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Caliphate on the Halt: Explaining the Stalling Campaign of the Islamic State in Libya

Diplomová práce

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Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá expanzí Islámského Státu v Libyi. V první části práce autor pomocí metody process tracing identifikuje 6 faktorů ('enablers'), které hrály klíčovou roli v úspěšné kampani Islámského Státu v Sýrii a Iráku. Těmito faktory jsou ideologie, schopnost využít státního kolapsu a vládnutí, financování, vojenské know-how, propaganda a sektářství. Poslednímu faktoru autor věnuje zvláštní pozornost, především pak tomu, jakým způsobem IS dokázal sektářství instrumentálně využít. V další části autor zkoumá, zda-li je úspěšná kampaň Islmáského Státu možná i v Sýrii. Identifikuje 8 strukturálních podmínek, které jsou spjaty s jednotlivými relevantními faktory úspěšného tažení IS v Sýrii a hodnotí jejich relevanci v Libyi. Z komparace obou zemí vychází, že kromě sektářství jsou všechny definované strukturální podmínky v Libyi relevantně přítomny a dle metody rozdílu J. S. Milla by tedy absence sektářství měla vysvětlit neúspěšné tažení IS. V poslední části autor analyzuje samotnou kampaň Islámského Státu v Libyi a přichází k závěru, že se zde IS skutečně pokusil replikovat úspěšný "syrský" model, avšak absence sektářství znemožnila organizaci prohloubit štěpení společnosti a posílit tím svoji pozici. Na závěr autor upozorňuje, že ačkoli je nesprávné Islámský Stát v Libyi úplně odepsat, neboť v minulosti prokázal schopnost produdit se z "klinické smrti" a je pravděpodobné, že se pokusí svoji kampaň obnovit, absence sektářství mu však v Libyi nedovolí dosáhnout stejného úspěchu, jako tomu bylo v Sýrii a Iráku.

Abstract

This diploma thesis examines the prospects of the Islamic State's expansion to Libya. Using the method of process tracing, the author assesses the campaign of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and establishes 6 factors he calls ‚enablers' that played key roles in facilitating its success – the ideology, exploitation of state breakdown and governance, funding, combat know-how, propaganda, and sectarianism. He dedicates special attention to the problematics of sectarianism and the way the Islamic State made instrumental use of it in both of these countries. The author then proceeds to assess the viability of the IS enterprise in Libya, examining whether the conditions and circumstances in the country are conducive for an IS unsurgency. He identifies 8 structural conditions that underpinned the relevant enablers in Syria and assesses their relevance in Libya. Comparison of the two cases shows that except for sectarianism all the structural conditions are relevantly present in Libya which, according to J. S. Mill's method of a difference of J. S. Mill's method of a difference, should explain the stalling campaign of IS in Libya. The author proceeds to confirm this hypothesis by assessing the actual campaign of the Islamic State in Libya. He contends the Islamic State tried to follow the successful blueprint of the Syrian enterprise but the missing enabler of sectarianism precluded it from aggravating the societal divide and galvanizing sufficient support in the country. In the end, the author claims the organization cannot be written off as of yet as it has bounced back from near-death experience before and is likely to make a comback, but the structural conditions in Libya will not allow it to gain the prominence it did in Syria and Iraq.

Klíčová slova

Islámský Stát, Libye, sektářství, Sýrie, džihádismus, takfírismus

Keywords

Islamic State, Libya, sectarianism, Syria, jihadism, takfirism

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V Praze dne 19. 5. 2017 Tomáš Lovecký

Poděkování

Na tomto místě bych rád poděkoval především mému vedoucímu, Mgr. Zdeňku Ludvíkovi, za velmi užitečné tipy a připomínky, kterými mě při psaní provázel, a Ladislavu Novákovi za jeho ochotu a trpělivost. Dále bych rád poděkoval rodině a přátelům, kteří mně při psaní byli oporou.

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Charakteristika tématu a jeho dosavadní zpracování:
The Islamic State managed to eclipse its former patron, al-Qa'ida, in both ruthlessness and the ability to make the world watch. Just as al-Qa'ida did in its heyday following the 9/11 attacks, the IS has also attracted a lot of attention and forged alliances with various jihadist groups around the world. Bay'ias – pledges of allegiance to a leader – have poured in from places such as Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Algeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Libya. The global reach of the IS phenomenon has been further enhanced by the returns of its foreign fighters to their home countries.

At the first sight, Libya seems to be an ideal candidate for an IS insurgency. It is a country that suffered vicious and unspeakably brutal dictatorship for over four decades and it has been torn apart by an equally brutal civil war that rendered the country ungovernable. It has a young and alienated population with very little prospect of decent livelihood. It saw an invasion by foreign powers and it hosts an active al-Qa'ida-affiliated group. Finally, it enjoys significant oil resources that fall prey to anyone who has got enough firepower to capture and defend them.

The Islamic State has shown it is more than capable of exploiting local grievances and dysfunctional state institutions and thrive in such environment. The aim of the thesis is to explore the prospect of such success in Libya.

Předpokládaný cíl práce, případně formulace problému, výzkumné otázky nebo hypotézy:
The goal of the thesis is to elucidate why the Islamic State is unlikely to thrive in Libya. The author of the thesis will demonstrate there are certain conditions (namely the lack, or rather a complete absence of sectarianism) that will prove inconducive to its tactics and strategy. If the hypothesis proves correct, the author believes the findings can be extrapolated to other countries/regions in the world that might seem perfect candidates for an IS insurgency, yet they will not provide the IS with conditions it needs to gain significant popular support.

Hlavní výzkumná otázka:
Will the Islamic State enjoy the same success in Libya as it did in Syria and Iraq?

Vedlejší výzkumná otázka:
Why has the Islamic State been able to solidify its position in Sirte, as opposed to the rest of the country?

Hypotéza:
The lack of sectarianism in Libya will deny the Islamic State the ability to win over sufficient popular support to replicate the Syrian/Iraqi story. In other words (and using John Stuart Mill's terminology), sectarianism is an indispensable variable that allows for a brutal, takfiri group such as the Islamic State to exploit local grievances and become a dominant player. This variable is not present in the Libyan context.

Předpokládaná struktura práce:
1. Introduction of the topic
2. Research question and hypothesis
3. Methodology
4. Libya is a perfect candidate for an IS insurgency
5. The history of radical Islamism in Libya, the Arab spring and the Civil War
6. Explaining the success of the IS in Iraq and Syria
7. Explaining the the stalling campaign of the IS in Libya
8. Conclusion
9. Implications – are the findings relevant for other countries threatened by an IS insurgency?

Metody (techniky) zpracování materiálu:
The author will apply the method of process tracing as described by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (2014). Analyzing the process of how the Islamic State managed to establish itself in Iraq and Syria and the crucial role sectarianism, endemic in the region, played in elevating it to the position of a dominant jihadist group, will serve as a demonstration that the sectarian tensions have to be present in order to allow a takfiri group, regardless of the advantages (military experience and expertise, significant financial resources) it enjoyes, achieve such success.

The author will define variables that all proved to different extents necessary, though, by themselves, not sufficient conditions to allow the Islamic State rise and thrive in Syria and Iraq. Then, the author will analyze these conditions in the Libyan context. Presupposing all but one are the same, the author aims to prove the missing variable is the main cause of the effect (= the lack of success of the Islamic State in Libya).

Základní literatura

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Introduction

Although the Islamic State (IS) phenomenon is likely to have reached its zenith and is now slowly diminishing – at least in terms of the state-likely entity that emerged in Syria and Iraq – the fight against it is by no means over. The organization managed to spread its tentacles far beyond the Middle East, exporting the caliphate to places ranging from Algeria as far as to the Philippines and inspired individuals or group actors to take action in its name all over the globe.

This paper will examine the first attempt at expansion of the Islamic State that is the 2014 establishment of an official branch in Libya. After identifying the set of conditions and circumstances that allowed the organization to blossom in Syria, I will assess whether these are relevantly present in Libya and discuss the viability of the IS enterprise in the country.

At the first sight, Libya seems to be a perfect candidate for a successful IS insurgency. It is a former brutal dictatorship that is rich in natural resources. After being rid of the dictator, it descended into a violent civil war that has plunged the country into a deep humanitarian crisis and rendered the state institutions more or less defunct in significant portions of its territory. In many places it hosts a young, disaffected population that has been exposed to economic hardships as a consequence of the civil war. It has been intervened in by regional powers and, last but not least, a number of radical Islamist groups mushroomed in the country in the wake of the turbulent civil war.

However, one condition seems to be missing in Libya. In my research, I have come to understand the problematics of the conflict in Syria and Iraq (a list that does not aspire to be exhaustive) but most importantly a product of identity politics. The Sunnīs, an ostracized minority in Iraq and an oppressed and disenfranchised majority in Syria, were – often involuntarily – mobilized based on their sectarian affiliation because there was simply no better option than joining their sectarian comrades regardless of political or ideological differences.

While in Syria and Iraq the Islamic State was able to activate its hyper-sectarian tactics and exploit the abysmal sectarian divide that was present in both countries, in Libya no such divide seems to be available. Building upon this observation, I will contend it is

very unlikely the organization will be successful in Libya, at least not the point it succeded in Syria and Iraq.

First, I will discuss the modus operandi of the Islamic State and its strategy in Syria and Iraq, focusing on how instrumental sectarianism was for its success. Second, I will assess the comparability of the Syrian[1] and Libyan theatre in respect to conduciveness for the IS insurgency. Third, I will examine the campaign of the Islamic State in Libya and discuss what role the absence of sectarianism played in the group's failed campaign. Finally, I will make a prediction on what are its next steps going to be.

[1] I chose the comparison of Syria and Libya as opposed to Iraq and Libya because in case of the former dyad, in both countries the Islamic State did not necessarily emerge as a native movement and it was to a smaller or greater extent imported.

Methodology

As a methodological framework for identifying the crucial factors that allowed for the IS ascendancy in Syria and Iraq I will be using process tracing, as understood by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel.[2] This methodological framework accepts both inductive and deductive reasoning and allows for tapping into a vast array of sources of information. As the authors put it, "process tracing examines the deductive observable implications of hypothesized causal mechanisms within a case to test whether these might in fact explain the case, or it inductively uses evidence from within a case to develop hypotheses that might explain the case".[3]

Given how complex the situation in the Syria and Iraq has been, it would be very difficult to make a coherent list of all the variables that enter the equation, whether they are facilitating or hindering of the IS enterprise. Process tracing, however, allows the researcher to work with the most significant variables and eschew the intervening ones without debilitating the causal interference. That is not to say the intervening variables are not important – they still affect the intensity of the causality – but the abundance of evidence for the hypothesis of choice is to be decisive in judging the veracity thereof.[4]

In the first part of the paper, I will give a brief overview of the history of the Islamic State, I will establish six *enablers* of its success, namely the ideology, exploitation of state failure and governance, funding, combat know-how, propaganda, and sectarianism, which I will give special attention to in a separate chapter.

In the second part of the paper, I will complement the methodological toolbox with J. S. Mill's *Method of a difference* that is best explained by the following excerpt from his classic *A System of Logic*: "If an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs, and an instance in which it does not occur, have every circumstance save one in common, that one occurring only in the former; the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ, is the effect, or cause, or a necessary part of the cause, of the

[2] Bennett, A.; Checkel, J. T. (2014). *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool.* Cambridge University Press, p. 8. ISBN: 9781139858472

[3] *Ibid,* p. 8.

[4] *Ibid,* p. 8.

phenomenon."[5] I will establish 8 variables, or more specifically 8 conditions that facilitated the ascendance of the Islamic State in Syria. These are:

- Dictatorship
- State breakdown
- Violent civil war
- Economic distress of the population
- Presence of Islamic Radicalism
- Overriding rivalry of the main players
- Means of funding
- Sectarianism

Using the method of a difference, I will compare these conditions in Syria and Libya and observe whether all but one (sectarianism) take on the same value in Syria and Libya. If this proves to be the case, inference can be made that it was indeed the lack of sectarianism that explains the stalling campaign of the Islamic State in Libya.

Finally, in the last part of the paper I will, again, use process tracing to assess the IS's Libyan campaign. I will examine how the aforementioned conditions interacted with and modified its behaviour and ultimately make a prediction on what is the future likely to be for it.

[5] Mill, J. S. (2002). *A System of Logic*. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, p. 455. ISBN 1410202526.

Literature Overview

Perhaps too much has been written on the topic of the Islamic State for one to be able to list all the arguments and authors who have contributed to the ever blossoming body of literature. However, there is a significant overlap of opinions and the authors very often differ merely in the degree of influence they ascribe to the particular enabling conditions. In this section, I will briefly discuss the major works on the topic.

Although the significant overlap of opinions does not necessarily mean there are not tangible difference between the authors, there is one juncture all authors converge upon. According to all, it is hardly conceivable the IS phenomenon would emerge had it not been for the U. S. invasion of Iraq. That is not to say the United States created the Islamic State (in the conspiratorial sense of the claim), yet it certainly created an environment that was nothing but fertile for an emergence of such organization. However, it is important to note the chaos triggered by the invasion and the following breakdown of the Iraqi state created environment conducive to all kinds of militancy, not merely the jihadist one.

Some authors, such as Fawaz Gerges, approach the situation in a rigorously scholarly fashion. Gerges identifies the reckless dismantling of the state institutions and army and the emergence of a sectarian Shīʿa Islamist government as the main factors that paved the way for the re-birth of the lethally wounded al-Qāʿida in Iraq.[6] David Kilcullen, a former counter-insurgency advisor of the U.S. military, shares with Gerges both the scholarly approach towards the issue and the main conclusions, only slightly parting at the end where he [Kilcullen] identifies the U.S. "premature" withdrawal from Iraq as yet another major strategic mistake of the West that brought the nearly self-imploded Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) – as the group renamed itself to in 2006 – back to life.[7] Much attention has been given to the social media sophistication and related recruitment techniques of the IS, Kilcullen doubts this "popular" notion though, claiming it was the swift military success that served as the best recruiting tool, and the use of social media was merely the amplifier.[8]

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[6] Gerges, F. A. (2016). *ISIS: A History*. Princeton University Press. ISBN: 9781400880362

[7] Kilcullen, D. (2016). *Blood Year: The Unraveling of Western Counterterrorism*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 0190600543

[8] Kilcullen, D. (2016).

There are also rather journalistic accounts that make use of first-hand on-the-ground reporting that often lack the analytical prowess of the previously mentioned scholarly works but still offer very useful information. Patrick Cockburn stresses the staggering corruption in the ranks of the Iraqi army that rendered its fighting power completely inadequate and often lead to the Iraqi forces running away from the heavily outnumbered IS army.[9] Abdel Bari Atwan, the author of *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, labels the Islamic State a modern phenomenon instead of a medieval revivalist movement. He primarily focuses on the use of propaganda and modern technology (such as match-making applications or online games for aspiring jihadis), and also on the sophisticated an organized manner of governing territories under the IS control.[10] Charles Lister also takes interest in the governing abilities of the organization and sheds light especially on its economic strength.[11] Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan take advantage of their direct journalistic presence in the Islamic State territory and similarly to Atwan and Lister focus on the IS approach towards the local population.[12]

Finally, there are authors who take primary interest in the former AQI and the current IS ideology. Joby Warrick spends a lot of time on the character of Abū Muṣ'ab az-Zarqāwī and his legacy to the organization[13], whilst Graeme Wood[14] and William McCant[15] make use of mostly primary sources of information and examine the eschatology of the Islamic State and its predecessors and relate it to its behaviour.

As aforementioned, the authors converge on vast majority of issues and vary only in the degrees of urgency they assign to them. The theme that has gone unmentioned in this summary so far yet a theme that is very much present in all the listed accounts is

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[9] Cockburn, P. (2015). *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*. Verso. Revised ed. edition (February 3, 2015). ISBN-10: 1784780405

[10] Atwan, A. B. (2015). *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*. University of California Press. ISBN: 9780520289284

[11] Lister, C. R. (2015). *The Islamic State: A Brief Introduction*. Brookings Institution Press. ISBN: 0815726678

[12] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015). *Islámský stát. Uvnitř armády teroru*. Brno: CPress. ISBN: 9788026408833

[13] Warrick, J. (2015). *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*. New York: Doubleday. ISBN 9780385538220 (e-book)

[14] Wood, G. (2015, March). What ISIS Really Wants. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from: http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/

[15] McCant, W. (2016*). The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*. Picador. ISBN: 9781250112644

sectarianism. I am deliberately bringing it up at the end to set it aside from all the other themes, as it is the primary interest of this paper. However, before examining its importance for the Islamic State, I will give a short overview of the organization's history.

1. Brief History of the Islamic State

Although the emergence of the Islamic State on the world stage appeared out of the blue to many, the group was hardly an *ad hoc* assembly of disenchanted Iraqis and Syrians who decided to take up arms against oppressive governments. The group's existence is in some way even pre-dating the U.S. invasion of Iraq and carries an ideological legacy that crucially affects its behaviour.

1.1 Meet the founder

The founder and spiritual father of what is known as the Islamic State today was Aḥmad Faḍīl an-Nazāl al-Ḫalāyla, better known by his *nom de guerre* Abū Muṣʻab az-Zarqāwī. A Jordanian by nationality, az-Zarqāwī was a ruthless, half-illiterate, tattoo covered petty criminal and recidivist who experienced a religious awakening during one of his numerous prison sentences. To repent for his sinful life, he decided to join the Afghan jihad, though arriving too late to have significant impact. Yet, he gained valuable combat experience and proved himself as fearless, dedicated holy warrior.

A disillusioning return home had az-Zarqāwī leaving for Afghanistan for the second time. However, as his short temper and obsessive taste for violence preceded him, he was essentially rejected by Usāma bin Lādin himself before he could even begin the courtship with the *Sheīkh*.[16] In an attempt not to lose him completely, al-Qāʿida decided to station az-Zarqāwī in Herat, Western Afghanistan, and lead his own training camp. Shortly after the U.S. invasion, unlike bin Lādin and the rest of the al-Qāʿida leadership who headed East, az-Zarqāwī and his companions left for the mountains of Northern Iraq.[17] Starting nearly from scratch, it was there where he started building an organization that has forever changed the face of jihadism.

1.2 Al-Qāʿida's unruly child

It is hardly disputable the American invasion of Iraq served as a catalyst for Islamist militancy in the country. Before the invasion, the presence of Islamist radicals was heavily circumscribed by Saddam Hussein who did not tolerate any organized

[16] Warrick, J. (2015), p. 75.

[17] *Ibid,* p. 79.

opposition.[18] One of the unforeseen consequences of the regime's demise was the creation of an environment that was very conducive for Islamic radicalism, a chance that Abū Muṣ'ab az-Zarqāwī was not going miss.

