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Defence & Security

THE BIG SPIN

Corruption and the growth
of violent extremism

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The Big Spin

Corruption and the growth of violent extremism

“Religious corruption, financial corruption, political corruption, and administrative and societal moral decadence. All of this you get in countries ruled by tyrants and not in #State_of_the_Caliphate #The_Islamic_State”

-@Americacrimina

7/11/2014

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Introduction

Extremist violence and terrorism make daily headlines. The instinct in liberal democracies is to frame these threats in terms of a global confrontation of values, the force of radical Islam pitched against the prevailing world order. But foreign policy narratives that focus on ideology overlook the exploitative governing structures and state predation that enables extremist groups to thrive. Corruption is the most powerful weapon in the armoury of violent extremism.

Corruption enables extremist movements in three ways. First, extremist groups draw on deep public anger at the abuse of power as a means to radicalise and recruit, and to deepen sectarian divisions. In Yemen, Houthi rebels initially portrayed themselves as a force to counter government corruption.¹ In Afghanistan, the Taliban challenged the legitimacy of the government's corrupt judiciary and promised law and order through Sharia Courts; government corruption, not religious radicalism, was the movement's greatest recruitment tool.² As this research shows, anti-corruption, security and justice are often central narratives in radical movements' efforts to boost legitimacy and support, as well as serving to foment suspicions of those external foreign forces or governments which are then viewed as complicit or, in some cases, a driving force behind corruption.

Second, corruption in state institutions is a practical facilitator for extremist groups. Links to organised crime on one side and to corrupt officials on the other facilitate financial and arms flows. In Libya and in Iraq, the operations of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have relied on smuggling, criminality (including human trafficking) and corruption of officials, even as they portray themselves as an alternative to the abusive, corrupt systems in power.³

But as dangerous as corruption is in driving support for or facilitating violent extremism, the effect on those forces expected to provide security is devastating. Corruption hollows out state institutions that could and should check extremist forces, especially as they resort to violence. In Iraq, the presence of an estimated 50,000 ghost soldiers among the ranks of the Army meant that nobody could stand in the path of ISIS as it took over Mosul, and similar problems have affected the fight against Boko Haram in Nigeria.⁴

This research illustrates how corruption strengthens extremist groups. The first case study focuses on ISIS's use of corruption in recruitment narratives: communications that seek to portray the group as a countervailing force for moral purity, for political integrity and for reliable public service delivery. The second case relies on interviews with fighters operating within the ISIS *wilayat*, or overseas territories in Libya and the Sinai Peninsula, and illustrates how corruption and weakness of state institutions has enabled ISIS units. The third vignette traces the effects of corruption on security forces in Iraq and their catastrophic failure to push back the IS advance on Mosul. Finally, we shift the lens to Nigeria and consider the role of corruption in the rise of Boko Haram. The findings confirm a pattern: corruption has served as a rallying call for extremist groups, facilitated terrorist acts, while in some cases rendering government and defence institutions incapable of responding.

¹ Diana Alghoul, "Beyond the Sunni-Shia Narrative in Yemen," Middle East Monitor, accessed August 26, 2015, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/middle-east/18556-beyond-the-sunni-shianarrative-in-yemen>.

² Sarah Ladbury and the Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), 'Testing Hypotheses on Radicalisation in Afghanistan', Independent Report for the Department of International Development, Kabul, August 2009.

³ Fazel Habrany, Shalaw Mohammed and Luke Harding, 'Inside Islamic State's oil empire: how captured oil fields fuel ISIS insurgency', The Guardian, 19 November 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/19/-sp-islamic-state-oil-empire-iraq-isis>; Loulla-Mae Eleftheriou-Smith, 'Isis and Italy's mafia "working together" to smuggle cannabis from North Africa into Europe', The Independent, 19 April 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-and-italy-s-mafia-working-together-to-smuggle-cannabis-through-north-africa-into-europe-a6991451.html>; UN Security Council Resolution 2199, 12 February 2015, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc11775.doc.htm>.

⁴ Suadad al-Salhy, 'How Iraq's 'ghost soldiers' helped ISIL,' Al Jazeera, 11 December 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/how-iraq-ghost-soldiers-helped-isis-2014121072749979252.html>

1. ISIS's corruption narratives

Will Cafferky, Jordache Horn, Stefanie Nijssen

Corruption and the abuse of official power have been a common feature of discourse among ISIS members, supporters, and sympathisers. In contrast, the group has sought to present themselves as an alternative model of governance, free of corruption, administratively efficient and a provider of justice and security, bound together by a moral and political integrity. This research draws on a mixture of primary and secondary source material emanating from ISIS, including promotional materials released by ISIS, Twitter posts by sympathisers, members and supporters, and interviews conducted with former and present members.

The research found that ISIS draws on narratives related to corruption and uses legitimate grievances surrounding the corruption, nepotism, bribery, and theft of public funds to justify its activities. Four main narrative themes emerged:

1. **Grand corruption:** ISIS propaganda on social media have regularly referenced systemic corruption by governments in the region, including the extensive plundering of state funds, nepotism, as well as the bribery of officials. The world is characterised in binary terms, with the group presenting itself as free from these vices and characterised by moral virtue, religious legitimacy and purity.
2. **ISIS as provider of security, justice and welfare:** ISIS fighters, supporters, and those living within ISIS-controlled areas have frequently expressed discontent and dissatisfaction with corrupt judiciaries. The group draws on this frustration and attempts to portray an idyllic picture of life under ISIS rule - portraying themselves as an effective judicial system and an alternative provider of government services.
3. **A response to sectarian divisions and inequality:** ISIS messaging has also tapped into a deep sense of discrimination felt by Sunni groups. ISIS regularly refers to regional governments' violations of the rule of law through targeting of Sunni groups. Again, the group portrays itself as the answer, able to deliver security and justice for the marginalised.
4. **The West and its allies as complicit in corruption:** ISIS has labelled members of the international community, especially the US and the West, as corrupt, and their allies in the region as complicit in their malfeasance and moral decay.

The antidote to grand corruption: The ISIS as pure, moral and clean

ISIS propaganda depicts a binary world order - a utopian Islamic state, free from vice, embodying moral virtue, religious legitimacy and purity. The construct may be simplistic, but ISIS draws on legitimate grievances surrounding the nepotism, bribery, and theft of public funds prevalent within Iraqi and Syrian politics in appealing to potential recruits. Grand corruption is a broad term for acts committed at a high level of government that distort policies or the central functioning of the state, and enable leaders to benefit at the expense of the public good, providing an important context.⁵ *The Management of Savagery*, one of ISIS's fundamental texts, that specifically refers to the diversion of resources and abuse of state institutions to protect a narrow elite:

The first: The power of the masses (quwwat al-shu'ḡb). [...] From time to time, there is a defanging of some of the masses who wake up from heedlessness by means of the armies and police of these states, which consider this duty to be their fundamental task, for which they accumulate wealth (al-amwwl wa al-`ata). (This endeavor) protects these regimes or protects the circuit of the ruling regime in the orbit of one of the two superpowers.

The second:... The second power that can return society to justice and to its belief system and values - even if it is partially according to the Sunna - is the power of armies. (The states) lavishly plundered money upon them and buy them off so that they do not perform this function, but rather the opposite.”⁶

The text also notes that oppressors will suffer for their actions: “And because He is a wise, just Lord who abstains from oppression, He will never allow the oppressor to oppress and corrupt without punishing him for his actions.”⁷ The accusation that Middle Eastern governments are corrupt has also featured prominently in less formal sources as well, including the ISIS publication, the *Dabiq* magazine:

Don't you see the allies of the tawāghīt [tyrants]? Don't you see those who spread corruption on the Earth? Don't you see the spies prowling amidst the lands? Don't you see the fighter jets above them protecting them? Are you fighting so that these people can rule the blessed land of Shām?⁸

The term “*tawāghīt*” – roughly translated as “tyrants” – is deployed in this passage as a synonym for the governments of Iraq and Syria. And throughout all 14 issues of *Dabiq* magazine analysed as part of this report, “*tawāghīt*” is often preferred to more conventional terms such as ‘government’, or ‘state’. In the ISIS narrative, citizens must decide between supporting tyrannical, corrupt regimes and allying with oppressed revolutionaries prepared to fight for moral and political virtue, and for the integrity of state institutions. This can also be seen in the tweets on the following page:

5 Transparency International. “FAQs on Corruption.” N.d. Accessed June 7, 2016. Available from: http://www.transparency.org/whoweare/organisation/faqs_on_corruption

6 Abu Bakr Naji. “The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass,” translated by William McCants. May 23, 2006, accessed June 10, 2016. Available from: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf>

7 Abu Bakr Naji. “The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass,” translated by William McCants. May 23, 2006, accessed June 10, 2016. Available from: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf>

8 *Dabiq* Magazine. Issue 10. Al-Sham is a blessed and sacred land that Allah destined to be the place of revelations, the birthplace of prophets and a refuge for godly men. Al-Sham (Greater Syria) is bordered by the Euphrates River on the northeast and Egypt on the southwest. Its major cities are Damascus, Jerusalem, Nabulus, Homs, Halab, Amman, Beirut, Askalan, Gaza, Saida; Sur, Tripoli, Ba'labek, Manbij and Al-Ma'rah.

Translation: Religious corruption, financial corruption, political corruption, and administrative and societal moral decadence. All of this you get in countries ruled by tyrants and not in #State_of_the_Caliphate #The_Islamic_State



Translation: And who opposes the Islamic State? Drunkards who are afraid of *hudoob punishments*; a corrupt official who spends his whole life living from bribes; the morally promiscuous and morally degenerative; the religious leader who scavenges his religion.⁹



ISIS as a provider of justice & security

As ISIS gained territory in Syria and Iraq, the group took over basic government functions: establishing a police and justice system, collecting taxes, running municipal and health services, building roads and providing access to water and electricity.¹⁰ As well as the consolidation of territorial gains, efforts have appeared aimed at creating a clear contrast between ISIS rule on one hand, and the corruption and perceived failures of previous regimes on the other. The ISIS offer to recruits is two-fold: a regime capable of delivering equitable security and justice, combined with the opportunity for revenge against a state that has either failed in its primary purpose.

As it gained control of new territories, ISIS has aspired to project an appearance of a sophisticated bureaucracy, seemingly with some success.¹¹ Former militants in Libya, for instance, explained that justice processes within ISIS groups are well-structured and predictable: “Those who got to go through it admit how fair it is,” said one militant.¹²

⁹ “Hudoob punishments” are a component of shari’a law. According to Khaled Abou El Fadl, “Qur’anic laws or the special class of specific ethical commandments, although a small and narrow part of the legal system, are of considerable symbolic significance. This particular set of laws includes a group of criminal sanctions that are known as the *hudoob* punishments. Underscoring the significance of the *hudoob* punishments is the fact that most of these laws implicate the mixed rights of God and human beings (*huquq mukhtalita*). The so-called *hudoob* punishments - which include lashing, stoning to death and the severing of hands - are the most controversial aspect of Shari’a law in the modern age.” From El Fadl, “Life in the Light of God: Islamic Law, Ethical Obligation and the Problem of Punishment,” ABC Religion and Ethics, 30 September 2014. <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/09/30/4097456.htm> (accessed 9/10/16)

¹⁰ David Kilcullen, *Blood Year. Islamic State and the Failures of the War on Terror*, London: Hurst and Company 2016, pp. 94-95, 133.

