tactics. The lower this level is, the more the government forces will be misled. Thanks to small fighting teams, the rebels squads can emphasize speed and enemy penetration behind the lines. According to Mao's knowledge, deploying a solid and extensive team of soldiers, different weakness types become highlighted in the conventional way of fighting. Therefore, he focused on some more unconventional fighting methods such as freedom of action and autonomous movement. The metric here will be A) Initiation of military action, B) Dynamic disposition, C) Capacity to engage the enemy's weaknesses (Griffith, 2002).
6. *The organization's structure* is another concept that is also very important in Mao Tse-tung's theory, mainly because it was imperative to obtain secretly support from urban areas (Samuel, 2002). Mao's strategy also implied the long-term consolidation of improvised military bases in rural terrain, giving the rebels a massive advantage in training recruits. For the government to realize the gravity of the situation and identify the areas of the insurgents will require too much time, and most probably, the civilians are already sympathizing with the rebel's cause and supporting them. The relevant metrics for this subtopic will be a simple analysis focused on the ability of ISIS to get organized to help the rebels A) Keep control over rugged terrains (Griffith, 2002).
7. *The final decision* is the final element that needs to be compared because it represents the last stage before eventually becoming a conventional army capable of carrying open field attacks

against the government forces. It is essential to mention that the rebels might start this process, but it is very unusual (Starr, 1976). They might eventually consider and accept any of the negotiations from the government because they are willing to obtain in a deceptive measure the upper hand, mainly in the context of economy, military and social. According to Mao's theory, there are just two subtopics that need to be studied. The first is obviously to know if A) the Islamic State Caliphate became a conventional army. Furthermore, if B) the IS negotiated with Baghdad and Damascus to illude them about their real intentions (Major Azam, 2017).

The validity of this research paper is limited to only one case study. Therefore any validity of the conclusion outside of this research case cannot be demonstrated through this paper. Nonetheless, in the context of the Islamic State, the research is still deeply connected to the model suggested by Mao, and therefore it recognizes it as a theoretical basis. In the next chapter, the paper will establish through comparison if the insurgency of Daesh in Syria and Iraq is in line with Mao's theory. By analyzing the efforts made by ISIS, the paper should gain an overview that could help the future counterinsurgencies against similar terror groups.

4) Analysis

As already mentioned, this chapter is all about the analysis of the insurgency of the Islamic State. The variables mentioned in chapter 3 of the theory of Revolutionary Warfare will be compared to the case study of the ISIS insurgency.

4.1) *Intelligence*

The theory of Revolutionary Warfare puts much emphasis on the concept of intelligence. According to Mao Zedong, the concept of intelligence is about the gathering of valuable information for planning an effective strike against the enemy. Furthermore, if correctly done, it is supposed to give an advantage to the rebels because they would eventually be able to exploit the enemy weaknesses. A few examples of helpful information about the enemies are their military equipment, level of discipline, patrolling movement, the number of soldiers, and much more. The most challenging thing about counterinsurgency is that everyone, independently of their age or gender, can collect valuable information about the government forces (Major Azam, 2017).

Even though many experts agree that much more research needs to be done about Daesh's insurgency, they still claim that ISIS fighters adapted to the environment and exploited it in a way that enabled them to expand fluidly. It is very likely that the IS group also relied on massive intelligence networks based on the support coming from local citizens, sympathizers, and coerced supporters (Speckhard & Yayla, 2017).

4.1.1) *Organization*

After the collapse of the Caliphate, multiple documents concerning the IS intelligence service have been captured, and consequently, many questions related to this topic have been answered. The IS outstanding skills came actually from previous Baath intelligence service members. Nowadays, we can claim that ISIS relied on an Intelligence service structure called "Emni" that allegedly supported the Jihadists' activities even after establishing the Caliphate. This word translated from the Arabic language means trust, and it was used to describe the Intelligence organization that was also picking helpful intel for the planning of international terror attacks. The number of services and intelligence capacities included in the Emni organization was impressive. The ISIS intelligence service collected data regarding the population and soldiers, their military weaknesses to prevent enemies' attacks, the monitoring of their logistics, territorial intel for future attacks, the spread of propaganda, the use of spies among refugees, interactions with Syrian intelligence, and much more. The primary purpose of this Intel organization was to manipulate the masses, implement the plotting, and restore the power in the Sunnis' hands (Speckhard & Yayla, 2017).

At the time of the Chinese revolution, Mao opted for a close intelligence network because, according to his theory, this approach would give him constant intel about the enemy movements. Everyone was capable of providing helpful intel to the rebels, and this aspect explains why Mao ordered his fellow soldiers to put pressure on the civilians to get constant intel. This strategy was a success because, at the same time, the government forces were unaware of being constantly monitored (Griffith, 2002). Considering a similar approach between the two different insurgents, the level of adherence of the Islamic State with Mao's theory gives us a score of 2.

4.1.2) *HUMINT and use of civilians*

Mao mentioned multiple times in his theory that it is impossible to succeed in guerrilla warfare without relying on the population. For him, recruiting disciplined farmers with leadership skills was already everything he was wishing. Mao's charisma certainly also contributed to mobilize the

people and eventually inspire them to work in favour of the movement (Major Azam, 2017). Daesh also relied on religious figures like Abu Bakr al Baghdadi to obtain the trust of the Sunni population and use them to gain constant intel (Speckhard & Yayla, 2017). The Jihadists also used the population to spread propaganda, gather intelligence, and maintain security. When the Caliphate collapsed, the Iraqi security forces always made a list of suspects based on the interrogations of locals that eventually led to public accusations of citizens. This unconventional tactic was required to define who the insurgents were and who the supporters (VICE News, 2016). Considering the similarities between Mao's theory and the ISIS strategy, the degree of adherence is again complete.

4.1.3) Knowledge of the surrounding areas

As already mentioned, many of the military leaders and pioneers of the movement gained experience abroad. Nevertheless, most low-ranking soldiers were Sunnis that grew up in the region (Patel, 2015). A further important aspect related to territorial knowledge was the multiple alliances with certain local Arab tribes. This aspect is particularly relevant in this chapter because, in general, even before the IS arrival, some tribes were already very notorious for their territorial control, local security, networks of people, criminal activities, and checkpoints (Green & Ward, 2017). With the support of these qualified ISIS members, it became almost predictable to see how this type of expertise and network of people was reflected in the IS strategy and military tactics. This theory is confirmed by the Jihadists' conquest of some areas along the border between Syria and Iraq. After the siege, ISIS established a robust military presence and re-activated a historical route that was not anymore in use after the Sykes-Picot, an agreement made immediately after the Great War. Even though this operation was also for propaganda purposes, it still highlights certain IS members' historical and territorial knowledge (VICE News Part 5, 2014).

According to Mao's theory, the rebels should do their best to avoid effective counterintelligence methods like potential infiltration of the terror group. The rebels must also rely on their knowledge of the terrain to choose the ground that better suits their operations. This requirement also implies using escape paths whenever the exchange of fire becomes too challenging for the rebels. Experts believe that Daesh pursued ideal military strategies to keep the enemy's soldiers as busy and in stressful conditions as possible. This approach was only possible thanks to their knowledge of the surrounding areas, an element that is entirely in line with the theory of Revolutionary Warfare. Therefore, the adherence level will be considered complete, with a total score of 2 (Major Azam, 2017).