Although it is commonly acknowledged the Islamic State was a franchise of al-Qā'ida gone rogue, from its earliest days to this day it has been rather an adopted, unruly child of *sheīkh* Osama. When az-Zarqāwī swore his *baī'ah* to Usāma bin Lādin in 2004, he relinquished the maiden name of his organization - Jamā'at at-Tawhīd wal-Jihād, which translates to Organization of Monotheism and Jihad – and began calling it al-Qā'ida in the Land of Two Rivers[19]. The nominal change, however, did not root out what was so deeply instilled in the organization's doctrine. Whilst al-Qā'ida has been a champion of global jihad aimed at the Far Enemy[20], az-Zarqāwī's focus laid elsewhere.

Al-Qāʿida in Iraq was from the very onset focused on the local rather than on the global. Following the invasion, the goal of expelling the infidel usurpers was quite clear and seemingly overarched the doctrinal differences between bin Lādin and az-Zarqāwī. Yet, the total war the latter declared on virtually everyone was not in line with what the former had imagined. Although his hatred for the West was no smaller than bin Lādin's, what the *Sheīkh of the slaughterers*, as the magazine Voice of Jihad once called az-Zarqāwī[21], hated more than anyone were the Shīʿa. Whilst the Americans he seemed to consider a temporary obstructions, the Shīʿa, secularists, and other religious minorities – all enemies of the one true faith - constituted the greatest threat to the well-being of the region.[22]

Violence across the sectarian lines often far exceeded the violence against the invading forces and prompted even the most wanted man on Earth to castigate az-Zarqāwī and advise him to stop the fratricidal slaughter of fellow Muslims.[23] The message had no

[18] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 50.

[19] For purposes of simplicity, the author of this paper will call the group AQI.

[20] The Far Enemy is a term describing the Western powers in general and the United States of America in particular. In 1990s, Al-Qā'ida quite successfully redirected the focus of the languishing jihadist movement from the local "impious" governments to the "head of the serpent". [Gerges, F. A. (2005). *Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 9780521519359]

[21] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 45.

[22] *Ibid,* p. 33.

[23] *Ibid,* p. 38.

avail. Az-Zarqāwī not only wanted the Americans gone, he also wanted the Iraqi Sunnīs to rally behind the banner of anti-Shīʿaism. The more indiscriminate attack against the Shīʿa, the more indiscriminate the response. And the more indiscriminate the response, the more Sunnīs set aside their moderation and fight for their lives along any group that shares their enemy. Even after az-Zarqāwī's death, the anti-Shīʿa zeal had not vanished. In one of their periodical calls for jihad, the Islamic State of Iraq – as the group re-branded itself to in 2006 – swore by God „to rid Sunnīs from the oppression of the rejectionists (Shi'ite Muslims) and the crusader occupiers ...".[24] The sequence in which the enemies were listed makes the point self-evident.

1.3 On the brink of demise

During the first couple of years after the U.S. invasion, az-Zarqāwī and his organization fed on the deepening sectarian divide and the anti-American sentiment and managed to seal a marriage of convenience with some of the freshly unemployed government and military officials who suffered the consequences of de-ba'athification and, more importantly, with the Sunnī tribes. These alliances provided AQI with very important sources of human capital, weapons, expertise, and safe haven. However, the mafia-style tactics and brutal methods the organization employed gradually alienated the host population[25] and ultimately brought about the *Sahwa* movement, known as the Awakening of the Sunnī tribes. Az-Zarqāwī and his successors Abū Umar al-Baghdādī and Abū Hamza al-Muhajjer aimed their indiscriminate brutality not only on the Shīʿa population but also at any dissenters and rejectionists – a category so loose that it included even Sunnīs working for the Iraqi government - that crossed their path. Combined with the Surge, the American increase of deployed forces in Iraq, the Awakening expelled AQI into the desert and caused its fall into near oblivion.

When Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī[26] took leadership of ISI[27] in May 2010, he was left with a decimated, bleeding organization that was meddled in a "two-pronged battle" against the Shīʿa as well as the alienated Sunnīs. Short from being pronounced dead, the

[24] Roggio, B. (2006, October 12). Al Qaeda's Grand Coalition in Anbar. *The Long War Journal*. Retrieved from: http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2006/10/alqaedas_grand_coali.php

[25] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 91.

[26] Not to be confused with Abū Umar al-Baghdādī, his predecessor.

[27] The group rebranded itself to the Islamic State in Iraq in October 2006.

American and Iraqi leadership were speaking about the campaign against ISI in a celebratory tone.[28] However, the tides were about to turn.

1.4 The rebirth

Although the adoption of appropriate counterinsurgency methods by the Americans and the tribal Awakening helped contain AQI/the Islamic State in Iraq by 2007, the sectarian tensions and past grievances were still very much in place. With the departure of the coalition forces in November 2011, the Shīʿa dominated government of Nūrī al-Mālikī felt empowered to set the old scores. The Sons of Iraq, the coalition of Sunnī tribal sheikhs that lead the Awakening movement, suddenly found themselves isolated. The government cut off the financial support and even turned against them as the weakened movement already faced vengeful attacks of the ISI.[29] The initial glimpses of sectarian rapprochement were followed by persecutions of the Sunnīs and mass Arab spring-like protests sprung across the Sunnī majority provinces, only to be met by harsh responses from the government forces. The situation deteriorated to the point where those who fought ISI during the previous years started joining its ranks.[30]

Another event that helped reinvigorate ISI was the onset of the civil war in Syria. A state of acute lawlessness that was awash with weapons and led by a dictator who is hated by most seemed to constitute a perfect chance to revitalize the fading movement. Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī was well aware of the window of opportunity that was opening in the West and in October 2011 dispatched an incognito group of fighters lead by Abū Muhammad al-Jūlānī to infiltrate the uprising and prepare ground for the ISI's emergence in Syria. The group was supposed to lay low, garner support of the local population, and recruit as many Syrians as possible, so it could present itself as an indigenous, nationalist movement.[31] It wasn't until the 23rd of January 2012 that al-Jabhat an-Nusra was officially established. Although the jihadist movement suffered a deep split when it became apparent al-Jūlānī's allegiance laid with al-Qāʿida central

[28] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 96, 97.

[29] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 95, 105.

[30] *Ibid,* p. 110, 111.

[31] *Ibid*, p. 162, 163.

when he rejected al-Baghdādī's appropriation of an-Nusra as a branch of ISIS[32], many of the an-Nusra fighters defected to the parent organization.

Despite being a fervent jihadist, al-Jūlānī was also a pragmatist. He remembered too well the former AQI's utter disregard for the host population brought about a near death of the organization and "concluded that the correct lesson from this experience was the need to form alliances with tribes and local communities [and] create humanitarian, rule-of-law and administrative programs to win the population over".[33] When al-Baghdādī entered Syria, he could take advantage of many of the assets al-Jūlānī and his an-Nusra so laboriously concocted, and start building an independent base for himself.[34]

Using a combination of combat know-how, brutal repression, intimidation, bribery, minor diplomacy, and provision of security and basic governance, the Islamic State became the richest and most powerful rebel organization in Syria. It wasn't long until it felt strong enough to return to Iraq and finalize its transformation. The journey of the Islamic State – the final rebranding of the organization – culminated on the 5th of July 2014, when Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī announced the establishment of an Islamic caliphate during his ramadan sermon.

[32] The group renamed itself to Islamic State of Iraq and *as-Shāms* (the term describing the territory of historical greater Syria) in 2013 to underscore its expansion to Syria.

[33] Kilcullen, D. (2016), p. 8.

[34] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 191.

2. The most powerful jihadist organization in the world

Despite the recent developments have seen the Islamic State set on the back foot, the jihadist enterprise is hardly dissipating as the drivers that allowed its ascendancy are still very much in place. In the following two chapters, I will introduce the 6 enablers of the IS's success in Syria and Iraq, namely the ideology, the exploitation of state failure and governance, funding, combat know-how, propaganda, and sectarianism, which will be discussed at length in a separate chapter.

2.1 Ideology

Although members of IS hold Usāma bin Lādin and his legacy in high esteem referring to him as "Sheīkh Usāma"[35], the group's path has diverged from that of its disavowed parent. Whilst al-Qāʿida central has been a clandestine, increasingly geographically dispersed organization that consider terrorism a way to galvanize Muslim identity in Muslims in a way they did not think of before, and as a "prologue to a caliphate [bin Lādin] did not expect to see in his lifetime".[36] The Islamic State, on the other hand, has been organized in a clear state-like top-down structure, has engaged in governance and, to maintain its legitimacy, has been required to hold territory and rule over a population of people.[37] These requirements are self-imposed and have to be understood in the context of the worldview the group has espoused.

Whilst in the early days of az-Zarqāwī AQI did not have much regard for what the Qurʾān had to say when assigning martyrdom operations and executing prisoners, the new incarnation of the group under the leadership of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī has gone out of its way to enshroud its actions in a veil of religious legitimacy. Al-Baghdādī himself is an Islamic scholar who has obtained a PhD in Qurʾānic studies at the Islamic University of Baghdad[38] and who played an instrumental role in the transformation of

[35] Wood, G. (2015).

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] (2015, May 15). Profile: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. *The BBC*. Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27801676

the Islamic State from a group of religiously illiterate fanatics to a group well-versed in the history and practices of the faith they claim to be representing.[39]

Although the Islamic State has not found widespread support amongst their coreligionists nor the Islamic scholars and its behaviour has been widely called 'un-Islamic', the reality is more nuanced than that. The IS interpretation of the Qurʾān, the ʾahādīth, and the Sunna, the three sources of the Muslim faith, is fringe but it is not completely divorced from the Islamic tradition. Graeme Wood, author of a contended yet very incisive piece in The Altantic called 'What ISIS Really Wants', analysed the group's rhetoric and conducted numerous interviews with its supporters, arriving at a conclusion the "religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam".[40] The doctrine is a product of a very selective, yet diligent and literal reading of certain holy texts that incite violence.

The Islamic State is a romantic revolutionary movement[41] that holds a very unique eschatological view of the world. Ushering the apocalypse occupies central role of the group's thinking and its rhetoric is a rhetoric of a clash of civilizations that is supposed to lead to the end times. Establishing a caliphate is a necessary pretext for the end times to come. Once established, the Prophetic narration holds, the caliphate shall collide with an army of infidels – the Crusaders – at the city of Dābiq (it is no coincidence IS named its propagandistic magazine by this very name). After a victorious battle, the caliphate expands – different sources suggest different magnitudes of expansion – only to meet its second arch enemy, the anti-Messiah "known in Muslim apocalyptic literature as Dajjal, [who] will come from the Khorasan region of eastern Iran and kill a vast number of the caliphate's fighters, until just 5,000 remain, cornered in Jerusalem. Just as Dajjal prepares to finish them off, Jesus—the second-most-revered prophet in Islam—will return to Earth, spear Dajjal, and lead the Muslims to victory."[42]

The ideological content became very resonant and even seductive for several reasons. First, its metaphysical claims inspired and attracted many disaffected people primarily in the West, who felt marginalized an uprooted from their communities. Second, it

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[39] Wood, G. (2015)

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] Atran in Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 161.

[42] Wood, G. (2015)

provided an alternative solution to the seemingly discredited democratic means that failed to bring about political change. Since the hopes for democratic reforms in Syria stirred by the Arab spring withered as the movement was hijacked by extremists and crushed by the reactionary al-Assad regime, people's belief in using democratic means to achieve political goals weakened and the Islamic State offered an attractive alternative.[43] Finally, the Islamic State filled a vacuum of ideas.[44] The idea of nation-states in either Iraq or Syria perished in the sectarian bloodletting that followed the fall of the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad and the bloodbath of the Syrian Arab spring, respectively, and the idea of an all-encompassing Islamic caliphate ruling all true Muslims arose instead. Coincidentally, the global jihadist movement lost its breath as al-Qāʿida became increasingly incapable of reaching out to wide audiences of Muslims worldwide. Ever since the death of Usāma bin Lādin (and even during his final years), the group's uncharismatic leadership had to offer nothing but protracted, pedantic, and boring tractates dealing with distant future. Contrasted with the 'right here, right now', 'instant paradise' media strategy of the Islamic State, coupled with a string of military successes and the group's ability to broadcast them made the enterprise very attractive.

The ideology sets the Islamic State aside from any other jihadist organization in the world. However, it is by far not the only thing that played an instrumental role in the group's success. Though very appealing to the disaffected populations abroad, other, rather more tangible 'products' had to be offered to the local, host population.

2.2 Exploitation of state failure and governance

The ideological break from al-Qāʿida central is not manifested only in the realm of rhetoric. While the parent organization's "Trotsky-esque permanent jihad" and the talk about social justice in Islam has been failing to stir the attention of the *umma*, the

[43] For example, according to the annual opinion survey amongst the Arab youth, the optimism has plummeted since the outbreak of the Arab spring and the respondents – although not supportive of the Islamic State's enterprise – prioritized stability over democracy. [7th Annual ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2014/15. *ASDA'A Burston-Marsteller*. Retrieved from: http://asdaabm.com/content.php?menu=research&page=71] and over a third of them agreed with the statement democracy will never work in the region. [8th Annual ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2015/16. *ASDA'A Burston-Marsteller*. Retrieved from: http://asdaabm.com/content.php?menu=research&page=72]

[44] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 118.

Islamic State acted on its promise of a caliphate and concentrated all its efforts to actually implement it.[45]

The intention to function as a state dates back to the founding days of the organization. As early as 2006 AQI was operating various governmental departments, such as department of health, oil production, agriculture, etc.[46] However, gratuitous brutality and a series of strategic mistakes betrayed its state-building efforts and nearly lead to the organization's demise. Yet, just as the American invasion provided the opportunity for the group's emergence, the Syrian civil war delivered a chance for the group's resuscitation.

In the turmoil of the state breakdown witnessed in Syria, the locals had been prey to armed militias, criminality skyrocketed, and in many places basic services could not be accessed. As there were no good options, the Islamic State often proved to be the 'least bad alternative'.[47] The group espoused a carrot and a stick type of approach towards the locals. It brought about sense of order – the roads were cleaned, criminals were brought to justice and *duly* punished, the power and the sewage system were restored, water, food, and basic telecommunication were available again, and even the market prices were being regulated.[48] Contrasted with the Hobbesian anarchy that preceded the group's arrival, the locals often found it preferable to overlook the pathological brutality of IS and live under the draconian rules rather than suffer from total lawlessness.[49] While other rebel groups often lost track of what was their original goal and focused more on looting rather than fighting the regime, the Islamic State made sure to avoid such behaviour.[50]

In places with powerful tribal presence the Islamic State replicated the initially successful tactics of making alliances with the tribes. Inspired by the American support

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[45] Porter, G. D. (2016). How Realistic Is Libya as an Islamic State "Fallback"? *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel, 9*(3), p. 3. Retrieved from: https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CTC-SENTINEL-Vol9Iss3_b5.pdf

[46] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 78.

[47] Malka, H. (2015). The Challenge of Non-state Actors. *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Retrieved from: http://csis.org/files/publication/141112_Malka_NonstateActors_Web.pdf

[48] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 238-240.

[49] *Ibid,* p. 233.

of the tribal Awakening, IS has made significant efforts to have favourable relationship with them or at least neutralize them as competition. When dealing with the tribes IS has been engaging in local politics and minor diplomacy, ranging from mediating disputes to bribes and intimidation.[51] To prevent the kind of concerted effort that expelled AQI from the Sunnī tribal areas in Iraq, IS has applied a version of divide and rule strategy. Sowing discord amongst the tribal leaders, the group took advantage of the generational and political abyss within the tribes. For example, younger clan leaders were promised positions of power (so far occupied by the tribal elders) and oil provisions in exchange for their cooperation and loyalty. If the loyalty of the tribes could not be bought, lack of willingness to cooperate was met with less favourable outcome and numbers of resentful tribal leaders were put to death.[52]

Above everything else, the fear and intimidation campaign and the brutal repression of dissent played the most crucial role in the Islamic State's ability to maintain rule over such a vast territory and population. In many cases, if the hearts and minds (the mantra of al-Qāʿida central) of the locals could not be won over the Islamic State would apply terror to ensure compliance.[53]

Whilst this very campaign broke the organization's neck in Iraq, the political circumstances in Syria proved conducive for it. Unlike in Iraq where the Sunnīs could find a strong ally in the U.S. military and the at-the-time not overtly sectarian Iraqi government, the Syrian regime was not interested in controlling the Sunnī hinterland during the first years of the civil war as it was dealing with the more imminent threats to its existence. This played out very well for the Islamic State. Its state building activities were, therefore, unabated as the regime was too busy fighting other rebel groups, and its decision to keep rather low profile at the beginning of the Syrian conflict meant it was not the primary target of any of the parties involved. Hence, it was given time and space to prepare ground for its future expansion.

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[50] They would even execute their own soldiers of convicted of stealing, trafficking, or other crimes. [Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 236.]

[51] Dreazen, Y. (2014, June 17). ISIS Uses Mafia Tactics to Fund Its Own Operations Without Help From Persian Gulf Donors. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from: http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/17/isis-uses-mafia-tactics-to-fund-its-own-operations-without-help-from-persian-gulf-donors/

[52] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 214-217.

[53] *Ibid*, p. 225.

2.3 Funding

The staggering expansion of the Islamic State would scarcely be possible without significant financial resources. Amongst other primacies, the Islamic State has also become the richest organization in the world, yielding between one to three million dollars per day by 2014.[54] Although its revenue has been gradually shrinking, it is unlikely the organization will fail due to insufficient funding any time soon.

Unlike most other terrorist and insurgent groups that are dependent on individual or government-related outside donors or prey on immediate, *ad hoc* sources of income, the Islamic State has managed to diversify and stabilize its income in a way it became increasingly difficult to disrupt its financing. A 2015 Financial Action Task Force report divides its income into five major categories, listing them by the order of profitability[55]:

1. Illicit Proceeds from occupation of territory including extortion and theft
    a. Bank looting, Extortion, Human Trafficking
    b. Control of Oil and Gas Reservoirs
    c. Extorting Agriculture
    d. Other Resource Extraction and Production Facilities
    e. Cultural Artefacts
    f. Illicit Taxation of Goods and Cash that Transit Territory where ISIL Operates
    g. Salary Payments to Iraqi Government Employees
2. Kidnapping for ransom
3. Donations including by or through non-profit organisations (NPOs)
4. Material support to include foreign terrorist fighters
5. Fundraising through modern communication networks[56]

Although all the activities listed above have contributed to the Islamic State's 'war chest', there are three that deserve further attention.