¹¹ Aaron Zelin. “The Islamic State Has a Consumer Protection Office,” *The Atlantic*, June 12, 2014, accessed June 10, 2016. Available from: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/the-isis-guide-to-building-an-islamic-state/372769/>

¹² Interviewed by Abdallah Handawy, Libya, 2015

The ability to offer security is also a significant theme in ISIS's messaging. Twitter posts compare life under ISIS with that which can be had under corrupt governments:

Translation:

#The_13th_anniversary_of_the_occupation_of_Iraq, The areas ruled by the Islamic state, people live in security, whereas areas governed by Rafida (Shia Muslims), people live in fear"



Translation: "Muslims today need the Islamic State system, which is honest, just, safe, and do not need a government that is ruled by gangs, tribes and hypocrisy."



Available evidence – especially interviews with fighters and those living in territories under ISIS control – indicate that ISIS's narratives on the abuse of power resonate. In Syria, a former government employee compared the predictable brutality of ISIS with arbitrary nature of previous regimes: "ISIS are not as cruel as the regime was. [With ISIS] if you don't do anything wrong – according to their standards, not ours – they will not bother you."¹³ The attempt to depict ISIS as a haven for justice and security also runs through its official magazine, Dabiq, which has frequently featured articles claimed to be written by British captive John Cantlie. One article touts ISIS's success in establishing security and tackling corruption:

For the first time in years, Muslims are living in security and their businesses are doing a roaring trade... Shari'ah courts are established in every city and are judging by the laws of Islam. Corruption, before an unavoidable fact of life in both Iraq and Syria, has been cut to virtually nil while crime rates have considerably tumbled.¹⁴

13 Liz Sly. "The Islamic State is failing at being a state," December 25, 2014, accessed June 6, 2016. Available from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-islamic-state-is-failing-at-being-a-state/2014/12/24/bfbf8962-8092-11e4-b936-f3afab0155a7_story.html

14 Dabiq Magazine, Issue 12, pg 47.

Accounts of the swift delivery of justice, as well as the provision of safety within the Islamic State feed into the ISIS message that they are replacing the “despotic” and “crumbling” regimes in Iraq and Syria.¹⁵ This narrative is also seen on Twitter:

**Translation: “Justice, Security
#Islamic_State_In_Two_Words”**



The detrimental effect of corruption on government capacity to provide services, such as municipal management, electricity, and healthcare has played into this narrative. Corruption may mean a citizen paying a bribe in order to obtain a license, for example, or draining local government budgets, leaving no funding for garbage collection or road reconstruction.¹⁶ In Iraq, funds allocated as aid for the country’s widows and farmers mysteriously dried up in 2010, leaving critics questioning why the government were able to fund the salaries and benefits of its politicians, but not those in need.¹⁷ The failure of corrupt governments to provide basic services has led to ready recruits for ISIS. A 2015 poll carried out by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research asked which two issues Iraqis felt the government needed to address most urgently. While “security” remained the most prominent answer with 48% of respondents citing it as a top concern, corruption (43%) and the provision of basic services (37%) were the second and third most popular concerns.¹⁸

Central to ISIS’s appeal is the contention that it can govern well and provide services for citizens. Dabiq Magazine outlines the extent of healthcare provided by ISIS, for example.¹⁹ Municipal services also feature heavily among discussions of ISIS’s ability to provide for its citizens. In one video depicting life under the rule of ISIS in Raqqa, the emphasis is on public services –the footage depicts ISIS members repainting fences, fixing telephone lines and tree surgery. Reports also indicated that ISIS in 2014 completed a new market, post office, a zakat (almsgiving) office, and an electricity office that monitors electricity use levels, installs new power lines and hosts workshops on how to repair old ones.²⁰ A 2014 report noted that ISIS has a Consumer Protection Authority Office which closes shops for selling poor products in the market, confiscating and destroying counterfeit medicine.²¹

¹⁵ *ibid*, pg. 50; and Dabiq Magazine, Issue 13, pg 54.

¹⁶ Patrick Cockburn. “Iraq 10 years on: How Baghdad became a city of corruption,” The Independent, March 4, 2013, accessed June 6, 2016. Available from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraq-10-years-on-how-baghdad-became-a-city-of-corruption-8520038.html>

¹⁷ Lara Jakes. “Welfare funding runs out in Iraq.” Associated Press, November 21, 2010, accessed June 6, 2016. Available from: http://www.today.com/id/40298978/ns/today-today_news/t/welfare-funding-runs-out-iraq/#.Vw4WvxMrKRt

¹⁸ Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. “Lack of Responsiveness Impacts Mood: August – September 2015 Survey Findings,” N.d., accessed June 6, 2016. Available from: https://www.ndi.org/files/August%202015%20Survey_NDI%20Website.pdf

¹⁹ Dabiq Issue 9, pg. 25

²⁰ Aaron Zelin. “The Islamic State Has a Consumer Protection Office,” June 12, 2014, accessed June 10, 2016. Available from: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/the-isis-guide-to-building-an-islamic-state/372769/>

²¹ Abu Bakr Naji. “The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass,” translated by William McCants. May 23, 2006, accessed June 10, 2016. Available from: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf>



Video Source: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/islamic-state-health-service-video-5579232>

Support for these actions has continued online through Twitter - and alongside praise for the group’s ability to deliver these services is frequently a clearly stated comparison with central government authorities. These tweets, focussed on the work done by ISIS’s “Office of Services” in Mosul, make direct references to the impact of corruption, through the theft of public resources, on the capacity of the government to keep the streets of Mosul clean. Twitter supporters also highlight the importance of oversight over service providers.

Translation: Before, 6/10 of the streets of Mosul, were polluted with waste but today they are clean, due to extreme oversight imposed by the Office of Services.



Translation: Thieves and the corrupt ran the municipality in Mosul; the workers were lazy, and there was no oversight, while drivers stole oil that was meant to be for street cleaning cars.



Of course such claims have been highly contested. Reports from ISIS-controlled areas suggest shortages of medication, water and electricity, which have caused the spread of disease.²² While there have been reports that the group established a food kitchen in the Raqqa for the needy and an Office for Orphans, one activist told a journalist, “In Raqqa you see lines of people in front of the relief kitchens because of the severity of poverty, while elements of the organisation eat the best types of foods and boast about themselves and their 'Caliphate' on social networking sites.”²³ According to a photojournalist from Raqqa, “people have been ordered to pay 'taxes' under the pretext of funding civic services. We see almost nothing of these so-called services in many places.”²⁴ The point, however, is not that ISIS is a rational alternative to corrupt government, but that this is *the* prevalent narrative the group has drawn on to secure support.



ISIS Propaganda Video on YouTube, since deleted for violation of Terms of Service – Source: YouTube [accessed April 2016]

Sectarian discrimination

Corruption and factionalism often operate in parallel – cultivating patronage and nepotism along sectarian lines can be a successful strategy for maintaining power. Entrenched elites within Iraq, for example, have exacerbated sectarian divides to reap financial and social benefits at the expense of the majority of the population, including both the Sunni majority as well as other marginalised groups. ISIS emerged during an increasingly militarised sectarian conflict. Since December 2012, competing groups effectively presented the Sunni population with the options of protest, federalism or insurgency. And in 2012, anti-government protests turned sectarian in majority Sunni areas of Iraq. According to the Institute for the Study of War, “Within a week, the Anbar protests had emerged as the focal point of the demonstrations, with tribes from Salah ad-Din, Diyala, Baghdad, Maysan and Basra sending delegations to Ramadi. From the beginning, the imagery of the anti-government protests demonstrated a range of grievances and intentions

²² Vocativ. “To Its Citizens, ISIS Shows a Softer Side.” March 20, 2015, accessed June 10, 2016. Available from: <http://www.vocativ.com/world/isis-2/to-its-citizens-isis-also-shows-a-softer-side/>

²³ Zaid Al Fares. “Life Under Isis: Robbery, Sex Slaves, and Headless Bodies in the Street,” July 31, 2014, accessed June 10, 2016. Available from: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/life-under-isis-robbery-sex-slaves-headless-bodies-street-1459147>

²⁴ Zaid Al Fares. “Life Under Isis: Robbery, Sex Slaves, and Headless Bodies in the Street,” July 31, 2014, accessed June 10, 2016. Available from: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/life-under-isis-robbery-sex-slaves-headless-bodies-street-1459147>

among protesters. [...] Although protesters and leaders continued to call for the avoidance of sectarian slogans, the geography and iconography of the protests, as well as the demands issued by the protesters, demonstrated the emergence of a sectarian, Sunni Arab identity that defined itself largely by its grievances against the Maliki government".²⁵ Protestors articulated specific demands of the Maliki government, including several related to sectarianism, injustice and corruption:

6. *Achieve balance in all institutions of the state, especially the military, security services, and judiciary*
7. *Repeal the operations commands in all provinces and all unconstitutional elements of the security services; withdraw the army from cities and inhabited neighbourhoods in Baghdad and the provinces; remove the concrete barriers; work fervently to provide security to citizens; and devolve responsibility for security to local police.*
8. *Reinvestigate cases related to religious and national leaders inside and outside Iraq in neutral judicial forums free from political influence.*
9. *Prohibit the use of sectarian phrases and slogans in state institutions, especially in the security services and the media. [...]*
11. *End arbitrary night raids, arrest accused persons in the light of day by legal methods, and end the "secret informer" law.*
12. *Form a Federal Supreme Court of professional and non-corrupt judges who do not belong to any specific ruling party or bloc, to serve as an independent, non-politicised judiciary.*²⁶

While there is no conclusive evidence linking these protesters and the birth of ISIS, the group was quick to capitalise on the grievances articulated above, including sectarian discrimination, by offering promises of safety and justice for Sunnis.

One Iraqi photographer stated:

*"[T]he police go on arresting Sunni, torturing them and refusing to release them unless their families come up with a bribe. I know one man who was there for a week before his family paid the police \$5,000 (£3,200) to get him released."*²⁷

The message that ISIS offers protection for the Sunni population is a common theme. One resident of Fallujah who visited family in Ramadi notes that many families were leaving Ramadi because of airstrikes and shelling but that "many preferred to stay, among whom was my brother. He said that, although they are living under bombs, ISIS is far better than the Shia militia and the Iraqi army."²⁸

²⁵ Stephen Wicken. "Middle East Security Report II: Iraq's Sunnis in Crisis," Institute for the Study of War. May 2013, accessed June 6, 2016. Available from: <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Wicken-Sunni-In-Iraq.pdf>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Patrick Cockburn. "Isis, a year of the caliphate: Day-to-day life in the 'Islamic State' – where any breach of restrictive, divinely inspired rules is savagely punished," *The Independent*, June 25, 2015. Available from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-a-year-of-the-caliphate-day-to-day-life-in-the-islamic-state-where-any-breach-of-restrictive-10348151.html>

²⁸ Ibid.