4.1.4) Military information about their enemies

Different sources about the ISIS insurgency have mentioned the possibility that Daesh might have multiple advantages over their enemies, especially if we consider that ISIS developed an informant's network based on sympathizers that provided them with valuable intelligence. There is even a realistic possibility that the governments of Iraq and Syria might have been infiltrated by pro-IS informants that shared with the terrorist group relevant secrets about their enemies' movement, operations, and much more (Brožik & Kaválek, 2015). A more specific example in favour of this theory was the impressive fall of Mosul that took place between 4th June till 10th of June 2014. According to the reconstructions of the events based on the only reliable source within the Caliphate's city, "Mosul Eye", there were at max only around 2'500 Jihadists soldiers that managed to take control of the second biggest city of Iraq with its 1,5 million citizens in just less than a week (Al Sharq, 2017). Even though ISIS fighters successfully managed to immediately recruit hundreds of liberated prisoners from the overpopulated jails of Mosul, this does not yet explain why 30'000 Iraqi soldiers, which were trained and equipped directly by the US forces, totally failed to stop the Jihadists. To make things even worse, many soldiers among the Iraqi

Defence Forces started to abandon the city and even desert from their units. A potential explanation for this is that there were not just informants among the high ranks of the Iraqi forces but also commanding officers on ISIS's payrolls that purposely did not fully intervene against the terror group. This event highlights the extension of a possible IS infiltration within the Iraqi government and his ability to gather intel about the enemy. Judging by the efficiency of their attacks during their last stage of Insurgency, which took place before the establishment of the Caliphate, it was evident that it was a well-coordinated attack that could only be carried out after the gathering of military intelligence (Abdulrazaq & Stansfield, 2016).

Mao, in his theory, considered the study of the government forces and their leaders, especially within the rebels' territories, as crucial. He considered relevant details regarding the enemy's position, the number of soldiers, level of discipline, fighting readiness, equipment, military know-how, and much more. Information like those suggested could seriously help identify the enemy's strengths and weaknesses and eventually help them better plan future military attacks (Griffith, 2002). With all things considered, the level of adherence to Mao's theory is complete, with a score of 2 points.

Intelligence (Table 2)

Organization	2
HUMINT & Use of Civilians	2
Knowledge of the surrounding area	2
Military information about their enemies	2
Total	8/4 = 2

Created by the author.

4.2) Violence

The theory of Revolutionary Warfare describes the use of violence as a critical element for any rebel movement because, according to Mao, political power comes exclusively from a firing weapon (Major Azam, 2017). Arguably this approach towards violence was very similar to the insurgency of Daesh. ISIS started to rely immediately on violence, using it as a tool to accomplish its strategy. Consequently, the Jihadists group became worldwide famous for their atrocities and spread fear and propaganda internationally. Many experts claim that violence in insurgency is a selective benefit that helps the insurgents gain additional population support for their cause. Usually, weak insurgency groups that cannot provide a sufficient amount of benefits, services, and support to the population must try to compensate for their low capacity and weaknesses through violence (Wood, 2010).

4.2.1) Violence with strategical implications

The theory of Revolutionary Warfare refers to a crucial principle called the unity of opposites, and this approach focuses on the tactical benefit of transforming the insurgents' weaknesses into strength. This approach allows the rebels to exploit the enemy's weaknesses and become consistently the strongest one from a military point of view. This approach implies that the rebels will primarily focus on defenceless logistic points and plan surprise ambushes against their enemies. Further strategical implications of violence in the context of guerrillas concern brutal attacks against the government's institutions and forces. According to Mao's theory, the idea behind these actions

was to challenge the government's legitimacy and capacity for providing essential services like security (Major Azam, 2017).

There have been studies that already dismissed the theory that Daesh's violence was considered irrational. Otherwise, it would have meant there was no strategic implication regarding their use of violence, especially about military strategy and ideology. ISIS managed to differentiate itself from other movements in Syria and Iraq not just for being brutal but also because the group decided to ignore the differences among the Arab communities and address other ethnic groups almost the same way. This element of Daesh's insurgency was a strategy meant to gather further transnational support, and it worked well for their ideology (Jones, 2016). Further strategic implications of embracing violence for Daesh were also the opportunity to provoke their enemy coalition and lead them towards missteps. However, as previously predicted, this approach was a double sharp knife for Daesh. On one side, they relied on violence so much that it seriously helped them gain territories and power because eventually, they murdered many of those who were in their way and promoted violence to revenge the Sunni grievances. Nevertheless, towards the end, this approach was at the expense of the locals, which most probably contributed to their defeat because a successful insurgency is mainly about who gets the population support for the long term (Jones, 2016).

It is essential to mention that Daesh also became famous for killing key figures like Iraqi generals, clerics, representatives of organizations, journalists, and many others. This strategy was used to undermine the governments of Iraq and Syria and eventually overthrow them (Major Azam, 2017). Considering the similarities between the theory of Revolutionary Warfare and the strategic implication of violence of Daesh, the level of adherence is complete, with a final score of 2.

4.2.2) Violence in the form of terrorism

Even though ISIS has carried multiple terror attacks in the Western world, it is also true that the most brutal atrocities were committed in Syria and Iraq. According to different experts, violence was not just used against anyone in their path, but it even became a brand for Daesh. The group made almost no distinction between gender, age, and religious groups, and eventually, many Sunnis were also killed by them (Jones, 2016).

Among their most brutal barbarities, there were different types of terrorism attacks. Suicide attacks were and still are one of the most relevant tactics of IS terrorism, and they have been used all over the world, mainly in the form of suicide belts and car bombs (Hall, 2014). Mass execution was also another type of terror attack exclusively used against Christians, Shia, or war prisoners who did not accept the "Towba". This was an opportunity that ISIS sometimes gave to soldiers of different groups to repent and eventually switch to their side.

Sexual assault was another crime that was committed on a medieval scale. Many reports mention that women were used as slaves, raped continuously, and donated to the fighters of the Caliphate as compensation for their duties (Watson, 2014). However, the most particular form of violence of Daesh was the beheadings, which were primarily meant for propaganda purposes. Through time the members of ISIS developed a unique style of beheading or killing. Usually, they covered themselves in black with a balaclava covering their faces and their prisoners dressed in orange. This costume was an act of solidarity with the orange-dressed Jihadist prisoners kept and tortured in Guantanamo, a US prison located in Cuba (Berlinger, 2014). There were even further killings committed by ISIS, which were unbearable to watch and to show to the news. For example, a Jordanian jet pilot was burned to death from a hanging cage; prisoners rigged with explosives, homosexuals were thrown from buildings, and military enemies were crucified alive and publicly exposed (VICE News, 2014) (Berlinger, 2014). According to experts, the idea behind these killings

was to be taken seriously as a terrorist group, attract recruits, receive prisoners' ransom, and discourage foreign involvement (McCoy, 2014).

The theory of Revolutionary Warfare mentions that violence is the best and most effective tool for the spread of terror and fear. However, this is not the only reason behind the use of violence because it can also become beneficial to communicate to the enemies that no place is safe from them, and the terrorists can always find ways to reach their enemies (Griffith, 2002). Therefore, Mao's theory appears to be very much in line with the ISIS activities, mainly because both groups left a considerable quantity of death, destruction, and massive panic. Hence, Mao's theory has a whole level of adherence with the Islamic State terror activities.

4.2.3) Violence related to propaganda

Thanks to ISIS propaganda, violence itself has become for the terror group a tool to ensure the proper narrative concerning the conflict and a great way to gain additional influence and power. According to different experts, ISIS spent much money producing almost professional propaganda videos to give the organisation a favourable image and spread fear. Daesh always tried concerning their brutalities to appear on the world news and consequently exploited the situation of the conflict by gaining additional validation for their cause (McCoy, 2014).

When discussing propaganda material about violence, it is essential to mention that similar groups like Al-Qaida used to publish a journal called "Inspire." This publication was more of a field manual to create bombs and get inspired to join the Jihadists. IS tried to imitate al-Qaida by creating "Dabiq," this was a collection of images of people who died from all sides of the conflict. The idea behind this was to radicalize the readers by showing them how nice the death was for the ISIS fighters compared to the other fighters. On one side, the propaganda piece wanted to manipulate the audience by suggesting that Daesh's dead members had a big smile on their faces for finally meeting God, an extreme interpretation that was totally in line with the concept of Jihadism. On the other side, the dead bodies of ISIS' enemies were mutilated and sad-looking. (Mullen and Todd, 2014). It is essential to mention that according to the ISIS propaganda based on the Jihadists Salafist ideology, the moment of death for anyone is already written and known to God, so according to the terror group, it is not a matter of life's choices because the time of death will eventually never change. So, according to this logic, simply fighting for the sake of the Jihad will require less courage from the fighters than expected because this decision will have no impact on the moment of death of the fighters (Chatham House, 2016).