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[54] Johnston, P. B. (2014). Countering ISIL'S Financing. *RAND Coporation*, p. 2. Retrieved from: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT419/RAND_CT419.pdf

[55] Financial Action Task Report. (2015). *Financing of the Terrorist Organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)*, p. 12. Retrieved from: http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Financing-of-the-terrorist-organisation-ISIL.pdf

First, seizing control of a number of state-owned banks in the northern provinces of Iraq and Syria allowed the Islamic State access to hard currency, estimated to have been at least half a billion USD during the second half of 2014 alone.[57] These bank takeovers were often not mere robberies. The Islamic State has been operating managerial staff in the banks and continued providing many bank services, generating more income by, for example, taxing money withdrawals by the customers, disguising it as a form of Zakat – the Muslim duty of alms giving.[58]

Second, what the report classifies as "extortion" is a large pool of activities spanning from indeed mafia-style practices such as racketeering to the extensive taxing of the local population and the businesses operating in the IS held territory. The Islamic State has shown a great level of sophistication and diligence in these matters, imposing fees and taxes on a vast number of activities and goods, ranging from fuel and vehicle taxes to fees for children attending schools.[59]

Third and last, controlling and operating the oil infrastructure in the captured areas has proven to be a sustainable source of revenue.[60] The Islamic State has had very good experience with illicit oil trafficking, an activity it engaged since the az-Zarqāwī days. As a result of seizing control of the oil wells, it is estimated that already by 2006 the then Islamic State of Iraq surpassed its parent organization in wealth, putting Usāma bin Lādin into an awkward situation as he had to ask his Iraqi franchise for money.[61] Despite the organization struggles to exploit the full potential of the oil infrastructure as its ability to extract, refine, and sell oil has been limited due to the coalition airstrikes and the lack of expertise[62], it has still been able to generate between 200 and 250 million USD throughout 2016 this way.[63]

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[56] *Ibid,* p. 1.

[57] Financial Action Task Report. (2015), p. 12.

[58] *Ibid,* p. 13.

[59] *Ibid,* p. 12.

[60] *Ibid,* p. 13.

[61] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 72, 73.

[62] Financial Action Task Report. (2015), p. 15.

[63] Heißner, S.; Neumann, P. R.; Holland-McCowan, J.; Basra, R. (2017). Caliphate in Decline: An Estimate of Islamic State's Financial Fortunes. *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, p. 8. Retrieved from: http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ICSR-Report-Caliphate-in-Decline-An-Estimate-of-Islamic-States-Financial-Fortunes.pdf

2.4 Combat know-how

Another prominent feature of the Islamic State's success story has been its military superiority to any other insurgent group in the region. It has got the manpower, the financial means to feed, clothe, and pay decent salaries to its soldiers, the necessary experience gained through the years of fighting and the military expertise of the mainly ex-Ba'athist military personnel that joined its ranks. Without a doubt, it is the last component that has had the most significant impact on the IS's dominance on the battlefield.

The American decision to disband the Iraqi army following the demise of the Ba'athist regime turned out to be a costly miscalculation. Vast numbers of highly qualified military personnel found themselves unemployment and with little to no prospect of regaining their jobs as the governmental structures were being taken over by the Shīʿa. Many of them, therefore, joined the numerous Sunnī insurgents groups that started abundantly appearing all over Iraq. By 2006, these army officers have "formed the backbone of the insurgency"[64], as 99 out of Saddam's 200 ex-generals were likely active in it.[65]

The Islamic State was quite successful in recruiting this target group. In 2011, al-Baghdādī started an "aggressive campaign to recruit the former Ba'athists to revitalize the weakened insurgency"[66] and as of 2015 it was estimated that some 30 % of the group's top leadership was comprised of former Saddam's military and police officers.[67] Although many have argued IS has been taken over by the ex-Ba'athists and downplay the importance of the faith component, it is necessary to point out a significant portion of the Sunnī military leadership was radicalized well before IS started courting them. The combination of Saddam Hussein's Islamic Faith Campaign that was supposed to stifle the danger of a potential Islamist fifth column growing in the country[68], and the exposure to the radical ideologies the officers underwent when serving their prison

[64] Pirnie&O'Connell in Yosufi, A. B. (2016). The Rise and Consolidation of Islamic State: External Intervention and Sectarian Conflict. *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, p. 96, 97. Retrieved from: https://connections-qj.org/article/rise-and-consolidation-islamic-state-external-intervention-and-sectarian-conflict?qt-popular=1

[65] *Ibid,* p. 97.

[66] *Ibid,* p. 97.

[67] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 149.

[68] *Ibid*, p. 61.

sentences have rendered them susceptible to the calls of the jihadists.[69] Similarly to the locals, some of the rather hesitant Baathists were heavily persecuted.[70]

The military expertise of Saddam's renegades coupled with the experience the fighters gained in Iraq, Syria, Chechnya, Libya, Indonesia or whichever conflict zone they happened to come from, was one of the pivotal reasons behind the Islamic State's ability to sweep through Syria and Northern Iraq.

2.5 Propaganda

The importance of propaganda for the Islamic State's resurrection is undisputed. The group's use of modern technology, be it the state of the art quality of its video production or the usage of Twitter, Facebook, and other social media for spreading propaganda as well as for recruitment has been revolutionary. While al-Qāʿida central became increasingly rigid and unappealing, the Islamic State has been able to reach vast audiences in essentially real time. This ability has had threefold impact.

First, IS has been able to spread its ideological message and garner support of many both inside and outside the region. The group managed to incite an unprecedented inflow of recruits from abroad that trump even the decade long Afghan jihad.[71] While a portion of the locals joined the group out of opportunism or for lack of other options – IS pays regular wages as opposed to other means of employment – the foreign recruits were drawn in by the spectacular portrayal of the caliphate and its goals. Unlike other jihadist organizations that focused on the rather worldly goal of toppling the Syrian dictator, the Islamic State loaded its propaganda with the establishment of the caliphate – the idyllic place where righteous Muslims live in harmony – and the apocalypse. It attracted a plethora of different personality profiles, although some discernible patterns arose. The idea of joining the noble cause attracted alienated and disaffected youth, often with troubled history tainted with criminal records and drug abuses notwithstanding, that sought a new reason for existence, the possibility to purge

[69] *Ibid,* p. 153.

[70] *Ibid,* p. 169.

[71] Schmid, A. P. (2015). Foreign (Terrorist) Fighter Estimates: Conceptual and Data Issues. *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, p. 3. Retrieved from: https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ICCT-Schmid-Foreign-Terrorist-Fighter-Estimates-Conceptual-and-Data-Issues-October20152.pdf

themselves of their sinful past and the chance to stand 'on the right side of history' before the end times fall upon the world.[72]

Second, the vulgar display of violence on social media and the celebratory tone such violence was accompanied with has served as a tool to intimidate potential dissenters. Although spectacular use of violence has been a hallmark of the IS's behaviour already since the az-Zarqāwī days, what used to be a 'shaky camera' is now a high definition footage, made in a specialized studio the organization has been running in Raqqa.[73]

Third, the Islamic State has managed to inflate its military prowess and paint its advances on the battlefield in such a way it made the campaign seem (to many) divinely ordained. According to some, the ability to advertise their military success was by far the most important piece promulgated by the Islamic State's propaganda.[74] Especially between the 2013 and 2015, their success on the ground proved to be the best recruiting weapon as they seemed to have been the solution to the grievances in the region.[75] As opposed to the promise of the paradise on Earth (or, for martyrdom seekers, the one in heaven) and the execution videos, the military advances provided the audience with a tangible proof the caliphate is not just about proclamations and random violence. Had it not been for the successful military campaign for which the social media merely served as an amplifier, the Islamic State would hardly gain such credibility.[76] Moreover, the IS propaganda not only proved to be a powerful weapon for recruitment, it also proved to be a weapon for combat. To illustrate the point, the Islamic State's takeover of Mosul serves as a great example. Prior to taking the city, IS released a video showing brutal treatment of government soldiers. This had a devastating impact on the morale of the government force's stationed in and around Mosul to defend the city, lead to desertions,

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[72] Wood, G. (2015).

[73] Wallace, B. (2014, September 11). ISIS has mastered high-end video production in its new propaganda wing. *PRI online*. Retrieved from: https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-09-11/isis-has-mastered-high-end-video-production-its-new-propaganda-wing

[74] Kilcullen, D. (2016, February 23). *Understanding ISIS - David Kilcullen @ USSC 23/2/16 [HD]*. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vKn8ZkESR4

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] *Ibid.*

and ultimately saw the Iraqi army withdraw despite the fact it significantly outnumbered the IS assailants.[77]

[77] Cockburn, P. (2015, February 4). *The Theatre of War Symposium Day One – Patrick Cockburn, The Rise of the Islamic State.* Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NDxOWTqyQE&t=2344s

3. The enemy of my enemy is my friend

Nadpis druhé úrovně Persuasive, rich, formidable in combat, and technologically savvy, the Islamic State set itself apart from all the other insurgent groups operating in Iraq and Syria. However, what allowed its initial insurgence in Iraq following the U.S. invasion, enabled it to embed itself in Syria, and make its triumphant return back to Iraq in 2014 was the strategy of instrumental exploitation of the sectarian divide that was starkly present in both countries.

Sectarianism, or the "process through which forms of ethnic and/or religious identity are politicized"[78], has to various extents yet quite consistently plagued the region for long centuries. The roots of the sectarian divide in Iraq go a long way back to the earliest Islamic history and the very schism within the faith. After all, the city of Karbala, the holiest place of the Shīʿa Islam, lays in the very heart of the country. Whilst the history of the cohabitation of the two sects has been marred by occasional bloodshed, the more recent history could be considered quite peaceful. The crushing dictatorship of Saddam Hussein proved to be very efficient in alleviating the sectarian tensions and conflict between the Sunnī and the Shīʿa were rather rare. Whenever there seemed to have been an organized sectarian dissent, such as in the case of the Shīʿa protests against disenfranchisement following the first Gulf war, the Ba'athist regime resorted to brutal repressions.[79]

The 1990s had seen an increase in religious awareness of the Iraqi population. In general, the economic sanctions had been taking a heavy toll on the Iraqis and as the crisis deepened, more and more people resorted to religion as the means to deal with the dire living conditions.[80] The trend did not go unnoticed by the state's authorities. Afraid of a potential Islamist insurgence in the country, Saddam Hussein launched in 1993 the so-called Islamic Faith Campaign that "instrumentalized religious references and symbols and […] involved a more socially conservative agenda".[81] Since the campaign

[78] Potter, L. G. et al. (2012). Sectarian Politics in the Gulf. Working Group Summary Report. *Centre for International and Regional Studies*. Retrieved from: https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/558538/CIRSSummaryReport7SectarianPoliticsintheGulf2012.pdf

[79] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 157.

[80] *Ibid,* p. 157.

[81] *Ibid,* p. 157.

was merely a ploy to pacify the Islamist elements within the population and to bestow the regime with an appearance of piety, Saddam continued to persecute radical Islamists as well as any other kind of organized dissent.[82]

The campaign, however, did play a role in fuelling a "shift to communal identity"[83] and prepared the ground for the chaos that unravelled as the U.S. forces entered Iraq. A full decade before the U.S. troops landed on Iraqi soil, Kanan Makiya, a scholar of Ba'athist Iraq, showed hauntingly accurate foresight:

> "After Saddam is gone, when people's lives and those of their loved ones look as if they are the chopping block, Sunni fears of what the Shi'a might do to them in the name of Islam are going to become the major force of Iraqi politics. The more Iraq's Shi'a assert themselves as Shi'a, the greater will be the tendency of Iraq's Sunni minority to fight to the bitter end before allowing anything that so much as smells of an Islamic republic to be established in Iraq. They see in such a state–whether rightly or wrongly is irrelevant–their own annihilation."[84]

Makiya's prediction turned out to be prophetic. With Saddam's departure, there was no overarching authority that could keep the sectarian tensions at bay. The Shīʿa majority that had been marginalized under the Ba'athists for decades swiftly gained the upper hand. Since the old regime was readily branded to have been Sunnī, the Sunnī community was vilified for its complicity with the regime and largely marginalized within the post-invasion political process.[85] Wālid as-Sād, an Iraqi sociologist, observed the nation was suddenly swept over by a tide of "religiosity and piety"[86], as the sectarian affiliations began to trump any other kind of identity.

The sectarian tensions spiralled into an outright war as Shīʿa militias, enjoying massive support from Iran (and often being directly operated from Tehran), started clashing with the Sunnī ones that were often lead by the former Ba'athist security. Identifiable links emerged between the Baghdad government and the Shīʿa militias such as the al-Mahdī Army or the Badr Brigade[87], groups that engaged in persecution and extrajudicial

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[82] *Ibid,* p. 157.

[83] *Ibid,* p. 157.

[84] Makiya in Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 64.

[85] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 157.

[86] *Ibid,* p. 157.

[87] *Ibid,* p. 161.

killings of Sunnī throughout Iraq. This quickly escalated the frustration on the Sunnī side and the lack of trust between the communities became abysmal. The grounds for a protracted civil war were set, as more and more desperate Iraqis started joining the sectarian bandwagon. Explaining the full extent of the sectarian bloodletting that ensued, however, is impossible without detailing the role al-Qāʿida in Iraq played in it.

3.1 No medicine but the sword[88]

The Sunnī community felt betrayed. By the Americans, by the international community, by the other Sunnī states in the region that left them at mercy of the Shīʿa regimes in Baghdad and Tehran. This conspiratorial narrative had become embedded so deeply within the community it rendered it an easy prey for the extremists.

Abū Muṣʿab az-Zarqāwī was obsessed. Even prior to the invasion and the eruption of the sectarian war, he already held deep antagonism towards the Shīʿa.[89] Before changing the name of his organization to *Tanzīm Qāʿidat al-Jihād fī Bilād ar-Rāfidaīn*, the "al-Qāʿida organization in the Land of Two Rivers", the group was called *Jamā'at at-Tawhīd wal-Jihād*, the Organization of Monotheism and Jihad. This name is particularly telling as it explicitly mentions at-Tawhīd which is the core concept of Islam stressing the belief in one and only god and forbidding worship or ascribing divinity to any man-made entity (which, by a stretch of imagination, allows for an indictment of the Shīʿa of such transgression for worshipping the graves of their Imāms, among other potential pretexts). This antagonism against az-Zarqāwī's co-religionists quickly evolved into a pathological hatred as the sectarian war broke out in Iraq. Az-Zarqāwī's interpretation of the Iraqi chaos was that the Shīʿa colluded with the Western powers and conspired against the Sunnīs.[90] Although the Shīʿa are generally labelled as heretics – for the aforementioned reasons – by the Sunnī Salafist movement, they are still considered Muslims enjoying the protection the faith grants its believers. Az-Zarqāwī's ideology, however, diverged not only from the mainstream Salafism but also from the ideology of the Salafist-jihadist movement as he did not regard the Shīʿa be Muslims at all. He and his followers embraced a controversial Islamic doctrine called takfīrism. This doctrine

[88] A caption accompanying a picture of two Shīʿa men with severed heads published by the Islamic State in the Dābiq. [Cockburn, P. (2015), p. 88.]

[89] Warrick, J. (2015), p. 76.

[90] McCant, W. (2016), p. 11.

that draws on fringe interpretation of the Islamic holy texts – providing the veneer of religious justification – enabled the group to promiscuously proclaim the Shīʿa apostates and, therefore, make them "fair game" for a kill as under the Islamic law apostasy is dealt with death.[91]

When courting al-Qāʿida central for membership for the second time, az-Zarqāwī wrote a letter to bin Lādin in February 2004, where in the most scathing terms he begins to outline his sentiments about the Shīʿa. After a brief condemnation of the Kurds for their selling out to the Americans, the content is exploding with hatred towards what he calls "the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom".[92] Whilst the Crusader enemy [the Americans] would "disappear tomorrow, or the day after", the real menace were the Shīʿa who – according to az-Zarqāwī – realized they could not win the fight against the Sunnīs in an open battlefield so they "shed [their] Shīʿa garb" and dressed as the Iraqi police, army, and government. They were, az-Zarqāwī insisted, the *true enemy*.

The latter half of the cited letter is very much a script of what later became AQI's strategy in Iraq. Az-Zarqāwī outlined his battle plan in the following words:

> "targeting and hitting them in [their] religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnīs their rabies and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breasts. If [we] succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnīs as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death at the hands of these Sabeans […] If we are able to strike them with one painful blow after another until they enter the battle, we will be able to [re]shuffle the cards. […] This is what we want, and, whether they like it or not, many Sunnī areas will stand with the mujahidin. Then the mujahidin will have assured themselves land from which to set forth in striking the Shīʿa in their heartland, along with a clear media orientation and the creation of strategic depth and reach among the brothers outside [Iraq] and the mujahidin within."[93]

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[91] Zelin, A. Y.; Smyth, P. (2014, January 29). The Vocabulary of Sectarianism. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from: https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/01/29/the-vocabulary-of-sectarianism/

[92] (2014). Zarqawi letter.

[93] *Ibid*.

Az-Zarqāwī was also very clear about the intended means as he explicitly mentioned martyrdom operations and car bombs.[94] His organization followed this blueprint very faithfully, although attacks of this kind had been occurring long before the letter arrived in bin Lādin's hands. It is very difficult to find reliable data on what portion of the suicide bombing can be directly attributed to AQI, but it is reasonable to assume an overwhelming majority of them were at least inspired by it or in retaliation for its attacks. The group unleashed hell, as nearly 43.000 lives were lost to suicide bombings between 2003 and 2010.[95] The first major attack took place on 29 August 2003 in Najaf where two car bombs exploded in the proximity of the Imām Alī mosque, killing 124 people.[96] A series of other bombing attacks ensued, culminating in 2006 and 2007.[97]

David Galula, a French classic of counterinsurgency thought, posits every counterinsurgency starts with a *strategic cause* which lends the movement ideological power.[98] Exploiting and exacerbating the emerging anti-Shīʿa sentiment, the strategic cause of AQI laid in identifying the post-invasion regime as a Shīʿa-concocted anti-Sunnī conspiracy. By unleashing a fratricidal war, AQI managed – as envisioned in the infamous 2004 letter addressed to bin Lādin – to rally people behind their cause often with no other choice left. Although the violence eventually backfired in the form of the Anbar Awakening that saw AQI and its successors lose strategic depth and diminish, the ideological legacy of Abū Muṣʿab az-Zarqāwī continued to live on.

3.2 World set aflame

When Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī assumed leadership of ISI, little changed in regard to the group's ideology and practice. Al-Baghdādī, as the string of leaders did before him,

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[94] *Ibid*.