Resisting a corrupting foreign influence

One of the core elements of ISIS ideology is the view that the West and its local allies are the “enemy” of the Islamic State – “apostates”, “infidels”, and “crusaders”.²⁹ ISIS highlights examples of how Western cultural influence has corrupted the local cultures in the Muslim world. ISIS portrays the governments of Iraq and Syria as participants in international corruption and asserts that those in government take advantage of external links to satisfy their own interests at the expense of their populations.³⁰ This idea is illustrated in Issue 12 of Dabiq Magazine:

*[A]merica makes the repeated mistake of backing treacherous allies who end up abandoning it when their interests collide. These allies decide then that aiding America no longer fulfills their own desires and personal glories. America backed the *tawāghīt* [tyrants] Saddam, Gaddafi, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and Bashar, all of whom later worked to serve their own personal, partisan, and sectarian interests despite American orders otherwise.³¹*

This article in Dabiq Issue 6 published under the name of the hostage John Cantlie refers to America’s interest in oil in Iraq, and to America turning a blind eye to the injustices suffered by the Syrian people under Assad’s regime:

America went back in 2003 under the pretense of “weapons of mass destruction” and the “war on terror” and, after ruining the country for its people, immediately turned the oil sales back into dollars. America would start wars and kill hundreds of thousands of people to protect the value of the dollar amongst other economic interests. This was made obvious when the US and its allies sat back and watched while Assad slaughtered more than 200,000 of the people of Syria. However, as soon as the Islamic State moved towards the oil fields of Iraq and Arabia, America immediately got involved.³²

Dabiq also quotes Cantlie expressing support for ISIS’s decision to begin minting its own coins, and references how the global economic financial system deprives people of the resources they deserve:

Of course, many central banks around the world rubbish the idea of a return to gold or a gold standard in the 21st Century, citing that it would be a huge step backwards. But it’s the job of mega bankers to rubbish gold, because if the world were to return to a monetary system based on precious metals, the control they and governments have over the country and financial health of the public would cease to exist.... The world banking system is a scam designed to feed itself and governments.³³

29 Frank Furedi. “Islamic State: Built on the West’s Cult of Victimhood.” July 28, 2015, accessed June 7, 2016. Available from: <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/islamic-state-built-on-the-west-cult-of-victimhood/17234#.VxCwLFKri70>

30 Adil E. Shamoo and Bonnie Bricker. “Why ISIS Exists.” *Foreign Policy in Focus*. March 5, 2015. Available from: <http://fpif.org/isis-exists/>

31 Dabiq Issue 12, page 45.

32 Dabiq, Issue 6, page 61.

33 *Ibid.* at page 62.

International complicity in the corruption of Iraqi and Syrian governments is also a popular theme by ISIS supporters on social media:

Translation: Arab systems of corruption accumulate money to impoverish their people and western countries support the systems, and what they call terrorism stems from the suffering.



In reply to a tweet from a Syrian journalist discussing the oppression of ISIS, the response states:

Translation: Be honest for once and compare the areas governed by the Islamic state to the territories ruled by Bashar and the corrupt opposition funded by the US.



#Panama_Papers

Arab tyrants stole the wealth of the Muslims and they allied themselves with the infidels against Muslims. And still the owners of the neighbourhood call for obedience and lack of infidels! !



Conclusions

ISIS's message is clear: governments in power are corrupt, bent towards the interests of a narrow, unrepresentative elite. They fail to provide services for their citizens; ISIS, on the other hand, is focused on justice, good governance and the provision of services.

ISIS's narratives around corruption are complex – they extend from systemic governmental corruption and kleptocracy down to the more day-to-day corruption that affects the provision of services. Messages centre on grand corruption and the misuse of the power of government for private gain, with references to a war driven by oil interests and the relationship between the banking sector and government. But they also deal with the corruption that affects people's day to day lives. They focus particularly on those issues that resonate on both a moral and practical level – like justice and security, and the role of foreign forces in their countries. And they endeavour to show that ISIS, unlike previous regimes riddled with corruption, can provide basic services that people need.

Of course, fundamentalist Islam is an important part of ISIS's narrative. But their message extends far beyond pushing religious dogma and is aimed at responding to the practical needs of the population. To many Iraqis and Syrians, these messages ring true – particularly those that have borne the weight of corrupt, inefficient governments and security forces, the impact of violent foreign interventions and decades of sectarian inequalities, alongside the inability to rely on their governments for effective basic services. Perhaps what is most concerning about the group is not its fanaticism, but its ability to unite fanaticism with messages that resonate with a frustrated public, to violent ends.

2. Corruption: a lifeline for extremist groups in Libya

Abdallah Hendawy

Although extremist groups claim to fight corrupt practices, corruption is also an essential part of their sustainability and protection. On one hand, these groups claim that states are corrupt in order to drive recruitment and justify their activities; on the other hand, they rely on corruption to enable the smuggling of arms and other commodities they need to sustain their activities.

The power vacuum and political upheaval that followed the Arab Spring have caused significant instability in the Middle East. Transnational extremist groups have swept the region and steadily expanded their reach - from ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria, to Wilait Sinai in Egypt, to Ansar El-Sharia and other pro-ISIS and pro-Al-Qaeda militant groups in Libya.

In Libya, the spread of extremist groups was facilitated by the legacy of the Gaddafi rule. Throughout his 42 years in power, Colonel Gaddafi relied on tribalism and marginalised state institutions, facilitating the rise of powerful non-state actors. By the end of Gaddafi's term, institutions such as 'government' and 'parliament' were replaced by tribal-based 'popular committees' that carried out governance, legislation and decision-making. This undermined the coherence of the state, contributed to rapid fragmentation and precipitated the divisions that took place throughout the country in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution.³⁴

Non-state actors, including militias organised along tribal and family lines, were central to shaping the post-Gaddafi period. Their possession of armaments and oil returns made them powerful and influential, and the election of a new Muslim-brotherhood backed government during the transition period did not dissolve or alter this equation.³⁵ State-building efforts were not strong enough to secure a transition to democracy and disempower non-state groups.

And it has been a vicious circle: the failure to orchestrate an inclusive political and social transition to democracy has further empowered tribal leaders and heads of the disorganised brigades who became *de facto rulers* of their provinces and ultimately created 'stateless states'. Although many of the factions and groups in Libya today were locally born, many of them are associated with regional or international networks such as Al Qaeda and ISIS.³⁶

This vignette, based on witness accounts, draws attention to the functioning of militant groups in the Libyan cities of Benghazi, Tobrouk, Derna and Jaghbub. It draws on 152 interviews conducted by the author in Libya with current and former fighters and others affiliated with the groups in early 2015. The goal of the interviews was to understand the groups' internal structures, their objectives, and the narratives they constructed and deployed.³⁷ All interviews and sources have been anonymised to protect identities, and conclusions drawn from witness accounts have been verified, where possible, against published sources.

³⁴ See for example: Jan-Erik Lane and Hamadi Redissi. *Religion and Politics: Islam and Muslim civilization*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing 2009, p206.

³⁵ Chivvis, Christopher S and Jeffrey Martini, "Libya After Qaddafi: Lessons and Implications for the Future," Rand Corporation, 2014 http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR500/RR577/RAND_RR577.pdf (accessed 25 October 2016)

³⁶ The Soufan Group, "Libya, Extremism, and the Consequences of Collapse," *The Soufan Group*, January 2016. http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/TSG_Libya-Extremism-and-the-Consequences-of-Collapse-Jan2016.pdf (accessed 25 October 2016)

And: BBC, "Guide to key Libyan militias," 11 January 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19744533> (accessed 25 October 2016)

³⁷ The precise methods used to conduct the interviews cannot be disclosed due to concern for the safety of the sources.

Witness accounts highlighted two key ways in which corruption enabled extremist groups. Similarly to ISIS units in Iraq and Syria, fighters in Libya use the perceived corruption of states in the region, as well as their affiliation with the Western-dominated system of governance, to drive recruitment and strengthen their legitimacy.

A missed opportunity: corruption and post-revolutionary transition

Like other Arab Spring protests, corruption and political repression during Gaddafi's 42-year rule were prime factors that sparked the mass protests that precipitated the fall of the regime.³⁸ Gaddafi's Libya was built on the rubble of monarchy institutions. Governing institutions were dismantled and replaced with a wide and complex network of "representative" popular committees. These committees were roughly equivalent to an elected executive authority that carried out laws and resolutions issued by the General People's Congress.³⁹ Despite Gaddafi's claim of building a 'representative' system, however, Libya's political system revolved around Gaddafi who controlled the political scene through a combination repression and the distribution of oil-generated money as patronage. In short, it was a kleptocratic regime that primarily benefitted Gaddafi himself, his family and allies.⁴⁰ Although some may argue that the National Transitional Council made a few genuine attempts to secure a smooth transition towards a modern state, violence and security challenges drained their efforts and distracted their focus, so they failed to deal effectively with underlying issues like corruption and put in place effective governance.

Corruption was therefore a key factor behind the Libyan conflict. But despite this, those in power following Gaddafi's fall failed to grip the rampant abuse of power. 66% of those interviewed for this research claimed that the post revolution period was no less corrupt than the Gaddafi era. While the transitional governments may not have been corrupt, there was an absence of political will and institutional mechanisms to combat corruption. Interviewees as well as official reports such as the Global Competitiveness Reports 2013–2015 asserted that corruption in police forces during the transition period was not limited to bribery, but that personnel lacked the efficiency, reliability, and training required to enforce law and order in Libya.⁴¹ The Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index in 2014 underlined the government's failure to implement any measures that could help minimise corruption.⁴²

The political disappointment and continuing corruption that overwhelmed the transition period, coupled with the power vacuum created by conflict, provided space for non-state armed actors to expand steadily and become key players in the political and social spheres of post-Gaddafi Libya. The National Transitional Council either lacked the interest or understanding to deal with corruption as governance structures shifted away from Gaddafi's system and towards new, post-revolution government institutions, or simply lacked the technocratic experience and knowledge to deal with corruption.⁴³

³⁸ World Bank, MENA Economic Monitor, "Inequality, Uprising and Conflict in the Arab World," International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / the World Bank, 2015. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/303441467992017147/pdf/99989-REVISED-Box393220B-OUO-9-MEM-Fall-2015-FINAL-Oct-13-2015.pdf> (accessed 14/12/16)

³⁹ Gerald Butt, "Colonel Qaddafi's Libya," BBC, 15 May 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3336059.stm (accessed 15/12/16)

⁴⁰ Johnson, Elizabeth and Maira Martini, "Corruption trends in the Middle East and North Africa region (2007-2011). U4 Expert Answer, U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, <http://www.u4.no/publications/corruption-trends-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-region-2007-2011/downloadasset/2748> (accessed 15/12/16)

⁴¹ World Economic Forum, Global Competitiveness Report Libya 2014-2015 <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2014-2015/economies/#economy=LBY> (accessed 14/12/16)

⁴² Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index, "Libya Country Report," Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014. https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2014/pdf/BTI_2014_Libya.pdf

⁴³ Mzioudet, Houda, "Libya's Other War: Fighting Corruption for Sustainable Stability: Attempts at curbing Libya's culture of corruption," Sadeq Institute, October 23, 2014. <http://www.sadeqinstitute.org/2014/10/libyas-other-war-fighting-corruption-for-sustainable-stability/> (accessed 14/12/16)

Libya's lack of strong institutions and absence of constitutions further complicated the transition. Unlike in Egypt and Tunisia, which had relatively cohesive state institutions such as the military and security forces that carried through periods of potential collapse, power in Libya was controlled by Gaddafi and distributed through a patronage network with him and his family at the centre. Power that was exclusively concentrated in the hands of Gaddafi was not transferred into democratic institutions but rather fell, shredded and disputed, among various newly emerged parties including militias, tribes, and even gangs. Failing to diagnose the socio-political consequences of the sudden changes and not taking the necessary measures to ensure a smooth transition to avoid power vacuum created a non-governed space perfect for the incubation of different patterns of corruption that range from government all the way to extremist groups.