All these propaganda and manipulation activities gave the Islamic State a considerable advantage because they could eventually deflect the criticism and justify their actions by reinterpreting entire parts of the holy Koran. Thanks to their continuous crimes and multiple ways of spreading their propaganda through social networks, they constantly appeared on the news (Soufan Group, 2014). The recruitment of foreign fighters was also deeply connected with the propaganda and the use of violence. This approach gave the newcomers a new purpose in life after transforming their frustration and eventually giving them a new concept of reality. ISIS propaganda also suggested that they were the only representative of real Islam because they were the only ones fighting against the enemies of the Muslim world, a label that was given to the West. A similar statement was made about the infidels that were preaching the wrong God, so even Muslim Shias were no exception (Lyall and Fisher, 2006).

According to Mao's theory, violence is considered one of the primary efforts and a big part of each insurgency's strategy and identity. So, it was crucial that the members responsible for the Guerrillas' propaganda were also capable within the media to spread their ideology, message, and

eventually the illegitimacy of the government. Hence, the degree of adherence between the two is considered complete, giving a total score of 2.

Violence (Table 3)

The strategical implication of violence	2
Violence in the form of terrorism	2
Violence related to propaganda	2
Total	6/3 = 2

Created by the Author.

4.3) Politics

According to the theory of Revolutionary Warfare, a requirement for a successful insurgency is to have a population that struggles with the policies of a government, injustice, or marginalization (Griffith, 2002). Whenever basic needs are missing on a national or regional level, it is very likely that some political groups, like a simple movement or even an insurgency group, could manage to apply leverage on these grievances and generate some sort of up-rising (Major Azam, 2017). We have also to consider that most of the future members of an insurgency are usually poor, male, and still at a young age. This category of people is the one with the highest need for societal change. However, after ineffective peaceful protests against the government, this category usually convinces itself that nothing is achievable without violence. The idea behind these decisions is that some protesters stop perceiving the governmental institutions as legitimate and get radicalized and want to obtain power (Starr, 1976). With all things considered, it is evident that the theory of Revolutionary Warfare refers to revolutions or insurgencies that were mainly politically oriented conflicts (Major Azam, 2017).

Even the Islamic State has carried a politically oriented conflict that has successfully replaced some areas of the Syrian-Iraqi government with the IS Caliphate. By the later implementation of Sharia law, concerning the Salafist interpretation of Islam, the IS terror group managed to further develop its campaign by promising to establish a society that will eliminate issues such as low level of governance, foreign influence, and corruption (Aulassyahied, 2018).

It is essential to mention that in Iraq, there were around 40 million citizens, and the Iraqi society was mainly composed of Shia Arabs (15 million), Sunni Arabs (9 million), Kurds (4,7 million), Turkmen (3 million), Assyrians + Armenians + Yazidis + Afro-Iraqis (2 million) and many other religious groups (Council on Foreign Relations, 2016). The information related to the demographics of the Iraqi population is beneficial to understand the origin of the Islamic State. According to different experts, the IS strategy was deeply connected with the Sunni discontent, and these grievances came from the north of Iraqi (Sunni areas), where the government was considered illegitimate. One of the social aspects that helped the rise of the Islamic State was the continuous unfiled promises made by Baghdad to reintegrate the Sunnis community into the state structure (Jones & Johnston, 2013). What turned to be unexpected for many experts was establishing different strongholds in Syria that boosted the military capacity of the Daesh insurgency (Brožík & Kaválek, 2015). On the other side, the Syrian society with its 21 million citizens was very different from the Iraqi ones. Most of the population were Sunni (62%), then there is the Alawite (13%) which belong to the Shia community and detain power thanks to President Bashar al-Assad, the Kurds (10%), the Christian (8%), and many others (Council on Foreign Relations, 2016). Before establishing the Caliphate, Syria was already struggling with a civil war that started with the Arab Spring. These conditions permitted the Islamic State insurgency to intervene by taking advantage of the current Syrian sectarian issues (Khatib, 2015).

4.3.1) Organization level

According to Mao's theory, a Guerrillas organization can start in different ways. Usually, the population starts the process, but there are many historical exceptions. It is also possible that the Guerrillas can get started by previous members of the regular army, local militia, tribes, criminal groups, or just a combination of them (Griffith, 2002).

The Islamic State was an organization that started its history with Abu Musab az-Zarqawi as the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. However, even before representing the international terror group, in 2003, az-Zarqawi was a leader of the predecessors of AQI, a terror group called al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, which was countering the US invasion of Iraq by relying on experienced al-Qaeda warriors. Later in 2006, after reaching the large-scale insurgency stage, the Jihadists eventually carried a brutal battle against the US troops in Falluja (Sly, 2014). Because of their capacity to fight against the most powerful army globally, they were consequently perceived as a successful Al-Qaida franchise (Brožík & Kaválek, 2015). This aspect eventually helped them to gain international support from foreign fighters and home-grown terrorists.

Nevertheless, despite their reputation, AQI was still a tiny Sunni insurgency group that promoted sectarian violence, making them gain media attention. After the deaths of the AQI's leader, the US forces, with the help of different Sunni tribal militias called Sahwa, were eventually able to push the terrorists back into a small-scale phase and seriously damage them. However, after the US forces pull-out from Iraq in 2011 and the government of Baghdad continued to lie with fake promises to the Sunni communities, things escalated once again, and AQI reached in just two years the stage of large-scale Insurgency. From that moment, it is confirmed that many high-ranking positions of the Islamic State insurgency were taken, primarily by liberated prisoners, members of Sunni tribes that changed sides, and most importantly, previously experienced members of the Ba'athist regime. There were mainly locals, foreign fighters with no experience, and deserting Iraqi army soldiers in low-ranking positions (Brožík & Kaválek, 2015).

In the case of Mao Zedong, like in the case of ISIS, their leaders were primarily pushing their people to counter their government oppression. In the case of the Chinese rebels, Mao considered it suitable to put in high-ranking positions people from the masses. Among them, there were mainly students or professionals ready to put their lives at risk for the sake of their cause (Major Azam, 2017). However, a similar approach by Daesh would have probably never enabled the terror group to establish the Caliphate in such a short time and smooth way. This aspect is particularly true because even though all the odds were against the success of the Jihadists, Daesh still managed to win against the Iraqi forces, which had a much more powerful army and was better equipped (Brožík & Kaválek, 2015).

Still, before establishing the Caliphate, an additional common element of the organization between Mao's rebels and the Jihadists terror group was their approach towards territorial controls. Every district of their area had headquarters, leaders, commanders, and much more (Jefferis, 2016). So, with all things considered, the degree of adherence to Mao's theory is considered only as an acceptable level of adherence.

4.3.2) Propaganda exposure

This element is probably one of the most crucial in the theory of Revolutionary Warfare. The movement leaders need to address the hate coming from the population's grievances and use it in a way that permits them to mobilize the people when necessary. In Mao's theory, whenever a government does not provide everyday needs, there is a potential for an uprising. Combined with the necessary ambition, propaganda, violence, leadership, and a suitable organization, this requirement will eventually lead to a successful insurgency (Major Azam, 2017). In the theory of

Revolutionary Warfare, well-motivated, indoctrinated, and adequately led peasants were already everything that was required to transform China (Griffith, 2002).