[95] Hsiao-Rei Hicks, M.; Dardagan, H.; Bagnall, P. M.; Spagat, M.; Sloboda, J. A. (2011). Casualties in civilians and coalition soldiers from suicide bombings in Iraq, 2003–10: a descriptive study. *The Lancet 2011; 378*, p. 906–14. Retrieved from: http://www.thelancet.com.sci-hub.cc/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(11)61023-4.pdf

[96] Wedeman, B.; Formanek, I.; Ensor, D. (2003, August 30). Najaf Bombing Kills Shiite leader, Followers Say. *CNN.* Retrieved from: http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/08/29/sprj.irq.najaf/

[97] Documented civilian deaths from violence. (2017). [Graph illustration of deaths from violence in Iraq by year]. *Iraqi Body Count*. Retrieved from: https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/

[98] Galula, D. (1964). *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. Wesport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, p. 3-4. ISBN: 0-275-99269-1

sought to employ brutal violence as a trademark military strategy of his organization.[99] When the American troops withdrew from the country, the Sunnī population lost the protective hand of the U.S. military and the Iraqi government did not – to say the least – feel obliged to take over the responsibility. ISI was suddenly allowed manoeuvring space it was being denied for long four years. Pronouncing the need for *fitna*, fratricidal war within the Sunnī community against those that pervert the faith[100], the group started settling old scores with the Sunnīs that were involved in the Anbar Awakening[101] and started its efforts to reinvigorate the sectarian bloodshed that lost its intensity in 2007. Be it mosques, markets, governmental institutions or any other public spaces, ISI re-escalated the suicide bombing campaign against Shīʿa targets.[102] Since al-Baghdādī's appointment as the group's *emīr* until the end of 2011, ISI conducted over a hundred operations across the country targeting Shīʿa members of the police corps and other officials.[103]

Whilst the U.S. departure from Iraq allowed ISI certain breathing space, the outbreak of the Syrian civil war provided the organization with a full blown opportunity to regain strategic depth and recreate itself from the ashes it was reduced to by 2010. The ISI cadres set sails West-bound with a clear objective: "exploit the emerging sectarian conflict, which was starting to mirror the carnage AQI had provoked in Iraq, as resistance to al-Assad's urban-centred Alawī regime increasingly came from poor, pious, rural Sunnīs."[104]

Witnessing the fates of al-Qaddāfī and Mubarak, al-Assad had no appetite for leaving "quietly".[105] Although the opposition was strong in numbers, it was weak in mounting concerted efforts against the regime. Another important factor that spared the al-Assad regime its demise was the significant support it enjoyed from abroad. Aside from the Russia backing that gradually intensified (primarily in response to the perceived betrayal by the Americans as – despite what was agreed behind the closed door – the

[99] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 144, 145.

[100] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 134.

[101] Yosufi, A. B. (2016), p. 108.

[102] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 29.

[103] Kilcullen, D. (2016), p. 74.

[104] *Ibid*, p. 75.

[105] *Ibid*, p. 70.

Libyan humanitarian mission turned into an enterprise that toppled Qaddāfī[106]), the regime was supported by its sectarian counterparts from the region. The Iranians, al-Assad's most vigorous patron, kept a steady stream of supplies, weapons, economic and humanitarian aid, intelligence support and, last but not least, personnel including Quds Force units.[107] Iraq also weighed in markedly, delivering aid for the regime and launching a campaign that was supposed to recruit Iraqi Shīʿa fighters and send them to fight in Syria.[108] Furthermore, Lebanese Hezbollah deployed its advisors in Syria to help coordinate the *shabīha* forces[109], the pro-Assad armed militias employed to crack down on dissenters. Ultimately, despite that popular wisdom that the Syrian civil war attracted overwhelmingly the Sunnīs, more foreign Shīʿa fighters fought for al-Assad than Sunnī fighters on the side of the rebels.[110]

In order to remain in power, however, al-Assad needed more than just the numbers. At the beginning of the conflict, he embodied a ruthless, brutal dictator who resorted to violent repression of rather peaceful protests and the international community was very much in favour of his departure. Al-Assad realized that in order to make up for the tainted image, he needed to create an enemy that would be even more repugnant than himself.

As the protests started getting out of hand, al-Assad began systematically radicalizing the opposition. On the 31st of May 2011 he declared an amnesty for political prisoners, a measure aimed to seemingly placate the growing opposition movement. The amnesty was, however, applied selectively and lead to deliberate release of hundreds of convicted Sunnī radicals who were up to that point languishing in Syrian prisons. These radicals – according to the plan – readily joined the ranks of the protesters.[111] Efforts to import violent radicals from abroad followed short after and the regime went allegedly as far as to facilitate weapons for some of the nascent radical militias.[112]

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[106] *Ibid*, p. 71.

[107] *Ibid*, p. 70.

[108] *Ibid*, p. 71.

[109] *Ibid*, p. 70.

[110] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 154.

[111] *Ibid*, p. 157, 158.

[112] *Ibid*, p. 160, 161.

Once the opposition got tainted by the extremist elements, al-Assad was swift to label anyone who partook in the protests an al-Qāʿida terrorist, and treated them in very much that fashion. The countermeasures became so destructive they indeed started living up to the slogan of the regime loyalists, "Assad or we burn the country."[113] Systematic rape and torture were underway at large, accompanied by a campaign aiming to ridicule and demean the Sunnī faith. Furthermore, the aforementioned *shabīha* forces under the command of Bashār al-Assad's brother Maher attacked not only individual dissenters but often entire villages and conducted numerous massacres against Sunnī civilians.[114] Allegedly, its members were promised a $150 bonus for every Sunnī they kill.[115]

The regime's tactics were actually quite similar to the ones of AQI and, later, ISI in Iraq. The goal was to radicalize the opposition, conduct massacres to provoke retaliation and initiate a circle of violence that would give the Syrian people a binary choice. Peaceful protests that demanded mostly economic reforms mutated into a civil war of existential dimensions, spreading general paranoia throughout the Syrian society. The Sunnīs, frustrated by the marginalization at the expense of the ruling Alawite-minority, were facing a borderline genocidal regime whilst the Alawīs and the Shīʿa who profited under al-Assad's patronage dreaded the possibility of a Sunnī takeover. The fear of and the animosity against the other was continually promulgated by the regime propaganda.[116] The sentiment of either group is well illustrated by a remark of an Alawī surgeon interviewed near Damascus: "They hate us. That is what they are … If given the chance, they will massacre us."[117]

Ultimately, the sectarian nature of the conflict was sealed as the Syrian civil war metastasized into a war of parochial interests of the surrounding countries with Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar advancing Sunnī interests in the region and Iran, Iraq, and Hezbollah standing on the other side of the sectarian divide.[118]

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[113] *Ibid*, p. 148.

[114] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 180.

[115] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 150.

[116] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 180.

[117] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 150.

[118] Carpenter, T. G. (2013). Tangled Web: The Syrian Civil War and Its Implications. *Mediterranean Quarterly, 24*(1), p. 3, 4. Retrieved from: https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/articles/tgc_med_quart_winter_2013.pdf

3.3 Seizing the narrative

Since al-Assad's regime did most of ISI's work even before its vanguard, the an-Nusra front, entered Syria in the second half of 2011, the group kept rather low profile, focusing on building a broad grass root support in the Sunnī provinces. After the split between an-Nusra and ISI, the latter continued to largely refrain from attacking the regime and focused more on fighting other jihadist factions.[119] This strategy spared it from unduly attention of the regime's forces and allowed it to establish itself in al-Raqqah and the surrounding areas.[120] Coincidentally, al-Assad was not too keen to attack the organization as well. Given his claims that the opposition was made up of al-Qāʿida terrorists was a "barefaced lie" [121], the arrival of the group was actually welcomed:

> "when ISI turned up—as genuine a bunch of hyper-violent extremists as he could hope for—this dramatically bolstered Assad's narrative. So the regime did little to target ISI, letting it gain control of contested areas and carve out a safe haven in Raqqa province. For its part, ISI avoided confronting the regime, and a de facto truce emerged between the two, which lasted until late 2013. ISI had no need to confront the regime because its goal in Syria (at this stage) was to create a sanctuary where it could recover from its near-death experience in Iraq."[122]

Unmolested by the regime, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Shāms (as the group rebranded itself following the split from an-Nusra) could proceed to the overtures with local Sunnīs. At that point, the Sunnī population was in many places left with no other option than accepting them. The regime's brutality was unchecked, many of the rebel groups switched their focus from fighting the regime to pillaging what was left of the country, and the international community seemed largely unmoved by what was happening on the ground, which culminated on the 21st of August 2013 in the failure of the United States to act on its chemical weapons red line.[123] It was especially the last

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[119] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 191.

[120] Kilcullen, D. (2016). *Blood Year: The Unraveling of Western Counterterrorism*, p. 81. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 0190600543

[121] *Ibid*, p. 76.

[122] *Ibid*, p. 76.

[123] *Ibid*, p. 80, 81.

point that, "by contrast, empowered emerging AQ and ISIS factions and permanently weakened the prospects for a moderate post-Assad regime".[124]

In many regions, and especially in the North, the Sunnī population languished. The unemployment rates were staggeringly high (hitting nearly 90%) and inflation rose to 400%. Aside from offering the prospect of earning around 400 USD a month for serving in its ranks, the organization also made robust investments into revitalizing local economy and employing poor Sunnīs in various way, for example "putting many in charge of policing, security, surveillance, and field command, an investment that has secured the organization's control of its newly captured territories in Deīr az-Zūr, al-Raqqah, Mosul, [and] Fallūja".[125] As Fawaz Gerges observed, "for poor Sunnīs who feel hopeless and desperate, the ISIS project reflects their hopes and fears and provides answers to their existential queries triggered by all-out civil war. They view the Islamic State as a viable alternative to the corrupt armed factions that butchered each other over the spoils of war and developed a reputation for thuggery, thievery, and moral corruption."[126] Moreover, ISIS provided the locals with a framework and an explanation for their situation. In other words, the "religion provided a communitarian narrative for the disenfranchised, anchoring them in a community and providing a bridge between tradition and modernity".[127]

Although the al-Assad regime went out of its way to widen the sectarian divide, the opposition forces were unable to seize the narrative of the conflict. While the rebellion had primarily nationalist overtones, it was only the arriving ISIS that injected a 'metaphysical', hyper-sectarian quality to the civil war. In other words,

> "[…] ISIS defined the struggle in Syria and Iraq through the framework of identity rather than ideology, developing a distinct pan-Sunnī identity, a deliberate contrast to the pan-Shia identity represented by the sectarian-dominated, Iran-backed regimes in Damascus and Baghdad. In the case of ISIS, there is a synergy between ideology and praxis. Of all the Sunnī armed groups in Syria, ISIS's brutal clarity allowed it to monopolize the

[124] *Ibid*, p. 80, 81.

[125] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 177, 178.

[126] *Ibid*, p. 178.

[127] *Ibid*, p. 179.

> identity narrative (deliverance of the Sunnīs from Shia domination) and appeal to downtrodden and marginalized Syrians."[128]

This is not to say ISIS was victorious in Syria solely because they managed to win the hearts and minds of the Sunnīs. As discussed in the previous chapter, employment of fear and violent repression was very often the key to subdue the conquered territory. However, providing a narrative that gave the locals a sense of clarity and hope for the future allowed ISIS in the initial stage to set a solid foothold in the newly occupied territories.

In the spring of 2014, the Islamic State – as the most current name of the organization reads – stunned the world with a blitzkrieg-style lunge into Iraq, capturing Mosul, Tikrit, Sinjar, and Zumar in a short succession. Even at the peak of its power, faithful to the legacy of its founder IS continued the war along sectarian lines, attacking the Shīʿa, the Yazīdīs, or the Kurds while clashing with the Iraqi government forces. The immense resources it has been placing into the establishment of a religiously uniform state entity only underlines the fact sectarianism has remained one of the top priorities of the organization.

[128] Essam in Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 194.

4. The „perfect place for hijra“

As I have shown in the previous chapters, the Islamic State thrives in the environment of statelessness. Whether it creates intractable fissures within the society and fuels civil war (as it did in Iraq) or whether it exploits a civil war that is already underway (as it did in Syria), IS has been deliberately seeking these environments and attempting to make them completely ungovernable. In this regard, the failure of the Arab spring to bring about democratic reforms and the subsequent descent to violent turmoil of many of the countries it affected created exactly the conditions IS thrives in. Moreover, the rapid advances the Islamic State made in Syria and Iraq attracted other jihadist groups around the globe. By December 2015, 43 of organizations pledged allegiance to it[129], some of which gained recognition as the IS's *wilāyat*s, i.e. integral parts of the caliphate. While many of the pledges were rather products of zealotry of insignificant militant groups, some of the organizations, especially the ones in Egypt, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Caucasus, and Libya have been considered quite capable and dangerous.[130] It is especially the Libyan branch that has stirred the most attention and in this chapter, I will examine to what extent is Libya suitable for an IS insurgency.

Prior to the events of 2011, Libya had been a dictatorship for 42 years. It was a place of many contrasts. On the one hand, Libya was turned from a backward desert land into a – by African standards – fairly developed country. Women rights were advanced, literacy rates were boosted significantly as access to education was made free, and life expectancy grew from 51/54[131] in 1969 to 74/77 by the end of 2010.[132] On the other hand, the country was deemed one of the most censored states in the world[133] and it was plagued with human rights abuses. The al-Qaddāfī regime ruthlessly crushed on dissent,

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[129] (2015, December 15). Islamic State's 43 Global Affiliates Interactive World Map. *IntelCenter.* Retrieved from: https://intelcenter.com/maps/is-affiliates-map.html#gs.pekFuqA

[130] Blanchard, C. M.; Humud, C. E. (2017). The Islamic State and U.S. Policy. *Congressional Report Service.* Retrieved from: https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43612.pdf

[131] Males/females life expectancy.

[132] MacFarquhar, N. (2011, October 10). An Erratic Leader, Brutal and Defiant to the End. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/21/world/africa/qaddafi-killed-as-hometown-falls-to-libyan-rebels.html

[133] *Freedom House.* (2009). Freedom of the Press 2009. Table of Global Press Freedom Rankings. Retrieved from: https://web.archive.org/web/20110804224233/http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fop/2009/FreedomofthePress2009_tables.pdf

executing or mutilating dissenters in public while broadcasting it on the TV, as well as hunting down exiled critics of the government abroad.[134]

The Arab spring engulfed Libya in January 2011. The government's brutal response to the initially peaceful protests initiated a downward spiral of violence. Within weeks, the situation evolved into a full blown civil war. A National Transition Council (NTC), an umbrella organization of rebel groups and anti-al-Qaddāfī tribes, spearheaded the fight against the dictator. Following its August offensive which climaxed in the capture of the Libyan capital, Tripoli, the NTC was recognized by the United Nations to have become an interim Libyan government in September 2011. Mu'ammar al-Qaddāfī, the symbol of the old regime, was captured and killed on the 20th of October. However, the demise of the old regime and the death of al-Qaddāfī did not put an end to the hostilities and the country invariably descended into chaos as the newly elected authorities failed to maintain order and disarm the factions that ousted the dictator.

These developments naturally attracted attention of the Islamic State, which labelled Libya the "perfect place for *hijra*[135] for those who can't come to Syria".[136] A move to Libya seemed to have been logical for numerous reasons: a) Libya's strategic position would enable movement of jihadists from Maghreb to the Middle East and vice versa, b) its proximity to the European shores and the rampant migrant smuggling market would facilitate crossing of terrorists directly to the Schengen area, c) it would serve as a new safe haven for the IS fighters, especially in the light of the recent developments in Syria and Iraq where the organization has been steadily losing territory and, d) additionally, it could distract the anti-IS coalition from the Iraq-Syria theatre and force it to divide resources to fight the organization on two fronts, e) its natural resources could provide a fresh new source of finding, as well as its f) munition stores, overflowing with light weapons, would provide an easy source of military equipment[137], g) and it could

[134] Eljahmi, M. (2006). Libya and the U.S.: Qadhafi Unrepentant. *Middle East Quarterly, 13*(1), p. 11-20. Retrieved from: http://www.meforum.org/878/libya-and-the-us-qadhafi-unrepentant

[135] Arabic term for "flight", likened to the one of the prophet Mohammad after he was expelled from Mekka.

[136] Schnitt, J. (2015). ISIS in Libya - Exploitation and Governance of Areas of Limited Statehood. *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*. Retrieved from: https://www.ict.org.il/UserFiles/ICTWPS-36-Schnitt.pdf

[137] Shay, S.; Baras, A. (2015). The Islamic State in Libya: Challenge and Response. *Institute for National Security Studies,* p. 204. Retrieved from:

serve as a reliable training base. Finally, h) it would provide the Islamic State with a major legitimacy boost, as it strives to become a global caliphate rather than "just a group in Mesopotamia"[138].

At the first sight, Libya has indeed become a perfect candidate for a jihadist insurgency as it seemed to have suffered from the same ills as its Syrian counterpart. For decades, the country choked in the grip of an oppressive dictatorship. An armed rebellion attempted (and, in the case of Libya, succeeded in) overthrowing the dictator. The rebellion eventually broke up and spiralled into a violent civil war and the country experienced a total collapse of the state which rendered many parts of the country completely lawless, leaving them at the mercy of local militias. The protracted fighting exposed the population to serious economic distress and, finally, the state breakdown allowed for emergence of extremist groups that took control over significant parts of the country's territory.

In previous chapters, I have established 6 enablers of the Islamic State's successful campaign in Syria and Iraq: the ideology, exploitation of state failure and governance, funding, combat know-how, propaganda, and sectarianism. In the following section, I will expand on each point individually and show whether they are relevant in the Libyan theatre.

4.1 The enablers

The aforementioned 6 enablers can be divided into two categories: *Portable* and *Non-Portable*. The *Portable* enablers are the ones that are not grounded in the particular territory where the Islamic State aims to embed itself and, therefore, can be applied at will regardless of geographical location. The *Non-Portable* ones, on the other hand, are directly linked to the territory at hand and cannot be transferred, as they are extracted from it.

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http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/The%20Islamic%20State%20in%20Libya%20Challenge%20and%20Response%20%20Shaul%20Shay%20and%20Av%20Baras.pdf

[138] Jawad, R. (2015, February 5). How strong is Islamic State in Libya? *The BBC*. Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31113659

4.1.1 Portable enablers

Ideology - The Islamic State's ideology has been pervasive regardless of place of birth, economical condition, education, or religious erudition of its adherents.[139] Because it makes universal claims about the community of believers and the global expansion of the Islamic caliphate, it is unbound by territory.

Propaganda – The staggering increase in connectivity worldwide including the developing world has allowed for an unprecedented spread of information. In Libya alone, there were nearly 10 million mobile cellular subscriptions made in 2015.[140] This means the IS propaganda does not required local media to reach the desired audiences, and therefore, is territorially unrestricted.

Combat know-how – The Islamic State has proven it is capable of exporting military expertise beyond its safe haven. The first example of this practice is the Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī's decision to send a group of fighters around Abū Muhammad al-Jūlānī to establish an IS cell in Syria in late 2011. In the case of Libya, the top command of the Libyan *wilāyat* has been almost exclusively composed of battle-hardened veterans from the Iraqi battlefields, such as Abū Nabīl al-Anbārī, Abū Habīb al-Lībī, Abū al-Barā al-Azdī, or Abū Zakarīa al-Tunīsī.