Corruption as a recruitment tool

The story of Abu Hazem is a typical example of the role of corruption in recruitment.⁴⁴

Abu Hazem comes from the city of Derna in eastern Libya – a city renowned as a stronghold of several Islamist militias. The most influential of these remain those affiliated with Al-Qaeda, such as the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade and Derna's Jihadist Shura Council, which currently outnumber ISIS-linked groups. Current and former fighters recall that corruption featured prominently in the groups' narratives of legitimacy.

Abu Hazem spent ten years as a political prisoner during the Gaddafi regime, is a current member of Abu Salim Martyrs Brigades and a former ISIS fighter. Abu Hazem's spell with ISIS was not voluntary; he felt unable to refuse when ISIS fighters in Derna knocked on his doors. Without protection from a powerful tribe, Abu Hazem could either join or be killed. In June 2015, a clash took place between Al-Qaeda affiliates in Derna against ISIS after ISIS killed prominent leaders from Abu Salim Martyrs Brigades. According to Abu Hazem, he seized the opportunity to switch affiliation and join Abu Salim Martyr's Brigades, which he saw as more "indigenous" than "outsiders" ISIS, which included fighters from Syria, Niger, Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, and France's citizens of Algerian descent.

According to Abu Hazem, fighters would meet to receive their daily briefing from their seniors at ISIS training camps in south-eastern Derna. In these "briefings", "corruption" in its broad definition (political, financial and religious) was consistently raised as a key issue. ISIS commanders would demonise the corrupt system of global governance that favours Western nations over Islamic ones, and cite the corruption of the Egyptian army as a form of oppression that Muslim societies are suffering from.

Ezzeldin's story also had a strong corruption dimension. Ezzeldin is a 22-year-old ISIS fighter and member of a powerful tribe. He was born and grew up in Benghazi. Interviewed in 2015, Ezzeldin politely but sharply criticised his tribe, claiming that his tribe was a key pillar of support to Gaddafi's corrupt 42-year rule in eastern Libya. The pattern, he believes, hasn't changed following the fall of Gaddafi: his criticism extends to General Khalifa Haftar, commander-in-chief of the internationally recognised armed forces that are loyal to the disputed Council of Deputies located in the port city of Tobrouk on Libya's eastern coast. "They didn't learn the lesson when Gaddafi collapsed," he said of tribal elders. "They are now repeating the same behaviour by supporting the corrupt regime of General Haftar, who aspires to an Egyptian model of the brutal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi."

⁴⁴ Names have been changed.

Ezzeldin explained that he has communicated his discontent to the tribal leadership, who initially ignored his concerns, and then threatened him when he kept voicing his opposition among other members of the tribe. He claims that same concerns were shared by his cousins, who were also part of the anti-Gaddafi protest in 2011, against the will of their tribal leadership. The tribal leadership eventually disowned Ezzeldin from the tribe, quoting his lack of respect for the elders and for tribal traditions.

When Ezzeldin was disowned, ISIS recruiters co-opted him. According to Ezzeldin, they stressed that ISIS aims to “fight corruption” and “build the Islamic State that establishes justices and Sharia laws.” Ezzeldin stated that he was never “an extremist” but said: “I could not betray the souls of the martyrs who died while fighting the Gaddafi’s corrupt dictatorship by accepting my tribe’s support to Hefter’s regime.”

Ezzeldin was captured by General Haftar’s forces during one of the confrontations in the district of Guarsha, Benghazi. His tribe was able to negotiate with his captors and secure his release on a promise that they would keep a close eye on him, and prevent him from re-joining ISIS. Later, Ezzeldin was removed to Tunisia and then to Egypt, under his tribe’s supervision, and kept away from the Libyan scene.

ISIS speaks of justice and dignity as their ultimate goal, contrasting themselves with the corruption and injustice of existing regimes that has frustrated people like Ezzeldin. Former militants of pro-ISIS groups interviewed for this research claimed that justice processes within the ISIS groups were very well-structured. “Those who have to go through it admit how fair it is,” said one former IS militant. Interviewees whose stories are discussed here, as well as others interviewed for the research, barely referred to religious convictions or fundamentalist Islamic thought when explaining the reasons their affiliation with violent extremism. Instead, they focused on injustice, tyranny, and corruption – a legitimate frustration that ISIS and other extremist groups promise a solution to.

Corruption at the border: a lifeline for ISIS

Ironically, and despite rhetorical commitment to fighting corruption, ISIS in Libya makes use of corrupt practices to sustain its activities. Corruption in the Egyptian military, for example, enables fighters to smuggle money, people and commodities across the border. Several sources confirmed that ISIS groups, using middlemen, pay bribes to low-ranking officers on both sides of the Egyptian-Libyan border to facilitate the exchange of commodities. Interviewees claimed that there was no other way to import weapons. To justify this practice, they draw on an Islamic rule that justifies committing prohibited practices if it is necessary to survive.

Sources interviewed stated that ISIS bought weapons using either cash or drugs, including Tramadol (common, sourced from Egypt), Hashish (common, sourced from Morocco), Opium (rare) and cocaine (moderately common). While ISIS leaders use drugs as a mean to facilitate trade and transactions, drug use is strictly prohibited among ISIS fighters, according to Abu Hazem; he described how an ISIS fighter caught using drugs in March 2015 was publicly executed. The bartering of drugs and arms was also confirmed by Abdelrazek, a 20-year-old resident of Tobrouk hailing from a poor family.⁴⁵ Abdelrazek and his four brothers were recruited by ISIS and other militant groups to provide an outer layer of security and intelligence for the areas where they live. Abdelrazek claimed they were not paid fully in cash by ISIS leaders. Instead, they received part of their pay in drugs, mainly Tramadol, which Abdelrazek and his brothers then re-sold. Today, Abdelrazek drives a luxury car through the city.

⁴⁵ Names have been changed

Sources – both Libyan and Egyptian – reported that prior to the Arab Spring, smuggling was limited; it did, however, flourish in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. On the Egyptian side, the chaos that followed the 2011 mass protests led to the decline in tourism in Egypt’s Western desert, which was catastrophic for local tribes which rely heavily on tourism. With the absence of an economic alternative, a redirection of the tribes’ activities was inevitable. Smuggling to and from Libya, though risky, became one of the very few available sources of income. And smuggling that was once limited to subsidised Libyan food and small AK-47s going to Egypt in exchange for alcohol and hashish has now expanded to include drugs, heavy arms and human trafficking. An investigation by the BBC reported one resident of Siwa’s claim that the low price and availability of guns meant that “every household has one.”⁴⁶

One common smuggling route runs from the Siwa Oasis in Western Egypt to near the Libyan border city of Jaghub. ⁴⁷ Routes continue on both sides, reaching Gaza in the east and Tripoli in the west. According to a Washington Post report, smuggling of arms has increased dramatically since the start of the war with Libya: for example, smugglers now offer shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, which Qaddafi’s regime had up to 20,000 of in its arsenal, but which were looted during the conflict. ⁴⁸

But it is not only the desert smuggling routes that allow illicit goods to flow – corruption enables smuggling within official border outposts controlled by the Egyptian and Libyan governments. According to interviewees, after the revolution in Libya, crossings between Egypt and Libya were either very restricted or closed for security and political reasons. Bribery became the means of transit: Libyan nationals bribe police personnel on the border crossing in order to admit them into Egyptian territories and stamp their passports so that they appear to have entered the country legally. For example, Mokhtar, a Libyan citizen interviewed for this research, said that he paid a bribe worth USD \$1,000 to Egyptian police in order to be “legally” permitted to cross the border through the Salloum crossing. This is another opportunity for smugglers: sources stated that officials from the Egyptian intelligence services office in Siwa would take a percentage of a fee for every shipment that passes the border in exchange for turning a blind eye to smuggling.

Conclusions: Libya

Corruption is part of the basic lexicon for extremist groups in Libya. It is not only a justification for rebellion, but a means of rationalising further violence, killings and hostility. This narrative is difficult to counter because of the historic role corruption has played in the country, and the failure of the transitional government to provide security for its citizens nevermind establish the rule of law and dismantle patronage networks. For many, ISIS messages - about the need for justice or eradicating corruption - ring true. And in some ways – for example, their strict internal justice systems - ISIS lives up to its promise of justice and accountability. But their involvement in smuggling and the trade of arms and drugs, including, according to interviewees, in cooperation with senior officials in the forces of Haftar, reveal the hypocrisy of these extremist groups. Not only do they take part in corruption themselves – they depend on it for their survival.

⁴⁶ Lewis, Edward, “Smuggling people into the country thousands want to leave,” BBC, 16 September 2015 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34259520> (accessed 25 October 2016)

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Fadel, Leila, “Smuggled Libyan weapons flood into Egypt,” The Washington Post, 12 October 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/libyan-weapons-flooded-egypts-black-weapons-market/2011/10/12/gIQA2YQufl_story.html (accessed 25 October 2016)

3. Six days in June: corruption and the fall of the Iraqi army

Lt Col Dave Allen, GBR-A

Corruption in peacetime robs populations of security, justice and economic development, and creates grievances that can be exploited by extremist groups. Corruption is equally pernicious in wartime: underpinned by appropriation of state structures for factional ends, corruption has precipitated spectacular military defeats and losses of swathes of territory to extremist groups.