Mao's theory suggests that military actions per se are not the only element of a revolution. On the contrary, the primary goal is to replace the previously existing society with a new one. Revolutionary warfare also touches upon further arguments such as the economic, social, and psychological aspects of a conflict, not just the military and political (Star, 1976). However, for ISIS, violence was always a significant part of their activities and a central element of their propaganda. Moreover, thanks to the spread of ISIS propaganda, they showed the world their military capacity and brutality. They also managed to capture and assassinate key figures to appear particularly trustworthy to many radicalized subjects worldwide. The terror group ISIS was notorious from the start for promoting Sharia law, and this approach allowed them to establish a state organization called the Caliphate. According to Daesh's propaganda, the terror group provided essential services, justice, jobs, sharia law's police (al Hisba), and much more (Baele et al, 2019). Hence, the degree of adherence to the theory of Mao Zedong is therefore thoroughly with a final score of two.

4.3.3) Ideology within the doctrine and instruction

Contrary to popular belief, one of the reasons behind the mutation from AQI to ISIS was Daesh's approach towards other Muslims, especially Shia groups. On one side of al-Qaeda's ideology, the biggest enemy was the Western world, and according to their propaganda, it was oppressing the Muslims around the globe. On the other side, the Salafist ideology and the Wahhabism methods used by ISIS were for sure sharing similar hate towards the West, but not exclusively. According to Daesh's members, Shia groups believed in the wrong interpretation of Islam, praying the wrong God, and therefore considered infidels (Byman, 2015).

Even though regular professional armies are notorious for keeping the politic out of their armed forces, it was quite the opposite for Jihadists insurgents and Mao's rebels (Major Azam, 2017). ISIS insurgency leaders were very capable of indoctrinating all their fighters with the Jihadists Salafist ideology. According to foreign fighters who joined the Middle East's terror group, the indoctrination itself was so much prioritized by the military leaders that it was taught earlier than anything else, even before shooting a rifle (Gaub, 2016). The Guerrilla leaders mentioned in the theory of Revolutionary Warfare put more emphasis on indoctrination than on fighting skills. This aspect was a crucial process because through propaganda, the fighters obtained a political explanation about the conflict, and like this, it was possible to persuade them longer of being on the right side and with the right people (Starr, 1976).

Even though Daesh's fighters destroyed many Shia's Mosques, there were also a few historical churches, especially in the city of Raqqa, that have been spared and transformed into indoctrination centres for civilians (VICE News, 2014). The instruction within the Islamic State was mainly covered with a radical Jihadists interpretation of the Quran and the Sunna. Therefore many schools within the Caliphate relied on books allegedly edited in Saudi Arabia, which radicalized the young students already at elementary schools (Almohammad, 2018). With all things considered, the degree of adherence between ISIS indoctrination and Revolutionary Warfare theory is considered level 2, which stands for a whole level of adherence.

Politics (Table 4)

Organization level	1
Propaganda exposure	2
Ideology within the doctrine and instruction	2
Total	5/3 = 1,66

Created by the Author.

4.4) The Level of Centralization

For many military science experts, there is not a realistic universal concept of military strength, that is because an army could be ideal for specific tasks like invading, but at the same time not very suitable for others, like maintaining control for an extended period. This war aspect is not related to military strength, personnel, and the defence budget, but it is more about the feasibility of the task in the face of the enemy's organisational aspect. A successful strategy should always acknowledge the strength and weaknesses of the enemy and consequently adapt them into military tactics. This approach is vital because conventional armies are primarily centralized. Therefore it is in the Guerrilla rebels' interest to carry decentralized operations over extensive areas. Mao wrote in his theory that ideally, the rebels should do their best to expand their area of involvement and maximize their chances of survival by exploiting the rural terrains and inflicting as much damage on the government forces as possible (Griffith, 2002). The decentralization concept is a must for the insurgents, and it allows the rebels to show their strength in the face of the enemies' weaknesses. Even though the major obstacle for the insurgents is to find competent leaders, this approach gives them plenty of exploitable opportunities. Under these conditions, the rebels' enemies become a potential logistics support because if adequately taken care of, they can be attacked and lose their military equipment, and eventually help the rebels indirectly to get resupplied (Major Azam, 2017).

4.4.1) Initiative

The insurgents of the Islamic State were known for coordinating well-planned attacks against government targets. They have proven that they could conquer enemy locations on multiple occasions, attack military convoys, and eventually gain supplies from looting the enemies. The terror group coordinated attacks against multiple targets to retain the military initiative and keep up with a certain freedom of action, which was the same approach suggested by the theory developed by Mao. Interestingly enough, during ISIS Insurgency, the military capacity of the Jihadists was directly proportionate to the number of deaths among the soldiers of the Iraqi Defence Army (Kavalek, 2015). These aspects of the conflict highlight a significant similarity with what was suggested by Mao about following actions meant to retain the initiative. Hence the initiative aspect of Revolutionary warfare has a whole level of adherence with the ISIS insurgency.

4.4.2) Predisposition to static disposition

The theory of Revolutionary Warfare suggests that it is essential for the rebels to initiate military attacks, to avoid static disposition, and give the impression that the fighters could be everywhere and at any time. For Mao, a successful way to fulfil these requirements is to organize the dispersed revolutionary forces. This requirement will eventually help them impact the enemies' morale and confuse them to the point of letting them think of not being well suited for this type of threat as military forces (Major Azam, 2017). Mao suggests that ideally, the rebels should not be heavily equipped like conventional forces, because like this, the guerrillas' fighters can quickly move

forwards and withdraw smoothly whenever necessary. Fighting tactics like this allow the rebels to plan unexpected attacks and divert the enemies for tactical purposes (Anchor Press, 1978).

The fighters of Deash have always carried underground attacks like the one against the US army in Falluja. They have been able to move smoothly between building thanks to a network of tunnels and secret passages. These tactics allowed the Jihadists to move and carry the “hit and run” type of attacks, which allowed them to have an advantage against conventional units with higher firepower. By keeping on moving, the conventional forces failed to identify a front and found themselves in an area with no safe ground or safe direction to withdraw. The consequence of these types of attacks gave the impression to the US soldiers that Jihadists were everywhere and nowhere at the same time and eventually brought them to panic. Besides this extreme historical example, many similar approaches on behalf of the Islamic State indicated a continuous and fluid operational setting (BBC News, 2014).

Interestingly enough, Mao’s theory suggests that a requirement for guerrilla fighters' survival concerns their capacity to run away and do it fast because this will often happen to them (Griffith, 2002). Based on all the similarities between the two groups, Daesh has a whole level of adherence in the context of dynamic disposition.

4.4.3) Capacity to engage the enemy weaknesses

ISIS had a well-organized military structure with different military commands, almost as a professional army (Khalaf & Jones, 2014). During the process of insurgency, the terror group kept their decentralized structure and carried operations in different regions through multiple operating cells and different leaders. According to military experts, these leaders followed Daesh's strategy and the orders of the high command. This characteristic also explains why many of the cells operating in Syria were starting their offensive campaign simultaneously. Thanks to their members and sympathizers, ISIS could eventually obtain constant and proper intel about their enemies. Many cells were composed of small units, allowing them to move smoothly, ambush their enemies, and withdraw fast from the operation area. This approach allowed them to operate wherever they spotted a weakness in their enemies and made them extraordinarily unpredictable and compelling. Hence, the theory of Mao applies fully to Daesh’s capacity to engage the enemy's weaknesses (Bilger, 2014).

Centralization (Table 5)

Initiative	2
Predisposition to static disposition	2
Capacity to engage the enemy weaknesses	2
Total	6/3 = 2

Created by the Author.

4.5) The structure of the organization

When discussing the ideal organization within the theory of Revolutionary Warfare, Mao considers different elements like the consolidation and maintaining of the rebels’ area in isolated terrain. This aspect goes hand in hand with the basics of an insurgency, and preserving the insurgents and pushing out enemies of their territories becomes a priority (Anchor Press, 1978). As already mentioned, the rebels ideally must take advantage of the government's minimal military presence in rural areas, which also implies basic stuff such as spreading propaganda, recruits’ locals, and much more. According to Mao, especially at the initial stage, there is nothing more important than

winning the hearts and minds of the locals in the rural areas and only later on cities which should be involved only in later insurgency's stages. Like this, it will be a lot more manageable to establish a military base or headquarter for the rebels, also because usually, in the rural areas, the government's response comes too late to be successful. In addition, villagers will most probably struggle even more with grievances than the citizens of the urban areas, consequently making things easier for the rebels (Major Azam, 2017).