4.1.2 Non-Portable enablers

Exploitation of state failure and governance – The ability to govern can be partially understood as a type of expertise or a following of a set of practices which would render

[139] Dearden, L. (2016, April 21). Isis documents leak reveals profile of average militant as young, well-educated but with only 'basic' knowledge of Islamic law. *The Independent.* Retrieved from: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-documents-leak-reveals-profile-of-average-militant-as-young-well-educated-but-with-only-basic-a6995111.html

[140] The World Bank's website, using information from the International Telecommunication Union's World Telecommunication/ICT Development Report and database, defines the subscriptions in the following way: "Mobile cellular telephone subscriptions are subscriptions to a public mobile telephone service that provide access to the PSTN using cellular technology. The indicator includes (and is split into) the number of postpaid subscriptions, and the number of active prepaid accounts (i.e. that have been used during the last three months). The indicator applies to all mobile cellular subscriptions that offer voice communications. It excludes subscriptions via data cards or USB modems, subscriptions to public mobile data services, private trunked mobile radio, telepoint, radio paging and telemetry services." [Mobile cellular

it portable (for similar reasons as combat know-how). However, the IS quasi-state can only be established in an environment of state failure that breeds lawlessness and economic distress of the population, i.e. conditions that need to be present in the targeted territory.

Funding – In the age of internet banking the flow of money is hardly impeded by international borders. However, sustained efforts to counter financing of the Islamic State made it dependent on hard local currency. Although a significant portion of the IS economy is fuelled by the revenue extracted from the local population through taxing, extortions, and kidnapping, the hard cash revenues from local resources are crucial.

Sectarianism – Forcing sectarian identity on the local population is the central element of the IS strategy because the deeper the sectarian divide is, the stronger is the – often involuntary – support of the locals. Sectarianism is, therefore, the final necessary condition that needs to be present in the territory of IS insurgence.

4.2 The perfect candidate?

Applying the J. S. Mill's method of a difference, if one or more of the Non-Portable enablers detected in Syria are absent in Libya, a phenomenon that has not occurred (or, in our case, has not come into fruition) can be explained by the absent Non-Portable enabler. Determining presence or absence of the particular enablers is, however, quite tricky since their presence or absence should be measured on a scale rather than in a binary fashion. To avoid arbitrary quantification of diverse and complex phenomena, I will operate with the binary of relevance and irrelevance rather than compare presence and absence.

While *Funding* and *Sectarianism* can be dealt with as single coherent categories (numbers 7 and 8, respectively), the *Exploitation of state failure and governance* has to be subdivided for its complexity into several categories (numbers 1 through 6):

1) *Dictatorship* – A long-standing tradition of dictatorial practices within a country and the subsequent failure of non-violent protest to bring about democratic reforms make the population generally more vulnerable to the IS narrative.

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subscriptions (per 100 people). *The World Bank.* Retrieved from: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2?locations=LY]

2) *State breakdown* – When the state institutions no longer function, space for alternative forms of government opens and allows actors such as the Islamic State to step in.

3) *Violent civil war* – In concert with the failure of the state to cater to the needs of the people, violent conflict further radicalizes the population on the one hand, and exacerbates the need for reliable security guarantors such as the Islamic State on the other.

4) *Economic distress of the population* – Although economic well-being was proven not to have significant impact on the Islamic State's recruitment, the economic state of the target population is very important as the locals do not necessarily have to be active supporters but rather silent bystanders willing to trade certain freedoms for improvement in their living condition.

5) *Presence of Islamic Radicalism* – The Syrian scenario showed the Islamic State aims to exploit existing jihadist networks and drain rivalling radical groups of recruits and assets.

6) *Overriding rivalry of the main players* – In Syria, the fact the al-Assad regime provided IS with space while focusing on the secular opposition allowed the organization to solidify its position in the country.

7) *Means of funding* – In order to maintain a functioning insurgency and, later, a quasi-state capable of governing territory, the Islamic State needs to have access to significant financial resources.

8) *Sectarianism* – A radicalized population along sectarian lines is much more likely to accept the IS's ideology or tolerate its presence as it is facing an enemy that pursues its destruction.

4.2.1 Dictatorship

Syria

Syria has had a long tradition of non-democratic rule. The initial post-independence period was marred with radical nationalism that failed to deliver on its inflated promises. A Ba'athist coup d'etat of 1963 reversed the political tide of the nationalist populism and brought about a period of a so-called "revolution from above".[141] Shortly after seizing power, Hāfiz al-Assad turned Syria into an oppressive "presidential monarchy"[142] and carefully nurtured his cult of personality.[143] He built a powerful,

[141] (2016) BTI 2016 — Syria Country Report. *Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung*, p. 3. Retrieved from: https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2016/pdf/BTI_2016_Syria.pdf

[142] *Ibid*, p. 3.

[143] Hinnebusch, R. (2001). *Syria: Revolution from Above* (1st ed.), p. 65-69. Oxford: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-26779-3

Alawī-dominated security apparatus and maintained very solid relationship with the military. In the realm of economy, he championed policies of limited economic liberalization that selectively benefited actors supportive of the regime, creating a web of a "new state-dependent private bourgeoisie".[144] Political dissent was violently repressed and any social activism came under scrutiny.[145] However, despite the systematic discrimination of religious and ethnic groups, ongoing martial law (in force since 1963 as a result of the allegedly continuing war with Israel[146]), human rights abuses, and suppression of individual freedoms al-Assad senior managed to "maintain overall peace" in the country.[147]

After his death in 2000, he the dictator was succeeded by his son Bashār who seemed to have been a wind of change as he initially championed several steps that brought about a sense of opening, for example by loosening the restrictions placed on media outlets, by granting amnesty to hundreds of political prisoners, or by allowing pro-democratic intellectuals hold public meetings.[148] These measures were, however, only temporary and arrests and harassment of dissenters returned to their previous intensity. The wide economic liberalization Bashār al-Assad flirted with at the beginning of his reign also did not take place, as the policies embraced by the state only "benefitted the elite and its allies, rather than creating opportunities for all."[149]

Regarding the regime's human rights record, a 2010 report of Amnesty International suggests the situation was as bad as ever before the outbreak of the protests:

> "The government remained intolerant of dissent. […] Torture and other illtreatment remained common, and were committed with impunity; there were several suspicious deaths in custody. The government failed to clarify the circumstances in which prisoners were killed at Sednaya Military Prison in 2008 and, again, took no steps to account for thousands of victims of enforced disappearances in previous years. Women faced legal and other discrimination and violence. The Kurdish minority remained subject to

[144] (2016) BTI 2016 — Syria Country Report, p. 3.

[145] *Ibid*, p. 3.

[146] *Ibid*, p. 9.

[147] *Ibid*, p. 26.

[148] (2005, March 10). Profile: Syria's Bashar al-Assad. *BBC.* Retrieved from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2579331.stm

[149] (2015, October 21). Syrian President Bashar al-Assad: Facing down rebellion. *BBC.* Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.com/news/10338256

> discrimination, and thousands of Syrian Kurds were effectively stateless. At least eight prisoners were executed. […] Syria remained under a national state of emergency in force continuously since 1963 and which, over many years, has been used to suppress and punish even peaceful dissent. This pattern continued throughout 2009. Political activists, human rights defenders, bloggers, Kurdish minority activists and others who criticized the government or exposed human rights violations were subject to arbitrary arrest and often prolonged detention or were sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials before the grossly deficient Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) or Military and Criminal Courts. They included prisoners of conscience. Others, including former detainees, were subject to travel bans."[150]

Naturally, the 40 year-long record of disregard for the needs of the Syrian population culminated in the events of 2011 and the ensuing civil war.

Libya

Mu'ammar al-Qaddāfī ascended to power in Libya through a military coup in 1969. Convinced he was a leader-philosopher, al-Qaddāfī conceived a political theory of an ideal system of government that was supposed to surpass the discredited and inherently flawed forms of government that embrace capitalism or communism. However, despite the "professed objective to break the shackles imposed by the vested interests dominating political systems", freedom in Libya did not thrive under the new prophetic leadership.[151] Although people's participation in the political process was superficially encouraged, few outside of the inner circle of al-Qaddāfī's family and his closest associates had any real influence or wielded any real power.

While the power laid exclusively in al-Qaddāfī's hands, any attempts to criticize or challenge his rule were met with harsh response. The security apparatus employed brutal methods to 'uphold security', persecuting or killing anyone who engaged in subversive thinking. Disseminating information that could harm the reputation of the country was met with life sentences and extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and torture were commonplace.[152]

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[150] (2010). Annual Report: Syria 2010. *Amnesty International*. Retrieved from: http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/annual-report-syria-2010

[151] Asser, M. (2011, October 21). The Muammar Gaddafi Story. *BBC.* Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12688033

[152] *Ibid.*

According to Amnesty International, in the wake of the Arab spring the government continued its long-established practices:

> "Freedom of expression, association and assembly continued to be severely curtailed and the authorities showed little tolerance of dissent. Critics of the government's human rights record were punished. Former detainees at Guantánamo Bay returned to Libya by US authorities continued to be detained; one died in custody, apparently as a result of suicide. Foreign nationals suspected of being in the country irregularly, including refugees and asylum-seekers, were detained and ill-treated. An official investigation began into the killing of prisoners at Abu Salim Prison in 1996 but no details were disclosed and some of the victims' relatives who had campaigned for the truth were arrested. Hundreds of cases of enforced disappearance and other serious human rights violations committed in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s remained unresolved, and the Internal Security Agency (ISA), implicated in those violations, continued to operate with impunity."[153]

Finally, when the protesters took on the streets in January 2011, they met the same fate as their predecessors in the 70s and 80s. Ironically, the attempt to quell the dissent with violence, a feature that had underlined the tone of al-Qaddāfī's 42-years-long rule, ushered its undoing.

4.2.2 State breakdown

Syria

The civil war in Syria brought about what can only be described as a complete state collapse. Although the Syrian Arab Republic continues to formally exist to this day, the regime does not exercise control over large swaths of its territory. As the civil war intensified and the rebel groups grew in strength, many areas in the Northern, Eastern, and Southern parts of the country (although the Lebanese-Syrian border area has also been contested) fell outside of the regime's control.[154] By 2013, al-Assad's foothold was confined to the area of Damascus (although even the capital city was not free of rebel activity), the area of the Mediterranean coast and the corridor that connects the two areas[155] while the rebel groups and the Kurdish militias took control of the majority of

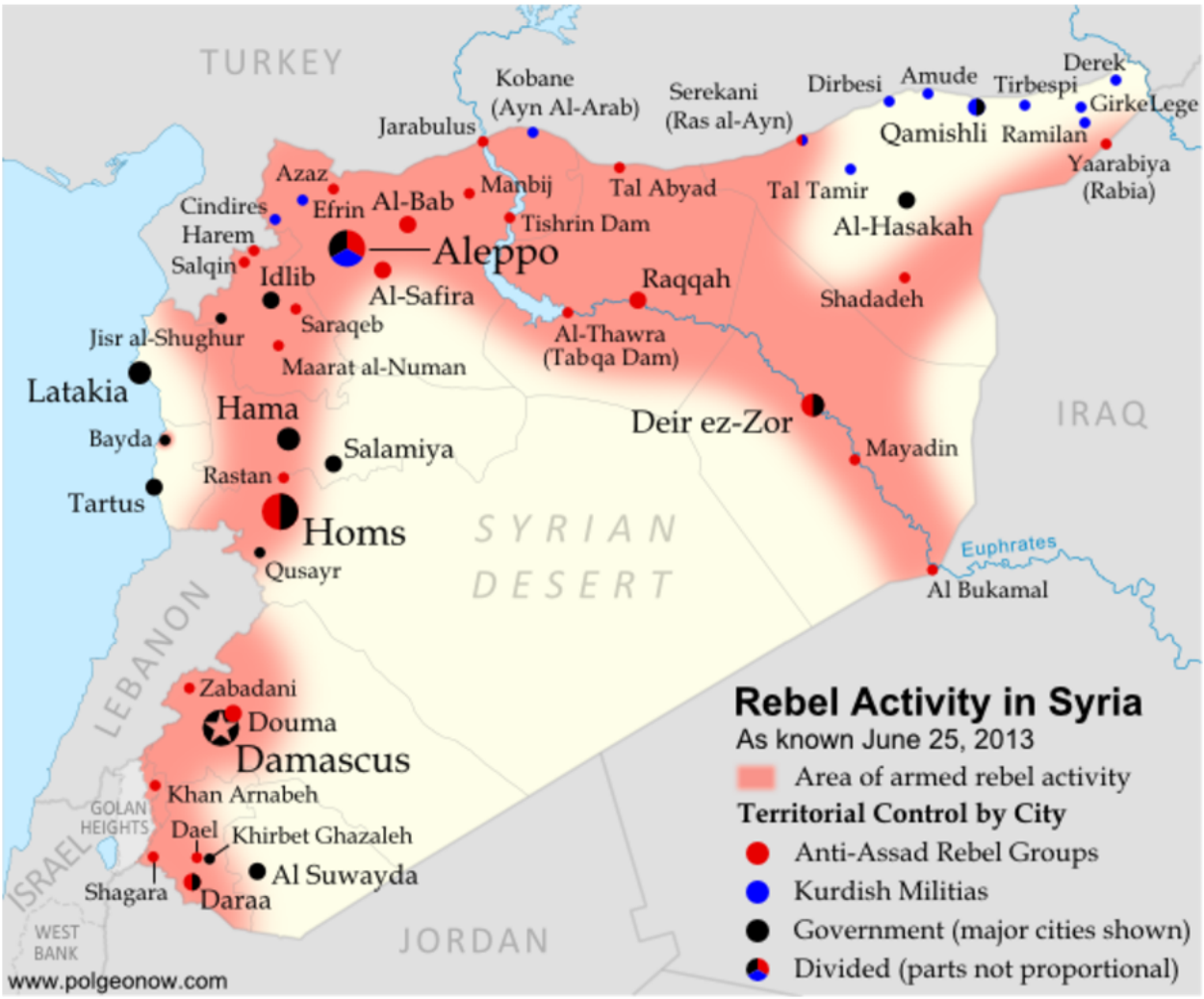
[153] (2010). Annual Report: Libya 2010. *Amnesty International*. Retrieved from: http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/annual-report-libya-2010?page=show

[154] (2016) BTI 2016 — Syria Country Report, p. 2.

[155] *Ibid*, p. 5.

Northern Syria and contested or partially took over other areas that were previously claimed by the government, such as Aleppo, Homs, or Darʿā.[156]

Picture I. *Rebel Activity in Syria, 2013*



Source: http://www.polgeonow.com/2013/06/syria-civil-war-map-june-2013.html

As early as 2011, in parts of the country that became too precarious to handle, the regime delegated use of force to paramilitary forces such as the *shabīha* gangs or Hezbollah that operated within the framework of *ad hoc* security units called National

[156] (2013, June 25). Syria Civil War Map: June 2013 (#10). *Political geography Now.* Retrieved from: http://www.polgeonow.com/2013/06/syria-civil-war-map-june-2013.html

Defence Forces.[157] Without any formal training or sense of accountability, this pro-regime "civil defence"[158] failed to maintain rule of law and often worked towards the opposite, which rendered vast areas in Syria without any legal protection or formal guarantee of security. Fear became the means of governance in these territories[159], which further alienated the frustrated population and set grounds for the appeal of the alternatives, be it secular rebels or al-Qāʿida affiliated extremists.

The destabilization of the regime is well illustrated by the Fragile State Index (FSI)[160] which skyrocketed between 2011 and 2016:

Year	***FSI***
2008	90.1
2009	89.8
2010	87.9
2011	85.9
2012	94.5
2013	97.4
2014	101.6
2015	107.9
2016	110.8

Al-Assad's Syria was already not faring well before the civil war broke out, as the *violations of human rights*, *legitimacy of the government*, and the *presence of vast numbers of* (Iraqi) *refugees* dragged the Syrian FSI down between 2008 and 2011. When the civil war unravelled in 2012, the seemingly stabilizing trend was dramatically altered. Four categories within the Syrian FSI surpassed the 9 point mark on the threat

[157] (2016) BTI 2016 — Syria Country Report, p. 5, 6.

[158] *Ibid,* p. 10.

[159] *Ibid,* p. 3.

[160] The Fragile State Index (or the Failed State Index, as it was formerly known) is a sum of 12 values ranging from 1 through 10, where the particular values represent the state's fragility within different threat categories (such as mounting demographic pressures, uneven economic development along group lines, or suspension or arbitrary application of law).

scale, as *Vengeance-seeking group grievance* joined the three aforementioned. A year later, the *Crumbling security apparatus* followed suit.[161]

Libya

Although the first democratic elections in the history of the country were held in 2012, the results did not satisfy everyone as many militias that took part in the overthrow of the al-Qaddāfī regime found themselves excluded from the government at the expense of the General National Congress (GNC) and the Islamists.[162] In order to prevent escalation of violence, the new government allowed members of these militias to partake in running certain governmental departments or provided them with material support, which only boosted their legitimacy claims as well as enhanced their fighting capabilities. Ultimately, the number of militias mushroomed "well beyond the number that actually fought against Qaddafi".[163]

Since the anti-Qaddāfī sentiment that united the opposition was no longer present, the rebel groups started pursuing their own parochial interests. Moreover, given the historical and demographic divisions within Libya, certain parts of the country never accepted the new Tripoli overlords and established parallel authority structures, allying themselves with the militias as a means of protecting their areas.[164]

The second general elections of 2014 were far from the (relative) success of those in 2012, as violence accompanied the voting process which corresponded with the staggering decrease in turnout, falling from 60% in 2012 to mere 18%.[165] In the following weeks, two power blocks consolidated. One around the House of Representatives (HoR) that consists of the newly elected parties in 2014 and is supported by the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army (LNA) of General Khalīfa Haftar, and the other around the pro-Islamist General National Congress (GNC) that

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[161] (2017). Fragile State Index. *Fund For Peace*. Retrieved from: http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/

[162] (2015, January 10). Libya's Civil War: That it should come to this. *The Economist*. Retrieved from: http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21638123-four-year-descent-arab-spring-factional-chaos-it-should-come

[163] Wehrey, F. (2014, September 24). Ending Libya's Civil War: Reconciling Politics, Rebuilding Security. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Retrieved from: http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/09/24/ending-libya-s-civil-war-reconciling-politics-rebuilding-security

[164] *Ibid.*

[165] (2015, January 10). Libya's Civil War: That it should come to this.

was elected in 2012 and refused to hand over power to the HoR. Although a UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) was formed in 2015, there was no clear delineation of responsibilities and little willingness on the part of the two parallel parliaments to give up their powers. In January 2016, the House of Representatives held a vote of no confidence of the GNA and withdrew its support of it.[166] Shortly after, the conflict between the two power blocks regained intensity.