The fall of Mosul

The advance of ISIS in the summer of 2014 surprised many, as the group consolidated its control over significant amount of territory in Iraq and Syria and established overseas provinces known as the *wilayat*. Perhaps the most spectacular coup was ISIS's conquest of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city and the strategically important capital of the northern province of Nineveh, on 4-10 June 2014. The battle for Mosul was notable for the ease with which ISIS routed Iraqi security forces: army and police units assigned to defend the city beat a hasty retreat, with troops abandoning weapons and fleeing their posts as ISIS advanced.⁴⁹

Over six days in June 2014, 1,300 ISIS fighters routed a 30,000-strong government force comprising the Iraqi Army's Second Division (responsible for the Nineveh province) and the Third Division of the Iraqi National Police. As the Iraqi forces retreated in disarray, they abandoned US-provided equipment which fell into ISIS hands: aircraft stationed at the Mosul International Airport; 2300 armoured HMMWVs; and in all likelihood, other types of equipment such as Abrams tanks. Much of the military equipment was put on trucks and moved to Syria, where it was later used in the Syrian civil war.⁵⁰ The ISIS offensive left northern Iraq split between ISIS and Kurdish control as the Iraqi security forces abandoned Mosul, Kirkuk and Tikrit; it led to the fall of the Iraqi government of Nuri al-Maliki and prompted an intensified air campaign by a US-led coalition aiming to push back ISIS forces.

Tactical decisions, such as prioritisation of static, checkpoint-based defences, played a part in the outcome of the battle, as did the failure to act on available intelligence, ISIS's increasingly effective military posture, and its use of suicide bombers to breach the city's defences. The Iraqi parliament's report into the fall of Mosul blamed Prime Minister Maliki and over 30 other high-ranking military and civilian officials, pointing to intelligence of an impending attack being ignored and troops being diverted from the Nineveh province.

⁴⁹ Martin Chulov, 'Isis insurgents seize control of Iraqi city of Mosul', *The Guardian*, 10 June 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/10/iraq-sunni-insurgents-islamic-militants-seize-control-mosul>, accessed January 2017; Liz Sly and Ahmed Ramadan, 'Insurgents seize Iraqi city of Mosul as security forces flee', *Washington Post*, 10 June 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/insurgents-seize-iraqi-city-of-mosul-as-troops-flee/2014/06/10/21061e87-8fcd-4ed3-bc94-0e309af0a674_story.html?utm_term=.6b49d6ed14d7, accessed January 2017.

⁵⁰ Agence France-Presse, 'Isis captured 2,300 Humvee armoured vehicles from Iraqi forces in Mosul', *The Guardian*, 1 June 2015; Jamie Seidel, 'Iraqi Sunni insurgents seize huge cache of US-made arms and equipment', 13 June 2014, <http://www.news.com.au/world/iraqi-sunni-insurgents-seize-huge-cache-of-usmade-arms-and-equipment/news-story/4dc84c11acc516dca006104674fb47ab>, accessed January 2017.



ISIS removes captured HMMWVs and transports them to Syria.

Source: @HaraldDoornbos, Twitter

But that same report pointed to a deeper problem. Senior officers, appointed due to their factional and sectarian loyalty rather than due to their professional record, were more focused on amassing personal fortunes through corrupt practices, including embezzlement of public resources and extortion of those under their command, than on maintaining an effective fighting force and assessing intelligence accurately.⁵¹ Factionalism and widespread corruption resulted in a fractured and ineffective chain of command, false impressions of the force's actual strength, exceedingly low morale, and dismal relations with Iraq's civilian population. It resulted in a depletion of capability to the point of ineffectiveness and brought about the failure of the Iraqi security forces.⁵²

ISF and corruption: soldiers who didn't exist and armoured vehicles with no wheels

Sunni-Shia relations in Iraq have been marred by the legacy of the Saddam Hussein era, the de-Baathification conducted by the US authorities following the 2003 invasion, and the civil war that followed it. Although violence levels were brought down by 2009 and a power-sharing political arrangement established, it rested on fragile foundations. Following the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2009-2010, Shia Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki sought to cement his control over Iraqi political and military institutions by appointing officials loyal to him, frequently with Shia supremacist convictions. Within the security forces, this amounted to the creation of a parallel command chain: a series of province-level operational commands reporting to the Office of the Commander-in-Chief, which in turn reported directly to him. The PM also oversaw the establishment of loyal units with sectarian loyalties within the intelligence services and special forces, framing counter-ISIS operations as a fight between Sunni and Shia.⁵³

⁵¹ Judit Neurink, 'ISIS in Iraq', *The Independent*, 25 February 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-in-iraq-the-fall-of-mosul-to-the-jihadists-was-less-of-a-surprise-to-baghdad-than-many-were-led-a6895896.html>, accessed January 2017; 'Iraq parliament refers fall of Mosul report, including role of former prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki to judiciary' *ABC News*, 17 August 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-17/iraq-endorses-report-calling-for-justice-over-mosul-fall/6704134>, accessed January 2017.

⁵² Atheel Nujafi, Governor of Nineveh province, described the outcome of the Mosul battle as a 'massive failure'. Quoted in Ariel Zirulnick, 'As Mosul falls to ISIS militants, doubts over US-trained Iraqi security forces', *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 June 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Security-Watch/terrorism-security/2014/0610/As-Mosul-falls-to-ISIS-militants-doubts-over-US-trained-Iraqi-security-forces-video>, accessed January 2017. See also Ned Parker, Isabel Coles, and Raheem Salman, 'How Mosul Fell: a General's Story', *Reuters Special Report*, 14 October 2014, <http://graphics.thomsonreuters.com/14/10/MIDEAST-CRISIS:GHARAWI.pdf>, accessed January 2017; Yasir Abbas and Dan Trombly, 'Inside the Collapse of the Iraqi Army's 2nd Division', *War on the Rocks*, 1 July 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/inside-the-collapse-of-the-iraqi-armys-2nd-division/>; David Kilcullen, *Blood Year. Islamic State and the Failures of the War on Terror*, London: Hurst and Company 2016, pp. 87-94.

⁵³ Kilcullen, *Blood Year*, pp. 48-51.

Maliki's actions, prioritising factional loyalty over professionalism and integrity, created a permissive environment enabling and supporting corrupt practices. It had rapidly become customary in the ISF to purchase senior command through patronage, as commanding a military unit had become a money-making opportunity. Battalion command could be purchased for \$10,000 and division command for \$1m, but the opportunity to skim salaries and support budgets made it simple to recoup that investment.⁵⁴ Good political connections would be helpful when making such a purchase, which further privileged individuals connected to the Shia-led government. They were therefore disproportionately Shia and sectarian in their outlook, alienating the significant Sunni populations in their areas of responsibility. Al Maliki's obsession with 'coup proofing' the Army had the additional effect of limiting the numbers of competent commanders available for effective resistance to ISIS.

Maliki's politicization of the army and police left their leadership corrupt, hollow and lacking in skill or commitment. ... This corrupt and demoralized force collapsed like a rotten outhouse as soon as ISIS gave it a solid shove.

David Kilcullen, *Blood Year*⁵⁵

In December 2014, six months after the Mosul debacle, new Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi informed the media that a simple audit-based control of the military's human resources records revealed the existence of about 50,000 ghost soldiers, i.e. individuals enrolled on paper, but never actually showing up to train or fight. These were suspected to be only the tip of the iceberg - costing the Iraqi military \$380 million per year, with their salaries either pocketed by senior officers or split between the soldier and higher-ranking officers, with both benefitting from the scheme.⁵⁶

This was hardly news, either on the national or on the regional level. In 2013, the ghost soldier problem in the Nineveh province was investigated by the MOD, but no action was taken.⁵⁷ Research conducted in 2014-2015 for TI's Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index found no evidence of robust regulations which could prevent the ghost soldier phenomenon through, for example, separating the chains of command and payment, making troops numbers and salaries public, or auditing human resource records.⁵⁸ As a result of peacetime inaction, estimates indicate that at the crucial moment, the armed forces division which on paper counted about 25,000, was in reality at best 10,000-strong. One of the brigades, supposedly comprising 2,500 men, turned out to have been 500 strong when it mattered.⁵⁹ Brigadier General Fadhel Jawwad Ali, appointed Commander on 8 June as the situation in Mosul worsened, found, upon arrival, broken-down equipment, undermanned checkpoints, and one unit which in theory had 500 men only had 71 present.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ The numbers are based on estimates drawn from personal experience; other sources quote figures that are even higher. See for example Tariq Ali and Patrick Cockburn, 'The Rise of ISIS and the Origins of the New Middle East War', 29 September 2014, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/09/29/the-rise-of-isis-and-the-origins-of-the-new-middle-east-war/>, accessed January 2017.

⁵⁵ David Kilcullen, *Blood Year*, C Hurst & Co Ltd., Feb. 2016, pp. 85 and 91

⁵⁶ David D. Kirkpatrick, 'Graft Hobbles Iraq's Military in Fighting ISIS', *New York Times*, 23 November 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/24/world/middleeast/graft-hobbles-iraqs-military-in-fighting-isis.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3As%2C%7B%22%22%3A%22RI%3A5%22%7D&_r=0; Eric Pianin, '50,000 Iraqi 'Ghost Soldiers' Make \$380 Million a Year', *The Fiscal Times*, 1 December 2014, <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/2014/12/01/Iraqi-Corruption-50000-Ghost-Soldiers-Make-380-Million-Year>, accessed January 2017.

⁵⁷ Parker, Coles and Salman, 'How Mosul Fell', p. 6.

⁵⁸ Transparency International, Iraq, *Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index*, 2016, <http://government.defenceindex.org/countries/iraq/>, accessed January 2017.

⁵⁹ Parker, Coles and Salman, 'How Mosul Fell', p. 6.

⁶⁰ Agence France Presse, 'Iraq officials disastrously mismanaged Mosul crisis, according to inquiry', 19 August 2015, available at http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/news/iraq-officials-disastrously-mismanaged-mosul-crisis-according-to-inquiry_34353, accessed January 2017.

This depleted force was not only undermanned, it was also underfed and under-equipped. For example, under the Iraqi regulations senior officers were responsible for purchasing food for soldiers and deducting the cost from their salaries. However, officers frequently pocketed that deduction, forcing soldiers to procure food and water individually from civilian markets. One provincial chief of operations removed from post after the fall of Mosul had earned himself the nickname of ‘chicken guy’ due to his propensity to appropriate and sell his troops’ poultry rations.⁶¹ With inadequate rations and their salaries skimmed by senior officers, Iraqi troops frequently resorted to extorting the civilian population, bringing already strained relationships to a new low. The Iraqi army extorted bribes from local communities, including at checkpoints in Mosul; forced payments for releasing civilians from arbitrary detention; and made itself a nuisance rather than a protecting force. Alienated by corruption, the civilian population could not be counted on for assistance or information.⁶²

One Iraqi general is known as “chicken guy” because of his reputation for selling his soldiers’ poultry provisions. Another is “arak guy,” for his habit of enjoying that anise-flavored liquor on the job. A third is named after Iraq’s 10,000-dinar bills, “General Deftar,” and is infamous for selling officer commissions.

New York Times, 23 November 2014

Corrupt practices similarly resulted in black market sales of military fuel, ammunition, spare parts, and service tools required to keep military equipment running.⁶³ This is graphically illustrated by the picture of US-supplied HMMWVs captured by ISIS, perched on axle stands, likely due the lack of spare tyres and tyre changing tools. Armoured vehicle tyres are impossible to fix on wheel rims without specialist equipment, which is also an attractive item for any haulage company - and which has turned up in civilian markets.⁶⁴ It is likely that following equipment shortages, Iraqi soldiers resorted to taking whole wheels off vehicles, effectively immobilising them.