Al-Qaida in Iraq likely started in rural desertic villages of the northern part of Iraq, and only later one moved on towards big cities like Fallujah. This experts' interpretation seems even more logical when we think that many of the villagers in rural areas of Iraq and Syria were not much educated and easier to manipulate through propaganda (Kavalek, 2015). Within the areas controlled by Daesh, there was also the Hisbah, some religious police that also helped the people in exchange for Daesh's support. Hence, the similarity and degree of adherence between Revolutionary Warfare and ISIS insurgency theory are total.

Organization (Table 6)

The structure of the organization	2
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Created by the Author.

4.6) Continuous Growth

It is ideal for the Guerrillas' rebels to extend their control area in different regions and expose the locals to propaganda. The population should be aware of the rebels' cause and be earnestly invited and pushed to get recruited (Major Azam, 2017). This strategy will later enable the rebels to plan attacks on a big scale, ambushes, and terror attacks. Like this, the rebels will stand a higher chance to steal military equipment, arms, vehicles, and additional tactical equipment (Griffith, 2002).

4.6.1) Capacity of coordinating attacks towards exposed enemy positions

In July 2014, Daesh started a military operation between Syria and Iraq called "break the borders". After weeks of continuous attacks, the soldiers of the Iraqi Army were trapped in security checkpoints with no possibility to get resupplied. After being surrounded by ISIS, the Iraqi units were desperate for help, but unluckily for them, no reinforcement ever came. The outcome was brutal, and after a total siege of Daesh, a propaganda video made by the Jihadists showed how the remaining Iraqi soldiers were beheaded. Despite a few ISIS failures against similar Syrian military outposts, Daesh still managed to successfully break the Sykes-Picot agreement and let the fighters and citizens of the Islamic State circulate freely between the two Arab nations (VICE News, 2014). This was just an example among many other recent events that demonstrated the capacity of the members of the Islamic State to plan and coordinate massive attacks against exposed military targets. Therefore, the strategy of the Islamic State completely embraced the suggestion mentioned in the theory of Revolutionary Warfare.

4.6.2) Territorial expansion

In this chapter, many events are worth mentioning, but in general, the IS's capacity of gaining territory expansion was impressive and almost unprecedented for an insurgency group. An event that proved how well the ISIS soldiers were expanding was what happened when the Jihadists put an end to the Sykes-Picot agreement. Thanks to the successful ISIS operation "Break the borders," the Jihadists could move between the borders and successfully reinforce the multiple ongoing

military advances. In August 2014, already one month later, the IS made significant territorial gains, mainly because there was no one capable of curbing their aggressive advance. Thanks to this strategy, the terror group gained control over the Euphrates water dam, oil fields, and further strategical points like main supply routes. Because of this expansion, the Jihadists could loot from the Iraqi army US-made weapons and other military equipment. The terror group was even so lucky to find bundles of cash which was immediately used to fund their political and military ambitions.

Because of all of this, Daesh was eventually able to commit further crimes against the Kurdish Peshmerga. The members of the Islamic State were also held responsible for a massive humanitarian crisis and the flow of thousands of Christian refugees that fled for their lives. All these war crimes and genocides were one of the major factors that brought President Obama to intervene. At first, the US intervention started primarily as a humanitarian mission and only later as a military one, but unlucky for the Syrians and Iraqis, it had almost no immediate impact on the military capacity of Daesh (VICE News, 2014). According to these significant events, we can claim that the Islamic State followed the theory of Mao almost to the letter, which brings us to a whole level of adherence.

4.6.3) Gaining additional military equipment

According to Mao's theory, the rebels will always struggle with a lack of military equipment, notably weapons and ammunition. Even at Mao's insurgency, the Chinese rebels were initially relying on pistols, hunting rifles, melee weapons, and other rudimental weapons to defend themselves and, at the same to attack their enemies (Griffith, 2002). However, luckily for the members of Mao's movement, after successfully planning military assaults and ambushes against convoys, they gathered more suitable weapons from the enemy. Precisely because of this military aspect and the importance of the supplies, the rebels repeated these tactics continuously and eventually became consequently dependent on their enemy (Major Azam, 2017).

Thanks to multiple reports and field investigators like the “Conflict Armament Research,” we now discovered what has been previously looted by the members of Daesh. It is essential to mention that initially, the group provided itself with military equipment from the Iraqi army, but this was insufficient for their strategies, and more guns than simple IEDs and Ak-47s were required. The Jihadists could not buy a massive quantity of weapons from the black market, so they intensified the looting of weapons from both the Syrian and the Iraqis forces. Despite some initial looting success, the terror group tried to do something unprecedented in the history of all Jihadists groups. Daesh used advanced manufacturing techniques and raw materials from the conquered oil fields and industrial bases to produce self-made ammunition (Wired, 2017). ISIS engineers were also able to upgrade looted weapons by assembling improvised rockets, mortar grenades, land mines, explosive drones, and much more. An interesting fact was also the creation of multiple remote-controlled cars rigged with explosives characterized by human-looking mannequins on the driver seats. These mannequins were covered with a particular material that released heat through electric cables and used to disguise the enemy to get as close as possible to the enemy's position and maximize the enemies' fatalities. The research and development of Daesh also managed to convert stolen missiles from jet fighters into surface-air missiles, and these were meant to take down passengers' aeroplanes (Sky News, 2016).

After all, the Islamic State managed to put its hands on weapons produced in Russia, Soviet Union, China, the USA, and Europe. Besides the classic weapons of the Infantry, the IS also looted loads of anti-tank weapons, anti-aircraft launchers, and towed artillery. They also stole multiple military vehicles like self-propelled artillery, military tanks, armoured vehicles, long-distance rockets, and aircraft. In this section, the last thing worth mentioning was the impressive capacity of ISIS to adapt thousands of Toyota pickups into fighting vehicles armed with heavy machine guns. These vehicles eventually became a symbol of ISIS fighters (Insiders, 2016). Hence, the theory of Revolutionary

Warfare has been entirely reflected in the IS Strategy. These aspects bring us a level of adherence that is full.



Figure 2: The Mystery of ISIS's Toyota Army. Source: <https://katehon.com/en/1226-the-mystery-of-isis-toyota-army-solved.html>

Figure 3: Exclusive: Inside an Islamic State Terror Weapons Lab. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9tIDlhPMHo>

Figure 4: ISIS releases 'proof' it fired rockets on Israel. Source: <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/isis-threat/isis-releases-proof-it-fired-rockets-on-israel-482278>

4.6.4) Recruiting

The theory of Mao suggests that the number of recruits should always increase for the sake of the insurgency. Most of these types of rebel movements constantly relied on the support coming from the population. According to Mao's suggestions, it is essential to gather new members, especially in

those rural areas which are seriously struggling the most with the population's grievances. This approach is considered crucial for a well-organized recruitment campaign because usually, these locals have a low level of education, and therefore, they can be more easily indoctrinated and convinced. According to Mao's interpretation, these rural areas are characterized by poverty, which means that the people around there have less to lose besides their own lives and family members (Anchor press, 1978).

When talking about the Islamic State recruitment process is almost impossible not to think about the phenomenon of the foreign fighters. This strategy was already applied in previous conflicts, like the Al-Qaida military presence in Afghanistan. These predominantly Arab fighters were meant to protect an Islamic nation from the brutal invasion of the Soviet Union (Malet, 2009). This historical event highlighted how much the foreign fighters were far from being ideal for an irregular conflict. It is essential to mention that the al-Qaeda members had insufficient knowledge of the terrain, the local cultures, the national languages, and they were usually getting sick and out of combat (Hegghammer, 2011).