The lack of security became the most significant problem of Libya. The country is awash with weapons as some estimates put the number of people under arms to 300 000 (accounting for 11% of Libya's estimated workforce) which is ten times higher than the estimated number of people who partook in overthrowing al-Qaddāfī.[167] Incidentally, there is a myriad of actors pursuing their own parochial interests without any ambition of substituting regular governmental structures. By January 2017, Libya has been broken down to many parts, with most of the areas in the Northeast being controlled by the LNA whilst the rest of the country has been divided amongst a plethora of various groups, ranging from Islamist militias to tribal forces. Overall, the abundant presence of the militias is especially a problem as it makes any attempts to reinstitute the governmental grip on the rest of the country virtually impossible and the situation is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

As in the case of Syria, the Fragile State Index illustrates the deteriorating trend very well. Before the civil war, Libya could have been considered – by African standards – a stable country, ranking 7th amongst her African counterparts in 2010 in terms of FSI. However, the time period between 2011 and 2012 brought a dramatic increase of instability culminating in the overthrow of the al-Qaddāfī regime and gained another momentum in 2014 and 2015 when the civil war was reinvigorated:

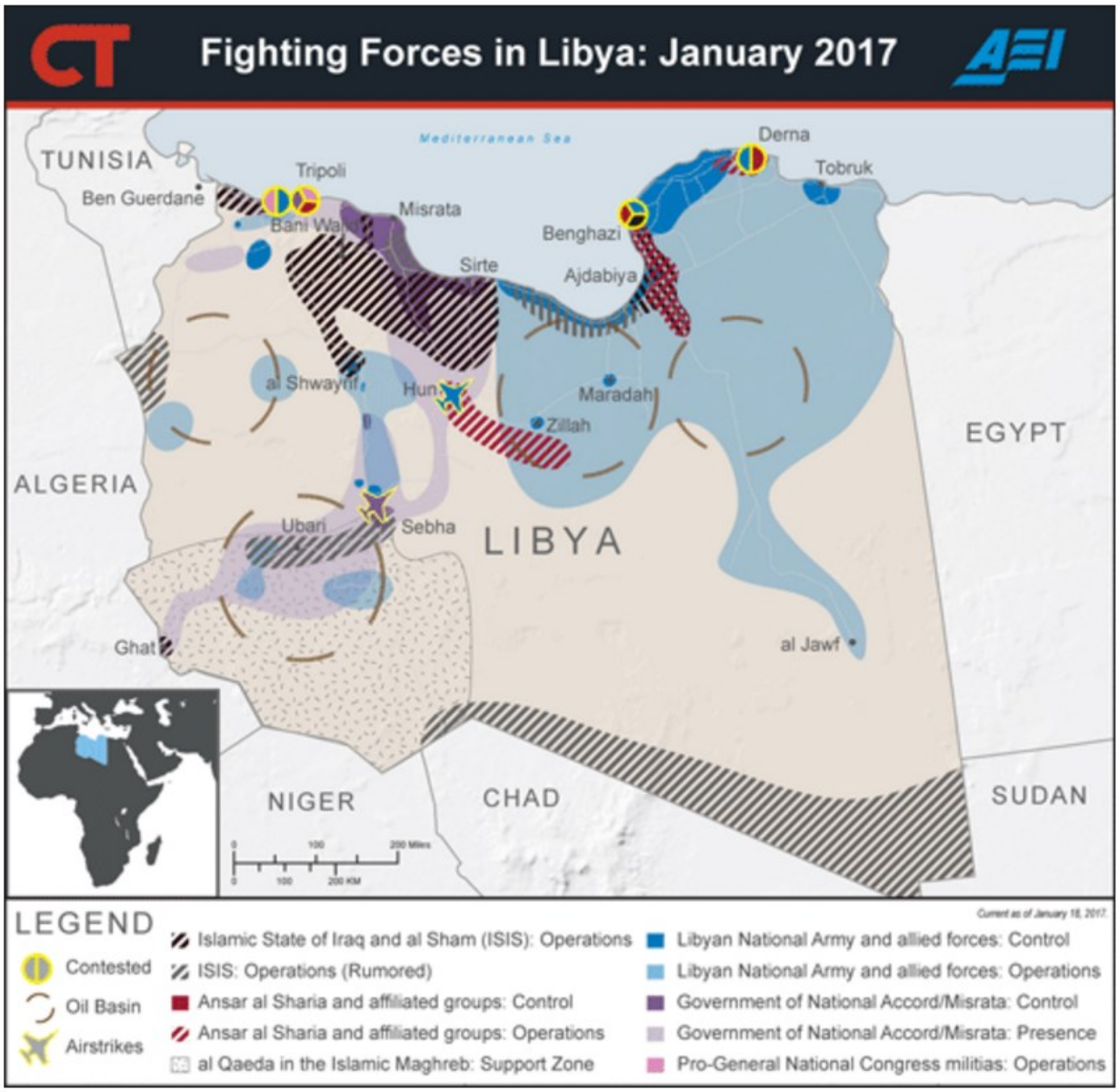
Year	***FSI***
2008	70.0
2009	69.4
2010	69.1
2011	68.7

[166] Al-Warfalli, A. (2016, August 22). Libya's eastern parliament votes against U.N.-backed government in Tripoli. *Reuters.* Retrieved from: http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-un-idUSKCN10X1DY

[167] Cordone and Associated Press in Schnitt, J. (2015), p. 13.

2012	84.9
2013	84.5
2014	87.8
2015	95.3
2016	96.4[168]

Picture II. The map of the fighting forces in Libya, 2017



Source: https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/fighting-forces-in-libya-january-2017

[168] (2017). Fragile State Index. *Fund For Peace*.

4.2.3 Violent Civil War

Syria

Constituting the biggest humanitarian catastrophe of the 21st century, the Syrian civil war has been extremely destructive. Aside from the enormous damage done to the country's infrastructure that is estimated to have been $163.3 billion by 2016[169], the loss of human life and the suffering imposed on the Syrian population has been staggering. The estimates have significantly varied, with the more conservative ones putting the death toll to 250 000 violent deaths while others have estimated as many as 470 000 by 2015. Additionally, within the same time frame there had been 1.2 million people injured, 4.8 million fled the country and 7.6 million had been internally displaced.[170]

The brutality of the conflict has been astounding and the civilian population bore the brunt of it. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry established in 2011 under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council reported the fighting parties committed numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity.[171] While none of the actors seems to have been exempted from these transgressions, the regime forces had been the most fervent perpetrators of these:

> "Government forces and their associated militias committed war crimes while rampaging through cities, towns and villages perceived to be opposition strongholds in areas including Homs, Idlib, Hama, Damascus and Aleppo governorates. They carried out indiscriminate attacks that killed or injured thousands of civilians. Many of the deaths resulted from the government's improper use of imprecise battlefield weapons in densely populated civilian areas. In addition to dropping free-fall, unguided bombs from aircraft, security forces fired mortars, artillery, incendiary weapons and rockets in residential areas. They also used internationally banned weapons, including anti-personnel mines

[169] (2016). 365 Days of Resilience Inside Syria, p. 9.

[170] (2016). Syria's Economic Outlook- Spring 2016. *The World Bank.* Retrieved from: http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/syria/publication/economic-outlook-spring-2016

[171] (2013). Amnesty International Report 2013, p. 258, 259. Retrieved from: http://files.amnesty.org/air13/AmnestyInternational_AnnualReport2013_complete_en.pdf

> and cluster munitions, and systematically looted, destroyed and burned property and sometimes the bodies of those they killed."[172]

Aside from the neglect for or the intentional inflicting of collateral damage, the regime and associated militias used excessive force to suppress protesters, targeted the wounded and the medical personnel that provided treatment on the battlefield and elsewhere[173], conducted assassinations of regime-critical journalists, or held people in indefinite detention. The prisons have been especially a gruesome sight with torture and ill-treatment leading to many deaths of the inmates (including children) in custody.[174] In 2013, an informant who called himself Caesar leaked photos of estimated 11 thousand people that were "tortured to death by the Syrian intelligence services, who sought to catalogue the crime meticulously".[175] Tens of thousands forced disappearances perpetrated mostly by the regime[176] and extrajudicial executions conducted in various degrees by all sides involved had been commonplace.[177] The impunity that has plagued the Syrian conflict brought about an acute need for restoration of law and order, often at any cost.

Libya

Although the period following the first general elections can be perceived as relatively peaceful, after the second elections of 2014 the country invariably descended into chaos as the old government did not recognize the newly elected one and both remained unable (and unwilling, as their security often relied on them) to disarm and disband the militias and monopolize use of force.[178] The fight for legitimacy spiralled into actual fighting which has only increased in intensity over time. Amnesty International reported in 2013 that "Armed groups on all sides of the conflict committed war crimes, including direct attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks using imprecise weapons such as

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[172] *Ibid,* p. 259.

[173] The regime enacted anti-terrorist laws that rendered providing medical treatment to the members of the opposition an act of supporting the terrorists. [(2016) BTI 2016 — Syria Country Report, p. 12.]

[174] (2013). Amnesty International Report 2013, p. 258-261.

[175] (2016) BTI 2016 — Syria Country Report, p. 12.

[176] *Ibid,* p. 12.

[177] (2013). Amnesty International Report 2013, p. 258.

[178] Schnitt, J. (2015), p. 13.

mortars and artillery shells, killing and injuring scores of people".[179] Extrajudicial killings have been perpetrated by all actors involved and harassment, intimidation, and torture of political opponents as well as mafia-style tactics such as abductions and racketeering have been a regular feature.[180]

Overall, it is very difficult to faithfully estimate the loss of life in Libya. During the anti-Qaddāfī struggle various sources put the death toll to as few as few as 2082[181] while others estimate as many as 30 000 dead[182] although the latter figure has been likely inflated. The death toll of the second civil war has oscillated between 4900[183] and 5200[184]. Aside from violent death, the conflict has also generated mass displacement of people, estimated to have affected over 350 000.[185]

4.2.4 Economic distress of the population

Syria

Four decades of the Alawī dominated political landscape in Syria took its toll on the economic situation of the majority of the population. Initially, Hāfiz al-Assad pioneered several successful motions to modernize the country that brought, for example, electrification, irrigation systems, or industrial and technical advancements.[186] However, combination of mismanagement, inefficiency, and cancerous corruption caused many of

[179] (2016). Amnesty International Report 2016/2017: The State of the World's Human Rights. *Amnesty International*, p. 234. Retrieved from: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2017/02/amnesty-international-annual-report-201617/

[180] *Ibid*, p. 234, 235.

[181] Uppsala conflict data program, Libya: Number of deaths. *Department of Peace and Conflict Research*. Accessed 2017, May 13. Retrieved from: http://ucdp.uu.se/#country/620

[182] Nordland, R. (2011, September 16). Libya Counts More Martyrs Then Bodies. *The New York Times.* http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/17/world/africa/skirmishes-flare-around-qaddafi-strongholds.html

[183] Libya Body Count. [Death toll figures from 2014 through 2016]. *Libya Body Count*. Accessed 2017, May 13th. http://www.libyabodycount.org/

[184] Uppsala conflict data program, Libya: Number of deaths.

[185] (2016). Amnesty International Report 2016/2017, p. 235, 236.

[186] Reich, B. (1990). *Political Leaders of the Contemporary Middle East and North Africa: A Biographical Dictionary*. Greenwood Publishing Group, p. 56. ISBN 9780313262135

his policies to fail.[187] Large informal sector and a network of crony capitalism structures emerged[188], excluding vast majority of the population from economic participation.

The advent of Bashār al-Assad's presidency brought economic opening, or rather a continuation of a series of selective economic openings called *intifah*s that were embraced by his father. However these openings were but mere ploys to open up the "Syrian markets for new business opportunities which were mainly used to award privileges that garnered support for the young president".[189] The clientelist network of a crony capitalist class the Ba'ath party had created and nurtured over the decades had been one of the main targets of criticism by the opposition movement.[190] Still, the first decade of the 21st century saw positive developments in the Syrian economy. The Gross National Income (GNI) increased from $4.68 billion in 2000 to $6.17 billion in 2010 as well as the Human Development Index (HDI) which grew from 0.589 in 2000 to 0.645 in 2010.[191] However, it is important to point out the benefits of these positive developments had not been distributed equally and the growth was not reflected in private consumption.[192]

Regarding the period following the outbreak of the civil war, solid data have been very difficult to obtain. Moreover, if data are available they often only refer to a population of selected geographical areas (mostly the ones controlled by the government) and scarcely account for the entire country. However, the available data unequivocally suggest the situation has been free falling since 2010. The stark deterioration in health, education, and income caused the HDI to plummet from the 2010 level to 0.575 in 2013[193] (and continued to decrease to as little as 0.443 in 2015 as estimated by the UN

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[187] Reich, B. (1990), p. 59, 60.

[188] (2013). Socioeconomic Roots and Impact of the Syrian Crisis. January 2013. *The Syrian Center for Policy Research*, p. 9, 10. Retrieved from: http://www.fao.org/docs/eims/upload/310686/SyrianCentrePolicyResearch%20SocioEconomicRootsAndImpactOfSyrianCrisisJan2013.pdf

[189] (2016) BTI 2016 — Syria Country Report, p. 4.

[190] *Ibid*, p. 4.

[191] Human Development Data (1990-2015). *United Nations Development Programme.* Retrieved from: http://hdr.undp.org/en/data/trends/#

[192] (2013). Socioeconomic Roots and Impact of the Syrian Crisis, p. 18.

[193] Human Development Data (1990-2015).

Development Programme[194]), which translated to a loss of twenty years of human development.[195]

Other indicators have been equally worrying. The *UNDP Syria Annual Report 2015* shows the mortality rate has increased with a staggering speed from 70.5 years in 2010 to astounding 55.4 years in 2015.[196] By 2013, the number of people relegated below the poverty line has been increased since 2010 by 3.1 million.[197] Overall, the number of people living in poverty more than doubled since the start, climbing from 35.2% (2007 – last available World Bank data[198]) to 85.2% (2015), while 69.3% of Syrians found themselves in the state of extreme poverty. The UN projected some 13.5 million people in Syria will need humanitarian assistance in 2016.[199]

Naturally, the provinces that have historically been the poorest have been affected the most. In the provinces of Deīr az-Zūr, al-Hasakah, and al-Raqqah the situation exacerbated to the point where unemployment rates soared from already alarming 60% before the civil war to staggering 90%. The inflation climbed to 400%. Incidentally, it were these areas the extremists established the most stable foothold in as they were able to provide salaries and protection to the destitute locals.[200] Last but not least, Syrian economist Jihad Yazigi singled out a nefarious trend of a burgeoning 'war economy' that has created "incentives for some individuals and groups to prolong the conflict."[201]

Libya

During the al-Qaddāfī years, the immense wealth from the natural resources was used to solidify power and pacify the population instead of enriching it. The dictator "used state-owned enterprises, restrictions on foreign trade and foreign investment, and subsidies for food, fuel, and other goods and services to cultivate loyalty and prevent the

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[194] (2016). 365 Days of Resilience Inside Syria, p. 9.

[195] (2013). Socioeconomic Roots and Impact of the Syrian Crisis, p. 12.

[196] (2016). 365 Days of Resilience Inside Syria, p. 9.

[197] *Ibid*, p. 12.

[198] Syrian Arab Republic. *The World Bank.* Retrieved from: http://data.worldbank.org/country/syrian-arab-republic

[199] (2016, March 11). Syria: The story of the conflict. *BBC.* Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868

[200] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 177, 178.

[201] (2016) BTI 2016 — Syria Country Report, p. 16.

emergence of alternative power bases" which lead to concentration of wealth in the hands of the favoured elite.[202] Moreover, the lack of structural planning and diversification of the country's sources of revenue left the Libyan economy "almost entirely dependent on oil and gas exports"[203] while the private sector remained underdeveloped.[204] When the civil war broke out in 2011 and then again in 2014, the crude oil production was impaired significantly, falling to a third of the production in 2010[205] which dramatically decreased the revenue, plunging the country into a deep economic crisis.

However, despite the unfavourable structural conditions the situation following the regime collapse was much calmer and Libya was "in contrast with Afghanistan, Iraq, other postwar situations in Africa, and even the Balkans, […] relatively wealthy on account of its energy resources and so less desperate for financial assistance from the international community".[206] The standards of living were quite decent for at least a portion of the population, with the average Libyan making $12,284 a year in 2010. Also, the Libyan infrastructure "was left mostly intact, in part due to the attention NATO military planners had taken to minimize damage to key infrastructure, such as oil production facilities".[207] However, the lack of stability and security that followed the first post-election period and the outbreak of the second civil war squandered the seemingly favourable economic conditions for Libya's peaceful transition.

Naturally, the civilian population suffered the most. It is estimated that by 2005, only 7.4% of the Libyan population was living below the poverty line[208] which was a lower rate than that of the Netherlands.[209] The civil war and the ensuing economic collapse

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[202] Chivvis, C. S.; Crane, K.; Mandaville, P.; Martini, J. (2012). Libya's Post-Qaddafi Transition. *RAND Corporation*, p. 11. Retrieved from: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR100/RR129/RAND_RR129.pdf

[203] (2017, January 12). Libya. *The CIA World Factbook.* Retrieved from: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html

[204] Chivvis, C. S.; Crane, K.; Mandaville, P.; Martini, J. (2012), p. 11.

[205] (2017, January 12). Libya. *The CIA World Factbook.*

[206] Chivvis, C. S.; Crane, K.; Mandaville, P.; Martini, J. (2012) p. 1.

[207] *Ibid,* p. 1.

[208] (2010, January 15). Libya Economy 2010. *Countries of The World.* Retrieved from: http://www.workmall.com/wfb2010/libya/libya_economy.html

[209] Chengu, G. (2016, September 14). Libya: From Africa's Richest State Under Gaddafi, to Failed State After NATO Intervention. *Global Research.* Retrieved from:

plunged a full third of the Libyan population into poverty by 2011.[210] The Human Development Index took a freefall from 0.756 in 2010 to 0.706 in 2011, essentially returning below its 1995 value.[211] "The living conditions, including access to clean drinking water, medical services, and safe housing, […] all declined as the civil war has caused more people to become internally displaced, further straining local resources."[212] Moreover, "lack of funding to finance imports, especially subsidized food, generated chronic shortages in basic commodities and expansion of black markets activities. This situation was exacerbated by households attempting to stockpile food. Inflation averaged 9.2 percent in 2015, mainly driven by a 13.7 percent rise in food prices. Prices of flour and bread quintupled."[213] The healthcare system has also been on the brink of collapse, as "60% of public hospitals in areas of conflict had shut down or become inaccessible"[214] which left around 1.3 million people with "no access to life-saving health care services and resources"[215]. The UN expected the same amount of people would be in need of humanitarian aid by 2017.[216]

4.2.5 Presence of Islamic radicalism

Syria

Although Syria hosted a very active branch of the Muslim Brotherhood which gradually radicalized after it was outlawed by the Ba'ath party in 1964 and attempted several Islamist uprisings in the 70s and the 80s[217], the al-Assad regime managed to keep the Islamists pacified, mostly through application of harsh measures:

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http://www.globalresearch.ca/libya-from-africas-richest-state-under-gaddafi-to-failed-state-after-nato-intervention/5408740

[210] Chivvis, C. S.; Crane, K.; Mandaville, P.; Martini, J. (2012), p. 11.