HMMWVs on axle stands as ISF did not have tyre changing equipment

Source: @jenanmoussa, Twitter

⁶¹Kirkpatrick, ‘Graft Hobbles Iraq’s Military in Fighting ISIS’; Abbas and Trombly, ‘Inside the Collapse’.

⁶² Abbas and Trombly, ‘Inside the Collapse’; Neurink, ‘ISIS in Iraq’.

⁶³ Abbas and Trombly, ‘Inside the Collapse’.

⁶⁴ Based on author’s personal experience in Iraq.

Conclusion

Ghost soldiers, corruption in sustainment chains and purchasing of officer posts were the tangible manifestations of corruption affecting the ISF. They rendered the force operationally incapable and deprived it of key equipment. Even more importantly, though, it sapped morale and made it impossible to create a robust, cohesive military, in effect creating the space for ISIS to operate in:

“[Corruption] takes more than soldiers’ food rations. It takes their dignity and self-respect as well,” an Iraqi officer explained. ... These units are left with a command climate where illicit payments are more important than effective operations or combat performance. ... Knowing that their fellow soldiers are still receiving some pay after effectively deserting, units lose—or fail to develop—an esprit de corps necessary to sustain strenuous operations.

Yasir Abbas and Dan Trombly, *War on the Rocks*, 2014⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Abbas, Yasir and Dan Trombly, “Inside the collapse of the Iraqi Army’s 2nd Division,” July 1, 2014, *War on the Rocks*, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/inside-the-collapse-of-the-iraqi-armys-2nd-division/> (accessed 7/2/17)

4. Nigeria: how corruption has fueled Boko Haram

Eleonore Vidal de la Blache

With more than 20,000 deaths and 2.3 million displaced people since the beginning of the insurgency in 2009, Boko Haram, an Islamist insurgency operating in the North East of Nigeria, has been one of the greatest security challenges facing the Nigerian government since the return of democracy in 1999. On a weekly basis, villages are burnt down, women and girls are abducted, and government buildings are attacked, obliging large chunks of a terrified population to flee from the Northern states (mainly Yobe, Borno, and Adamawa) across other parts of Nigeria and its neighbouring countries.

In 2013, the Jonathan administration launched a military offensive against the Islamist insurgency, in the hope of stabilising the northern part of the country ahead of the 2015 presidential elections. Three years on, despite some significant advances from the Nigerian army, Boko Haram continues to spread terror in north-eastern Nigeria and the broader region. In May 2016, President Buhari declared that corruption had been largely responsible for the inability of the Nigerian military to quickly defeat Boko Haram and that curbing corruption meant making progress against the insurgency.⁶⁶

Many factors can account for the rise and successes of the Islamist insurgency, but government corruption and corrupt practices within the Nigerian defence and security sector in particular have fuelled conflict and grievances in northern Nigeria, and contributed to the rise of Boko Haram. Along with providing messages for Boko Haram to draw upon to secure supporters, corruption simultaneously incapacitated the army to counter the group.

Corruption at the heart of the early Boko Haram narrative

In the 1970s, several Islamic movements in Northern Nigeria, such as Maitatsinism, started promoting an Islam based on the strict implementation of Sharia law.⁶⁷ These movements were severely repressed by the army in the 1980s, which led to their dissolution, but they provided an ideological basis for a large part of the Muslim population in the Northeast who were fiercely opposed to Western influence.⁶⁸ In a region in which more than 60% of the population lived on less than \$2 a day, people felt abandoned by Muslim elites, who had largely accepted the culture and influence of British colonialism and had thrived on it. The poor Muslim population from the North suffered due to high levels of government corruption and was exasperated by the Nigerian State's inability to provide accountable governance.^{69,70} People felt largely unprotected by security forces, plagued by corruption and institutionalised extortion and bribery.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Levinus Nwabughogu, 'Corruption in military responsible for Nigeria's loss of 14 LGAs to Boko Haram – Buhari', The Vanguard, 18 May 2016. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/05/corruption-military-responsible-nigerias-loss-14-lgas-boko-haram-buhari/> (accessed 23 August 2016)

⁶⁷ Léa Baron, 'Nigeria: Boko Haram c'est qui ? C'est quoi?', TV5 Monde, 21 April 2016.

<http://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/nigeria-boko-haram-c-est-qui-c-est-quoi-4931> (accessed 23 August 2016)

⁶⁸ Femi Owolade, 'Boko Haram: how a militant Islamist Group Emerged in Nigeria', Gatestone Institute, 27 March 2014.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4232/boko-haram-nigeria> (accessed 23 August 2016)

⁶⁹ Léa Baron, 'Nigeria: Boko Haram c'est qui ? C'est quoi?', TV5 Monde, 21 April 2016.

<http://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/nigeria-boko-haram-c-est-qui-c-est-quoi-4931> (accessed 23 August 2016)

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Donnelly, 'Boko Haram will continue to rampage while Nigeria tackles accountability', The Guardian, 21 April 2014.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/21/boko-haram-rampage-nigeria-counter-terrorism> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁷¹ 'Nigeria: Corruption fuelling police abuses', Human Rights Watch, 17 August 2010. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/08/17/nigeria-corruption-fueling-police-abuses> (accessed 23 August 2016)

For example, senior Nigerian police officers enforced a system of “returns”, in which rank-and file officers had to pay up the chain of command a share of the money they extorted from the public.⁷² Failure to do so would see officers downgraded to less lucrative postings. Moreover, security forces’ regular and brutal interventions against the northern Muslim population greatly accentuated grievances against the government.

In 2000, Mohamed Yusuf, a charismatic Muslim preacher, started exploiting these divisions and grievances by linking government corruption with Western influence in governance and created a movement, “Boko Haram”.⁷³ The sect’s name is usually translated as “Western education is forbidden”. In his preaching, Yusuf denounced the “corrupt and elitist school system,” which he said was training corrupt civil servants and destroying traditional Islamic values and cultures.^{74, 75} From 2002 onwards, Yusuf started building alternative Islamic schools in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, which attracted a large part of the poor Muslim population. Between 2002 and 2009, the movement continued to consolidate itself. It began attacking symbols of state power, such as police stations and military bases.

Throughout these years, Yusuf’s public outcry against police and military forces grew significantly. In his sermons, he accused them of being paid by politicians to discredit the movement and intimidate him.⁷⁶ As a resident from Maiduguri explained: “they [early preachers of Boko Haram] were saying the truth about the violations committed by government agencies. [...] They said, if our constitution was based on the Islamic system, all these things wouldn’t be happening; it would be a just and fair society.”⁷⁷

By 2009, the Nigerian government, increasingly anxious about Yusuf’s influence and its radical predicaments, started responding with force. In June 2009, 15 Boko Haram members on motorbikes were killed by policemen during a funeral procession, ostensibly because they were not wearing helmets.⁷⁸ This sparked outrage within the sect members. They interpreted the disproportionate use of violence, at a time when they were mourning fellow members killed by the police, as an outright provocation from the security forces.⁷⁹ A month later, Boko Haram launched an attack in Bauchi state. Following a succession of clashes in Kano, Yobe and Borno, the police and army intervened and killed more than 800 people, the large majority being from Boko Haram. Yusuf was killed in public a few days later by the police in Maiduguri. While the cause of the surge of violence in July 2009 still remains unclear today, a report from Human Rights Watch denounced the security forces’ allegedly brutal behaviour during the attack and their involvement in extra-judicial executions.⁸⁰ To this day, there is no public evidence that the Nigerian government has ordered an investigation into these events or prosecute any members of the security forces who allegedly took part in extra-judicial killings. In 2012, Human Rights Watch denounced their failure to do so.⁸¹

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Femi Owolade, ‘Boko Haram: how a militant Islamist Group Emerged in Nigeria’, Gatestone Institute, 27 March 2014. <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4232/boko-haram-nigeria> (accessed 23 August 2016)

⁷⁴ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/boko-haram-formed-amid-nigerian-government-corruption-1.2636547>

⁷⁵ Léa Baron, ‘Nigeria: Boko Haram c’est qui ? C’est quoi?’, TV5 Monde, 21 April 2016.

<http://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/nigeria-boko-haram-c-est-qui-c-est-quoi-4931> (accessed 23 August 2016)

⁷⁶ Elodie Apard, ‘Les mots de Boko Haram: les prêches de Mohammed Yusuf sur ‘le djihad obligatoire’’, Le Monde, 29 April 2016.

http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/04/29/les-mots-de-boko-haram-1-2-les-preches-de-mohammed-yusuf-sur-le-djihad-obligatoire_4911156_3212.html (accessed 23 August 2016)

⁷⁷ Maiduguri resident talking to Sarah Chayes about the early preaching of the extremist group Boko Haram in:

Sarah Chayes, ‘Corruption: Violent Extremism, Kleptocracy and the Danger of Failing Governance’, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 June 2016.

http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/063016_Chayes_Testimony.pdf (accessed 23 August 2016)

⁷⁸ Uri Friedman, ‘The Bike-Helmet Law that helped trigger and insurgency in Nigeria’, The Atlantic, 22 May 2014.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/05/the-bike-helmet-law-that-triggered-an-insurgency-in-nigeria/371301/> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ ‘Nigeria: Prosecute Killings by Security Forces’, Human Rights Watch, 26 November 2009.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/11/26/nigeria-prosecute-killings-security-forces> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁸¹ ‘Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Forces Abuses in Nigeria’, Human Rights Watch, 11 October 2012.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/10/11/spiraling-violence/boko-haram-attacks-and-security-force-abuses-nigeria> (accessed 24 August 2016)

The July 2009 events marked a turning point in the movement's history. With their spiritual leader Yusuf killed during the attack and the disproportionate use of violence by Nigeria's security forces, the movement became increasingly radicalised. In 2011, Boko Haram committed a terrorist attack in a United Nations building in the capital Abuja, killing 25 people.⁸² A few months later, its members attacked a church on Christmas day, killing more than a 150 people.⁸³

Government and security forces' corrupt practices and their unaccountable violent behaviour thus played a major role in the early construction and rise of Boko Haram. Corruption became a key element of Yusuf's preaching, through which he managed to rally a large discontented and poor Muslim population from the North behind him. Yusuf's brutal killing by security forces in front of a public that had massively supported him pushed the group towards increased violence and created a strong ideological platform for his successors.

Military collapse under Goodluck Jonathan (2013 – 2015)

The years following Yusuf's death resulted in a surge in violence, terrorist attacks and clashes between Boko Haram and the Nigerian security forces. In May 2013, following more than 120 attacks by the insurgency and thousands of deaths in the northern states, the then Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan proclaimed a state of emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa.⁸⁴ To support the Joint Task Force (JTF) of military, state security services and police forces which had been operating in the region since 2011, he sent an additional 2,000 troops to the north accompanied by heavy military equipment.⁸⁵ He then launched an offensive in the Borno region to attempt to dislodge insurgents.