Nevertheless, in the case of ISIS, they managed to recruit many newer international members than al-Qaeda, but it is also true that they primarily train them with basic military knowledge and a few of them using explosives. After that, they mostly send them back to their homelands to commit terror attacks. This element signifies that the foreign fighters mostly did not play a significant role in the success of the Daesh's insurgency, and according to different experts, they were sometimes even slowing the local fighters down (Byman & Shapiro, 2014)

The most significant component of the Daesh's fighters were mainly Sunni locals from impoverished areas of Iraq and Syria. Among those who joined ISIS, many were volunteers, while others feared retaliation to their families or tried to survive and consequently joined the terror group. Indeed, another significant component of the IS fighters was the unprecise quantity of soldiers who accepted the "Towba". This was a unique opportunity for ISIS's prisoners to repent and convert to the radical Jihadists-Salafist form of Islam (Speckhard et al, 2020). Among the high ranks of ISIS, there were experienced members from different Sunni tribes and the Ba'athist regime. The latest group was already known for sympathizing with Sunni's cause, and the previous Saddam Hussein's political view which was characterized with lack of power-sharing with Shias (Brožík & Kaválek, 2015).

A further critical element of the ISIS recruitment campaign was the recruitment of local underaged soldiers. ISIS created an entire generation of indoctrinated children that were ready to fight the apostates and infidels. Due to the compulsory Islamic school system filled with propaganda messages, the children were prepared to fight against ISIS' enemies. At around the age of 16, the young children were sent to military Sharia camps and trained to fight. The Qur'anic excuse used by the Jihadists to let the children participate in military operations was related to the historical fact that Usama ibn Zaid (an adoptive son of the Prophet Mohammed) led an army against the Romans at the age of seventeen. So, according to their logic, if he did it, nowadays children can do it as well (VICE NEWS, 2014). Considering that the recruitment of the Islamic State was remarkably more advanced than the one suggested by Mao, the level of adherence between the two can only be considered complete.

Continuous Growth (Table 7)

Coordinating attacks towards exposed enemy positions	2
Territorial expansion	2
Gaining additional military equipment	2
Recruiting	2
Total	8/4 = 2

4.7) Final decision

According to the Revolutionary Warfare theory developed by Mao, this is the final stage of the movement because the rebels will eventually reach the conventional formation at the end of this process. This revolutionary change will allow the group to gain complete control of the territory, patrol and manifest their presence in the open, and confront their enemy conventionally. This aspect does not imply that they do not need anymore to attack military targets, loot for additional weapons, and recruit new members. At this final stage of the insurgency's process, it is also very likely that their main enemy, the government, will attempt to negotiate with the rebels, but the main problem is that the rebels have already reached their highest military peak. Therefore there is not a genuine reason for the insurgents to compromise. However, at the same time, they are still willing to begin with a negotiation process that will bring them favourable conditions in the political, military, social, and economic sectors. It is important to acknowledge that the rebels are willing to consider this path only because they want to preserve the rebels' movement or manage to gain additional time to reorganize (Griffith, 2002).

4.7.1) Becoming a conventional army

Thanks to the official statement made by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the establishment of the Caliphate with Raqqa as its capital was eventually confirmed by Western authorities. It is still possible that such an extensive reform that partially changed the terror group into a conventional force might have only started in 2014 after establishing the Caliphate. This theory would also explain why so many military events mentioned throughout the paper took place immediately after establishing the Caliphate but have still been considered part of the insurgency process (Maurer, 2018). After establishing the Caliphate, Daesh's soldiers set checkpoints everywhere, and their presence along with the Hisbah police was evident in every corner of the streets (VICE News, 2014). Eventually, the Islamic State soldiers started to behave more and more like a professional army. They even organized multiple parades in different conquered cities and started showing the IS flags along their military trenches. On multiple occasions, the terror group army attacked in formation the enemies' positions with big military convoys. Some reports reported that ISIS soldiers were well-coordinated and advancing smoothly like a conventional force. The terror group also created tank and artillery battalions which were deployed alongside the irregular forces (Ripley, 2018).

Interestingly enough, the Islamic State did not just create a conventional army but also almost a "conventional" State. In fact, in the Caliphate, there were even public tribunals, new taxation systems, active prisons, new scholar systems, new car plates, multiple foreign currencies, public executions, and much more. These examples confirm the initial successful conversion of the Islamic State, which started as an insurgency and eventually ended as a collapsed State (Mosul Eye, 2019). After all the similarities with the Revolutionary Warfare theory, the Islamic State approach perfectly fits this context and obtains a whole adherence level.

4.7.2) Negotiation

To answer this question extensively is very difficult because from one point of view, the conflict in Syria and Iraq is too recent to be thoroughly analyzed, and on the other side, many of the involved factions are still very active in those areas and are probably unwilling to share highly confidential information. A further element that needs to be addressed in this subchapter is the difficulty of finding reliable sources that cannot be disqualified for being biased, based on unproven theory,

propaganda, or simply fake news. Indeed, there are still many theories that accuse multiple governments of somehow sympathizing, collaborating, not condemning, or even indirectly supporting the Jihadist's factions, but for this analysis, they would be considered out of context.

Due to the brutal conflict in Mesopotamia nowadays and the massive hate between the two major factions, the possibility of a potential negotiation between ISIS and Baghdad is, for many, very unrealistic. However, experts often criticized the behaviour of President Bashar al-Assad towards Daesh. As mentioned in the previous Intelligence chapter, some documents allegedly confirmed a relationship between the intelligence services of ISIS and the secret service of Damascus. This per se does not confirm anything about a possible negotiation, also because the two could have potentially met for totally different reasons, like the saving of civilians (Speckhard & Yayla, 2017). Nevertheless, one of the foremost critics towards President al-Assad was referring to the spread of Syrian misinformation on national news and social media. This element was probably a strategy to intentionally confuse the different insurgency groups and label all Syrian anti-Bashar groups as dangerous Jihadists terrorists. However, even groups like the Free Syrian Army of Aleppo, which was at first only fighting against the Syrian president and was not involved in genocide, radical Sharia law, or even Salafism Jihadism, were consequently accused of committing brutalities and lost support from the local population (New York Times, 2011). This Damascus's strategy was also advantageous to smoothly shift the attention from the brutalities of the Syrian regime and put it into those committed by Daesh. This approach eventually gave the impression to the world that the Syrian and Russian forces were fighting against Jihadist terrorist groups like Jabhat al Nusra, Daesh, Ahrar al-Sham only (Pizzi, 2014).

Even though it was most probably in Damascus' interest to prioritize the liberation of the Syrian economic capital of Aleppo, things like the military defeat of political enemies like the Free Syrian Army still do not confirm or deny the theory that Damascus and Baghdad might have started a negotiation process with Daesh. Therefore, it is essential to conclude by saying that there is only one aspect of the theory of Revolutionary Warfare that cannot be answered yet with proven facts in the context of ISIS insurgency.

Final decision (Table 8)

Becoming a conventional Army	2
Negotiation	Not Available
Total	2

Created by the Author.

4.8) Review of the Analysis

The entire analysis chapter was made to evaluate the level of adherence between the theory of Mao Zedong called the Guerrilla Warfare and the insurgency approach of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq.

Overall Score (Table 9)

Intelligence	Full level of adherence
Violence	Full level of adherence
Politics	Acceptable level of adherence
Continuous Growth	Full level of adherence
The level of centralization	Full level of adherence
The structure of the organization	Full level of adherence
Final Decision	Full level of adherence / Not Available

Created by the author.

The purpose of the research paper was to establish if the theory of Revolutionary Warfare provided a deeper understanding of the Islamic State insurgency and strategy. Once again, the null hypothesis represented a non-valid framework, and the dependent variable was the degree of adherence reflected from Mao's theory in the Daesh approach. This methodology allowed the usage of Mao's theory as a referring guide to discover more about ISIS main activities and much more (Major Azam, 2017). This comparative analysis established that there is almost an entire level of adherence between the two. The positive outcome is because all the different criteria of the multiple topics mentioned throughout the theory of Revolutionary Warfare fitted in the context of ISIS insurgency. Consequently, there is any null hypothesis because the theory can be fully applied to the context of Syria and Iraq.