[211] Human Development Data (1990-2015).

[212] (2017, January 12). Libya. *The CIA World Factbook.*

[213] (2016, March 13). Overview: Libya. *The World Bank.* Retrieved from: http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/libya/overview

[214] (2016). Amnesty International Report 2016/2017, p. 234.

[215] (2017). Libya's Economic Outlook- April 2017. *The World Bank.* Retrieved from: http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/libya/publication/economic-outlook-april-2017

[216] (2016). Amnesty International Report 2016/2017, p. 234.

[217] Seale, P. (1989). *Asad, the struggle for the Middle East.* Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 3. ISBN: 0520069765

> "Suspected Islamists and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, which remained outlawed in Syria, faced arrest, prolonged detention and unfair trials, mostly before the SSSC[218]. Defendants convicted of belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood are routinely sentenced to death and then have their sentences immediately commuted to 12-year prison terms. Hundreds of suspected Islamists and others accused of security offences were believed to be held at Sednaya Military Prison and other prisons, and to be subject to harsh treatment regimes."[219]

It wasn't until the outbreak of the civil war when radical Islamism made its full Syrian comeback. The emergence of a number of extremist groups pioneered by an-Nusra set the groundwork for a Sunnī insurgency and created a network of patronage, privilege, contacts, and partially sympathetic locals that was later exploited by the Islamic State.[220]

Libya

While enjoying a relative degree of freedom under King Idris, the Libyan Islamist movement was severely repressed during the al-Qaddāfī era. Through imprisonment and torture, the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood were forced to officially dissolve the organization and remain underground for the rest of the 1970s.[221] In the 1980s, the Brotherhood – or the Libyan Islamic Group (LIG), as the movement renamed itself to – experienced a short revival. However, al-Qaddāfī managed to imprison or execute most of its members by the middle of the decade[222] and the movement did not resurface until late 1990s when it opened a diffident dialogue with the regime.[223]

Aside from the mainstream Islamism represented by the Muslim Brothers, Libya has also been a host of Islamic radical groups, most prominently the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). After several unsuccessful attempts to overthrow the regime in late 1980s, the group experienced its most prolific years in the second part of the 1990s when it conducted numerous "operations against the Libyan regime, including several

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[218] Supreme State Security Court, tasked with prosecution of political and national security trials.

[219] (2010). Annual Report: Syria 2010.

[220] Gerges, F. A. (2016), p. 191.

[221] Zelin, A. Y. (2013). World Almanac of Islamism: Libya. *American Foreign Policy Council,* p. 2. Retrieved from: http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/Zelin20130405-AFPC.pdf

[222] Ashour in Zelin, A. Y. (2013), p. 2, 3.

[223] Zelin, A. Y. (2013), p. 3.

failed attempts to assassinate (sic) Qadhafi himself".[224] However, by the end of the millennium the regime managed to launch an effective anti-terrorist campaign and decimated the LIFG, as most members of the group were either killed, captured, exiled in London, or seeking refuge in Afghanistan.[225] A period of reconciliation with the al-Qaddāfī regime ensued and in 2009, LIFG proclaimed armed struggle against the Libyan government as un-Islamic and established that *jihad* is only to be waged in countries invaded by infidel armies.[226]

Despite the fact that by the time the civil war broke out the Libyan radical Islamist movement was defunct and leaderless, the state breakdown allowed new jihadist groups to emerge. As early as 2011, Ansār ash-Sharī'a emerged in Benghāzī and Derna, the Imprisoned Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahmān Brigades conducted several attacks against Western targets, and al-Qāʿida central made moves towards establishment of its Libyan cell.[227] Later in 2014, the expansion of the Islamic State in Libya was facilitated by the very fact a dense network of radical Islamist groups was already laid down.

4.2.6 Overriding rivalry of the main players

Syria

Upon its arrival in Syria, a tenuous truce emerged between the Islamic State and the regime forces. At the time al-Assad was too busy fighting the more immediate threat of the secular opposition that posed an acceptable alternative for the West, and did not militarily engage the arriving jihadists of the Islamic State. Moreover, this neglect was likely intentional. Facing a defeat, al-Assad was desperate to gain international support by labelling the revolution a terrorist plot to overthrow his regime and the presence of a violent extremist group with connections to al-Qāʿida was, therefore, considered a favourable development de facto confirming his narrative.[228] Therefore, in the initial stage the regime did very little to fight the Islamic State. However, this inaction backfired as it allowed the Islamic State to establish itself in the country and garner

[224] *Ibid,* p. 4.

[225] *Ibid,* p. 5.

[226] Ashour in Zelin, A. Y. (2013), p. 5.

[227] Ashour in Zelin, A. Y. (2013), p. 10.

[228] Kilcullen, D. (2016), p. 76.

necessary strength to undertake its infamous expansion of 2014. Lastly, the regional powers also failed to act as neither Turkey nor Saudi Arabia listed the Islamic State as the primary threat, fearing instead the possibility of an independent Kurdish state in case of the former and expansion of Iranian influence in case of the latter[229], which gained the Islamic State a tacit approval of both.

Libya

For similar reasons, the Islamic State was not the main target for either of the power blocks that emerged in the post-Qaddāfī Libya. According to Claudia Gazzini, International Crisis Group's senior analyst for Libya, as long as the military confrontation between the HoR and the GNC continues, there will be little prospect of concerted effort against IS and other jihadist groups.[230] As for international actors, little had been done to counter the Islamic State's presence in Libya as it was not until 2015, when Egypt launched a series of air strikes, retaliating for the videotaped murder of the 21 Coptic Christians.[231] Only as late as August 2016 the United States launched a sustained aerial campaign against the organization in Libya, supporting the LNA attempts to take over Sirte and the surrounding areas[232] and continued the strikes in January, targeting IS training camps in the desert.[233]

4.2.7 Means of funding

Syria

The Islamic State's ability to fund itself has already been discussed in this paper. Aside from its ability to extract revenue through taxing the population under its control, the other main sources of financial means stem from operating the oil infrastructure,

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[229] Kilcullen, D. (2016), p. 163, 164.

[230] (2015, May 27). The Limits of the Islamic State in Libya. *International Crisis Group.* Retrieved from: https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/limits-islamic-state-libya

[231] (2015, May 27). The Limits of the Islamic State in Libya.

[232] Joscelyn, T. (2017, January 19). US bombs 2 Islamic State camps south of Sirte, Libya. *The Long War Journal.* Retrieved from: http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/01/us-bombs-two-islamic-state-camps-south-of-sirte-libya.php

[233] Starr, B. (2017, January 20). US bombs ISIS camps in Libya, dozens killed. *CNN.* Retrieved from: http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/19/politics/us-airstrikes-libya-isis/

engaging in illicit trade, and managing the bank institutions located in the captured territory.

Regarding the oil revenues, after taking over the areas in Northern Syria and Iraq the organization was to some extent capable of exploiting the existing oil infrastructure by either selling oil products locally or smuggling it around through the black market networks that burgeoned in the chaos of the civil war. Regarding the banks, the hard cash IS obtained by capturing them and generated by actually managing them as banking institutions allowed it to partially protect itself from the coalition's efforts to disrupt its financing by freezing its assets.[234]

Libya

Libyan natural resources make it the wealthiest country in Africa as it sits on 47.1 billion barrels of proven oil reserves.[235] The oil infrastructure is administered by the National Oil Corporation (NOC), one of the few remaining institutions that remained functional despite the fragmented political landscape in the country.[236] However, given the central governmental authority is absent, the NOC has to rely on armed militias for security of its infrastructure. "In the southwest, the El Feel and Sharara oil fields, together Libya's largest, are controlled by GNA allies the 3rd Force from Misrata, but the pipeline linking them to the coast is blocked by Zintani militias and the shipping terminal is controlled by allies of the Tripoli PFG. To the east, although Haftar's Libyan National Army controls some fields in the Sirte Basin, the connected export facilities are mostly held by groups currently aligned with the GNA."[237]

The fragmented nature of the security network makes the oil infrastructure vulnerable. Given there are numerous actors that control different parts of it with varying degrees of combat readiness, other militias such as the Islamic State will be poised to exploit their weakness and challenge their position. Although some experts suggested smuggling oil

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[234] Financial Action Task Report. (2015), p. 12, 13.

[235] Chivvis, C. S.; Crane, K.; Mandaville, P.; Martini, J. (2012), p. 11.

[236] Wintour, P. (2017, March 29). Struggle for control of Libya's oil threatens to deepen conflicts. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/29/struggle-for-control-of-libyas-oil-threatens-to-deepen-conflicts

[237] Shennib, G.; Alexander, C. (2016, July 5). Libya Oil Deal Doesn't Mean It's Ready to Pump More Oil. *Bloomberg.* Retrieved from: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-07-04/libya-oil-squeezed-by-political-stalemate-and-islamic-state

in Libya is not an option because, unlike in Iraq where a long tradition of oil smuggling has been established, such tradition is non-existent in Libya[238], selling oil abroad is not necessarily the only way the Islamic State could take advantage of a captured oil storage or refinery. First of all, the organization needs to supply its highly mobile insurgency with fuel (refining oil for its own use was one of the ways the Islamic State took advantage of the captured refineries in Iraq and Syria).[239] Secondly, the argument that there is no tradition of oil smuggling in Libya might be a hindrance to such efforts but the extraordinarily developed network of illicit trade and black market is likely to be conducive for such activity. Finally, as we have seen in Syria, IS has been willing to sell energy to its direct enemies[240] and the endemic corruption in Libya grants conducive environment for such trade.

Aside from the oil industry, the illicit economy that has blossomed since the start of the civil war is another easily accessible and lucrative funding opportunity. The "collapse of Libya's security sector and its porous borders have created fertile conditions for transnational criminal networks. Libya's location at the crossroads between Europe, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa makes it a desirable location for traffickers looking to reach European markets." The main markets are weapons, drugs, smuggled goods, and, last but not least, migrants. The 2015 Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime and RHIPTO estimated the migrant trade alone might be worth 255-323 million USD.[241]

As for the banks, it is difficult to predict whether the Islamic State could exploit the banking system in Libya in a similar fashion it did in Syria and Iraq. Naturally, there is little information available on the vulnerability of the Libyan banks to forceful takeovers and from the few pieces of reporting on the matter it seems the Islamic State has rather struggled. In Sirte, the organization "closed all local banks and turned one of them, the Bank of Commerce and Development, into the ISIS-run House of Islamic Money, which provides US dollars and Euros as well as Libyan currency to its members

[238] Schnitt, J. (2015), p. 20.

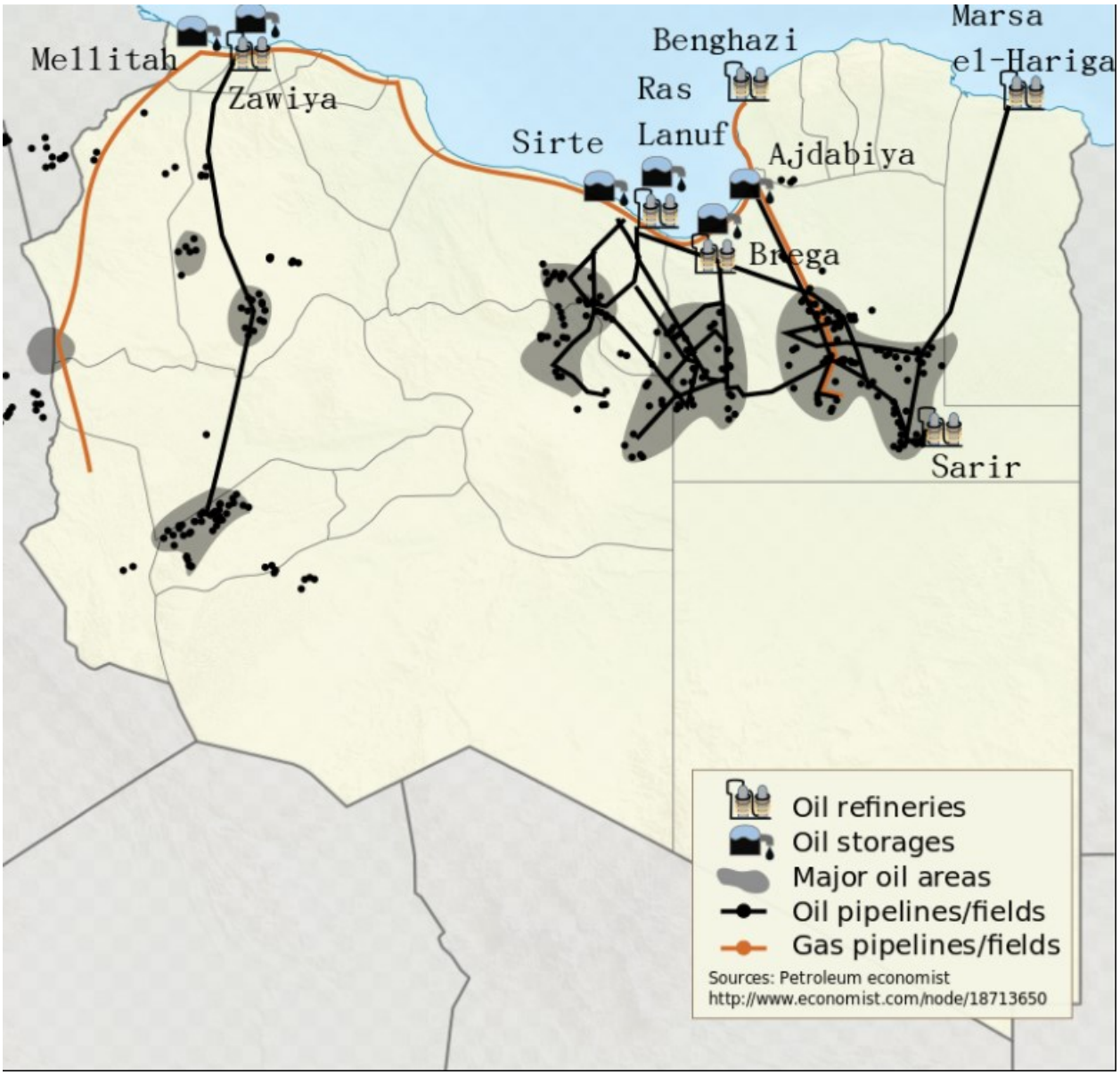
[239] Financial Action Task Report. (2015), p. 13, 14.

[240] Faucon, B.; Al Omran, A. (2017, January 19). Islamic State Steps Up Oil and Gas Sales to Assad Regime. *The Wall Street Journal.* Retrieved from: https://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-steps-up-oil-and-gas-sales-to-assad-regime-1484835563

[241] Schnitt, J. (2015), p. 14.

but not to the public".[242] Although the reasons for doing so are unclear, it is clearly a divergence from the strategy of the paternal organization. It is especially strange given one of the three branches of The Central Bank of Libya seats in Sirte.

Picture III. *Libyan oil infrastructure*



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oil_reserves_in_Libya#/media/File:Libya_location_map-oil_%26_gas_2011-en.svg

[242] (2016, May 18). "We Feel We Are Cursed": Life under ISIS in Sirte, Libya. *The Human Rights Watch.* Retrieved from: https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/05/18/we-feel-we-are-cursed/life-under-isis-sirte-libya

4.2.8 Sectarianism

Syria

As already discussed at length, the decades of Alawī domination and the overtly sectarian nature of the regime's response to the revolution created deep division along sectarian lines that were readily exploited by the extremists. The religious composition of the Syrian population is indeed fragmented. The majority – 68.4% of the population – adheres either to the Shāfi'ī or Hanāfī rite of the Sunnī faith, 11.3% are Alawīs, 11.2% Christian (various rites), 3.2% Druze, 2.1% Ismaīlī Shī'a, 1.3% Nusaīrī, 1.1% Imāmī Shī'a and the list is concluded by a small percentage of Yezīdīs and Alevīs.[243]

Libya

While the composition of the Libyan population is by far not monolithic, the divisions run along ethnic lines instead of religious identities. The religious demographics is dominated by Islam (making up 97% of the population), followed by small numbers of Christians (2.7%), Buddhist (0.3%), Hindus (<0.1%), Jewish (<0.1%), followers of folk religion (<0.1%), unaffiliated (0.2%) and others (<0.1%).[244] The vast majority of Libyan Muslims are adherents of the Mālikī branch of Sunnī Islam. The Shī'a are virtually non-existent in Libya, except for expatriate workers[245], whilst the other two Muslim minorities, the Ibādīs and Sūfīs, make up only a fraction of the Libyan population.[246] Even though there were attacks with sectarian motivation aimed against Sūfī shrines[247], these sects are barely visible on the Libyan political scene and it is unlikely that politicizing this sectarian divide would generate any momentum.

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[243] Izady, M. (2010). Syria: Religious Composition in 2010. *Columbia University.* Retrieved from: http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Syria_Religion_Detailed_lg.png

[244] (2017, January 12). Libya. *The CIA World Factbook.*

[245] (2016, January 16). Pakistani Ahmedis held. *Libya Herald.* Retrieved from: http://www.libyaherald.com/2013/01/16/pakistani-ahmedis-held/#axzz4h2wFWwAe

[246] Minority Muslim Groups. *Islamopedia Online.* Retrieved from: http://www.islamopediaonline.org/country-profile/libya/religious-minorities/minority-muslim-groups

[247] (2012, August 25). Libya Sufi shrines attacked 'by Islamist hardliners'. *BBC.* Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-19380083

Regarding the ethnic division, 97% of Libyans are of Arab-Berber origin, while the remaining 3% are composed of Greeks, Maltese, Italians, Egyptians, Pakistanis, Turks, Indians, and Tunisians.[248] The social fabric is based on tribal affiliations comprised of 140 known tribal networks, many of them being further divided into several branches and clans.[249] These divisions, however, are unlikely to be exploited for two reasons. First, the tribal network is very complex and there is no clear delineation between the ethnic groups (a recent study has shown that close to 90% of the Arabs living in Libya actually claim an Arabized Berber heritage[250]). Furthermore, jihadism in Libya never had a "distinctly tribal character".[251] Second, the Islamic State was never interested in abusing ethnic division in Syria and Iraq and nothing in its ideological toolbox suggests it should change. Actually, the organization has never championed Arab nationalism. It has embraced a pan-Islamist approach and spoke about a "caliphate encompassing all Muslims."[252] This is also manifested in the make-up of its ranks. The Islamic State has been quite clearly an equal opportunity movement that absorbed different ethnic groups such as Chechens, Kurds, Turkmens[253], as well as Caucasian Westerners.