Despite some initial successes, it became quickly apparent that the Nigerian army was totally unable to effectively address the insurgency. Nigerian soldiers appeared to be poorly equipped and lacking motivation to fight Boko Haram, despite an annual defence budget of up to \$6 billion.⁸⁶ In February 2014, Borno state's governor, Kashim Shettima, said: "I told the president that Boko Haram rebels are clearly better armed and more willing to fight."⁸⁷ In 2013, local residents from Maiduguri, tired of witnessing an incapable army, decided to create a civilian joint task force (Civilian J.T.F) to help fighting Boko Haram by providing intelligence to the military, maintaining check points and searching pedestrians, vehicles and residences.⁸⁸

⁸² 'Abuja attack: Car bomb hits Nigeria UN building', BBC News, 27 August 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14677957> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁸³ Monika Mark, 'Hell on Christmas Day: Nigeria's Deadly Bombings', Time, 25 December 2011. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2103091,00.html> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁸⁴ 'Nigeria's president Jonathan declares state of emergency', BBC News, 15 May 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22535419> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁸⁵ 'Curbing Violence in Nigeria (ii): the Boko Haram Insurgency', International Crisis Group, 3 April 2014. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/west-africa/nigeria/216-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-ii-the-boko-haram-insurgency.pdf> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁸⁶ Aryn Baker, 'Nigeria Military Quails When Faced With Boko Haram', Time, 10 February 2015. <http://time.com/3702849/nigerias-army-boko-haram/> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁸⁷ Léa Baron, 'Nigeria: Boko Haram c'est qui? C'est quoi?', TV5 Monde, 21 April 2016. <http://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/nigeria-boko-haram-c-est-qui-c-est-quoi-4931> (accessed 23 August 2016)

⁸⁸ Ashionye Ogene, 'Nigerian Vigilantes Aim to rout Boko Haram', Al Jazeera, 31 May 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/05/nigerian-vigilantes-aim-rout-boko-haram-2014526123758444854.html> (accessed 24 August 2016)

The decline of the Nigerian military can be traced back to the 33 years of military rule following Nigeria's independence.⁸⁹ Repeated coups and alleged coup plots throughout the period increased suspicion and led to the weakening of "specific units or services, by slashing funds, prohibiting training exercises or allowing equipment to deteriorate."⁹⁰ Turnover among senior ranks was high, preventing appropriate leadership. When Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999, successive civilian governments, fearing a military coup, dramatically reduced the defence budget.⁹¹ Between 2000 and 2008, the defence budget was less than 3% of overall government expenditure. This changed under the Jonathan administration with the offensive against Boko Haram, but meant that the Nigerian army had been operating without key resources for a long period, making them highly ineffective and poorly trained.⁹² In addition, a large number of troops had been sent on various peacekeeping missions leaving an ill-staffed army having to defend a huge Nigerian territory.⁹³

But it was not just financial and human resources that caused the military decline. The military and the Nigerian security institutions were plagued by huge levels of fraud and corruption. Oversight has been a, given successive civilian governments' acceptance of "a strange and ambiguous understanding of the concept of security"; public scrutiny over the defence and security sector has been viewed as undesirable, and potential undermining national security.⁹⁴ This approach is in part the result of the many years of military rule and explains why today, defence and security matters are still exempt from important components of the legal framework in Nigeria, such as the Freedom of Information law and the Code of Public Procurement. This exemption has enabled procurement scandals and abuses which have greatly impacted the Nigerian army's ability to operate effectively, and furthered the public perception that leaders in government act in their own interests.

In 2013, soldiers complained that 50% of their allowances for dangerous field duties were stolen by commanders.⁹⁵ Interviews with soldiers also revealed that troops were living in very poor conditions, lacking basic facilities like tents and arms. Despite being budgeted and paid for, ammunition rarely reached the front, leaving soldiers with a few bullets each to fight militants armed with RPGs (Rocket-Propelled Grenades).⁹⁶ Soldiers also had to buy their military uniforms themselves and cover their medical expenses when wounded in battle.⁹⁷ This contributed to low troop morale and unethical behaviour by the soldiers who, at times, were left with little choice but to sell their weapons to insurgents. Multiple reports also indicated that some units were filled with ghost soldiers (troops that exist on the payroll only), while their commanders collected their pay.⁹⁸ 2014 saw many cities, such as Gwoza, Bama and Mubi, fall to the hands of the insurgents, further complicating the task of the Nigerian military. This was also the year that 276 schoolgirls from Chibok were captured by Boko Haram and when the sect started to expand to Northern Cameroon.

⁸⁹ 'Curbing Violence in Nigeria (ii): the Boko Haram Insurgency', International Crisis Group, 3 April 2014. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/nigeria/216-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-ii-the-boko-haram-insurgency.pdf> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁹⁰ 'Nigeria: The Challenge of Military Reform', International Crisis Group, 6 June 2016, p.3. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/nigeria/237-nigeria-the-challenge-of-military-reform.pdf> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁹¹ Ibid/.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Philip Ikita, 'Corruption in Nigeria, not just Boko Haram, is at the root of violence', The Guardian, 11 July 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2014/jul/11/boko-haram-nigeria-violence-corruption-security> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Aryn Baker, 'Nigeria Military Quails When Faced With Boko Haram', Time, 10 February 2015. <http://time.com/3702849/nigerias-army-boko-haram/> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁹⁷ Interview by Nic Robertson with Nigerian soldiers, 'Nigerian soldiers discuss Boko Haram Fight' CNN, January 2015. <http://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2015/01/15/ctw-pkg-robertson-nigerian-soldier-boko-haram-fight.cnn> (accessed 24 August 2016)

⁹⁸ Sarah Chayes, 'Corruption: Violent Extremism, Kleptocracy and the Danger of Failing Governance', Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 June 2016. http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/063016_Chayes_Testimony.pdf (accessed 23 August 2016)

Under the administration of Goodluck Jonathan, public frustration with corruption grew, and there were accusations that the government intentionally destabilised parts of the country and even colluded with Boko Haram. In the North East, a large part of the population felt that state elites, including army officials, were colluding with Boko Haram to destabilise the north-eastern economy and create instability ahead of the 2015 presidential elections.⁹⁹ Chaos undermined the prospects the re-election of Jonathan. Southerners on the other hand accused Northern politicians of financing Boko Haram to destabilise the North, in order to undermine the credibility of the 2015 elections and damage government legitimacy.¹⁰⁰ While allegations were thrown from both sides, some facts do raise real questions about links between the Nigerian military and the extremist group.¹⁰¹ First is the revelation in 2014 that most of the Islamic terror group's weapons had been stolen from the Nigerian military.¹⁰² According to former US ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, there were hints that sympathisers in the Nigerian army had deliberately left doors of armouries unlocked for Boko Haram.¹⁰³ Some have also argued that the Nigerian security forces were infiltrated by rogue elements who were behind some acts of violence in order to profit from security contracts.¹⁰⁴ In 2014, 10 generals and 15 army officials were caught and convicted for treason for giving vital information, including military strategies, to Boko Haram members.¹⁰⁵

Though evidence of the links between the military and Boko Haram remain limited, the allegations – particularly when combined with the military's inability to respond effectively to attacks in 2014 – damaged public trust towards defence and security forces and government officials. According to a report by Mercy Corps, in which 47 former youth members of Boko Haram were interviewed, alongside inefficiency and security force abuses: "youth cited frustration with government corruption; they had been overlooked for government jobs because of nepotism, or perceived crippling unfairness in political processes."¹⁰⁶ To an already-vulnerable population that felt that their security and survival were in the hands of politicians and corrupt officials driven by personal and financial interests, Boko Haram provided an alternative option.

President Buhari's anti-corruption war since 2015

Shortly after being elected president on a promise to curb corruption and eradicate Boko Haram, President Buhari established a 13-member presidential anti-corruption committee to probe military procurement practices between 2007 and 2015.¹⁰⁷ The newly-elected president wanted to shed light on fraudulent corrupt practices that he suspected had taken place under the two previous administrations and to understand why the Nigerian army had been unsuccessful against the Islamist insurgency. In its interim report published in December 2015, the committee pointed to a certain number of high former defence and security officials who had been involved in fraudulent practices.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁹ Robyn Dixon, 'In Nigeria, Distrust Hampers the Fight against Boko Haram', Los Angeles Times, 23 June 2014. <http://www.latimes.com/world/africa/la-fg-nigeria-military-20140623-story.html> (accessed 24 August 2016)

¹⁰⁰ 'Curbing Violence in Nigeria (ii): the Boko Haram Insurgency', International Crisis Group, 3 April 2014. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/nigeria/216-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-ii-the-boko-haram-insurgency.pdf> (accessed 24 August 2016)

¹⁰¹ Robyn Dixon, 'In Nigeria, Distrust Hampers the Fight against Boko Haram', Los Angeles Times, 23 June 2014. <http://www.latimes.com/world/africa/la-fg-nigeria-military-20140623-story.html> (accessed 24 August 2016)

¹⁰² Katherine Baffour, 'Boko Haram's Source of Weapons Revealed', Naij, 2014. <https://www.naij.com/66368.html> (accessed 24 August 2016)

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Yvonne Ndege, 'The Rise of Nigeria's Boko Haram', Al Jazeera, 30 September 2013. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/09/201397155225146644.html> (accessed 24 August 2016).

¹⁰⁵ Vincent Ehiabhi, 'Army Court-Martials 10 Generals, 5 Others for Helping Boko Haram', Naij, 2014. <https://www.naij.com/67472.html> (accessed 24 August 2016)

¹⁰⁶ 'Motivations and Empty Promises: Voices of Former Boko Haram Combatants and Nigerian Youth', Mercy Corps, April 2016. <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/motivations-and-empty-promises-voices-former-boko-haram-combatants-and-nigerian> (accessed 24 August 2016)

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/188893-breaking-buhari-raises-13-member-panel-to-probe-weapon-procurement-since-2007.html>

¹⁰⁸ 'Nigeria orders arrest of ex-adviser over \$2bn arms deal', Al Jazeera, 18 November 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/nigeria-orders-arrest-adviser-2bn-arms-deal-151118043340314.html> (accessed 13 October 2016)

One example is Sambo Dasuki, the former National Security Adviser under Jonathan, who was arrested for allegedly stealing \$2.1 billion from the defence budget while he was serving from 2012 to 2015 by awarding phantom contracts.¹⁰⁹ The former Chief of Defence staff Alex Sabundu Baddeh and the former Chief of Air Staff Adesola Nunayon Amosu were also arrested, together with 17 other ex-military chiefs. Since then, the committee has uncovered other corruption scandals including military officers allegedly involved in the diversion of \$15bn meant for procurement of arms.¹¹⁰

In May 2015, Buhari declared that corruption had been largely responsible for the inability of the Nigerian military to quickly defeat Boko Haram.¹¹¹ The loss of 14 local government areas to the insurgents under the previous administration and the ensuing uncovering of major procurement scandals had greatly tarnished the reputation of the army and the defence institutions.¹¹² He reiterated the importance of fighting defence corruption to effectively fight the insurgents, praising his administration's recent anti-corruption measures: "when we curbed corruption and removed the injustice in the military, we begin to make progress."¹¹³ While the insurgents retain a strong foothold in rural areas, at the time of writing the Nigerian army has successfully recovered all 14 territories lost to Boko Haram and destroyed or recaptured most their military equipment.¹¹⁴

The recent anti-corruption measures taken by Buhari have had a positive impact on the army's ability to secure victories against Boko Haram. There are, however, concerns that the President is only going after those in the opposition, protecting corrupt officials from his party.¹¹⁵ The ongoing purge of military officials suspected of corruption and fraudulent procurement practices (38 senior military officials were forced to retire in June 2016) and more rigorous scrutiny over the defence budget has meant that the army is more likely to receive appropriate equipment to fight the insurgents.¹¹⁶ The stronger role given by the President to the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) which is actively investigating corruption allegations is also a promising step. And Nigerian civil society's mounting pressure on the government to address corruption in defence and security is also having a positive impact.