5) CONCLUSION

Like many other insurgency groups, ISIS and its predecessor AQI had a violent political struggle and a compelling narrative about the Sunni grievances. The Jihadists fought their enemies with asymmetric tactics and consequently spread propaganda for obtaining legitimacy. The IS gained control over people and resources and tried to replace the previous public services with similar ones. ISIS insurgency was active in rural and urban areas with a solid political and military organization. Even though it is difficult to establish when the Jihadists reached each of the insurgency phases, what is interesting is that it took only around ten years for Daesh to reach the insurgent victory and five years of war to wipe out ISIS and make the Caliphate collapse.

From the previous chapter, it was possible to learn more about the history of Daesh that started to operate as a terror group thanks to experienced Jihadist fighters in the North-West part of Iraq. The research paper helped confirm that the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham was an Insurgency group with an extreme political orientation that fought for the establishment of the Caliphate and the implementation of Sharia law. Their criminal and insurgency-related activities represented an unprecedented challenge to the Iraqi government and only later to the Syrian one. The movement eventually managed to become so successful that it conquered a large portion of the Arab territory, with Raqqa as its capital. The group itself heavily relied from the start on violence and justified its brutal actions by describing them as simple acts concerning political vengeance and radical reinterpretation of the holy Coran and Sunna. Thanks to Daesh's successes, the group inspired other Jihadist insurgency groups and started to recruit foreign fighters worldwide. Later on, the group also became worldwide famous for planning and spreading global terror.

Thanks to the comparative analysis and the framework of the research paper, it was eventually possible to establish the level of adherence between the ISIS insurgency and the principles of the theory of Guerrilla Warfare developed by Mao Zedong. Because all the relevant criteria of the independent variables of Mao's theory fitted almost entirely in the ISIS strategy, the research paper's outcome highlights an almost complete level of adherence between the two.

This positive outcome means that Mao's theory can be for sure applied in the context of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and eventually help on an academic level to find more effective COIN approaches. This aspect is particularly relevant because the terror group Islamic State is still operating worldwide with similar approaches to the one of the Levant.

Theories like Revolutionary Warfare suggest that most insurgencies start their activities in marginalized parts of societies that struggle with a low level of governmental support. This ability to capitalize on local grievances and inspire trust from similar groups and the local population is for sure a remarkable capacity of groups like ISIS, Al-Shabab, Boko Haram, and many others. Consequently, this strategy made Daesh gain enough support to mobilize the people against the local governments. Under the circumstances of the Iraqi and Syrian societies, experts believe that after successfully challenging the national authorities' legitimacy, there was no alternative scenario for a group like ISIS than to rise as winning actors (Brands & Feaver, 2017).

Now that ISIS is not on the world map anymore, the risk of an ISIS come back is still unlikely but not entirely unrealistic in the long term. This element is considered by many as particularly true because the situations in Iraq and Syria have never been so critical and desperate, which again could become an ideal scenario for another insurgency type of conflict. Concerning this potential risk, the local governments must do their best to prevent further outrageous war scenarios, which means that the Sunni grievances need to be addressed successfully for the long term. It will also be crucial to maintain peace without underestimating any rebel groups, especially if Jihadists.

The research paper extensively analyzed the ISIS insurgency and emphasized all those aspects that were so crucial for the success of Mao's movement. Even though many experts criticized the theory of Revolutionary Warfare for covering only the basics of an insurgency movement, it is still very applicable to the context of ISIS, and it can for sure provide a practical framework for a more appropriate COIN strategy that fits all those ongoing insurgencies of the Islamic State. The suggestions to counter, at best, the Islamic State will be explained in the chapters below.

5.1) Major mistakes that lead to the establishment of the ISIS Caliphate

Throughout all the readings, reports, news articles, and documentaries, it was palpable that the Iraqi government put much effort into countering the military aspect of the ISIS insurgency. The most impressive achievement of the Iraqi counterinsurgency was the anti-ISIS strategy of 2006 called "Sahwa," also known by the name of "Sons of Iraq," in which around 4'500 Sunni tribal members of the Northern part of Iraq were successfully convinced to collaborate with Baghdad and the US forces (Kavalek, 2015). This promising COIN approach expanded in 2007 and changed its name into "Concerned Local Citizens." It eventually led to creating a massive new militia composed of thousands of locals recruits (Benraad, 2011). This strategy was so well planned that, at first, it seriously impacted the Jihadists terror groups and their local criminal activities. At that time, it was hard to believe that those areas would have become the territories of the Caliphate of the Islamic State just a bunch of years later. In the beginning, the Iraqi government succeeded through this COIN strategy by convincing the population to join the anti-ISIS movement in exchange for stable jobs position, wages, and much more. In other words, Baghdad successfully addressed the issue of the Sunni grievances. However, as soon as the Sunnis of the anti-ISIS movement realized that there were no further signs of the promised jobs and wages, things escalated so terribly that many members decided to abandon their duties or even switch sides (Kavalek, 2015). This failure pointed out a crucial mistake made by the Iraqi government that goes hand in hand with the theory of Guerrilla Warfare. If from one side Baghdad was very capable of addressing the military aspect of the Counterinsurgency, on the other side, it failed to successfully address on the long term the political aspect of the battle. Therefore, Baghdad failed to win the hearts and minds of the Sunnis and eventually let the unrepresented minority struggle further with their grievances. The ISIS propaganda later exploited this feeling of hate and anger coming from the experience of being constantly abandoned by the national government (Kavalek, 2015).

It is also important to mention that different elements within the Syrian and Iraqi society positively impacted the rise of the Islamic State. For example, a statistic provided by Human Development Reports suggests that in the context of the Worldwide education index Iraq was ranked in 2011 as 123° and Syria as 151° (Education Index, 2011). According to insurgency experts, this element made most probably even more effortless for IS to spread their propaganda and ideology. The latter usually consisted of giving a simplified explanation of the events that divided everything into right and wrong.

At the time of the conflict, the nations of Iraq and Syria were also very remarkable for being among the nations with the highest unemployment, poverty, and corruption rate (Kavalek, 2015). In 2011, Iraq was ranked as 160° in the world Corruption Rank, while Syria was ranked as the world's worst, ranked as 179° (Trading Economics, 2021). These high levels of corruption were so tragic and so challenging to solve that they had a double impact in the context of insurgency. Because on one side, it helped the insurgents gain direct support from corrupted high-ranking members of the Iraqi forces, and on the other side, it was helpful for the ISIS propaganda to promote sharia law to eliminate corruption from society in the long term.

Contrary to popular beliefs, a previous study suggests that the emergence of ISIS was not necessarily inevitable and could have been curbed years before establishing the Caliphate. This assumption does not mean in any way that sectarianism, state failures, and regional dynamics did not favour the rise of ISIS. However, there are further worth mentioning elements that played a role, such as the US administration's policies that were more focused on countering Iran's influence over Iraq than in preventing ISIS insurgency. Because already in 2011, well before the impressive military advancement of ISIS, the Obama administration did not give much importance to convince the Iraqi president al-Maliki to reach some agreements about power-sharing with the Sunni communities.

On the other side, a weak anti-ISIS response was not considered particularly relevant for the IS's advance. The terror group grew up mainly in Iraq and expanded only towards the end of the Insurgency in Syria, letting the US too limited opportunities to intervene. At the same time, the Syrian government and army appeared too busy with other insurgency groups to focus primarily on Daesh seriously. Nevertheless, the US could have also try to comply with multiple Baghdad requests and give military support to thwart ISIS's advance in 2014. A US intervention would have seriously damaged the ISIS military capacity and led to much less expensive military and societal costs. However, the problem with these plans of action would have been beneficial to Maliki's power and the Iranian influence over Iraq, an outcome that would have been unbearable for the US government. These are just some of the mistakes that different experts have identified, and they should not be taken as ground-breaking facts. Many of these suggestions come from a counterfactual analysis and should not be confused as a tool to blame any of the involved factions (Brands & Feaver, 2017).