4.3 The missing enabler

To sum up the comparison of the two theatres, all the enablers with the exception of sectarianism are to varying extents relevant in Libya:

[248] (2017, January 12). Libya. *The CIA World Factbook.*

[249] Libyan People. *Temehu.* Retrieved from: https://www.temehu.com/Libyan-People.htm

[250] Libyan People. *Temehu.*

[251] Wehrey, F.; Alrababa'h, A. (2015). Rising Out of Chaos: The Islamic State in Libya. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.* Retrieved from: http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=59268

[252] Jaeger, L. (2017). Islamic State in Libya. In Varin, C.; Abubakar, D. (Eds.), *Violent Non-State Actors in Africa.* Cham: Springer International Publishing, p. 91. Online ISBN: 9783319513522. Retrieved from: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/9783319513522_4

[253] Weiss, M.; Hassan, H. (2015), p. 170.

	ENABLER	RELEVANT	REASONING
1)	*Dictatorship*	Yes	Just like Syria, Libya experienced four decades of dictatorial rule marred with human rights abuses, suppression of individual freedom, and concentration of wealth among a narrow group of elites.
2)	*State breakdown*	Yes	The ability of the Libyan state to govern its territory, monopolize use of force and provide for the needs of the population was severely impaired or non-existent in certain parts of its territory.
3)	*Violent civil war*	Yes	The Syrian civil war brought about a conflict that has been significantly more violent. However, the situation on the Libyan ground resembles Syria in terms of the civil war's features such the lack or complete absence of security in certain areas, the unchecked rampaging of militias, or the dysfunctional justice system and it cannot be discarded despite the fact it has not reached the staggering intensity of the conflict in Syria.
4)	*Economic distress of the population*	Yes	As in the case of the *Violent civil war*, although the scope of the humanitarian catastrophe that befell Syria is not comparable with Libya, the fact that a third of the Libyan population lives below the poverty line and approximately a fifth of it is in need of humanitarian aid renders a very significant portion of Libyans in economic distress.
5)	*Means of funding*	Yes	The combination of abundant oil reserves, fragile security of the oil infrastructure, and the availability of a flourishing black market and illicit trade networks provides environment that is conducive to the IS funding practices.

6)	*Presence of radical Islamism*	Yes	Although the traditional Libyan jihadist movement was obliterated by the al-Qaddāfī security apparatus, newly established jihadist groups have been present and active in Libya ever since the outbreak of the 2011 civil war.
7)	*Overriding rivalry of the main players*	Yes	At the moment, the ongoing power struggle between the HoR and the GNC ruled out the possibility of a concerted effort against the Islamic State.
8)	*Sectarianism*	No	Sectarianism is not present in Libya. Although the country hosts a small numbers of divergent Muslim sects, it is very unlikely the divide could be politicized and give the IS momentum similar to the one it gained in Syria or Iraq.

In the final chapter I will assess the campaign of the Islamic State in Libya and connect the prediction made by the J. S. Mill's method of a difference with the actual developments on the ground.

5. The Caliphate expands ... and stalls

5.1 The first expansion

Following the Iraqi blitzkrieg of spring 2014, it became apparent the Islamic State's expansion will inevitably surpass the borders of the region. On October 5th, roughly three months after the caliphate was declared in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State fighters paraded a military convoy through the streets of Derna, marking the first successful attempt of the organization to expand elsewhere in the world.[254]

It comes hardly as a surprise Derna was the first Libyan city where the Islamic State sowed its seeds. First of all, a systematic social, economic, and political neglect by the central government plagued the city for several decades. Since the living conditions were steadily deteriorating and the unemployment rates rising, numerous Derna youth sought the answers in the call of radicalism[255], earning the city a nickname "hotbed of radical Islamism"[256]. After it became apparent neither the revolution was going to address the problems of the Libyan people[257], their numbers only increased.

When a group of Libyan veterans of the al-Battar brigade returned from Northern Syria[258] to its hometown, Derna was already sprawling with groups of Islamist radicals. The veterans joined forces with a newly established Young Muslims Shura Council (YMSC), a group that splintered from the Derna wing of Ansār ash-Sharī'a.[259] Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, well aware of the window of opportunity that had opened up, sent Abū al-Barā al-Azdī and Abū Habīb al-Jazrāwī to assess the situation and "collect the pledge of allegiance to the Caliph".[260] Shortly after the *baī'a* was collected, al-Baghdādī announced the establishment of three Libyan provinces, naming them Barqa

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[254] Kotra, J. F. (2015). ISIS enters the Stage in the Libyan Drama – How the IS Caliphate expands in Northern Africa. *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, p. 8. Retrieved from: https://www.ict.org.il/UserFiles/ICT-ISIS-in-Libya-Kotra.pdf

[255] Eljarh in Schnitt, J. (2015), p. 21.

[256] Wehrey, F.; Alrababa'h, A. (2015).

[257] Eljarh in Schnitt, J. (2015), p. 21.

[258] Kotra, J. F. (2015), p. 15.

[259] *Ibid*, p. 15.

[260] Wehrey, F.; Alrababa'h, A. (2015).

(Cyrenaica), Tarābulus (Tripolitania), and Fezzan.[261] Abū Nabīl al-Anbārī, another prominent figure of the Islamic State, was dispatched from Syria to oversee the takeover of the city.[262]

The spell of the Islamic State in Derna was, however, short-lived. After several shock and awe attacks against the local figureheads and the murder of 21 Egyptian Copts, it came under severe pressure from Egyptians and later on from the LNA and the Shura Council of Mujahideen in Derna, an umbrella organization associating various jihadist organizations in the city.[263] While the attempt of the former failed due to internal disputes, the latter managed to push the Islamic State out of Derna by July 2015, denying it the time and space to fully entrench itself in the city.[264] Furthermore, the dispersed IS forces were attacked and significantly reducedd by the LNA in the suburbs of Benghāzī and in Sabratha.[265] Although the organization is still active in this region, it does not control territory, "let alone govern".[266]

As the pressure in Derna mounted, the Islamic State refocused its attention to the West. Encountering virtually zero resistance, on February 19th 2015 their military convoy entered the city of Sirte. Benefiting from the network set up by the Benghāzī wing of Ansār ash-Sharī'a[267], the Islamic State consolidated its position in the city and eventually came to spread its area of control to a 120-mile stretch of coastline.[268] By the spring of 2016, the organization was at its finest. The U.S. officials speculated its

[261] Porter, G. D. (2016), p. 1.

[262] Cruickshank, P.; Robertson, N.; Lister, T.; Karadsheh, J. (2015). ISIS Comes to Libya. *CNN*. Retrieved from: http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/18/world/isis-libya/index.html

[263] Porter, G. D. (2016), p. 1.

[264] *Ibid,* p. 1.

[265] *Ibid,* p. 1.

[266] *Ibid,* p. 1.

[267] Wehrey, F.; Alrababa'h, A. (2015).

[268] El Amrani, I. (2016, February 18). How Much of Libya Does the Islamic State Control? *Foreign Policy.* Retrieved from: https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/how-much-libya-does-islamic-state-control

strength was up to 6000 fighters[269], whilst other sources such as the French suggested it might be double the figure[270].

However, the organization met the same fate it did in Derna. Due to lack of ability of the other militias to engage in a concerted campaign against IS, it was not until May 2016 – at that point, the organization was at the peak of its expansion, eyeing the prospect of taking over Misurata, the 3rd largest city in Libya – when the militias realized the threat an increasingly strong IS posed and launched an offensive against it. Supported by the U.S. from the air, the *ad hoc* coalition expelled IS from Sirte on December the 7th.[271]

5.2 Playing by the playbook

Although so far the Libyan campaign seems to have been a fiasco, the Islamic State has clearly attempted to follow the blueprint of its Syrian/Iraqi success. Just as it was the case with al-Jūlānī, the likes of al-Anbārī or al-Azdī were supposed to bring military expertise and organizational skills and try to replicate the successful model of expansion.[272] It exploited existing jihadist networks, tried to exercise governance in the controlled territory, subdued the local population using a carrot and stick approach, undermined the state to deepen the power vacuum, and tapped in similar sources of funding as the parent organization.

First and foremost, the Islamic State has made the most of the already existing jihadist structures. It is no coincidence its most intensive presence occurred in Derna, Sirte, and Benghāzī, all Ansār ash-Sharī'a strongholds. For one, Ansār ash-Sharī'a in Derna and in Benghāzī served as a reliable source of recruits. A targeted campaign to recruit the group's members caused a spree of defections to the Islamic State, either for ideological or opportunistic reasons. In Sirte, the Islamic State even stationed a renowned Bahraini

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[269] (2016, April 7). Department of Defense Briefing by Gen. David M. Rodriguez. *U.S. Department of Defense.* Retrieved from: https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/715846/department-of-defense-briefing-by-gen-david-m-rodriguez/

[270] El Amrani in Porter, G. D. (2016), p. 2.

[271] Morajea, H.; Abi-Habib, M. (2016, December 5). Libyan Forces Claim Full Control of Former Islamic State Stronghold Sirte. *Wall Street Journal.* Retrieved from: https://www.wsj.com/articles/libyan-forces-claim-full-control-of-former-islamic-state-stronghold-sirte-1480957488

[272] El Amrani, I. (2016, February 18).

cleric Turkī al-Binālī to win over recruits through his preaching.[273] Interestingly, as Larissa Jaeger pointed out, in Libya the Islamic State has not spared with criticism anyone except for radical groups[274], as it seems they are interested in incorporating them as whole, coherent units instead of merely drawing in single members. The recruits, however, do not hail from Libya alone. They have come from a plethora of countries, namely from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia (whose recruits make up the most significant non-Libyan portion of the IS in Libya), Egypt, Chad, Sudan, Senegal, Mali, Yemen, Afghanistan, or Bangladesh.[275] Finally, aside from strengthening its ranks with their recruits, the Islamic State has also built on the social work the particular groups, but especially Ansār ash-Sharī'a engaged in, such as providing education, cleaning services, or policing work.[276]

The effort to act as a governing entity is very clear in Libya. Since the defunct state institutions cannot maintain the infrastructure and rule of law, the Islamic State is poised to step in its place. In the initial phase, the organization reaches out to the aggrieved locals[277], acting like a non-profit organization rather than an armed militia. It engages in public service activities such as cleaning the roads, organizing charity events to support the poor, or regulating the traffic.[278] These efforts are, naturally, meticulously documented and boasted about on the IS twitter page.[279] Proselytizing is a major part of the initial courting as well, manifested through preaching[280], establishment of religious advisory centres or organization of qur'anic competitions.[281] Improving employment opportunities is also on the agenda. In this regard, the ambition to govern on the part of

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[273] Wehrey, F.; Alrababa'h, A. (2015).

[274] Jaeger, L. (2017), p. 89.

[275] (2016, May 18). "We Feel We Are Cursed": Life under ISIS in Sirte, Libya.

[276] Zelin, A. (2015, August 6). The Islamic State's Burgeoning Capital in Sirte, Libya. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. Retrieved from: http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-states-burgeoning-capital-in-sirte-libya

[277] (2016). A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players. *European Council on Foreign Relations.* Retrieved from: http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/mapping_libya_conflict

[278] Lacher in Schnitt, J. (2015), p. 21.

[279] Lefler in Schnitt, J. (2015), p. 21.

[280] Wehrey, F.; Alrababa'h, A. (2015).

[281] Zelin, A. (2015, August 6).

IS is underlined by a de facto HR campaign to recruit locals with administrative skills who could help with the administration of the city.[282]

However, mimicking a non-profit organization is only a small part of how IS establishes control over the infiltrated city. Along with the public services and proselytizing activities, the organization monopolizes use of force, targeting first the groups that engage in looting to bring about the sense of order and justice.[283] Once unrivalled in the military terms, it harasses or eliminates potential political rivals or other actors who do not fit within the IS governing framework, such as judges or the police.[284] Similarly to the organization's behaviour in Syria and Iraq, upon recognition it cannot govern as an independent actor it aligns itself with the local power structures, namely the tribes or the ex-Qaddāfī loyalists whose support is crucial.[285]

The fear factor comes in a little later. Once the organization feels confident enough, it gradually starts applying the draconian rule, with public beheadings, floggings, stoning, and amputations being commonplace.[286] To announce itself to the world, it launched a series of shock an awe brutality, starting with the attack in the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli that was followed by a video-taped mass execution of 21 Coptic Christians from Egypt. Later, the same fate befell 29 Ethiopian Christians as they were executed in the very same, orange jumpsuit-like fashion.

Since governing a handful of cities is not the end game for the Islamic State, the organization has also focused on the Libyan state itself. As it has not been strong enough to stand up to the LNA nor the GNC militia cluster, it has tried to undermine the financial resources of the actors. Well aware of the oil dependency (exports of which composed staggering 96% of the government's revenue[287]), the Islamic State launched a sustained campaign to damage the oil infrastructure.[288] Although it seems to be contrary to the Syria/Iraq *modus operandi* where the IS took over the oil wells and refineries rather than destroyed them, it is necessary to acknowledge in Libya these facilities are

[282] Kotra, J. F. (2015), p. 17.

[283] Khalaf in Schnitt, J. (2015), p. 21.

[284] Schnitt, J. (2015), p. 36.

[285] Zelin, A. (2015, August 6).

[286] El Amrani, I. (2016, February 18).

[287] U.S. Energy Information Administration in Jaeger, L. (2017), p. 91.

[288] Shennib, G.; Alexander, C. (2016, July 5).

not placed in a complete vacuum and are much less easily accessible as they are already controlled by the rivalling militias. It is quite likely the Islamic State has the ambition to operate the oil infrastructure as it does in Syria and Iraq but at this point – and it is also necessary to recognize it has been generating revenue by controlling the oil infrastructure to a limited extent already[289] –, the more immediate goal of weakening the opposition trumps any longer-term considerations.

As aforementioned, although the Islamic State has managed to generate a limited amount of oil revenue in Libya, it has by far not reached the scope and scale of the Syrian/Iraqi enterprise. Instead, it focused on other sources of revenue such as taxing, smuggling[290], human trafficking, sales of antiquities, or resale of the spoils of war.[291] Taxing has been especially the focus of the group. Spanning from shāri'a-compliant taxes and taxes on business through "collecting tariffs on goods and vehicles on the coastal highway that runs east and west of the Sirte as well as on the highway heading out of town to the south"[292] or on the usage of criminal routes that ever increasingly span through Libya.[293]

The last though the most important item in the IS's playbook, fanning and exploiting sectarian hatred, has not been achieved. In religious terms, the Libyan society is very uniform and no division was significant enough to have been exploited. Although the members of the al-Battar Brigade showed a thorough indoctrination with takfīrism when they had laden the statement announcing the group's establishment with vitriolic anti-Shī'aism[294], upon their return to Libya there was no significant object for this doctrine to be applied. The group did attack several Sufī shrines or its worshippers, but the Sufīs are neither a significant political force nor they are supported by an external actor[295] – as it was the case, for example, with the Iraqi Shī'a and Iran – to generate a vengeful backlash and the spiralling violence we witnessed in Iraq and Syria.

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[289] Jaeger, L. (2017), p. 92.

[290] Schmitt, E. (2016, February 21). U.S. Scrambles to Contain Growing ISIS Threat in Libya. *The New York Times.*

[291] Porter, G. D. (2016), p. 2.

[292] Porter, G. D. (2016), p. 2.

[293] Schmitt, E. (2016, February 21).

[294] Wehrey, F.; Alrababa'h, A. (2015).

[295] Porter, G. D. (2016), p. 3.

Concluding thoughts and the future of the Islamic State in Libya

Although the initial incremental successes of the Islamic State in Libya suggested a certain trend, the fears that Sirte might be a new Raqqa[296] have been unsubstantiated. As I have established in this paper, Libya exerted very similar structural conditions for the IS successful insurgency yet the absence of a relevant sectarian grievance caused the group never to have gained the prominence it rose to in Syria and Iraq.

The Libyan campaign has been, for the most part, a faithful attempt to replicate the Syrian/Iraqi model of expansion. However, the Islamic State was unable to create nor exploit an existing societal divide as the divisions within the Libyan society were both rather weak as well as impossible to activate within the hyper-sectarian framework of the IS ideology. Although – for a time being – the group managed to portray itself as a 'guarantor of order and safety' in Derna and Sirte, this status could not have been elevated to the 'guarantor of survival'. Because of that, the initial popular support (be it involuntary or voluntary) was never strong enough to give IS the momentum it achieved in Syria and Iraq.

The Islamic State in Libya has been now reduced to its Southern part, with small cells scattered across the rest of the country. Although it is clear it will still remain a violent threat, it will "be a poorer and more constrained organization, deprived of personnel, revenue, and the fundamental narrative tropes of governance and sectarianism".[297] It is very likely that its behaviour will manifest in two ways. First, it will act as a guerrilla movement that strikes and withdraws into its safe haven, at least until it does not regain enough confidence and strength to make a comeback. Second, it is likely to be more active in the "traditional style of terrorism by targeting population centers, police academies, and militia bases with suicide attacks."[298]

However, it should not be written of completely. As Tarek Megerisi observes:

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[296] LaFranchi, H. (2016, January 11). ISIS attacks on Libya: Why oil might not be its top goal. *Christian Science Monitor.* Access through EBSCO.

[297] Porter, G. D. (2016), p. 1.

[298] Megerisi, T. (2016, November 28). Libya's Hollow Victory Over the Islamic State. *Foreign Policy.* Retrieved from: http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/11/28/libyas-hollow-victory-over-the-islamic-state/

> "While the anti-Islamic State forces may have breached the jihadis' bastion, the environment that spawned the threat in the first place persists. The state is powerless, the economy is dysfunctional, and the country is plagued by violence and instability, making Libya a breeding ground for numerous other threats to itself, its neighbors, and the surrounding region."299

Indeed, the Islamic State has proven to be an incredibly resilient organization that is capable of surviving near death experiences, reconsolidating itself and lashing out when it is least expected, that is abilities that are were likely to drive its re-emergence on the Libyan battlefield. Yet, the evidence suggests a triumphant Mosul-like victory is fairly unattainable.

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[299] *Ibid.*

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List of abbrevations

AQI	al-Qāʿida in Iraq
GNA	Government of National Accord
GNC	General National Congress
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
HoR	House of Representatives
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Shmās
LNA	Libyan National Army
NOC	National Oil Corporation
NTC	National Transitional Council
YMSC	Young Muslims Shura Council