Conclusion

Corruption has played a major role in the rise and success of Boko Haram. In its early years, the Islamist sect was largely constructed through anti-corruption and anti-elite rhetoric. Abuses by the security forces, and high levels of fraud and corruption in the army, meant the group's message resonated. Corruption also hollowed out the military, leaving troops ill-equipped and without the incentive to tackle Boko Haram effectively. In the case of Nigeria, corruption has both fuelled the group's rise and obstructed the government's response.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ade Adesomaju, 'Let Buratai resign or sack him, Falana tells Buhari', The Punch, 10 July 2016.

<http://punchng.com/let-%E2%80%8Bburatai-resign-or-sack-him-falana-tells-buhari/> (accessed 24 August 2016)

¹¹¹ Levinus Nwabughio, 'Corruption in military responsible for Nigeria's loss of 14 LGAs to Boko Haram – Buhari', The Vanguard, 18 May 2016. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/05/corruption-military-responsible-nigerias-loss-14-lgas-boko-haram-buhari/> (accessed 23 August 2016)

¹¹² 'Nigeria made faster progress against Boko Haram after curbing corruption in military – Buhari', Premium Times, 18 May 2016. <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/203659-nigeria-made-faster-progress-boko-haram-curbing-corruption-military-buhari.html> (accessed 24 August 2016)

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Nigeria Boko Haram: Militants 'technically defeated' – Buhari', BBC News, 24 December 2015. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-35173618> (accessed 24 August 2016)

¹¹⁵ Johnbosco Agbakwuru, 'Fayosegate: Stop harassing opposition party members, Rep tells Buhari', The Vanguard, 29 June 2016. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/06/fayosegate-stop-harassing-opposition-party-members-rep-tells-buhari/> (accessed 24 August 2016).

¹¹⁶ 'Purge of 38 Army Officers', Daily Trust, 8 July 2016. <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/editorial/purge-of-38-army-officers/154493.html> (accessed 24 August 2016)

Conclusions: the international community's response

Immediate threats to public security posed by terrorism require rapid action; tackling the root causes of violent extremism demand deeper thought. No scale of effort to hit back at radical groups will succeed if the causes of radicalisation go unaddressed. It is tempting to see Islamic extremist groups as irrational fanatics or to accept the frame of a binary world view – the radical ideologies against the liberal order. Yet as this research shows, the drivers for extremists groups may be more pedestrian – narratives around corruption and injustice are likely to resonate strongly with the frustrated populations from which they draw their support. Radical movements like ISIS thrive when people lose all faith in those in power – when officials profit from the misery of the many, when the police exploit rather than protect, and when economic opportunity is skewed in favour of the connected few.

The failure of corrupt elites to provide security and justice for their citizens has clearly and significantly contributed to their readiness of populations to take up arms or support insurgents and extremist elements. Air strikes and international support to military forces opposing groups like the ISIS are woefully insufficient to build long-term stability, which requires the establishment of a meaningful alternative in responsive, accountable governments. If the Arab Spring tells us anything, it's that political elites that fail to respond to the basic demands of their people, and particularly those that are accumulating significant military capabilities, represent the most serious threat to our security.

Failure to recognise the root cause of extremism is undermining international efforts to respond to the threat posed by radical groups. Tackling corruption must be a first order priority. Deep public frustrations cannot be pushed to one side in favour of short-term interests – such as trade or diplomatic access. As the narratives of ISIS show, foreign forces are often seen as complicit in – and sometimes drivers of – corruption in governments of the region. And if corruption isn't addressed, there is a high risk international assistance programmes will simply fuel patronage networks that exclude and disenfranchise populations, often along sectarian lines. To address this, corruption risks need to be explicitly, systematically and uniformly recognised in the design and delivery of security assistance, and in planning for international interventions. And there are practical steps that can be taken diplomatically, such as visa denials and asset freezing, that can help begin to address elite corruption.

But more broadly, Western governments need to rethink fundamentally their relationships with the Gaddafis, Assads and Malakis of the future. Many of the leaders to whom Western governments turn are far from friendly forces in the fight against terrorism. Too many Western governments focus on seeking to influence or moderate the behaviour of corrupt autocrats because they see them as an alternative to instability. But in the end, corrupt governments are the architects of future security crises.

Annex 1: Narrative analysis - notes on methodology

Sources: an overview

The aim of our research was to uncover prominent narratives within ISIS propaganda. The focus was on primary source material, which has come from a number of different sources:

- **Promotional materials released by the Islamic State:** The most prominent ISIS publication that we used as a data source was Dabiq – a magazine published in multiple languages and used as a key medium for propaganda and recruitment. Fourteen issues of Dabiq magazine were published between 14 July 2014 and 13 April 2016; all were used for this study.
- **Twitter posts by ISIS sympathisers, members, and supporters:** Researchers reviewed tweets expressing some of the underlying grievances and tensions among IS supporters, which we subsequently arranged into four narratives. Since many “Islamic State” tweets were negative, external references to the group, the use of tweets was limited.
- **Interviews conducted with former and present members of ISIS:** Also included as secondary sources were analytical studies that were drawn from a broader range of interviews conducted by academics. A few journalists have also been able to interview current and former ISIS supporters. Most fall into three categories: fighters who are still part of ISIS, those who had defected, and those who have been imprisoned by local authorities because of their affiliation with the Islamic State.

Twitter: an unreliable source

Reports on ISIS’s online presence have been conducted before; in 2015, the Brookings Institution investigated the profile of 454 accounts identified as sympathising with ISIS.¹¹⁷ The study highlighted a number of obstacles they faced, which we found equally challenging in our own attempts to garner evidence for this study. Four key problems identified by the Brookings Institution have been challenges for us as well:

Tweet deletion: The report found that some accounts holders would delete tweets, either manually or through third party apps.

Suspensions: The Brookings Institute report estimated a maximum of 70,000 ISIS-affiliated Twitter accounts existed mid-way through the March of 2015. In February 2016, Twitter announced the suspension of 125,000 ISIS-affiliated accounts since mid-2015.¹¹⁸ Accounts we were observing often were suspended within hours of us discovering they existed.

¹¹⁷ J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan. “The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter.” Center for Middle East Policy. Brookings Institute. http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/isis-twitter-census-berger-morgan/isis_twitter_census_berger_morgan.pdf

¹¹⁸ Matt Broomfield. “Twitter shuts down 125,000 Isis-linked accounts,” The Independent. February 6, 2016. Available from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/125000-isis-linked-accounts-suspended-by-twitter-a6857371.html>

Name changes and voluntary deletions: The report found that many accounts holders would change their Twitter handles to avoid suspension, or else pre-emptively deactivate the accounts.

Private accounts: We found that a number of accounts we attempting to view were in fact locked (i.e. one had to request to follow them) and therefore access to such accounts was challenging.

However, there are further challenges that relate specifically to this study. The Brookings Institution report focussed on demographic issues (number and location of supporters, frequency of tweets, etc.) lending themselves to statistical, quantitative approaches. Our aim, however, was to understand the themes contained within the pro-ISIS publicity. This goal required an approach based on a qualitative, interpretive methodology, which came with its own challenges:

Translation: Establishing the nuance within some tweets was difficult, as the Arabic used was occasionally unconventional, neither formal nor any recognisable dialect. This slowed down the analysis and on occasion forced us to discard sources.

'Noise': In order to find accounts and tweets, we used Twitter's built-in search function, using key terms likely to feature in the tweets. The big challenge here was accounting for noise (non-relevant tweets and accounts). Firstly, a number of anti-ISIS or news accounts utilise the same words to denounce the Islamic State, or provide updates on news surrounding the situation in the region. As these accounts made up a vast majority of the results for these search terms, a significant amount of time was spent having to translate, and subsequently discount this data. Furthermore, perhaps in a bid to avoid suspension, a number of accounts who claimed to support ISIS, mostly posted news updates on the events such as bomb attacks, or territorial progress. These news tweets provide little insight into the grievances and narratives present in ISIS propaganda, and the process of filtering through the vast quantity of sources to identify relevant information was an obstacle.

Whilst the challenges outlined above were undoubtedly obstacles in the data-collection process, we were still able to find useful tweets expressing some of the underlying grievances and tensions, which we subsequently arranged into four narratives. However, the high pace of changes affecting the relevant Twitter accounts makes it difficult to ascertain how many different supporters were behind them, and therefore how representative the sample analysed here is. We recommend that it should be treated as a snapshot.

Other Sources:

Due to the challenges we faced in our attempt to gather source material from Twitter, we looked to other sources as a way of learning more about the prominent narratives within ISIS communications. These sources came primarily in two forms: interviews conducted by other analysts and press releases/publications released by ISIS itself.

Interviews:

A few journalists have had access to those who are or have been supporters of ISIS: current fighters or affiliates of ISIS; those who had defected from ISIS; and those who have been imprisoned by local authorities because of their affiliation with ISIS. These interviews provided insights into ISIS' face-to-face recruitment and communications strategy, i.e. the way it promoted itself to communities and citizens in the region. The quotes and transcripts we obtained from these articles posed fewer challenges than the analysis of Twitter posts. Interviews were scanned for mentions of grievances and rationales motivating those who join ISIS, and relevant quotes were used to help establish the four narratives identified in this report.

Press Releases and Publications:

Beyond Twitter, ISIS communicates through more traditional publications. The most prominent publication that we used as a data-source was Dabiq – a magazine published in multiple languages, used by ISIS as a key medium for propaganda and recruitment. 14 issues of Dabiq magazine were published between 14th July 2014, and the 13th April 2016, all of which were used for this study.

Analysis

Using this source material, we set out to understand what the nature of the grievances expressed was, and whether there were any prominent themes appearing throughout the sources. The analytical method we employed is closest to hermeneutics: a close analysis of texts geared toward drawing conclusions on their basis. We were primarily interested in finding out whether corruption was a prominent feature within these narratives, and what types and manifestations of corruption were present within the arguments. The texts were read by two Arabic-speaking researchers and the conclusions were reviewed and verified against existing publications by three other team members.

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