5.2) Suggestions from the theory of Guerrilla Warfare about Daesh COIN

Even though the subordinate question of the research paper was just a highly hypothetical one, it could still become helpful to develop better COIN approaches to prevent any further ISIS's comeback in Syria and Iraq. An additional reason to extend the research is to prevent worldwide establishing similar states like the IS Caliphate. It is also important to mention that on the 28th of June 2021, many worlds ministries meet for the Global Coalition against Daesh. This recent event was a reminder of the danger that ISIS represents and how realistic it still is for Daesh to rise again (External Action Service, 2021).

When facing an Insurgency like the one of the Islamic State, it is crucial to seriously address the Sunnis' grievances for the long term and rely on local groups like tribes to maintain security. This is an essential aspect because tribes are already normality in Iraq and partially in Syria too, and they usually have full knowledge of the local area and developed a relevant network of people. Even though they might get involved in criminal activities, it is also true that they usually have fighting capacities, territorial control and are often perceived as a legitimate authority. In other words, it is always good to have certain influencing groups on the right side of the conflict (Bobseine, 2019).

A further recommendation concerning the COIN strategy in Iraq is not to over-rely on Shia Militias, but instead, it is worth trying to boost the Iraqi army and find alternative partners. Because after the collapse of the IS Caliphate, there are still many active Shia militia groups in Iraq that Iran directly finances. Baghdad was previously so desperate for help against Daesh that the Iraqi government primarily focused on these Shia fighting groups to defend the capital and reconquer the nation. Nevertheless, now the problem is that these Shia militias are allegedly looting continuously in Sunni areas, selling massive quantities of drugs, and carrying violent actions against civilians. Many of these groups belong to the international terrorist list and are so powerful that even rumours claim they can directly control the Iraqi government and the Iraqi forces instead of the other way around (VICE News, 2015).

5.3) COIN Recommendations from the comparison with a similar study about Boko Haram

A Major of the Nigerian Army that studied at a US military academy analyzed the brutal insurgency of Boko Haram in the northern part of Nigeria. He made a research paper that applied the same type of comparative analysis, and it ended with a whole level of adherence between African Jihadists and the theory of Mao. Interestingly enough, the African terror group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State immediately after establishing the Caliphate, making the two insurgents groups even more similar.

Indeed, each research paper is minimal because it focuses only on one specific insurgency with its objectives, propaganda, and causes. However, many Jihadist insurgencies showed a similar approach in their tactics and engagement, which means that hopefully, with enough research, there could be sufficient frameworks to deeply analyze all the Jihadist insurgencies and obtain a more universal and efficient counterinsurgency strategy.

Mao's theory of Guerrilla Warfare could become a referring point in the context of insurgency and seriously help different types of experts, policymakers, and army members. The extension of this type of methodology and research will undoubtedly impact the academic focus on a long-term solution that could counter future similar occurrences worldwide.

The research about the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria demonstrated how the terrorists were constantly engaged with guerrilla warfare against everyone on their path, especially the Nigerian Army. Thanks to the profound knowledge of Major Azam, the research was confident enough to say that the current Nigerian COIN strategy was not well suited for stopping the Jihadists. After carefully analyzing the same aspects mentioned in the theory of Revolutionary Warfare, here below there will be the leading suggestions for a better Nigerian COIN approach. These Boko Haram recommendations will then be analysed in the ISIS context and evaluated (Major Azam, 2017).

❖ Socio-Economic development

In Nigeria, the Jihadists promoted Sharia law to suggest a better form of society and eliminate lousy governance. Therefore, to gather support for the insurgency, Boko Haram used politics, propaganda, and the exploitation of local grievances. Under these circumstances, the Nigerian government should implement policies that would seriously address the people's suffering. Things like developing infrastructure, promotion of trade, investment in human capital, and new jobs would seriously help counter the insurgents. This recommendation will eventually create an atmosphere in which the youth will no longer rely on violence to survive (Major Azam, 2017).

As already mentioned throughout the paper, this suggestion also applies to the Islamic State insurgency in Syria and Iraq. Things like acquisition programs, power-sharing with the Sunnis, and industrial projects would have also helped against Daesh's rise.

❖ Strengthening Border security

Throughout the insurgency of Boko Haram, the group recruited local inhabitants and obtained further support from the population. Boko Haram also showed his superior knowledge about the terrain and developed an international network in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Thanks to these relationships, the terror group developed further criminal activities like human trafficking, smuggling, and much more. Based on the research about the Nigerian movement, the paper suggests relying on modern technologies, operational vehicles, and surveillance equipment to extend border security (Major Azam, 2017).

This suggestion is also in line with the research about the Islamic State of the Levant, especially if we consider how strategic it was for Daesh's insurgency to break the Sykes-Picot agreement between Syria and Iraq. Initially, almost no civilians were let through the Syrian-Iraqi border because of the multiple military checkpoints from both official Arab armies. However, in 2014, many of these checkpoints were overrun by the Jihadists, and the insurgents could move freely. This conquest gave a considerable advantage to the Jihadists, which were more than able to expand and progress (VICE News, 2014).

In addition to that in an interview about ISIS made by Oliver Stone with the Russian President, Putin declared that the Russian Air Force found in 2014 allegedly a highway between the border of Syria and Turkey with thousands of lorries that were delivering daily gallons of smuggled oils to different Turkish Mediterranean harbours in the southeast of the nation. According to the Russian president, this route was meant to finance the terror activities of the Islamic State. Even though the Russian Air Force later bombarded this highway, this episode was still another example of a low level of border control that favoured the Jihadists (SHOWTIME, 2018).

These are just examples that confirm that even for the counterinsurgency of the Islamic State, it would have been better to strengthen relevant border security and prevent Daesh from moving freely between the Levant and Mesopotamia and from selling to the black market smuggled oil and looted products like historical artworks.

❖ **Training and Equipping the Military**

The problem with the concept of insurgency is that conventional armies mostly do not understand irregular warfare and therefore are not very well suited for facing guerrilla tactics. Nations like Nigeria are no exceptions, and the research paper about Boko Haram seriously suggests training the soldiers for more counterinsurgency types of operations. The soldiers of the Nigerian Army should be trained for a more challenging scenario like, for example, the explosions of IEDs. Ideally, the Nigerian Army should also attend some joint training sessions with the neighbouring states (Major Azam, 2017).

The situation in Iraq was different from the Nigerian scenario also because previously, the US troops trained the local soldiers for counterinsurgency purposes, and they even equipped the Iraqi soldiers with modern military equipment and vehicles (Lindsay & Peterson, 2012). Considering the impressive fall of Mosul in the hands of ISIS, around 30'000 Iraqi soldiers who were trained and heavily equipped still failed to defend the second biggest city of Iraq in less than a week against 2'500 estimated Jihadist fighters. So, it is fair to say that the Iraqi army was not struggling with a low amount of men power or other crucial military aspects, but it was either struggling with corruption and a low level of military leadership (Abdulrazaq & Stansfield, 2016).

The Syrian Army had a different approach because even though it still has compulsory military service, the Russians trained and equipped the Syrians with standard equipment. The problem was that the Syrian forces allegedly did not focus much on ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliated groups the same way they did with other anti-Assad groups like the Free Syrian Army. However, particular areas like Idlib, a city close to the Turkish border allegedly under the influence of al-Qaeda, is still struggling with the civil conflict. According to experts, the Russian-Syrian counterinsurgency approach always started with a massive bombardment from the Russian Airforce. It then continued with a ground-clearing process carried almost exclusively by the Syrian soldiers. This approach proved to be an efficient technique, but it also led to massive destruction, way more significant than the one left by the Jihadists (Shapir, 2017). So, with all things considered, this is the only point from the framework about Boko Haram counterinsurgency that does not fully apply to the context of Syria and Iraq.

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